

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
January 12, 2010
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Commissioner Maria Anderson
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.
Commissioner Wayne “Chip” Withers

City Staff

City Manager, Patrick Salerno
City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

F-1 [Start: 9:32:51 a.m.]

Discussion regarding Planning Session with appointed officials
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.

Mayor Slesnick: Mr. Cabrera we have a discussion that you’d like to lead.

Commissioner Cabrera: Thanks. Our last meeting in December, I briefly discussed the fact that I thought it would be a great opportunity for us at the beginning of the year to begin a planning strategic process, and I have to share with you that in my discussion which was directed at the four of you, I made a commentary toward the end of that discussion that if I did not hear from you that I would put it on for this first meeting’s agenda; and that came across as a miscommunication between the Manager and I, because the Manager intuitively took that as a directive from me and that’s why you all got that e-mail asking you to provide some dates and times that we might be able to do this. So I wanted you all to know that’s strictly a miscommunication between the two of us, and what I wanted to do rather than get ahead of ourselves, which incidentally I’m very grateful to the Manager for taking that initiative, but prior to going to that extent, I wanted to have like an open dialogue with the four of you, and see how you really wanted to do this, and let me tell you why. I think it’s really critical that we begin some sort of strategic planning process as Commissioners. I think the Manager certainly has some strategic vision and some priorities that he and his staff want to accomplish, but I think we do too, and lots of time it’s impossible for us to have that kind of dialogue whether it’s because of the agenda, or because of Sunshine Law. So the purpose of this really is for the five of us along with our three constitutional officers to meet, and to come up with some new priorities,

and new initiatives; and I guess what I'm trying to get at, I don't want to insult anyone, especially any of you, but I want to make sure this is something we all want to do as a team, because I have scares from one of our last exercises when we did the evaluation process and it just got shelved for a long time and maybe it was my fault, maybe I wasn't moving it quickly enough, but the bottom line is that I learned from the "School of Hard Knocks," that if you are not going to be committed to the process, then why do it?- and I don't want to put anybody on the spot, so what I wanted to do was to try and have a general dialogue between the five of us and see how you wanted to do something like this, because you know I have my own ideas of how to do it. Personally, I think it should be transparent, not that we are not transparent, because the five of us I think are very transparent when it comes to reaching out to the public and our own policy setting, we are very transparent. But I was even contemplating of having something where you know, if the public wants to sit there and watch, its fine; it's not their time to speak, it's not their time to give us their vision, it's our time, but in the past what we've done from what I recall is, we've been in the basement of the Police Department, we've been at the Biltmore Hotel's the tower above the country club section, and we've been at the Youth Center – the Coral Gables Youth Center, and we've been in venues where it hasn't necessarily been a place where the public may feel comfortable in sitting and watching, and learning how we go about the strategic visioning. So that was one issue I wanted to bring up; where do you want to do this?- how do you want to structure it? The Manager once again had a great insight in the message he sent us, and I hate to misquote him, but I believe he made a comment that he would be prepared to find a facilitator to assist us, and I think again that's great. I know he probably knows a few folks out there, we may know a few folks out there, that we may want to identify to help us in that process, I mean, I've done a little bit of research and have learned that there are a few people out there that, you know, have no bias toward the City of Coral Gables or is not part of the City, have not worked with the City in the past, did not have a previous relationship with any prior administration, maybe that's a good thing to have as well. So having said all this, and I apologize if I am rambling, but I really wanted to find out from you all if there was (a) a true interest and commitment in doing this, and then I wanted to get an insight from you all as to how we structure it, and then provide the appropriate directives to the Manager to help us schedule this time together; and of course incorporate our City Attorney's Office as well as our City Clerk. Any thoughts on this?

Commissioner Withers: Couple of random thoughts, I'll ramble for a minute. I don't know, I really haven't spoken with the City Manager about this, so I'm making some assumptions that you can either deny or say yes. I kind of feel – I think it's a good idea; but I think we need to Ralph, I think we need to look at a couple of steps to get there and maybe really define what we want to get out of it. We've had two or three of these sessions; we had one in the City Manager's office where we put stuff all over the walls, we met at the Biltmore and we came up with all these ideas, at least I thought we did, and focused in on where we were headed. I honestly don't know where we are on any of those, I mean, have we accomplished them?- are we on track?- you know what I'm talking about? We've had quite a few that we have, so I would like to maybe take some time and go back and refocus if anything has been accomplished on any of those, or if we want to adopt any of those, you know where I'm coming from on any of that?

Commissioner Cabrera: What I wrote down based upon what I heard you say, from my past experience in planning, you want a situational analysis, where are we today?- where are we with the things that we said at the Biltmore, at the Youth Center, and all the places where we've met? How many of them did we achieve? What were the benchmarks?

Commissioner Withers: And why didn't we achieve them, is it because we couldn't afford to achieve them or because they were no longer appropriate visions to chase after?

Commissioner Cabrera: What were the metric measurements?

