



GABLES GOOD GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 21, 2019

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GOOD GOVERNMENT
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ELECTION UPDATE - VOTE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

This is the first in a series of GGG Newsletters in advance of the upcoming April 9 City Election for Groups I, IV and V. Over the next several weeks, GGG will provide insight into the candidates' views on a variety of topics through sets of questions sent to them. In this issue, the responses to the first set of questions are presented.

Candidates have been asked to provide responses by a specified publication date. However, it may not always be possible for candidates to meet the deadline. Any response received after the deadline will be published in the subsequent GGG Newsletter.

GUEST WRITER SERIES UPDATE

The first guest-writer article in a GGG Newsletter/Blog, written by blogger and journalist Elaine de Valle, achieved the goal of bringing attention to the upcoming April 9 election, and it was one of GGG's most read publications. The GGG Blog received good traffic and many readers visited the candidates' websites. There was very little direct response to the article from readers, however, Commission Group IV Candidate Carmen Olazabal did reach out to GGG and requested that her following comments on the article be published: *"An article on February 7, 2019 about the upcoming Coral Gables Municipal Election misstated that Carmen Olazabal 'gave herself a 10% raise' when she served as interim city manager. Rather, the Coral Gables City Commission approved her contract as Interim City Manager on May 5th, 2014, and her salary reverted back when a new city manager was appointed. The article also misstated the year of Ms. Olazabal's service as interim city manager. Her service occurred in 2014, not 2013. The article also misstated that Ms. Olazabal 'procured Merrett Stierheim.' Rather, it was the Coral Gables Commission that directed the hiring of Mr. Stierheim. The article also misstated that Carmen Cason is 'running' Ms. Olazabal's campaign. Rather, Mrs. Cason is an active and valued volunteer in the campaign."*

Gables Good Government Committee supports issues and causes that preserve and improve the quality of life in Coral Gables, and promotes the effective and efficient management of City government.



ELECTION UPDATE - VOTE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

GROUP I

CANDIDATE: Jackson "Rip" Holmes:

www.ripholmes.com

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

I am running because I own property on Miracle Mile, which is being destroyed because unwise efforts to build a massive office building – on the only land a department store could go – would cause Miracle Mile owners to go under, and sell out to developers building 15 story buildings on Coral Gables main street, Miracle Mile.

I do not believe Coral Gables voters want this, including because with such urbanization comes urban crime.

I believe Coral Gables' greatest asset is its quality residents, who want to be able to raise their children safe from urban crime.

If we have a 15 story main street, we lose our claim to being a suburb; we have urbanization and crime, and Coral Gables' greatest asset, or quality residents, will move to true suburbs like Pinecrest, Palmetto Bay, Kendale Lakes, West Kendall, and so on.

I believe I have the answer to traffic, namely MetroRail on our superhighways – SR 836, Palmetto Expressway, the Turnpike, and so on. I advocate the City join Vince Lago in suing the County for an accounting for the Penny Sales Tax Transportation Funds. With that stolen money, we can pay for the MetroRail expansion and cut our traffic problems by 1/2 to 1/3.

2. Coral Gables is known as "The City Beautiful", what are things that can be improved or beautified?

I advocate Misting Machines in the downtown, to enable shoppers, workers, and pedestrians, to cope with the overpowering summer heat.

3. What kind of service improvements do you think the city needs or that you may want to propose?

In the face of the Trump Administration's pervasive attacks on the immigrants who have helped make Coral Gables what it is today, I advocate that our City do what many other cities, like New Haven, Connecticut, have done, ISSUE CITY IDENTIFICATION CARDS TO RESIDENTS WHO WANT ONE. Many of our undocumented residents are not even allowed to deposit money into another person's account, for lack of an I.D. I SUPPORT ISSUANCE OF CITY I.D.'S.

After we assure we have fully funded Police, Fire, and trash pickup, I am for lower taxes. Having attended some 1/2 of all City Commission Meetings for the past 20 years, I believe taxpayers' money is inexcusably wasted over and over and over again. Too high City pensions, and huge salaries for department heads who make mistakes you and I don't make, is mis-spending taxpayers money, in my opinion, as are so many GIVEAWAYS such as the Palace Senior Residential Center next to Miracle Mile, which should have included a

department store on the ground floor of the parking garage component. Commissioners spending \$1 million dollars for an art project of dubitable aesthetic appeal is only one example of excessive spending of YOUR taxpayer dollars.

4. What ideas do you have about the city budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

Please see my answer to question 3.

CANDIDATE: Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli:

www.valdesfauliformayor.com/

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

I am running because I think Coral Gables needs good government and that is provided with good leadership.

