



GABLES GOOD GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

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CORAL GABLES ELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE **Responses from Commission Candidates**

To GGG Members and Friends:

The Coral Gables Commission candidates have provided answers to a questionnaire sent to them by the GGG Board and Advisory Council. All responses are published as written by each candidate.

We thank all the commission candidates for their time and for giving their views to Coral Gables voters on many of the issues that are important to our community. Remember to Vote!

Coral Gables Election Date

VOTE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 8th!

Vote-by-Mail Ballot

Register by 5 p.m., March 27, 2025

votemiamidade.gov/votebymail

(305) 499-8444

Vote Early

April 5 and April 6; Coral Gables Branch Library,
7 a.m.-7 p.m.; 3443 Segovia St., Coral Gables

Vote on Election Day

7 a.m.-7 p.m., Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Vote at your assigned precinct.

GROUP I – MAYORAL CANDIDATES:

Michael A. Abbott
Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

Michael A. Abbott

Group I – Mayoral Candidate

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General Questions

GGG: Why are you running?

ABBOTT: To use my experience working in the private and public sectors to bring positive changes to the City, including, but not limited to: 1) create effective & more efficient uses in budgetary spending (get more for less, or cut spending that is not efficient or beneficial—not to be misconstrued to mean eliminating services), 2) being a beyond reproach mayoral candidate, I seek to eradicate corruption from within our City Government and to mitigate overbearing influences from outside sources, 3) as smart growth proponent, bring civility, goodwill and respect back across business, government, academia, labor, and the broader community.

GGG: What is the single most important issue you would address or advocate for if elected?

ABBOTT: Restoring ethical conduct and promote good moral character in all facets within the City of Coral Gables.

GGG: In what ways do you think the current City administration could better serve the citizens of Coral Gables, and how should the upcoming administration put those ideas into action?

ABBOTT: As the mayor of Coral Gables, I will be transparent, accountable, and beyond reproach. I intend to serve you honorably. A Government for the people, by the people, seeking a rigorous cost analysis road map for effective governance. Effective governance also requires promoting an inclusive and respectful culture across governmental, commercial, and residential living activities—promoting tolerance for, including, but not limited to, opposing opinions, religious differences, political ideologies, physical challenges, and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, I am opposed to even the appearance of corruption.

Issue-Specific Questions

Civility and Ethics

GGG: One of the few things people seem to agree upon today is that, when it comes to political and policy discussions, there is little agreement and even less civility. This lack of civility has been on full display in the City of Coral Gables in the last year.

What do you think can be done to improve trust and participation in local government? Do you have any ideas about promoting civil discourse in our community – both within City government and in the interactions between City officials with the public?

ABBOTT: Create a voice committee made of up local business and resident volunteers—which may have subcommittees depending relevant concerns. The voice committee chair, or designated person, will represent the voice committee at City Commission Meetings. Promoting civil discourse in our community, whether it is inter-governmental, or the interactions between government officials and the broader community, City Officials should promote and practice the following principles: 1) those affected by a decision should be involved in the decision-making process, 2) it should be evident that the public input will influence the final decision, and 3) communicate how and why how the public’s participation affected the decision made. Discourse is a two-way street, with the understanding that the City Officials are there to serve the broader community. The broader community is the ultimate customer.

GGG: *Do you believe the Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives (such as the implementation of pay raises and the hiring and firing of key staff), and if so, how do you propose achieving this goal? In other words, what specific processes should be put in place to ensure transparency and open debate?*

ABBOTT: The Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives by welcoming public discourse on all matters before it, including, but not limited to, pay raises the City Commission voted for itself. Just because it can, it might be better to convene a public committee to vet the issue and make it’s recommendation. The fallout experienced from the recent pay raises given to the respective members of the City Commission has been an unfortunate distraction.

Development

GGG: *Large-scale development, and the accompanying problems of traffic and density and demands on fire and police services, continue to be an issue of concern for many Coral Gables residents.*

GGG: *Where do you stand on the development issues that residents have raised? Do you think the City should do more than it is already doing to control development and its impact on quality of life for residents?*

ABBOTT: I am a smart-growth proponent. I believe the heart of this matter goes to the character of the elected official. Either they have selfless or selfish motivations. Elected office is NOT a get rich quick scheme. That said, property owners are due their say as to any City Govt placed land use restrictions, and these restrictions to strive to strike a balance the interests of the property owner and the broader community.

Public Safety

GGG: *What is your position on traffic calming?*

ABBOTT: Generally speaking, I am in favor of roundabouts in residential areas. Maybe a traffic calming measure should be to reopen some closed streets.

GGG: *What is your position on requiring sidewalks in Coral Gables for pedestrian traffic? What is your position on adding bicycle lanes or paths for bicycle traffic?*

ABBOTT: With a safety-first approach, yes, the City should promote pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Budget and Taxes

GGG: *What concerns do you have about the City budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?*

ABBOTT: Unfunded obligations.

GGG: Do you believe the City has adequate resources to fulfill growing demands on services given the increase in density in development? Do you believe the City should aim to decrease taxes, leave taxes at the current level, or increase taxes?

ABBOTT: Ultimately, the costs of running the government should dictate adjustments, if any, in millage rates. If, for example, there is a budget deficit of \$2,5 million, and the collective desire is to not reduce services or to increase taxes, then that deficit has to be filled by an increase in revenues, reduction of costs, or a combination of both. Some home sales reassessed to market values would put a dent in this deficit, but maybe not enough to cover that deficit, so any remaining difference must come from increases in other revenue sources (increased commerce activities or increases in prior year's assessed property values), or in reduction of projected expenditures, such as by refinancing long-term obligations or by negotiating more favorable terms on contracts. Generally, however, budget surpluses should be earmarked to pay down unfunded liabilities, first and foremost.

Elections

GGG: Do you believe the City should maintain its April election tradition, and, if so, what do you think can be done to improve voter turnout and participation?

ABBOTT: I am open to discussing this matter, but I am in favor of greater participation rather than less. A November-election month would best meet this greater participation goal.

Mayor Vince Lago

Group I – Mayoral Candidate

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General Questions

GGG: Why are you running? What is the single most important issue you would address or advocate for if elected?

LAGO: I am running for re-election because Coral Gables is my home, and I am committed to preserving its unique charm, protecting its residents, and ensuring our city government remains transparent and accountable. My most important priority is maintaining the character and livability of Coral Gables by ensuring responsible development, enhancing public safety, and fostering a government that puts its residents first. Over the past few years, we have made significant progress in lowering crime, expanding green spaces, and standing firm against overdevelopment that threatens our quality of life. However, there is still work to be done, and I am ready to continue leading with integrity and a clear vision for the future.

