

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
March 25, 2008
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Slesnick 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, David Brown

City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

City Clerk Staff, Billy Urquia

Chief Hammerschmidt, Police Department

Major Mark Ginn, Police Department

[F-1 Start: 10:48:56 a.m.]

F-1 – DISCUSSION ON DISTRIBUTION OF THE CITY NEWSLETTER

Mayor Slesnick: Items F1, two and three. Mr. Kerdyk, you have two, I will take the first one. When it sunk in that we weren't doing any more printed newsletter, I just, and I am not asking for any decisions today, but I did want to voice my objection to the fact that we no longer will do a printed newsletter to our citizens. I love Channel 77, I think it is doing great work. If you watch Channel 77, its' changed tremendously in the last several years, and it has programming that is compelling and interesting, but as we all know, from surveys we have all done in our political campaigns and so forth, it's only a certain percentage of people that watch Channel 77. We have a great E-news, it's probably one of the best things that we have got going, and it's great, and I think other people would like to copy it, and even though eighty percent of the people in the City have computers, I just have to tell you that there is only so many that have even given us their email addresses and after that, there is only so many that may read them or pick-up on them. I realize as we face this coming year, we face budget cutbacks and so we must be careful about how we spend our money and as I have said to David before bringing this up, there are all kinds of things you can cut back on -- the size of the newsletter, you can cut back on the quality of the paper, you can cut back on the frequency and the times of year. I just think that at certain times that it is important to present to our citizens the printed news that we want them to hear about our City. When three of us came to office and found two of us waiting for us here in 1991, and I think we all agreed and we have all done an excellent piece of work on communicating with our citizens, and I think it has paid great dividends for our citizens to understand their government better and

unfortunately, we get certain amount of press in the Miami Herald and Neighbors and we get a lot of, I don't know what you call it, in the local newspaper, and I think it's important that citizens hear all sides of the issues, so, the fact of the matter is, all I want to do is air this concern. I would like us to think about it as we go into the year, and determine whether or not there is a way and have maybe the Manager come back to us and present to us a way, maybe once every six months, we can do a two-sided piece of paper that costs less to mail, and costs less to print, and cost less to produce, but at least, it puts into the mailbox of every citizen some of the basic new points that we think that are important and especially during this coming time of very interesting time budgeting and pensions.

Commissioner Withers: Would you be interested in selling advertisements in the newsletter if it funded the cost of printing it and mailing it?

Mayor Slesnick: I wouldn't be opposed to that at all as long as they are appropriate ads, and as long as you know, they are ads that fit what a newsletter should have. Yeah, I mean, I am not opposed to any innovative ways. Once we get the ads on the trolleys we could...

Commissioner Cabrera: I was going to say...

Mayor Slesnick: I knew you were going to say that.

Commissioner Cabrera: The minute we get our ...trolley advertising done. I mean, the minute that gets going...

Mayor Slesnick: Maybe you could buy a package deal...

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah.

Mayor Slesnick: trolleys and newsletters.

City Manager Brown: This is an important discussion believe it or not, because I have shied away from selling the Coral Gables name or getting sponsorships on paper for things such as the newsletter; and I really want to hear your discussion on this because this can change the way we do a lot of things with regard to how we put the Coral Gables name out in the future. So, I am really glad we are talking about this, the trolley is one thing.. and we have had our problems getting the scope of work right, but we have got that done, but whether it is E-news or the web page, or the newsletter, the selling of advertisement on there is something that I kind of said, well, that's just not our style, but if this Commission, and I think it might become our style by process of elimination as we go into our new budget. But this is a... I would like to hear everybody's opinion on this, because it is... I think it is very important, as we go forward.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, the elimination of the newsletters was an item discussed at least once maybe twice in the communications board as I saw the minutes. The way that

I would support a newsletter would be with Commissioner Withers' idea of having advertisements; I would tell you though, at the same time, I would be very careful as to...

Commissioner Brown: What advertisements...

Commissioner Cabrera: ... who advertises, you know, the form of advertising that is done. But, I have to compliment the City on a couple of other communication initiatives. The whole, the whole message for all callers coming into City Hall is very positive because it does give a great deal of information and the Golden Gables publication which is still being printed, addresses many of those senior citizens who do not have computers. They won't, they won't get them all, but it will do a better job than... and since we were able to assist in that process, my office was able to give the Parks and Recreation department a list of voters 65 and over, and that list was much larger than what we had compiled through the Fire Rescue, Police, and there is probably about 40 percent larger, but that is only registered voters, there are people in our City that are seniors that are not registered to vote.

City Manager Brown: Just as an update, the recording on the telephone hold is a product born out of E-news, and we are going to have to readjust that product and not just print straight E-news because the items in the paper could even become outdated...

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah.

City Manager Brown: ... and continue to say things that have already occurred. So we are going to probably thin-out those items in E-news that have a date certain so that it doesn't sound like we are behind the times.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, Mayor Slesnick pointed out something very interesting that he said about 80 percent of our citizens have access to a computer and with that in mind, we don't have those email addresses, but I would challenge you to talk to your department heads about ways that you can capture that data. Whether I am renewing a Coral Gables Youth Center annual membership or gym membership, or I am paying for my house alarm permit renewal, or I am pulling a permit to paint my house, there are so many ways that we touch the public that in the process whether it is part of the form or its part of the questionnaire, or part of the process, get that information, the email address information, because I tell you what... we will then build a very, very, very strong data base. Because the people that we are touching are those that need us, for whatever reason, whether it is for a permit, or whether it's a renewal of a Parks and Recreation membership, whatever it may be, and I think we are missing a great opportunity at capturing that kind of data.

City Manager Brown: Commissioner, we are doing it in some areas, but we can certainly to do it better job.

