

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item K
February 10, 2026
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item K

Discussion Items

Mayor Lago: Moving on to the next item which is not on the agenda. For the good of the order, Madam Vice Mayor, would you like to add anything else?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Reminder to everybody who is interested in green space. On the 19th there is a meeting for the beautiful design that our staff has done on University Drive which will include flowering trees, butterfly plants, and preservation of green space at the Youth Center at 6 p.m. for the University Drive Dog Park. And for any of you who have children who would like to enjoy some compliments of the Coral Gables Garden Club, a coloring book on pollinator plants, we have that. And Crime Watch has also provided and is available to provide reflectors for individuals to be safer on the streets and they've dropped some off to me. If you'd like some, I will have them in my office, and my staff can hand them out. And if you go to the next Crime Watch presentation,

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they'll show you how to do CPR. They have CPR training. They have a doggie mannequin that helps make it a little more interactive. That's it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. City Clerk, I have two images that I wanted to go ahead and put.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, and cable TV should have them ready.

Commissioner Castro: So, I am partnering with the Coral Gables Run Club on February 28th, Saturday at 10 in the morning in front of the park. We're going to do a run, it's almost three miles, around the golf course, and I welcome all residents. There's already several residents that are there, but I think this is a nice opportunity to go ahead and meet your neighbors in a very healthy manner. This would be February 28th, and I hope to see you there. You'll see me running those three miles with you. And then the next one is, it has to do more with dogs, more dogs. The next pack walk for Coral Gables will be February 21st. Pet Supermarket partnered with us. The Miami-Dade Animal Services partnered with us too. Bodega Partners partnered with us too. There will be portraits painting that are going to be painted during this event at the end of Bodega, so I expect people to see us there as well. We're going down Miracle Mile, showcasing all the stores that are there, all the way down to all the way back, so it's a two-mile walk with the pups. And there's going to be adoptable dogs there, so if anybody's interested, that would be amazing. You can go ahead and remove that. I also want to give a little update about the last dog walk that I had. There were several adoptable dogs there. It was very well attended. I was very happy. There were a lot of donations when it came to blankets. I had three full cars. I went on two different occasions to go donate blankets because of the cold front. I also went ahead, and I fostered a dog, and it was a wonderful experience for over a week, and I thankfully got that dog adopted. So, I'm encouraging people to go ahead and try to do the same thing. That's it.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: Right. So, the only thing I really think it's worth, on my part, mentioning today is, and it came up quite a bit during the last few hours of our last item, is what a special place Crystal Academy is, and Mary Palacios, who runs it. It is unique. It is a place that I have toured. It is a place that I would encourage residents, if they haven't gone to meet with Mary, to fully understand and maybe even experience what a gem that is, what a real service that is from the heart that she does this for, the most needy amongst us. Please do. Please do visit Mary and get to know a little bit about a place that's so small and so needy in need of support at this time for the neediest of us all. It's a place where love and magic and community come together. A big fan of Crystal Academy.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I can't thank you enough for saying that. I've been going to Crystal for years, and you said it. It's magic. It's magic, and we are blessed. We're blessed to have them in

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our backyard. Mary will tell you; we have pizza parties there all the time, and let me tell you, when I go there, I get more out of it than the kids get out of it at the end of the day. I get more out of it than the kids get out of it, so I'm happy that you brought that up because, you know, very unexpected. Yes, sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor. Thank you, Mayor. I just want to bring up the City Hall. We are in construction documents. The Commission offices are ready.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Our first meeting will be in March, and I need the second floor to start exploratory demolition, and so if the Commission can move at the end of the month, if possible, it would be greatly appreciated because we need to get to exploratory demolition on the second floor, and we have less people coming in, and the whole building will be really almost a construction site in a sense from exploratory. We have to get in here and find out what's in this Chamber, so we're trying to proceed as fast as possible, so I don't know if that's acceptable to the Commission, but it would be greatly appreciated.

Mayor Lago: I think it's very acceptable. On that point, just an update. A contractor will be selected in the next two weeks, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: The third one has already been selected for this week, and we are selecting the construction manager at risk for the mobility hub.

Mayor Lago: I apologize. I got confused. I wanted to mention on that, you know, what was stated before. This is being done on my watch, and it's going to be accomplished. I may not be able to enjoy the office as Mayor, but at the end of the day, you know what? It's going to get done. It's going to get done.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You'll always be welcome back.

Mayor Lago: Ah, Commissioner Fernandez, would you like to say anything for the good of the order, since we're talking about City Hall?

Commissioner Fernandez: I just want to echo those comments about Crystal Academy. I think if anybody has not had an opportunity to visit, you should. The welcoming the kids give you is incredible. Seeing how they interact and how they really care for our community is a blessing. Mary and her team do an incredible job there, and it's truly one of the highlights of Coral Gables.

Mayor Lago: All right, get better, get better, Commissioner. All right, so if I add a few things, if I add a few things here. So, a resident sent me a really interesting photo last week that I wanted to put up. I put it on my social media. And, you know, it really encompasses how amazingly fragile our community is, and why we need to do everything to protect the environment, our waterways.

