

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C-1
August 25, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item C-1 [9:02 a.m.]

Mayor's Comments

A discussion regarding the Historic Preservation Board.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, Mayor's comments. The first one is Historic Preservation Board. We have, in the past few meetings, had criticisms as to our historic preservation procedures, our historic preservation commitment, and our Historic Preservation Department, which is the only city where it is a department, has five boards under it; the Historic Preservation Board, Coral Gables Merrick House Governing Board, Pinewood Cemetery, Cultural Development and Arts Advisory. We have six full-time and one part-time employees in our Historic Preservation

Department, as opposed to most cities, which have between one and three. Ninety percent of -- more than 90 percent, 94 percent of the items that have been presented for historic preservation to our board have been approved by the board. Have been approved, including districts and some houses and such. At our last meeting, we had appointed a person, former head of staff of the board, historic preservation person, who -- I've received complaints. I've received dismay in comments from members of the board because Dona Spain, the former director of the board, called into question the motivations, qualifications and lack of preparedness and insufficient care in fulfilling the obligations of members of the board, and that destroys the collegiality of the board. That has been done. She is there, and I hope that she does not continue calling into question the competence or motivations of the people on that board. I'm also concerned about Ms. Spain's ability to appeal decisions of the board in which she participates. I think that is destructive, and be that as it may, these are my comments, and many people are dismayed as to her having been appointed. Next item in Mayor's comments is Mediterranean...

Commissioner Mena: Can I just say that I'm not dismayed at all, that I think it's a great appointment to the board. I mean...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: So, you say that and I hear comments from members of the board that are very upset and distressed that she was appointed after having attacked them personally.

Commissioner Mena: Well, but...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I think that's improper.

Commissioner Mena: It was critical. She was highly critical. She's more than competent, over-the-top competent. And it's -- look, we are critical of each other sometimes when we serve on a board together. I've heard you say people here are playing politics on issues that they take very seriously, and saying other things to some of us, and I could be offended and take my ball and go home and not be happy about it. Or I can continue working with you to reach a resolution. So,

Dona's qualified. She was critical that day. And you know, she -- you now, last year, respectfully, you basically tried to overthrow the Cultural Advisory Board and were so critical of them that they started writing to us to defend themselves and their credentials, but that's part and parcel of trying to make progress, to improve things. Sometimes you're critical of people. I can understand that somebody felt she crossed the line. Okay, that's a subjective opinion. But is she qualified? Yes. Is our board better for having somebody with her qualifications? Yes. So, I think everybody just needs to learn...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And I don't question her qualifications...

Commissioner Mena: To get along and...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: At all. (INAUDIBLE) judgment. But anyway...

Commissioner Mena: What's that?

Vice Mayor Lago: Commissioner...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I haven't questioned her qualifications. I have questioned...

Vice Mayor Lago: Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Her judgment in making a personal attack on members of...

Commissioner Mena: But we've talked about that issue now multiple times, and we keep going back to it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: And there's a lot that happened on that item specifically that we could talk about, but for that to be the thing that everybody's honed in on, you know, respectfully, you know, we've got to let it go, and we've got to move on. She's qualified.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah, that...

Commissioner Mena: That should be all that should matter.

Vice Mayor Lago: Commissioner Mena and the Mayor, you know, when we talk about Dona Spain -- and Commissioner Keon has every right to appoint her, she's a private citizen -- not only does she have every right, she has done an exceptional job representing the City and this community in two different capacities; one as an employee at the City, which again, was she tough on issues? Did she advocate on behalf of what was correct in regards to historic preservation? She did. Were we always on the same side? We were not. But again, criticism comes with the territory. This is the standard operating procedure today -- in today's day and age. Was she tough? Yes, she was incredibly tough, I think, in her emails, but I have the utmost respect for Ms. Spain, and I had a conversation with Miriam because I saw that there was mentioned before by the Mayor about -- if there was a potential conflict of interest. And I think Miriam can shed some more light in regards to that there isn't a conflict of interest, that Dona Spain would recuse herself from that public entity where she serves as the Chair, if she is required to in regards to a matter on the Historic Preservation Board. So -- and when I mean it, I mean Dade Heritage Trust. So, I think this is an item that we need to move forward from. You know, historic preservation sometimes -- like was in the case in the last residential property that came before us, is contentious. You have two different sides that are advocating on behalf of something that they truly believe and that they're passionate about. I just don't want to, you know, lose focus on the fact that we're here to serve the City and that criticism comes with the territory. We should just move on from this issue and continue to push the ball forward. So...

Commissioner Keon: I'd like to add that Dona Spain is my appointee and I stand by her as an appointee, and what she had to say, she said as a private citizen, and if there becomes an issue of the ability for that board to work together because of the behavior of anyone on that board, I think maybe we could take it up again, but at this moment, this is an issue that, as has been already said, should sit behind us. It's over, it's done, and I'm sure that you have all adults on that board that don't agree with everything that comes out of everyone's mouth at any given time that they may meet on any given occasion for any given issue, you know. If they don't like it, they don't have to like it, but you know, she's my appointee to that board and I think that she serves the City very well.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, and I expressed my opinion. I'm still holding it, and let's go on to the next item.