Since being elected to the commission in 2013, I have dedicated my time to protecting what makes Coral Gables special while ensuring we move forward with smart, sustainable solutions and a government that is accountable to its community.

GGG: In what ways do you think the current City administration could better serve the citizens of Coral Gables, and how should the upcoming administration put those ideas into action?

LAGO: While we have achieved great progress, our city government must be more transparent, accountable, and responsive to residents. Over the last two years, major decisions—such as hiring and firing key staff like the city manager or approving salary increases for elected officials—have been made without proper public input or following proper process.

To improve this, I propose:

- Expanding transparency measures, such as requiring increased public notice and resident feedback on major city decisions.
- Enhancing community engagement by holding more town halls and listening sessions with our residents – our bosses.
- Implementing stricter fiscal responsibility measures to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and in ways that benefit residents, not politicians.

If re-elected, I will continue working to make our government more open, honest, and resident-focused.

Issue-Specific Questions

Civility and Ethics

GGG: One of the few things people seem to agree upon today is that, when it comes to political and policy discussions, there is little agreement and even less civility. This lack of civility has been on full display in the City of Coral Gables in the last year.

What do you think can be done to improve trust and participation in local government? Do you have any ideas about promoting civil discourse in our community—both within City government and in the interactions between City officials with the public?

LAGO: Trust begins with transparency and accountability. When residents feel their voices are heard and respected, engagement increases, and discourse improves.

To build trust and encourage civil dialogue, I propose that we take several important matters either ignored by the city commission or hidden from the residents directly to the voters via referendums, including rescinding the 101% salary increases approved by the Commission in 2023, moving municipal elections from April to November, and whether the city should have an office of the Inspector General.

I will also advocate additional public forums and town hall to foster open discussion with our residents, as well as improv access to city information through the city’s digital platforms, making decisions more transparent and easier to follow.

By leading with professionalism and respect, we can set the tone for productive conversations and stronger community relationships.

GGG: Do you believe the Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives (such as the implementation of pay raises and hiring and firing of key staff)? If so, how do you propose achieving this goal?

LAGO: Absolutely. As I stated above, to build trust and encourage civil dialogue, I propose that we take several important matters either ignored by the city commission or hidden from the residents directly to the voters via referendums, including rescinding the 101% salary increases approved by the Commission in 2023, moving municipal elections from April to November, and whether the city should have an office of the Inspector General.

I will also pursue a national search for our next city manager, one that allows the best and the brightest to apply, to include some of our own senior staff, which have been shut out for consideration due to the way in which the last two managers have been selected.

These steps will ensure that government decisions are made in the open, with input from the people who matter most—our residents.

Development

GGG: Large-scale development, and the accompanying problems of traffic and density and demands on fire and police services, continue to be an issue of concern for many Coral Gables residents.

Where do you stand on the development issues that residents have raised? Do you think the City should do more than it is already doing to control development and its impact on quality of life for residents?

LAGO: I stand in the same place I have stood for 12 years: always fighting against overdevelopment that threatens our city’s character. While responsible growth is important, we must ensure it aligns with our community’s needs and vision. These positions have earned me the wrath of some out-of-town developers who have spent thousands of dollars attacking me during elections and, most recently, the failed recall.

To better control development, I have worked to expand green spaces to offset density increases. One of my proudest accomplishments has been securing five new parks downtown without costing taxpayers a dime—and I’m not stopping there. I’m committed to adding five more, ensuring we have even more green spaces to enjoy with family and friends.

Coral Gables must remain a livable, beautiful community, not a city overrun by unchecked development.

Public Safety

GGG: What is your position on traffic calming?

LAGO: I fully support traffic calming measures to ensure our streets remain safe for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers, as well as measures to address speeding and cut-through traffic by working with neighboring municipalities and Miami-

Dade County. In fact, I sponsored the legislation that was unanimously approved by the commission to permanently reduce the speed limit from 30 to 25 mph on local residential roads maintained by the city.

GGG: What is your position on requiring sidewalks in Coral Gables for pedestrian traffic? What is your position on adding bicycle lanes or paths for bicycle traffic?

LAGO: Pedestrian and cyclist safety is a priority. I support sidewalk expansions where feasible, particularly near schools and parks. I, proudly, have been the strongest advocate for sidewalks in University Drive, Blue Road, and Granada Boulevard.

Budget and Taxes

GGG: What concerns do you have about the City budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

LAGO: We must remain fiscally responsible and ensure taxpayer dollars are used wisely. Our city has experienced one of the highest property tax increases in the country, and we should provide residents with tax relief. I have proposed lowering the millage rate twice during the past two years, but my colleagues have opposed them. At the same time, they have voted to give themselves a 101% salary increase and are currently discussing putting the city in over \$50 million in debt by using bonds for projects they haven't even identified yet.

As we are preparing to celebrate the 100th anniversary of our incorporation, Coral Gables is at a pivotal moment in its history. We must choose a future that prioritizes responsible growth, public safety, fiscal responsibility, and government transparency.

GGG: Do you believe the City has adequate resources to fulfill growing demands on services given the increase in density in development? Do you believe the City should aim to decrease taxes, leave taxes at the current level, or increase taxes?

LAGO: We must ensure our police, fire, and public services keep pace with demand. That is why I have led the charge in spending over \$100 million in a new, state of the art public safety building and a new fire station on Sunset. Rather than increasing taxes during a period of ballooning property values, we should focus on smarter spending and efficient budgeting to maintain – and increase - services without burdening residents. Moving our elections to November, for example, would save the city approximately \$200,000 per election.

Elections

GGG: Do you believe the City should maintain its April election tradition, and, if so, what do you think can be done to improve voter turnout and participation?

LAGO: I believe moving elections to November would increase voter turnout and save taxpayer money. Residents deserve a system that encourages participation, not one that suppresses it. Unfortunately, what we have seen from my colleagues on the commission and some of the candidates running for office they support are calls for “quality voters” over quantity – a truly undemocratic proposition.

A thriving democracy depends on active participation, and I believe that having more – not less – voters is the right thing to do for our city. That is why 28 out of 34 municipalities in Miami-Dade County have already taken this step.

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

Group I – Mayoral Candidate

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GGG did not receive answers to its questionnaire from Commissioner Kirk Menendez.

GROUP II – COMMISSION CANDIDATES:

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Laureano Cancio
Felix Pardo

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Group II – Commission Candidate

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General Questions

GGG: Why are you running? What is the single most important issue you would address or advocate for if elected?

ANDERSON: I am running for re-election to further improve the quality of life in our city. Public safety is the most important issue that guides my priorities. In my first term, I voted for adding 15 Police Officers, 15 Firefighters, the Sunset Drive Fire Station and competitive wage increases for employees.

