

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-6
May 19, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

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

City Staff

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

Public Speaker(s)

Meg Daly, Founder, Friends of the Underline
Ulysses Cleckley, CEO of the Underline
Maria Cruz
Betsy Gaultier
Roberta Newey
Catherine Gilhouli
Mauricio Martinez
Jill Squirtlow
John Daly
Marlin Ebbert
Christine Yormack
James Colby
Charlie Gymo
Gonzalo Sanabria

Agenda Item F-6 [Start: 3:45 p.m.]

Discussion regarding Underline Maintenance Funding
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

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Mayor Lago: So now I'd like to go back to item F-6, which I also put on the agenda that deals with a discussion regarding the Underline Maintenance Funding. When I started this project over 10 years ago, I wrote the legislation, along with other leaders in Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami, South Miami, and Miami County, to provide the funding to build the Underline through the vision of Meg Daly and her team. I stand 110 percent behind the Underline. I think it's a great project. I think it's a challenging project, which will be, again, transformational for our community on many different fronts. I think it will raise property values. I think it'll make people healthier. I think it'll bring communities together. But one of the things that we did not consider when we wrote the legislation was that it would be more than just impact fees, that it would be in perpetuity maintenance. Now, the county has stated that they're not going to be providing 100 percent of the maintenance that they're asking the cities to step in. Currently, we are the last city in Miami-Dade County, out of South Miami, City of Miami, that hasn't stepped up yet. This is the way I see it. I'm going to be blunt and to the point, okay. I don't want to give a dollar. I've been very clear with Meg Daly. I don't want to give a dollar. We need the money. I just gave you an example. We need the money to take care of our own projects. But we're put in a position where we have no other choice. Miami has already committed. South Miami's already committed. And Miami-Dade County's committed. The county is not going to provide us with the funding to maintain what they've built. The options are, do we leave it basically run to the grounds? Do we not provide the necessary funding for safety? Do we not provide the necessary funding to replace the green matter, the trees, landscaping, to make sure that we maintain the hardscape, the basketball courts, the pickleball courts, the litany of programming that is expected in these three miles. By the way, from my understanding, and I imagine that Meg will speak about it a little later, we have some of the most intensive programming of any stretch in the 10 miles. So, this is programming that, again, is in our backyard, that is being provided for our residents, for the entire community, but at the end of the day, the people closest to it, I think, are going to enjoy it the most. So, I think we need to be honest with ourselves. What is the next step that we do here? We're hearing immense, we're having, we're getting immense pressure from Tallahassee. We're seeing an increase in pricing. We've made huge commitments to infrastructure in the city, but we can't continue to turn a blind eye to this because this cannonball is coming down the lane and we better take action, or the action will be taken for us in one form or another. But I'd like to hear from my colleagues. I put together a few items, you know, numbers on some memos. I don't know if you were able to read some of the legislation that was provided in regard to what the underline is requesting. On some of the requests, I'm supportive, especially when you talk a little bit about the first line item for the first year of money, what's being considered. And I'd like to see if staff would like to go over a little bit, Madam ACM. They're looking for FY 26, \$180,000 commitment. Can you go over what the commitment from there moving forward is expected to be?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Sure, Carolina Vester, Assistant City Manager. If I could have the presentation just to provide some background from the inception of the initial agreements between the city and the county. So, like we discussed, the Underline is a 10-mile linear park, beautiful park, with a multimodal corridor beneath Miami-Dade County's Metro Rail system. It basically connects us from the Miami River all the way to Dadeland South. You have some key stakeholders to keep in mind. So aside from just the Underline, you have Miami-Dade County, it's a Miami-Dade County property. We have the Friends of the Underline, also known as The Underline Management Organization, or TUMO, and also known as the Underline Conservancy. And then of course you have municipal partners. We have the City of Miami, City of South Miami, and City of Coral Gables who are all impacted and benefit indirectly from the corridor. There are approximately three miles, 26 percent of the Underline traverses through the City of Coral Gables, and that's from Southwest 38th Avenue all the way to Southwest 57th Avenue. Here's just a little map of the entire corridor, and you'll see Phase Three has predominantly the sections allocated to the City of Coral Gables. So brief history, the city has, as the Mayor mentioned, contributed over \$7 million towards capital expenditures associated with the construction of the Underline project. In its inception in 2018, the governance structure adopted by Miami-Dade County was basically to select The Underline Management Organization, or TUMO, as a public-private partnership model providing for the management, maintenance, operations, programming, sponsorship, and of course fundraising of funds. The initial commitment was \$358,882 annually for the maintenance of the linear park with the expectation that the management organization was to raise private funds to cover additional maintenance and operating costs. Within that initial agreement, what was funded was basically landscaping. It didn't consider additional amenities. So, in 2021, there was a master maintenance interlocal agreement that was executed between Miami-Dade County and the City of Coral Gables. It established how improvements within Coral Gables right-of-way would be maintained. There was allocation of long-term operational responsibilities between both entities, procedures for future city requests and enhancements, county acceptance to maintain the base Underline improvements constructed within the City of Coral Gables right-of-way through its designated management organization. And here, just an excerpt of that initial agreement, DTPW intends to tender the maintenance obligation undertaken under the maintenance agreement to the management organization. So, moving forward in March of 2023, there was a memorandum published by the County Mayor that identified significant concerns regarding the increased long-term O&M costs of the linear park. The original estimated county obligation, as I mentioned before, was a little bit over \$350,000 annually in maintenance with separately a \$50,000 annual FP&L license contribution. There was a proposed shift by The Underline Management Organization for the new estimate maintenance costs exceeding at this point \$9 million annually to look at a split with the county funding 70 percent and TUMO funding 30 percent of the maintenance. And the county would be responsible for approximately \$6.3 million annually if you take that in consideration and that was what was published at the time in that memorandum. So, what is the current state of the maintenance costs? Like, I mentioned, the proposed cost is \$9

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million for the entire segment. This is an increase of basically 2,400 percent from the original maintenance framework contemplated in 2018 in the agreement.

