

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
June 10, 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

City Attorney Intern, Harrison Wittels

Public Speaker(s)

Rita Schwartz, Co-Founder of Pets' Trust

Michael Rosenberg, Founder of Pets' Trust

Irene Secada, Coral Gables Resident

Alexander Adams, Coral Gables Resident

Agenda Item F-3 [Start: 03:03:20 Video]

A Resolution of the Coral Gables City Commission recognizing that a substantial majority of the Miami-Dade County electorate voted to support the initiatives presented by Pets' Trust; the Coral Gables City Commission urges the Miami-Dade County Commission to establish in this budget session the funding mechanisms for the Pets' Trust Initiative; the Coral Gables Commission will encourage other Miami-Dade County municipalities to join the City of Coral Gables in support of the Pets' Trust Initiative.

Mayor Cason: Ok so now we are going to move on to the cat people. We are going to do F-2 and F-3.

Commissioner Lago: Do you mind if we do F-3 first?

Mayor Cason: F-3 first then. Do you want to read it?

Commissioner Lago: Yes. Good afternoon. Basically what we are proposing here is a Resolution from the City of Coral Gables Commission recognizing a substantial majority of the Miami-Dade County electorate voted to support the initiatives by the Pet's Trust. The Coral Gables City Commission urges the Miami-Dade County Commission to establish in its budget session the funding mechanism for the Pet's Trust initiative. Just very briefly, because I really would like for these individuals who are here to quickly speak because Commissioner Keon has also an item on this agenda which is F-2, which is in very similar stance to what we are talking about here in F-3. Just to give you a quick synopsis in January of 2012 the voters, close to 500,000 in the County, supported overwhelming with sixty-five percent vote to support the Pet's Trust and their endeavors to spay and neuter pets in this community. Obviously, what we are trying to do here is avoid the slaughter of animals in this community specially animals that we so dear and near love, animals that we have at home. I have been approached, and I know that several other Commissioners have been approached, because here in the City of Coral Gables we have an issue with feral cats which are aggressive, which do property damage and have resulted in a multitude of fines for individuals who do not even own these cats, but happen to own parcels of land that the cats call their home now. So, when I was brought forth this idea, and friend of mine who is also here today here in the Commission brought up the idea of supporting the Pet's Trust I wanted to have these individuals who are on the board of the Pet's Trust really discuss the options and why we are here today. So, please take it away.

Ms. Schwartz: Hi, good afternoon, Rita Schwartz, 7100 SW 133 Street. I am the co-founder of the Pets' Trust. I realize that you deal with many issues every day, and I can imagine what you go through to educate yourselves on all of the different issues and to make the right decisions. I would like to explain everything you need to know about the Pet's Trust in a nutshell. Three years ago we brought the issue to the Commissioners, that historically we kill 20,000 adoptable animals every single year right here in Miami-Dade Animal Services, and this has been going on for decades. We let the Commissioners know the cost to taxpayers to kill an animal is \$300. The cost to spay and neuter that same animal is only \$65. We gave them an easy solution the Pet's Trust, the only real solution to the problem. The most important component is high volume, low cost, spay and neuter. When we brought the solution to the Commissioners, they explained they would not pass a referendum about raising taxes without having the people approve it. So they told us they would let the people decide, the only way people can vote for a property tax is with a straw ballot, the County Attorney worded the ballot question and the Commissioners

unanimously approved the language. It was really bad for us because the first sentence on the ballot said it is a tax, they told us to educate the public so they would understand, and I personally worked 20 hours per day with thousands of volunteers to get the word out, we were on radio, TV, talk shows, attended meetings at clubs. We spoke at schools and universities we ran a full campaign to make the public aware of the issue and the solution. We had fifteen hundred volunteers at all of the polling precincts for early voting and as on Election Day to answer the questions and hand out information. The founder Michael Rosenberg spent three days in a cage at Miami-Dade Animal Services to raise public awareness of the issue. Our cause received national attention we got calls from animal experts, and specialists from all over the country, asking about our plan. Gloria Estefan and Cesar Milan sent in videos in support of our initiative and so the people voted, 500,000 of them sixty-five percent voted to raise their property taxes to solve the problem. They said yes, we will pay an additional \$15 per average household to stop the killing, they knew what they voted for and the rest of the country watched. We have the solution for the problem; we developed it, made a plan for it and the voters, voted for it. This is the forty-three page plan of action that the thirteen Commissioners and the Mayor signed off on. This is not only the solution for us, but a role model for the rest of the country to stop the needless, senseless killing. We the people are the voice for the animals who had none, we voted for them and for their voices to be heard. That is what democracy is all about. Please do not silence our voices. Thank you.

