

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-12
July 1, 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)

Agenda Item F-12 [5:08 p.m.]

Discussion regarding Youth Center property
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suarez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: F-12 please. Discussion regarding Youth Center property.

City Attorney Suarez: Yes Mayor. So, would you like me to go through some of the history.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Suarez: Okay. So, Mayor, in the 1940s, the Coral Gables War Memorial Youth Center Association operated a Youth Center at the property where the Publix is currently located, and my understanding is the city would fund that operation or budget and provide funding for that operation. There was a reverter clause on the property that if it ceased to be used as a Youth Center it would revert to the City of Coral Gables. At some point in the 1950s that association approached

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the city and requested that that reverter be released so that the property could be sold and the proceeds from that sale could be used to purchase the property where the Youth Center is currently located and then the balance of that to be also used for funding the operation or for constructing the Youth Center actually. And so, in 1950, I think it was in 1955, the city did acquire what's known as lots 117 and 118 where the Youth Center is located and part of the field from the University of Miami, a couple of other lots were owned by individual owners and there were a couple of other little lots that were acquired by eminent domain and that is where the Youth Center was constructed. In 1958, the city by ordinance directed that the property be deeded to the Coral Gables War Memorial Youth Association so that it could be deed back with the reverter clause that we are familiar with or that we've heard about, and that reverter clause provides that, should the property, the property must be used for the recreation and benefit of the youth of Coral Gables with limited use allowed for adults recreation and civic uses. And so, failing which would revert to the association. And then, the other part of the field was acquired later, I believe it was 1968 from the University of Miami and there was also a right-of-way that was vacated. So, the reverter clause applies to those initial conveyances, so it's not the entire property, but it's certainly the property on which the building and part of the field are located.

Mayor Lago: Okay. The reason why I put this on the agenda is because I received many phone calls from residents who are very concerned about what they saw during the elections. This is, to me, a big concern as a result of our cherished Youth Center should not have any cloud on title, should be clean, and when you talk about the 501(c)3 that is associated with the Youth Center, you've had a multitude of issues with that 501(c)3. It actually expired on multiple occasions. I haven't seen the filings. The board hasn't met in years, because I know several individuals that are on that board, and I think that it lacks the transparency that the Youth Center or any property associated with the City of Coral Gables should have. Case in point, if you have the Mayor's Council or if you have a board here in the city, there are notes that are taken, there is a member of staff that's there, its televised, none of that exists for this board, and the odd case, this board is dealing with over \$100,000 in cash and bank accounts, and has power over the Youth Center if something were to occur. That to me is a problem, especially when you talk about potentially, which was already discussed and I thank God that we were able to stop it, \$160 million dollars be spent on a bond referendum in regard to our parks and Youth Center where \$80 million of that 160 was going to go to the Youth Center. Think about spending \$80 million dollars' worth of taxpayer money, which is not really \$80 million, but when you spend \$80 million you have to pay interest on that, so its potentially \$140-\$160 million over the 20-30-year life span of that bond. Imagine spending all that money on a property that we could potentially lose one day on a reverter clause. So, what I'm asking today, with your help and I hope the Commission joins me on this is to clear title. I'm asking for there to be a formal investigation in regard to this organization. I want to see all documents. I know that staff have recently been provided with a bunch of different documents that they found in storage. I'd like for staff to come back in August with a plan of action to contact

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the board, ask for bank records and for a plan to dissolve the cloud on title. The city will never, in my opinion and the opinion of many, I don't think would knock down the Youth Center and building housing there. The intent of the Youth Center is for the members of this community, the young people of this community, to have a place where they can call home and enjoy themselves. So, the idea that this board has to exist and there has to be a reverter clause because we need to protect the Youth Center, that's not the case. The case is simple. We need to clear this up and it's an asset that belongs to the city and we need to move forward and give it a very clean slate and clear up these issues that in my opinion are clouding, not only title, but are clouding the good name of the Youth Center and people associated with the Youth Center. Madam City Attorney, what do you recommend moving forward that we do to bring this back in August with a plan of action.

City Attorney Suarez: From here to August Mayor, we can explore the possibility of if that reverter can somehow be released. Obviously, one way is to request that it be released and we can also review any documents that have been located by staff, and we can look into the history of whatever those documents might shed light on in terms of the reverter clause or anything else and we can come back in August and report back and provide the Commission with any options.