Regarding development, four years ago the Mediterranean Code improperly allowed modern architecture to receive bonus height and density with zero setbacks. The corrections I sponsored make it more difficult for future projects to receive bonuses and require a conceptual review process for residents to comment. I supported residents' requests for less density (living units) and more trees and parks than the Zoning Code requires. See rhondaforcoralgables.com/issues. I oppose the expansion of commercial zoning into multi and single-family zoned areas, and require developers to install traffic calming, improve drainage, extend/replace sidewalks, and provide other benefits that improve the quality of life.

GGG: In what ways do you think the current City administration could better serve the citizens of Coral Gables, and how should the upcoming administration put those ideas into action?

ANDERSON: The City Administration, more specifically, the Development Services Department, needs further improvements. Four years ago, on the heels of covid, the Department took the first step to transform a permitting process that was a slow paper filing process to an electronic version on-line. Mobile permitting was added to assist the sick, disabled and elderly.

Electronic filing is easy for individuals who are architects and developers; but is a minefield for those who are not. An easier option is needed for those who cannot electronically file. Our residents pay significant permitting fees and should receive prompt, first class service without paying extra fees.

With the criticism of directors and employees in the Department that started immediately after the last election two years ago, we have lost critical employees. It is my hope that a new Commission that supports critical employees will help us rebuild a cohesive Department and efficient permitting process.

Issue-Specific Questions

Civility and Ethics

GGG: One of the few things people seem to agree upon today is that, when it comes to political and policy discussions, there is little agreement and even less civility. This lack of civility has been on full display in the City of Coral Gables in the last year.

What do you think can be done to improve trust and participation in local government? Do you have any ideas about promoting civil discourse in our community -- both within City government and in the interactions between City officials with the public?

ANDERSON: Before the last election two (2) years ago, the issue of civility and professionalism on the Coral Gables City Commission was not an issue. Even when Commission members passionately disagreed on a policy or issue, it was done with decorum and respect.

The Commission's guiding principle should be to do what is in the best interests of the residents of our great city. Clear and transparent information must be provided to residents. All significant non-emergency items must be noticed on the agenda and clearly inform residents. For instance, the firing of a city manager should not be noticed as a "succession plan," and issues such as the commission doubling its compensation must be noticed on an agenda and placed on a ballot at the next election; not buried in the final budget. Our Charter will require significant changes to prevent problems like this and others from recurring in the future.

GGG: Do you believe the Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives (such as the implementation of pay raises and hiring and firing of key staff), and if so, how do you propose achieving this goal? In other words, what specific processes should be put in place to ensure transparency and open debate?

ANDERSON: During the past two years, three members of our Commission have taken actions without a transparent process. In addition to the items noted above, the Commission hired a new city manager without any notice, application process, background checks, or opportunity to review the credentials of applicants. Similarly, the public had no notice that three Commissioners requested doubling the Commission's compensation without placing the item on a ballot for voters to decide. And although one member of the Commission claimed the city was a "cesspool of corruption," three members of the Commission voted against allowing the voters to decide if the city should employ the services of an inspector general to investigate such serious allegations.

Going forward, a transparent process must be immediately adopted and placed on a ballot for the voters to enshrine in the City Charter so future Commissions cannot unilaterally repeal them without the voter approval.

Development

GGG: Large-scale development, and the accompanying problems of traffic and density and demands on fire and police services, continue to be an issue of concern for many Coral Gables residents.

Where do you stand on the development issues that residents have raised? Do you think the City should do more than it is already doing to control development and its impact on quality of life for residents?

ANDERSON: All development, whether large scale or "as of right" impacts traffic, pedestrian safety, density and demands on fire and police services. All residents and property owners near projects must receive notice and have an opportunity to voice concerns or provide suggestions or comments.

I have never voted for a project residents have opposed, and (1) increased the side setbacks on townhomes near existing buildings, (2) limited building lengths in the North Ponce Residential Infill District, (3) removed bonus height and reduced setbacks from projects with modern architectural styles, (4) required early conceptual review of projects seeking bonuses and zoning changes, and (5) advocated against Tallahassee controlling or preempting our zoning code through the Live Local Act or Bert Harris Act. See “Florida’s awful Bert Harris Act is for the birds -- Law to protect landowners, helps developers and hurts the environment,” Pittman, Craig, (2021, Nov. 4) <https://floridaphoenix.com/2021/11/04/floridas-awful-bert-harris-act-is-for-the-birds/>.

Public Safety

GGG: What is your position on traffic calming?

ANDERSON: Living one block off LeJeune Road and on Sevilla – a major cut-through from Red Road to the Central Business District -- I have always been a strong advocate for traffic calming and having developers pay for it. During my term, I have required developers to pay for or install traffic calming in neighborhoods that their project impacts. In addition, I have engaged Florida Department of Transportation to reduce speed limits near Coral Gables High School, install pedestrian crossing improvements, agree to add a sidewalk on Bird Road, and engage in studies to reduce speeds and improve pedestrian safety on LeJeune, Bird Road, U.S. 1 and S.W. 8th Street. On the County roads, I requested and obtained repaving on Coral Way, Old Cutler and Maynada Streets. On the city streets, many traffic calming devices have been installed and, in the interim, temporary devices have been installed.

GGG: What is your position on requiring sidewalks in Coral Gables for pedestrian traffic? What is your position on adding bicycle lanes or paths for bicycle traffic?

ANDERSON: On major streets where it is unsafe for pedestrians to walk, the city should pay for the installation of sidewalks. In addition, I believe that resident input is necessary for sidewalks and bike lanes. That is why I knocked on the doors and spoke to residents on very busy streets to determine if they wanted sidewalks or bike lanes before seeking grants to defray the cost of design and installation.

Budget and Taxes

GGG: What concerns do you have about the City budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

ANDERSON: Revenues from property taxes have substantially increased in the past two years and must be carefully managed to avoid increasing recurring expenses rather than addressing one-time expenditures for needed infrastructure repairs and decreasing debt service. Public safety and critical infrastructure are high priority city expenditures. The maintenance of our city buildings, facilities and equipment must be continuously budgeted in a 5-to-10-year plan to ensure that the city can deliver the services residents expect. The budget must also anticipate that there will be periods when revenues will decrease and avoid increasing recurring expenses for non-essential positions or items.

GGG: Do you believe the City has adequate resources to fulfill growing demands on services given the increase in density in development? Do you believe the City should aim to decrease taxes, leave taxes at the current level, or increase taxes?