Commissioner Withers: And then what we really want to come out with is a defined outcome of this meeting we are going to have? Do we want to say that, yes, we are going to rebrand the City, do we want to fix the Pension Plan?- do we want to – what is our....but more importantly I kind of feel that the past year really the past year and-a-half in the City we've kind of been plugging holes and bailing water to keep afloat. I really feel that way, I don't know if you all feel the same.

Commissioner Cabrera: I feel exactly the same way.

Commissioner Withers: So I would kind of like leading up to this is, where are we really as a City?- before we move forward into a visioning process. Where are we as a City on our road to recovery?- and what is that expected recovery? Is it expected six months, a year, a year and-a-half, because I think before we really start moving forward, which I really think if you don't move forward you are standing still, you are going backward, exactly. That I'd really like to see what we could sustain as far as a vision moving forward; where we are right now? What's the outlook for the next year, year and-a-half, to two years? Those are my comments.

Commissioner Withers: I think that in order for us to begin the process we have to start with the "as is" or the situational analysis, so I actually see that part of the strategic process is exactly what you said, and I completely agree with you about us being reactive and kind of bailing water and being put in a situation. But see here's the catch, what you said is very important and that probably should be committed to one single meeting. So you know, this probably is a sequential process that maybe the beginning part of it is to start at the situational analysis point, and then move forward from there; and so it doesn't mean that in one meeting we are going to identify five new priorities for the five of us, or ten new priorities and we are going to give them to the Manager and say, here make these work. There needs to be some measurements, there needs to be some benchmarking and that's part of what I'm sure he and his staff will do, but that's the part where we begin to give the vision, because you know, you are absolutely right; I was thinking that the starting point would be to take the last ten list of things – ten items. Remember one of the biggest ones that we had was streetscape, or landscaping the downtown area, that was like number one on the hit parade; where we are going to find the money to do that? So, I mean, I'm with you. As long as the five of us understand that this is not going to be a one day event or a two hour function, at some point in time we need to do this, and we need to do this to help our Manager and his staff, and he in turn needs to see if he can buy off on some of these things

because he may or may not be in a position to even support some of these projects. So I appreciate the feedback.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I'd like to opine on this too. The fact is that I'm fully supportive of always being a person that is part of the process of planning; there is no doubt about it. I do think we have to have a sort of a jaundiced eye considering the budgetary restrictions that we are under at this present time, I think the world has changed dramatically from when we met last. I think our number one issue in the city is making sure we meet our budgetary obligations, and make sure that we do not raise taxes for the residents next year. I think really that's our focus. When we sat there a year or two years ago, we had great visions and you point out one, we had a great vision of landscaping the downtown area, and we thought the money would continue to roll in, well that's not the case now, and we have to live within those constraints. Now that could be part of the process to discuss that, but I do know that we need to keep that in mind for whatever planning process we have, and I think sometimes things change and things are changing in the city, and I don't want to get into a planning process and have these great ideas and everything and not be able to execute based on budgetary constraints. That's basically my feeling on the situation.

Commissioner Cabrera: You know I think that the Manager will keep us leveled in terms of that; I think that's one of his strengths, and I believe – I can tell you, I don't know about the rest of you, but I know that we've had a few conversations where he'd been very blunt and said, we just simply can't financially make something like that happen, and then in other instances he said, you know, I think this is a good idea and I think we can move it forward and it falls within the financial parameters that we need. But Vice Mayor, I concur and I think that discussing the budgetary restrictions that we may or may not have will be a critical component, but I think that will be his responsibility, he'll be the one that tells us, lady and gentlemen, I'm sorry but it's just not going to be something that we are going to be able to do in the next twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six months, and here are the reasons why. So I'm going to allow him to have all the latitude to be able to steer us from that standpoint and tell us what's in the budget that we can afford.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Not only what's in the budget that we can afford, but also the timing that it takes to implement these things, so that we don't take our eye off that ultimate goal which is meeting our budgetary constraints. There is a thing that sometimes we have all these great visions and we go in different ways, and I really believe – this is how I feel in this time right now we have one main concern, which is dealing with our financial issues that affect the City of Coral Gables, that's it. Three years ago something different, two years ago something different, but in my opinion we might have different ideas of how we deal with that issue amongst us; I might say retirement issue, you might say, hey we need to cut staff, whatever that issue is, but that's the number one focus, and I just don't want to take our eyes off that game ball.

Commissioner Cabrera: No, I'm not interested in doing that, and see that's the reason why this planning session could be so worthwhile for us because you just gave the best example you could give, you said a lot of positive things too, but you used the exact example of look, my priority is

this, it maybe retirement, and your retirement may be to cut payroll, but the point is how are we going to get there as a group if we don't have some sort of an agreement amongst the five of us if that's a directive we want to give the Manager. So if in fact we do have a retirement change, or if in fact we have a serious payroll reduction, the five of us may not all agree, but we are all in tune with one another. So really that's the purpose of the exercise, it's not so much to reinvent the wheel, because we are not reinventing the City of Coral Gables, but we do need to and, I think, I'm beginning to get the sense that you all agree that we do need to retool how we've done this and how we've formed these positions; because I don't know, Chip and Bill, you were here before Maria, Don and I, I wasn't a Commissioner so I don't know how much of this you did with Manager Eads, I'm not sure how much of this planning took place, to the best of my recollection as a Commissioner, I think we started that ball rolling in 2001.

