

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-1
January 24, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jim Cason

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suarez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Cultural and Arts Specialist, Catherine Cathers

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-1 [10:08 a.m.]

H-1: A Resolution of the City Commission accepting a proposal from artist Janine Antoni and approving the fabrication and installation of the sculpture *Whispering Through a Stone*, (unanimously recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel, approval/denial vote: 7 to 0, and the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 7 to 0); authorizing the City Manager or his or her designee to negotiate an agreement with the artist; authorizing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 amended budget to recognize as revenue a transfer from the Art in Public Places reserve, and appropriating such funds to put toward the cost of fabrication, installation, and related expenses regarding the artwork..

Mayor Lago: Time certain 10 o'clock, H-1 and H-2.

Commissioner Cason: You deferred H-2.

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Mayor Lago: Oh, I'm sorry, we deferred H-2, yes. So, its H-1 that was deferred too or no.

City Attorney Suarez: H-1 is A Resolution of the City Commission accepting a proposal from artist Janine Antoni and approving the fabrication and installation of the sculpture *Whispering Through a Stone*, (unanimously recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel, approval/denial vote: 7 to 0, and the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 7 to 0); authorizing the City Manager or his or her designee to negotiate an agreement with the artist; authorizing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 amended budget to recognize as revenue a transfer from the Art in Public Places reserve, and appropriating such funds to put toward the cost of fabrication, installation, and related expenses regarding the artwork.

Ms. Cathers: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Good morning. Thank you for being here.

Ms. Cathers: Catherine Cathers, Art and Cultural Specialist with the City. The Cultural Development Board is making a recommendation for the Commission, an installation of the sculpture *Whispering Through a Stone*. Adler Guerrier is here as an appointed member of the Arts Advisory Panel to speak and answer any questions on their behalf. Janine Antoni, the artist, along with her gallery representative are attending the meeting via Zoom, and Ms. Antoni would like to make a statement following the presentation, will be available for any questions. So, we do have a PowerPoint. I'd like to briefly review the process we followed and the resulting recommendation. So, City Commission has consistently supporting building the city's public art collection with artworks by prominent artists. On August 2, 2022, the Arts Advisory Panel reviewed a proposal by Janine Antoni that included a permanent sculpture *Whispering Through a Stone*. The Panel unanimously recommended approval of the proposal at that time. On August 4, 2022, the Cultural Development Board reviewed the proposal and prioritized recommendations for artwork that could be completed and celebrated in time for Art Basel 2022. On August 24th, the City Commission saw the initial proposal for *Whispering Through a Stone* and overall expressed interest in the artwork, also prioritizing decision for Art Basel 2022, at that time. So on December 20th, the Cultural Development Board reviewed a revised proposal for *Whispering Through a Stone* and is recommending approval to the City Commission today. This is a rendering of the piece at one of the proposed locations, which would be across from City Hall underneath the tree. Janine Antoni just as a little refresher about her background. She is from Freeport Bahamas. She lives and works in New York and Miami. She received her MFA and Sculpture with Honors from the Rhode Island School of Design and is represented by Luhring Augustine. Antoni works in sculpture, performance art and photography. She is globally known for deeply personal and conceptual process that articulates her relationship to the world, and the emotional states felt in and through the senses, which this piece represents. Her artwork has been exhibited and is in the collections of major institutions, including the Whitney Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the