ANDERSON: Yes, I believe the city has adequate resources to provide services. In anticipation of future increased density in the Central Business District, the police and fire chiefs requested, and the City Commission approved, staffing increases in 2022. Because the city does not provide trash or waste services to office and apartment buildings or townhomes, those structures have not increased the service demand on sanitation workers.

I believe the best means to provide tax relief to residents that are struggling is (1) the significantly lower garbage fee I sponsored in 2024, (2) for the State to increase homestead exemptions, and (3) for the County tax appraiser to reduce taxable values. By increasing the homestead exemption and decreasing taxable values, residents that are struggling to pay taxes and insurance will be provided relief for all County, School and City taxes.

Elections

GGG: Do you believe the City should maintain its April election tradition, and, if so, what do you think can be done to improve voter turnout and participation?

ANDERSON: No. Elections in April or any other month not tied with County-wide elections, have consistently had very low voter turnout. In addition, the turn-out for the run-off election two weeks later is extremely low. April is a time when families like to take vacations while students are on Spring break and people forget that there is an election in April.

Moreover, maintaining elections in April requires our city to spend \$100,000 to \$200,000 more for an election than it would cost to do the elections along with the County-wide elections. Two years ago, I sponsored the ordinance to move the elections to coincide with the County-wide elections, and when three members of the commission did not support it, our State representatives were disappointed with the city's decision to waste taxpayer dollars on off-season elections.

Laureano Cancio

Group II – Commission Candidate

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General Questions

GGG: Why are you running? What is the single most important issue you would address or advocate for if elected?

CANCIO: I am running because I want to make sure that the historical past and aesthetic beauty of our city is protected by limiting rampant construction. In addition, a greater effort must be made to support and fund the arts. Lastly, our public school system must guarantee that every child in our city will be able to attend a school that is within the city's boundaries. There is no doubt that the construction boom in Coral Gables has upset many of our citizens and it is clearly the most important issue that must be addressed by our elected officials. The character of our city is under assault and a better balance must be achieved between the needs of our community and property owners.

GGG: In what ways do you think the current City administration could better serve the citizens of Coral Gables, and how should the upcoming administration put those ideas into action?

CANCIO: Effective immediately, all city departments should be ordered to answer their telephones during working hours. At present, no one in our administrative offices feels compelled to answer their telephones. Callers are told, in a recording, to write an email and await a response. Normally it takes two to three days to get a call answered. Sometimes, messages are not even answered at all, and citizens must personally visit the city's administrative offices. When they do, they are charged parking fees. Our citizens should not be charged for parking when they visit their city's administrative offices on business. Contacting or visiting our city's governmental offices should not be a cumbersome event for any city resident.

Issue-Specific Questions

Civility and Ethics

GGG: One of the few things people seem to agree upon today is that, when it comes to political and policy discussions, there is little agreement and even less civility. This lack of civility has been on full display in the City of Coral Gables in the last year.

What do you think can be done to improve trust and participation in local government? Do you have any ideas about promoting civil discourse in our community – both within City government and in the interactions between City officials with the public?

CANCIO: The issue is quite problematic. I have seen some of our public officials threaten citizens with arrest because they dare to speak during hearings or express disagreement with those in charge. Some of these officials demand to be treated as if they were judges and forget that they are elected public officials who are there only because citizens have decided to grant them the authority they possess, but only on a temporary basis until the next elections are held. Such authority, however, is not to be abused. Under the circumstances, I would say that the only way the matter will be resolved is when Coral Gables residents finally decide to remove these officials every time there is an election.

GGG: Do you believe the Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives (such as the implementation of pay raises and hiring and firing of key staff), and if so, how do you propose achieving this goal?

In other words, what specific processes should be put in place to ensure transparency and open debate?

CANCIO: The City Commission has transparency and open debate, and no changes are necessary. The problem that we face is that our Mayor has yet to accept the fact that the City Commission has decided not to follow his leadership. Each member of the commission has one vote, and so does the Mayor. The implementation of pay raises and the firing of the City Manager were conducted after following all legal requirements. The Mayor is just upset that the City Manager he hired was terminated by the rest of the commission and that he did not have the power to veto the action. Similarly, he did not have the power to veto the decision to authorize pay raises. It is totally unreasonable for the compensation of a City Commissioner to be \$35,000, when a City Manager earns \$300,000 and a real state broker can earn \$600,000 in one financial transaction.

Development

GGG: Large-scale development, and the accompanying problems of traffic and density and demands on fire and police services, continue to be an issue of concern for many Coral Gables residents.

Where do you stand on the development issues that residents have raised? Do you think the City should do more than it is doing to control development and its impact on quality of life for residents?

CANCIO: There is no doubt that the construction boom in Coral Gables has upset many of our citizens. The character of our city is under assault and a better balance must be achieved between the needs of our community and property owners. We are not talking about banning construction, but about making sure that the uniqueness of our city is protected by limiting rampant construction.

Public Safety

GGG: What is your position on traffic calming?

CANCIO: I believe that traffic calming offers an opportunity for our community to reduce the negative impact of motor vehicles. Studies have shown that it permits us to make street safer for pedestrians and cyclists. On the other hand, critics have pointed out that the practice slows or damages emergency vehicles and causes damage to buses. In addition, traffic calming has also been associated with cognitive load, driver errors, and unsafe decision-making. In any case, I think that we should study each case individually and encourage the practice in areas where it will do the greatest good. As an avid runner, I would encourage the practice, provided all sides of the issue are evaluated before implementing the practice at a particular location.

GGG: What is your position on requiring sidewalks in Coral Gables for pedestrian traffic? What is your position on adding bicycle lanes or paths for bicycle traffic?

CANCIO: Coral Gables is a beautiful city which can be greatly enjoyed by walkers and runners. Requiring sidewalks would take away a great portion of the beauty of a walk or a run in our neighborhoods. In addition, house owners truly enjoy having a property that is open and unrestricted. Sideways should be limited to streets with a lot of traffic, as a safety precaution from vehicles and bicycles who usually do not respect walkers or runners. In the matter of creating bicycle paths, I must say that I am completely against the practice. Bicycle drivers usually prefer to take over the sidewalks and the highways, depending on their best interest. While jogging in our neighborhood, I have had many close calls with bicycles. Very often they strike runners and walkers from behind, without giving any warning that they are approaching at high speeds.

Budget and Taxes

GGG: What concerns do you have about the City budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

CANCIO: I would recommend that there be greater involvement by the City Commission in how the budget is put together by the City Manager. There is a lot of money spent by our administrators and not enough supervision of how the final numbers are put together. It is important that the Commission become aware of how vendors are picked for specific jobs, as well as the bidding process they must engage in prior to getting a city contract. I would estimate that the Commissioners have limited knowledge of what goes on and that the City Manager has the upper hand in dealing with such issues. More time must be spent in the actual process of budget creation by the Commission, if we are ever to get to the question of how many critical decisions are really made by lower-level bureaucrats.