Mayor Lago: So, if we may stop right there. That's the problem. So, when you look at this, our back is against the wall in regard to what is the future of the Underline in the Coral Gable section. I can't talk about South Miami, and I can't talk about the City of Miami. I'm about where we are right now. So, our options are we can continue to put our heads in the sand and try to avoid the reality of what we're facing, or we are going to make a plan to address this issue. What else? What are you seeing there? What would be our responsibility over the next five years?

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor, can I ask a quick question before we, I apologize for interrupting, but that's an important question. But Carolina, to what do you attribute a 2,400 percent?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Will you guys entertain me to finish the presentation?

Mayor Lago: Yes, go ahead.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Thank you. Because there are some staff concerns related to the exact cost, correct? So, the current request that was proffered was for the City of Coral Gables to do an initial per rated amount of \$180,000 for this 2026 fiscal year. And then for the following fiscal year, there's a request to fund 1 million annually with an established request of 5 percent increased escalation, as well as a five-year commitment for those payments. So that takes us to about \$4.49 million dollars. Again, the total projected annual O&M costs are approximately \$9 million with municipal contributions intended to cover the approximate 30 percent. So, this takes me back into that original 70-30 split. This commitment is to cover the 30 percent. So, the question is also, what are we doing with the additional 70 percent pending? And that's something that the county has discussed and there's no resolution yet as the county goes over their budget, how to fund the difference.

Mayor Lago: That was where I was headed.

Assistant City Manager Vester: So, some of the concerns that we have as staff, if we were to engage in a long-term commitment to fund these funds, is who receives those funds? The city really needs a detailed line-item operating budget to determine how those funds are allocated. The same way we present a budget to the City Commission, we would need to see a budget to make sure that those numbers are in fact going towards the Underline appropriately. There are no defined metrics for the services to be provided, just an initial maintenance schedule. So, we would ask for a metric of those services. We would like to discuss, maybe there's some duplication of services that might already be funded through taxpayers' money. So, we want to make sure we are not duplicating services. We need audit rights, financial transparency, as well as government's representation and operational oversight if funds are to be paid directly to the Underline.

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Clarification also needs to happen on county versus municipal maintenance obligation. And we need to get back to the table and discuss this with the county as well. And as I mentioned before, the linear park in reality, it's a larger regional public benefit. Of course, there is a local benefit as well, but the responsibility in this proposal is really putting that responsibility on the local government here. And that's the end of my presentation.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Not a problem.

Mayor Lago: So, we're going to hear from, I'd like to see if Meg Daly can come up on her team just to give us a little bit of feedback and where we stand right now after some of the comments from the ACM. And we have, I think about what, 15 speakers? All in favor, correct?

City Clerk Urquia: I didn't go through it.

Mayor Lago: We have a long, whatever you'd like. I just, we have a long agenda. So, I want to make sure we get to the main points. Come on, come on, come on up.

Ms. Meg Daly: Hello, Meg Daly, Founder of Friends of the Underline. And I'm joined by Eulois Cleckley, CEO of the Underline. I do have some remarks. Thank you for your presentation. There's a lot of pieces missing to that. Since that discussion with Miami-Dade County of a 70-30 split, the Underline is actually contributing 60 percent of the operations, maintenance, and programming expenses. So, the way that we've approached this, and when we met years ago, Mayor, the question was, A, how do you build it? How do you maintain it? And we didn't have a clear way forward on the maintenance. And in fact, I think because we're so entrepreneurial together, we've been able to create a 10-mile linear park from blighted land in less than 12 years. That beats the Atlanta Beltline, the High Line, other signature parks around the country. And so now we're at the point that we're trying to, we are coming up with a shared model with the lead on the contribution coming from the private sector, which is a combination of corporate sponsorships, as well as naming rights and a variety of other earned revenue opportunities. And then shared participation from the municipalities within the areas that represent. So, the City of Coral Gables is actually three miles or 30 percent of the 10 miles long. It actually has a little more acreage because it's 130 feet wide rather than the typical 100 feet wide. So, we asked for, when approaching City of Miami, City of South Miami is 300,000 roughly per mile times the linear mile within the jurisdiction. So, as the Mayor mentioned, the City of Miami has contributed, has a five-year plan of contribution. The beneficiary, I think, was questioned who that would be. It would be the Underline Conservancy, which is the operator. It's a public-private partnership with Friends of the Underline appointees, as well as representation from the county and a few departments. And then we have, I think another question came up was, where does the money go? How does it get distributed? And we do have a 55-page management agreement with Miami-Dade County, which actually has an interlocal

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agreement already in place with the City of Coral Gables. So, the operator is the Underline Conservancy, and the relationship is county to city. Right, so you're familiar with that structure, right?