Mr. Rosenberg: I am Michael Rosenberg I the Founder of the Pets' Trust, Rita is co-founder. Rita has been rescuing animals for twenty some odd years, she finds them on the street, people call her she has seen the problem first hand that is never going to go away. I discovered the problem just a couple of years ago. The building on the Palmetto and 74th, we all drive by it and we don't think about it, but being involved in the community, I had the opportunity to speak to the Animal Services Director a few years ago, and innocently and stupidly I said "Is that the building where you kill the animals?"- I wasn't really sure, I lived here for a long time I didn't really thing about it, and he said "Yes, that is where we unfortunately kill them." "How many do you kill?" "Well, 20,000 a year". And I am going wow that is sixty or seventy every day. "What is wrong with them, are they sick?" "No, there are just too many"- "every day?- how many did you kill last year?"- "21,000." "Wow, how about the year before?"- "20,300"- Well how about going back thirty years? It is the same, it never changes, we kill sixty or seventy a day, one hundred come in every day. So, we can sit around and do nothing or do something. I decided let's try and solve the problem, so we came up with this idea sort of based on the idea of the Children's Trust, create a Pet's Trust. We went to the Commissioners and we said "Can we vote on it?" and they said, first they didn't want to, but when we started showing them the cost every year to keep killing it was never going to go away, they said alright you can vote on it, but you will lose, people in Dade County will not vote to raise their property taxes for anything. Well, they are wrong 500,000 people said yes they will raise their taxes to do this and in Coral

Gables. I am proud to say sixty-four percent of your community voted to do this, and that gives you a pretty strong message when people vote to do that. There was a great article on the Herald today that ninety percent of our community in this poll wants to be able to tell you things. Ninety percent voted, we want to be able to give you a message by referendums. The reason why a referendum was non-binding, was because people can't vote to raise their property tax. They can only give the message, so I knew we have to win by more than 10 votes. That is not a very strong message if you win this by ten votes it would win you an election, but we needed to win by a lot. We needed to win by more than 1,000 votes, we needed to win by more than 100,000 votes we won by 250,000 votes and after it was over the Commissioners who said we will honor what the people say, Commissioners of Dade County and the Mayor. They decided we didn't know what we were voting for; they said the language wasn't clear. They created the language, they approved the language, they unanimously approved the language. So our mission instead of coming around to all of the communities and saying thank you this year for sixty-four percent of your people voting to do this and by the way we have just done 100,000 spay and neuter surgeries. We have done nothing the past year. So, I am back and we are back and we are taking this 34 city road trip, going to all of the different cities going to people like yourselves saying would you please help us, would you please send a message to the Commissioners and the Mayor of Miami-Dade County that when you vote it counts and also by the way when you do that it will save the animals and that is why we are here and Irene will tell you the rest about how many cities have done this and what we have done so far.

Ms. Secada: Thank you for allowing us to be here today Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, my name is Irene Secada I live at 472 S. Dixie Highway, Coral Gables. I met Rita and Michael a few months ago because they had this issue and as a lifelong pet owner, I decided to get involved in helping them, and we came up with this notion of going to the municipalities and asking the municipalities to send a symbolic message to the County Commission, that we should honor the will of the people. So, the way this started was, this group of people met with a lot of the advocates who do the spade-neuter program who do pet programs all over the County. They met and they had a meeting of the minds and from that meeting of the minds they pushed forward with this initiative. So to date fourteen other municipalities, including City of Miami, Miami Brach, Homestead, Doral, West Miami, South Miami and others have voted to pass this Resolution to send a message to the County Commission because the truth is, we don't want the animals to have to take this walk, to go into this room, where they step and are put on the table and they are given a shot and then taken out in a garbage bag, because that is what happens every day at Animal Services and because they are so crowded sometimes they can't receive the animals, so instead they die in the street. It is a very profound issue, I am one of eight kids, our family adopted almost every stray dog that came through the neighborhood if it got to the middle of the block where we grew up, and we were able to afford to spay and neuter those animals, but we know that is not the case and the biggest issue is the cats, 450,000 to 500,000 stray cats in