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And Mr. Clerk, do you have that photo that I can put up? This is one of our waterways here in the midst of the cold front. It was probably about 40 degrees, 30 degrees that day. And that's right adjacent to UM, near the Thesis. And you can see all the manatees there. And if you've got a chance, you can even spot little baby manatees. The photo is not that good. It's been sent and passed along. But I wanted to show the community because we drive by this location in our cars on US1, and we never take a moment to really take a step back, get out of the car, maybe grab a coffee, maybe go and eat a snack and sit there and look at something that again, is taken for granted and it is a beautiful sight. These are creatures that are, you know, have to be cherished and have to be protected at all costs. And, you know, they're right in our backyard. So, I wanted to share that and just highlight how blessed we are. Another thing that I that I wanted to talk about was the Bark Park grand opening recap. After 10 years of working on the Underline, I'm very proud as a product that I sponsored, and that I helped get funded and through leadership of the Vice Mayor, we were able to finally deliver on a beautiful dog park. And here's just a little quick recap video of, you know, a dog park that was delivered. This is true legislation. You know, these are, this is true efforts that take years and years to get done. We had an amazing experience that day. There were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people there. I want to thank Commissioner Lara and Vice Mayor and Vice Mayor Anderson for being there. There were adopting dogs, but more importantly, it was about community. I'm very proud of that. That's a product that I worked on for the last 10 years. This is something that takes a lot of effort, takes a lot of planning, you know, going to the county, getting funding. We raised almost, we raised, Mr. Manager, was it around \$7 million?

City Manager Iglesias: \$7.1 million dollars.

Mayor Lago: \$7.1 million for the Underline. That was all done not with taxpayer money. It was done with impact fees. I wrote that legislation. And this is a product that brings community together. There is no dog park that I'm aware of, tell me it's for dog owners, that is of this quality, that I'm aware of anywhere near, anywhere near. So, I want to thank my colleagues, Commissioner Lara and the Vice Mayor, for being present and for all your hard work as dog owners to get this done. Thank you for that. And also, the Underline as you drive by, I'm very proud of that. It's going to be completed. That's another game changer, a transformational project here for the city. Probably in the next three or four months it'll be done. Not only is it going to increase property values, which is important, but it's going to get people out of the, get out of their houses, meet people, stop using electronics, you know, get on the street, go to the Underline, go enjoy yourself, spend time with your family, with your friends, work out. I'm very proud. That's one of my legacy projects that I've been working on for 10 years. And it's something that, again, I will always look back on and say, you know, this is a project that we worked on collectively and we got it done for the city. And I'm very proud of that. I also want to talk a little bit about the Gablesopoly that came here a little while ago. Order that. Order the Gablesopoly. It's \$30. I personally sponsored, I think it was like a \$1,000 personal sponsorship or \$1,500, I can't remember. I know that the Vice Mayor did the same and so did Commissioner Lara. As always, thank you for your support. All the money

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goes to the Coral Gables Community Foundation, which is being directed to the Mark A. Trowbridge Foundation. If we sell all 1,200 units, you're talking about almost \$150,000. And I really think that we're going to sell in the thousands because it's such a cool gift that you can give to somebody. You know, you go to a dinner at someone's house and they're Gables residents, hey, I brought you something. It's \$29, I brought you something. So, it's really cool. It's something you can sit down; it's going to be a nice gift. You can give for corporate gifts. I'm just telling you to go out there and do that because it spreads the word of all the good things that we're doing here in the city. But more importantly, at the end of the day, it's all about the Chamber and it's all about Mark A. Trowbridge, which, again, is an individual who embodied, he was Mr. Coral Gables. So, with that being said, Madam Vice Mayor?

Vice Mayor Anderson: A couple of comments I wanted to add on Crystal Academy. The Garden Club has done flower arranging with the students and what you said about getting more back than what it does for the children, it does do a lot of good for the children, because they feel special, but participating in it is such an enriching experience that the Garden Club members continue to do that with the children. And the other note was that you saw the videos of the dog park opening. All the dogs got along beautifully, big dogs, little dogs, in between size dogs. It was quite an event.

Mayor Lago: How many people do you think were there?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Hundreds, a thousand maybe.

Mayor Lago: I want to thank Chewy for their sponsorship, amazing work. Med Daley, the whole Underline team, city staff did a wonderful job, amazing work, and I want people to go out there and enjoy it. That's another amenity in the city.

Commissioner Lara: Easily over 1000 because they come and go. Park was full.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, Burgerliscious had a thousand.

Commissioner Lara: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's where my litmus test is. I mean the people came and went and the dogs just got along great. So, there's all those called a Bark Park, and everybody was having a great time.

Mayor Lago: Amazing work.

Commissioner Lara: I mean, I just want one observation, calling it a bark park, right? But I didn't really hear a lot of barks.

Mayor Lago: There wasn't. There wasn't.

Commissioner Lara: A lot of dogs, though.

Mayor Lago: There were a lot of dogs.

Vice Mayor Anderson: A lot of tails wagging.

Commissioner Lara: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: A lot of good times. So, with that being said, thank you to everyone who came and showed up today and gave their 2 cents. We show what our democracy is all about here in the City Beautiful. We welcome you to the next Commission meeting. Thank you to staff for doing an amazing job. Staff deserve all the credit. Mr. Manager, DCM, ACM, all the directors, all the staff. Thank you, thank you, thank you for preparing us for this meeting. We thought it was going to be a short Commission meeting, and we're ending almost at 5.30. It wasn't the case. But at the end of the day, I hope everybody has a wonderful week. Stay warm, and God bless.