Eulois Cleckley: Thanks, Meg. Eulois Cleckley CEO with the Underline. Just to add an additional set of facts here that Meg is talking about. So actually, the City of Miami has committed a 10-year MOU to fund the Underline with the first five years committed, at \$1.5 million per year, with that same type of escalation factor that was presented by Carolina. South Miami has a five-year commitment, executed MOU of \$300,000. And so again, the request is just for all of the municipalities to follow suit with what has been the trend to help cover their 30 percent of their portion for covering O&M long-term. As Meg mentioned, we continually are focused on ensuring that we are leveraging all of our private fundraising to be able to cover as much as possible on the Friends of the Underline side. And we are showing significant growth within year-over-year increases in private fundraising. So, we're asking for a shared commitment here because of the value of the project. And it just makes good sense as we move forward, especially in the vein of being a public and private partnership that this was originally intended to be.

Mayor Lago: Anything else?

Meg Daly: My remarks are much better than my comments.

Mayor Lago: Whatever you like to do, the floor is yours.

Meg Daly: Okay, great. I want to remind everybody that I'm a very proud Coral Gables resident and I'm founder of Friends of the Underline. I just want to reiterate that we are deeply grateful for this relationship over the past decade. And we've transformed what was once forgotten land below Metro Rail into one of the most ambitious public space projects in the country. And the most exciting part is this, Coral Gables is about to become a 40-plus acre destination within the corridor. By the end of 2026, that's the end of this calendar year, the full 10 miles will be complete. All three miles of the City of Coral Gables will be completed. This section includes the cherished Chewy Bark Park in Coral Gables, four pickleball courts, full and half-court basketball, an outdoor gym, natural landscapes in the wilds and stormwater ponds, micro-forests, which my friend Pizzi Meizzi will talk about, plazas for community gathering, public art, and free cultural and educational programming. This is not a temporary project. This is civic infrastructure with shared responsibility. So, from the day we cut the ribbon, and we have a lot of ribbons to cut, over the next few months, the public will expect and deserves a clean, safe, beautiful, and professionally maintained park. That means 24-hour security, 24-hour landscaping, graffiti removal, maintenance of recreational spaces, and a visible welcoming presence every day. We're prepared for that responsibility. The Friends of the Underline is built as a nationally recognized public-private partnership model. As I mentioned, 60 percent of the funding comes from private philanthropy, sponsorships, and partnerships. But like every great park system, public investment is essential to

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sustain this world-class civic asset. We've already mentioned the contributions from the cities of Miami and South Miami. We currently attract 3 million visitors a year. That number is expected to balloon to \$9 million a year. They are going to bring support local businesses, activate public spaces, increase mobility, improve quality of life, and reinforce Coral Gables reputation as one of America's most livable cities. This is an opportunity for all of us to help shape and sustain a legacy project that will serve generations to come. We are so proud to be your partner, and we respectfully ask for this year's fiscal deferred funding commitment to be finalized, and that we work on a multi-year funding plan for your consideration. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, she basically said what my intentions were, and I'd like to hear from the public. I'd like to be able to resolve the issue of the 2026 funding. One second, let me just finish. We're not doing a public comment yet. So, I'd like to figure out what we do moving forward in regard to the funding issue. The county's already been clear in regard to their position. The state is not going to be funding, but we need to figure something out moving forward. So, it's not whether we approve five years now, this is a conversation, this is why it's a discussion item. And we can bring it back in July, we can bring it back in August, but I think that we need to address the FY26. Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: So, my question was posed actually to Carolina Vester. Maybe I can pose it to you. Hi, Meg.

Meg Daly: Hi.

Commissioner Lara: How is it that we got to that discussion at one point of how maintenance was going to be handled, how much it was expected to cost, to now recognizing what looks like a 2,400 percent rounding error or clerical error, how did that happen first? And the answer to that question will help inform me, at least one Commissioner, about any of the projections or estimates going forward, because I just need to understand how we were so off.

Meg Daly: The number that was presented in the management agreement with the county was from mowing the lawn. And that was a minimum contribution, not a maximum contribution. So, every year we go back to the county with an ask as we grow. And since we are now, we've actually exceeded our expectations on the delivery of the project. This was supposed to be completed actually 10 years from now, in 2035, but a federal grant accelerated that schedule. So, there was a compression of time. There was a compression of speed. And I don't know where the 2,400 percent calculation came from. That's not a number I'm familiar with, and it's not one we work with. We've been saying that the operations and maintenance would be roughly a million a mile for some time

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Commissioner Lara: Carolina, if I can, through the Mayor, could you add some clarity for me? Because I'm not sure I got much more clarity.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Sanabria, will you allow us to address this? We're going to have public comment now.

Mr. Sanabria: I can do it now?

Mayor Lago: No, no, no, we're going to call you up, but let us deal with the items first, and then we'll have public comment.

Assistant City Manager Vester: So, like Meg said, that original number was in that original agreement, and that was only contemplating landscaping, right. It wasn't contemplating activation areas. So of course, there's some discrepancy there because you weren't planning, or they were not planning at the time to operate, program those spaces. Aside from that, that estimate was not done by the city. That was an estimate provided to us, and that's why we're asking for an itemized budget to identify where those funds go.

Commissioner Lara: Who provided that to you? Who provided that?

Assistant City Manager Vester: The Underline in their proposal.