Commissioner Withers: We did some, but it really wasn't as detailed.

Commissioner Cabrera: And maybe it doesn't need to be detailed either; you know, it doesn't mean that when we get together in a strategic session we tell the Manager to cut ten percent of payroll, or to definitively change the retirement plan in this fashion; I think we just tell him what our priorities are and allow him the latitude, and I keep using the word latitude, to be able to get these things done and then provide us feedback, and then benchmark it. Let's say we want this accomplished by a particular date and time, well you know, there is a performance standard there that's been set for him that he needs to then achieve, and that's a good thing, that's a very positive thing to do these initiatives based upon performance standards, and we don't have any. All I can tell you is that reserves are down, they are probably at nil, and we got to fix the problem; that's great to know, but how are we going to get there?

Commissioner Anderson: Some thoughts – I'm kind of following the line where you are Bill. My main broad goals that I have, I think we all agree on, are fiscal health, and operational soundness; and I think that's something that the Manager has already started on; I think we are beginning to see the fruits of that, but I think there is still a bit to go, and fiscal health includes pension, includes all of those things under that subset. I have no problem with having a visioning session, but I think we might hold off, maybe hold it in abeyance for awhile, gather some information, then maybe have it a little further down a little bit, my thoughts. The Manager is still not into a year and there is a lot of work to do. I mean we have – the reserves are not where we need to be, there is going to be another year where we are going to be facing a really incredibly tight budget season; we just laid off ten percent of our employees; I think there is a lot on the table and there is probably a lot of uncertainty out there in the employee world as to what's going to happen, and I certainly – I think we have sat in visioning sessions and we had some really good ideas, I think maybe right now for a little while we may want to hunker down and just focus, from my perspective, on fiscal health and getting operationally better from departmental efficiencies and things like that. Maybe some time in the summer or fall to look at those again, but I appreciate the thought, and that's what I'm feeling right now, but I thank you for bringing it up.

Mayor Slesnick: If I can I'd like to add some footnotes to some of the things that were said, and I'm going to borrow a few words from Maria that I liked, fiscal health and operational

soundness, I think, are good words for the considerations that we are going to be facing this year, but the one I disagree with, I know you just used it, but “hunker down”. I see Coral Gables as one of the most dynamic cities in South Florida, and as we look toward the end of this economically challenging period, while we are worrying about fiscal health and operational soundness, and while we are retooling, I agree very much that that is our first priority, is to get through this challenging period, but I think in getting through it we always need to keep our eye on how do we are prepared to bounce when we get through this?- in other words what is the next big goal?- how do we really position Coral Gables to be ready to attract the businesses that are going to be coming to South Florida?- to have our downtown ready to receive new people and new businesses, and attract people to be shoppers, using our restaurants, and how do we make sure that our residents are positioned to have the quality of life that they want? So I want to make sure in my perspective, it’s not yours, or maybe not yours, but I want to make sure that while we talk about the operational soundness, the fiscal responsibility, the retooling, that we are also talking about, this is an opportunity and I think we saw this in our own budget. We did, as I think Commissioner Cabrera referred to, even though we did ratchet down a lot of things, we put some money into things that were preparing us for the future; some of our needs of our infrastructure and so forth, and some things that will propel us into the future. So that was just a commentary on the philosophy. But Ralph let me answer specifically some of your first questions; one is yes, I think it’s a great idea for us to get together, I thought one of the nicest things we’ve done together is our various planning sessions, and I didn’t really care whether we accomplished the goals or whether we put goals that were unrealistic. I really liked getting to know each other and getting to understand each other a little bit better that we did in those sessions, and I thought we came out of those sessions over the years as a closer knit group, and I think we proved a point – unlike some of the Commissions in our area that all represent different districts, they have different agendas, they don’t talk to one another because of the Sunshine Law, and we don’t, but in those sessions we publicized and we could talk, we really got to understand that we could operate as a group with a common feeling even though we didn’t agree on everything; and so I think it’s important to have that time, but because of that I would love to see us continue to have some of them in places where we can sit around the table and look at each other and talk informally back and forth. Obviously, they need to be published, they need to be publicized, people are invited to sit in, I would hate to take it on a formal setting where we kind of lose that intimacy.

Commissioner Cabrera: May I just comment on that?

Mayor Slesnick: Yes.

