



CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING
Meeting Minutes of August 9, 2021, 8:30 a.m.
Coral Gables City Hall, City Commission Chamber
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, Florida 33134

*Historical Resources &
Cultural Arts*

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MEMBERS	J 20	A 20	S 20	O 20	N 20	D 20	J 21	F 21	M 21	A 21	M 21	J 21	J 21	A 21	APPOINTED BY
Ana Lam	-	-	-	P	-	-	-	P	P	P	-	P	P	E	Mayor Vince Lago
Barbara Reese	-	-	-	A	-	-	-	P	P	P	-	P	P	E	Vice-Mayor Michael Mena
Bonnie Seipp	-	-	-	P	-	-	-	P	P	P	-	P	E	P	Commissioner Rhonda Anderson
Carmen Cason	-	-	-	A	-	-	-	P	P	P	-	A	P	P	Commissioner Jorge L. Fors, Jr.
Vanessa Torres*												E	P	P	Commissioner Kirk R. Menendez
Alexis Ehrenhaft	-	-	-	P	-	-	-	P	P	P	-	P	P	P	City Manager Peter Iglesias
Joanne Meagher	-	-	-	P	-	-	-	P	P	P	-	P	P	P	Board-as-a-Whole

LEGEND: A = Absent; P = Present; E = Excused; * = New Member; ^ = Resigned Member;
 - = No Meeting; # = Late meeting arrival

STAFF:

Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer
 Colette Worm, Docent Coordinator

RECORDING SECRETARY/PREPARATION OF MINUTES: Nancy Kay Lyons, Administrative Assistant

The meeting was called to order by Chair Meagher at 8:38 a.m. and attendance was stated for the record.

APPROVAL OF ABSENCES:

A motion was made by Ms. Seipp and seconded by Ms. Cason to excuse the absences of Ana Lam and Barbara Reese from the August 9, 2021, meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

OPENING STATEMENT

Chair Meagher opened the meeting with a quote from Doc Dammers' friend Theodore Weigall about how Dammers felt about George Merrick: "The only man in the world for whom he (Dammers) had really a respect and an admiration altogether unbounded was George Merrick, whom he had backed in his younger days when things at Coral Gables were not so good, and whose advisor and friend he had remained ever since 'By hell it certainly takes a tall giraffe to high hat that guy' a remark made perfectly seriously was one of the most sincere tributes from one man to another that I ever heard."

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETINGS:

A motion was made by Ms. Seipp and seconded by Ms. Cason to approve the minutes of July 12, 2021 with spelling corrections. The motion was unanimously approved.

DOCENT COORDINATOR REPORT:

Ms. Worm informed the Board that Merrick House won the "most Gables-esque" award from the Chamber of Commerce. She also provided updates on: the House listing on the City website, docent recruiting, telephone issues, fire alarm, bollards, and social media. Ms. Cason asked for a tour and a list of all the big-ticket items that the board could fund. Ms. Worm's suggestion was to wait until after a meeting that has been scheduled with City Staff. She also suggested that they wait to schedule the meeting between the board and the commission so that they would have action items to discuss.

- 1. Visitor Report:** Since the house opened on July 10th there have been 72 visitors on the public tours. Almost half of the people came for the 1:00 tour. Numbers for Saturday and Sunday tours were split evenly, and they sold every item that the Merrick House had to sell. Chair Meagher said one person bought \$72 of merchandise on

Saturday. Ms. Cason asked how they replenish the merchandise that has been sold. She was told there was plenty of inventory. The board went on to discuss items that could be sold.

2. **Admission Prices:** Ms. Worm suggested that the Board increase admission prices. Current prices are: \$5.00 regular, \$3 for seniors, military, and students, and \$1 for students aged 6-11. Children under 6 are free. Ms. Ehrenhaft suggested that they charge \$10 regular, \$5 for military, seniors, and students. Ms. Seipp asked if kindergarteners would still be free, to which Ms. Worm responded yes. Chair Meagher opined the prices should be different for group tours. Ms. Ehrenhaft suggested staggering the prices based on the amount of people in the group. Ms. Seipp said that they wanted to encourage schools to bring little children to learn about the museum, and if they made it too expensive, they would just go somewhere else where it was free. She suggested having a special tour rate for school children. Mr. Adams suggested looking at similar places and seeing what they charge, as they would need justification to change the fees. Ms. Worm said she would do the research.
3. **Docent Scheduling:** Mr. Adams stated the biggest concern was the lack of docents, as much effort had been put into re-opening the house and now they had to curtail the hours the House was open for tours. He asked how long it took to train a docent, to which Ms. Worm responded a couple of months normally unless they had prior experience and were familiar with the process. Mr. Adams asked if Ms. Worm knew when everyone would be back in town. She replied that she had all the dates on a spreadsheet noting that their dates were flexible and most people wanted to be back for Doc Dammers Day. Ms. Seipp asked how often the docents were required to be at the Merrick House. Ms. Worm responded twice a month, but they were not held to anything and that docents had different reasons for not being able to attend. Ms. Worm said that she was juggling a lot of things; she had thought that 12 was a good number of docents to have. She asked if any Board members would like to become docents.
4. **Payment:** Ms. Worm said that the biggest deterrent is that people do not carry cash. Ms. Seipp suggested Venmo. She acknowledged it would probably be more difficult for a city than a school, but she thought there should be some way to make it easier for people to pay. Mr. Adams agreed to speak with the Finance Department and see if it was time to reassess how everything is done. He thought one of the things they had in their favor is that we would want to be cashless, especially with COVID back on the rise. Ms. Worm asked if she could go with him to the meeting, to which he replied affirmatively. Mr. Adams went on to say that there seemed to be a fairly involved processes even if you have an event, of how you accepted money, where it is deposited and how it is held accountable. He thought there should be a simpler way to do it. Ms. Seipp said that Bank of America has Zelle which, because it was a bank, maybe people would feel safer. Ms. Worm said that some of the older docents fear technology and would want to be paired with someone else who knew how to take the payments. Regarding pre-payment, Ms. Worm and Chair Meagher had talked to the Venetian Pool staff who said the program the city had was not user-friendly. Mr. Adams said that there should be something on the web for people to pre-pay for tours because if they prepaid and did not show up, at least docent time would not be completely wasted. Also, prepayment would allow them to adequately schedule tour times and docents.