Commissioner Lara: Okay.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Yes. So, the current estimated cost--

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, like I was telling you in the beginning, 10 years ago, when we talked about this, it was a completely different project in a different scope. Now, as the county has their own financial issues, they have serious budget issues across the board, with all due respect to my colleagues in the Commission, on the county and the Mayor, they've decided that they will not be funding this to the magnitude that we expected. So, it falls on us, and it falls now on the Underline. The Underline is not prepared. They do not have an endowment at this moment, even though they've raised significant funds to be able to address all the maintenance issues. So, what I'd like to see, you know, if we can figure this out, is address the 2026 funding request, make a decision on that, if it's the will of this Commission, or we can move it to, or we can defer to July. I'm ready to make a decision on that, and then really roll up our sleeves and figure out a way to find the strategy for the next three or five years and put a bookend on it, which I'm not willing to accept, by the way, there's multiple issues that I'm not willing to accept. I'm not willing to accept five years, and I'm not willing to accept a CPI index increase every single year. We have to, you know, there's not an open checkbook where at the end of the day, it can just continue to grow and grow and grow. I want to, just like the county put a bookend on us, we got to put a bookend on them.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor. I agree with you, right. And I'm not looking at three or five years at this point either, but with respect to, you want to look at fiscal year 26.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, that's what I'm saying.

Commissioner Lara: Okay, but the ask is to us, right.

Mayor Lago: 100 percent.

Commissioner Lara: Like we're asked to open up.

Mayor Lago: I'm here.

Commissioner Lara: Not an open checkbook, but we're asked to provide funding. We had not been prepared or expected. So now it's like a new ask. Okay, so question is, have we, or just to Ms. Daly, so have, has the, I'm not even sure I understand the organization today, right, so is there an organization? Are there more than one Underline organizations? And if the answer is yes, can you briefly describe what it is that they do today?

Med Daly: Sure, there's two organizations. Both of them are 501(c)3s. The Friends is, I'm the Chair of the Friends. I'm also Chair of the Conservancy. The Friends organization is the fundraising arm and advocacy arm. It was a very similar model to the Performing Arts Center. You had a fundraising arm, sort of the, there was the Trust, which is the public-private, and then there was the fundraising arm, which the Friends are. The organization that operates is the Underline Conservancy, which is a public-private board with five appointees from Friends of the Underline and four members of the board who are appointees of the Miami-Dade County Mayor, the TPO, Parks Department, and the Department of Transportation. They operate, they meet monthly and provide all the audited financials to Miami-Dade County. The Department of Transportation is what's called our contract manager, so they're a reviewer. So, we already have audit and transparency functions through the county and have annual reviews. So, the Underline is the funder, Friends of the Underline is the funder to the Conservancy. The Conservancy is not a fundraising arm; it's an operating arm.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: This is a big ask. It's a big ask because it's not only, it's not a one-time ask, it's a reoccurring cost, and this park is not going away. While the years pass by, the more it's going to cost eventually because of inflation. My question is, if we cannot commit to this, what's going to happen?

Med Daly: And that's a great question. And one of the reasons that we've been very opportunistic in trying to sort of diversify the funding, there is a reverter clause within our agreement with Miami-Dade County, that if the Conservancy does not have funds to operate, then the county has 30 days to reclaim the project, and they would take over operations at their level of service. We provide all the security, the maintenance, the garbage collection, the recycle, all the programming, the art. So, all of that is under the Conservancy, and the level of service from the county would be substantially less. As you can tell, the first commitment was for mowing the grass.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think one of the levels that we need to reach here so residents throughout the county can understand the actual cost of doing business is to be able to share the financial statements, and what does it really cost?

Meg Daly: Sure.

Vice Mayor Anderson: But long-term, I think that we need to have that conversation also with the county and our other municipalities for long-term solutions, so that year after year, or cycle after cycle, you're not coming in hoping that there is a line item that's going to be available on a budget that we don't know may or may not exist in the future, depending on what the legislature decides to do, the property taxes, et cetera. Clearly, the buildings that are closest to the Underline benefit the most. There are many people that come from some distance and use the bike lanes, but the everyday people that walk it are the buildings closest. So I do think that we need to have that long-term conversation with the county and with neighboring municipalities to come forward with year 27, 28, and forward, and in the meantime, require the same level of transparency that we've asked from other organizations with regard to the funding and the spending and so forth, so that everybody's on an even playing field. But I do think we need to move forward at least to handle 2026 with those records being provided.

Mayor Lago: If I may, I just want to put something on the record. So, this is what we need to understand. So South Miami committed \$300,000 for a mile, for one mile, correct? Just for one year.

Mr. Cleckley: No, for five years.

Mayor Lago: So, \$300,000.

Mr. Cleckley: Correct.

Mayor Lago: All they're going to give is...

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Mr. Cleckley: Sorry, Mr. Mayor. So, the first year is prorated and it's the same circumstance of what we're asking here today. But the remainder of the five-year MOU is calculated at \$300,000 per mile.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, and I want to explain to people. We're three miles, the following year will be a million. So, you divided obviously about 300 and change per mile. The City of Miami has committed to \$1.5 million for five miles. So, it's another \$300,000 per mile, correct? And then you want to ramp them up, up to a million, correct, a year, is that the plan?

Mr. Cleckley: Correct, there's an escalation factor annually for both the City of South Miami as well as the City of Miami.

Mayor Lago: But are they jumping up from, like we are the \$300,000 the first year, correct?

Mr. Cleckley: Correct.

Mayor Lago: We have some public comment. I'm going to ask, we have a very long, we have a really long agenda. So, if you can keep it as concise as possible. Mr. Clerk, can we hear from-

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm not even sure what to say. Every meeting that we had, we had assurances that there were not going to be any maintenance costs for the city. And for the county to just punt it off on the municipalities is unprecedented. Question for staff. If the city were managing this project, what would the cost be? The maintenance cost?