GGG: Do you believe the City has adequate resources to fulfill growing demands on services given the increase in density in development? Do you believe the City should aim to decrease taxes, leave taxes at the current level, or increase taxes?

CANCIO: The City does NOT have adequate resources to fulfill demands on services given the increase in density in development. A critical decision must be made on either limiting development or raising the taxes of companies who are engaged in massive development within our boundaries. There is no justification for the Commission to permit a rampant development policy that does not provide an adequate plan to appropriately finance the support system that must be created to support such policies.

Election

GGG: Do you believe the City should maintain its April election tradition, and, if so, what do you think can be done to improve voter turnout and participation?

CANCIO: I strongly believe that the City should maintain its April election tradition. Furthermore, I do not think anything else should be done to improve voter turnout and participation. Currently, many of our voters vote by mail. The system is known to everyone, yet many people choose not to use it. In addition, there is an opportunity to vote at the Public Library on the Saturday and Sunday before an election. Then, there is a full fledged election provided on April 8th, for those who did not get an opportunity to vote. Clearly, our Democratic system provides the opportunity for all citizens to vote in our elections. If they chose not to vote, that is their right. We simply do not live in a dictatorship and can not force them to vote against their will.

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GGG did not receive answers to its questionnaire from Felix Pardo.

GROUP III – COMMISSION CANDIDATES:

Richard Lara
Claudia Miro
Tom Wells

Richard Lara

Group III – Commission Candidate

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General Questions

GGG: Why are you running? What is the single most important issue you would address or advocate for if elected?

LARA: I am running for Coral Gables City Commissioner because I believe it is time to restore civility, transparency, and accountability in our local government. My deep affection for the City Beautiful drives me, but more importantly, I am committed to ensuring that our residents' voices are heard and valued—not ignored or silenced.

One of the most pressing issues facing Coral Gables is the lack of respect in City Hall. But of even greater concern is the budget and how uncontrolled spending will unreasonably and dangerously burden our residents now and for decades to come if we continue on this path.

GGG: In what ways do you think the current City administration could better serve the citizens of Coral Gables, and how should the upcoming administration put those ideas into action?

LARA: The City administration must prioritize transparency and resident empowerment by actively listening to community feedback instead of making key decisions behind closed doors. Too often, major issues—such as city manager selection and pay raises—are decided without meaningful public input. Residents deserve a voice in shaping their city's future.

Additionally, professionalism in City Hall must be restored. City Commission meetings should focus on solutions, not personal attacks or political grandstanding. Leaders must engage in respectful, constructive dialogue that prioritizes residents over partisan conflicts.

The next administration should commit to open government, town halls, and advisory referendums to ensure public input drives decision-making. Coral Gables thrives when its leaders work collaboratively, act transparently, and put residents first. By fostering civility and inclusion, we can build a stronger, more united community that truly represents the people it serves.

Issue-Specific Questions

Civility and Ethics

GGG: One of the few things people seem to agree upon today is that, when it comes to political and policy discussions, there is little agreement and even less civility. This lack of civility has been on full display in the City of Coral Gables in the last year.

What do you think can be done to improve trust and participation in local government? Do you have any ideas about promoting civil discourse in our community – both within City government and in the interactions between City officials with the public?

LARA: Building trust and participation in local government starts with open communication and genuine resident involvement. Too often, decisions are made without meaningful public input, leading to frustration and disengagement. The City must prioritize transparency by holding regular town halls, open forums, and public votes on key issues.

To foster civility, elected officials must set the tone by focusing on policy, not personal attacks. City Hall should be a place for constructive dialogue, where differing opinions are respected and debated professionally. Encouraging community roundtables, resident advisory boards, and stronger public outreach efforts can create a culture of cooperation.

Additionally, improving access to information—through livestreamed meetings, interactive Q&A sessions, and digital engagement platforms—will help residents feel heard and valued. By committing to respect, transparency, and collaboration, we can strengthen civic trust and ensure that Coral Gables' government reflects the needs of its residents.

GGG: Do you believe the Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives (such as the implementation of pay raises and the hiring and firing of key staff), and if so, how do you propose achieving this goal? In other words, what specific processes should be put in place to ensure transparency and open debate?

LARA: Yes, the Mayor and City Commission must improve transparency by ensuring that major decisions are made in the open, not behind closed doors. The approval of pay raises, election date changes, and hiring or firing of key staff should never happen without full public input.

To achieve this, the City should increase public forums and town halls, allowing residents to voice their opinions before decisions are made. Referendums should be required for major issues like pay raises for elected officials and changes to election dates, ensuring these choices reflect the will of the people.

Additionally, Commission meetings must remain professional and policy-driven, free from personal attacks and political theater. Agendas and key proposals should be easily accessible online, with live streamed discussions and clear opportunities for public feedback. By fostering open debate, public participation, and ethical decision-making, we can rebuild trust and ensure transparency in Coral Gables government

Development

GGG: Large-scale development, and the accompanying problems of traffic and density and demands on fire and police services, continue to be an issue of concern for many Coral Gables residents.

Where do you stand on the development issues that residents have raised? Do you think the City should do more than it is already doing to control development and its impact on quality of life for residents?

LARA: As a supporter of responsible development, I recognize the importance of balancing growth with community preservation. Coral Gables' charm and quality of life must be protected from overdevelopment that strains traffic, infrastructure, and public safety services.

The City should take a more proactive approach by ensuring that new development aligns with our community's needs. This means enforcing smart zoning policies, requiring impact assessments on traffic and public services, and ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with growth. Additionally, we must create a transparent and predictable permitting process that encourages thoughtful development while preventing projects that compromise our city's character.

Collaboration with residents, industry professionals, and city planners is key to maintaining the integrity of Coral Gables. We should also explore sustainable building practices and housing solutions that enhance our community without sacrificing its unique appeal. Growth should never come at the expense of our quality of life.

Public Safety

GGG: What is your position on traffic calming?

LARA: Traffic calming is essential, but it must be done the right way—thoughtfully, strategically, and with input from both professionals and the community. Traffic congestion is a major issue across Miami, including Coral Gables, and while slowing down traffic in certain areas can improve safety, it should never create unintended consequences like increased congestion or inconvenience for residents.

The best approach is to work closely with transportation planners and engineers to determine where traffic calming measures—such as roundabouts, speed humps, or narrowing lanes—make sense. At the same time, public meetings and resident input should guide the process to ensure solutions actually improve quality of life rather than create new frustrations.

If there's a smart, effective route to making our streets safer and more efficient, we must take it. But it should be done with expert guidance and public feedback to ensure we get it right.

