

**CITY OF CORAL GABLES
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of March 19, 2009**

Members	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	
Leslie Pantin Jr.	P	P	P	P	*	*	×	E	P	P	E	P	P	Mayor Donald D. Slesnick II
Richard Chimelis	E	P	P	A	*	*	×	A	+	+				Commissioner Maria Anderson
Sam Joseph											P	E	P	
Katherine deBlij	P	E	P	P	*	*	×	P	P	P	P	E	P	Comm. Ralph Cabrera Jr.
Vivian More	P	E	P	P	*	*	×	P	E	E	E	P	E	Comm. Wayne "Chip" Withers
David Stiefel	P	P	P	P	*	*	×	P	P	P	P	P	P	Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk Jr.

* No meetings

x No quorum

+ Membership discontinued

Staff in attendance:

Maria Rosa Higgins Fallon, Public Affairs

Raimundo Rodulfo, Information Technology

The meeting came to order at 9:30 a.m.

Approval of minutes

The minutes from the February meeting were circulated for approval.

Motion: David Stiefel motioned to approve the February meeting minutes. Sam Joseph seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Information Technology

Raimundo Rodulfo from the IT Department reported that the department is testing some tools to improve the City's website. IT will contract an outside company to do automatic checking of broken links, correct misspellings and check for ADA compliance which needs to be reported on a yearly basis. For example, when posting pictures, ADA compliance requires that the text be read for those who are visually impaired. The City's website currently has more than 1,000 pages which is very cumbersome to check manually. The IT Department has found a good company that will provide improvements to the website for a yearly subscription of around \$1,000 to \$2,000.

City Manager's Search

Maria Rosa Higgins Fallon reported on the selection of the new City Manager. She attached a press release that announced the recommendation to appoint Patrick Salerno as new City Manager. This recommendation will go back to the City Commission for ratification. Salerno was Sunrise City Manager for 17 years and comes to the City with big credentials. Once on board, Higgins Fallon will find out about how to promote his vision, his goals and possibly introduce him on a *Powertalk* show.

Leslie Pantin concurred that this would be good timing and expressed his desire to continue to explore what this Committee can do in response to the front page article on The Herald and

subsequent cartoon. Pantin said that if this would have happened in any other place other than Coral Gables, it would not have been a front page article.

Kathy deBlij commented that there is another article coming out in a couple of days. Pantin said that this is the price you pay for being a leader among other cities and that Coral Gables holds itself to higher standards. Pantin concurred that it is a good idea to do positive pr with the new City Manager.

Higgins Fallon said that she is waiting on the leadership of the new City Manager to rebuild the city's image. She added that the good news in all of this is that the City has some powerful communications tools that can be used to this effort. Pantin suggested having town hall meetings around neighborhoods with this message.

deBlij agreed that a lot of good news comes from Coral Gables. She said that what has happened in Coral Gables is a real problem and the solution is to fix it. David Stiefel said that our job is to look out for the city more than taking one side or another. If Salerno is confirmed by the Commission, then it is the Committee's responsibility to do what is best for the city.

Sam Joseph agreed that the Committee's role is to make sure the city is seen in the best light. He agreed that some repair work needs to be done. The city needs to come out with a message that it is a new day, an age of transparency, and one way is to show up to places.

deBlij did not agree that the Committee's job is to put lipstick on a pig. She said that communications is defined as a two-way street. She suggested that maybe the Committee should be the first whistleblowers on what is happening in the city and looking at the bigger picture. She said to include news of what residents want to know since currently there is nothing coming from us that is negative. deBlij said the city hardly announces anything about lawsuits.

Higgins Fallon said that her office does not make announcements about ongoing litigation.

Stiefel respectfully disagreed with comments made by deBlij. He stated that the entire situation is being used politically. According to him, the "scandal" situation is political and highly partisan. To the extent that committee members represent the Commission, he said that it is the Committee's task to look from the city's point of view and to do what is best for the city and its image.

deBlij said that there are problems across City Hall such as the Building and Zoning issue, the Country Club, what's happening at the Biltmore, a Finance Department that does not have records, and an IT Department with a \$10 million budget.

Pantin said that previously the media has reported on personal stories. However, the latest Herald story was about taking a shot at the City of Coral Gables.

Joseph said that the steps to take depend on what kind of manager Patrick Salerno is going to be. He must be a public person dedicated to rebuilding the city's image with a new administration, with new changes and going to the public with that message. He said that this cannot be done behind the scenes.

Higgins Fallon said that once the new City Manager is on board, she will extend an invitation for him to attend a future Communications Committee meeting so that all these ideas and issues can be presented to him and explore ways in how this Committee can assist.

Joseph requested clarification about the city having a daytime population of 80,000 people. Higgins Fallon replied that those statistics were provided by the Development Department as the number of people that commute daily to work to the City of Coral Gables.

deBlij reported good news as she saw the Country Club being covered by a tent. The location is being treated for termites.

Elections Public Education

Higgins Fallon distributed copies of the printed Voter's Guide. She said that this issue has gone through many revisions. It will be distributed March 31 to 24,000 residences and renters in the City of Coral Gables, and it is a bilingual piece. She also distributed copies of an election ad that will be placed on The Herald announcing the ballot issues. The ad will be published for two consecutive weeks prior to election.

Higgins Fallon also reported that public service announcements are currently running on CGTV. Election information has also been posted on the website. Her office is informing, not advocating, about the issues.

Stiefel brought up the usage of the City's e-news mailing list for partisan use. Groups have requested this list through public records requests and are sending out partisan political e-mails to the entire mailing list. In some cases, those e-mails are not properly identified. He would like to request the legal department to provide guidelines for these groups which are using a public list to better identify themselves, especially if they represent a political interest. According to him, the list is being misused.

Joseph asked if there is a disclaimer when subscribers sign up to be on the e-news list. Higgins Fallon replied that there is currently a disclaimer that has been added in the past months and is posted on the website where people sign up to e-news. The disclaimer makes reference that if you provide information to this list you may be subject to public records.

Higgins Fallon also mentioned that since these political messages have been sent, some e-News subscribers are not happy with their e-mail information being forwarded to other parties. As a result, some of them have opted out of the e-News list. She also reported that recently she sent a press release clarifying that e-mails coming from the city will only come from e-news@coralgables.com and other emails from different senders are not from the city.

Coral Gables Television

Higgins Fallon showed the video "The Gables Bunch" presented at the recent Employee of the Year ceremony.

She also showcased the public service announcement currently running on CGTV about upcoming elections. Higgins Fallon reported that CGTV will go live on election night reporting the results as they come in from the polling places.

The last video shown was a Spanish version of Newsdesk to remind members that this news segment is also produced in Spanish after the Commission meetings.

City News Update

Higgins Fallon distributed the latest e-news.

Joseph inquired if there is additional explanation on the proposed amendments on the TV public service announcements. Higgins Fallon reported that she was originally intending to include a more in-depth explanation of each amendment, however, the video production became cumbersome and could not provide visual equal time to all the amendments.

With no other business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.