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Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and among others in Ireland, Sweden, the UK, Germany and more. In addition, Antoni has been represented in several international biennials and festivals including the Whitney, Venice, Johannesburg, documenta, and others. So, here's another rendering of the piece, if it were to be placed on Miracle Mile and this is just technical information about the piece which would be a new commission, completed in 2023 out of carved stone. The estimated scale being about 5 by 4 by 6. It will depend on what stone would be selected with an estimated weight of about 20,000 pounds. So, a little bit about the piece itself. The stone will facilitate a private conversation in a public place. Whispering Through the Stone is based on the design of a classic conversation chair and allows people to share secrets or important moments privately while in a public space. Two seats will be sculptured out of a large stone facing in opposite directions with a small hole passing through the stone, connecting the areas to allow those seated to speak in an intimate manner. The artwork is meant as a grounding presence, a place of respite, welcoming visitors to slow down and allow meaningful conversations. We anticipate that the stone will quickly become a chair safe for special moments. She did propose a variety of locations and she is very open to having it live in one place and then perhaps move to another. She could perhaps speak more about that if you'd like. This is just a different view of the same locations along Miracle Mile and again at Merrick Park. And just for clarification, the site across the street in Merrick Park is outside of the Holiday Park borders and behind where the large Santa is placed at that time of the year. So, we felt that as staff, we felt that that location has the number of people passing by it, not only for festivals who can see it and then maybe return for those special moments and also we've noticed a lot of people just taking regular daily walks and walks with their dogs. So, while it still has that beautiful feeling of being in a park setting with the tree behind it. So again, just a close up of that rendering. This is an estimate of the artwork itself with a breakdown of the various components of the artwork, and then we're asking for an additional \$29,500 to take care of the installation, lighting, signage, and education and outreach. Another rendering of the piece on Miracle Mile. So staff is recommending the total funding of \$307,000 for the proposed commission related expenses, as I just mentioned. The funding is proposed through the Art Fund which is funded through private development projects. And now, I would like the city to recognize Janine Antoni, who is available via Zoom. Mr. City Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: She is on Zoom.

Ms. Cathers: Great.

Ms. Antoni: Thank you. I just want to say thank you for giving me the time to tell you about my piece. Catherine did a beautiful job, very succinct and articulate. I just wanted to say that I have a big connection to Florida. I've been coming here my whole life and my parents have been living in South Florida for 25 years, but in the past 15 years I've been coming for ten days a month to take care of my elderly mother, and Coral Gables, especially Miracle Mile has become a

destination to get her out of the house. And so, when I got this opportunity to make a proposal, it was within that context that I thought about the piece. I had a memory of my childhood. I grew up in Freeport, Bahamas and we had a shopping center called The International Bazaar, and we used to go there for dinner and for shopping, and at the center of this shopping center was a big Buddha, with two staircases leading up to him. And my father said to me, I'm sure he made this up, if you rub the tummy of the Buddha your wish will come true. So my brother and I would race off, run up the stairs to hopefully have our wish come true. And so, I wanted to create an object that was a kind of ritual for the people of Coral Gables and the visitors. And I can say, if I had the opportunity to make the piece, I'll certainly sit my mom in that stone and tell her what an amazing mother she has been. So the idea for *Whispering Through a Stone* is that it provides a place and a tool to say what needs to be communicated, and the specialness of the situation would create an intention in the speaker and allow the sentiment to resonate for the listener. So that's just a little story to say why as an artist I would come up with this sort of idea. So, there's a little hole that goes between the two seats that allows you to speak your feelings. I'm here for any questions or thoughts or even recommendations of sites that you might have.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Adler, welcome – welcome again. Like I mentioned before, thank you for your service to the city. It's a big commitment for you and I know you take a lot of pride, and you came to see me on Friday open office hours, and we talked for some time in regards to the future of arts here in the City Beautiful. Very bright especially with people like yourself and Catherine who are leading the way, along with the board. I wanted to get your opinion and a little bit of guidance because as a person who not only I highly respect you, I have a passion for your artwork. Your artwork is beautiful, complex, and as I told you, I know you are going to get very upset what I'm going to say right now, but I'm going to say it anyway, put it on the record, I look forward to the City of Coral Gables one day having one of your works in our parks so that people can see, not only an exceptional artist, but a resident who has been in the most major museums in the world, has been in the Whitney, has had exhibitions in some of the most major museums internationally, is represented by the most important gallery here in South Florida and the State of Florida who is now in Art Basel Switzerland, along with being in Art Basel Miami, David Castillo, who I have a lot of respect for, and you've been with him since the beginning. You are one of his first artist that you signed with him. How many years ago was that?