Assistant City Manager Vester: We would have to explore that. We haven't done an assessment. We'd have to look at that.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: I believe that we have to look at the maintenance agreement. We have not received that. And we have to -- I believe the ACM had a very nice slide to show everything that we need. Before we get into any contractual obligation, I want to know what that money is going to be used for. And we need to be able to audit, to know exactly what we're receiving. So, before we provide a million dollars a year, we would like to know exactly what we're getting for that. And also, can we audit it? Can we look at -- that might be another solution. But right now, this is a little nebulous right now.

Commissioner Fernandez: It's not even can we audit it? It's what accountability is there when the first agreement is not being upheld? We had an agreement. We put in \$7 million, was it? For the construction. And we were told maintenance is going to be covered. And now we're on the hook for maintenance going forward. We're not sure at what level of maintenance. Because yes, today, the maintenance is being done well. It's a small piece that's open. It'll be open by the end of the year. But is it going to be at the level that Coral Gables residents expect? The county is always putting restrictions on us when they give us funding for our parks. Coral Gables residents can't have preference. We can't do our own things. Are we going to have that same ability to put restrictions on what the county can do? Because now we're putting money into a project. This is also a million dollars towards routine maintenance. What about extraordinary maintenance? Let's say we have a storm come through and wipe out the pickleball courts. Is that on the city to then put in the funding to repair those?

Mr. Cleckley: So just a couple of clarifications. I do not believe that there was a separate operations and maintenance agreement for the City of Coral Gables. That's number one. Number two, in terms of having the ability to have transparency within our budgeting process, we welcome that. We already go through that process currently with the Department of Transportation and Public Works. We actually produce a multi-year pro forma and revenue expense and budget so they can understand how well we're keeping up with not only the expenses that are being projected, but also the revenues that cover those expenses. In terms of if there's an extraordinary natural event that happens, it's a similar type of response to what happened at municipality or county level. We do have reserves that we set aside for those particular instances. But if there's something that requires additional capital expenditure, because of some type of damage or anything else on the operations and maintenance side, we try to budget for that accordingly. But if it's something that's so extreme, that's something that I think every single project within the county and municipality would have to entertain ways to identify funding to cover that.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: So Eulois, how are you? Eulois, how are you? I'm assuming, but just to be sure, that you wouldn't have, if you've been provided with the list of what the Assistant City Manager was saying, are items that we would need to see that the City Manager has said, items having to do with transparency and the ability to audit and to know how the funds would be spent. I assume you have no objection to any one of those requests.

Mr. Cleckley: No, absolutely not. We welcome it.

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Assistant City Manager Vester: On that list, just as a reminder, the agreement currently as stands is between the city and the county. So, we have to get back to the table with all entities involved because there's no current agreement with the Underline. So, if there's a funding contribution, that has to be ironed out. And then there's questions of oversight and governance. So, if you're taking taxpayers funded money to allocate towards this, then there has to be a governance aspect where the local government here has some oversight.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, can we have one minute per person, please?

City Clerk Urquia: Confirming one minute, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yeah, one and a half, two minutes. Just try to be as concise as possible, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to make a suggestion. If all that the speaker intends to say, is they support it that perhaps one person stand up and ask everybody to stand up that is in support of the Underline, rather than have a repeat of everything. Is there any? No, I understand. Is there anybody here against?

Mayor Lago: Would anybody like to speak in opposition of the project? Go ahead.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, would you like to go down the list?

Mayor Lago: Yeah, of course. Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: So, first speaker, Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, 305-323-2154. In the last few minutes, we heard about two instances that we need to put money into. The Ponce Park, they said that they were going to be short of X amount of money, that they would be talking to us about how we were going to help. Now, I supported the Underline from the get-go. I thought it was a beautiful idea. But at this time, I don't see how we can commit to any long-term agreement when we don't even know if we're going to have enough for what our residents need and must have. I think at this point, we're talking about things that we don't know. Maybe the idea, I think the Mayor said, maybe we should look at it later on when we know how much money we're going to have, whether the tax idea is going to go through, whatever the case. At this point, I do not believe that we should commit to anything.

City Clerk Urquia: Adam Yermack.

Mayor Lago: I think there were only two individuals in opposition that wanted to speak.

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City Clerk Urquia: Betsy Gaultier.

Ms. Gaultier: I couldn't be more in favor of supporting the Underline. I think, is this too loud? I think what they've done is magic. It's turned an undeserved, neglected area of the county or the city into a truly magical walkway. Everybody can use it. And the more development we have in this city with high-rises and people living in big buildings instead of individual homes, the more that's going to be appreciated. They need a place to get outside, to walk, to play pickleball if they want, see an art show, and have a yoga lesson. It's magic. And the very idea that the city would not be in support of it denies and negates your desire to be called the City Beautiful. You can't do that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Roberta Newey.

Ms. Newey: Roberta Newey, 1236 South Alhambra Circle, 33146. I just want to say that I've seen the beauty of the Underline. I've walked it from 37th to the river. And last week I walked the part that isn't officially open yet from Red Road to Dadeland South. And it's a very special place. People like it. Please find a way to support it. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Catherine Gilhouli.

Ms. Gilhouli: Good afternoon, Mayor and Commissioners. Catherine Gilhouli, 414 Alhambra Circle. I am a proud resident of City Beautiful and have owned my home for over three decades. About eight years ago, I became involved with the Underline program because it took wasteland and turned it into the possibility of connecting a disconnected city. And when I walk out on it and I see families with children or dogs, it's beyond my imagination that that was a possibility in this city 10 years ago, 15 years ago, 20 years ago. Please support this. And we are a very transparent organization. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mauricio Martinez.

