

City of Coral Gables City Commission Second Budget Hearing
Agenda Item 3
September 27, 2016
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item 3 [0:00:00 a.m.]

An Ordinance providing for the levy of taxes for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2016 and ending September 30, 2017; fixing the rate of such levy; providing for the segregation and the application of the proceeds of such levy; providing for the separability of the provisions hereof; and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1, 2016. (Passed on First Reading on September 13, 2016).

Mayor Cason: So, let's move on to Item number 3. Do we have a motion? This is the ordinance.

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Agenda Item 3 – Ordinance providing for the levy of taxes for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2016 and ending September 30, 2017.

Commissioner Keon: I'll make a motion.

City Attorney Leen: And this is the item that is the taxes and the millage rate. This is the item that requires a vote of four.

Mayor Cason: So, Commissioner Keon made the motion. Commissioner Lago second. City Clerk.

Commissioner Slesnick: Discussion.

Mayor Cason: You want to discuss?

Commissioner Slesnick: I just want to say something. Just back to the sculpture and so forth about money being spent in the City of Coral Gables. Commissioner Keon and I both attended the meeting last Saturday at different times.

Commissioner Keon: It was noticed anyway.

Commissioner Slesnick: So, I just wanted to say one thing that came out of the discussion is that the citizens of Coral Gables really would like to hear more about what's going on in the City and they question how they can find out more. Of course, I stressed e-News and so forth and about our page in the Miami Herald. Because when this discussion came up, whenever it was, 2013 or whatever, I believe about three-fourths or four-fifths of the meetings that were held were held with the former City Manager and Cindy Birdsill, our Economic Development Director at the time, because I live in the neighborhood and everybody that lives in the neighborhood that came to the meeting on Saturday and nobody had heard anything about it until it actually was performed. And so, when we're spending a million dollars of the City's money, whether it be from taxes on the homes or from permits and so forth, I really feel we need to be more transparent and no matter what we spend, but especially anything over \$100,000 so that the

residents are informed as best we can. Now, if we don't -- if they don't get the Herald and they don't read it and they don't read the e-News, that's their problem. But they're looking for a way to hear more about what's going on in the community and they want that information. So, if we could, as a body, and our City Manager, think of more ways to inform our citizens, even though they -- we had 43 meetings -- most of us had not even heard about any meetings. And I know you can send out postcards and other things, but there's -- there must be some way of informing the citizens of Coral Gables how we're appropriating our money and spending their tax dollars.

Mayor Cason: I'm happy that -- in the first budget meeting no one showed up, and this has been a tendency in the last five years.

Commissioner Slesnick: I know we've had...

Mayor Cason: No one in the audience. So, I mean, part of it is, we've been discussing this for a long time. We've gone to social media. We got your newspaper every week. We've got Coral Gables Television. We've got...

Commissioner Lago: We've got the Coral Gables app.

Mayor Cason: Expanding the notification period, but people have to want to know and have to be engaged and follow what's going on...

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Because everything that we do here is televised and can be found.

Commissioner Slesnick: And there are -- but again, when this happened, we did not have any of those things in place and ads were being put in the Miami Business Review and not in the Herald.

Commissioner Keon: But we do use the Miami Business Review for notice.

Commissioner Slesnick: No, no. No, I meant when the -- when this was passed -- when that was passed. But again, if there's any way that we could expose the public more -- and I do know that just by promoting the City e-News in various locations, like at the farmer's market and so forth, we have 2 or 3,000 more people on the City e-News now...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: Than we did so...

Commissioner Lago: But, I mean, Commissioner, I understand. I respect your comments as always, but I mean, we -- I take -- I think as a Commission as a whole, we take great pride in being the most transparent city in Dade County. I mean, there -- I speak to a lot of other Commissioners of the League of Cities as your representative, and they come up to me and tell me, you guys do an incredible job notifying the residents. When you talk about notifications in reference to proposed development projects, we go to an extent that no other city does, five times the span in reference to the notifications. Usually, it's about 250 feet. In some cases, we're at a thousand and now fifteen hundred square feet from the project.

Commissioner Slesnick: And I hear you.

Commissioner Lago: You know, we're doing -- we're online. We have an app. We are doing -- we buy a page in the neighborhood -- a full page in Neighbors every single week. We have the gentleman from Miami Herald at all our meetings who writes incredibly effective articles -- and I'm not pandering...

Commissioner Slesnick: He does.

Commissioner Lago: To him, but I mean, he does cover us.

Commissioner Slesnick: Thank you, Lance.

Commissioner Lago: I mean, the only thing we can do is maybe rent a skywriter and put this on...

Commissioner Slesnick: I'm just talking about from the past.

Commissioner Lago: Maybe on some sort of -- maybe rent a skywriter and maybe rent like a giant billboard on Bird Road and we'll...

