

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item
June 2, 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)

Lieutenant Colonel Juan Carlos “JC” Gomez

Agenda Item

Pledge of Allegiance by Lieutenant Colonel Juan Carlos “JC” Gomez

Mayor Lago: Sir, tell us your story that we're incredibly proud of.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): Hey, Mr. Mayor, thank you and Commission. Thank you, City of Coral Gables. Thank you for having me here today. I come on behalf of the American Legion Post 98 and our 155 members that serve the community daily on four major pillars that the American Legion represents. That's number one is veteran affairs, where we participate and actively assist our veterans with the resources that are available to them through Veteran Affairs Department. Secondly, legislative action. We take part in these types of processes locally, statewide, and nationally for military and veteran families. Third, we're involved in really actively involved in patriotic events. Last week, we planted about 7,000 flags almost on two cemeteries in recognition of our fallen veterans. And then this weekend, we picked them up because otherwise the landscaping teams kind of mow over the flags. We can't allow that. And then lastly, we're involved in youth programs, which is our most important interest, is to develop the future leaders of the United States in our local communities. We do that through a number of

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initiatives, through scouting, through ROTCs, through the JROTCs in the high schools, and through mentorship of our young people here in the community of Coral Gables and beyond that throughout Miami-Dade. I encourage you to visit us. We're right around the corner from here. There's a lot of initiatives that we have to make the post look better and to continue to be an active part of the community. And as such, I'd like to recognize you, Mr. Mayor, and of course, Commissioner Lara, for the initiative. We really appreciate the inviting us into this platform where you, last week we had, or last meeting, you had a 101-year-old veteran here who lives right here in the community and was a member of the U.S. Navy, although you said he was in the Army, but he was in the Navy.

Commissioner Lara: It was Navy, and I corrected myself. I fell right on that sword.

Lt. Col. Gomez: I'm just messing with you. I just think it was great that you have him here and that you're going to have him as the Marshal for Veterans Day, and I commend this Commission for moving forward with the recognition of Veterans Day here in the City of Coral Gables. So, with that being said, I'd like to just give you and you a couple of coins that I brought for today. Are there police officers here today? No, there's not. I do have something for them, but I'll just pass it along to the police department when I get out of here. So, what I'm going to present to you today are two different things. I'm going to present to you, Mr. Mayor, the Department of Florida's American Legion coin, and to you, Commissioner Lara, I'm going to present to you a more involved coin that has to do with Memorial Day. It's something that I presented to some of our volunteers on Memorial Day, and I have one left, and I'm going to give it to you. With that, I thank you again for having us here at these meetings, and I look forward to further engagement with the City of Coral Gables on behalf of the American Legion and thank you once again.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. So, I just want to talk a little bit about this gentleman, Lieutenant Colonel. What he has done in regard to the American Legion has to be commended. Over the last three or four years, he invited me multiple times to visit. He has completely changed, and if I may, I want to just provide a little bit of background, and we didn't rehearse this, we didn't talk about this before, correct? You know, some people see things as what you see with your eyes, right. If you look at the American Legion post, it is completely refreshed. From new windows, and I want to mention Signature Windows, who provided all those windows. They provided them, I don't know if it was at cost or free.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): No cost.

Mayor Lago: No cost, okay? This is a resident here in the city who has come here before and has provided free windows to residents who have a need. So, he's a very stand-up individual. He also did all the exterior lighting. It looks beautiful. He repainted the structure. He's done a lot of things to really spruce up the building, which is incredible. And again, it's what Coral Gables is all about. That's why we're the City Beautiful, right. But I think it's a lot more than that. And that's why I mentioned, you know, you see things with your eyes, but you can also feel things. And every time

