

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
October 8, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Economic Development Director, Belkys Perez

Public Speaker(s)

Elvira Marcos
Olga Ramudo
Rebeca Calvet

Agenda Item F-2 [1:00 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving “La Feria de Sevilla” event as one of five events of the International Cultural Events Program. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto the final item on the agenda, agenda item F-2.

City Attorney Suarez: F-2 is a Resolution of the City Commission approving “La Feria de Sevilla” event as one of five events of the International Cultural Events Program.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may. First off, I sponsored this item, and I would like to thank Belkys and Olga and all our team in regard to our International Cultural Events programming. A few years ago, just to give you a little quick background, I had the privilege, along with my staff of allocating funds in our budget to start a program which ended up giving us “Dia el Muertos” and also gave us “La Feria de Barranquilla.” The intent was to have five events. We’ve been very thoughtful,

very methodical. We've been presented, as Belkys will tell you, previous event, but it hasn't been up to snuff in regard to our opinion. We wanted to find things that were up our alley that were exceptional. We also wanted to make sure that we dealt with Consulates that were located in the city or had some sort of relationship with the city – Spain, obviously, we could spend hours talking about the relationship of Spain, George Merrick; Sevilla is a Sister City. So when this idea was brought forth, and we had multiple meetings and we sat down and we had a conversation, I thought this was something that again, would bring a level of culture to our city, expand like when you see “Dia el Muerto” thousands of people coming here, they have a good time, it's a family-friendly atmosphere, then they go and have dinner or they go and have drinks, they go see a movie, or they go see theater, or they go to Books and Books and buy something. Its an opportunity for us to really get our money's worth on this investment and get people wanting to come to the City of Coral Gables and potentially come back and enjoy. So, Belkys, I would love for you to talk a little bit about this potential third addition to our cultural International Cultural Events programming and introduce, by the way, also we are and I apologize, I should have said it from the beginning, I just caught myself.

Economic Development Director Perez: They have to leave, so I want to...

Mayor Lago: Sorry.

Economic Development Director Perez: They have to leave, so I want them to say a few words.

Mayor Lago: Yes, and I also just want to introduce with all due respect...We have our Consul of Spain here. She has been amazing, amazing to work with my office, with the city...Belkys, take it away.

Economic Development Director Perez: Thank you. Good afternoon, Mayor and Commissioners. So, I do want to give Sofia Ruiz del Arbol Moro, the Deputy Consul General of Spain and Elvira Marcos, the Director of the National Tourism Office of Spain. Just a second to say a few words, because they do have to leave. So, Consul if you want to come. Elvira.

Mayor Lago: Elvira, thank you very much, and I apologize for the delay. Thank you.

Ms. Elvira Marcos: Thank you very much for the opportunity and thank you all for listening. This is a beautiful project that has been going on in the city, well in Miami-Dade County for, how many years, five years. La Feria de Sevilla is a very special event that occurs in the City of Sevilla in Spain, and it has become one of the most important international events that we celebrate in Spain. What we would like to do is to have a cultural approach towards the City of Coral Gables. It has been located in Key Biscayne and right now, we think that it has to grow bigger and the cultural approach would be with the City of Coral Gables that's a Sister City for Sevilla, and we have been working in the last two years to do many other cultural programs like with the museum, a fun trip there to know a little better, how the architecture of Coral Gables has been influenced by the City of Sevilla, and many other cultural projects. I don't want to be longer with this, but I would like to thank you again and please consider that you have all our support for this. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Economic Development Director Perez: Thank you. So, I do want to mention the other individuals that are here. We have Daniella Murano Coll, she is a representative of La Feria de Sevilla from Sevilla. She is the one representing La Feria de Sevilla. Thank you so much Daniella for being here, and she is here because there is an event that's happening at the Consul General's house in relation to Hispanic Heritage, and so, they are here this week for that. Timing could be a little off with our storm coming, but you are still getting a warm welcome, so I am glad you're here. I also have Olga Ramudo, she is the Chair of the International Affairs Coordinating Council, and she is the representative for our Sister City, Sevilla. And I have Rebeca Calvet, she is the Founder of this event, through the Ex-pat Club, and I have the event planner as well, Johana De Jongh, which is the event planner for La Feria de Sevilla, and then I have Leticia Perez from my office, she is the International Business representative. I am sharing my screen and I just wanted to give Olga a second just to tell us how we got to where we are.

