

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C
August 26, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez (Absent)
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz
Tom Wells
Jason Jackson
Patrick Ilabaca

Agenda Item C [12:41 p.m.]
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Public comment. Public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. Our speaker today is Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Good morning. Well, good afternoon. This is Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. And this is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. I wish I had more good things to say, but it's been an experience today again and again and again. All righty. Last I had something, but I guess I'm going to leave it for next time. We keep talking about democracy, civility, respect, transparency. Those words are so good. They are really good. We get up when the presentations are being made. We sleep while people are talking. We really disrespect the people that are being

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honored many times. But that's okay. In the City of Coral Gables, we don't do that. We respect everybody. We, once again, keep talking about the past, what people shouldn't be doing. We demean and talk down to other people sitting in the dais. Respect, respect, respect. I don't know what respect means anymore, because it certainly doesn't mean what you all use.

As a parent, as a mother of three daughters and two granddaughters, I'm ashamed of the way we treat people here. I'm sorry. This is not what, see, look, he's not even paying attention, so who cares? It's very sad that the people that claim to show how respect and civility should be are the first ones to violate that. Shameful, shameful, shameful. If I were related to, actually, I will be writing a note to the police honorees, and I will send them the video that I took about people sleeping, about people doing exactly what he's doing now, not paying attention. Now, I know I'm not important, but the police officers that were honored were certainly important in my book, and the firemen were important too, and we did not respect them. But that's okay. The king can do whatever he wants, and respect doesn't apply to him.

City Clerk Urquia: Tom Wells.

Mr. Wells: I'm Tom Wells. I live in 1310 Coral Way. Respectfully, the direction and leadership by the Commission's regime, Mayor Lago, Anderson, and Lara, LAL, is troubling. We've never had a Commission illegally steal our right to vote. Based on Mayor Lago's recent special bulletin and claims by his PAC, it's not honest. For example, number one, illegal ordinance stealing our vote. Thankfully, it appears that LAL acknowledges the legal ordinance per item F-18 today. But if you want to really be physically responsible and save us \$80,000 to move the election, have your referendum on November 3rd, 2026. We already have two referendums where we can vote by mail, vote in person, or early vote. Number two, personal cost. Our budget compares Coral Gables to cities of Boca Raton and Palm Beach Gardens. Unlike Coral Gables, those cities do not pay for their Mayor to have two dedicated employees. We include this cost together with Mayor Lago's salary and expense reimbursement. We're paying over \$180,000 annually for Mayor Lago. And that's before the \$120,000 salary paid to Chelsea Grannell, who now works for a new City Manager, hired without any search committee or salary negotiation. Ms. Grannell's salary increased by \$26,000. Unlike her successors, she's not a lawyer. And the new City Manager's salary before benefits for him and his family is almost \$307,000. \$14,000 more than any prior City Manager. Again, no search committee, no salary negotiation. And that does not include the \$120,000 severance paid to the prior Commissioner to quit to create a vacant spot for the current City Manager. That is unprecedented. Number three, broken promises. LAL's broken promises, aka lies, include no tax cut or physical responsibility. Our budget will increase by 10% to \$306 million. Number two, no independent voting for residents. LAL always votes together. Number three, no independent search committee to choose a City Manager. Number four, no steps taken yet to allow

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residents to decide when they want to vote. Number five, not being against overdevelopment. Number six, claim political drama by censoring Commissioner Castro when all she asks the Attorney General is whether what you're doing is legal. And it turns out it's illegal. It always was illegal. And number seven, breaking the oath of office on their first day of action. I, like all the other residents, want more informed voters. LAL wants more uninformed voters, not because that's good for Coral Gables, but rather it prolongs their rule over the city. And before we hear another misleading statement, LAL also stands for liars always lie. Please move on from past grievances. Start focusing on better leadership for Coral Gables. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Jason Jackson.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Jackson: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: First and foremost, I appreciate your patience.

Mr. Jackson: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: And we're blessed to have you as a resident of the city, my friend.

