

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting  
Agenda Item C  
July 1, 2025  
City Commission Chambers  
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago  
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson  
Commissioner Melissa Castro  
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez (Absent)  
Commissioner Richard D. Lara**

**City Staff**

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

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Tom Wells  
Maria Cruz  
Robert Ruano  
Samuel Lawson  
Gonzalo Sanabria  
Vivian Gonzalez  
Manny Portuondo  
Alysia Fernandez  
Roland Rodriguez**

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Agenda Item C [10:12 a.m.]

**Public Comment**

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. First speaker this morning is Mr. Tom Wells.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.  
*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*

Mr. Wells: My name is Tom Wells; I live at 1310 Coral Way and reside in the city for the last 32 years. At this point, Mayor Lago, Vice Mayor Anderson and Commissioner Lara not following the rule of law and not allowing a resident to vote on Charter Amendments as to changing our April voting date. This is an illegal action that wastes the city's time and money. This voting package is reducing the terms of two Commissioners and sometimes vote against this pack and also reducing the Mayor's own term by five months so he can serve almost ten years as Mayor, circumventing the eight-year Charter term limit. If this voting pack cared about residents and the rule of law, they will let us vote in this Charter Amendment that makes our city different from the City of Miami. At the May 20<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting, I gave you a legal memo as the rule of law; the Commission term can only be shortened by resident vote based on Florida Supreme Court cases from 1931 and 1970. It would be irresponsible as the fiduciary of our money; you should either request an Attorney General opinion or let the residents vote on this issue. You ignored my advice. On June 11<sup>th</sup>, the Florida Attorney General issued AGO 2025-01, providing a municipal charter in Miami-Dade County can only be changed by resident vote due to the Miami-Dade Home Rule Amendment. You ignored that advice. On June 25<sup>th</sup>, the Attorney General issued a letter to the City of Miami because it is also trying to change its election date via ordinance warning Miami of impending litigation due to its illegal action. You ignored that advice. Governor De Santis stated there is no authority for the City of Miami to change its election date via ordinance. By ignoring the Governor's advice, you expose our funding request to veto power. The Miami-Dade Charter states that our Charter can only be amended exclusively by voters. It's been part of the Florida Constitution since 1885. The Constitution and Charter cannot be changed by statutes or ordinances, only by voters. This rule of law, per 1999...case from Judge Coe, another Coral Gables resident. AG opinions before 2025-01 do not involve Miami-Dade City, do not address the Home Rule Amendment. Please stop this illegal power grab that wastes time and money and let residents vote on Charter Amendments as required by Florida law. In conclusion, if you persist with this action it will go to litigation. We will lose in litigation after lots of expenses and you'll look for a scapegoat. If you blame the City Attorney, it's not her fault, but if we replace her, I would prefer that we replace her with an independent search committee.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, two things of correction or clarification more like it. Do you consider this an illegal act?

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, first of all, we are still in the public comment period.

Mayor Lago: I understand, but I just want to be very clear, it's fresh, so I want to be very clear.

City Attorney Suarez: So, the Commission already acted, Mayor, the ordinance was already adopted, and it was approved as to form and legal sufficiency.

Mayor Lago: And we're not the first city to do this, correct.

*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*

City Attorney Suarez: No, we are not.

Mayor Lago: In Miami-Dade County, correct.

City Attorney Suarez: There is another city in Miami-Dade County.

Mayor Lago: And there was never an issue with the Governor then, correct.

City Attorney Suarez: Not that I'm aware of, sir.

Mayor Lago: Okay. And I also like to clarify one item. If I'm losing five months, how am I extending my term to ten years?

City Attorney Suarez: I don't know sir.