The most important issue, the biggest challenge is keeping our City in the tradition of George Merrick, with the quality standards he set for us, all within the context of 2019 and our metropolis of 3 million people. When Merrick founded our City, it took him 4 hours by cart to get his grapefruit to Miami, today we are right in the middle of the county and 800,000 cars pass thru our City. We have to adapt to changing conditions while preserving our heritage.

2. Coral Gables is known as "The City Beautiful", what are things that can be improved or beautified?

We are preserving our history restoring our City Hall as one of many projects. Parks additions are also important.

3. What kind of service improvements do you think the city needs or that you may want to propose?

As to service, I think we should continue what we are doing, people friendly service. We have over 20,000 homes in Coral Gables with 4 pickups per week, 2 trash, 1 garbage and 1 recycling, that is 4 per week multiplied by 20,000 is 80,000 contacts with our residents per week. If you multiply this by 52 weeks in the year, I think we are doing fine. Public safety, an essential function of municipal government is also in excellent condition with crime being the lowest ever.

4. What ideas do you have about the city budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

With regard to the budget, we are whittling down our legacy of unfunded pension liability. Please remember that when I ceased being mayor in 2001 our pension obligations were fully funded and now our liability is \$237,000,000. We are working on this problem without increasing taxes and at the same time continuing our fine services.



ELECTION UPDATE - VOTE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

GROUP IV

CANDIDATE: Ralph Cabrera
www.cabreraforcommissioner.com/

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

With so many critical issues facing the City of Coral Gables, I have the experience and knowledge to make a real difference. Also, as a 52 year resident and a three term commissioner, I understand the importance of protecting and enriching the city’s unique quality of life. Simply put, I am running because I will make the needs of the residents my first priority and will take a proactive and inclusive approach to governing our city, solving problems and tackling challenges head on.

Development is one issue I would focus on to ensure growth is compatible and projects, observes and adheres to the City’s Zoning Code. Most importantly, I would consider proposed development that enhances the livability of Coral Gables. I believe I have already established a record of promoting smart, quality and tempered growth and have taken a strong stance against “development for the sake of development”. Finally, my stance on development will be a major priority as we create a vision for our city.

2. Coral Gables is known as "The City Beautiful", what are things that can be improved or beautified?

Coral Gables is not only known as, “The City Beautiful.” It is also known as the “Garden City.” I will support the ongoing efforts of creating local residential parks to enhance our resident’s quality of life and beauty. In terms of

beautification, I would continue to ensure that all our historic monuments and entrances are properly updated and renovated. It has always been my policy to take care of the historic treasures we own first, before we consider "shiny and new".

3. What kind of service improvements do you think the city needs or that you may want to propose?

The City of Coral Gables government works for you. I believe strongly on improving residential street lighting to enhance crime prevention and improve night visibility. This includes repairing existing streetlights that have been out for months and years. I also believe we should continue to invest in automating the city's permit process services and enhance our online experience. This is your city and our task and goal, is to meet your needs day-in and day-out. I am also interested in enhancing the business climate for both small and large business entities so our residents can better utilize and make our downtown a viable dining, entertainment and shopping destination.

4. What ideas do you have about the city budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

As I have done in the past, I will make it a priority to closely monitor the city’s borrowing and current debt to ensure financial viability for years to come. Presently, I believe borrowing has become much too easy over the years. I will also actively work with my colleagues to continue to implement strategies of reducing the long standing unfunded pension liability through collective bargaining with the city’s unions. This is an ongoing priority.

HOW TO JOIN GGG
Send a letter to: Gables Good Government
1825 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Box #448
Coral Gables, FL 33134
Email us at gablesgoodgov@gmail.com

ANNUAL DUES LEVELS
\$50 Individual / \$75 Household
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\$1000 Corporate Donor



ELECTION UPDATE - VOTE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

GROUP IV

CANDIDATE: Jorge Fors, Group IV

votefors.com

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

I am running for Coral Gables City Commissioner because I want my children to grow up in the same Coral Gables that I did, one of the last true representations of a neighborhood-community in South Florida. Coral Gables is a wonderful city, but there is always room for improvement and there will always be a need to protect what we value. As we approach what will mark the second quarter of the 21st century, our city will face new and difficult challenges posed by factors that we have never before experienced, such as technology, aggressive growth, and forces of nature. I want to use my energy, work ethic, and fresh perspective to tackle the issues that will arise from this changing-landscape so that our city adapts and grows vibrantly, while remaining true to our shared vision. I am running for this office because I am confident in my ability to lead the city and our residents into this new era and do not want to stand on the sidelines. The single most important issue I would advocate for if elected is quality life. That issue is implicated in many different areas. I am primarily concerned with those that directly affect the average residents who, like me, were raised here, live here, and run a small business here. I have spoken to thousands of residents on a one-to-one basis, and it has not been surprising to hear that quality of life is suffering as a result of aggressive growth, expansion, and traffic. As I drive through our city, I see examples of developments that have improved our city and made it more walkable, but I also see many examples that have directly impacted our quality of life and diluted its historic character. Like any other vibrant city, we will continue to grow and evolve, but it must be done intelligently and carefully, without treading on quality of life or the city's character. Our city limits are definite and finite, we will not get a second chance, and expanding our city limits under unfavorable terms is not the answer either.

