

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
September 14, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Chelsea Wilkerson, CEO, Girl Scouts of Tropical Florida

Agenda Item G-1 [Start: 11:40 a.m.]

A presentation about the impact of Girl Scouts in Coral Gables
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: We have a 10:00 a.m. time certain, I apologize, the Girl Scouts, the presentation about the Girl Scouts here in the city. Please come forward. I apologize, I'm sorry by missing your time certain. How are you doing?

Ms. Wilkerson: I'm well, thanks, how are you?

Mayor Lago: I'm so happy that you are here. The Girl Scouts are a big part of this community, and I wanted the Commission to briefly understand a little about what the Girl Scouts are doing, besides the fact they sell the best cookies in town.

Ms. Wilkerson: Yes, and there are some in your offices waiting for you.

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Mayor Lago: But I told you that I would distribute them, so leave them in my office and I will distribute them.

Ms. Wilkerson: You know there are witnesses here, right.

[Laughter]

Commissioner Anderson: You could be like my father-in-law, and he keeps them.

Commissioner Menendez: Not only the best cookies, but the best salespeople.

Mayor Lago: That's called strong-arming, its not sales, its strong-arming.

Ms. Wilkerson: Articulate, trained, marketing experts is what we call them, absolutely.

Mayor Lago: And I know that its strong-arming because I have two Girl Scouts at home and there is no sales tactics there, you just need to buy this, even though you say, I don't want to buy them because they are so good, I don't want them at home. I like the ones with the caramel and the coconut, they are delicious. What are they called again?

Ms. Wilkerson: Samoas.

Mayor Lago: They are delicious, but you can't say no, especially when they are outside Publix or you see them in the street, they are so adorable in those outfits, maybe that's not the right thing to say, but.

Ms. Wilkerson: Let me tell you, those girls are very cute and its also, the Girls Scout Cookie Program is the largest growing business in the world. Annually Girl Scouts sell over \$850 million dollars in cookies and the proceeds from the cookie sales go back to those girls to decide how they want to invest in their Girl Scout experience – community service, developing projects, travel, adventure, camping, getting outdoors. So, the cookie program is a part of the four pillars of the Girl Scout leadership experience that's the entrepreneurship and time and again women from across sectors and industries credit the cookie program as where they launched their careers in marketing, they learn public speaking skills, they learn money management, they learn goal setting, there are so many aspects to the Girl Scout Cookie Program. In addition to the cookie program, you know Girl Scouts of course, is also known for camping, and I'd like to share with you a little bit about camping and the importance of getting girls outdoors. One of the other pillars of the leadership experiencing girl scouting is outdoors, and more time girls spend outdoors the better they do in terms of being challenge-seeking and developing self-esteem. And for all of us living here in South Florida and understanding that our environment is so much a part of why we live here and it's also our economy and it's frightening a little bit to think that this is the first generation of children that are being raised indoors. For multiple reasons we have vilified the great outdoors and children are not allowed to just roam freely. But in girl scouting we get girls outside to have meaningful impactful experiences and our girls learn about mangroves and they learn about

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beach clean-ups, and they are able to provide service, but also getting the girls in the mangroves and having her say ewe its wet, and within five minutes she is saying, oh my gosh, look at all this plastic, how did this get here? – what about the animals? – what if they eat it? – what’s going to happen to those animals? – and so we know that this is the generation that we are raising today that must solve the climate crisis and if we don’t get them outside and if they don’t have opportunities to have hands-on outdoor experiences, we are not going to make it, we are definitely not going to make it. I’d also like to share a little bit about some of our camps that we have. I know there is a PowerPoint, but we don’t have to go there.

Mayor Lago: There’s a PowerPoint.

Ms. Wilkerson: Oh, there we go, champion girl ambition, yes – okay, we can go to the next slide. I don’t know if there is a clicker or if I just say next slide, please. There we go, next slide, thank you. Perfect. So, Girl Scouts – for girls – preparing girls for a lifetime of leadership and success and the girls in Coral Gables are doing incredible things. Nationally we have 111 Girl Scout Councils across the United States. I represent Girl Scouts of Tropical Florida, CEO, we serve Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, we are one of six Girl Scout Councils in the State of Florida. And if you look across over our – nationally over almost 110 years of impact, here in South Florida 98 years, you see the Girl Scouts, girls who are involved in girl scouting in those formative years over index across sectors in terms of career achievement and professional accomplishments, and for you all as elected officials, I think its interested to see the number of women in elected office, Senators, Secretaries of States, Governors, who were Girl Scouts during those important years of their lives.

Mayor Lago: Can you go back to that slide.