Mayor Lago: And I also want to – recently there was a rush to reactivate the board, reconstitute the board. I'd like to see up to the minute finances, not just a spreadsheet, I'd like to see actual audited financials. We're not talking about \$5,000; we are talking about a lot of money. I'd like to see audited financials. I'd like to see minutes. I need to see minutes. This is a board that has power, power over the Youth Center, a rather significant property here in the City of Coral Gables and has a reverter clause. So, I'd like to see what are we facing before us. I'm not an attorney, but at the end of the day, we are in a position where we have to put the city in the best solid footing moving forward, and I think having something out there that's ambiguous and potentially clouds our ability to control the Youth Center is not in the best interest of the city.

City Attorney Suarez: So, Mayor, in August we can come back and perhaps it could be a resolution directing that my offices reach out to the organization and request this information and request that the reverter be released, so it could be something like that in August.

Mayor Lago: I think we should make those requests now in preparation for August.

City Attorney Suarez: Okay.

Mayor Lago: I'd like to see bank records, up to date bank records, going back five years. I'd like to see meeting minutes going back five years. I'd like to understand why was the 501(c)3 extinguished, why it was for so many years not active.

City Attorney Suarez: So, we can send a request, and we can make that ask.

Mayor Lago: And I hope my colleagues will provide their own guidance as attorneys in regard to how we can clarify this issue and put the city in the best position moving forward.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Did you want to speak, Commissioner? I'm fully supportive of, you need something from us to help, to authorize you to make those requests.

City Attorney Suarez: I think a direction – I've got the direction here, so I don't need a formal motion. I think I'm hearing that there is consensus with that direction.

Commissioner Lara: Well, you certainly have my support. During the campaign when this sort of came up to light, some of the concerns that reached the public regarding, for me perhaps, the most concerning was the change in designation from not-for-profit to profit, if that's the case, right, because if that were the case then it sounds or appears to me that it would have been done through inaction, non-feasance, some failure to do what was expected to be done. That is the first red flag of perhaps some form of mismanagement at the highest levels of that board, and there is just simply too much attached to the board, namely, as the Mayor said, the Youth Center itself. So, we not only recognize every day how important the Youth Center is to the residents of the city, but we also debate endlessly about how many hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars are going to go to the upkeep, the improvement of that property. So, we must ensure that we protect it, and so, these are very basic no-brainer type requests that we would need. They would look very much like, you know what you would serve with a subpoena or if we were in litigation and just basically request for production, interrogatories and so forth. Its very important that we are comprehensive and that we're kept up to speed on what response, if any, we get, which would help inform us and dictate what next steps would be, but I would hope and trust and expect that your request for transparency and a comprehensive production of information will be complied with forthwith, and it won't be delayed unnecessarily. I could be wrong.

Mayor Lago: On that point, make sure we get corporate documents, any insurance that they may have, any emails, financials, non-profit records, all their filings, and I'd like to make sure these are audited financials. I think it's critically important and I think that moving forward it allows us to part the ways to finally put this to rest.

City Attorney Suarez: We'll make the request.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And the obvious, annual meeting minutes of the regular corporation, continual filings, the voting history, stock issuance, all those type of documents. We can always chat after the meeting.

City Attorney Suarez: We will make the request and see what is provided.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Commissioner Lara: I believe that we may be well served, I know that it appears that we have consensus here on the dais, but I would love to either have through a formal motion or other vote of conforming – I'd like to move that we do so.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second to provide the requested documents that we've spoken about over the last ten minutes in the August Commission meeting through the Manager's office and through the City Attorney.

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: I have a quick question before I vote. What is the legality or jurisdiction, are they obligated to give us these documents?

City Attorney Suarez: So right now, it would be a request. We would be asking them to provide the documents as of right now.

Commissioner Castro: Are they obligated to give them to us?

City Attorney Suarez: So, we can explore that further, but as of right now the direction is make the request and then depending on what else we find and whatever documents in the history that we can see here, but its not an organization that we currently have oversight over, but we can make the request and see what they provide or what response we receive.

Commissioner Castro: So, the motion is to make the request. My vote is yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes. And I'd like to also add something. If they don't provide the documents, I have no issues going legal to make sure that we again, protect the Youth Center, especially when there's already a history of not properly filing your documents as required by the State of Florida in regards to non-for-profit and we are talking about a significant amount of money that is associated with the Youth Center, and to be clear, and I've said this three times and I'll say it for a fourth time, the Youth Center should be crystal clear when it comes to title. We should not behold to any organization, because nobody will protect the Youth Center better than this Commission and the employees. Thank you very much.