Mr. Guerrier: 2009.

Mayor Lago: 2009. So, I want your opinion, because your opinion matters.

Mr. Guerrier: Well, as far as this is concerned, I would say as Catherine's presentation pointed out, the Advisory Panel, we were unanimous in supporting this work mostly because of its tenor. To have an artwork that suggest casual and everyday interaction can be what triggers the sweetness of a sculpture, the sweetness of an object in our urban landscape is kind of a rare thing. I can say

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in South Florida we don't have any such object anywhere around. So, for me that's what turned me on there. I make a lot of work with botanicals, flowers, because that usually does that for me. Almost all of us have a weakness for beauty that is shared. This particular sculpture offers something else. It offers communing, talking, whispering; whispering is actually a proper verb here because you whisper something softly, you whisper something intimately, you whisper something that you wish your listener catches every syllable and every tone. I really like this sculpture. I think it will be an object that functions quite differently and complimentary with every other object we have in the collection, but also what is also missing on Miracle Mile. We have a lot of cars, we have a lot of people, but we don't have a lot of points of rest on Miracle Mile. Sure, there are benches and technically this is a glorified bench and double chair, but this offers something a little extra. So that is my general guidance. It will only enrich this landscape to have a similar work.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Mena: I know you walked a little bit through it in your presentation, the process to get here and sort of how, you know you're coming here with one proposal and I don't think anybody questions the stature of the artist or her reputation and whatnot, but from my seat I have to make a decision on spending \$300,000 on something, it's a lot of money, and I guess my question is, did you guys review multiple proposals from multiple artists? Is that something that you know, again, appreciating the board's work that we would have an opportunity to look at what those options were, because my thing is just I'm sitting here and I'm only being presented one option and it has a significant price tag, but I have to be vigilant about, and I'd just like to understand what else was considered, and I apologize you may have covered it, but what exactly, how did you guys as a board kind of get to the one artwork that you're here today with and what else was considered and what other options are there, because I'd like to just understand. Again, this is one of these things where, hey, this is a beautiful piece of art and if it was free this wouldn't even be a question, but there is a price tag on it and because there's a price tag on it, you know, not just the artwork, but everything that goes along with it, the installation of material, etc., we have to discuss what the options are as well. What else was considered and what else went through the process to get to the board. Can you kind of walk me through that a little.

Ms. Cathers: Sure. So, it actually stemmed from when we were searching for an artist for Art Basel last year. So, we looked, and the panel looked at numerous artists at that time and then they narrowed it down to two artists, Janine Antoni and George Santos Calderon, who were both given the same opportunity to present a proposal for permanent work, which is what the Commission has been directing us to seek out, rather than just temporary pieces. So, since the piece was so enthusiastically embraced at that time and the Commissioners at that time also expressed interest

in it and you said how much you liked it, we brought it back and gave her the opportunity to expand upon that proposal and rework it a little bit.

Vice Mayor Mena: But what you just said, its funny you say, because that was my recollection as well. I remember there was a couple of different artists.

Ms. Cathers: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: That we were talking about.

Ms. Cathers: Yes.

Mr. Guerrier: Well, those were tied with our Art Basel event.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Mr. Guerrier: And both as temporary unveiling of it, but also we've had noted over the years that acquiring work is also part of the goals, so this is how this came to be.

Ms. Cathers: And we do have the upcoming opportunity...

Vice Mayor Mena: Did you subsequently, I guess my question is even going back to that Commission meeting, there were at least two that were being discussed at the time.

Ms. Cathers: Yes. The other artist chose...

Vice Mayor Mena: Both go through this process and then the board decided on one versus the other, that's what I'm saying.

Ms. Cathers: The other artist chose not to propose a permanent artwork. He chose to only propose temporary work.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, there was only one work ultimately that was submitted for a permanent.

Ms. Cathers: Correct. Yes. And now we have the upcoming opportunity for, I think the \$250,000 opportunity for a regional South Florida artist to do a permanent work that we'll be releasing an RFQ on shortly.

