

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

--MEMORANDUM--



TO: Mayor Vince Lago; Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson; Commissioner Ariel Fernandez; Commissioner Richard Lara

CC: City Manager Peter Iglesias; Deputy City Manager Joe Gomez; Assistant City Manager Carolina Vester; Economic Development Department; Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors

FROM: Commissioner Melissa Castro

DATE: June 30, 2026

SUBJECT: Upcoming Resolution Supporting an Economic Development Partnership with the Town of Bal Harbour

Colleagues,

I wanted to provide some background information on an item I intend to bring forward at our next Commission meeting.

Earlier today, I met with Commissioner Alejandro Levy from the Town of Bal Harbour to discuss an economic development initiative that I believe has the potential to benefit both of our communities while supporting our respective local business districts.

During our conversation, we discussed the many similarities between Coral Gables and Bal Harbour. Both communities are recognized for their exceptional restaurants, retail destinations, cultural offerings, museums, family-friendly events, and vibrant commercial districts. Rather than viewing neighboring municipalities as competitors, we discussed the opportunity to establish a collaborative partnership, similar in spirit to a sister city relationship, that focuses on supporting one another's local businesses, promoting each other's events and attractions, and encouraging residents and visitors to experience everything both communities have to offer. By working together, both municipalities have the opportunity to strengthen their local economies while building a lasting partnership centered on economic development.

As we all know, the summer months can be particularly challenging for many of our small businesses and restaurants, especially within our downtown commercial district. While we are fortunate that this summer has benefited from the increased visitation associated with the FIFA World Cup, providing an economic boost to many of our local businesses, that level of activity is

temporary. In future summers, when we do not have a major international event drawing additional visitors to our area, many of our businesses will once again experience the seasonal slowdown that has historically affected our downtown. Supporting our business community requires creativity, collaboration, and proactive economic development efforts, and I believe this initiative presents an opportunity to continue attracting visitors and supporting our local economy long after FIFA concludes.

The concept behind this initiative is straightforward. The City of Coral Gables and the Town of Bal Harbour would partner to encourage residents and visitors to explore, dine, shop, attend cultural events, and participate in community activities in both municipalities. By leveraging each municipality's existing attractions, business districts, signature events, and cultural programming, we can expand awareness of everything Coral Gables has to offer while creating additional opportunities for our local businesses.

The resolution I will be bringing forward is intentionally broad. Its purpose is to establish the Commission's policy direction while leaving the implementation of the initiative to our professional staff. Specifically, the resolution will direct the City Manager's Office, our Economic Development Department, and the appropriate staff from the Town of Bal Harbour to work collaboratively to determine the best path forward. Whether that ultimately becomes a week-long promotional campaign, reciprocal marketing efforts, coordinated event promotions, seasonal initiatives, or another creative economic development strategy will be determined by staff after they have had the opportunity to evaluate the available options. I believe this approach allows those with the appropriate expertise to develop recommendations that maximize benefits for our local businesses while providing the Commission with the flexibility to consider those recommendations at a later date.

During my conversation, Commissioner Levy shared that he has already discussed this concept with members of his administration, including his Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs staff, and they are excited about pursuing this initiative. He also advised me that he intends to present a similar resolution before the Bal Harbour Town Council at its July 14 meeting so that both governing bodies can formally establish the policy direction for their respective staffs to begin working together on this partnership.

I believe this represents an innovative, collaborative, and cost-effective approach to supporting our local business community. Rather than creating a new government program, this initiative simply directs both municipalities to work together, leverage existing resources, and develop creative ideas that increase visitation, support local businesses, and strengthen the economic vitality of both communities.

I look forward to discussing the proposed resolution with all of you at our upcoming Commission meeting. As always, I welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

Thank you.