Ms. Wilkerson: Of course.

Mayor Lago: Because we were just talking about women in positions.

Ms. Wilkerson: So, I have comments for you on exactly those two things, talking about women in leadership.

Mayor Lago: This is an important slide because you have four of us here, four fathers that’s got two girls, I have two, you’ve got two.

Commissioner Fors: I have three.

Mayor Lago: Oh, a third one.

Commissioner Fors: Three coming next week.

Mayor Lago: Three coming next week – and you’ve got one right here.

Commissioner Menendez: Who was a Girl Scout.
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Commissioner Anderson: I have two girls too.

Mayor Lago: And the Commissioner has two girls too.

Ms. Wilkerson: Wonderful – were they girl scouts?

Mayor Lago: But let me tell you, my two girls have been Girl Scouts and the change, the change in them is, not only noticeable, but they are super outgoing, they have an immense amount of respect for the environment, for their colleagues, and it's a foundation, like when I went to military school for three years, it's a foundation that stays with you forever.

Ms. Wilkerson: Absolutely. It absolutely is – and when you are talking about developing girls and for future leadership positions, that's where its at and you see this slide shows a century of impact, and so it's not just coincidental. This is some information about our Council in Tropical Florida. We have typically about 3,500 girl members across Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. We are very proud of the fact that we have girls from every residential zip code in this community and that our girl membership is almost an identical mirror reflection of the general girl population. We are truly a diverse and inclusive organization. We spoke a little bit, I said something about the four pillars of the Girl Scout leadership experience. This is what girls do when they are girl scouting and so I want to hit on two things – STEM. So, we just had a whole conversation about representation in appointed boards and elected boards and I think that its important to understand that Girl Scouts has – we have put a stake in the ground in developing the STEM pipeline and recognizing the need for STEM, gender diversity in STEM and representation of girls and women in those careers. And our commitment is that by 2025, 2.5 million girls will have hands-on significant experiences in STEM fields, so you need architects, that's where you are going to get them. There was a conversation earlier with the Police Department about, sounded to me a lot about cyber security and digital literacy, that's where its happening. Our girls are learning badges in cyber security starting in kindergarten. We know that we have to develop this talent domestically and that we've got to do it within girl scouting. Outdoors we talked about getting girls outdoors; life skills – hey, if you want to have girls understand the importance of basic civic traditions, how we carry a flag, how we treat a flag, these are symbols of our country, these are symbols of what we stand for as a nation, and there is no better place for girls to have those opportunities. I don't know how often, but I'm going to assume you've had at least had a few girls come and stand where I'm standing. When a girl does that, when she's 8 or 9 or 10 years old, the next thing she says is, hey, if I stood on this side, in a few years I'm going to be on the other side. So that's those life skills and where those girls are learning that and then entrepreneurship, of course we talked about that. So, Girl Scouts in Coral Gables and I understand we have a number of them here. If you haven't been to Camp Mahachee, I would love for you to come and visit Camp Mahachee. We have an incredible property on Old Cutler. That's where the Mayor and I were able to meet. It is a dream. You drive down this rustic road and you think, the first time you get the address, its across from Fairchild, you think that can't be right, and you drive down this rustic road and you are just lost in a wilderness oasis, and it is an incredible property. Girl Scouts of Tropical Florida purchased that property in 1945, so think about what was going on in the world in 1945, for \$3,337, and where do you think they got that money? – they were selling cookies during World War II and

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saved the money to invest. So, you talk about leaving a legacy and paying something forward. We are truly a legacy organization, and we continue to be stewards of this incredible property where girls are able to get outdoors safely, connect with hardwood hammock, see stars at night, hear night noises. Many of our girls in Coral Gables and across our jurisdiction don't have opportunities to be outdoors after dark, and they can go to a magical place like Camp Mahachee, and it opens the world for them.

Mayor Lago: And you know what I think, you failed to mention one thing I think is more important, I think it's a place where girls can be girls.

Ms. Wilkerson: That's exactly right. They run; they have adventures.

Mayor Lago: There is no pressure to be something that they maybe are not.

Ms. Wilkerson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: They don't have to confine to society's, sometimes society puts constraints or walls and I think this is a very special place and one of the first things that I asked her, I said, tell me that this is going to be protected forever. I want to make sure that financially this is protected forever. And she told me that this property would never ever be sold. It's a jewel in our backyard.

Ms. Wilkerson: It is a jewel in our backyard.

Mayor Lago: That's why I wanted to bring this to your attention.