GGG: What is your position on requiring sidewalks in Coral Gables for pedestrian traffic? What is your position on adding bicycle lanes or paths for bicycle traffic?

LARA: Sidewalks and bicycle lanes can improve safety and mobility, but they must be implemented strategically and with input from engineers, experts, and the public to ensure they enhance—not hinder—traffic flow.

For sidewalks, I support requiring them where they make sense—especially in areas with high pedestrian traffic, schools, parks, and commercial zones. However, implementation should respect the character of our neighborhoods and be done without creating unnecessary burdens on homeowners.

Similarly, bicycle lanes should be carefully planned to promote safety without worsening traffic congestion or reducing essential roadway capacity. We must work with urban planners and transportation experts to ensure bike lanes are placed where they truly benefit riders and integrate smoothly into existing infrastructure.

If these improvements can be made without negatively impacting traffic or residents, I will support them. But they must be done the right way—with professional guidance and public input.

Budget and Taxes

GGG: What concerns do you have about the City budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

LARA: Of great concern is the budget and how uncontrolled spending will unreasonably and dangerously burden our residents now and for decades to come if we continue on this path. A \$100 million bond is being pursued now by a majority of the Commission without justification. Debt will be incurred for projects with high interest payments, for which the City has already budgeted without the need for a bond. A lack of transparency and accountability in City Hall closely tied to a pattern of repeated three-to-two votes over the last two years has shown that certain commissioners have disregarded due process, limited open discussion and shut out opposing viewpoints. This kind of governance erodes public trust and prevents meaningful collaboration on the issues that matter most to residents.

GGG: Do you believe the City has adequate resources to fulfill growing demands on services given the increase in density in development? Do you believe the City should aim to decrease taxes, leave taxes at the current level, or increase taxes?

LARA: The City must be fiscally responsible while ensuring that taxpayer dollars are being used efficiently. With increasing density and development, it is crucial to allocate resources wisely to maintain high-quality city services without burdening residents with higher taxes.

I believe the City should aim to lower taxes by cutting wasteful spending, prioritizing essential services, and investing in smart growth strategies. By streamlining operations, leveraging technology, and ensuring new development contributes its fair share to infrastructure and public services, we can maintain world-class city services without unnecessary tax increases.

Coral Gables has the resources to meet its growing needs—but only if managed correctly. The focus should be on spending taxpayer dollars where they matter most—on public safety, infrastructure, and community improvements—not on unnecessary expenses or political pay raises. Lowering taxes while maintaining services is possible with efficient, transparent, and responsible financial management.

Elections

GGG: Do you believe the City should maintain its April election tradition, and, if so, what do you think can be done to improve voter turnout and participation?

LARA: I believe Coral Gables elections should be moved to November to align with state and federal elections, ensuring higher voter turnout and greater civic participation. More residents are engaged in elections during this time, and shifting our local election would make it easier for people to vote while also saving taxpayer dollars on a separate election.

That being said, this is a decision that should be made by the voters. There is no such thing as a “high-quality” or “low-quality” voter—we are all Coral Gables residents with a right to have a say in our local government. The City should put this issue to a referendum and let the community decide the best path forward.

Regardless of when elections are held, we must also increase voter outreach, expand access to information, and encourage civic engagement to ensure every resident has an opportunity to participate in our democracy.

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General Questions

GGG: Why are you running? What is the single most important issue you would address or advocate for if elected?

MIRO: I am running because, if elected, I would be the first non-attorney commissioner with 25 years of government experience, a master's in public administration, and a deep understanding of how to do the job on day one. The issues that were present when I sought public office four years ago are still unresolved and, frankly, have gotten worse.

I am running to be a true voice for the residents of Coral Gables. With my knowledge, articulate communication, and political savvy, I believe I am uniquely equipped to serve and lead effectively from the dais. My goal is to bring real, informed leadership to the table and make meaningful progress on the challenges our city faces, focusing on the needs and concerns of everyday residents.

GGG: In what ways do you think the current City administration could better serve the citizens of Coral Gables, and how should the upcoming administration put those ideas into action?

MIRO: The current City administration could better serve residents by truly understanding and engaging with the entire community—not just those who attend meetings but also those who are quietly observing and waiting for change. The administration needs to be more in touch with the concerns and frustrations of everyday residents who are fed up with the lack of civility and the constant in-fighting.

This behavior needs to stop, not just because of an upcoming election, but because it is the right thing to do for the community. The next administration must prioritize restoring respect, cooperation, and transparency. It's clear that residents are paying attention, and if this toxic environment persists, they are ready to vote for change. By listening to the silent majority and fostering a more respectful, collaborative approach, we can rebuild trust and create a government that truly serves the people of Coral Gables.

Issue-Specific Questions

Civility and Ethics

GGG: One of the few things people seem to agree upon today is that, when it comes to political and policy discussions, there is little agreement and even less civility. This lack of civility has been on full display in the City of Coral Gables in the last year.

What do you think can be done to improve trust and participation in local government? Do you have any ideas about promoting civil discourse in our community – both within City government and in the interactions between City officials with the public?

MIRO: We must lead by example. Civility cannot be forced, but it can be modeled. Calling out incivility often leads to more animosity rather than productive dialogue. Instead, we should focus on fostering respectful discussions and ensuring public meetings remain professional and constructive.

Education is also key. Providing training on Robert's Rules of Order for elected officials would help maintain order and structure in discussions. Many officials take office without a clear understanding of proper procedures, leading to unnecessary conflicts.

Additionally, bringing in fresh faces with fresh ideas can help reset the tone of discourse and encourage a more collaborative and forward-thinking approach to governance. By prioritizing transparency, respect, and education, we can rebuild trust and increase public participation in local government.

GGG: Do you believe the Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives (such as the implementation of pay raises and hiring and firing of key staff), and if so, how do you propose achieving this goal? In other words, what specific processes should be put in place to ensure transparency and open debate?

MIRO: The processes for transparency already exist, but I believe education is key to ensuring they are fully utilized. The City Manager and City Attorney can play a critical role in advising and guiding the Commission to follow the proper procedures, ensuring consistency and transparency in decision-making.

In addition, public comment is essential. By providing regular opportunities for residents to voice their opinions, we remind the Commission that they are being closely observed, which encourages adherence to established processes. Ensuring that all decisions, especially those involving significant financial or staffing changes, are thoroughly discussed in public forums will not only increase transparency but also foster trust and accountability in the decision-making process.

Development

GGG: Large-scale development, and the accompanying problems of traffic and density and demands on fire and police services, continue to be an issue of concern for many Coral Gables residents.