Commissioner Cabrera: I don’t disagree, but I would like to do if its agreeable amongst the five of us, if that’s the direction we go, that it’s not a formal setting like this, but it’s an inviting setting that if in fact somebody wants to sit down and listen and watch they are allowed to do it, that’s all I meant, because that way – here’s what happens Don, then the knuckleheads out there can criticize us all they want, but we literally made it available to the public, so when they make commentaries about how we do things in the Shade, and how we make secret deals behind doors

and what have you, I can take that away from them, that's why I'm doing this, it's really more for that than anything else.

Mayor Slesnick: That's fine. The second thing is, on a facilitator, you know, I think if we found a good facilitator who helped really drag us out of our shells and together if we are in shells, that's great, but I have sort of seen the best and the worst as you all have, and I really don't want some Sunday School teacher or Pre-Kindergarten teacher again kind of leading us around. I hope that if we use a facilitator it's something a little more dynamic and something at our level, you know.

Commissioner Cabrera: You know, personally I would tell you that it would be great to have a facilitator that brings two qualities to the table: one is private sector experience as well as public sector experience, and some true accomplishments in that arena facilitating both business and government; and I can tell you from the little research that I have done, you are looking at somewhere around \$4-\$5,000 a session, that's the running, if it's a local person. If it's someone from outside then you are also talking about travel expenses, but that's a financial commitment that needs to be agreed upon by this group, or we end up doing this ourselves, and that could be challenging.

Mayor Slesnick: I don't my mind having someone bring in new ideas and new ways to think about things, so that's fine, I just hope it's at a level that inspires us as opposed to....

Commissioner Cabrera: Instead of what we had in the past.

Mayor Slesnick:...instead of irks us; and I also think the idea of including the three public officials that we have, I have it's a great chance for them to get to know each other better, as well as us, and work on an informal basis to talk the same talk, to talk the same language and to get to exchange idea. So that's my thought.

Commissioner Anderson: Just a few more things. First of all just for clarification, when I said "hunker down," I meant just to focus, but I don't think we should negate anything that we've been doing to reach out to be who we are and who we want to be, absolutely not. So I just wanted to support you on that, that wasn't my intent, it just meant to focus. Another thing if we were to go ahead and do this, I think it's important to have a quality facility; and I think it might be important to look at a facilitator that we might have a session on group dynamics. I think there have been some rough times in the last couple of years where we have been polarized as a Commission, and it's not that we don't care about our city or we don't care about issues, that would be a good way to see if we can build consensus better, or maybe we get to decisions where we don't stand so far apart from one another and we can try to build better bridges, doesn't mean we won't agree, but I think sometimes it's been tough. I mean, I speak personally, it's been tough some of the decisions that I felt a little bit of times especially in '08 and some in '09 have really been hard and have separated us a bit at times. I would like for us to find some more common ground, I hope that facilitator is part of that might help us with those issues, because I think that's really key for any governing body to disagree but to maybe find more common

ground. I don't think in my perspective we've been finding that as often as we might. I offer that up as a thought for the betterment of the whole.

Mayor Slesnick: Do you have your input?

Commissioner Withers: Can we ask the City Manager to comment?

Commissioner Cabrera: You can do whatever you want.

Commissioner Withers: I'd like to just hear – you've heard it.

City Manager Salerno: The decision of having a planning session clearly rests with the Commission. The staff and myself included are not in a reactionary mode. We are looking at the challenges that the city faces, and we are addressing them. So I just wanted to put that on the table that if there is a goal setting session staff is not waiting for direction, that's what staff is here for, is to provide administrative leadership to address those issues that we foresee, that's our job to be proactive and not reactive. Now certainly a bit of what we've been doing and still are doing is reactive. When you start a position and within the second week find that you are \$8,000,000 in the hole, you are reacting clearly to that, you are not being proactive in the sense of keeping it from happening. So I do believe if the Commission decides to have a session that a facilitator would be appropriate; they create a level playing field amongst the participants to make sure that everybody has the opportunity to speak, everybody's view is considered, no one person or individual's view is more important than the other. I would look to explore the University of Miami; certainly the university is a wealth of talent. I've heard discussion by the Commission we should look toward the university more so in the past to help us in these regards. I don't know whether they will provide us someone; I certainly think that needs to – we need to see who they have on staff that, I couldn't imagine that they don't have people on staff that have served in that role with the large faculty that they have. There has been discussion about an informal session, that it would be an informal setting; we certainly can do so. I agree that that's – you want as low key an environment for as free thinking a discussion as possible. I'm not prepared here obviously today to talk about all the details, all the things we are doing, but you all know from our discussions individually where our focus has been. It is both financial and as well as developing the organization's capabilities, that's where our focus has been. We are an organization in transition clearly, on many different fronts; financially and organizationally and that will continue for some period of time. So I think to the extent that there is a discussion, we need to keep in mind that this is not a – we are not this point humming on all six cylinders so to speak, and part of that is the reality of the financial situation that we are still, we are not bailing water at the moment, we past that when we adopted a budget for this year. So we are not trying to make sure that the organization stays afloat. We need to complete the first quarter's financial report and get that out because I think any discussion without the benefit of that and the Finance Department knows they are preparing the first quarter's report, expect to have that in a couple of weeks, because that needs to set the benchmarks as was discussed of where we are financially going into this year; how much more has the economy deteriorated our financial situation, if at all? Are our numbers on target, etc? - So I'm not taking the position frankly whether – right now