Mr. Guerrier: And a scenario that we hope to get at least five or six maybe ten artists to consider at one point and maybe peer it down to something, the best choice anyway.

Vice Mayor Mena: Listen, I just have a hard time with being presented with one option with that kind of cost associated, that's where I'm struggling with a little bit, because again...

Ms. Cathers: And just for clarification, code does allow the Commission, the city to do direct selections, which we've done in the past too.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm sorry.

Ms. Cathers: Our code does allow us to do direct selections of work and/or artist which we have done before, so it is not outside of the scope of the program and what's allowable by code.

Mr. Guerrier: Additionally, I know you are phrasing it you have one choice, but that's only in this moment. Technically, this process has been happening for a year, so within the larger...many other works was considered and that has to be the process within which the Advisory Panel make recommendations to the Cultural Board, who makes recommendations to you and get back. So we're at this terminal point, it seems like its only one thing, but this work did quite literally come from a process that you approved of. So many other things were considered.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure – and I appreciate that, listen, I really do, but this is the last part of that process and it is part of that process.

Mr. Guerrier: A pill must be swallowed.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes, exactly. And again, my recollection was when we talked about it the first time there were multiple and so now I didn't realize that one had kind of not submitted anything.

Mr. Guerrier: As a question that I can take back to the Advisory Board, Panel, is it more comfortable for your decision-making to be presented multiple works in this scenario to consider or...

Vice Mayor Mena: It is for me. I can't speak for my colleagues.

Mr. Guerrier: I'm speaking with you.

Vice Mayor Mena: With the cost – again, there was another item today that got deferred which didn't go through this process and was another thing altogether, I recognize that, but it was being donated. There was only installation cost, that's a different conversation, obviously. Again, this is \$300,000 expense and while I recognize it comes from the Art Fund and that's an important distinction, I think its just like if you said, here Vice Mayor, here's \$300,000 you can go out and buy any artwork in the world right now with that budget, but I'm only being presented with one option, so that's where I'm having a tough time myself. That's just my thought, my concern a little bit.

Mr. Guerrier: And Mr. Vice Mayor, the metaphor is slightly off. It is akin to someone saying, here Vice Mayor, here's \$300,000 to go buy an artwork. You already sent Catherine and I to go shop on your behalf.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure.

Mr. Guerrier: This is what we came back with.

Vice Mayor Mena: And that's why I get back to having options. When I last spoke with the shoppers there were two things on the table and now there's only one, right. So, I'm just saying, I appreciate that and listen, the last thing I ever want to do is waste your time or anybody's time at all. I'm respectful of your time. I'm respectful of the artist. This is a tremendous artist with a tremendous reputation. All I'm saying is my role here is not as art critic or anything like that, its as we kind of control the purse, right, we have to now commit to expending these dollars.

Ms. Cathers: And I think that's why we have the Arts Advisory Panel process and Cultural Development process who then makes that recommendation to you. We feel that we followed the process through code and then we do have another opportunity coming up that typically and this is a standard process, we will be releasing it widely. We won't know which artists are going to respond and then that list will be peered down to a number of artists that will be asked to present proposals. Those proposals which typically are maybe three to five people, will come to the Arts Panel, they'll come to the Cultural Board and the Cultural Board will ultimately make a recommendation, one recommendation back to the Commission.

Commissioner Anderson: Let me make a quick comment. We had, what was it, the poles that we had to look out, we had two-three options to look at, with cameras on them and the Wi Fi. I think that's what we're looking for is, having a selection of two-three options with recommendations and with the report. As far as the piece, it's a lovely piece, but I would not put it on the corner of LeJeune and Coral Way. If we were going to put it in that park, there is going to be yellow Poinciana coming in for Arbor Day, along with a pollinator garden on the opposite corner, the Mile has many locations that would be conducive to a whispering conversation, but the noise of the cars on LeJeune would look at that. It would be a yelling conversation between two people on that stone. So those are my comments.

