

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
May 24, 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
Historic Preservation Officer, Dona Spain
Historic Preservationist, Elizabeth Guin

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-4 [0:00:00 a.m.]

Discussion regarding the status of the GOB grant program, for the restoration of historic houses in the MacFarlane Homestead and Golden Gate neighborhoods, as well as concerns regarding the 20-year restrictive covenant requirement.

Mayor Cason: Okay, F-4.

City Attorney Leen: That'll be...

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Agenda Item F-4 – Discussion regarding the status of the GOB grant program, for the restoration of historic houses in the MacFarlane Homestead and Golden Gate neighborhoods, as well as concerns regarding the 20-year restrictive covenant requirement.

Commissioner Keon: F-4, quick.

City Attorney Leen: So, F-4 is discussion regarding the status of the GOB grant program, for the restoration of historic houses in the MacFarlane Homestead and Golden Gate neighborhoods, as well as concerns regarding the 20-year restrictive covenant requirement. Dona Spain is here. Here's the issue. This relates to the approximately \$600,000 grant from the County. That has been a priority of the City as well. That money is going to restore historic properties in the MacFarlane Homestead. Because of the source of the funds, it also is serving a lower and middle income sort of low-income to middle-income housing benefit as well. The money comes from basically an affordable housing grant, so there has to be certain requirements are met. The problem is this is not a typical affordable housing program, where there may be a new large building coming in and there may need to be limitations that that development be used for low-income housing or affordable housing for a long time. That's not this case. These are specific houses that are owner occupied that have been owner occupied through generations. And even though it does involve lower to mid income individuals, the need to have a 20-year restrictive covenant tying these properties and making it very difficult to sell them is not in existence here. So, the concern is that we've gone -- and I'm going to turn it over to Dona -- we met with so many individuals and they keep -- that live in that neighborhood and none of them are taking advantage of this grant, which is meant to help...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: One person is.

Commissioner Keon: One person.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I apologize. One lady is.

City Attorney Leen: The community. Except for -- well, I was going to say except for one person. Only one was willing to accept this grant, and you know the reason they've given? And this include Edwina Prime, who is the president of the homeowner's association. The reason

they've all given is the restrictive covenant, the fact that this property will be tied up for 20 years. And what they think is more appropriate and what the City thinks is more appropriate, and what we believe Miami-Dade County thinks is more appropriate if they bring it up to the County Commission to get approval is five years.

Commissioner Keon: Five years.

City Attorney Leen: Five years sets the principle. It makes it clear that this is for affordable housing, but it doesn't tie up the properties forever and hurt the individuals who this is meant to help. With that, I'll turn it over to Dona Spain.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Well, you just about said it.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, so I had a conversation with Commissioner Suarez last night. You know, I told him that we had these two items on the agenda. He was very happy to hear about the Bahamian Village. I also talked to him about, you know, this issue, and he said absolutely bring it back.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Okay, great.

Commissioner Keon: I'll help you, and how long. I said five years. He said we can...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I really think that was the sticking point, at least out of -- we identified five properties; one, what turned out to be not owner occupied, so that person can't qualify and one took advantage of it. We're ready to go. We have an architect hired. He's, I believe, done at this point with working drawings. We're hiring the contractor that actually did the art building at the University of Miami, that wood-framed structure.

Commissioner Keon: Oh, great.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's a contractor that...

Commissioner Keon: Beautiful.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Really should be working on this, so we're going to get him on board. So, we're ready to go, but we only have one property owner, and that's the lady that lives across the street from the church.

Commissioner Keon: St. Mary's.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: At 129th Row, St. Mary's.

Commissioner Keon: St. Mary's.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And the other people were concerned with that 20-year restriction.

Commissioner Keon: You know, I think that part of the problem with this for 20 years -- and you know, it is a community of people that have known in their history that these types of things, covenants and loan programs or whatever were used to take away their homes. I mean, that is the tradition in a lot of black communities. It was how people obtained their properties. And so, they're very suspicious of it, and they're very uncomfortable with anything that is that long because that's what they see it as, and that's where it's...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And some of them are older. They don't know whether they're going to live for 20 years...

