

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-1
November 18, 2014
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Vince Lago

Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

Interim City Manager, Carmen Olazabal

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Acting Assistant Manager, Cindy Birdsill

Public Speaker(s)

Dr. Carol Damian

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A Resolution approving the artist and concept for the public art work proposed for the two traffic circles located on Segovia Street at Coral Way and at Biltmore Way.

[Note for the Record: Recording started here 1:47:27 p.m.]

Ms. Birdsill:...received 181 applications for the project through our RFQ process, after many discussions waddle it down to 5 semi-finalists, who are all nationally known public artists, Island Abrabuk, Larry Kirkland, Brad Goldberg, and Doug Hollis, in addition to Alice Aycock. Each of those artists put together a concept that was presented to the judging panel, they did models and drawings to present to the group and the judging panel is unanimously recommending Alice Aycock's piece. We also took the piece to the Historic Preservation Board to get a Certificate of Appropriateness for the circle at Segovia and Coral Way and the Historic Preservation Board unanimously voted to grant the Certificate of Appropriateness, so they were also very excited by

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Work proposed for Segovia Street at Coral Way and Biltmore Way

the project. So now I would like to turn it over to Carol Damian, who is going to present the project to you.

Dr. Damian: Just suffice it to say she is an incredible prominent and highly respected artist, a New York artist whose work is all over the world. She does major public art projects as well as smaller gallery exhibits – that’s kind of hard to read so I’m just going to go through this quickly. I think that pictures speak louder than words; she’s got quite an extensive proposal here that’s in front of you, and in paper too, you’ve got that in paper, you can’t read that screen, I can’t read that screen; and I think what is important about this, this is a site specific project. In other words, the way the process works, is we review the art of many, many different artists even down to the five that are our short list, and when artists apply for these proposals, the decision-making on the part of the committee is based on their previous art work, in other words they are not asked to give a site specific proposal, but just to convince us that we would like to have their art, like to take the next step that they are professionals in this particular kind of work. So when we got down to the five, those five artists came to Coral Gables, they visited the site, they familiarized themselves with the Gables, they toured the City, and then came back with a site specific proposal, what they thought would be appropriate for those two circles. At the end of the proposals by the five artists, we as a committee voted absolutely unanimously for Alice Aycock’s work; and we were voting for her work, but amongst a very, very highly qualified group of artists, all of whom had had experience in this area. So Alice’s art work proposal based on her familiarity with the City as she toured around it, and especially one thing that – these are all the detailed part that we can go back, this is where the important stuff starts. One of the things that we found quite fascinating about Alice is that she is a master gardener and even though she lives in New York, she grows all kinds of exotic plants and of course, is very familiar with Fairchild and spent time at Fairchild, and the thing that inspired her to do this particular project was the passion flower, and so this is very nature inspired, but it’s also Florida-Miami nature inspired. So these are the two circles that are being considered on Segovia, this is the passion flower, so this is a botanical drawing of a passion flower, a flower that she has raised and a flower that has fascinated her throughout her entire life; and this is the proposal for the circle at the Biltmore, this is Biltmore Way, so this is the first circle. The project is a two-part project, it begins with this particular sculpture which is larger, it is in a water fountain, as you can see, and it is really the center piece of this project. The second part that you are going to see is sort of an offshoot of this. So here is some details of it, see what it would look like, and the flowers. So what you are looking at here is a whimsical, fantastic construction based on the image of the passion flower that is done in a way to kind of enhance all of the details of the particular flower. You can see some other views of it. I think it really speaks for itself, I mean it’s quite extraordinary, here’s what it would look like at night. She’s done an amazing job in the presentation as you can see. You can tell this is a professional. One thing, it’s very important with public art projects and I work on a lot of public art projects, and frequently have artists

saying to me, well you won't even consider our work and why can't I do this?- well you can't do this because you don't know how. You don't know how to work with a civil engineer, you don't know codes, you don't know we have hurricanes in Florida. We have certain conditions and so the idea that these are professionals that know how to work with all of this is very, very important. When you see a presentation like this with architectural drawings, civil engineering drawings, you know that it's the artist's vision, but she has a vision that can only be brought forward with professional assistance and knowing, and I'm saying this to you because you are going to question all of the details as you should, as all of us do; how is this made?- how is going to stand up to the environment?- what are the care issues?- etc., etc., so she has addressed this and it's all in your packet, I'm not going to go over all of that word by word with you, but I want to convince you that she knows exactly what she has to do and will certainly continue to answer to the concerns of the City moving forward with this. There are some of the details of the flowers, there it is again. It's a quite a contraption, right?- and it's really amazing and I think that Fairchild and that's part of this process, but they are going to be really jealous that this is not at Fairchild, because it looks like it should be right there at Fairchild Gardens.

Mayor Cason: It's stainless steel and what are the materials?

Commissioner Lago: Aluminum?

Dr. Damian: It's aluminum with a special paint that they use as weather resistant and all.

Mayor Cason: And that's going to have mist, if I understand...

Dr. Damian: The mist is on the other piece, this is just water.

Ms. Birdsill: She is proposing that the flowers will mist; she hasn't decided quite yet how much they will mist. Again, this is just the conceptual idea that she is going to start working and once she gets into the engineering and the plumbing they'll see what looks best, but the idea is that sitting in a reflecting pool and that it will mist, and at night of course the mist will pick up on the lighting.

