

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-4**  
**July 9, 2024**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Melissa Castro**

**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**

**City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**

**Annie Betancourt**

---

Agenda Item F-4 [5:31 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution No. 2023-267 to allow the Charter Review Committee to consider questions and potential amendments to the City Charter without the need for a joint meeting of the City Commission and the Charter Review Committee. (Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez) (Co-Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: Let's move onto F-4.

City Attorney Suarez: F-4 is a Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution No. 2023-267 to allow the Charter Review Committee to consider questions and potential amendments to the City Charter without the need for a joint meeting of the City Commission and the Charter Review Committee.

Commissioner Fernandez: This is just to simplify the initial resolution and allow the Charter Review Committee to begin working immediately. I spoke to the Chair. I've spoken to two other

*City Commission Meeting*

members of the Charter Review Committee. This is a huge relief for them so that they can start working on addressing the items that are before them. They have received a lot of input from the community. I know I've spoken to at least three board members on what my concerns are, what I would like for them to look into. I urge my colleagues to do the same and I'll make a motion to move this on.

Mayor Lago: Before you move on. I'm going to second. I'm in favor of it. Can I just get a simple response from you in regards to this. Can you admit due to the fact that what the City Attorney just mentioned, we're not going to make the November deadline with the Charter findings that are going to be proffered to the Commission.

Commissioner Fernandez: First off...

Mayor Lago: I'm just asking.

Commissioner Fernandez: The last time there was a Charter Review Committee...

Mayor Lago: Was eight years ago.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes. All those items were heard in the April Election. So now, all of a sudden, this November ballot thing that you continue to push as your priority.

Mayor Lago: I'm saying November is the next election.

Commissioner Fernandez: Coral Gables voters vote in April.

Mayor Lago: So, you want it two years from now.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. That's when it will probably be coming up. They are going to start meeting effective immediately.

Mayor Lago: I would want to have the most people voting on...

Commissioner Fernandez: No. I want Coral Gables voters participating and I want the Charter Review Committee, that's the reason I'm putting this on this agenda.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: So that the Charter Review Committee can begin work.

Mayor Lago: But the people who vote in November are Coral Gables residents.

Commissioner Fernandez: Agreed.

Mayor Lago: But you just said you only want Coral Gables residents.

*City Commission Meeting*

Commissioner Fernandez: But you just want Coral Gables residents to vote on the items that are important to you.

Mayor Lago: No, they're not. I want everybody to vote.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes. Yes, because you were against them voting on annexation. No, that was Vice Mayor Anderson.

Mayor Lago: Don't be so aggressive.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. I'm not the aggressive one.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Commissioner Fernandez, again, I must correct you. I'm in favor of voters voting on annexation. I prefer them to vote after we determine whether or not the folk's wanting annexation to have sufficient votes to pass it, so we didn't waste the taxpayers time voting on an issue that would never happen.

Commissioner Fernandez: And that's what we're doing with Charter Review. Charter Review is going to review the item of the Inspector General and give us advice on how to implement the Office of Inspector General so that voters can vote on the final product. Not a pie in the sky, try to figure it out now.

Mayor Lago: What's a pie in the sky. It's a factual...

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't want to have to send it to voters twice.

Mayor Lago: It's a factual resolution which would be sent directly, it would be supported by this Commission, and it will be sent directly to the voters.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's okay. It's okay.

Mayor Lago: I don't know...

Commissioner Fernandez: I made a motion to vote.

Commissioner Menendez: I have something to say. I second his motion.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Commissioner Fernandez: But I think the Mayor seconded it.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay.

Mayor Lago: I don't have an issue with it.

*City Commission Meeting*

Commissioner Menendez: I'm ready to vote.

Mayor Lago: I don't have an issue. My point is let's not force ourselves on other people that isn't going to go to the voters now.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Do we have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, we do. First speaker is Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: I said a yea vote.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Annie Betancourt.

Mayor Lago: How are you ma'am. Good to see you.

Commissioner Menendez: Welcome to...