Where do you stand on the development issues that residents have raised? Do you think the City should do more than it is already doing to control development and its impact on quality of life for residents?

MIRO: I stand for responsible development—projects that are built to scale, align with existing zoning, and complement Coral Gables’ architectural character. New construction should preserve the City’s unique aesthetic and fit seamlessly within established neighborhoods.

During my two years on the Planning and Zoning Board, I took a firm stance on the Ponce Park project, advocating for residents until the developer made meaningful concessions. When the project passed, neighbors spoke in favor of it—a true win-win compromise.

As Commissioner, I will continue to ensure that development respects our community’s identity while addressing residents’ concerns. Thoughtful planning and transparent discussions will allow for smart growth that enhances—not disrupts—the quality of life in Coral Gables.

Public Safety

GGG: What is your position on traffic calming?

MIRO: I support traffic calming measures that enhance pedestrian and driver safety while preserving the city’s aesthetic and historic charm. Speeding and cut-through traffic are growing concerns in residential areas, and solutions such as well-placed speed humps, roundabouts, and better traffic signal coordination should be considered based on community input.

GGG: What is your position on requiring sidewalks in Coral Gables for pedestrian traffic? What is your position on adding bicycle lanes or paths for bicycle traffic?

MIRO: Walkability is key to maintaining Coral Gables’ quality of life. Sidewalks should be implemented in areas where pedestrian traffic is high, especially near schools, parks, and near the underline. However, they should be implemented thoughtfully to preserve green space and historic character. Bicycle lanes should be considered feasible, prioritizing safety and connectivity without disrupting traffic flow. Both of these should be thoughtfully decided with public input from the neighbors who are being directly impacted.

Budget and Taxes

GGG: What concerns do you have about the City budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

MIRO: I am concerned that inefficiencies in our budget are preventing the City from addressing basic yet highly visible issues that directly impact residents' daily lives. For example, simple fixes like repairing potholes and properly painting street lane markings—such as those around the roundabout on Biltmore Way—should not take years to resolve due to budget constraints.

Additionally, our city should prioritize making crosswalks ADA-accessible and equipping them with audible signals, at least in the downtown area, to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility.

As Commissioner, I would take a department-by-department, line-by-line approach to identify inefficiencies and reallocate resources where they are needed most. By prioritizing practical, high-impact improvements, we can enhance the quality of life for residents without unnecessary spending or delays.

GGG: Do you believe the City has adequate resources to fulfill growing demands on services given the increase in density in development? Do you believe the City should aim to decrease taxes, leave taxes at the current level, or increase taxes?

MIRO: I do not believe the City has adequate resources to keep pace with growing demands, particularly in public safety. Despite increased density, we remain short 32 police officers and several firefighters per shift based on national standards for effectively responding to high-rise fires. That is already a public safety concern that must be addressed.

Regarding taxes, I am not in favor of cutting them without a clear explanation of how and where residents would feel the impact. The value and quality of our city services far outweigh the benefit of a minor tax reduction that would have little to no meaningful effect on residents' yearly tax costs. Instead of focusing on tax cuts, we should prioritize fiscal responsibility and smart resource allocation to ensure Coral Gables remains a safe, well-maintained, and highly desirable place to live.

Elections

GGG: Do you believe the City should maintain its April election tradition, and, if so, what do you think can be done to improve voter turnout and participation?

MIRO: While there are valid arguments on both sides, I personally favor maintaining April elections because it preserves the independence and importance of our local government. If city elections were moved to November, voter turnout might increase, but Coral Gables races would be overshadowed by presidential, congressional, state, and county elections—as well as judicial races and constitutional amendments. This could diminish the focus on local issues that directly impact our residents.

Additionally, merging our elections with a November ballot would likely introduce more partisan influence, with party-backed slates and endorsements shaping outcomes in a process that is meant to remain nonpartisan. It would also make it harder for candidates to reach voters effectively amid the flood of political mailers, texts, and calls—potentially leading to voter fatigue and disengagement. Higher campaign costs could also discourage qualified residents from running, creating barriers to participation and limiting the diversity of candidates.

Tom Wells

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General Questions

GGG: Why are you running? What is the single most important issue you would address or advocate for if elected?

WELLS: I have lived for over 30 years, worked for over 17 years and with my wife, Diane, raised our 2 daughters in Coral Gables. I have participated in every aspect of Coral Gables life, including voting, serving as Vice-Chair of the Charter Review Committee and advocating resident issues at Commission meetings. I passionately love this City.

I am running for Commissioner because I am troubled by the direction taken by the City with incompatible real estate developments and the lack of transparency and civility by City officials.

I will:

- stop incompatible developments by enforcing our Zoning Code and Comprehensive Plan that encourages compatible land uses (FLU-1.1 and 1.1.11), requires a concurrency impact analysis for all development orders (FLU-1.1.7) and prevents intrusion to residential neighborhoods by incompatible uses (FLU-1.3.2);
- create transparency by providing timely and accurate information to residents; and
- restore civility with our City and Civility Codes.

GGG: In what ways do you think the current City administration could better serve the citizens of Coral Gables, and how should the upcoming administration put those ideas into action?

WELLS: Concurrency includes required services needed to address (both now and for the next 5 years) traffic, safety (including police and firefighters), noise, light, sewage, potable water and other infrastructure. Cost for such infrastructure should be borne by developers (not residents). The Gables Waterway project was excepted from a traffic study. I will not vote for exceptions to our Zoning Code mandates, especially to learn about the traffic impact on our residents and infrastructure.

Civility is a continuing issue. Civility applied to elected officials barely passed 3-2 in 2023. (October 24, 2023, Item F.5 at R. 23-6553). Civility requirements and Robert's Rules of Order exist requiring elected officials to be civil and respectful but need to be followed and enforced. Our residents deserve officials who do not sow division, who respect everyone, and who do not use PACs/special interest groups to create sides within our community. We are one community.

Issue-Specific Questions

Civility and Ethics

GGG: One of the few things people seem to agree upon today is that, when it comes to political and policy discussions, there is little agreement and even less civility. This lack of civility has been on full display in the City of Coral Gables in the last year.

What do you think can be done to improve trust and participation in local government? Do you have any ideas about promoting civil discourse in our community – both within City government and in the interactions between City officials with the public?

WELLS: Promoting civil discourse starts with the conduct of our elected officials. It requires respecting residents and other elected officials. I demonstrated such respect in the 14 Commission and Townhall meetings and the 8 Charter Review Committee meetings at which I have spoken in the last 2 years. I am the only Group III candidate who has executed the Statement of Fair Campaign Practices running a positive campaign and prohibiting lies and anonymous blog attacks.