Mayor Lago: Moving on.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. We always brag about the fact that our city is different than anyone else's. We do not have scandals. At the last Commission meeting, Commissioner Castro proposed that something be added to the HR manual about personal relationships between employees. Another Commissioner then asked the City Attorney and City Manager if they knew of anything happening that would justify the proposal. Both of you answered no. I couldn't believe that neither of you was aware of what has been discussed around the city, in City Hall, in the media, and in other social gatherings. We brag about being transparent, but the fact is that our city is known for covering up. I put together some information that I requested to be put in the minutes. There are only examples of some of the incidents that have happened in the city and had been the talk of the town. I call the report and you all will be getting one, CG Confidential, and this is the disclaimer, these facts may sound familiar. They have been widely circulated and reported by the press and social media. If they remind you of someone you know that's probably just a coincidence, or is it? What about a parks and recreation van being used to transport city guests to Alley Cat, a local strip club. What about a Finance employee depositing city checks into her own personal account. What about a City Manager having an affair with the City Mayor's secretary. A City Mayor hiring his BFF so they could go to lunch together. A city director and a City Manager using city vendors and employees to do work at their personal properties at city expense. A city employee's stealing \$100,000 from the city by paying ghost employees and other schemes. A City Manager and another employee using city credit cards for personal purchases. A city employee using a P-card to buy personal items, including pots and pans, with the city director's approval. A city Mayor having an affair with a subordinate. A city employee complaining about sexual harassment and to make the issue go away, getting transferred

*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*

or provided a job into a neighboring city. I'm giving the City Clerk a copy of this information and request to be added to the minutes. I'm also providing a copy for every one of you.

City Clerk Urquia: Robert Ruano. Mr. Ruano.

Mr. Ruano: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Mr. Ruano: It's hard to follow that. Mr. Robert Ruano, 1544 Mercia Avenue. I'm here today to talk to you about a topic that pains me to talk about more and more, but before I do, well, I was going to have something in writing then my laptop didn't work this morning, so this is what you've got. But I would like the Clerk – can you show a little video quick; I'd like to show you something. This is from Saturday, this is the corner of my house in Brett and Mercia. See the little curb there – the car went over the curb, went about 100 feet, a little over 100 feet, totally took out two palm trees, completely snapped a pole and stopped because the wooden pole there that was by my neighbor's house. Thankfully – can you pause it right there – there you go. Thankfully, the house next to it, or on the other side is about who has two little girls were not walking on there going to the canal, or the neighbor on this side who has a five-year-old girl and a new baby. I bring this to you because you are about to do something terrible on the other side. Commissioner Lara, you didn't get a chance to see this, but could you bring up the other slide please, and the other slide, and Mr. Iglesias, I don't think you were here either. That one. This is option 3 modified, okay, this is option 3 modified. In October, this Commission voted on the sidewalks on Alhambra to not go forward with the sidewalks against the road like the Mayor has been pushing and like it has on San Amaro across the street from his house, and they did this, and I sat with Commissioner Castro, thank you for going a little bit higher, a little bit closer; and I sat with Commissioner Castro and Public Works Director and I think the Assistant City Manager, and came up with a modified option 3 that would protect most of the trees. As you can see, most of the trees are still there, as you go through and it sometimes goes out into the street to protect trees, and the Commission was supposed to see this in March and vote on it, they decided not to. What happened was, Mayor came back, as you saw last time and kind of steamrolled it, you can turn that off and changed it back. You can turn that off for a second please; and so, I will implore you, you are about to make a serious mistake by putting a sidewalk, a curb sidewalk and I would just finish, and by the way, I kind of did your job for you, I sent to 1500 feet within the project site, I sent to my neighbors.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Ruano, would you be kind enough, you've already gone over 20 seconds.

Mr. Ruano: No, actually, we weren't because we were in the middle of all this stuff, remember.

Mayor Lago: Please.

*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*

Mr. Ruano: We got all this. I sent it for you. You are already getting emails, letters. This is not over Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, my friend.

Mr. Ruano: And it's not a done deal. I'll give this to the Clerk.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Samuel Lawson.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Lawson: Good morning, everyone. Bear with me, I have a few scrambled notes here. I didn't have as much time to prepare as I'd like to, but I'll try to get to the point that I think is probably on a lot of people's minds. But before I do, I would like to congratulate...