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that I've been there, there's a lot more people involved in the Post. There's a lot more engagement. You're front and center. You're at events, and you're reminding people, and it's a shame that we need to be reminded what a privilege it is to live in the greatest country in the world. And the sacrifices that are made by veterans who either pay the ultimate sacrifice or gave many, many years of their lives to ensure our freedoms and that our democracies are intact. And that we continue to expand on those democracies, and our Constitution is protected. So, I want to commend you for that. You've come to visit me multiple times in office hours. You've invited me to the Post. You've allowed me to witness the celebrations that happen at the Post. And I recommend that everyone take an opportunity, not only to get engaged, but to donate to the Post. Because it's a true privilege to have the Post in our backyard on Alhambra. One of the things that I had mentioned at the last Commission meeting, I want to make sure that it goes through. For the next year, we're celebrating America's semi-quincentennial moment at the Commission meeting. This is what we're doing today. And what we're doing is ensuring that we honor those who honor us with their sacrifices. And I want to make sure we continue to do that, not just for one year. We continue to honor these individuals like yourself. And I also wanted to make sure that we have two events right now, two installations on Giralda. Currently Tejido. We have another one after. For three months, it's going to be six months. And I had requested that we do something to celebrate America 250. With American flags. And I had asked the Manager and the Commission. Did we ever take a vote on that? I don't know if we ever took a vote on that. Or if we were still. Did we take a vote, or did I just bring it up? I can't remember, Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I thought we were going to do flags all along Ponce de Leon Boulevard. And we're working on that to have American flags on Ponce.

Mayor Lago: I want to make sure that we do that. I want to make sure that we do that, and we leave them up as much as possible. And I also want to make sure that we have a budget. And I think that's one that we were thinking about using the structure at Giralda, we already paid for six months to potentially add those flags on Giralda also. I mean, I think it's an overkill, but the flags, structures is an overkill, but at the end of the day, we have it up. Why not just, you know, continue to use it. So, I would like to make a motion. If the Vice Mayor will run this portion of the meeting, to put together a budget through your office, to see what we need to do to make sure that we can put up flags. as we lead up to 4th of July, we have time, and also to start preparing the third iteration of an installation that deals with, maybe we celebrate all the American flags. You know, there's a new one that just came out, I saw it the other day, you know, 250. There's obviously 250 in the middle, and it's a circular with all 13 colonies. So, I think it's very beautiful. I think it's very emblematic of what we are here as a city, very proud to be Americans. I would like to see that we move forward with that, and we actually deliver on that, and we don't allow July 4th to come and go. We're very patriotic, we do a lot of great things, but I want to make sure that we take advantage of what we're doing in Giralda, and the fact that we can install as many American flags in our

downtown. So, if people come to our downtown, they really feel the patriotism. But I'd like to make a motion on that, if I could entertain a second.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk. Well, it's the Vice Mayor running the meeting, I apologize.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh, we can call the roll.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. I would love to support this. I have a question though. Before when I had proposed to go ahead and put things on Giralda, I think you had mentioned to me that it was an issue because of hurricane season.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Commissioner, but we have in our contract that it would be taken down and put back up in case we have a tropical storm or a hurricane event.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Can you, Madam Vice Mayor, I'm going to continue with another item. Can I continue now? I just want to make sure.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. I want your input. And I want it to come through the Manager, and I'd love for you to provide it. And I would like for you to give us ideas in regard to what we can do to incorporate the Post. You need more face time. I want people to donate. I know Signature donated; they gave a lot of money. To them, it's important. I want people to look at what we have in our backyard. A lot of people don't realize it. They don't understand it. They drive by that building, going to work, we all do, or going to an event or going to visit a doctor or something important and they fail, and trust me, I do it every day. We're just trying to get from point A to point B, and they fail to really understand what's inside those walls of that building.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): I get it. And just so you know, during my term as a Commander there, we've increased engagement tremendously. You've already felt it. Some folks here in the room have felt it. The idea behind that is that, hey, listen, veterans are part of this community. I mean, the narrative of all we've been for many years, to some degree, we've tried to change the narrative of who we are. We're contributing members of society. We're people that

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lead. We're people that are engaged and are here to stay. And listen, veterans are made of the people that are sitting in this room right now, right. People that serve the country in any capacity in the armed forces came from our neighborhoods. They didn't come from any place out of the ordinary. So therefore, when they come back after service, they're just a little bit changed in that they served their country in a different capacity, but many people served their countries without a uniform. And what we're trying to sort of create is a narrative that says, hey, listen, we're part of it. We want to be part of the greatness of the city, of the community, and of the country. And I think that we're headed in that direction. With that said, with this initiative that you just placed forward, we'll communicate with the City Manager so that we can be a part of it. We just did an initiative with Commissioner Manuel Ortiz in the county, and we're happy to engage the city, of course, in the same type of manner. So, thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: If you could go through the Manager's office, if you want, you can copy myself or any of my colleagues. I'd like to be copied to see how we can better engage.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): Absolutely. Yeah, there's great synergy there, and we're happy to be involved.

