

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D – Mayor’s Comments
October 26, 2021
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

Assistant to the City Manager, Solanch Lopez

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item D [Start: 9:22 a.m.]
Mayor’s Comments

Mayor Lago: Now moving onto Mayor’s Comments. So, I ask you today for a little bit of patients in regard to Mayor’s Comments. I’m going to indulge in a lot of things that I have to mention today. I think they’re all good things. So, it’s a moment to have a conversation and I’d love for my colleagues to please interject and engage in the conversation. First off, what I’d like to do is I’d like to talk a little bit about our Tallahassee update. The Commission, myself, along with Commissioner Fors and our team here in the city were privileged to represent the City of Coral Gables in Tallahassee, where we had the opportunity to meet with several Senators and House of Representative leaders in our State Legislature, along with the Lieutenant Governor. The goal of our meeting was very simple. It was to strategically encourage members of the Appropriation Subcommittees to allocate state funding towards our 2022 Legislative Priorities, which are pretty incredible priorities that have been put together by Naomi and the City Manager’s team, along with the City Attorney and City Clerk. In an effort to hit a benchmark and that’s one of my

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priorities as an elected official, as the Mayor has been to, hopefully get more money that we've ever gotten in years past to bring back to the city. We made that abundantly clear in over a dozen meetings that we had with elected officials. Among some of the individuals we met was with the Lieutenant Governor, as I mentioned, Jeanette Nunez, President of the Senate, Senator Wilton Simpson, Senator Ileana Garcia, Speaker of the House, Future Speaker, Representative Danny Perez, Daniel Perez, Representative Jayer Williamson, Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera, along with Representative Bryan Avila, Representative Duran, Representative Vance Aloupis, Representative Marquette. So, we met with a litany of elected officials. It was a world-wind and I just wanted to make sure that we put it really on the record, so people understand the level of effort that was given in Tallahassee. We started very early in the morning, and we ended the day at night, in an effort to meet with as many different entities and elected officials to really, really stress the importance of our Legislative Priorities, and I can't thank enough Naomi, Chelsea, the City Manager's team, Patty for putting everything together, along with my colleague Commissioner Fors, who really shined bright in Tallahassee on our advocacy efforts. I don't know if my colleague wants to say anything, Commissioner Fors.

Commissioner Fors: Yes. I'll add. I fear jinking it, so I don't want to emphasize how spectacular I think the meeting went. We really went up there with intention and purpose to accomplish a specific list of goals. I think that strategy was formulated by the Mayor and by Naomi Levi-Garcia and Chelsea Granell with a lot of tips and insight from our lobbyist, Southern Strategies and the folks from Ron Book's office. I think we checked the box on every single thing we were trying to accomplish. The job is not yet done, but I think that it was clear that this is now the second time that we do this, because we were, we truly felt like we were very effective what we set out to do. I also want to take a person point of privilege to mention that the Mayor, I think really hit it out of the park. I kept on telling Naomi Levi-Garcia and Chelsea Granell that he was – I've never seen anybody so on with respect to the mission and the message. I joked with him over there that I think he spent a week practicing in front of the mirror, because his passion for the issues that he was talking about was something you couldn't fake, and you really saw it in the eyes of the Representatives that we were speaking to, and I think it really sold our message.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Commissioner, I appreciate that. That's very kind of you. We are going to be going again to Tallahassee in November for two days, two or three days, excuse me, and I look forward and I welcome anybody that wants to join us. My colleagues on the Commission and the Manager's staff, the more the merrier. I think it's a great opportunity, because we are talking about usually every year, we potentially get on average \$4 to \$500,000 in funding from the state. I want to bump that up. I want to bump that up to several million. We have identified projects, these are quality of life, public safety projects, which are ready to go. They are shovel-ready projects, a lot of them are in design, some of them are studies which will help us really address certain issues that are affecting our residents, and I think for a long time in this community and we made it abundantly clear that we've given our fair share, and I would like nothing more than bring

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back as much money as we possibly can to continue to serve our residents to the best of our ability. So, I want to congratulate staff, congratulate the Manager, my colleague on the Commission. It was a flawless effort and I congratulate you. I look forward to November. I also want to mention Red Ribbon Week. I just learned about this, this week. Red Ribbon Week officially started October 23rd and runs through October 31st. The Coral Gables Trust and Informed Families is requesting for the Coral Gables City Hall to be lit red during any of these days. Informed Families is a South Florida non-for-profit organization created by parents and helps Florida's kids grow up safe, healthy and drug-free, through fun and effective prevention programs for students and families in the K-12 schools and communities. They focus on four campaigns; Family Day, Red Ribbon Week, Lock Your Meds, and Safe Homes Smart Parents. Lighting the City of Coral Gables City Hall red would be an ideal way for families in Coral Gables to unite and take a stand against drugs. It will also show the city's personal commitment to a drug-free lifestyle. So, I ask my colleagues to support that. We can light it once, two days, three days, whatever the Manager deems appropriate.