OLD BUSINESS:

Doc Dammers Event: Chair Meagher showed everyone that the Doc Dammers Event is listed on the City's website, noting that as they get more sponsors they would be listed on the page.

1. **Sponsors:** Ms. Seipp stated she had received \$5375 in checks. Ms. Seipp went over her spreadsheet noting that many of the sponsors had also come to the breakfast event. She noted:
 - i) Mr. & Mrs. Ehrenhaft would be underwriting the trolleys.
 - ii) Maddox and Company Real Estate is going to do something, but she did not know what.
 - iii) Ms. Seipp said she was having difficulties reaching Bacardi and was trying to contact their local marketing director.
 - iv) The Biltmore Hotel donated a weekend stay at the hotel, and Celebrity Cruise Line is going to donate a cruise for the auction.
 - v) The following have committed to \$500 sponsorships: Mercedes Benz of Coral Gables (Ussery Automotive Group), Susan Dockerty and daughter Liv (will also buy an ad), Bonnie and John Seipp, Guy and Loyda Lewis from the Villagers, Commissioner Fors.
 - vi) Shine Water will donate water at each location.
 - vii) MG Developers is talking about hosting the entire cocktail party at the museum. Ms. Seipp will be meeting with them later in the week.
 - viii) Ashley Cusak will do a full-page ad on the back page inside cover for \$750.
 - ix) Joey Higgins, a friend of the Parks family, is a \$250 sponsor.