Ms. Betancourt: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission. Hello and welcome to the Manager. Annie Betancourt, 1261 Ortega Avenue, citizen of Coral Gables. I'm here to express my concern and my disappointment simply because I was really looking forward to having a joint meeting with all of you, because I strongly believe in dialogue, and I strongly believe in collegiality and kind of having the transparency. I have been delighted to hear other issues such as trees and high density, but what is the point of having members of the Charter Commission or Committee and not having this kind of dialogue with you. So, I am very sorry that this is presented to not have a joint meeting. Honestly, I was really looking forward to having a joint meeting, because that's how we learn and that's how we have a dialogue and it's an opportunity for me to understand where your thinking is coming from. Someone mentioned the fact that it's hard to put together the schedules of ten people. Well, I haven't heard anything since we last had our public Town Hall meeting here. I haven't heard a thing. So, I am concerned that we, all jointly together are dragging our feet, and I am open to encourage you to continue the dialogue, continue moving forward, have a joint meeting, as it was originally drafted, and frankly that is all I have to say.

Mayor Lago: May I add something very quickly. First of all, I want to say thank you for your service. I appreciate that. It's a pleasure. I was voting in favor of this because I was under the impression by the sponsor that this was something that was coming from the Charter Review, that you wanted this. That you wanted...

Ms. Betancourt: What? – eliminate.

Mayor Lago: That's what I was basically made, like under the impression that this is what was happening. I'm a no vote. If the Charter Review tells me, you want a joint meeting, I'm in favor of that.

*City Commission Meeting*

Ms. Betancourt: I believe that's the whole point of having a joint meeting.

City Attorney Suarez: I do want to clarify. The Charter Review Committee has not considered this question, right. So, the original resolution...

Mayor Lago: So why are we pushing this?

City Attorney Suarez: The original resolution included a joint meeting, but the Charter Review Committee has not met to discuss or take any votes or any action.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fernandez says that he's spoken to several Charter Review members and that's what they wanted. Again, I was taking him at face value saying...

Commissioner Fernandez: I have, and I have not spoken to you.

Mayor Lago: One second. One second.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I have not spoken to you, but I spoke to three other members, and they wanted to get the process started.

Mayor Lago: Let me just finish. Let me just finish. I try to not interject with people on boards. I don't speak to any of my board members, say before a vote. I haven't spoken to the Chairman, my appointee, Mayor Slesnick about this issue. I could call him and ask him, but I just wanted to respect the chain of command that he's serving at the pleasure of the city and just like you are, but I don't see, to me this doesn't make sense. I don't see why – its contrary, you know. We're not willing to do the Inspector General, but we're willing now to speed up and have a – circumvent the actual ordinance that we wrote, which was in an effort to bring the Commission and the Charter Review together. It doesn't make sense. I was in favor of it because I was taking Commissioner Fernandez at face value, but I'm going to tell you now, I'm a no vote on this because why not. I've only been contacted once and it was like, are you willing to meet, how's your schedule. I said, I gave the dates that I'm available and no one ever contacted me. That was probably three weeks ago.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm available all summer. I already took my vacation. City Manager, I know Lina in your office is good at herding up all the cats in the neighborhood and I would suggest that take this under your realm and get the communications going, because if we have a board member here that didn't receive a communication then we have another breakdown of communication. Let's see if we can get people rounded up, because I do believe with the dialogue that there's a benefit to it and we'll end up with a better product.

Commissioner Castro: The reason I co-sponsored this was because summer was coming and I didn't want it to be more delayed, but whatever is the will of the Committee, at the end of the day.

*City Commission Meeting*

Vice Mayor Anderson: Summer is great.

City Attorney Suarez: We need to be clear. The Committee hasn't taken a position either way. We don't know what the Committee's position is, is what I'm trying to say.

Ms. Betancourt: Nobody has contacted.

City Attorney Suarez: Right, but the Committee can only act by having a public meeting to decide on even this issue, but the point is this, right now it's within the discretion of the Commission because the Commission established the Charter Review Committee and convened the Charter Review Committee with those parameters, but it's up to you all whether you want to change them or amend them, but there is no position of the Charter Review Committee on this issue.

Commissioner Castro: So, my question here is, Gabby contacted me asking me if I was available on a certain date, is everybody in consensus, have we found a date or are we still looking for a date.

City Clerk Urquia: We're still looking for dates that the entire Commission is available to meet.

City Attorney Suarez: I think the Clerk was trying to check with the Commission first before going out to the Charter Review.

City Clerk Urquia: First before going to the board.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Let's put some dates out there, put a calendar together. It's like when I asked to move this meeting. I asked to move this meeting back or forward. Myself and one Commissioner said yes, the other three Commissioners said no. It's the first time in eleven years that we've had a Commission that says no to moving something. No. Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: We were only given one date.