2. Coral Gables is known as "The City Beautiful", what are things that can be improved or beautified?

In my eyes, Coral Gables remains "The City Beautiful". But again, there is always room for improvement. Among

other things, I believe we need to prioritize the maintenance and repair of our unique historic features, such as the beautiful fountains that line our streets (many of which receive less care than they require and deserve), over the installation of new features. Additionally, I have observed what I believe to be a proliferation of street and traffic signs in areas where they are duplicative and/or unnecessary. I believe we also need to create a program for the implementation of better and more attractive lighting on many of our streets, always consistent with the character of our neighborhood. Finally, our City must also prioritize the maintenance of our existing parks and green spaces. Recently, our city has established new parks, but some are not first-class and up to standard. I intend to work with colleagues to continue focusing on this need, among other things.

3. What kind of service improvements do you think the city needs or that you may want to propose?

Our city enjoys excellent services. When it comes to services, my primary focus will be ensuring that we do not compromise or strain those services through unnecessary expansion. With that being said, I believe that improvements can be made to our waste collection procedures. I also believe that it is incumbent upon us, as a city, to find solutions for our fellow residents who receive below-average emergency first response times. Of course, these solutions need to make sense for the city and I am committed to working with the residents and colleagues to solve the problem in a manner we all deem acceptable.

4. What ideas do you have about the city budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

In terms of the city budget, I believe the city must continue to aggressively pay down the pension debt beyond what we are required to pay on an annual basis. Our pension liability is the product of a serious misstep that is not entirely behind us. Any and all adjustments to the budget should focus on this and ensuring that it does not occur again. I will regard this element of the budget as a matter of high priority if elected. In addition, I intend to advocate for the general deployment of our resources in a manner that consistently reflects the preference of the majority of our residents. We can ensure this by providing enhanced transparency and opportunities to be heard for the citizens on issues concerning the expenditure of significant amounts of public funds.



ELECTION UPDATE - VOTE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

GROUP IV

CANDIDATE: Carmen Olazabal, Group IV

www.carmen4coralgables.com

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

I am running because I feel a sense of duty to serve my community. Ten years ago, my husband and I moved to South Florida from Boston to find a new home for our growing family. As young parents, we wanted what most young parents want: a nice neighborhood with spaces for kids to play and an active and vibrant community. We found that place in Coral Gables and have never looked back. Here we discovered a well-planned community with a rich history, an involved government encouraging high standards, and an engaged citizenry with pride in the community. I now feel that same pride and my two kids only know one place as their home. As a result, I feel a sense of duty to give back to this special city and to help lead the next chapter in our community's history. When elected, I will work to improve the quality of service the City provides to its residents by having:

- A focus on the quality of life of all of our residents – enhancing the beauty and safety of our neighborhoods, managing traffic, ensuring development is of appropriate scale and in keeping with the vision of the City, and preparing for a sustainable future.
- A world-class customer experience across all city operations – to ensure our customers receive courteous, timely, informed advice in their interactions with the city.
- Fiscal responsibility and transparency – to assure our stakeholders that their contributions are managed professionally, with sound judgement, transparently, and that their feedback is being heard.

2. Coral Gables is known as "The City Beautiful", what are things that can be improved or beautified?

As commissioner, I will support efforts that build on the beauty of our neighborhoods by enhancing sidewalk connectivity, improving pedestrian and cyclist safety, maintaining our trees, and improving pedestrian-level lighting. I believe we can make small, tailored changes across our neighborhoods to invite residents to come out and walk, meet each other on our streets or local parks, and build an even stronger sense of community. I support efforts to expand recreational activities to ensure that all of our residents have the opportunity to maintain a healthy active life style. I believe we can use city-owned amenities such as the Youth Center, the Tennis Centers, the Venetian Pool, and the Granada Golf Course to provide our residents with ample opportunities to meet others, to enjoy our public spaces, and to perform meaningful activities.

Continuing on the success of the Miracle Mile and Giralda

Streetscape project, I support initiatives to create a more walkable downtown. I also support the creation of new public spaces, like the Giralda Plaza, to attract residents and visitors to our downtown businesses. As commissioner, I will work to ensure that Coral Gables remains a place where residents can live, work, play, and study, and to keep Coral Gables beautiful.