Ms. Olga Ramudo: I will be very brief. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, thank you for having us. And basically, how this all started because I love my city, I work, live, play, I own property, everything. I don't leave my zip code. They tell me about a restaurant opening and I said, that's outside my zip code, I don't leave my city, I love my city. So, because of our Spanish influence, our Sister City relationship, to me, it makes no sense that we have an event such as this any other place but in our city. So, last year, I believe it was 2,000 people that came. We had people coming from other states, we had people coming from Sevilla. I mean it's a great opportunity to showcase our city. It's a great event to bring to our neighbors. It's a very high-class event and I think you will agree once you see what Belkys is going to show you, in videos and pictures, you're going to see the quality of event that we will have.

Mayor Lago: If I may Belkys, just want to say, I want to thank you, Olga, for everything that you do on behalf of the city. You are extremely active, like many residents that are here that we mentioned all the time, you make us look great, along with Belkys staff and I apologize, I didn't see you in the back. Thank you for all the hard work that your staff puts in, amazing work, and this is a testament, what we are doing today is a testament to staff, residents, electeds, coming together and bringing something beautiful to the city that could only grow. Like what we've seen with Dia de Muerto, which is something pretty special.

Ms. Olga Ramudo: Thank you.

Economic Development Director Perez: So, I'm going to go through this really quickly, but basically the Ex-pat Club, which is a club that was created with ex-pats from Spain, they came to the United States and they were kind of missing that cultural heritage that that program caused. So, they started this program five years ago, in 2019, and they had La Feria de Sevilla in Key Biscayne. It is an international worldwide recognized event. It brought to life South Florida ex-pats to communicate and just be together for this event, but its grown now, and so its not just Spanish ex-pats that go. We now have a good amount of even people who are American that attend, because they are looking for that cultural experience. It has grown now to an event that helps to foster economic growth and cultural exchange and mutual prosperity, and we'll see that in a second how it does that, but I want to show a video and we can cut it whenever you guys feel.

Ms. Olga Ramudo: And if I could interject, that picture that you're seeing, those are not pictures from Sevilla. Those are pictures from the event last year. That's how people dress and that's how people show up.

Economic Development Director Perez: This is a video that's going to take you to YouTube and hopefully we can hear the music too. Oh, its not showing. Could you share my screen. Here we go.

[Video Presentation]

Vice Mayor Anderson: You've got to get the men out there dancing too, its mostly women dancing.

Commissioner Menendez: They are just standing there drinking.

Ms. Olga Ramudo: There are...classes included by the way.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. I'll need those.

Mayor Lago: I know you have to go, and I feel terrible.

Economic Development Director Perez: I apologize. I just wanted to show you that, because I think it shows you what you're going to get.

Mayor Lago: It shows quality, it shows the level of the person who is visiting, the food.

Commissioner Menendez: Where will it take place in Coral Gables?

Economic Development Director Perez: It would be taking place on Alhambra, so it would happen on LeJeune to Ponce de Leon. Again, there's more things that are being happening for this year, it would be in March, March 8th, so that is a Saturday, and I'm just going to go through this now.

Commissioner Menendez: How does that play with Carnival.

Economic Development Director Perez: No, it's the first week. The first Carnival, the Carnival on the Mile is the first weekend of March, and so this would be the second weekend.

Commissioner Castro: So, would this only be one side of Alhambra, or would it take both sides?

Economic Development Director Perez: It would be both sides. It would be both sides, closing the entire street from Alhambra to Ponce de Leon.

Commissioner Castro: So, basically the same place as Burgerlicious.

Economic Development Director Perez: Yes, except Burgerlicious is only one block, it doesn't go all the way to LeJeune. So basically, because of our centennial, again, that we're celebrating in 2025, the fact that we have a Sister Cities relationship and we are going to have dignitaries from

Sevilla, as you see more coming as well, and we are going to have a lot of media impact as well with this event, we'd like to bring it. However, its not on consent for you for a reason, and that's just because it has traditionally been a ticketed event, and so, we wanted to go over the value proposition for that ticketed event.