City Manager Iglesias: I have no issue with that Mayor. We can certainly do that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. I appreciate the support. I want to also highlight a few other issues that I think are important, just in case someone asks you. At the last TPO meeting last week when I arrived from Tallahassee, we arrived like I think it was one o'clock, I had a TPO meeting at 2 o'clock in downtown. I presented a piece of legislation that I drafted with the help of the Director of the TPO that calls for a study to be implemented between 37th Avenue and U.S.-1 and 57th Avenue and U.S.-1. What is the point. What is the purpose of this study and that is to address the congestion issues resulting from the development of the Douglas Station and neighboring stations and neighboring projects? The Vice Mayor and Commissioner Fors will be bringing, are proposing some legislation that is on the agenda today that deals with the RTZ. So, I clearly articulated in the TPO meeting, as your representative that we are not against the proposed projects, but what we are against is poor planning and a lack of infrastructure. We also want to see things in the context of the City of Coral Gables. The City of Coral Gables has already taken a significant stand forward. If you look at some of the projects that have been developed on the TLD corridor on U.S.-1, in between the county's uncontrolled projects at the Douglas Station and the City of Coral Gables that we have already put several thousand units. If you look what happened at Merrick Park also, as a potential corridor on the TLD. So, what we are looking for now is opportunities. How are we going to traverse U.S.-1 with all the congestion currently happening on LeJeune and Ponce? Anybody that tells you there is no congestion there is lying, and I mentioned that very, very clearly. So, this study is going to provide us with a review of different alternatives to address the congestion that we're facing as a result of the proposed and continued construction on the U.S.-1 corridor. So, you'll be seeing that coming before you probably in the next six months after the study has been completed. I'd also like to take a personal point of privilege to recognize our City Manager. The Association of Cuban-American Engineers and the Cuban-American Association of Civil
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Engineers recently celebrated their 2020 and 2021 honorees and award-winners. Coral Gables took top honor in 2020. So, this is something to be very, very proud of. The city's streetscape project which refurbished Miracle Mile and Giralda Plaza into pedestrian-friendly streets received the Civil Engineering Project of the Year, Category Number 3 from the CAACE. This award is presented annually to an engineering or architectural project where the main component is civil engineering and the construction cost range between \$25 to \$100 million dollars. So, we were recognized for this project. And I wanted to congratulate everyone that worked on this project, our team, our consultants, architects, engineers, especially city staff. You deserve all the credit. I'm also very proud to acknowledge that our City Manager Peter Iglesias is a nationally recognized structural engineer and received Engineer of the Year from the Association of Cuban-American Engineers for his more than 3 decades of dedication to the field. Mr. Manager, to say that we are proud of you is an understatement. You make us very proud. And I want to put this on the record, not only are you a very competent engineer and you are a great leader, but one of your best characteristics is that you don't play politics. Either you are black or white, and that is something that we can talk about your ability as an engineer, your ability as a leader, but what this community has longed for a long time, because the Commission has done it for a long time, but we've lacked a leader who calls balls and strikes, and that to me, is something that I always tell you and I think its something that we need to acknowledge on the record. So, this is just a simple gesture that was acknowledging, but I wanted to make sure that we did it on the record, because you are a gentleman, as always how you conduct yourself. So, congratulations.

City Manger Iglesias: Thank you Mayor. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

[Note for the record: A photo was taken with the Commission and the City Manager recognizing his awards and achievements]

Mayor Lago: When the Mile started after three years of planning, there was one person that showed up with me at 10 o'clock at night to start the milling process. You know who that was? – that was this man right here. So, I remember starting the milling process for the construction of Miracle Mile, he was there with me to witness this historic moment. And I still remember the phone call when we encountered some drainage issues which delayed the project. So, the award is to celebrate you as an engineer, but Miracle Mile, the Public Safety Building, the refurbishment of our Fire Stations, and the planning of our Mobility Hub do not happen with your leadership and with your team. So, I congratulate you on that.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you very much Mayor. Thank you.