City Clerk Urquia: Sir, sorry, can you please state your name and address for the record.

Mr. Lawson: Sure. Samuel Lawson, 450 Camila Avenue, Coral Gables. I haven't been here in quite a while, maybe 18 months or so, so I'd like to first congratulate the Mayor, the Vice Mayor, and Commissioner Lara on your incredible victories. I think the people were quite vocal in the margins by which they elected you. And then second, I would like to address the Mayor and the City Manager. You two specifically were put through incredible public humiliation at the hands of a rouge Commission. You didn't deserve it. You are men of great honor and integrity. You've both fought for this city, given up much of your personal self in a variety of ways and you did not deserve to be treated like that; and the entire City of Coral Gables understood that, and they showed up to vote knowing Mr. Iglesias that one of platform policies, let's say, that these Commissioners were running on was their support of you. So, the city resoundingly supported you coming back and so, Mayor Lago and City Manager Iglesias, I want to personally thank you for not giving up when you were being humiliated or attempted to be humiliated because your character never allowed yourself to be humiliated. So, you didn't deserve that. I'm grateful for you fighting and staying here to be endorsed and voted in by the public. So, what I'm here today to talk about is an article that was published in the last week, I think it was, by a local author, don't know who he is, or she is, they are an anonymous person. They run a periodical called Aesop's Gables, and there were some incredible allegations made that seemed to have quite a bit of evidence that would pretty simply and straightforwardly make those allegations pretty self-evident, but I just want to run through a few things so that we have tabled here what my request is going to be before the Commission. So, there was an accusation, and I don't need to beat around the bush because it was directed at Mr. Ariel Fernandez, of number one, deceptive conduct, that a sitting Commissioner operated under fake identities and used a fictitious organization to covertly collect residents' political opinions.

*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*

Mayor Lago: Mr. Lawson, if you could, please bring it in for a landing, you only have three minutes to speak.

Mr. Lawson: Okay. I would just urge you to let me speak a little bit longer, because I haven't been here in quite a long time.

Mayor Lago: I can't give it to anybody else. I've got to be fair to everybody else.

Mr. Lawson: Okay. There have been serious allegations. I urge all of you who are here in this room to read Aesop's Gables most recent article. The allegation suggests that a sitting Commissioner defrauded, basically the entire City of Coral Gables, by in a felonious act collecting public information and using it in an incredulous way. So, what I'm asking for today is that Mr. Fernandez, who has called in sick today, to not face I'm sure what's going to be other people confronting this issue to step down, and second, I would like to ask that the Commission take a vote, if Mr. Fernandez does not step down to look into and to remove this Commissioner. I know that the three of the four of you have continuously voted in support of things in terms of the city and now the city needs for you to defend them.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lawson: So, that puts eyes on you, Commissioner Castro, to see where you would likely vote on something like this.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lawson: Thank you very much and by the way, in terms of Mr. Wells comment, I would like to add and I'm sorry to be out of order, okay.

Mayor Lago: I'm asking you to please sit down.

Mr. Lawson: The city is very much in favor of moving the elections, so even though you may be operating by the letter of the law, you are certainly not operating by the spirit of the law.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Lawson: Sorry for the out of order.

Mayor Lago: Next speaker.

Mr. Ruano: For the record, it was a minute-50 over. You should be fair, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Lawson: He tried.

City Clerk Urquia: Gonzalo Sanabria.