Mayor Lago: So this is something that we worked on last week in the meetings that we had, given an understanding to all of our Coral Gables residents, while we are going to have people who come from other cities, because they always want to come and enjoy our first class events here, just like they want to enjoy our first class facilities, we wanted to make it about Coral Gables residents and Coral Gables families.

Economic Development Director Perez: So, what the event organizer has proposed is that the admission includes a special activity for children. There is a Sevilla masterclass that you get as well, so you learn how to do the Flamenco dance. There is a live Flamenco show that lasts for hours. You will have horse carriage rides, which are pending confirmation, but last year they had horses bred from the royal kings, royal fleet, I'm going to say, but I know that's not the right word.

Commissioner Fernandez: Got it.

Economic Development Director Perez: You saw in the video the attention to detail as far as the decorations are concerned. There is a discounted food and beverage price, so the vendors are not just charging whatever they want, there is a set price for it; and there's a dress code that's encouraged, because it just adds to the experience that you get; and there's going to be some free giveaways and tastings available as well, as supplies last. Children will go in for free, 12 and under, and there will be a discount provided for residents, they have to show their I.D.

Mayor Lago: And the discount is what we talked about, correct.

Economic Development Director Perez: I don't know if Rebeca wants to come up and talk about the discount.

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: I want to thank the Commission and this beautiful City of Coral Gables that has so many Spanish roots, buildings. So, regarding the admission tickets. I only want to tell you that this event has been sold out for the last five years. The day before we always hang up the sold-out symbol, and we still have people that come to the door and say, I pay whatever is necessary to come in. Last year we had 300 people that arrived at the door, had to pay \$50.00 to come in. Nobody complained. We start at 35, that was last year. I think this year we will start 37. We try to keep our prices low, and we will have a discount for Coral Gables residents. We think about 20 percent discount for Coral Gables, I think its \$30. I think everybody can pay that. We also, when you come to the event, you will have that pass, they will range between \$5 and \$10, where can you find this in Miami, nowhere. And the idea is that everybody tastes a little bit of food from the plates, like paella, and they spend \$30, and they really get a lot of food. The same with drinks; we are in the range of \$8 to \$15; \$8 for a beer, \$15 for a good wine, \$10 for a medium wine. So we really encourage it. Why do we do the ticket. We think that if you do tickets, people really want to come, they dress nicely, and if you dress nicely you somehow act nicely. Its true. Its like that and

we have seen it in our events. So, I can only say, its always sold out. Last year we had 2,500 people. This year we did it in Key Biscayne, we want to get bigger. I think this is a great location.

Mayor Lago: Its no different, and if I may, its not different, for example, Burgerlicious in the same location.

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: Correct.

Mayor Lago: And I'm a big fan of Burgerlicious and I always partake as a judge and all that money goes for a great cause, but what I really like about this is, number one, it's a Sister City, number one, it's the Centennial.

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: That's right.

Mayor Lago: Also, the fact that its about culture.

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: It is.

Mayor Lago: And a lot of us Bask, a lot of us are Guyego, like my mom, Guine. A lot of people who came to this great country can be traced back all the way to Spain. So this is a great way to sit down and bring your kids, my daughter's name is M___, my little one is Catalin, we wanted to memorialize and pay homage to Spain and to the culture that we are so blessed to have in our blood. So, I think that this is an opportunity for us to take ownership of an exceptional, incredible event that I think will only get better and I will tell you this, and this is my last comment about it, is that if you look at, for example, and I always go back to the comments of Dia del Muertos, start off very small. Remember Belkys, 100 people, small stage, small programming, and over the years, over the last four years the Mexican Consulate has produced an incredible atmosphere for people to learn about Mexico, original dialect speaking, original dance, and you see what is there to Mexico than what we always think about Mexico, right, apples and tequila, there is a lot more to Mexico than that, there is, and we joke about it and I joke about it with the Consulate, because if you see the way the Consulate comes dressed, its amazing. They hire professional makeup artists, they really take the time, because they want people to understand the beauty of their culture, and it's a lot more than what people think. So, people leave there with an understanding of that. That's my goal. To leave an event that's something that grows with the community.