Commissioner Cabrera: No, you have got to do it across the board.

City Manager Brown: We can do it...

Commissioner Cabrera: And you know what, I would urge you to challenge your department heads and ask them how they would get that information from our constituents. I will bet you that... what are you up to know, 17 department heads?

City Manager Brown: No, no, 13.

Commissioner Cabrera: Good for you.

City Manager Brown: Thank you.

Commissioner Cabrera: All right, good job, good job Dave. So, that's like four less, four or less P-cards.

City Manager Brown: Yeah, about two or three.

Commissioner Cabrera: Some four or less P-cards. I would ask you to challenge them, and I will bet you they will come back with some really bright ideas, so that's just a thought.

Commissioner Anderson: How many do we have on ... how many emails do we have – over 7,000, was it?

City Manager Brown: Ten thousand.

Commissioner Anderson: Ten thousand.

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: Good morning, Maria Rosa Higgins-Fallon. We have approximately 7,000 names on file.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: We started with about 380 names way back in 2003, and in a couple years we have gotten to about 7,000 names. Right now the way we capture the emails is through our website, everybody can go in there and check, and also when we send the Enews we ask if they want to be added to the list. So we get around 30 to 50 names every other week, and those names are inputted into the data base.

Mayor Slesnick: I didn't mention the website, the website is certainly a whole new generation website than when we started, that's also good. But, the 7,000 is a little deceiving in the number of households...

City Manager Brown: Yeah.

Mayor Slesnick: ...because certainly I think if I look around this we probably have two E-news subscribers in my household...

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: Right, right. Those are just individual subscribers, people and they usually subscribe at home, and they usually put a business email, so it's not the households, we have to...

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah.

Commissioner Anderson: On Channel 77, do you say, if you want to be included on the Enews you do that?

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: We, we cross-promote everywhere, we cross-promote whenever we do the message in print, when we do the message... I think you probably here something, you know we do everything on Channel 77...

Commissioner Anderson: Cross, right.

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: Golden Gables, so we do... We have the E-news at Coral Gables.com, as our main contact information and that's where we get the mailing listing.

Commissioner Cabrera: Mr. Clerk, I have question of you and I, maybe I am putting you on the spot, but of all our Board and Committee members throughout the City that we appoint or are appointed by the Manager's Office, how many of those do we have their email addresses? Would you venture a guess.

City Clerk Foeman: I would have to check. Commissioner, off-hand, I wouldn't want to guess, but I can check and give you...

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, you asked for the information, I you know... I give you credit for always asking for that information, and every time I appoint someone, if it's off the cycle, I always give you their email address and encourage you, encourage the City to track that information. But, you know these are just ideas that I am throwing out. If we don't have email addresses for all our board and committee appointees, then that's something that could be easily rectified by department heads and secretaries of boards and committees.

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: We do have a database on the board and committees, and whenever we have new names we work with the City Clerk and input those names. Not everyone has an email...

Commissioner Cabrera: Right.

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: ... but I would think that 70 percent of board...

Commissioner Cabrera: Okay, but I bet you that everyone does have an email, but we are not just getting the data.

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: Yeah.

Commissioner Cabrera: And, even if you have to engage the Commission on getting the board and committee appointments to give you that information, I would be happy to, to do that to assist the process, because we are missing such an opportunity knowing that, like Mayor Slesnick said, we have 7,000 and that is not necessarily statistically accurate from the standpoint that we have what, 17,000 households?

City Manager Brown: Eighteen.

Commissioner Cabrera: Eighteen thousand households, and we probably like he said have multiple subscribers to E-news, and multiple users of the website.

Mayor Slesnick: And we have a lot of business people that on their, E-news that would not necessarily account for households. So, it's lot of residents that are not hearing us now, not because of great efforts and not because of great ideas...

Commissioner Cabrera: No, no.

Ms. Higgins-Fallon: It just takes time to get them...

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah, but that's the kind of thing that you... If you get on the band wagon, you create a very focused program, to get this done, and you get the support of your department heads I think we could really kick it up and get more of that information that the Public Affairs probably needs in order to more effectively communicate.

City Clerk Foeman: Commissioner.

Commissioner Cabrera: So, I hope you will take my advice and massage it, consider it, let me know how you feel about it. You know, I would love for you to put that down as one of the initiatives, that report that you give us know every other wee, I would like that to be one of my items on a way to improve our ability to capture email addresses from citizens and, and businesses. Maybe the Chamber could help us in that exercise.

City Clerk Foeman: Commissioner Cabrera:

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, sir.

City Clerk Foeman: Yes, we just checked. Out of 240, we have 166. That's roughly 69 percent.

Commissioner Cabrera: Okay, it's not bad.

City Manager Brown: That's good.

Commissioner Cabrera: It should be 100 percent, but that's a great response. Thank you for getting the response.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yeah, that a very good response. That's good.

Commissioner Cabrera: Oh, the response is great. You mean from the Clerk's Office?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yeah.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah, he's awesome.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yeah, that's very good. Yeah.

Commissioner Cabrera: He's unbelievable. Anyway... didn't see him, he phased in and out. He is...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: That's pretty good.

Commissioner Cabrera: That's pretty good, yeah.

Mayor Slesnick: Well, anyways, thank you all for listening and thank you for contributing to the discussion and I just don't want us to loose site that the printed word has meaning or there wouldn't be newspapers and I think that we should never lose site of that, that's all.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah, but where are you going with this? Do you want us to come back and...

Mayor Slesnick: No, I just want... I wanted the Manager to come back to us down the road with some thoughts as he gets into budgeting, and I think that ... should give him...

Commissioner Cabrera: Should resonate.

Mayor Slesnick: ... food for thought.