Mayor Lago: We have a lot of veterans here.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): Yeah, I know. That's one of the initiatives that we're going to bring forward is to find out exactly how many veterans we have within the City of Coral Gables. We have a couple of things that are initiatives that are happening right now. As a matter of fact, in the Coral Gables Museum, we currently have on display a war memorial that is what we call a field memorial. And if I can just may briefly speak about that. A field memorial is when we lose a member in service while we're deployed. That same night, we hold a memorial. It's got the boots, the rifle, their cover, usually some type of helmet, and their dog tags, well, their ID tags, and a flag. We play Taps at midnight, and we all salute. We have that on display right now at the Coral Gables Museum. I urge you to go see it. It's emotional. You're going to see it. You're going to bring up some emotions. It's got a little bit of pride in it, too, what it represents, that sort of thing. Represents every religious factor that we have in the service and in our country. The dog tag typically states your religious beliefs or lack of. We have all of them represented on the display. It's a good collaboration. It's one of the many things that we've been doing, like I said, in the Post to continually engage out in the community and bring people into our Post that are not necessarily veterans. You don't have to be a veteran to come on in there. So again, I welcome this opportunity to work with the city for this initiative and for any initiative that has to do with the military or veteran affairs.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Manager, if I just, two more requests, if you indulge me, through Martha Pantin. I think my colleagues will support me on this. Number one, I'd like to put on our next newsletter advertising the show at the museum so that people can become aware of it here in the city. We have over 30,000 people that receive our newsletter, and Martha does an amazing job

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along with her team to get the word out. And the second thing that I'd like to do is I'd like to collaborate with this gentleman and the Post to send a request to all residents and business owners via our newsletter. I'm going to put it on my newsletter, so I'm going to remind Lora and the team to do it. Maybe we can piggyback on it. Asking, are you a veteran? Let's do some homework for him. Let's make it easy on him. We have a lot of contacts, and maybe we can lead with, are you a veteran? We want to hear from you. We want to engage you. We want to get you involved, not only because we want people to get involved with the Post, but at the end of the day, it could be potentially beneficial for the city on multiple different fronts. For example, we could have our own database for Memorial Day, like what Commissioner Lara has put together now as a formal city event. We could have it for the 4th of July. Maybe we can give them some benefits in regard to coming up on stage with us, joining us, engaging with us. Maybe we can find veterans to come here, because I would like to do this not for one year. I'd like to continue doing this. Once we exhaust all our city employees who are veterans, there's only so many, I'd like to continue rotating this and continue engaging those members of our community who have served this great country. So, there's a lot of things that I think we can use with that information. Obviously, privacy, we'll be very careful with that, and of course, engage, but I'd like for them also to provide that information to the Post, because the Post wants to engage as many people so they can come in and continue to do the great work that they're doing at the Post.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I think, if I may, Madam Vice Mayor, I think Commissioner Lara wanted to say something before I interrupt you.

Commissioner Lara: Thank you. By the way, I support your initiatives and those ideas and we should take, I guess, a necessary rhetorical vote, as I'm pretty sure how it's going to come out. But I wanted to say, Lieutenant Colonel Gomez, thank you on behalf of a grateful country. Thank you on behalf of a grateful city for your service. I myself have never served in the armed forces, but I've always been in awe of the men and women that have, because as the Mayor has said, and my colleagues in the dais have said, the freedoms that we've enjoyed for the last 250 years are only possible through the extreme and ultimate sometimes sacrifice that you all have given on behalf of us. So, thank you on behalf of all of us Americans who live, work, and play in the greatest nation the world has ever known. So, thank you. And I'm also immensely honored that you would consider and gave me this memorial coin, overwhelmed, didn't know that you would consider this. My role, along with my colleagues, is very small, you know, to try and recognize you all. I'm extremely proud. I did sponsor with the support of my colleagues that we are now recognizing for the first time Veterans Day in the City of Coral Gables.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): That's a big deal.