My pledge to foster this conduct is:

- Support actions that preserve and enhance the quality of life of residents, including opposing incompatible real estate developments
- Respect and listen to Coral Gables residents and encourage their participation in local government
- Be transparent and timely provide accurate information to residents
- Be civil during and outside of Commission meetings to other elected officials and to residents
- Be accountable to residents for actions that I take as an elected official

GGG: *Do you believe the Mayor and City Commission can improve transparency and create more open and standard processes as they propose and advance initiatives (such as the implementation of pay raises and hiring and firing of key staff), and if so, how do you propose achieving this goal? In other words, what specific processes should be put in place to ensure transparency and open debate?*

WELLS: The City's estimated budget is published by the City Manager every year by June 30. As the budget changes, the City Manager should publish updates on the Commission agenda. This would highlight pay raises (which were discussed at the first and second budget readings). A Townhall meeting should also be held to discuss pay raises.

I have proposed a Charter amendment requiring the City Manager to report as a Commission meeting agenda item any material change to a project that is more than \$1,000,000 or 100% above the original estimate. This change would inform residents about the increase in the cost of the Mobility Hub from \$29.6 million to \$62 million and Burger Bob's renovations from \$580,000 to \$1.5 million.

I have advocated for an independent search committee to select a City Manager which should have been done in 2018 before hiring Peter Iglesias. See: <https://www.votetomwells.com/issues-advocated>

Development

GGG: *Large-scale development, and the accompanying problems of traffic and density and demands on fire and police services, continue to be an issue of concern for many Coral Gables residents.*

Where do you stand on the development issues that residents have raised? Do you think the City should do more than it is already doing to control development and its impact on quality of life for residents?

WELLS: The City must do more to prevent incompatible development per our Zoning Code and Comprehensive Plan. Housing Policy 1.2.6 provides "New development shall be compatible with adjacent residential areas." Incompatible over-development allowed in our City is a gift to real estate developers that impose undue burdens on all residents because of increased stress on traffic, waste, safety and security infrastructure.

I oppose exceptions to our Zoning Code that allow increased zoning/building height as done with Rishi Kampoor's 16-story 1505 Ponce Project at the June 28, 2022, Commission meeting. Per a Miami Herald article by Tess Riski, Mayor Lago recused himself from that vote but had financial connections with Mr. Kampoor. At the same meeting, the height restriction for Codina's Regency Parc (across from the Post Office) was eliminated allowing the building of an 18 story, 240 foot, 174 unit, 389 parking space building. Don't we deserve better?

Public Safety

GGG: What is your position on traffic calming?

WELLS: I want more traffic calming measures in Coral Gables. Daniel Bishop was killed on March 4, 2024, in a crosswalk with a WALK sign near Coral Gables High School by a person with an expired license making a turn. Safety and security is the most important service that our City can provide to residents. All types of traffic calming need to be implemented in Coral Gables, including more speed tables, more pedestrian count-down crossings and preventing turns during certain times at high pedestrian crossings. In 2017, we reduced the speed limit on local residential roads to 25 mph. We need to take more measures to enforce such speed limit and discourage cut-through traffic speeding through the City Beautiful.

While canvassing, I spoke with a visually impaired resident who was unable to cross Ponce to go to the Youth Center or the Library. We also need more acoustic traffic-crossing signals.

GGG: What is your position on requiring sidewalks in Coral Gables for pedestrian traffic? What is your position on adding bicycle lanes or paths for bicycle traffic?

WELLS: We have 3 miles of cracked sidewalks per a 2023 CG Magazine article. On October 22, 2024, the Commission passed an intent to issue bonds of \$59 million with a 3-2 vote to raise funds now to pay for sidewalk repairs and other improvements rather than over multiple years. The recurring annual capital improvement budget of \$5M would be used to repay the bond. The new bond will not affect the City's AAA credit rating. Debt service (including outstanding bonds of \$107 million) will not exceed 8% of total expenses. This bond will be issued at 3.5% interest – lower than 4.8% on current outstanding bonds. The City gets 2 benefits from this bond – accelerated required improvements and a lower repair cost in inflationary times and before damages increase. I approve this plan.

I also approve of additional sidewalks and bike paths to increase resident safety.

Budget and Taxes

GGG: What concerns do you have about the City budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

WELLS: A concern for the City is a new expense per Fla. Stat. Section 192.091 causing the City to pay \$1.8 to \$2.5 million to the County as a commission on taxes collected. At the same time, the City's compensation to police and fire needs to be increased because it is not competitive, which means that we cannot attract or retain needed safety and security employees.

There needs to be more transparency in capital improvement estimates and timeliness for completion of projects. My prior answer addressed transparency issues with the Mobility Hub and Burger Bob's renovations and my Charter amendment requiring the City Manager to explain such issues at Commission meetings. I will also require the City Manager to compare the City's budget to actual revenue/expense results on a quarterly basis and explain at Commission meetings to increase transparency to residents.

GGG: Do you believe the City has adequate resources to fulfill growing demands on services given the increase in density in development? Do you believe the City should aim to decrease taxes, leave taxes at the current level, or increase taxes?

WELLS: The City has substantial resources to address its needs. Tax rates should stay the same for now.

Mayor Lago recently stated that Coral Gables has the 3rd lowest property tax rate of any full-service city in Miami-Dade County. So, decreasing taxes now by 2% with the needs facing the City and the change with the County becoming a "fee office" is fiscally irresponsible. Mayor Lago proposed a 2% ad valorem tax rate decrease which the Commission voted against 4-1 and the Budget/Audit Advisory Board unanimously disapproved. We need to be smart in protecting the City and identify cuts in the budget caused by any proposed revenue reduction.

Finally, the major beneficiaries of Lago's proposal are real estate holding companies like Agave (owns the Plaza) and Hines Global Income Trust (owns the Lifetime building) – not longtime residents whose ad valorem property value cannot increase by more than 3% per year.

Elections

GGG: Do you believe the City should maintain its April election tradition, and, if so, what do you think can be done to improve voter turnout and participation?

WELLS: As done for the past 100 years, I favor our April local election for the following reasons:

- Avoid increased partisanship during state and federal elections
- Avoid increased campaign costs when competing with many other elections for name and voter attention
- Avoid voter fatigue related to excessive election mail and canvassing
- Make elections only about Coral Gables - not like the City of Miami

Increased November campaign costs prevents self-funded campaigns like mine to ensure that you hear from me rather than PACs and non-CG special interest groups supporting my opponents.

Voting options are the same in both April and November.

There may be more November voters, but the emphasis on Coral Gables is eclipsed.

The City can do much more for voter engagement, including allowing candidates to have a booth at the Farmers Market to educate voters and using trolleys to take residents to early voting and day of voting.

GABLES GOOD GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

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