staff is fully engaged with all the issues that you know are going on, and there are many of them, and if the Commission decides to have one, we'll see that it is a beneficial process, that it's worth the time and energy. I've done many of these in the past, they can be very useful, however I think we have to recognize where we are as an organization today. I think it's very clear to everybody here that I heard from everybody is financial is number one. If we are not healthy financially, we can't help anyone including ourselves, so that has been my number one task and duty, and that is to find a way to improve our financial stability and I'm not making that on my own, I've heard it from all of you that, that's what we need to be focusing on as well as all the other issues. We are not focusing on that at the expense of the present. We're not just an organization today looking at cutbacks and cost-cutting measures and more efficiencies, because if that's all we focus on, that's a rather bleak future to be doing so. So based upon the things that I've heard from you individually, I just want to share that the things that I hear from each of you individually, the things that you'd like to see, those things are actually in some fashion being worked on in every instance. So whenever a planning session is held, if it's held, rest assured that we'd see it's a useful exercise. That's all I have Commissioner.

Commissioner Cabrera: Two quick comments; one is, I think that bringing the University of Miami up is a great suggestion, however, they are part of the City of Coral Gables, they are part of the landscape, 266 acres, and I was really contemplating somebody fresh, someone without any bias, without any predispositions to us and to our climate and to our culture, and to what they will be part of in this process. Two – the Manager just helped me frame something for all of us, he said, *"the things that I hear from you individually"*, that was a really important statement, the things that he hears from us individually. He has an advantage that I don't have; I don't get to hear from you individually unless we are here and talking to each other, and we are talking about resolution or consent agenda C-2, or metal roofs, or country club outdoor dining, but whatever it may be...

Mayor Slesnick: Had to say metal roofs, right.

Commissioner Cabrera:...had to because I thought about it this morning.

Mayor Slesnick: First meeting in 2010.

Commissioner Cabrera: I thought about it in the shower; I said, you know what?- darn it, I mean seriously, we should even think about bringing it back, but all kidding aside (laughter), but all kidding aside.

Commissioner Withers: Is that a motion?

Commissioner Cabrera: I don't have the benefit of having conversations with you individually, if I did to the extent – I do talk to my friend Chip Withers and my friend Don Slesnick, I see Commissioner Anderson at times on the golf course or we bump into each other on the street, but I don't have the ability to sit with the four of you and begin developing how we as a team are going to take the city to the next level, to the next year, to the next two years, to the next three

years, and while I am very pleased to hear the Manager say that we are not reacting, well I can give you five examples while he said that of why we still react, and it's not fault of his and it's no fault of his personnel, but it's just the situational condition that he has to live with, that we all have to live with, and we all have to accept, but there is one point that I would like to make to all of you and that is, I've gone around and have begun to study other municipalities, and the one common thread that the really successful ones have, the ones that are not financially strapped, the ones that don't have to raise the millage rate, the ones that don't have to cut payroll, they have a planning process, and they have a – it's not a planning process that five or seven or nine Commissioners sat down on a March afternoon to come up, it's an ongoing document, it's a living document, it's a document that gets replaced, changed, transplanted, its modular, and it's always changing, and yesterday the priority in the city is finances, and we all agree to that, and “hunkering down” is not a bad word, focusing is not a bad word, but throughout the process whether we are hunkering or processing or focusing or reacting there has to be some common thread among the five of us, and I don't have one; I genuinely don't have one. I can't say that we as a body have agreed that this is the way we are going to get to the next step. Yes, we've talked about retooling our pension plan, and we've had workshops on that, and we've had collective bargaining shade meetings on it, but have we really all just come to a point that we say this is how we want to move in the next two-three-five years on pension? Have we decided that we want to change perhaps the way that we look at our own finances, the way that we project our finances, have we done any benchmarking? I can tell you; I see benchmarking at the public safety level all day long. We know how many Fire Rescue calls we go on; we know how many responses we make in our Police Department, what our response time is and there are certain benchmarks, but I don't know other benchmarks; I don't have Building and Zoning benchmarks; I don't have Finance benchmarks other than what I see come the budget cycle. So going back to what the Manager said, the things that he hears from us individually, I'm very pleased that he hears from everyone here individually, but I want to hear from you individually; I want to hear from Don, and Maria, and Chip, and Bill; I want to know what you are thinking, and I don't have that insight.

Mayor Slesnick: Well, we were talking about process, but you made a few comments thrown in about substance, so I need to say a few words about that.

Commissioner Cabrera: Go ahead, fine, that's good.