*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Sanabria: Good morning, everybody. Gonzalo Sanabria, 944 San Pedro Avenue in beautiful Gables by the Sea. It's such a refreshing sight as I look here on the people on the dais to see Peter Iglesias reinstated to his post. Every time I was here in the past, and I saw an unqualified City Manager, that was costing us a horrendous \$1,000 a day, because of an ambush hire, spearheaded by Commissioner Ariel Fernandez, and that was a gross misjudgment of what this city needs. So, it revealed itself in what Mr. Fernandez really is, it's all for himself. Recent further details that Mail Chimp and People Count USA could be tied to some operations held by a sitting Commissioner and I'll tell you what colleagues of the Commission should really put in the effort to investigate this to make sure, to make sure that that's not the case. If it is the case, you need to come through with it and it's upon you, upon you to make sure that this is a clean situation and not a verified situation. If it's a verified situation, it needs to be investigated. I urge you, all of you left here on the dais and Commissioners to vote on a resolution today, to investigate this allegation, preposterous allegations made in the Aesop's article, because if it has teeth, it's a discredit to the Commission, it's a discredit to the city. This is not a banana republic. This is the City of Coral Gables. We are a preeminent city, not just in the state, but in the nation and we cannot be besmirched by the activities of one individual who is all for himself. Please, pass a resolution to further look into these allegations which may have some merit. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Vivian Gonzalez.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Gonzalez: Good morning. Vivian Gonzalez, I am not a Coral Gables resident. I live at 6601 S.W. 160<sup>th</sup> Court, Apartment 108, Miami, FL 33173. I'm here on behalf of Greater Miami Youth Symphony, I'm the Executive Director and Greater Miami Youth Symphony was founded in Coral Gables, sorry I'm short, 1958. I just wanted to thank you all for the continuous support of the Coral Gables Cultural Grant and the development this year of the Youth-Arts category, which helps fund organizations like Greater Miami Symphony that have full season youth community youth music education in Coral Gables, which includes our weekly live ensemble and beginning classes at the University of Miami Frost School of Music, as well as our performances there from late August all the way through early May. We bring approximately 400 students from across Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach to Coral Gables every week during that time. So, thank you for your support and quickly, thank you to Catherine Cathers and the Cultural Art staff and the esteemed panel that did such a great job going through all the applications. So, I just wanted to say thank you because at a time when funding is really difficult for our youth arts programs, it really encourages us to continue to have programming in your city. I was a student of Greater Miami Youth Symphony in the 1980s and it was the first time I came to Coral Gables. I grew up in North

*City Commission Meeting*  
*July 1, 2025*

Miami Beach and I had never seen a place so beautiful ever – the trees, the houses, University of Miami campus and it's really our goal to give that to all of our students who come to our program. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Go ahead and go to Zoom next. First speaker on Zoom is Manny Portuondo.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir, Mr. Portuondo.

Mr. Portuondo: Good morning, Commissioners, thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Manny Portuondo; I live at 820 Geronimo Drive in Coral Gables. I'm speaking on behalf of 723 petition supporters that have said no to low bridges on the Coral Gables Waterway. I understand that you guys will be talking about this later today. Unfortunately, I won't be available later today, so I wanted to take the opportunity to speak to you, hopefully one last time. As mentioned before, I think the Underline is a great addition to our city. However, we all believed Miami-Dade County, nor the Underline has fully considered the impact that their bridge will have on the navigability, safety and future sea level rise on the Coral Gables Waterway. We are homeowners on the waterway, users of the waterway. We care deeply about the waterway. My understanding is that the proposed bridge has had some redesign that makes it three feet higher now than the US-1 bridge, which is progress, but its not enough. During the past couple of months, we decided to engage an architect to take a look at the bridge design and the architect designed a new bridge that raises the Underline bridge by an additional three feet without changing either the slope of the bridge or the bridge itself. Its really just an engineering design change that takes into account a very well-known engineering technique called "upturn beams" which wraps the beams going up versus going down and by doing so we gain three feet of clearance, which is very important if you want to navigate the waterway. I think – Commissioners, you guys have this first design that was sent to you this week. I know I have spoken to many of you, and I really urge you to advocate for this higher bridge design. We preserve our 20-year-plus structures, let's build it right the first time so we don't have to move them again in the future. And in addition to that, I urge you to request from Miami-Dade some language, legal language in any agreement that the city were to agree to with Miami-Dade would require Miami-Dade to bring up the height of the bridge to any future height that would be higher than the US-1 bridge or Ponce bridge at the time that that were to change. Thank you and I appreciate your time today.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Portuondo, thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker, Mr. Mayor, I only have a first name, I don't show a last name is Alysia, if she could please unmute and state your name and address for the record, please.