Commissioner Menendez: And by the way, I see the photos of the moms or the adults in the photo. I got to visit Camp Mahachee when they had, I think a ceremony and awards, but true story. My wife when she was a young girl never got a chance to be in the Girl Scouts. She always wanted to. It was just the situation. Though my daughter loved the experience, I think my wife enjoyed it even more, because she got to finally fulfill in some way the experiences of the Girl Scouts.

Ms. Wilkerson: So, what you are seeing actually, these are women, you've got Commissioner Regalado in the picture on the bottom, Patricia Cruz, and I think Suzanne Levitt, a number of Coral Gables residents in the picture on the top. Those women are Camp Mahachee in Troop 305. We started a Troop for women, because so many women, like your wife, came to us and said, I never got to be a Girl Scout as a child, because the families weren't from here, they didn't understand what's this about. We were handing out promotional materials, showing girls sleeping, sleeping out of their homes in slumber parties and those were things that they weren't allowed to be a part of, and then also, women who said, I was a Girl Scout, those were some of the best experiences of my life and I want to do it again. So, I would love for your wife to join Troop 305. It's run by a group of adult volunteers that are running a Troop just like the Girl Scouts.

Commissioner Menendez: I think that's the Troop my daughter Lidia was part of back in the day. So, I'll let her know for sure.

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Ms. Wilkerson: Yes. Absolutely, we would love to have her join Troop 305. Some ways to support Girl Scouts. One is Camp Mahachee is here in your own neighborhood in Coral Gables. We do have an event coming up – campfires to cocktails. You know, I always have to have a pitch, right, I’ve got to have something to share with you an opportunity, so campfires to cocktails is coming up. Its our first post-Covid in-person fundraiser and we are very, very excited about that event and it will be held at Camp Mahachee.

Mayor Lago: I’ll be attending that event.

Ms. Wilkerson: Wonderful – yes.

Mayor Lago: I don’t know how many seats...

Ms. Wilkerson: We are capping it at 250.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. So, I’ll be buying some seats and if my colleagues would like to go to the event, they are more than welcome to join me.

Ms. Wilkerson: Yes, absolutely, we would love to have you. And also, not that it’s a competition, but Girls Scouts of Tropical Florida have been here longer than you all. The first Girl Scout Troop met in Coconut Grove, the first Girl Scout Troop in South Florida met in Coconut Grove in Miami in 1923, and so, we are very excited that we are fully launching our hundredth anniversary, our centennial celebration for 2023. I know Coral Gables 2025, University of Miami 2025, we’ve been here longer than you, and so, we have big plans on showing Miami and showing our community how we celebrate centennials around here and painting our entire community Girl Scout green. And so, we would love to connect with, if your mother, your daughter, if you have memories you would like to share, just bringing together a large committee of community members to help us celebrate our centennial and also to ensure that Girl Scouting is here in this community for the next 100 years. So, thank you so much for your time. There is my contact information, and yes, there are cookies that may or may not have been distributed to your office and it’s the new cookie.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, I want to say something very quickly before you leave, I’d like to brag a little bit about the Girl Scouts. My daughter sold more Girl Scout cookies last year than any other Girl Scout in their Troop and a lot of that has to do with all of you who ordered. I know that it was a battle between the City Attorney and myself, because she was also trying to sell Girl Scout cookies, but we beat her, of course.

[Laughter]

Ms. Wilkerson: It’s not a competition.

Mayor Lago: It is a competition. I don’t care what anybody says, but all jokes aside, listen, I just want to say thank you to everybody who supports the Girl Scouts. This is everything that’s right with this country.

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Ms. Wilkerson: Yes. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Its exceptional and I will be joining that event that evening. I ask you to please come and enjoy, support the Girl Scouts, and I want to try to do something where we potentially could sell Girl Scout cookies here at City Hall, maybe in the front, maybe set up a table right outside, on the sidewalk and make a big day, make a Saturday about it and try to do something maybe in regard to our, what we do here for three months.

Commissioner Anderson: Farmers Market.

Mayor Lago: Farmers Market and now we can expand our Farmers Market to North Gables, something that we are working on here with Fred and the Commission, so I want to make sure that we can do something interesting here in the Gables and just get our whole community behind the purchasing of cookies.

Commissioner Menendez: And by the way, around 2 o'clock we're very interested in eating cookies or anything, the perfect time to hit us.

Ms. Wilkerson: That's the time, at 2 p.m. we should just have the girls.

Commissioner Menendez: We'll sell them out.

Ms. Wilkerson: Good to know. Good to know – yes. Well, thank you again so much and have a great afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. And do me a favor, please send all my colleagues on the Commission information about the event and all the things about the Girl Scouts and stuff like that.

Ms. Wilkerson: Absolutely, we will. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here.