Mayor Slesnick: Your comment about other cities that are not having to raise millage rates or in great economic shape or good economic shape, I just don't know how many of those cities exist in Florida, from my travels I don't think there are many. I think Michal Pizzi, the Mayor of Miami Lakes kind of got it right when he said the cities that are in good shape right now for this kind of economy are the newer cities that are mostly contracted out, the County patrols, the County Fire Department does this, they don't have a pension plan, and so forth because they came along in the 1990's or 2000's; and I have to tell you the majority of cities, I believe, that did not bite the bullet and raise their millage rate or take some action to raise their revenue this year are going to be doing it this coming year, and I'm hoping that we did what we had to do and are prepared for the future better than they are.

Commissioner Cabrera: I'm not being critical of us, but I can tell you whether it's by being a new city, whether it's by contracting out, whatever it is that got them to where they are, whether it's by not having such a large downtown, or having a larger downtown, or having a more fluent demographic, they are out there and they may not be necessarily here in South Florida and the Dade and Broward counties, but they are out there because I find them all the time, I find them all across the nation, and I'm not saying that I go out there Don and compare 50,000 citizen community with us, with a thriving private university, and a thriving downtown area. I don't do that. I'm relying on just giving you insight based upon cities that have 20,000 residents and cities that have 100,000 residents, and there are not many, but they are out there, and the common thread that I keep going back to Don, is when I go and do more research on them I find that, hey man, they have a planning process, they've got a strategic plan, they've got something that they are constantly benchmarking against; they are actually setting up measurements to reach certain milestones and they are achieving those milestones, and they are not achieving them in some areas – they are not achieving them in some areas. So if you felt that I was being completely critical to us, I'm not, but maybe in the planning session I can share with you some of these cities, I'd be happy to do that, and tell you how they went about doing what they did and how they got to where they are today; I'd be happy to do something like that, but I'm not trying to...

Mayor Slesnick: And my point is when I sit around the League of Cities, League of Mayors and so forth, the common themes that we talk about here, Ralph, are the exact same themes, exactly the same themes that Mayors and Commissioners from all over the State talk about and the same challenges; and that I find some comfort, OK; I wish them all well and I wish us well, but I find some comfort that we are not like a leper community here economically.

Commissioner Cabrera: When I read about other cities having terrible woes, I say to myself, hey things are not so bad here in Coral Gables.

Mayor Slesnick: And I would take this opportunity to say this, that you all watch the newspapers, you all see the TV, you all have been around personally, you know other people in other cities, and I'm very, very, very proud to be a part of this Commission. I'm not going to cast any aspersions on anyone else, but I've got to tell you that this Commission stands tall in the way it deals with one another; and Maria I understood your angst and what you said about some of the debates we've had, and some of the differences we've had, bringing some discomfort to each of us, but the fact is that in looking at other places this is, and I hope the citizens can appreciate a very well functioning Commission that has a great deal of respect for each other, and works hard to overcome differences, to reach common conclusions and consensus decisions, and I'm very proud to be part of it, and I think your efforts are lending to the future of that.

Commissioner Cabrera: Before we go to next steps, because I do have next steps for all of us here, depending upon the will of this group; Commissioner Withers, I was very astute to ask the City Manager to provide some input from his end, I'm interested in hearing from the City Clerk as well as the City Attorney what they think of this because often times we don't ask them and

they are also constitutional officers in this government. So may I start with our City Attorney, do you have any thoughts and input on this item?

City Attorney Hernandez: Not at the present time Commissioner, I wasn't prepared to lend my thoughts to the process.

Commissioner Cabrera: I wasn't prepared either, I wasn't prepared either, I didn't come up with...

City Attorney Hernandez: Sorry.

Commissioner Withers: Liz, come on get out of your shell, let's go.

City Attorney Hernandez: I apologize; I had never been asked input on the planning session.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, I'm asking you now. Listen, I didn't write a speech today, I didn't put together a planning process, I didn't have an outline in front of me, I've been taking notes about what everyone's been saying, and so – I've known you a long time; you have to have some thoughts in what's been said because I know you have been listening. You are a very bright person, and you handle a lot of issues in a very strategic and managerial way, surely you must have some thoughts in mind that I'd like you to share with the rest of us.

City Attorney Hernandez: I always find that when the City Commission has its meetings and sets out its vision and its policy, that we are able to better respond and prioritize the goals of the City Commission, and we are able to work hand in hand with the City Manager's office on those items that are cost effective, and we are able to advise you as to what would be a more costly investment by the city in achieving the goals and policy objectives that you have. So from our perspective it does give us guidance as opposed to trying to figure out what each of you want and whether there is consensus in the Commission. So we appreciate when you come back with, these are our priorities and this is the order of the priorities.

Commissioner Cabrera: Do you have any thoughts about things that you believe should be an integral part of this process that as Chief Legal Officer you could provide the five of us?

City Attorney Hernandez: Absolutely. It's always been the position of our office that we have to revamp the pension ordinance. We believe that as it's written now it's an incentive to disability claims. We did a study about ten years ago, and we advised the Commission at that time as to what we felt needed to be changed, and we still believe that a lot of change needs to occur in order to get those costs under control, and I think that would be a tremendous boost to helping the city on the road to recovery.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well given the fact that, you know, sort of put you out there without a whole lot of fair warning, maybe you could between now and the time that we get together

provide us with more of your priorities and be prepared to discuss them in that kind of session. Mr. Clerk any thoughts from your end?

