City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-2
February 5, 2013
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission
Mayor Jim Cason
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Commissioner Maria Anderson
Commissioner Rafael "Ralph" Cabrera, Jr.
Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff
City Manager, Patrick Salerno
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)
Leona Cooper, Coral Gables Resident

D-2 [Start: 9:37:06 a.m.]

Leona Cooper regarding the West Grove Trolley Depot
Commissioner Maria Anderson

Mayor Cason: OK. The second and last appearance today is, we have with us Mrs. Leona Cooper who is here to discuss the West Grove Trolley Depot. Commissioner Anderson would you like to introduce her?

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you very much Mayor. As she comes up, I'd like to say that Mrs. Cooper along with her late husband Mr. William are iconic figures in our City, served on City Boards, been very active and so I'm just thrilled. I've been a big fan of Leona for a long, long time and I thank her for being here.

Mrs. Cooper: Good morning. I'm Leona Ferguson Cooper and I live at 200 Washington Drive, Coral Gables. I live across the street from where my husband was born some 84 years ago. We

are Gablites, so we are like the aboriginals of Australia, we are the first people there; and I'm here to address not only the trolley thing, I want to talk about a few other things that are bothersome to us in our community. As you know, the Homeowners Association we are all basically, the people who were born there and it's a conflicted standard when we come to the City to do things that we are always sort of delayed, look like we are the ubiquitous "47 percent", we pay all of our dues, all of taxes, all of our fees, all of whatever; and it seems like it's a bit troublesome to get things done. Now that is because you know as you know, we are trying for about the last five years to get a community thing built, we called it first the Bahamian Village, and its gone on so I don't know if we need to use that name anymore, that's not been so good for us, but we've never been able to get things moving. As you know, we had received a grant from the County to upgrade some of the houses in the historical district, but because we had so many delays and so many setbacks from the City, we were only able to do three of those houses that we redid, we built four; and then you have that project across the street on U.S.-1 that they came to us and asked us to help them out because their project, they were supposed to put in affordable housing, and because they didn't want to do that they asked us would we take it on for them? So they offered us $350,000 if we would, our organization that is, if we would let them, but apparently something went awry and that $350,000, we only received $150,000, and the other $200,000 went to the City, we never understood that, and what that was for we don't know, and we still haven't been able to find out. So, now we have to put in another application because we've been set back about five times, I guess, we've been doing this for about the last five years, my husband's been gone four, and we've been doing this maybe two or three years before he left. So I would like to ask you all when we come and ask you to help us improve that community and we are the only people that have done this, all the improvements that were made in that area, you may not know, some of you are very new on the Commission, the business of the street marking, Roxcy Bolton is here, Roxcy and I had a little army, it was an army of two and we come out here and fight with you guys, I haven't done it lately, Roxcy does it, I think she still fights with you, but you know when we had a fire in that area, the McFarlane area, the Fire Department from the City of Coral Gables didn't want to put the fire out because they didn't think we were Coral Gables, because we didn't have the proper street marking. So Roxcy of course on her rampage went and got them to start putting down the proper street markings for our community. So you know how this makes us feel that you don't want us to belong, you don't want to hear that but it's true, you don't want us to belong, you don't want anybody to know that we are there and that we are a part of you. Remember we helped to build this City Hall; Merrick himself depended upon the Bahamians that lived in our area to show him what to do when he got here. It wasn't Merrick that got the book and got all those Hispanic names out of it to name the streets, but he never went to Spain, he didn't know anything about Spain, so we helped him, we helped him to make this a big City and I want you all to understand, all of you, that when you address us you have to use a certain amount of decorum, you have to respect us because without us we may not have been here, we helped Merrick, so the other part of it is the trolley. Mr.

Kerdyk, I used to talk to you all the time about bringing that trolley to Grand Avenue and you always told me no, and I never knew why you couldn't do that, that trolley would have been wonderful. We had several old community people that always wanted to ride that trolley, but to ride it they would have to go somewhere else to get it. So does the trolley belong to the City of Coral Gables or not?- is it a Coral Gables vehicle?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes, it's Coral Gables.

Mrs. Cooper: And who funds that?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Who funds it?- it's a combination of half penny sales tax that Dade County redistributes to the City of Coral Gables, that's where most of the funding comes from.

Mrs. Cooper: OK. So then I used to use the Metrorail to go to work before I retired as the Supervisor of Microbiology for the Miami Veterans Administration Hospital, and I would see that trolley come into the Metrorail Station and I'd see people get on that didn't live in the Gables and people got off that didn't live in the Gables, they would catch the trolley, get on to the trolley and go different places out here and go to work, go to Eighth Street, go wherever they are going but had nothing to do with us, and I never could understand why we couldn't have the services of that trolley.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: May I address you please?

Mrs. Cooper: I'll let you, I'll let you.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes. OK.

