

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comments
February 15, 2022
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
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Jackson Rip Holmes
Mark Trowbridge
Maria Cruz

Agenda Item C [Start: 9:55 a.m.]
Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker today is Mr. Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Everyone, just like we mentioned in the last Commission meeting, we are affording everybody three minutes to speak. The floor is yours Mr. Holmes. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Holmes: Thanks. I hope you let me run a little bit. First of all, greatest part of the meeting is the beginning, our police are so impressive. I have two comments of praise and a plea for your help on parking. So, first of all, I want to thank you all, all of you for doing the mobility hub. Take

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it to the bank. This has doubled the value of my property. This is a beautiful building. It's the safest building parking garage in the State of Florida, maybe the safest parking garage in the country – safety, saving lives. Second praise is to Mayor Lago who is really a visionary on how do we get to not needing parking, what happened to the penny sales tax funds. He's a true hero in having taken upon himself to sue, to say what happened to the \$27 million dollars that were collected for rapid transit throughout our county. We could have had monorail, Metrorail, excuse me, up on all of our highways, getting people out of their cars and reducing the need for parking. The county, instead, raided that fund to the tune of \$27 million out of the \$32 million collected for just other purposes during the Great Recession, and he wants to get the money back. And I urge you all to get behind this. Let's consider Ms. Ramos, the possibility of suing the county to get the money back where it was intended. That leads me into my plea. No one has demonstrated better than Mayor Lago that we are stuck with our cars, because of the horrendous things I just described, which I think the city really should consider reviving his litigation to get that money back. Now here comes my plea. Parking then is a necessity, right. If we cannot provide parking to our downtown, we are going to lose. People will say, hey, I don't have time to run around chasing for parking. I don't want this mandatory remote parking. I'll just go elsewhere until you figure out, if you ever do, how I can park my car. The mobility hub, of course is a tremendous, miraculous shot in the arm for our parking, but here's my concern, Mayor Lago, the developers rule here. We approve four-story buildings with mandatory remote parking on Miracle Mile, those people, I hope you give me a second here. Those people, I think are going to come knocking on your door, they are the 800-pound gorillas in the city, and say, let us use the mobility hub for our mandatory remote parking, because under this new zoning code regulation, they are not going to be able to afford providing parking within the 1000-foot radius. So, they'll say, we are the 800-pound gorillas, we want to use the mobility hub. Well, what about the rest of the parkers? – what about the rest of the shoppers? What about the city's income base from the downtown? If those people don't have a place to park, not only do people like me go under, but even the city is say, Oh my God, where's our tax base here? That's why I believe, unfortunately, we need to preserve the 345 Andalusia parking garage. This is just like; this keeps me up at night. I'm just absolutely begging you. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, if I may answer your question or your statement. What I have tried to do, and I think what we have accomplished is, ensure the city continues to own both parcels of land. That's why we went into a different direction in regard to a PP3 option that was being offered. We are building a parking garage, the city is going to own the parking garage, and we are going to have the other additional parking garage which will afford us, I think Mr. Manager, 300-plus parking spaces.

City Manager Iglesias: The parking garage will be over 400.

Mayor Lago: 400, excuse me, and those parking spaces will be continued to be used by the community, that building will not be torn down at the present moment. Like I said before on the record, I'm opposed to selling that piece of property if the city does not have a requirement to sell it.

Mr. Holmes: So, you are saying you don't have any plans to convert the 345 garage into something else at this point.
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Mayor Lago: At this moment, no.

Mr. Holmes: And you have been courageous in fighting to keep the city land from...

Mayor Lago: Its not only myself. It's the Commission, the Manager.

Mr. Holmes: And Pat Keon. I was here. I was here. You deserve praise. You weathered the storm, but we've got more storms coming.

Mayor Lago: But I give you my word that we are not going to be getting rid of that parking garage anytime soon, okay.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mark Trowbridge.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Trowbridge the floor is yours.

Mr. Trowbridge: Good morning, everybody, Mark Trowbridge from our Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, 201 Alhambra Circle. And thank you Mr. Mayor for the opportunity to address you during Public Comment. I too want to add congratulation on behalf of our Chamber leadership and membership, many of whom are part of the CABA organization, in extending our well wishes and congratulations to Miriam on her taking the helm of the organization. Miriam, we are very, very proud of you and look forward to opportunities to continue to work together and align where we can. So, congratulations. I also want to thank many of you in the room today for assisting us in putting on our first Burgerliscious in 27 months, our tenth anniversary celebration this past February 3rd. Mr. Mayor, I'm hoping that the eating of the various burgers did not contribute to your sore back. I know you lifted quite a few during your roll as a judge, but I want to especially thank our city folks in the Parks Department, working very closely with us to make sure we had a safe and memorable event. I certainly want to thank Alex Escobar, and of course the entire police force for all of the work they did to make sure that we were able to block the street off and have an incredible event. Nearly a thousand people attended the event and the proceeds from that event, as you know, help fund our Welcome Center, which is not only for visitors to our community, but for our residents who are welcoming visitors and for folks that want to learn more about our City Beautiful. And finally, I'll just like to mention that I was very privileged to participate in a fly-in this past week with all of the members of our Commission, as well as some of our outstanding staff. This was a first for our Chamber to travel with the city. We have gone up for a number of years on our own with our membership, but this was kind of a second bite at the apple for us, which was outstanding. And for those of you that are listening and participating in today's meeting, you should know two things. I think, number one is, how proud you should be of all of our elected officials for the hard work they do in Tallahassee, for the relationships that they have, and for their unabashed desire to bring dollars back to the City of Coral Gables, whether it's through direct