Mr. Jackson: It is my pleasure. I love living here in this place.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Jackson: Greetings, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor Anderson, Commissioners, city officials, staff, and most important greetings to my neighbors, the citizens of the City Beautiful. Mayor, you have been a budding friend, and I appreciate your ability to recognize there are some of us who have no agenda. We just love this place. We've loved that we've raised our families here and want to do whatever we can to keep this place what we love to call it beautiful. Thanks to Commissioner Castro taking some time last week to talk to me about some of her concerns and mine as a resident, you seem very diligent in service, and we appreciate that. I want to move through and just get to my main thrust, which is what I've heard, and I embrace the term the "Brickellification" of this town. And I don't want to speak about the intent or the ideals of 100 years ago, we live right now. And in this space right now, I feel like I can talk about when I'm not in this town, which is a lot about this paradise we have within a paradise, a place to be proud of a place to love. As I noted earlier, like my commitment, my passion, my feeling about this town is super deep and personal. Not one citizen of this town not deeply interested or invested in commercial development can be happy or proud about all of these towers going up. Those of us at 1121 Madruga Condo Association, talk about eventually, you know, retire from the beautiful basketball team downtown and about nine years in that time when my commute turned into just a drive through a canyon of towers. That's not special. That's not unique. That's not why we live in Coral Gables. Listen, this

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project at the corner of US 1 and Mariposa, I know it's going up, you know, it's going up, the county knows it's going up. But I want this group, as we heard today, which was encouraging to maintain its connection, maintain its collaborative work dynamic and relationship with the county through this process. Those of us who live in that space, we feel a little bit like the redheaded stepchild of this city. And we want to make sure that you all are actively changing that perception for us, particularly with this project that's coming up. This is the hardest thing to do outside of sacrifice, which we talk about a lot in the Miami Heat organization. But love is the hardest thing. Love is best when it is unconditional. But that's the hardest kind. As I noted, and we'll repeat many, many times, I love the city, love what it's meant to my family. I love bragging about it from sea to shining sea. But I do not love some of the things that are happening. And what we are currently destined to become, we don't focus on service and loving discourse for the people, by the people forever. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Patrick Ilabaca.

Mr. Ilabaca: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, city staff, officials, my fellow residents. Firstly, I'm glad to see that you're much better these days. Last time I saw you were in the muletas, so I'm glad to see that. I'm just here to say thanks. School's back. I live in the Italian village, Patrick Ilabaca, 513 San Lorenzo. There was always a big problem, as we all know, in the Coral Gables area during the school in and out. I want to thank the Chief, if he's still here, the Coral Gables, I mean, excuse me, the Coral Gables community, safety community, as well as the Miami-Dade School PD. We actually saw two versus one. We actually saw two safety, community safety there versus just zero. And there's a huge presence within the officials of the Coral Gables Police Department that significantly, significantly made much more orderly dismissal this time of year, especially the first couple of weeks. I think there's a couple of things that can be addressed that to make it a full on that just a band aid. There is a structural thing that needs to be addressed in terms of the pickup and drop out but that's a very convoluted issue because of so many different types of entities that need to be engaged. However, the Coral Gables community safety official officers, they're there until 2.30 p.m. and they're stationed in San Lorenzo and as well as San Antonio, I believe. They leave at 2.30. I know they need to go back to report back but between 2.30 and 2.45 is when the speeding starts up again and that's the last 15 minutes. If there's some way, somehow that the board could figure out a way to extend 15 more minutes, it will reduce just a little bit more the speeding that goes on, on the side streets of my neighborhood. Last but not least, the illegal parking and the speeding have been best, has been better, which is great for the community safety of all. However, I think there's still some things that can be done. But again, that is more of an issue that needs more collaboration. While I have 30 seconds of my time, I'm super happy about the green waste energy effect that's going to be. I think it's fantastic. It's a wonderful, wonderful initiative to raise money and generate money which is a great thing to do. And last but not least,

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we look forward to celebrate the Italian village in October, with the help of Commissioner Castro. I hope everyone who wants to who lives in Italian village are able to go there and of course the city officials. It's going to be a fun time. I'm actually helping out and using a little bit of my past experience in event management to help Commissioner Castro do a fantastic event I hope everyone is able to come out here should be fun. But thank you so much again and thank you again. Thank you, Chief. You told me you're going to have a plan over last time I saw you here and you did, and I appreciate it and often did a great job. I never saw all the different types of facilities, SUVs, the dare, I never saw the dare before the motorcycles were on full force it demonstrated law and order. Thank you so much for doing that. But there's still work to be done but it's a significant, significant achievement that you guys did and compared before we're very, very happy for that. Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, my friend. Thank you for being here with us.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right, perfect. We'll close the public comment.