[Applause]

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Mayor Lago: I also want to recognize staff for Adventure Day. It was an incredible weekend. This weekend the entire Commission attended Adventure Day for all, and I wanted to give a shoutout to the Community Recreation Department and for all city staff who helped coordinate such an incredible event. My daughter, Catalin, really enjoyed all the activities. I know that Commissioner Fors and Vice Mayor Mena's kids were there also. I know that Commissioner Menendez is a full-grown adult, but he's a kid at heart. He sent me some videos that were great of him riding some of the, what was it called, the zip line, and it was...

Commissioner Menendez: The zip line is officially safe. I got on it, and it didn't collapse.

Mayor Lago: You were doing a public service. I love it. So, it was truly remarkable to see how well attended the event was. Not only did we celebrate Disability Awareness Month, but it was also a grand opening, the first ever inclusive playground in Coral Gables. So that's something that I want to commend, because staff did an incredible job. I also want to acknowledge Code Enforcement; and I'm acknowledging Code Enforcement, not only because I see the improvement, along with our Waste Management Department. We've seen an incredible improvement in the way things are being done. And I want to make sure that people understand the Commission is watching. We are watching how you're stepping up to the plate. We are watching how even the most difficult times you are coming through. So, I want to congratulate our Waste Management Department and our Code Enforcement Department, which is really being proactive, and they are going out there and doing everything in their power to serve the residents of this community. So, I want to congratulate them for their efforts. The last person that I want to recognize, and I appreciate your patients with me. Had a lot of things that I've mentioned here in the Mayor's Comments. I want to recognize someone who is very special here in the city. A person that we all work closely with, her name is Solanch. Solanch Lopez who was awarded the 2021 Ford Mujeres Legendary Award for the community. The award is comprised of 20 Latina honorees selected from Miami, New York, Los Angeles, Houston and Dallas, Ford Mujeres Legendarias represented the 29 million exceptional Latinas in the U.S. that are making a difference in the workplace, their homes, the environment and the community. Each Mujer Legendaria is recognized for their embodiment of one of four motor company's brilliant pillars, technology, sustainability, leadership and community. I think you embody all four of those. Solanch was born in Cuba and came to Miami at the age of 5. She is proud of her Latina roots and values her role within the Miami community. In her work as the Assistant to the City Manager. We all know the meaningful role she plays in our city and the exceptional work she has done with Keep Coral Gables Beautiful, a program she brought to our attention, which is making a difference in our community. I can't exemplify or I can't state how important that statement is to me personally. I am a stickler for litter, a stickler for doing things the right way and doing it once and doing it the right way. You and I have that in common and I think we work very well with each other, but you have taken a role, a leadership role and something that I wanted to do for a long time and to me, I couldn't ask for anybody who could do a better job than me. So, I just want you to know that when I go out there

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and I see the level of quality, the level of care that you take to make sure these events are put on, that we are leading by example, that we are really filling in the word beautiful in City Beautiful, that to me, if I haven't said it enough, I want to put it on the record that I can't thank you enough for that. That means a lot to me. And she's an example of how the United States is a land of opportunity. Just think, she started in the city working at the Venetian Pool and during her time here, she is not only has risen through the ranks, but earned a Master's Degree in Marketing. She is also incredibly hardworking and well respected amongst her colleagues. Ford has honored nearly 200 women of distinction in the United States over the past decade during Hispanic Heritage Month. This year's honorees were announced at an awards reception last week. Please join me in saluting Solanch for this well-deserved recognition. Congratulations Solanch.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: You've got to say a few words, come on. Don't be shy.

Ms. Lopez: I wasn't expected to be called up here, so I'm kind of thrown aback. Like I said at that, it was a big honor to receive that recognition and definitely this one. A large thank you to Carolina Vester, our Assistant Director of Community Recreation who is the one that first brought me to the city.

Mayor Lago: She's incredible.

Ms. Lopez: Has guided me throughout the years and is the one that nominated me for this recognition. She was the 2021. All the past nominees nominate the future ones. So, I owe her a lot and to the City Manager for giving me the opportunities he has. He's the one that green lit the Keep Coral Gables Beautiful program and it's been really fun and engaging to be able to put that program together with Matt and with you guys and we give to the community.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. When you get your plaque or your award, whenever it comes in, maybe we can come and take a picture with it. Is that fine? I look forward. Congratulations – well deserved.

Commissioner Menendez: Congratulations Solanch.

Commissioner Anderson: Congratulations Solanch.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: Alright, enough Mayor's Comments.