

CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING
Meeting Minutes of August 14, 2023, 8:30 a.m.
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, 2nd Floor, Coral Gables, Florida 33134

MEMBERS	M 22	J 22	J 22	A 22	S 22	O 22	N 22	D 22	J 23	F 23	M 23	A 23	M 23	J 23	J 23	A 23	APPOINTED BY					
Bonnie Seipp	P	N O M E E T I N G	N O M E E T I N G	P	E	P	P	N O M E E T I N G	E	P	P	P	E	N O M E E T I N G	N O M E E T I N G	P	Vice-Mayor Rhonda Anderson					
Carmen Cason	A			E	P	P	P		P	P	P	P	P			P	P	P	P	P	Mayor Vince Lago	
Mary Beth Burke	P			P	E	P	P		P	P	E	P	P			P	P	P	P	P	P	Commissioner Kirk R. Menendez
Margaret Groves																					A	Commissioner Melissa Castro
Alexis Ehrenhaft	E			E	P	E	E				P	P	P			P	P	P			P	City Manager Peter Iglesias
Genevieve Orr				*	*	*	*				*	*	*			*	*	*			P	Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Joanne Meagher	P			P	P	P	P				P	P	P			P	P	P			P	Board-as-a-Whole

LEGEND: A = Absent; P = Present; E = Excused; * = New Member; ^ = Resigned Member.
 - = No Meeting; # = Late meeting arrival.

STAFF: Anna Pernas, Historic Preservation Director, Kara Kautz, Historic Preservation Officer.
 Gay Bondurant, Docent Coordinator

RECORDING SECRETARY/PREPARATION OF MINUTES: Yvelisse Bonilla, Administrative Assistant

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Meagher at 8:44 a.m. and attendance was stated for the record.

The motion was unanimously approved.

OPENING STATEMENT:

Preface to Opening statement: From a Modern Arcadia: Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and the Plan for Forest Hills Gardens and George Merrick: Son of the South Wind: In November 1910, more than one hundred fifty newspapers carried stories about plans to build a model suburban community called Forest Hills Gardens on 142 acres in the borough of Queens. “A garden city for America,” announced the New York Sun. It would be “a conventionalized and modern Garden of Eden,” said the New York Tribune, “a fairy tale too good to be true.” Dubbing the proposed development “Sageville” in honor of its patron, Mrs. Russell Sage, a Portland Maine newspaper summed up the venture with Yankee succinctness: “It will be a Community of Quality.” Some of the news accounts mentioned the name of the new town’s site planner, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.

Frank M. Button, a native of Vermont, trained as a civil engineer at the University of Vermont and worked with Frederick Law Olmsted on Chicago’s 1893 Columbian Exposition. Button remained in Chicago and landscaped many parks, cemeteries, and estates in the area.

Shortly after Olmsted founded the America Society of Landscape Architects, Button became its fourteenth member and was elected to Fellowship in 1910. In 1920, following his wife’s death, he moved to Miami with his daughter. In early 1921, a close friend named Charles B. Stearns recognized Button walking down Flagler Street. Prior to public offerings, Stearns, a wealthy Chicagoan, had paid \$38,000 for four blocks of soon-to-be Coral Gables. As one of the largest landowners, he had become close to Merrick and was involved in the early planning. When Stearns saw Button,

Button's daughter later recalled, he raced to Button, saying, "Hey Frank, you are just the man we want!" Stearns immediately took Button to meet George in his Flagler Street office, and before the meeting concluded, George hired him.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A draft for the minutes of 05/8/2023 was distributed to board members. There were no additional remarks or edits made. The agenda item to approve the minutes will be added to the 9/11/2023 meeting.

HOUSE REPORT:

1. Coral Gables House Report:

- a. Ms. Bondurant stated due to leak in living room on April 22 & 23rd the wet rug was picked up by Public Works. Ms. Kautz will ask Public Works to bring rug back to the House.
- b. Ms. Meagher asked Ms. Kautz for Public Works to check on the A/C for the House this week.
- c. Ms. Kautz and Ms. Bonilla will obtain the dishwasher once the Department receives it's P-Card.
- d. Ms. Meagher would like the City to pick up the garbage bin by the picnic area. Currently, it is emptied into another bin for the City to pick up.

2. Ms. Meagher would like a meeting with Public Works to discuss a maintenance schedule. Ms. Seipp is looking to have Public Works put certain items on a permanent list for future maintenance. Staff will coordinate with the Public Works Department to address these concerns and will communicate any updates with the Board. A request for Public Works Staff to attend upcoming meetings can occur for future meetings.

3. **Tour Update:** There have been 85 visitors. (59 adults, 13 seniors, 9 students and 15 under 6-year-olds.)

4. Merrick House Matters:

- a. Bondurant continues to work with all docents to make sure accurate information is communicated during tours. In June, Ms. Bondurant coordinated a short workshop for 7 docents. This workshop covered an overview of the historical preservation designation process. Several of the new docents were asking questions for additional structure and support for their tours. A review of rules for tours was reviewed. Discussion was abundant.
- b. Ms. Meagher and Ms. Bondurant met with the Mayor regarding the play, *The Placemaker Poet*. The Mayor has asked the Commissioners to support the play. Ms. Castro has given \$1000 in support of the play.
- c. The A/C leak in the living room in April caused some staining to the couch pillow. Ms. Meagher has cleaned the pillows.
- d. Ms. Levasser, Archivist, found an old trunk with the name Althea Fink. This trunk is now displayed in the main bedroom.
- e. The 1925 wedding dress is now properly displayed on a dress form, provided by the Coral Gables Museum.
- f. The Board discussed updating the tea set display at the house. Ms. Meagher proposed creating an exhibit of the dioramas created by Nancy Martini. There are 12 boxes, highlighting 12 properties that the Villagers supported throughout the year. The display would run through the Fall and be removed before the holiday season.

A motion was made by Ms. Ehrenhaft to have the 12 dioramas displayed at the Merrick House during the Fall. Seconded by Ms. Seipp.

The motion was passed.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. **Holiday Open House:** Villagers Home Tour is now on 12/9/23, same day as MH planned the Holiday Open House. The board discusses different options, including scaling down the event. Ultimately, the decision was made to change the Holiday Open House to 12/17/23. Expectations for this event are: carolers, no vendors, Santa, apple cider, cookies (supplied by board members) symphonettes, games.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. **“100 Voices”:** Need volunteers for the 9/17 event. This is now active on Eventbrite. Ms. Meagher is away until 9/16. Board member is needed to handle food and publicity. Ms. Meagher will get a videographer.
2. **Spring 100 Voices:** Thinking of Dan Fedora, works at Coral Gables High School for hosting as well as Dorothy Thompson. Also need an architect. No date yet.
3. **Gramophone** – Working with Bruce and Dariel, Docents, on research to have the gramophone in working condition.
4. **Pit by driveway** – Ms. Kautz called public works to get this rectified. Ms. Meagher stated the pit is much better.
5. **Craig Johnson** – Had open heart surgery on 8/10/23. He is currently in critical care. Ms. Meagher did visit him with a care package and will continue to reach out.
 - a. Pond is being maintained as best as possible. Staff obtained an estimate to update the existing infrastructure and ongoing maintenance of the pond from Pond Doctors.

DISCUSSION ITEMS: None

CITY COMMISSION ITEMS: None

ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY: None.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:21 am.

Respectfully submitted,


Anna C. Pernas
Historic Preservation Officer