Mrs. Cooper: But now that we are getting again near to wanting to put our development up, I would like to ask you when that trolley is up and running, I don't know where you are going to have that station or what?- but when it's up and running if it would be available for our use to have people come to our area. I don't know how you would manage it and so forth, but while we are at that because I am not going to take up all your time, I don't like to stand up any more, while we are at it about the trolley station being projected for the Douglas Road area, I think that's insulting to bring that there into a black community, because as you know the Gables black community and the Coconut Grove black community are sort of like together, we are all one big family, and its hurtful to me that you would do that. I might have another personal reason why I think it's terrible, my daughter has a house that she just paid for right three doors from where that Gables trolley station is going to be, and you are a real estate person, you know what that's going to do to her real estate, it's going to make it worth not anything really and truly and I think

that's definitely unfair. So, I'm asking you all to be more considerate about what you do and how you take care of business when it comes to us. We pay taxes and if you check the rolls of the people that vote, we vote 100 percent, you know that. Most people are happy to come over to our community when it's time to get votes for the election because we either make you or break you. So that's all I've got to say. I'll listen to you now.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: That's OK. I just wanted to say, I actually don't remember saying no to you. I know that....

Mrs. Cooper: But I do, I've got a good memory.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk:...I know there are several locations in the City of Coral Gables would love to have trolley service go to them not only the area you are speaking about, but throughout the residential community and unfortunately when we've done our studies and we are doing another one now, which I think should incorporate trying to bring the trolley over to the area. I think that in my opinion once we do the study we can make a determination, but I will tell you that the study initially said that the best thoroughfare was up and down Ponce de Leon, it's not servicing any of our other residential communities, it's up and down Ponce de Leon in our commercial areas, and it's really trying to bring local people that are working here in the City of Coral Gables to their places of work.

Mrs. Cooper: Yes, that's why I'm asking you whenever you get it, if you could let it come by our proposed place, we used to call it the Bahamian Village, but I don't think that's been a lucky name for that.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: OK.

Mrs. Cooper: So we would like for it to come there too, OK?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: OK.

Commissioner Cabrera: Mrs. Cooper if I may?

Mrs. Cooper: Yes.

Commissioner Cabrera: When the trolley was approved by the Commission a number of years ago, we actually approved it at Coral Gables High School that day, we had a special meeting at Gables High and Mrs. Bolton presented at Gables High and the genesis or the purpose of her presentation was to in fact have the City of Coral Gables consider and move to bring the trolley

south of Dixie Highway – to the black Gables Mrs. Bolton, that's what I mean to cross off Dixie Highway into the black Gables, yes ma'am; and so that's been contemplated and discussed and we actually took up this matter as well when we decided to move the trolley north and while my colleague is absolutely correct, it's meant to service mostly the Ponce area, now it's north of Southwest Eighth Street and it does a complete loop in a neighborhood area, and so it does serve that area as well; and one last thing, while it was originally a circulator to circulate people, it's really become a major transit connector, it's connecting the transit system of Miami-Dade County to Coral Gables, and so you do find a lot of low wage earners and students using the trolley more so than a circulator that was created for the purpose of circulating people in the downtown area. I just wanted to add those comments.

Mrs. Cooper: But we have low wage earners too also in the McFarland-Homestead. We call it "Black Gables" because that's what Roxcy named it, we really don't like that, but we like Roxcy and we don't like West Grove, Black Grove, and Black Gables because it's too – one, those things are insulting.

Commissioner Cabrera: I didn't mean to insult you.

Mrs. Cooper: Oh no, I know you don't, you are just saying what everybody else says, I'm just letting you know…

Commissioner Anderson: The McFarlane Homestead.

Commissioner Cabrera: McFarland Homestead Lola B. Walker Homeowners area, I'm sorry.

Mrs. Cooper: No, it's the Golden Gates subdivision.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK.

Mrs. Cooper: Golden Gates and the McFarlane and Mr. Merrick helped us name that, so that's what it is.

Commissioner Cabrera: I do apologize.

Mayor Cason: We'll certainly include McFarlane area in the study. Mr. Manager, when is the study going to be done?

City Manager Salerno: Mayor, it's a five year. As you all recall, we received a grant approximately $40,000 from the MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) to be matched with

City funds. The grant is being circulated among City staff, excuse me, the contract for the consultant to conduct a five-year master plan of the trolley system, its being circulated among staff. I expect to sign it within the next few days. One of the items, task items in the scope of services is to look at expansion of services and give us a plan over the next five years, not just – no areas identified specifically, but just to look at what are the logical expansions of the system. So I take it today what the Vice Mayor has suggested and has requested from Mrs. Cooper is we will ask the consultant to specifically include this area in their study scope and make sure that they evaluate it along with any other areas. There is no trolley service today south of U.S.-1, so any expansion south of U.S.-1 would be the first time in the City that service is provided, and certainly it should be evaluated not just this area, but other areas and I'll make sure that, that's done; and I further add Mayor, that it's been several months Mrs. Cooper as you know, we took a drive, I picked you up at your home about nine months ago to look at areas of your community that you wanted to bring attention to staff. I appreciated the time to get your personal comments as to what you thought needed be paid attention to by the City, and as you know those items that you asked me to look at personally had been each addressed; the sidewalks were cleaned within a week or so of the time you brought them to my attention; the signs at the park and on the column, as you know the bronze plaque was just replaced last week.