3. What kind of service improvements do you think the city needs or that you may want to propose?

I think customer service is a key element contributing to residents and businesses feeling welcomed as part of one community. Simple actions can make City Hall more accessible -- like allowing residents to park freely within city boundaries and then sending them the bill at the end of the month, setting appointments with City staff online, or allowing for more online processes for permit applications or camps registration. Actions like these send a clear message that the City is here to serve its customers. We can also improve by making processes clearer, making a deliberate effort to help customers, and becoming more available.

A common source of concern among both residents and business owners is the permitting process. People perceive the process as difficult, expressing that it is unclear what the City ultimately wants, that staff is not always helpful, and that the process takes too long. I believe that the process can be more transparent (i.e. the requirements should not be ever changing), that staff should be welcoming and should make the process easier, and that review wait times can be reduced (smaller permits should be reviewed within two weeks and no permit should take more than 30 days to be reviewed).

4. What ideas do you have about the city budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

I believe that residents have a reasonable expectation of trust and transparency from their government – to know that our budget is well-managed and that every tax dollar is well-spent. The city provides budgets, meeting minutes, and videos so that engaged citizens can learn about what is happening in city hall. However, in the age of big data and information at the palm of our hand, I believe that we can do more to provide intuitive dashboards that give residents the insights they need hold our government accountable. As commissioner, I will rely on my background in engineering, business administration, and public administration to ask the right questions to make sure that resources are used effectively. I will be vigilant to ensure that our government is not careless in requesting additional resources without tying it to an added level of service that can be tracked with performance standards. Also, I believe that all existing expenses need to be evaluated periodically, ensuring that associated services are being delivered as effectively as possible and that the performance of such services is tracked.



ELECTION UPDATE - VOTE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

GROUP V

CANDIDATE: Michael O. Mena

www.votemena.com

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

I am running for re-election as Coral Gables Commissioner to ensure a safe and prosperous future for my family, your family, and our City. In my first year in office, I have worked to establish myself as a public servant who is open and accessible to our residents, who will fight to protect and enhance our quality of life, who is diligent and fair, and who will serve with integrity and reason. I think the single most important issue in any City must always be public safety. I have followed through on my pledge to work with our City administration and staff to eliminate the double-digit vacancies in our Police Department (and we have) and to support initiatives that continue to keep crime at record lows. I have fought to support our men and women in blue and to make certain the City operates with the highest levels of accountability and integrity. And I have pushed for our first responders to have the best possible resources at their disposal to provide the highest quality of service to our residents.

2. Coral Gables is known as "The City Beautiful", what are things that can be improved or beautified?

I think many things need to be improved and beautified. From the quality and condition of our infrastructure such as lighting, sidewalks, and landscaping, to one of my primary focuses which has been improving our City parks and green spaces. I have successfully advocated for the allocation of additional park impact fees to go towards enhancing all of our City parks and providing the quality of play areas and shading that our children deserve. There is still much more work to be done, but I am committed to continue enhancing our parks and acquiring more green space. This coming year will see, among other things, significant improvements to Kerdyk Park, as well as a new Dog Park which is in the works at

a more central location in Coral Gables. The last two years, our parks and recreation team has overseen significant improvements to the Coral Gables Youth Center play area, the opening of our new Betsy Adams and the Garden Club Park (wall and fencing coming soon), the redesign of Holiday Park, and the installation of new lighting at Phillips Park.

3. What kind of service improvements do you think the city needs or that you may want to propose?

One area where I believe we need to enhance our service is with respect to our recycling program. We take pride in embracing sustainability initiatives and leading the charge on such issues. But right now we have small, uncovered recycling bins which means that when it rains our recycled items are often ruined and our residents are less incentivized to recycle properly. We have engaged a consultant who is in the process of evaluating our system and options so that we can initiate a new and enhanced recycling program (still with the valet service our residents expect). Another component of this effort will be education and making sure our residents understand what items are appropriately recycled (as opposed to being tossed into unsightly trash piles). We can and should do better on these issues and we need to work towards that goal.

4. What ideas do you have about the city budget and the use of our resources? What would you do differently?

I think we need to better prioritize certain services over other budget items that may not be as critical. For example, I believe we need to do a much better job with our code enforcement efforts. I know that this is a priority of our new City Manager. We cannot afford to just live off of our reputation as a City with a strict code, it is important that we also enforce it. That requires, in my opinion, more resources and staff. We have a substantial enough budget to be able to address issues like that without raising property taxes, but it requires trimming unnecessary expenditures in other areas.

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