Mr. Martinez: Good afternoon. My name is Mauricio Martinez, and I am happy to call-

Mayor Lago: Where do you live, sir? Your address?

Mr. Martinez: My address? 1235 Leesman Street.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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Mr. Martinez: I am happy to call the City of Coral Gables my home since September last year. I moved from New York and initially when I moved, I was scared that I was not going to have a green space in which I will be able to have a walk in the morning, have some moment to just like think about my day and just enjoy and be with nature. But when I moved and I saw the project of the Underline, I was really excited for it. And I just want to say that spaces like the Underline are going to be necessary for humanity in the future. We need spaces in which we can connect, we can enjoy nature, we can be with our fellow citizens and just share this space. And you can't really put a price on that. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Jill Squirtlow.

Ms. Squirtlow: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Jill Squirtlow, 5440 Kerwood Oaks Drive. I had been a resident of Coral Gables for the past 20 years. I've raised my family in the City Beautiful and have been fortunate to have had access to all the parks and playgrounds and everything this magical city has to offer. I only wish the Underline was available when my children were growing up. But the Underline is much more than a park. It's a community gathering place. And in light of Mental Health Awareness Month, I just want to call attention to some of the unique offerings specific to the Underline. We hosted community meals, new mother walks, speed friending events, and the largest pool party for dogs. All to bring people together to break bread, make new friends and feel part of a community. People came from all over the country, not just Underline adjacent. What I think is interesting is that a healthy city is built on healthy residents. And the Underline provides a forum to bring residents together in joy, fun and collaboration, resulting in both physical and mental well-being. So, in that light, I ask that you approve this funding. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: John Daly.

Mr. Daly: Hi, my name is John Daly, 647 Almeria, which is coincidentally, it's the same exact address that Meg has. I'm here because Meg was up at three o'clock in the morning last night. She was concerned about the project. And it's really odd for me when I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and I turn around, she's not there. But she was downstairs typing up what you read today. So, I think that it's important sometimes to detach ourselves from all the financials that are going on. And try to understand what this family has sacrificed over the last 12 years. And I've got to give it to my father and mother-in-law, Parker and Van Thompson, who were probably the most civic minded people I ever met in my life. And that's where Meg learned how to do this. And the sacrifice that she's made, we've made financially for this, because I know that somebody who can find \$150 million from my company, I would definitely make them king or queen for a good 10 years. And I would pay them handsomely. But we don't get paid for this, not a single penny. As a matter of fact, we actually give money to the Underline as well. So, the sacrifices that we make are the other side of what we've been talking about today. And they're very real. Fortunately, we're

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okay. But you got to understand, the amount of times that she's gotten up at three o'clock in the morning are numerous. And it was all because she wanted something good for society. Genuinely wanted something good for society, because we're not making anything from this. She doesn't want a street named after her. She doesn't want a park named after her, nothing. So, I think it's really important that sometimes we look at the human side of this, rather than the financial side of this, and try to understand that I've gone over my time. But secondly, I know that the City of Coral Gables has been very generous and very giving and we really, really appreciate that. And we hope moving forward that continues. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Marlin Ebbert.

Mayor Lago: How many more do we have?

Ms. Ebbert: Hi, for the record, my name is Marlin Ebbert. I live at 6510 San Vicente Street. I'm a 38-year resident of Coral Gables, and I am here in support. I, first of all, want to thank you all for your wonderful support of the cinema last month. And I kind of view the cinema and the Underline as two wonderful things that have happened to Coral Gables in the last 15 years. And I understand that you have a problem with this funding, and I can understand it going forward. But I hope that you can find the funding for the rest of the year and then try to figure it out for the next five years. So, I'm here in support, and thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Christine Yormack.

Ms. Yormack: Good afternoon. Christine Yormack, 724 Alhambra Circle. Thank you, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and the Commission. First and foremost, I actually serve as the treasurer of the Friends of the Underline, so, I'm intimately familiar with the financials, the operations, and how the money is spent. But what I want to say, along with what everybody has already agreed with today which is the value that the Underline brings to the community, but it's really the flip side of that. I view this as an investment in our community. I view this as if we don't invest in our community, what does that say about us? And what does that provide our residents? Because when you look at a park that has been deteriorated, where it has graffiti, where it doesn't have the right kind of safety that we're looking for, for this city, it's not the kind of place where people invest. It's not the kind of place where people want to live. It's not the kind of place where people want to raise their families. My daughter goes to Carver Middle School, and actually her and I walked along the Underline on occasion, and it's absolutely beautiful. And I can do that with my 12-year-old daughter. I would let her do that alone because it's so safe. So, with that, I'm fully in support of the Underline, and I understand the concerns you raised today because as a financial professional, fully understand all the questions and agree we need to provide you with that

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transparency. But at the same time, view this as an investment in our community because the best communities have the best parks and the best places to live and are the safest. And that's actually what brings more money, more economic development, and more prosperity to help us fund these kinds of projects. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: James Colby.

Mayor Lago: Who's next?

City Clerk Urquia: Charlie Gymo will be next.

Mr. Colby: Hey, Mr. Mayor, Commissioner, staff. Yes, the Underline is-

Mayor Lago: What is your address?