Mayor Lago: No, we were not.

Commissioner Fernandez: We were only given one date. We were told the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner. Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: July – that was the only option given to us.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner. Commissioner, that's wrong.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, that was what was given to us.

*City Commission Meeting*

Mayor Lago: Show me in writing. Show me in writing.

Commissioner Fernandez: We can get our staff in here.

Mayor Lago: Show me in writing because you know it's not in writing.

Commissioner Fernandez: July 23 was the only date we were given.

Mayor Lago: It's not in writing. I'm not even in town.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Sorry sir.

Commissioner Fernandez: What was the date your office gave us.

Mayor Lago: It was not.

Commissioner Fernandez: July 23<sup>rd</sup> was the only date that I was given.

City Clerk Urquia: It was the week of July 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Commissioner Fernandez: The week of July 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Mayor Lago: But respond and say, okay, how about the following week. I just gave you the day I got back. Hold on. But the problem is that it's a game. It's a political game and it's all about making it as difficult as possible. I said I get back on the week of July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Pick a day or we can do it the following day. My point is this, I'm excited about meeting with the Charter Review. I think it's great. I think it's well worth investing the time, because it's a simple bit of respect for the time that you're giving, and the entire Charter Review is giving to this community. So, at the end of the day, I'm in favor of meeting. So, I am not going to support this. I think it's the right thing to do is to sit down with the entire Charter Review, get a date together, sit down for as long as it takes, and listen, listen to what the Charter Review has to say.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, City Manager, can you have your office assist in coordinating potential dates.

City Clerk Urquia: Vice Mayor it would be my office that coordinates the meeting.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. That's fine. I said I'm in the rest of the summer, except for little times that I've blocked, but if that's the only date people are available, I'll try to move the medical appointment for my husband, etc., it's only one medical appointment I can't move.

Commissioner Menendez: Are the meetings traditionally Sunshined for the Commission to attend and speak.

City Attorney Suarez: It would be Sunshined for both Commission and Charter Review Committee.

Commissioner Menendez: Both. But in the past the last couple of meetings they have not.

City Attorney Suarez: It was not a joint meeting. This is a joint meeting.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm just saying it might be good just to Sunshine both regardless that way whoever's available, not available, maybe somebody is travelling.

City Attorney Suarez: So, the intent is a joint meeting and obviously if someone cannot attend, they cannot attend, but if there is any action to be taken, we would need a quorum in the room from both committees, from both the Committee and the Commission.

Commissioner Menendez: What I'm saying is, if someone cannot make whatever date is selected and the next meeting is Sunshined for both that elected who missed can then participate in and share their views.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Menendez, there is not a next meeting. There is one meeting between the City Commission and the Charter Review Committee.

Commissioner Menendez: In the recommendation.

City Clerk Urquia: Just one meeting.

City Attorney Suarez: It's a joint meeting to kind of kick-off the Charter Review and give them guidance, so that's what we've been trying to schedule.

Ms. Betancourt: I do recall that our last Town Hall meeting where we had members of the public, the question came up, what is the timeline. And repeatedly, either the staff or the Chairman, I don't know if it was Mr. Slesnick, somebody said, there is no timeline, like there's nothing. So, again, here we're being faced with the issue, should we not have a joint meeting or have a joint meeting. It's not a sense of urgency. It's just a sense of being efficient. Let's do it.

Commissioner Fernandez: And that's the reason that I put this forward so that the committee can start working versus waiting for the Commission trying to schedule a meeting and continuing to push, take the ball down the road. I wanted to make sure. You can get started. If you guys have a quorum next week, you get started next week. That's what I wanted to make sure you were able to do and that was the conversation I had with the other board members. They are ansy to get started just like you are.

*City Commission Meeting*



Ms. Betancourt: I'm simply here, I'm going to sit down. I'm simply here to express disappointment that we haven't met, haven't had a joint meeting. Thank you so much.

Commissioner Castro: Let me ask you something. So, you would prefer to have a meeting, let's say in two, three months or would you prefer, I mean would you prefer to wait.

Ms. Betancourt: The question is in your hands. What is the timeline? We have not been defined when is our next meeting. Is there a timeline for the job or the work we're supposed to do?