Miami-Dade County and it takes a radical solution for a very severe problem so the 100,000 spay and neuter a year that is the goal. We hope we will be able to do that and we understand money is tight, we totally get that, but if we don't take some very, very severe measures to do it, by sending this measure and by hoping that the County Commission can find more money that is available today we are going to keep having the problem, but we hope instead, because we are all here, we are all advocates we will never give up for these poor animals that have no other voice, we will never give up because we want the Mayor and his folks to be able to enact this animal foundation with real money to make a difference that is going to be a long lasting permanent solution, because what we have right now is a Band-Aid, and is like putting a Band-Aid on somebody. I am not the nurse that you are Pat so I don't know the right expression, but they severed their leg and trying to put a Band-Aid to stop, but it is just not going to be the answer. So, I am optimistic we have eight other cities who have agreed also, eight other cities have this on their agenda forthcoming in the next couple of weeks and we will hope to visit, every single one of the municipalities in Miami-Dade County during this process. So thank you for your time today, if we can answer any questions, we are happy to answer any questions that we can. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: And I have Alexander Adams.

Alexander Adams: Hello Commissioners, I saw this item late on the agenda, but...

Commissioner Keon: Your name and address.

Alexander Adams: I am sorry. Alexander Adams, 36 Palermo Avenue, I am not against keeping away the killing of animals. What I am against is the way, it seems like continuously, I'll say we in government, specifically County mostly continues to add what are fees, or their special assessments, special needs and taxes which are disguised as not property taxes, but individualistic and too many times we need clear language on these ballots. I can tell you I as one didn't answer this question because it was non-binding, non-binding to me means you don't come back and make a binding vote in a Commission in the future on which you called non-binding in the past. Maybe it was a technicality, maybe it was explained right from the beginning, that has a long history and what I'll give you in the last ten years, what we have had in this county is GOB bond referendums for a lot of different issues, they are paid by taxes. We have had a Transit Tax which turned out not to be 100 percent for transit. I mean could not deliver what they asked for, we have a Tourism tax, we have a Children's Trust Tax. We in Coral Gables just a year or two ago decided to lower our "Property Taxes" by a fraction of one cent and add a fire fee which actually raised our taxes, we have the Children's Trust Tax. We have the School Board Bonds that we just passed, we have the Marlins Stadium Bonds, we know have the future Water and Sewer Bonds because the County used that maintenance money in the general fund when they had lean times and so now we are paying for it and now we know that

there is a future tax for Miami-Dade College. So my question to you is, when are we going to...I am not against any of these individual items, but I think it needs to be in the general fund, in the public and we need to decide what are we for and what are we not and we need to work within our means. I mean are we going to have a tax for the arts, parks, the historic, the homeless, the museum, they are all good causes, but we just cannot go down this slippery slope and that is really my point here.

Mayor Cason: Thank you. Is this the same Resolution that the other cities have passed word for word?

City Attorney Leen: Harrison would you come up please.

Ms. Secada: There is actually more than one version of the Resolution. I think some cities tweaked it and put a phrase here, or a phrase there that was a little different.

City Attorney Leen: This is Harrison Wittels he is an intern in my office, he is also a former student of mine with FIU Law School. He helped prepare this packet and also item F-3 and F-2, with the Commissioners so I would like you to answer this question.

Mr. Wittels: So they are very similar, but they are not the same. From all of the different Resolutions they say essentially the same things, but they are different words.

Commissioner Keon: The ones that have come before these cities?

Mr. Wittels: For the different cities like Miami Beach, Doral they all are saying very similar things, but the sentence structure is different.

Mayor Cason: What ours says is pretty vague, it says establish the funding mechanism, it doesn't say raise taxes, it doesn't say find savings somewhere else, be more efficient. So this is...I mean I can support this...

Commissioner Quesada: Here is what I propose, I agree with Alex in the sense that I normally wouldn't be for something like this and creating tax but at sixty-four percent of our population voted for it, so I am in favor of the Resolution, but I am looking at the Resolution language. I am looking at this Resolution, A Resolution of the Coral Gables City Commission recognizing that sixty-four percent of the City of Coral Gables Electorate voted to support the initiative as presented that would be the only amendment that I would change. I think it is applicable to us.

Commissioner Lago: And I think also to what Commissioner Quesada is saying and the Mayor, you are talking about...We are looking to fund something that is needed in this community. I agree with your regarding the taxes, I want to limit the word tax as much as possible. I think we

are overtaxed, this Commission prior to me joining a year ago had lower taxes on two separate occasions.