Dr. Damian: Is there mist on the second piece too?- no – OK. So here it is. This is the second circle; this is the circle on Coral Way, North Greenway, I live on North Greenway, so I drive the circle every single day, and so what she has done on this circle is she has literally taken one of the flowers and flopped it down like it blew in the wind from one place to another, and there it sits. So it's a much smaller version and that's the idea that we wanted the artist to connect the two circles, we didn't want the work to look like they were separate and there has been some discussion of connecting it even more officially through the street there, but that's the next part of the project, I guess, but here you can see it. So it's another quite extraordinary object that will sit there. I want to also before we turn over to the discussion of that particular piece, I just want

to just give you an indication of some of her work, so you know that when we bring this artist to Coral Gables we are bringing one of the most important artist in the world and she is coming right off of Park Avenue.

Commissioner Lago: She is very important. She is represented by Fritz.... in Miami and I've seen her work on Fifth Avenue, which you are seeing right now.

Dr. Damian: This is what you are looking at right now. This is the project called "Paper Chase", Park Avenue has a very dynamic project that includes the works of art of prominent artists throughout the year, and they are placed all the way down the Avenue, so this was last year, last summer when Alice did what she called "Paper Chase".

Commissioner Lago: Again, if I may speak, eleven years of experience in regards to the art world and I defer to you. When you go to any major fair in the world, I've been to Freeze, The Armory, and obviously Art Basel here in Miami and Hampton...also, you see her sculptures, prominently displayed in some of the most important galleries in the world. I've had the pleasure of meeting her on two occasions, incredibly soft spoken...

Dr. Damian: Yes, very articulate.

Commissioner Lago:...one of the most intelligent, articulate, artist, and not saying women, saying artist in the world. She is by far a master and we'll be putting history in her place as one of the most important artist of her generation. Who is she contemporaries with did you say?

Dr. Damian: Richard Serra.

Commissioner Lago: Richard Serra – I mean you are talking about masters.

Dr. Damian: Did you see that on Park Avenue?

Commissioner Lago: Keefer, Serra, Richard Serra, who else would you say is on her level?- now you are talking about individuals that – she is in every major museum in the world.

Dr. Damian: Yes, she is; and also she does beautiful small work you see at the fairs, beautiful drawings and...for some of these pieces that are very popular as well. So here are just a couple of other examples of her works, some of her big public art projects.

Commissioner Lago: A lot of the works too of the ones that I've seen incorporate marble, movement, not as much as Calder, but they are static but they have a little bit of movement in them, which is interesting.

Dr. Damian: Yes.

Mayor Cason: I think the challenge since we are in South Florida is going to be the drivers.

Dr. Damian: Absolutely.

Commissioner Keon: I totally agree.

Mayor Cason: Remember what happened to our old shoe with Cartagena Circle, I look at that and, oh my God, how are we going to keep the drunk drivers from crashing into it, that's going to be a challenge, the landscaping and keep them away.

Ms. Birdsill: Absolutely that is one of our concerns and as Dr. Damian mentioned, public artists like Alice come with a team, so she is going to have her engineers and her plumbing people and we are going to work with our Public Works and Public Service people as well. We do need to come up with something that prevents a car from getting to the art piece, if it's coming at the circle. So we have options of bollards, rising up the wall, raising the ground level up a little bit, so we will be through the engineering process of this discussing all of that.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: What's the timing on something like this?- what's the time schedule?

Ms. Birdsill: You know I haven't had an opportunity to talk with Alice yet about what her timing is. I know that she is anxious to get started, but I don't have an answer for that right yet.

Mayor Cason: This is so spectacular. I don't think you are going to find anything better that more fits with what Coral Gables is about. We are putting orchids in our trees and now we have beautiful...

Commissioner Lago: We are enhancing the park.

Mayor Cason: We are enhancing the park, so I think it's wonderful.

Dr. Damian: For an introduction to a public art project with this work, it puts us on the map.

Mayor Cason: Does anybody have any doubt?

Commissioner Keon: No. It's very exciting.

Mayor Cason: Do we have a unanimous support?- unanimous?

Commissioner Lago: Do we have to take a vote on this...?

Mayor Cason: Let's make it unanimous – unanimous.

Commissioner Lago: Yes – 100 percent.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Dr. Damian: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Lago: Great work.

Mayor Cason: Excellent.

Commissioner Keon: Beautiful. Do we get drawings of this?- no, but real drawings. We want them for our office, we have no art in our office, we want drawings (laughter).

Ms. Birdsill: Well as part of the contract the artist is going to provide photographs.

Commissioner Keon: It will be City property.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: She'll do what?

Ms. Birdsill: She is going to be providing some professional photographs of the final project, so I'm sure they'll be nice pieces.

Commissioner Keon: Maybe we can frame them and put them in our office.

Ms. Birdsill: Right. Right. But her renderings are computer generated.

Commissioner Lago: Can you do me a favor or someone on your staff does it. Could you get us a copy of the names and addresses for the individuals that gave up so much of their time over the past year to help us put this together?

Ms. Birdsill: Absolutely.

Commissioner Lago: Like Ms. Damian, so I just want to write them a hand written note thanking them, because this is incredible. Cindy has worked incredibly hard on this, she has kept me in the loop, I know that this is her passion for over the past, since I got elected a year-and-a-half ago, I know you've been working on this, but let me tell you, about 115 – 181 applicants...

Ms. Birdsill: We did.

Commissioner Lago:...to end up with something that six months ago was on Fifth Avenue. Only the best are on Fifth Avenue, only the best. You've had some giants that have been on Fifth Avenue.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Only the best in Coral Gables.

Commissioner Lago: Only the best.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

[End: 2:03:28 p.m.]