

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item I-1
February 23, 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

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item I-1 [1:24:51 p.m.]

Status update regarding the City Commission's request to the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners to resolve the lawsuit between Miami-Dade County and the Lola B. Walker Homeowners Association.

Mayor Cason: Let's do quickly I-1 and I-2 and then we'll get to H-2.

City Attorney Leen: Thank you Mr. Mayor. I'll be quick. Item I-1 is a status update regarding the City Commission's request to the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners to resolve the lawsuit between Miami-Dade County and the Lola B. Walker Homeowners Association. I'm very happy to report that Commissioner Lago, Commissioner Keon and I had a publicly noticed meeting with Mayor Gimenez and a number of the County staff, which went as well as it could. I know that they are going to want to speak briefly on the subject, as will I, but we really appreciate Mayor Gimenez's involvement. He had a member of his staff here earlier and I told the staff member that as well. Mayor Gimenez wasn't so concerned about the legal arguments back and forth, he really wanted to get this thing done, and what he told us was that all of us have an interest, the City, the County, and Bahamian Village to

get this thing done, and the neighborhood, and that's in the best interest of the neighborhood. So what we agreed to do was to tow the lawsuit. So right now there is a lawsuit pending, that's going to be towed and by that it's going to be pushed off, and it could be for even a couple of years. In the meantime, the parties are going to set up milestones to get this property developed. There is going to be a community center and then there is going to be the retail component, and I know that the City is already been meeting with the Bahamian consulate, we've had a meeting, it doesn't mean that that's going to happen, but it may, but I know that Commissioner Lago and I know the Commission, I know the City staff are working on meeting people and trying to get this thing moving; and I've imparted that to the County Attorneys, so they are aware. So that was the first thing. Then we went to the County Commission and in front of the County Commission we basically presented our position and they weren't going to speak, because it was an ongoing litigation, but I could see that they were very receptive to what we said. Individual Commissioners have informed us how supportive they are, and by Commissioners I mean County Commissioners to the City. So we feel like we are doing the right thing. We think the County and the Bahamian Village and ourselves are all on the same page, we really appreciate the County's taking a second look at this and trying to reach a resolution that will help the residents and get this thing built. So the one thing that we did tell them, we told the County was that we will continue to expedite things. We'd be happy to be part of the agreement, we would put on the record that we'll continue to make this a top priority, and we'll work to get this approved. So with that I'll turn it over to Commissioners Lago and Keon.

Commissioner Keon: I thought that they were very receptive and we all wanted the same thing and its how we get there, I think we have a decision that will help us get there. It was a very good experience.

Commissioner Lago: It was. I agree with the City Attorney's comments, along with Commissioner Keon's comments that they were very concise, the County listened, the Mayor understood the position of the residents of the Lola B. Walker Homeowners Association, and along with the County Attorney and their staff doing everything in their power with the help of the City of Coral Gables, we have certain milestones that we need to provide them with in the week or so, which will detail the progress or the future progress of both the community center and the retail component, which will serve as the financial mechanism which will bring a lot of opportunity to that area of the City of Coral Gables. As we've talked about a few different things in reference to this area, and it's been a focal point of this Commission, I welcome you when you have a chance there is a homeowners association meeting tomorrow night, I welcome you to attend. I will be there, I know you have to notice it, but more than anything I welcome you just too really become involved with Lola B. Walker. It's a very interesting area of the City, which is transforming very quickly, and I think that once we start construction on the community center, which hopefully will happen within the next – I understand they'll be going to bid on the

construction documents that are currently under review in the City. Once that community center comes online, I think you are going to see an area of the City which has been underutilized, hasn't received the necessary attention to really take off. I appreciate the Commission's support, the residents are really grateful to the Commission, they mentioned it to me many, many times we were there, and I just want to say thank you to the County Attorney's office and to Mayor Gimenez, along with his Deputy....

City Attorney Leen: Russell Benford.

Commissioner Lago:...for that gentleman, he's been a class act; we met with him several times, so thank you.

Commissioner Slesnick: Thank you for being there for us.

City Attorney Leen: One other thing. We've talked about this individually, but I do know that we need to say thank you to Commissioner Suarez too. He came here to our Commission meeting, and I know he's been a big supporter of this, as well as our other two District Commissioners Sosa and Levine Cava, but Commissioner Suarez this is his District, you may want to....

Commissioner Lago: Commissioner Suarez has been an incredible advocate on behalf of the residents and has always represented this Commission and this community with dignity and he's really shown how important this area is to South Florida. There is a lot of great history. One of the comments that I made before the Commission is that everybody talks about George Merrick's vision, a lot of us until you read Arva book and one of the other books that deal with Coral Gables, a lot of people don't understand that George Merrick's vision was implemented by the Bahamian settlers who have lived in that neighborhood for almost 90 years. So we have to really recognize that vision that was implemented by those individuals and how grateful we are to have them in our City.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

[End: 1:30:51 p.m.]