Mr. Colby: Oh, forgive me. 1115 Manatee.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Colby: The Underline is terrific. It's great. You go to the parks that are open now, you're going to have a great time. And you should absolutely make city funding decisions because I like it. That's what I think is most important. The reason, and I completely understand the frustration that the Commissioners and Mr. Mayor and the staff are expressing based on the county's decisions to change the funding agreements that it put in place. However, we now have a new landmark for our municipality, for neighboring municipalities. People will be interacting with it and there will be three miles open in our city by the end of the year. That's an exciting opportunity. It does create these cost hurdles for us, but it's important that if the City Beautiful shows up as the City Beautiful, that the park reflects well on us and reflects well on our community and shows the stewardship that we exhibit in so many other parts of the city that you take care of for all of us. Thank you. Appreciate the time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Charlie Glamor. No. Next. Gonzalo Sanabria.

Mayor Lago: Charlie. You're Charlie?

City Clerk Urquia: No. Sorry.

Mr. Sanabria: I'm sorry. Oh, it's good exercise getting up and down.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We knew you needed it.

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Mr. Gymo: Good afternoon, Mayor and Vice Mayor and Commission. My name is Charlie Gymo, and I've been part of the Underline project for about two years now. And I've actually met with some similar projects that are happening across the country. And this project is head and shoulders above even comparable projects for less money and less overall funding. We are extremely fortunate to have the ability to have this in our backyard. And I just wanted to mention that we are now in the Guinness Book of World Records for the most dogs in a pool party as of last weekend. And that has put the City of Coral Gables in the Guinness Book. And I support the Underline and thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Gonzalo Sanabria.

Mr. Sanabria: Good afternoon. Gonzalo Sanabria, 944 San Pedro Avenue. And I'm directing my comments to all of you. So, I worked on the board of directors of Miami-Dade Expressway Authority for 13 years, became quite familiar with transportation, became even more familiar with the Underline and also the Ludlum Trail. In 2019, I worked on a project that is still ongoing where it ties the Ludlum Trail with the Underline. Now we have three miles in which Coral Gables has exposure to the Underline. Let me tell you something from my experience. It's three miles of headaches. It's three miles of problems. Even though it's some great dreams, some great projects, some beautiful things that could potentially happen. You're going to have people that we don't know transmitting through those three miles. We have a million dollars a year committed to this project which is going to balloon. We have to service that area with police and fire. Let me ask you this. Our revenues in the budget of Coral Gables are not that flush to go ahead and give a million dollars away to a project that's not going to bring us any revenues in return, but it's going to give you a lot of headaches. So does that million dollars that we have to commit to something buy us some more policemen, some more fire people, some more needed park department assistance. We cannot afford this million-dollar commitment to the Underline. Thank you.

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

Mayor Lago: All right, so we'll close the public comment. So, my goal today is to move forward, obviously with the FY 26 commitment and bring back to the Commission in July or later than July or August, what is the Commission's will in regard to the three-to-five-year bookend for funding the Underline. I welcome anyone who has any ideas on the Commission or wants to work with staff to address this. I have been working on the Underline for 10 years now, bringing it to fruition. I take a lot of pride in this project. I don't like the position that we are in as a city right now at the end of the day. So, I've met with multiple County Commissioners and with staff and we're in a position where we have to make a decision. But I'd like to know from the Manager if he can work with Meg Daly and the team to find out transparently what is the proposal in regard to maintenance and Coral Gable standard? Can we do it for cheaper and can we do it with our staff? Again, I know

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that it may contribute to conflicts with the Underline. And I want to understand the checks and balances to ensure that we're just not writing a check and at the end of the day, we're not getting our money's worth. That's the situation we got into 10 years ago when we approved this. And then obviously there was, I hate to use the word bait and switch, but there was a bait and switch by the county. So that's where we are right now. I don't know if my colleagues have any other questions. Other words they'd like to say or things they'd like to discuss.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Something that we should really consider, the county should deed this to the city. If we're going to be taking care of the maintenance and they're not going to be taking care of the maintenance, if there is a reverter clause, the reverter should be deeded to the city. Because if we're going to be investing as much as we are long-term, it should really be our property that we're investing in. At the end of the day, this money is going to be coming from probably our parks projects or other projects that we have in the city. And Coral Gables has some of the most beautiful parks in Miami-Dade County. We have invested tons of money over the last 10 years on beautifying our parks within the city. And that comes with a maintenance cost as well that we always have to be budgeting for. So, when we have these tough conversations up here, it's not that we don't see the vision of the Underline or the commitment and the sacrifice that has been given by Meg. I mean Meg had an incredible vision. And it's not Meg's fault that somebody is pulling back from the table. And that is not on you, Meg. You did your job; you delivered this project. And it's a project that Miami-Dade County should be thanking you for, not pulling back from the table and saying, well, now it's your problem to figure it out. And we just have to crunch numbers. I mean, as far as our city, we have our commitments already. We have commitments to projects. And we're not talking about a small line item. We're talking about probably one of the largest line items for maintenance in our city. We have a Youth Center that needs \$60 million to do the renovation of. We have several parks that we're trying to get to, we haven't gotten to. This will be a large commitment. So, if the county is not willing to do its part, then it has to give up something for us to be able to make a commitment. I agree with you. I think we need to fund at least year one. This is going to be a long-term negotiation with the county. I don't think that they're going to be, it's going to be a short negotiation. And I guess the question for staff is, what do we need to do? Is this an ordinance that needs to be presented as an amendment to the budget? Or is this just a resolution that the Commission makes authorizing the funding?

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, this is a reoccurring cost at an escalation of 5% per year. It's a reoccurring cost. So, this would be something that would not be a CIP item. This would come out of the reoccurring General Fund. So, it's a substantial commitment.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, for this year. I'm saying for this year. The \$186,000 that's currently being considered for year one.