Commissioner Menendez: You stole my joke. So, it's too close.

Commissioner Anderson: For once I did.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes, that was good. You're picking up my humor. You were mentioning that that's why you go shop for the Vice Mayor, but that's also why you keep the receipt, because you never know when its not necessarily what we feel is the proper purchase or

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the proper acquisition. I'm glad the Vice Mayor and you all made, its important for the public to understand that where the funds are coming from, because I don't want anyone to be confused its coming from our general funds, that's an important distinction. I agree so far that it will be good for us going forward to have a couple options so that we can have, I think a healthy discussion. I think the piece is very nice. I like the concept of bringing people together, having conversations. We try to push that concept, that idea in our community so its well in line with that, but I do echo my concerns going forward on what we would like to see to make it, like I said, a more vibrant conversation.

Mayor Lago: So, Mayor, unless you have something to say.

Commissioner Cason: I like the piece.

Mayor Lago: I like the piece too.

Commissioner Cason: I like the piece. There is a process. We had this discussion when we had the flowers, remember, and at that time I said, I don't think we should be the judges up here of art. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I'm not an artist. I'm not a person that my particular view should prevail. I would rather have the experts, the people that do this to look at all the options and comes to an agreement, 8 and 0 for me of people that are really experts in this that have looked at all the options, that have found a great artist and come to us and say, this is the one we think you should get. I go with that. I don't want to make the choice. I wouldn't want you to come in with two different pieces and say, you chose which one. No, I'd rather have you all, that's why we have the board to make those choices and here's why we think you should take this one over the other one. I don't think that this should be in a place that's very noisy. I don't think it should be where there's a lot of cars. If you are going to have whispering, it ought to be in a place that's quiet where you can come and have that conversation. I would not have it on Miracle Mile; people going up and down on their bikes and the roller skates and making all that racket. It's got to be in some place that's quiet. I like the piece. I think the process worked. It's not the taxpayers monies, the money is coming from the developers. Somebody has to make the choice, we have your group help us make that choice. You made a recommendation. I would go with your recommendation, in my view.

Mayor Lago: So, I have a lot of respect for the artist, her CV is exceptional, represented by one of the most important galleries in the world, private collections of many serious collectors throughout the world, and homes, along with the museums, which I think carry a lot of weight in regards to this artist pedigree. I understand art is very subjective, people have their interpretations and their views of the work. When you come to my house, you'll probably see some works of art that you'll wonder why they're hanging up on my wall. I see this work as being very conceptual in nature. It leaves you with a lot of opportunity to interpret the work. I don't think you're going to make

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everybody happy in regards to art. To find an artwork that gives you a 10 out of 10 is very, very difficult, where everybody finds it, sit down and say, I love this work. I think its very difficult and I think it will never happen, but I think the City of Coral Gables is setting the bar really high in regards to bringing forth exceptional artwork. We are the envy of every city in Miami-Dade County. I think we have an opportunity to bring something different, but I agree with some of the comments of my colleagues in regards to the location. I don't think the location works.

Ms. Cathers: And the artist is very open and flexible to working on that.

Mayor Lago: I think the location doesn't work because of the noise, and also, I think we need to be very careful with these works, because let me give you an example. The work – this is going to be actually interactive work. We have those sculptures on Giralda, if you come close to those sculptures, those marble sculptures on Giralda, people are stepping on them, they are actually like drawing on them. I hate to say this, but we are going to have to potentially corner those off so people don't interact with them as much as they are, and I'd like to see if maybe you can report back to the Commission with like a status update in regard to those sculptures, because we want to protect them.

Ms. Cathers: Yes, we're happy to.

Mayor Lago: I'd like to see that. I like the artwork. I think its interesting. I think its something that could complement the many artworks that we have here in the city, we're talking about an internationally acclaimed artist. I think its important. Some people may look at _____ they may look at a Tony Craig, they may look at work by Ms. Housigo and wonder, what is that? – and I accept it a long time ago. You are not going to make everybody happy. Just do your best and bring forth artists that you think are at a level that is respectable and that have a pedigree and have a CV that when you make that decision, that tough decision, like the Vice Mayor was saying, we're spending this much money, that you feel comfortable that you're making, and I hate to use this word correlation with art, but you are making an investment, you're making an investment; you're making an investment in a work that has a proven track history and trajectory.