Mayor Cason: If anybody has any ideas of other ways, let us know.

Commissioner Lago: We can't beg you to show up to these meetings. We have done everything in our power. Look, I hold -- and the last Commissioner to do this was you and myself, and all of you have come -- Commissioner Kerdyk used to do it 15 years ago. I've been holding city...

Commissioner Slesnick: Town hall meetings.

Commissioner Lago: Town hall meetings over the last three years twice a year. I hold them in the first quarter and in the last quarter. I'm going to have another one in November. I spend my own money, over \$3,000 last year...

Commissioner Slesnick: I spend my own money, too.

Commissioner Lago: Last year, I spent over \$3,000 mailing out -- because the Commissioners have no budgets, no budget to send out a simple mailer to the residents -- because they think

we're doing propaganda for ourselves -- to basically have a forum where all of staff who doesn't receive any overtime pay, attend these meetings and listens to all the residents and basically tackles any topic that you like. I understand what you're saying and I agree with you wholeheartedly. My comments are more based out of frustration that I don't think we can do anything else.

Commissioner Slesnick: I'm just saying the citizens of Coral Gables live in Coral Gables because they love Coral Gables and I don't want to be compared to any other city in Dade County because there's no other better city than Coral Gables.

Commissioner Lago: But that's why we go head and shoulders above any other municipality.

Mayor Cason: Let's put it this way. If anybody either watching the television...

Commissioner Slesnick: We need suggestions.

Mayor Cason: And has some ideas, give us some suggestions...

Commissioner Lago: Listen, as a matter of fact...

Mayor Cason: (INAUDIBLE) come up with any...

Commissioner Lago: Let me interject. Let me speak to the best clerk in Miami-Dade County. Mr. Clerk, didn't you implement a software that allows individuals who are listening right now who can't make the meetings write in and basically become part of the meeting?

City Clerk Foeman: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: Who was the first city to implement that?

City Clerk Foeman: We were the first city in Dade County.

Mayor Cason: And let me ask you as a follow-up question...

Commissioner Slesnick: Are we the only city?

Mayor Cason: Has anyone used it?

City Clerk Foeman: No.

Commissioner Lago: Has anyone used it? So let me...

Mayor Cason: There's your answer. I rest my case.

Commissioner Lago: So let me explain to you. If you were at home right now and you can't make it to the meeting, you could log on to the computer and be just like the three people who spoke before us and verbally interject and state what is on your mind in reference to whatever topic we're dealing with and it will be memorialized and you will have your moment in the sun and you will be dealt with and your questions will be answered, and nobody's used it. How much -- let's talk about money, I'm sorry. How much are we spending on that program on a yearly basis, to be transparent, to be excessively transparent?

City Clerk Foeman: Five hundred dollars a month.

Commissioner Lago: Five hundred dollars a month. And how long have we been using it?

City Clerk Foeman: This past year.

Commissioner Lago: There is no other municipality in Dade County to do this, and we're doing this for our residents. And we allow you -- and we implore you, you want to get involved in the City of Coral Gables, like Commissioner Slesnick says, we don't have any other idea. We've run out of ideas. We're doing -- we're using programs that nobody else uses.

Mayor Cason: And let's -- and with this as well, I don't know about you, but I probably had -- I think the last count was 18,000 emails.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah.

Mayor Cason: We all get emails. Our doors are open. We're here.

Commissioner Lago: We respond to them personally.

Mayor Cason: Everything we do here is televised and we can go back and find any portion of any discussion back for years. So -- but what we find is every meeting somebody will come and say I didn't know, I didn't know. And -- but take a look at how many people out of our 31,000 registered voters vote.

Commissioner Lago: And we haven't even mentioned -- I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mayor. We haven't even mentioned what the Manager implemented when she came on board. She's implemented a quarterly newsletter that never existed before, where you learn about what's going on in the city, what issues are going on, what events are going on, and you have a half-page dedicated to every Commissioner and the Mayor in reference to topics that we want to discuss. So, I mean, if I'm missing an opportunity, I implore you to please call in. You can contact us here and give us an idea.

Mayor Cason: So, to close this discussion, any more suggestions, please let us know. We'll -- we entertain any suggestion how to better inform our citizens about the -- and our meetings go on 11 hours. We're discussing many, many things, so...

Commissioner Keon: We did have a young couple that did make a suggestion, and we've been talking to Peter about it, and he is going to talk to IT whether it can work or not. And if it works out, we'll come back and IT will tell us about it, so...

Mayor Cason: But let's ask...

Commissioner Keon: Thank them.

Mayor Cason: We have -- let's move back to Item 2 (sic). We have a motion and a second.
City Clerk.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Yes.

(Vote: 4-0)