Mr. Wittels: I would like to interject; this is essentially a general pledge that you guys are supporting the voters. The issue...

Commissioner Lago: That is where I was headed...I was going to say listen, this is not an issue about tax or putting it in the general fund, but I agree, just to go off on what Mr. Adams was saying I agree whole heartedly we want to limit taxation, because obviously we have seen that government does not do it as well as the private sector. It is a known fact, but going off that Commissioner Keon has item F-2 which plays hand in hand into this issue here. If you speak to the residents of this community you will see that they are in dire need of an answer and right now we don't have an answer. Right now you walk down the streets and there are cats everywhere so this was brought up like this gentleman is saying to show support to the sixty-four percent of the individuals in this community of 49,000 who voted in favor of coming up with an answer to something that right now is not even addressed. The only way that we are addressing it is just by killing, there needs to be an answer, and the answer here is if we are bringing in sixty pets a day and obviously we are not seeing a decline in the 400,000 plus feral cats in this community we need to put forth something that is going to address this issue so what is the answer do we continue to kill or do we spay and neuter these animals and hopefully see a reduction in the near future in regards to the procreation of these animals. This is why I brought this up, and this is why I see that there is an importance in setting forth a plan that will address these issues in the near future and hopefully eliminate as much of these animals as possible.

Mayor Cason: Maybe in the first sentence where it says recognized in the extensive majority of the Miami-Dade County electorate and the sixty-four percent of the Coral Gables residents put that in.

Commissioner Quesada: Perfect.

Commissioner Lago: I don't have an issue amending that at all.

Commissioner Quesada: I will make a motion for that Resolution with the amendment that the Mayor just stated.

Mayor Cason: OK. Do we have a second?

Commissioner Lago: Second.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Lago, seconds it.

City Clerk.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.
Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes.
Commissioner Lago: Yes.
Commissioner Quesada: Yes.
Mayor Cason: Yes.
(Vote: 5-0)

Commissioner Keon: I would like to make...I know that it went to a referendum and you wanted to funded with a special assessment, but when you said that the cost of euthanizing these cats is more than the cost to spay and neuter these cats, I think hopefully what I would like to see Miami-Dade County do is rather than impose a different fee is to take the revenues that they currently fund that program with a euthanization program and just replace it with a spade and neuter program, so you don't go through...and actually it would save them money. If you do this they would just take the money allocated and they would just put it someplace else.

Mr. Rosenberg: The \$300 is when an animal is found on the streets and they bring it there, by law they have to keep it for five days.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Mr. Rosenberg: So during those five days, you have to feed it, you have to take care of it, you have to give it shots, you have to prepare so when the owner comes there is not a lawsuit. All that work of taking care of the animal is the \$300, it is not the exact day they kill it, the exact day they kill it could be \$50, but all of the work to maintain that animal that came in no matter where in came from it is an average of \$300 to do it, and the neuter part the \$65 you do the surgery and you are done.

Commissioner Lago: Mr. Carter could I ask you one quick question. I imagine that the Commissioners here probably would like the answer to this. Once an animal is neutered and is released back...

Ms. Secada: Right, we didn't address that.

Commissioner Lago: Can you just quickly address that so that people get an idea of the process once the animals are neutered.

Ms. Secada: Well this is specifically addressing the feral cat thing, Rita informed me last week really that the average lifespan of those feral cats is two to three years and because there are so many abandoned cats and so many become feral cats and they are breeding you are never going to end the cycle.

Commissioner Lago: And how often can feral cats breed, let's say?

Mr. Rosenberg: Well, three times a year.

Commissioner Lago: Three times a year,

Mr. Rosenberg: One is going to have to find a girlfriend.

Commissioner Lago: In my neighborhood is pretty...

Mr. Rosenberg: One cat every four months can have three or four, so one cat that is not spayed is twelve a year and those twelve are having twelve and those are having...That is why there are 400,000 of them.

Commissioner Keon: Cats apparently can get pregnant when they are pregnant. Did you know that?

Mayor Cason: The stuff I am learning today is amazing.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor regarding F-3, so what I plan to do in drafting with the Clerk a new Resolution for F-3. We will amend the title including the vote in Coral Gables and based on the amendment to the title we are also going to amend Section 2 which uses a similar language, the majority of Dade County voters and we will make that consistent with the title.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Alright, thank you very much.

[End Video: 3:27:00]