Commissioner Lara: It is a big one. I'm very happy that we're going to make this first one so memorable. And I'm reaching out to all of the residents through this communication and with the

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Mayor's indulgence, you know, to publicize this with the broadest reach that we can via newsletter and otherwise. To come, in fact, Frank Lucero and I are talking about where the exact location of the celebration will be as I anticipate it's going to be very, very well attended. It's going to be a very large celebration. And you're right. The former Navy man, Dr. Hal Silberman will be our honoree veteran for the Veterans Day celebration. And I'll finish by saying that I've always been in awe of our vets and I've had the extremely great fortune in just the last few weeks to have met Coast Guard, obviously Army, very close friend of mine and some of his colleagues who are Marines. And of course I spent this past weekend, I was with Admiral Matt Schaefer.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): I know, that's my commanding officer.

Commissioner Lara: He's-- wow, what a Navy SEAL. I mean, it's the whole thing. So, my point is, as I have an opportunity to speak with these men and women and I'm floored, the American Legion Post 98 needs to be, as the Mayor was urging us, a place where the community should frequent. You meet on the second, fourth Wednesday of every month, 303 Alhambra is the location. Beautiful building right across from Cafe de Metro. I highly encourage, oh, by the way, a shout out to Matt Brophy as well, who is a force when it comes to the Post.

Lt. Col. JC Gomez: Green Beret.

Commissioner Lara: Green Beret, right. So, we're making our, we're missing the Delta Force here or the Rangers, right. We'll get to them all eventually. But if you make the effort, speaking to the residents, to go meet with the vets, their stories are not only inspiring, they're heartwarming and they're uplifting. And the work that you all are doing, especially with the kids, is so very important for the fabric of our country and to continue the spirit and the solidarity that's absolutely necessary to keep the flames of freedom always burning bright. So, thank you very much, Lieutenant Colonel.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): It's my pleasure. I will leave one more thing just so that everybody's aware. You know, we're uniquely positioned in the State of Florida, moreover, in the greater Miami-Dade area to have two commands here in South Florida. And in the State of Florida, three major commands. If you're not aware of them, I'm going to help you. We have SOUTHCOM in Doral, we have CENTCOM and SOCOM in Tampa. And in Homestead Air Base, we have very well, not very well known because it's a very quiet little place, but we have a special operating command down there. You just met with our commanding officer, Two-Star Admiral in the United States Navy, Navy SEAL type. We have a lot of people here. We have District 7 Commander here for the United States Coast Guard, which I think, no, he's not here right now, former Mayor Slesnick was at that change of command. There's just a lot of presence here. If you don't know what a four-star command is, there's only a few of them in the entire world. We have one of them here in Miami-Dade County. That means that there's a lot of resiliency within our state and within our city. It's an important topic because the presence of these major commands within our community brings in not only military families, but the federal dollars to support all

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those families in the efforts that the commands do. Most recently, you've been getting a lot of attention for SOUTHCOM on the news because of the activity down in the area of operations, which hasn't been for many, many years, right. And so then now it's getting a lot of attention and maybe we can feel exactly why it's so important to retain those folks here. And then once they're out of the service, and this is where the Post comes in and tries to keep them engaged in the community and doing positive things. So, these things that we're talking about, these topics, I know I'm taking a lot of time this morning, are very important, not just for the recognition on the patriotic side, but economic impact on our community as well. So again, I thank you all for entertaining me this morning and having this in-depth discussion. And I look forward to more engagement and actual activity to follow. So, thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Just briefly, I mean, both my father and my father-in-law served in the Greatest Generation.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And they were called the Greatest Generation because the fear that you had to have stepping up to serve in that period of time, knowing that the likelihood of coming home was extremely low. That's why they got called the Greatest Generation. And everybody else that followed in their footsteps, like yourself, deserves the honor. So, I would also like to receive an email from you in any way and capacity that we can assist because it's somewhat sad that more people don't show up for Memorial Day and Veterans Day. And I would hope that we can get more people at these events. And we're probably going to need to have confirm your attendance type of setup so that we can anticipate how many people will be there and so we can provide the necessary chairs and amenities. But please reach out and let me know how I can assist in any way to help the Post.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): Excellent, I look forward to that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Have a wonderful day, sir.

Lt. Col. J.C. Gomez (American Legion Post 98): Thank you. Good luck today. I know you got a lot of busy things to do today and I wish you luck in your decision-making. Good day.