Commissioner Cason: I'd like to make a motion to approve.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Commissioner Cason: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: No

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: No

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Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 3-2)

Ms. Cathers: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: And that's why politics and art sometimes they don't mix, but.

Commissioner Anderson: I like it, but...

Mayor Lago: You know what I respect, I respect that my colleagues on the Commission are moving forward and making those tough decisions. I voted no on a piece of art a long time ago, that has not been installed yet. It's a building that has not been built, its on Ponce, and I don't think it falls in line with – there's no CV, there's no strength and I want the Arts Board along with the Commission to put people on notice that we want the best, we want the best, the best work to come here, because at the end of the day when we're gone, we want it to be – we want people to come to the city and to come and enjoy the best art. And I'll tell you when we were inaugurated the Tony Craig work for Art Basel there were a lot of collectors that came from all over the world and they said, wow, we're impressed. We're reading about what's coming to the City of Coral Gables in regards to the caliber of work and no other city is doing that. So, we're talking about internationally renowned artists that are doing exceptional things – minorities, female artists.

Vice Mayor Mena: Again, I respect the process and by the way, I love what we're doing in terms of the overall program. There are a lot of pieces that I love. My issue here is, again, I'd like to have seen a different process and maybe I'm not a fan of the direct process. Again, when we talked about her, my understanding was there were two artists following in the track. I only found out for this meeting that there was now one. As a broader comment, and just in terms of feedback generally, not about this, you know I would like to see some diversity as well, not only in terms of the artists, but in terms of the genre of art. I think we've, as long as I've been here exclusively done contemporary art installations, that I know of and you can correct me if I'm wrong. I think there's room for a lot of variation there and I think we have residents who enjoy more classical pieces and others that enjoy contemporary and I think there's room for both, and I think when you go to most metropolitan cities you see a little bit of both, you know, in the art, in the architecture, in everything. And so, I'd just like to see as well a little bit more just diversity in what we pursue.

Ms. Cathers: Just a little teaser. I think you will be seeing something coming up.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay. Great.

Commissioner Anderson: Last comment. My no vote was as to the only one option and my...comments from residents is to why not more of the traditional pieces more historically that fit in with the city and would like to see some local artists as well.

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Mayor Lago: We're working on that.

Commissioner Anderson: We have some great local artists.

Mayor Lago: We're going to be presenting that and that's one of the items that our friend here brought to me and said, listen, we are going to be putting forth a search for local artists to find the best, but I want to put on your radar since we are here in the Sunshine, its opportunity. I presented Catherine with two opportunities for the future that I'm working on. One of them is a monumental sculpture by Louise Nievelson, exceptional female artist who is getting incredible attention now, and I'm also working on presenting a work by Frank Stella and we've been talking back and forth. We've been having meetings, different galleries, and we want to present that to the Commission forthcoming, along with this search for local artists. So there's going to be a commitment to ensuring that we continue to do small works - \$150,000, \$200,000, but I also want to make sure that we make monumental purchases. Frank Stella is probably the most important living artist outside of Richard Serra, _____, these are giants. To make a long story short, we saw democracy in action here today and I think we're going to see a great work come to the city.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add that I personally thank the Cultural Development Board for at least coming forward with a strong vote, so their will, their thoughts, their opinion, their decision was a firm vote and that, to me, was very important, because as a Commissioner I appreciate when an advisory board and different boards come and let us know clearly their position, it makes our job a little bit easier. And again, going forward, all the comments to be taken into consideration. It's a lovely piece, like I mentioned before and I'm glad it got approved but I'm glad that we're going to move forward and make things better.

Ms. Cathers: Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your hard work. Take a five-minute break to go to the bathroom. Thank you.