City Clerk Foeman: Yes Mr. Mayor, I'm sorry, Commissioner Cabrera, we've always been somewhat proactive in our efforts to find ways to support the city particularly as it relates to public access issues and building the type of infrastructure that will support that, given the fact that we are dealing with a change in the political climate and there are some initiatives that may impact us down the road at least on the state legislative end as it relates to public access. So we are looking at ways from a process standpoint to facilitate a better process flow within my area of functionality that affects other areas, departmental areas within the city. At some point we'll be presenting a business plan that we are working on as it relates to potential revenue stream, and seeing the feasibility as to whether or not that would help us with public access issues.

Commissioner Cabrera: Thank you sir. Does anyone have anything they want to add?

Commissioner Withers: Just one quick thing. Listening to everybody make comments and especially the City Manager, and by the way, I think the UM might be an opportunity Ralph, I know what your concern is, but as the City Manager was talking about an auditorium. I had the opportunity to speak, believe it or not, to the UM students, they didn't know my pedigree or I'm sure I would not been asked to be there; but there was about 200 of them in the audience, and the interaction was pretty neat to be back in a university setting with an educational atmosphere, it was just – maybe there is a fit there, I don't know, an auditorium through one of their political science classes, one evening at the UM inviting professors students, residents, I don't know. One of the sessions I think might be quite neat. An only warning that I have to all of us and especially me is, I really do think that we are going to emerge a city in the next 12-18 months totally different from what the city was two years ago. We are going to be – we've already seen changes with the City Manager, in departments as to what their missions are, as to what their titles are, as to what their goals are. I don't know how much of this reorganization was planning us for the future as it was getting us through the current situation we are in right now, I don't know. But my concern is – listen, I'm all for shooting for visioning where we want to be, but my concern is I don't want to set some of the goals and some of the objectives to where we won't be able to reach them. I would rather set goals and objectives on continuing the recovery and hitting those benchmarks, than hitting goals and objectives once we are already up and running again. Do you understand what I'm talking about? I would rather set goals and objectives based on a recovery plan getting us to a hundred and ten percent (110 %).

Commissioner Cabrera: Achievable goals and objectives.

Commissioner Withers: Instead of goals and objectives as if everything was clear and we could just move forward. I think a lot of our energy, and I didn't mean to say that we are reactive, but I still think a lot of our energy over the next year is going to be avoiding a tax increase; I think a lot of our energy is going to be continuing to get us out of the situation that so many people find themselves into. So I just think if we do this, and maybe it is a two, or three, or four step, I think

we need to look at here and now what are some of our goals and objectives to move us forward, as well as goals and objectives once we've gotten to the place that we want to get to.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well I think that going back to what you said earlier was, we have to start at the very beginning and analyze what we have done and what we have not achieved, and what we have achieved, but I'm with you. Look, you know, I've done this a lot; I mean, I've been in the corporate world a bunch of years and I did this with Blue Cross Blue Shield for eleven of my twelve years there, and I did it at Vista, now Coventry for nine of the years I spent time there, and I did it in the pre-paid dental field for seven years with Oral Health Services, and then American Dental Plan which then became Comp Benefits; and I'm naming these companies because in every step of the way we had top end facilitators, we had top end folks that came in to help us develop processes; whether they were business processes or operational processes, or sales processes, I lived it all; and the one thing I can tell you that I come away with that corporate experience is, hey, you know there were some organizations that we really did a great job, and some organizations where we just did the thing and we put it away in a shelf, and then we went back to the old drawing board of reacting to things, and reacting to the market, and reacting to government, and reacting to customer, and that was the end of it. We can do that here, but we've got – everything I heard you say would be an integral part of a strategic planning process. I mean, setting, doable, goals and objectives, not throwing something out there that we know we are never going to achieve, it's a waste of your time, it's a waste of all our time, it's a waste of the city's time, but at the same time we are not even there yet and the Manager has been with us ten months or nine months, its awhile and we had a turbulent time before that, and we didn't have turbulent years before that, but when we first entered office we had a bit of a turbulent time changing Managers, and so I just see that this is a golden opportunity, but you know what?- I'm not going to get an ulcer or lose more hair over this one. If this is not something we want to do, I'm perfectly OK. I'm done in 2013, I'm out of here, let somebody else deal with this beast, I don't want to be around anymore. The point is that there is a golden opportunity to do something now and I get emotional, and I said to myself I'm not going to get emotional this morning because I am going to see how everybody reacts, but I can tell from everybody verbal's and non verbal's who's on board and who's not, I can tell, I know who's on board and who's not. I can count and I have worked with you all for eight years, so I don't know where you guys want to go, but excuse me for saying guys, I don't know where you want to go, but I am prepared to try to work this through and you know, listen I have my feelings about UM, I love them, I don't think we use them enough, but if the feel of this group is we want to go out and get UM to help us because (a) they are a great resource, and (b) they are in our backyard, and (c) they may be inexpensive, so be it, we can go in that direction. I just know we got to move in some direction, if we are not ready to move in some direction I will hunker down Don, I will hunker down until 2013 and just sit there and watch because I don't have anything else to do, I really don't except round-about's and traffic calming circles.