Ms. Fernandez: Can you hear me?

*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*



Mayor Lago: Yes.

Ms. Fernandez: My name is Alysia Fernandez; I live at 6000 Granada Boulevard, Coral Gables, Florida. I've been a resident in Coral Gables for 60 years, living presently at this address for 40 years. I have two issues I wanted to speak about. I was trying to be there today, but it was impossible for me to go. One is about Ariel and the Aesop's article that came out and I see he's not there, so I really cannot speak directly to him, but I'm sure he's watching on Zoom or whatever and he will hear this comment. So, I'm speaking first to Ariel then to Melissa. Ariel, you campaigned on transparency, meanwhile in the background you are guilty of breaking Florida Statutes and being a proven liar. This is called corruption. This is what you brought to the City of Coral Gables. We, the residents, do not trust you, plain and simple. This is not the first time I have called for your resignation, the first time being in April at the Commission meeting when you wanted to fire City Manager Iglesias for your own personal reasons. Today, for the second time, I'm asking you to resign now or run the risk of being removed. You should be removed if you don't resign, because you brought on the corruption. Now, I'm speaking to Melissa. Commissioner Melissa, Richard Lara won by a very healthy percentage in the April 8<sup>th</sup> election. His platform included moving elections to November, as well as repealing the salary increases you gave yourselves, without resident input. Commissioner Lara won because people agreed with his platform. The will of the people was to rescind the salary increase. This was passed by this Commission in the May Special Meeting. The remaining was moving the elections to November, which also passed by this Commission in May. Why you found it necessary to align yourself with what's happening in the City of Miami shows that you have got an agenda. It is embarrassing. The May meeting held voting on these two items, and the decision was made by majority, and it reversed what the Commission had passed without resident input in 2023. I'm sorry, I did not agree. The Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, I'm glad to see City Manager Peter Iglesias back in Coral Gables. Congratulations Mr. Iglesias.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: Alright. Then we will close the public comment.

[Note for the Record: Other items were taken up and then the Mayor reopened Public Comment for speaker Roland Rodriguez who wasn't able to get on Zoom earlier]

Mayor Lago: Before we move to item E-1, Mr. Clerk, would you like to hear the individual that was waiting for some reason was not able to get through.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. Mr. Roland Rodriguez will appear on Zoom if he can please state his name and address for the record.

*City Commission Meeting  
July 1, 2025*

Mr. Rodriguez: Good morning, everyone. My name is Roland Rodriguez; my address is 3310 Alhambra Circle. I'm speaking on behalf of our neighborhood and in reference to Mr. Robert Ruano's comments, in reference to the sidewalks. He mentioned he met with Commissioners Castro and Fernandez and provided other alternatives. I'd like to mention that neither one of these individuals is a professional engineer and I think it has been made very clear through the city staff and standards applicable that these are safe decisions and safe options that were provided to the public. He also showed a video, unfortunately there was an accident, but in the video there actually was no curb. So, the vehicle rode through the grass and thankfully no one was hurt. Again, this is a viable option. This has been edited through Public Works, as an engineer myself, I can tell you that it is a safe option and we come to you as a neighbor, a homeowner and it has gone up several times and it just continues to be delayed, which continues to be an actual safety issue and continue to delay this item. Again, we find ourselves speaking on an item that has been covered several times, it has been vetted, has been proven to be shown safe and Mr. Ruano just continues to limit the move forward of this item based on a personal agenda that is actually not in the best interest of the neighborhood, but a personal agenda to himself. That's all. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: I apologize about that. Item E-1.