City Attorney Suarez: There could be a resolution with direction to the City Manager and to City Attorney so we can negotiate it and turn to the appropriate agreements for such funding. Ideally, we would have had those agreements done and presented to you if that's what the Commission would like. But there could be that direction, and we can certainly do that if that's the will of the Commission.

Mayor Lago: I'm a believer that the cleanest way to do this is to present it at the next Commission meeting, have staff put it together for one year FY 26, and then have our team have a sit down conversation with the county and with the Underline to see what the next three to five years looks like. I will not support a project for longer than three years. And with a CPI increase, I will not do that. We need to be very careful. We've had this scenario already. And I'm not going to allow this to happen again. I want commitments and I want to be backstopped to ensure that everybody has some skin in the game.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: You're correct, Mayor. I think we need a clear understanding with the county and with the Underline, clear responsibilities, clearly what we're going to pay, clearly what we're going to receive, and clearly what we can audit.

Mayor Lago: So, this is my request, okay. We have a long agenda, and I want to move forward. I would like for staff to present to the Commission the next agenda, excuse me, at the next Commission meeting, FY 26 budget, \$180,000 for the Underline. That's one item. The second item be a three to five year, depending on what the Commission finally decides on, funding strategy for the Underline with no CPI and with a bookend that has to be approved by the next Commission in three or five years to continue funding. But I want those documents to come forward. I want that legislation to come forward after you've met with the county and after you have met with the Underline. You can present me FY 26, at the next Commission meeting. I don't have a problem with that. I'm ready to move forward on that. I think the Commission is also. But I want to have a very clear schedule of values, scope, cost, budget, and a plan of action to fund over the next three to five years. And I need that same commitment from the Underline with a schedule of values. And I need the same commitment from the county. Because everybody's going to feel a pinch if depending on what happens in Tallahassee. And I want to understand, my understanding is that

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the county is hundreds of millions of dollars, potentially in the red on certain fronts. So, we've been very tight in regard to how we spend money, or at least I've tried my best. I haven't won every battle. But at the end of the day, I think we're in the better position than we were 13 years ago. I don't want to have to pay for the broken plates of other people. I have a responsibility to the residents of the city. And I am the person who wrote the legislation on this project. And I'm a believer in this project. And I don't have a problem putting some skin in the game. But I want to make sure that everybody's held to the same standard. Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Just so there's a little clearer record. The county land also serves as the Metro Rail, the basis for the Metro Rail. I had reached out to the county a while back when people wanted to have a kayak launch there. That piece is also county land. It's very complicated because then you also have FDOT land, which you'll hear more about when my discussion item comes up on FDOT to give you an update as to some of the safety issues that together with the Underline Senator Garcia that we had been out on site and discussing. But I also know that there are ongoing discussions at the county for a long-term funding solution. So, without delving into that, because it's at an early stage, I'm going to ask the City Manager's office, let's have that discussion with the county. And let's look at 27, 28, 29 going forward. A recurring funding source is available for the Underline because it is not just an asset for Coral Gables. It's asset for all of us. That's why I was down on 27th Avenue looking at safety issues because Coral Gables residents go there too. And if it's dangerous at 27th Avenue and dangerous at other intersections, it infects all of us who use the Underline throughout the county. And it needs to be taken care of. So that's my ask. And we have the transparency, not just because we're questioning it, but because we owe it to the residents as well. Okay.

Mayor Lago: Anything else? Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: So actually, Madam Vice Mayor, that would be good. We can probably charge them rent for the Metro Rail.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's not our land.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, if it was our land.

City Attorney Suarez: It is right of way. It is right of way. That's it. It's right of way.

Commissioner Fernandez: The other thing I was going to ask is if staff could look into what maintenance would be if Coral Gables were to handle maintenance. Because that's one way that

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we can assure that it's being done to Coral Gables' standards. And we would be able to manage that. If we're at the negotiating table, that may be something that we can negotiate. And that way we can be sure that it's being held up to our standards. So, if you can just maybe work on a presentation for us, I'd appreciate it.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: The only negative thing with that, Commissioner, is that we would take responsibility for the maintenance. We'd take responsibility for all those structures. Question is, a hurricane comes in, it gets knocked down. Who's responsible for that? So, there's such an unclear chain of responsibility here that I think we need to look at that. And then we can come back to the Commission at the next meeting and look at all these issues that have to be looked at.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Lara: So just to end, I guess, the issue. I'm with you that we need to get this thing resolved. One way or another for 2026. But I certainly wouldn't want any of the questions, comments, or concerns raised by us here on the dais as reflective of not being supportive of the Underline. That we don't think it's an amazing project. Because I think that's pretty clear. We've been behind it from the get-go, and we've already invested a substantial amount into this project. So, we're not revisiting. And I really appreciate everyone's comments, right. But we're not revisiting whether it's a worthy project. It certainly is. We all believe in it. But I'm sure everyone else can understand that we're stewards of the taxpayers' money. And I need to listen to our staff and our City Manager, particularly, who say we need to understand. We need to know where the money's going to go. We need transparency. We need the ability to audit. And we got to make sure that we're being prudent with it. That it's not a no. That is actually the means forward. The way forward.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, I think we have, everybody's repeating the same thing. I think we have an action plan moving forward. Okay. Staff's ready to present the next Commission meeting for the \$180,000 for the FY26. Just want to be clear. And then they're going to present the three-to-five-year plan with no CPI. We're going to bookend it. I need you to meet with the county and I need you to sit down with Meg and her team and make sure you're ready to rock and roll. Okay. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.