Mayor Slesnick: Ralph, Ralph could you take what you've done here and circulate to...

Commissioner Cabrera: Oh, I'll circulate our notes.

Mayor Slesnick:...I mean with suggestions.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well what my recommendation was the next steps for us would be then to do what the Manager did a week ago and that is solicit input from all of you on some days and times and come up with a venue that achieves what you've suggested which is, let's be in an informal environment and does what I suggested, that it provide public space if someone wants to sit there and listen and watch. So I was looking to do that with the Manager, and then of course since the will of this group because Commissioner Withers is the only one that really spoke up is to go to UM, then by all means let's go in that direction and talk to the good folks at UM, because I think what he said is really pertinent, there are some great venues there. I have not had the opportunity to speak to students there, but I've had the opportunity to sit there and watch speakers and they've got some great little auditoriums there that are very cohesive and warm and at the same time inviting for the public.

Mayor Slesnick: They are but hard to reach for the public sometimes, I mean, I think there are some good spots here in the city, so I think we should look at several different choices, and you know Chip, going back to your comment, when we first came to office as you remember, I moved the Commission around the city, we haven't done that for a while, I guess we lost our push to do that, but I was thinking when you were talking about that of maybe taking one of our Commission meetings down to the UM and holding it in an auditorium where students can come and go and watch us. You remember our – you'll never forget our meeting at Coral Gables Senior High School and despite the issue and incredible nature of some of the arguments, if you remember high school students politely came and went all day long, and watched us and left and never disturbed anything....they had a great experience watching their City Commission. So we can certainly do that; we could do that for the UM and certainly in a more intimate setting I think do the planning, so either way.

Commissioner Cabrera: You know when I look at going out some place to do a meeting, I just look at the cost associated with it, that's my biggest concern; but I think it's a wonderful suggestion and I would certainly be agreeable to doing it. Any additional thoughts?

Commissioner Withers: I like the initial meeting, as kind of an internal state of the city recap.

Mayor Slesnick: One that we might not need a facilitator for.

Commissioner Withers: Yes – exactly.

Mayor Slesnick: In other words this initial meeting between all of us to carry this conversation forward, I don't know, or do you think we need to go right to the...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I don't have a position.

Mayor Slesnick: Well your thought, I'm not pushing anything.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I think we need a recap and I don't think it's necessary to have a facilitator at the initial recap because I can't remember what we dealt with two or three years ago, and I'll like to find out where we are on those initiatives.

Commissioner Cabrera: Who's going to lead that Bill?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I would think the City Manager would make the presentation to us because he is recapping of where we were and where we are right now.

Commissioner Withers: I don't see it as much as a discussion meeting as I do just a pure informational meeting, you know, because I'm thinking right now Ralph, I can think of four of these we've had in the past year; we had two at the Biltmore, we've had three in the City Manager's office...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: You mean over the past several years.

Commissioner Withers: Yes, that's what I was saying.

Commissioner Anderson: I think we need information first. I think we need just like on other issues that we are waiting on, we need information on in order to make the next step for a planning session; we need some basic financial and other project information before we even sit down in a visioning session, I think that's a wise thing in order for us to be able to proceed more efficiently and more...that's it.

Mayor Slesnick: Well let's move from there to actually circulating...are you going to circulate?

Commissioner Cabrera: I'll just give the Manager, you know what?- I'll just ask the Manager as a courtesy to all of us if someone could transcribe or through the Clerk's office if they can transcribe today's discussion, outside of the minutes, so that it's in the form of notes, and I'll just defer to the Manager's office to do all of the leg work necessary to make this happen in one form or another. I'm not taking any leadership over this. I appreciate you all listening, I appreciate the feedback, I always learn from these experiences.

Commissioner Withers: One last question Ralph. Do you at some point seeing different community partners involved in this process?

Commissioner Cabrera: Well the biggest community partner was going to be or is the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce. I met with Mark and Sarah Artecona on this already and they were on board, they were completely on board, the only person I left out of the quotient and it was my fault for not being able to reach out to her was Mari Molina and I wanted to do that as well, but Mari and the B.I.D. as well as the Chamber; the Chamber has already discussed it with me and if the UM is the direction we want to take, I'm sure Sarah Artecona is the University's excuse me, the Chamber's chairperson would be more than helpful in wanting to get the

Chamber on board, I'm sorry, to get not only the Chamber on board but the University on board. Yes, they are on board, they were both extremely excited more excited than we are.

[End: 10:31:02 a.m.]