City Attorney Suarez: So, there have been no deadlines provided to the Charter Review Committee.

Commissioner Fernandez: And that's why I wanted to get this process started, so that you could get started and it really depends on the questions that you have before you, how long it takes you to discuss each item on the Charter, could take you one meeting, it could take you two meetings, you could discuss three in a meeting. It really depends on the committee and the discussion. So that's why I wanted to get the process started.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, you want to get the process started at the cost of the process.

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: What's the cost?

Mayor Lago: Having a meeting that's critically important between the stakeholders, in between stakeholders that's the whole point. It's detailed in the ordinance. We've already changed the Charter Review enough. You guys have removed the Manager's appointment, the City Attorney's appointment. You tried to remove the Chairman who has always been the Mayor's appointment. You guys have basically completely and utterly changed it in an effort to control it. And I get it. I understand it. It's great. You wanted to do it. Now you don't want to have a meeting between the Commission and the Charter Review. I'm just saying, have respect for these people, at the end of the day. They are doing this for free and they are taking a part of their time to be here, and we should at least have a meeting to listen to what they believe as, after meeting with all the residents who sat down and came to those public meetings, let's sit down and have a conversation. I want to know what you view as important. What did the residents say? What do you view after you've reviewed everything, have you had your discussions. What do you view as important and how can we work together collaboratively. That's my point. And by the way, in the issue of the days, I was very clear, I get back the first week of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. I can push our meetings, our meetings, just like I said, I want to push this Commission meeting and the Charter Review meeting after that. And the answer was no. I was not offered, hey, how about the 24<sup>th</sup>, how about the 25<sup>th</sup>, how about the 26<sup>th</sup>,  
*City Commission Meeting*

27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>. I wasn't offered any of that. It was no. So, I said okay. Perfect. So, I had to stay here and cancel a work meeting that I had, which is perfectly fine. It is what it is. That's the way it works. It's not a big deal.

Commissioner Castro: You realize that the question was practically, can we change the date to here.

Commissioner Fernandez: To this date.

Commissioner Castro: That was the only question. I didn't know where it came from.

Mayor Lago: You didn't just hear what the Clerk said. I said for the week of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Commissioner Castro: I'm saying when it came to me.

Mayor Lago: But the Clerk sent you an email.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. We had a conversation.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: I did not send an email sir. We reached out to the offices of the respective Commissioners.

Mayor Lago: What did you say?

City Clerk Urquia: The week of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, it's a conversation.

Commissioner Castro: Did you ever tell me it was from the Mayor. No. I had no idea.

Commissioner Fernandez: Nobody had any idea.

City Clerk Urquia: I did not tell them who it was for or anything like that.

Mayor Lago: It doesn't matter. Why would you not respond and say, hey, how about other days?

Commissioner Castro: I didn't know it had anything to do with you or any of us. I thought maybe it was a city thing.

Mayor Lago: It was clear.

Commissioner Fernandez: And Mr. Clerk, what was my conversation with you? My concern is, I don't want staff who has already planned their vacations around the city schedule to have to then

*City Commission Meeting*

change their vacation plans in order to accommodate a Commission meeting, but I said reach out to the person and find out if they are other dates and this was the only date that was offered, the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Mayor Lago: It was not.

Commissioner Fernandez: And actually, that was a conversation I had through staff.

Mayor Lago: It was not.

City Clerk Urquia: It was also offered, Mr. Mayor, for you to Chair the meeting through Zoom.

Commissioner Fernandez: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: I'm not going to do that. That's not respectful. That's not respectful especially when I'm leaving for business and I'm not going to be able to sit in the middle of a hotel for ten hours chairing a meeting when I have to be there for work. If I was there for a good time, it's a different story. So, my point is, my point is that I gave the option of an entire week. You said no and that's where we ended up. We're going to take a vote on this today. I hope that it does not pass and then we're able to meet with the Charter Review before this work gets started.

Ms. Betancourt: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: So, you have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Fernandez: I withdraw my motion. Let's move forward with the meeting as requested.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Commissioner Fernandez: Ask the Clerk to inform the members of the committee that we tried to pass this and there was a request from a member of their board to keep this meeting.

City Clerk Urquia: Understood. We will recirculate dates amongst the Commission first to find, perhaps a week that works for the entire Commission and then we'll go back to the Charter Review Committee members.