

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C
March 12, 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

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz
Rip Holmes
Eduardo Brunken
Sarah Gaglian

Agenda Item C [9:32 a.m.]

Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk moving onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. First speaker this morning is Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, Coral Gables, Florida, where we lived since 1976. I have some comments written, but I'm going to start by making a comment about A-2. Many years ago, one of my students said something that I've always remembered. If you look at any organization, hospitals, governments, schools, if the executives do not show up to work, you may not know, but if the cleaning lady doesn't show up to work, if the bathrooms are not cleaned, if the bus driver doesn't show up to work, we have a problem and the phones start ringing. I think

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it's about time to recognize the women that work for this city that are not executives, but they are mothers, they are single parents, and they deserve to be recognized. I know they couldn't all be here, but when we have an event in the evening, we could have invited some of them to come and be recognized, and I'm sorry, that's not acceptable. Alright. My comment today, by the way, I'm wearing my *Winter is Coming*, because winter is coming, believe it or not. There is an elephant in the room, and I didn't have the other prepared so I'm not talking about that. Today on the agenda, I see that we're naming several parks. Several women are being recognized, but there is a glaring absence on the list. A woman who has been recognized by the state. If you go to Tallahassee, the Women's Hall of Fame, her name is there. The county, the Rape Center carries her name. The women's park, she's there. What has the City of Coral Gables done for her? Nothing, even though she was very active, even though she made many things change in this city. The powers that be, the establishment has chosen to ignore her. Today, I'm here to say shame on you, and ask that politics be put aside and recognize Roxcy Bolton. If there is somebody in this city who deserves to be recognized, who deserves to have a park, a building, some facility named after her is Roxcy Bolton, and I'm ashamed to say we have failed her. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good morning.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you all. It's a great new City Commission we have with a great new City Manager. So, I'm going to make two comments, one is a rather high praise for the City Manager and then the other one would be in promoting the safe design of the Mobility Hub, so get ready. I'm going to coin a phrase today. Amos Rojas is the second coming of Jesus Christ for Coral Gables democracy and here comes the key line on this, for trying to return Coral Gables a place that's safe to raise kids, children. What's more sacred, what's more religious than children. We have lost Coral Gables as a place to raise children from infancy, zero to 18 independence. I hate to say this, but our last two Mayors have killed it. Well, it's not really them, it's the Supreme Court, it's the Citizens United decision, that's what killed it. But with this new City Manager, what is more sacred, what is more worthy of the phrase, the second coming of Jesus Christ and to try to restore in Coral Gables, to try to restore Coral Gables as a safe place to raise children free from over-development and the crime that comes with it. And second place for that nomination is, I'm going to nominate him for a profile in courage award with the Kennedy people the swing vote Kirk Menendez. Let me move then to the second item. I think I have a couple of slides.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. So, if you can go to the one that talks about women shoppers, women outspend men. So, guys and girls, have you ever noticed women like to shop and men don't, and so, if we're going to have a parking garage on Miracle Mile, the Mobility Hub, we better think about our bottom line. I had a discussion today with the Finance Director, Blanco Gomez, she and I had different views on what statistics have been published as to how much this garage will affect the city's tax base, and I'm saying its 7.5 percent. I hope you'll give me a couple of seconds. So,
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women do the shopping and that's our first thing here. You can see women 75 percent of the shopping. So, then we need to make sure that they feel welcomed, and they feel safe. Can we go to the one about the FBI statistics. I'm so bad with these slides and thank God for Billy Urquia.

City Clerk Urquia: You're good.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. We're on somewhere. Okay. So, this is the best thing that I've come up with and I need to do more research on getting something straight from the FBI, but this says that the FBI says that parking structures are the third most dangerous type of property in our country. I found working on these garages since I came back here was published in the Miami Herald in 1998, women do not like garages, they are unsafe, they are dark, darkness breeds mugging or sexual assault. So, if we think about how do we protect the city's tax base, because it's not about helping the private property owners helping me, its about helping the city pay the unions their COLAs and keeping a balanced budget and all that. So, if we can make women feel safe, then they will do more shopping and the city will have more money to pay the unions who deserve higher rates, but we've got to make sure we generate the money from the women shoppers. Now, if we go then to the next slide.