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appropriations or for other methods. I watched the Mayor, Vice Mayor, and each of the Commissioners talk to the Governor, various leaders in the House and the Senate, and really advocate on behalf of Coral Gables. I think you all know we are strong stewards of our dollars, and therefore we should be rewarded not penalized for having dollars in our coffers, but opportunities to do the repairs that we need to do for Venetian Pool, mitigation that might be needed to be done for our former incinerator site, and of course you just heard conversation about the mobility hub. And so, the work of going up, its not easy to get to Tallahassee, its an expensive trip to go up there, but most importantly the time and effort that each of our Commissioners gave, working closely with Chelsea, of course, and Naomi and Martha Pantin. I got to see it in action. Thank you for including our Chamber. Thank you for the great, great privilege of working together for our business community, for our residents and citizens, and for our City Beautiful. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Mark, thank you. Thank you for allowing us the privilege also to officiate this year's Burgerliscious. It was delicious, it was a great event. It was a great family event. So many young professionals, so many people coming out of work, enjoying, happy to be back enjoying this community after almost two years away, as a result of COVID. In regard to Tallahassee – We have to do it again. I appreciate the fact that the Chamber was our partner that came up with us. It was great to have you in the meetings. It was a different dynamic, and it was a big benefit, showing that not only can the government come up and advocate on behalf of the residents, but also our business community is hand-in-hand advocating on behalf of the City Beautiful. So, thank you for that. I appreciate it.

Mr. Trowbridge: Thank you Mr. Mayor and I hope that your back feels better. I want to remind you that you did require us to workout while we were in Tallahassee.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mr. Trowbridge: That could be a contributing factor.

[Laughter]

Mayor Lago: Yes, we all worked out together. It was a good teambuilding exercise there in Tallahassee. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Ms. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, good morning, the floor is yours.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I've been a resident here since 1976; same house, same husband, same kids, since 1976. I'm sorry to have to bring this up again, but I made a promise to
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myself that I will not let this go by the wayside. Time keeps passing by, years have come and gone, and the female officers involved in the manufactured swimming pool incident, the officers were slandered, mistreated, and maligned have not been made whole yet. What and when is our city going to make it good for them. Let me remind you that justice delayed is justice denied. As time goes by justice is going to go away for these ladies who have suffered enough and I'm tired of hearing excuses. You know, first we have somebody who is pushing the wrong stuff. Then when that person left, we still had the person who is handling the investigation, then the investigation was not done right. Then command – enough is enough. These women were maligned, were slandered, were hurt. Their families suffered, including the Chief who was also maligned and hurt. When is our city going to do good for them like we do for a lot of people that sue and get money and get settlements? When are these people going to be made whole? Please.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, thank you for bringing this to our attention again. I've asked the Chief to address this issue.

Chief Hudak: Sir, as of last week, the State Attorney's Office filed a closeout memo under their investigation, their criminal conduct on people that we identified on the second round. There is a meeting that is supposed to take place with the Internal Affairs Commander and the officers that were affected, I want to say tomorrow, its on the calendar. The investigation will then come to a conclusion for the administrative review and get forwarded to me for any type of action we'll take against any other officers that were involved in the entire totality of the issue with involving the 14 officers.

Mayor Lago: Once the findings have been rendered and the Manager approves of it, I'll like to sit down and have a discussion with yourself and the Manager over this issue. Ms. Cruz brings up a lot of good points in regard to the female officers, along with yourself, and what transpired. And I'll like for also for my colleagues on the Commission to also have a briefing in regard to what transpired and why it's taken so long to address the issues at hand.

Chief Hudak: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: So, we can do that hopefully by the next Commission meeting, which will be in March, I would gratefully appreciate that, because I agree with Ms. Cruz. We have to turn the page, but let's turn the page appropriately. I don't want anybody who works for the city or anybody who is involved with the city to feel that we have tossed them by the wayside, and this is not an important issue to address. This is incredibly important. So, I don't want to talk about it too much of it right now, obviously because we are on the record and these are conversations that's an investigation ongoing, so I want to respect that, but at the end of the day, we need to face this head on, and I want to make sure that these women get the respect that they deserve. Thank you Chief. I appreciate it. Thank you for your hard work.

Chief Hudak: No problem.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: Let's close the Public Comment and we'll move onto the Mayor's Comments.