Mrs. Cooper: It hasn't been put up yet.

City Manager Salerno: OK. It is in – I was told that it was being installed last week, so I just wanted to let you know that that bronze plaque that's been missing for quite some time has been purchased, is being installed and the wooden one that hangs that you brought to my attention at that time, the purchase order I believe has been issued and it is a custom sign. I think you actually approved the art work last week for that to go; and then lastly I wanted to give you an update. You asked me as far as what can be done as far as landscaping improvements throughout the community. We are nearing completion of the tree succession plan that I talked to you about and hopefully within the next few months that plan – we will have neighborhood meetings, three north of U.S.-1, two community meetings south of U.S.-1, and I specifically have checked and made sure that there is a specific recommendation for the area that you showed me, so I'm quite confident that within the next few months….

Mrs. Cooper: Street calmers also – what are we going to do about the street calmers?- because you know we get that traffic off of U.S.-1 when people are trying to avoid coming up U.S.-1 out of the south of the County and they cut through our neighborhood; and I noticed that street calmers are everywhere else but we have not been able to get any in our neighborhood.

City Manager Salerno: I don't have that on my list, but I'd be glad to talk with you and follow up to get what your suggestions are in that regard. I just wanted to give you, since you are here give

you a personal update of those items because we did drive 15, 20, 30 minutes throughout the neighborhood and you did give me a list of four items and each of those four items have either been completed or about to be completed within the next two months. So, I want to make sure that you understood the status of where those items are. I tried to call you to give you that update, but I'm glad to do it personally.

Mrs. Cooper: OK. But one last thing, I don't want to belabor this and I'm going to be leaving after this. I want to tell you guys the ones of you who are Commissioners, when you make appointments to people that make contributions to your whatever, and they get here and sit at this dais and they're performing for you and for us in the City, some of them have so much – they feel so big about it, you know, and they sort of talk down, especially to our community. We've had that a lot and sometimes you get so annoyed because they talk down to us and I want you when you appoint them let them know that we are just as important as the people in Gables by the Sea or Coco Plum or whatever, we vote, we are not that 47 percent that ubiquitous number, you know, we pay our dues and we don't want to be looked down on, we are citizens of Coral Gables and just warn them, I know they give you money to help you with your election, but tell them respect us when we come in, we need to be respected.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: The one thing I would like the City Manager, I should say another thing I would like the City Manager to do is to come to some conclusion with those $250,000 that she was referring to, maybe you can get us look into that and find out what happened to that other $150,000.

Mrs. Cooper: $200,000.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: $200,000 yes, the $350,000.

Mrs. Cooper: We are going to be coming back now with new plans and the other thing you just got a new person in charge of Building and Zoning or whatever, and he came in wanting to take the wall down on U.S.-1. Why is it that every time we get a new person that comes into the City of Coral Gables and they are feeling really elevated because they are coming to our beautiful City, they think they need to come in and change things that we decided that we wanted?- and it has to be their way or the highway, that you got to stop, we are not going to stand for it. OK?

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you – no, no. Mrs. Cooper thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: I'm just thanking her, I wasn't stopping her.

Commissioner Anderson: No, no, I wasn't interrupting you. I'm sorry, if you finished, go ahead, please. Just wanted to thank you for coming that's all.

Mrs. Cooper: Thank you for listening, but do something about it.

Mayor Cason: And thank you.

Mrs. Cooper: OK.

[End: 9:55:15 a.m.]

[Note for the Record: Mrs. Roxcy Bolton and her daughter approached the podium to speak on the item].

Mr. Alvarez: I would gladly yield to Mrs. Bolton.

Mrs. Bolton: Thank you. [Inaudible].

Ms. Bolton (Daughter): She had a stroke a couple of years ago and has not regained her speech, but she still has a desire to be involved in the City and to especially to support the "Black Gables".

Mrs. Bolton: Yes, yes. [Inaudible].

Ms. Bolton: Loves that section of Coral Gables and America and wants to make sure that they receive…

Commissioner Anderson: And that they are treated with respect.

Mrs. Bolton: Yes, yes, yes…[inaudible]…

Ms. Bolton: And she objects to the trolley garage being built on Douglas Road and has questions as to how much the City received for selling the current location, where it is currently located on LeJeune Road, and objected to the City selling that, and thinks that Douglas Road, the location that's been selected for the trolley garage is an industrial – by turning it into a garage it's turning it into an industrial use that is in conflict with what she believes in, and she is supporting their fight against it.

Mrs. Bolton: Thank you. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much Roxcy, appreciate it.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

[End: 9:58:40 a.m.]