

# CITY OF CORAL GABLES

## --MEMORANDUM--



**TO:** Mayor Vince Lago, Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson, Commissioner Richard Lara, Commissioner Ariel Fernandez, and City Manager Peter Iglesias

**FROM:** Commissioner Melissa Castro

**DATE:** May 27, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Supporting Local Businesses and Protecting the Future of Our Downtown

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The recent handling of the Fritz & Franz World Cup proposal should concern every resident, business owner, and stakeholder who cares about the future of Coral Gables and the long-term vitality of our Central Business District.

Over the course of two separate commission meetings, I requested a time certain for this item so the applicant, his legal counsel, residents, and staff would know when the matter would be heard. Both requests were denied by the Mayor, forcing the applicant and his team to remain for hours in uncertainty while trying to prepare for one of the largest international sporting events in the world.

Small businesses do not operate with unlimited resources or unlimited time. Events connected to the FIFA World Cup require months of preparation involving staffing, vendors, security coordination, marketing, inventory, and logistics. Repeated delays and uncertainty create real financial consequences, not only for the applicant, but for neighboring businesses that benefit from the increased foot traffic and economic activity these events generate throughout our downtown.

What made this situation particularly concerning was that the matter continued to be framed primarily as a public safety issue while, on the record, the applicant's legal counsel repeatedly offered compromises, operational adjustments, and coordination with police and fire personnel in an effort to responsibly address concerns and move forward collaboratively. Instead of working toward resolution, the process resulted in continued delay. Delay itself can become a denial.

At some point, it becomes difficult to ignore the appearance that certain businesses are being subjected to inconsistent treatment and unnecessary procedural uncertainty. That perception is damaging to public trust and to the business community we claim to support. This issue extends far beyond one establishment.

Over the past several years, Coral Gables has watched multiple businesses struggle or close after making substantial investments into our downtown. Residents witnessed the closure of Bar 77, one of the original sports bars on Giralda Plaza and a longtime gathering place for the soccer community, particularly during international tournaments and major matches. Fritz & Franz has similarly served as a cornerstone for soccer fans and community gatherings in Coral Gables for decades. These establishments were not temporary concepts. They became part of the identity, culture, and energy of our downtown.

Pisco y Nazca also closed its Miracle Mile location after approximately two years of operation despite occupying one of the most visible restaurant spaces in the Central Business District. Other businesses along Miracle Mile have also struggled to survive despite significant investment and community excitement surrounding their openings.

Every closure impacts the character and economic health of our city.

When businesses close, Coral Gables loses jobs, tourism, foot traffic, energy, and economic momentum within our downtown. We lose gathering places that help create the vibrant atmosphere residents consistently say they want preserved.

Fritz & Franz has become one of those longstanding gathering places. During major international soccer events, it attracts residents and visitors into our downtown, benefiting nearby restaurants, bars, retail shops, and surrounding businesses throughout the Central Business District. It is particularly troubling that, amid repeated delays and ongoing uncertainty surrounding this process, Fritz & Franz has now reportedly been placed up for sale. Whether intentional or not, situations like this send a damaging message to the broader business community about the challenges of operating and investing in Coral Gables.

This conversation is also occurring at a time when municipalities across Florida are closely monitoring discussions in Tallahassee regarding significant changes to homestead exemptions and local government funding. Governor Ron DeSantis recently announced plans to call a special legislative session focused on property tax reform and a proposed constitutional amendment that could significantly expand homestead exemptions statewide. Among the proposals publicly discussed was increasing the homestead exemption to \$250,000, with future discussions involving the potential elimination of homestead property taxes for a large percentage of Florida homeowners.

These proposals could have major financial implications for municipalities throughout Florida that rely heavily on property tax revenue to fund essential city services, infrastructure, public safety, parks, sanitation, and quality-of-life initiatives.

As these discussions continue at the state level, local governments must think proactively about long-term financial sustainability. A strong and successful business community is critical to the economic health of Coral Gables and to maintaining the level of services residents expect without placing additional burdens elsewhere.

For that reason, we should be especially thoughtful about creating an environment where responsible businesses can thrive, invest, attract visitors, generate economic activity, and contribute to the continued success of our downtown.

Supporting local businesses is not only an economic issue. It is a quality-of-life issue, a fiscal issue, and an investment in the long-term future of Coral Gables.

As Commissioner, I will continue advocating for fairness, consistency, economic vitality, and a collaborative approach that supports both residents and local businesses.

I believe Coral Gables can protect public safety, preserve quality of life, and still foster a thriving business environment. Those goals are not mutually exclusive, and our residents deserve leadership capable of achieving both.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Castro', with a stylized, flowing script.

**Commissioner Melissa Castro**  
Office of the City Commission