

PINECREST

FPL, state senator called ‘bullies’

• Pincrest Mayor Cindy Lerner accused state Sen. Miguel Diaz de la Portilla of supporting Florida Power & Light instead of his constituents.

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Pincrest Mayor Cindy Lerner said that state Sen. Miguel Diaz de la Portilla, R-Coral Gables, and Florida Power & Light, are behind a series of nasty automated telephone calls to her constituents.

Lerner, a former Democratic member of the state House of Representatives, has been an outspoken critic of FPL’s plans to put eight-story-high power lines along U.S. 1 through Pincrest and neighboring communities.

“I am calling out FPL and Miguel Diaz de la Portilla,” Lerner said at a Pincrest Village Council meeting on Tuesday. “They are acting as bullies.”

She accused Diaz de la Portilla, whose Senate district includes most of Pincrest, of putting the interests of his lobbying business — his firm represents FPL — before the wishes of his constituents, who don’t want high-voltage power lines in the midst of their main business district.

Diaz de la Portilla did not respond to telephone messages left with his staff in Miami and Tallahassee this week. FPL said it had nothing to do with the calls.

“FPL is not involved in any way with these calls and has not supported any PAC involved with these calls,” said Neil Nissan, a spokesman for the utility. “Once again, Cindy Lerner is knowingly misleading the public by making up inflammatory allegations.”

The robocalls pin an alleged crime rate increase and tax increase in Pincrest on Lerner. Pincrest currently has the second-lowest property tax rate in

Miami-Dade County, although the village had a 5 percent tax hike last year.

Lerner and Diaz de la Portilla were both automatically reelected to their respective offices last month after no one filed to run against them.

Annette Taddeo-Goldstein, a Pinecrest resident and Democratic activist, said that she has heard the robocalls twice already. She said they also accused Lerner of being “in bed with lawyers” and spending thousands on legal counsel. During Lerner’s time as mayor, Pinecrest hired a law firm to sue FPL over a proposed rate increase and the power lines. She also has organized a coalition of cities to fight both FPL proposals. The coalition includes Pinecrest, South Miami, Coral Gables, Cutler Bay, Palmetto Bay and Doral.

Taddeo-Goldstein said that the call came from a political action committee called Conservatives for Florida, which is controlled by Diaz de la Portilla.

Diaz de la Portilla is a lawyer and lobbyist at Becker & Poliakoff, whose clients include FPL.

Lerner said that she will seek a public apology from Diaz de la Portilla.

She said she is being attacked because she is fighting FPL. Lerner also said in a phone interview that she was organizing a coalition of municipalities around the state to pass resolutions opposing FPL’s early cost recovery, which would result in higher rates.

The Miami-Dade League of Cities — as well as the Broward League — have already passed resolutions opposing the rate hike.

Lerner said that she was working on getting the Florida League of Cities to also pass a resolution so it could become a priority next legislative session.

Lerner says that Diaz de la Portilla has attended Miami-Dade League of Cities meetings, as a member, with representatives of FPL to discuss some of these ongoing legal fights. She said he has been “very visible partnering on the FPL side of these issues.”

Lerner said it is unethical for a lawmaker to lobby against a city he or she

represents in the Legislature.

“He is a state senator representing the people of these communities and he is now getting money to oppose us on a position that we have taken,” she said.

Santiago Leon, another Pine-crest resident, said that he sent Diaz de la Portilla an email expressing his disappointment about the negative robocalls. “It was very nasty and the tone was extremely disagreeable,” he said.

In May, South Miami Mayor Philip Stoddard criticized Diaz de la Portilla for calling up and lobbying on behalf of FPL over the proposed base-rate increase. Stoddard has also fought FPL over the possible rate hike and the power lines.