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, they -- no.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Or what happens to their heirs. There's a concern.

Commissioner Keon: Right, and then it becomes a real problem for everybody else. So, you know, you can really understand it. So, I said to him, you know, we would like to see five years. He told us to, you know...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I mean, I can't speak for these residents...

Commissioner Keon: Talk to him. We can go...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: But I think that would go a long way.

Commissioner Keon: Through the same process again when Craig gets back. We can request it be placed on the agenda of the County Commission or Mayor Gimenez would like to meet with us instead.

City Attorney Leen: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: That would be fine, but we'll move forward with asking this to be changed to five years.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Great. I'd love to be a part of that conversation.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, we will.

City Attorney Leen: And on this particular issue, I would like a resolution of the Commission indicating that you would like a five-year restrictive covenant. I'll draft it up, it'll be signed by the Mayor, and then we'll turn it over to Mayor Gimenez and to Commissioner Suarez.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, I'll make that motion now. I'd like to make the motion that we direct the City Attorney to create a resolution to make the restrictive covenant five years, as opposed to twenty years.

Commissioner Lago: I'll second.

Mayor Cason: Do we have a second?

Commissioner Lago: I'll second the motion. I'd also like to, again, go to the County Commission if we are given that opportunity. And I'd like to see if we can put a time cap, if we can hopefully get on the next County Commission. Because if anybody has an opportunity to visit the property in question, which the lady has qualified, the one in front of St. Mary's Church, which this Commission, through using private funds, renovated a lot of that property, the exterior façade, they're living in deplorable conditions.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: She had to move out.

Commissioner Keon: They moved out.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: She had to move out with her children. She couldn't live there.

Commissioner Keon: They got them to move.

Commissioner Lago: For a long time, I visited her...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: She was living there for the longest time, yeah.

Commissioner Lago: And it was a brutal situation to live in...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Horrible.

Commissioner Lago: That I would not wish upon any individual, not even an animal could live in the way that they were living.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And shocking that it's in Coral Gables, I have to say.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah, and that is what's...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: When I first walked in there, I was shocked.

Commissioner Lago: And that is what is embarrassing. At one point they didn't have air conditioning. The roof...

Commissioner Keon: Well, it's not even that. There were holes in the floor.

Commissioner Lago: Had multiple leaks. The house was deteriorating. It was a very, very, very distressing situation.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I wanted to introduce Elizabeth Guin from my department. She's a historic preservationist, and she's in charge of this project. She's fabulous.

Commissioner Lago: And I also like the fact that the City...

Commissioner Keon: Welcome.

Commissioner Lago: I also -- Let me just give you one last point. I also like the fact that the City of Coral Gables -- this is a statement. This is something that you and I have talked a lot about -- that we are taking control over this. The County's not going to take control over the renovations. We're going to take control of the renovations, which I think, you know, gives a little bit more accountability and allows us to have more control whether -- what are the actual improvements and stretch the dollars as much as possible.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Absolutely.

Commissioner Lago: And really -- I mean, we've been working on this \$600,000 for three years now.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I know.

Commissioner Keon: It's almost three years.

Commissioner Lago: And we got it done. But, I mean, now we just got to take that money...

Commissioner Keon: And we got to get it into the...

Commissioner Lago: And use it.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And get it done.

Commissioner Lago: And use it.

Commissioner Keon: Hands of -- and get these projects done.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Absolutely.

Mayor Cason: Alright, City Clerk. We have a -- Commissioner Keon made the motion. Commissioner Lago seconded.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Quesada: If you can just give me a moment, I just walked back in.

Commissioner Slesnick: We're voting on...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Five years rather than twenty on the covenant.

Commissioner Slesnick: Five years instead of twenty.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you. Great work.

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Commissioner Slesnick: And I'm sorry, your name again is? Elizabeth?

Historic Preservationist Guin: Elizabeth Guin.

Commissioner Slesnick: Thank you, Elizabeth.