City Clerk Urquia: I have two photos, which one.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. So, let's go to the one with the fancy one. Thanks for giving me a little leeway. Okay. So, this is the garage that will make women feel safe. Now think about this. If you're standing there, that garage, the Mobility Hub, that is a transparent building, you can see through it, and so, think if you're across the street. If you're where that camera is, you can see if some ugly guy is assaulting some beautiful woman shopper who's paying the bills for the city and you can yourself, just look at that thing, you can call 911 from your phone and protect that woman and the mugger will, as he leaves the garage will have the police with their flashing lights waiting for him and he'll never get out of the garage, you follow me, and you watching that thing from across the street will have apprehended and you, you can make sure that our women shoppers are safe. Finally, we go to the last slide, and I'll wrap it up. There are those who want to take us back in time and don't want to live in the year 2024 when we can make such, this will be the safest garage if we do it the way I just showed, they want to take us back to this. Now, this was built by the same people that have the present contract here. This is right across from the Fire Station on Minorca, does that look like a jail to you? – are any of us Superman, do we have x-ray vision, can we see a woman being mugged in that garage, take a look. That's not safe. There's no way its safe, and if our income depends on women wanting to shop here, we need to go with the safe one. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Appreciate it. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Eduardo Brunken.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir. Good morning. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Brunken: Good morning. How are you all doing. My name is Eduardo Brunken, resident for over 25 years, living on Obispo. I started playing pickleball around five or six years ago, and when
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I used to say the word pickleball, people would go, what the hell is that, right. Now you all know what pickleball is. You are getting bombarded, right – ESPN, corporations, billionaires are investing in this sport. Right now, they are estimating around 6 or 7 million people playing in the United States, its going to be 40 to 50 million by the year 2030. Now if this was a stock it's going this way and we're going to go here, we're here. So, the growth is there. It's not a fad, because first there was that argument, is pickleball a fad, like racquetball, totally different sports. Why is pickleball the fastest growing sport? Any reason why you think it's growing so fast. I'll tell you, I guess. Number one, it's easy to play. Anybody can play pickleball. There are people that have never played pickleball in their life or played any sports in their lives, are enjoying the sport of pickleball. You don't need to be as athletic. Reason number two, like in tennis, basketball. I can't go out and play basketball now or volleyball, it's just too physical, even tennis is too physical. And probably the most important its social and that's what differentiated it between us and racquetball and tennis and some other sports. You play a game, you sit down, and you talk to everybody, you meet a lot of new people. I've met over thousands of people that have played for Las Vegas all the way down to Homestead. It's been my pickleball experience and the people that play pickleball are very good people and very community oriented. And kind of looking back, what's the purpose of government; one of the purposes of government is enrich the quality of its citizens, right; build community. I don't know what other thing out there that is doing that on a consistent daily basis. Okay. Also, it's very affordable. There are places you can play for free. You can buy a paddle – people are giving away paddles for \$40.00 and that's it. It isn't golf, any of you golfers that have played. The social aspect, I've played in different places. One of the places I've played there's three generations playing, a grandfather, a son, and a grandson. What sport has that. I've played against 88-year-old players and 11-year-old players, and guess what, both of them have killed me. Okay. So, obviously I'm a proponent and it makes sense for Coral Gables to expand the pickleball program. I think what's important is, where I played in places like Las Vegas, the reason I go to Las Vegas is because my son lives out there, a place called Sunset Park, Google it if you like. The community there built 24 free courts, lighted courts, beautiful, state-of-the-art courts on the south side, right next to the airport. If you ever go to Vegas, right next to the airport there's a beautiful facility out there, and they are building one north of similar, again free is the key word. I think you need to have that as a part of your component. In closing, what are the other benefits for Coral Gables. It's going to get more exposure. We were talking about building it on top of the parking lot there, you're going to get more exposure so that restaurants, retailers, its going to bring in more traffic. Again, people with money, people are going to go to the restaurants, eat after playing at night and have events. Another suggestion is what Lincoln Road did on Miami Beach, they closed down Lincoln Road, not totally closed down, but they had a pickleball court tournament there, thousands of people showed up. We could do that here on Miracle Mile to promote the City Beautiful. So that's my two cents. Have a good day.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have a speaker on Zoom. I don't have a name, but I will be recognizing her next. Ma'am?

Ms. Gaglian: Speaker: Can you hear me?

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Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Ms. Gaglian: My name is Sarah Gaglian, a pickleball enthusiast. I work for United Community Bank at 3399 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, Coral Gables, Florida. Pickleball has changed my life in a variety of ways, as well as my family's. Pickleball courts frequently become hubs of activity providing a venue for neighbors to gather, compete, and of course, form life-long friendships. The games double and promote teamwork and collaboration, creating a sense of community that goes beyond the court. One of the most appealing characteristics of pickleball for me, my family, is that it offers a low impact workout that is appropriate for most people regarding age and fitness level. I have my mother who is 80 years old, and she is now playing. Pickleball promotes a sense of community and togetherness among players whether participating in a local league or a pickleball game, players create connection based on shared experiences and the love of the game. The sport continues to grow in our area and the construction of new courts will motivate community members who have never played pickleball to try it, as well as attract new players and relieve the overload of pickleball courts in the areas. Thank you, Council members, for your time and attention.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

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

Mayor Lago: We have nobody else for public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: No sir.

Mayor Lago: Alright, we'll close the public comment and move to the Consent Agenda.