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: I think its also a community event. We have all the family that comes together, the children with the grandmother, the mother, the teenagers even come, because we engage all the community. We have at least more than ten Flamenco academies that come here. Many of them allocated here in Coral Gables, so the children come to perform, the whole family comes to the event. So, I think it's a great opportunity and we really would love to be part. I was also, last week in Seville, in Spain, and there's a lot of people, institutions and companies that want to come to Coral Gables to the event, because we want to also do networking, we want to do meetings, and they really want to come to the fair.

Ms. Elvira Marcos: Which I think it has a dual purpose, its not only the cultural. We are going to showcase our city to major corporations that are going to be coming...like they do in Spain, so I think it's a dual purpose. I think its only a win-win situation for our city and for the residents.

Mayor Lago: And if I may Belkys and Olga, along with the Consul, please, with full respect to you, and to your team, consider, if my colleagues approve it, that this is going to be La Feria de Sevilla, I would love for it to be La Feria de Sevilla in Coral Gables, and I'll tell you why, because I want people to talk about Coral Gables in Spain. When you mentioned, hey look, there is going to be a beautiful Feria de Sevilla, I don't want it to be Miami, with all due respect to Miami. I want it to be Coral Gables. There is a reason why you're coming here, the reason why we've been working on this, and I think there's an opportunity to showcase all the great things in our city. Think about it. There is no commitment,

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: I think we...

Mayor Lago: I just want to keep mentioning Coral Gables as much as possible.

Ms. Elvira Marcos: We spoke about that, absolutely.

Mayor Lago: That's all I'll mention.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think this is phenomenal. I thank you all for all the work that you've put in. Key Biscayne use to be part of Coral Gables, so I'm glad that we're keeping it within the City of Coral Gables. Mr. Mayor, thank you for the work that you've put in and bringing this and creating these grants. I think you are making a motion, so I'll be happy to second your motion, Mr. Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I just have an ask. When you do the advertising for it, also tell people where they can park.

Economic Development Director Perez: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That you include where to park, the closest places, because that's usually the biggest challenge, because especially when you have people that are not familiar with the downtown and where to park. We had a young lady come in earlier today and saying that there wasn't parking available somewhere, but the problem is its kind of nicely hidden, because its tucked in nice buildings.

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: We spoke about that as well, to have like a map showing where all the parking were. We have a lot of parking.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We do.

Mayor Lago: And Belkys will tell you and you know this, I don't have to tell you, there is a brand-new parking garage adjacent to the Public Safety Building, there is obviously, the Aragon Parking Garage. If we showcase that like on the back of the flyer.

Economic Development Director Perez: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: When the person sees the flyer, the invitation, accessible parking within two blocks, people will walk two blocks for good, cheap, protective parking.

Economic Development Director Perez: They'll also have the trolley.

Mayor Lago: And the trolley.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And the price of the parking is cheaper in the buildings and people don't realize that. So, we already have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Menendez: And I'm good. I think the presentation was wonderful, the reasoning behind it. It's a perfect fit. I guess earlier we approved "Parken Sevilla" and now we are going to approve La Feria de Sevilla, so Sevilla is the theme of the day.

Ms. Rebeca Calvet: Yes, Sevilla it is.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Beautiful. Beautiful.

Commissioner Castro: I like it very much. I guess the next question would be, where do we buy our dress.

Economic Development Director Perez: There is a fashion show that's happening. Its going to be March 6th, so you can see the design that you want at that point. So there are a lot of events that are happening as a result and now they are happening here in Coral Gables.

Mayor Lago: Belkys, one last thing before we take a vote. Will you and Olga and anybody from the staff or the Consul meet with me on Friday, if possible. I want to make sure I have all the points when I meet with the Spanish Consulate this week.

Economic Development Director Perez: No problem.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. So we have a motion and a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you. It's a beautiful project.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Muchas gracias. Thank you staff.

[Applause]

Ms. Olga Ramudo: Thank you, all of you, thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

Ms. Sofia Regalado: Excuse me. Thank you so much. My name is Sofia Regalado, I am the Consul of Spain. Thank you. Muchas Gracias for having us here and for all the support. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: [Spoke in Spanish] Gracias.

Ms. Sofia Regalado: Thank you. Thank you everybody.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.