- x) Shutts and Bowen is the title sponsor for \$2500.
 - xi) Gay Bondurant did an ad for Merrick House board and docents.
2. **Auction Items:** Ms. Seipp discussed progress made, but the Board needed to work on additional auction items. A banner with the sponsors' logos was discussed. Ms. Seipp noted 2010 Gala had 28 sponsors in the program and felt that they could beat that number so she asked the board to commit to finding additional sponsors.
 3. Ms. Torres reported that Prudential Insurance is going to buy a full ad, CPA Firm Danny Guaran is a maybe, a real estate brokerage confirmed, but she is still waiting on the check. She also contacted realtor Manuel Vidal, a photographer, and a public adjustment company.
 4. Ms. Ehrenhaft reported: Stretch Zone will be a sponsor and provide an auction item, Maddox and Company will be a sponsor, Hampton House – Jackie Collier is going to talk to the board, and she hasn't heard from Dade Heritage Trust.
 5. **Caterers:** Chair Meagher asked if MG Developers would provide a bar with the food. Ms. Seipp said that she was certain they would, but she would follow up with them anyway. Chair Meagher said that if MG Developers sponsored the food, the caterer's purview would change. Ms. Seipp suggested that maybe the caterer could possibly provide more food at the House and the Venetian Pool.
 6. **Program:** Margaret Meeks created a beautiful program and had sent it to Ms. Worm, Ms. Bondurant, and Mr. Adams for a final look. There are still items to be added. Chair Meagher passed the program around for everyone to see and suggested that extras be ordered to sell at the house.
 7. **Eventbrite:** Ms. Seipp reported that she had spoken to the Coral Gables Community Foundation about Eventbrite, and the City has used it before, so they thought it would be fine for them to use it for this event. She will send an electronic version of the invitation and they will create an Eventbrite page with a link. The money would go to CGCF, but it is listed as a separate event. CGCF will write a check to the city. Chair Meagher asked Ms. Seipp if she had talked to CGCF about people registering for the auction at the same time. Ms. Seipp said she had not. She did not think that they could do that through Eventbrite, but could link it to whatever auction program that they used. Chair Meagher said she would look into auction programs.
 8. **Email List:** Ms. Worm asked about the email list so people could be added. Ms. Seipp said that there was a separate email list for this event and noted that everyone could be sent the invite to be forwarded to their friends.
 9. Chair Meagher stated the event would be publicized in: E-News, Jeannett's Journal, Gables Insider, Great Gables Guide, Edible South Florida, Coral Gables Museum and Venetian Pool websites, Coral Gables Magazine, and the Miami Herald. Ms. Seipp asked how many tickets were going to be sold. Chair Meagher said each trolley seats 25 people and there is a limit to the number of people (50) allowed in the Merrick House at one time, but that would be pushing it. The way they were picturing it, most of the people will be on the porch eating and drinking as you cannot take food into the house, then groups of 20 would go inside at a time. Chair Meagher suggested having five trolleys so that people would be going to the Venetian Pool or the Merrick House and 50 people at any given place. 1920s music piped into the museum. Ms. Ehrenhaft suggested having music on the porch, like a harpist or something soft. Ms. Seipp agreed that it would keep people entertained outside while they were eating. Chair Meagher said that Ana was working with the Coral Gables Music Club. Ms. Cason suggested asking them to learn *Moon over Coral Gables*. She had suggested a classic guitar at the Pool to focus on the Spanish theme.
 10. **Attendance:** The board discussed the maximum number of tickets that should be sold and agreed on 250. Chair Meagher suggested that all guests should register only at the Museum. Ms. Ehrenhaft asked what would happen if everyone showed up at the same time. Chair Meagher responded that Nicholas Cabrera had put them in touch with a University of Miami fraternity that he said might be willing to volunteer. Trolley numbers would be finalized when they knew how many people were attending. Chair Meagher will confirm with the Museum if there was a specific time that they had to be finished. She thought they might be amenable to having people stay longer, as that is where the silent auction would take place. They would also be able to control what time they ended at the House and Venetian Pool so that all the volunteers could go back to the museum.
 11. **Auction Items:** Chair Meagher said a docent donated prints and books. They would also have Stretch Zone and Ms. Bondurant might do a drawing. She will ask Snow's and asked if anyone had a relationship with Jay's Jewelers. She said more items were needed. Ms. Seipp noted that restaurant certificates do well at silent auctions and suggested that while out to dinner, board members ask for a donation. She said the ¼ page ad was \$125, which is affordable to many restaurants or little shops. Ms. Seipp will ask the Biltmore Spa for a donation.
 12. **Antique Cars:** Ms. Cason will get in touch with the person about antique cars. Ms. Ehrenhaft noted Guy Lewis had a big collection of antique cars.
 13. **Dancers:** Ms. Lam contacted Maria Fleitas who is willing to do a dance demonstration at the museum.

14. Sponsorship Ads: All sponsorship ads are due September 10th.

Chair Meagher encouraged everyone to dress up in 20s attire. Ms. Ehrenhaft said it would be fun if they could buy boas for each lady and maybe some pearls. Chair Meagher said it would be nice if they could have boater hats (plastic to keep costs down) for the men. Chair Meagher asked Ms. Ehrenhaft to do some research.

December Open House: Chair Meagher said that they would have to plan for the open house at the September meeting.

NEW BUSINESS: None

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Chair Meagher inquired about the coral rock grotto, and whether Ms. Kautz had gotten an estimate from the rock people. Mr. Adams said he did not know. It was thought that it was a good opportunity to get an estimate to repair the grotto at the same time as the front coral rock wall.

CITY COMMISSION ITEMS:

Chair Meagher asked what the procedure was to get the price changes for the Merrick House on the Commission agenda. Mr. Adams said that he thought it should come through Staff. He said the staff would take it through the process, but they needed as much information and justification as possible. They also needed to anticipate any questions that might be asked so they needed to have everything laid out as to what they were proposing and why.

ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY:

Chair Meagher asked how much money was in the Merrick House account. Mr. Adams responded that \$32,174.00 was in the Merrick House Fund and \$4,939.00 in the Roxcy Bolton Fund. Chair Meagher asked if the fund grew or if the money just sat there. Mr. Adams said he did not know about the fund, he would have to ask Ms. Kautz. Chair Meagher said that the Roxcy Bolton Fund was specifically for external maintenance of the house. Mr. Adams asked if any other grants for maintenance had ever been applied for, as he knows that the National Trust has a grant. He thought it was the Johanna Favrot grant for up to \$10,000.00 for interiors. He said that there were various grants out there and if she wanted him to go over them, he would. Chair Meagher said they could go over them at the September meeting. Mr. Adams said that some of these funds did not require a match and they were just an application. Ms. Worm stated that the DAR has a Historic Preservation Grant up to \$10,000 per year that could be on an ongoing basis. She said the problem was that Merrick House is not technically a 501(c)3.

Ms. Worm said that visitors to the house had suggested that they sell Fink's Magic Sanitizer in little bottles.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:57 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Adams
Historic Preservation Officer