

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item I-3
January 26, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Economic Development Director, Julian Perez

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item I-3 [0:00:00 a.m.]

Presentation on the Coronavirus Relief Fund for the Small Business Recovery Grant and Technology Workshop Grant.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Madam City Attorney, is there anything you wish to bring up?

City Attorney Ramos: I don't have any items, sir, but I do believe there's a presentation on the Corona Relief.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, oh, I'm sorry. I made a mistake.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes. Mayor, I would like Director Julian Perez and Diana Gomez to provide a presentation on our Corona Relief Fund. And if I may say that Economic Development and Finance have been -- have done a tremendous job representing our City. They have been unbelievably professional and diligent in getting us maximum funding from the County. And with that, I'll turn it over to the directors.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Julian.

Economic Development Director Perez: Good afternoon, Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager, City Attorney and the Clerk's office. My name is Julian Perez, and I'm the Economic Development Director for the City of Coral Gables. This morning, the department would like to take a few minutes of your time to make a quick presentation and give you an update to you, the business community, and our residents regarding two very important grants that we were awarded, and that is the Small Business Recovery Grant and the Technology Grant. Before we start our quick presentation, I would like to take just a few minutes to thank everybody that was involved in this project, including the Chamber, the BID, and the Foundation, and especially the team that is here with us today behind me, Belkys Perez, Zeida Sardinias, Yenisys Gomez, Francesca Valdes, Paula Rodriguez, and all of the directors that were involved that I'm going to mention in a few minutes. This is a very exceptional team of professionals. We were given a very, very tight schedule to put together a monumental project, and you're going to see that in a second. It was less than six weeks what we were asked to put all of the applications together, the program and so forth. Let me go ahead and just walk you very quickly through the Small Business Recovery Grant. Again, this grant is a multipurpose funding opportunity to provide assistance to those small businesses in our community that were affected by the COVID-19 health crisis. A total of about 149 applications were submitted to the Economic Development Department. Due to the funding constraint, only 60 applications or 40 percent of the applications were submitted to Miami-Dade County. We were only awarded for this grant, \$800,000, and then later on, we put another thousand from the technology grant to make it \$801,000. In order to maximize the recovery impact, individual grants were capped at \$15,000 to make sure that we cover as many people as possible. Again, it was a major undertaking by a number of departments, and I want to recognize those departments;

Economic Development, Finance, Legal, IT and Procurement. Every dollar from this program was directed to the small business community, and that was \$801,000. And let me explain to you how we were able to do this. The City had three options with this grant. Option number one was to reallocate the entire amount to Miami-Dade County and let Miami-Dade County run the program for us. The second option was for us to go out and hire a consultant, like many communities have done. And then the third option was to put the team that I just mentioned together and all the departments here and undertake this effort and make it an in-house program. And as a result of that, we were able not only to return every single penny to our business community, but also, if you look at the amount of time and effort that was put together, I would say that close to \$70,000 from City effort was also part of this, so you could look at this as an in-kind contribution. As you recall, right after the reopening of the economy, a lot of our businesses were saying, what are you going to do, what are you going to do? What is your plan, what is your plan? Well, we were working on a plan and we had a plan, and the City was ready to contribute, but the City was ready to contribute as some of the funding assistance came along too, and this is what I'd like to call the in-kind contribution. So, an additional five businesses were able to be funded too as a result of this in-kind contribution. Let me just point out to you that we started in November 13th, and we went through all of the holidays up to the last minute on December 30th, to make sure that all of the applications, those 60 applications got in. It was not only getting the applications in, but it was working with the applicants themselves. There were many cases where we've had to put all the information for them together to be able to submit a package that was acceptable to the County. So that was another set of activities that the group was also involved in. Many calls were made very late at night. They were made right after holidays and so forth to make sure that these folks were able to put together an application that was complete and acceptable. Very few applications were rejected, by the way, for lack of information. Very quickly, the next slide, please. In order to be able to accomplish this task in such a short period of time, we had to be very well organized from the get-go. We looked at this in three major program phases with a series of milestones. And very quickly, just to walk you through it, we had to prepare the grant proposal, and I would like to thank Naomi for also helping us out a lot on that effort. And then once we did that, we had to get it approved by the County very quickly, then developed the application, and then the implementation of our outreach program. I remember going out on

Sundays, you know, walking the entire commercial business community, letting them know that the application was already on our system and to please file and if they had any questions and so forth, and other members also did the same thing. So we basically went out there, we walked the community, had one-on-ones with some of the owners and managers and so forth. Then phase number -- phase two was then doing all of the review and coordination and then having the County begin to review these applications as quickly as possible. And then finally, the execution of agreements and the grants and release of checks. I wanted to point out something very important too, that we only released checks when the applications were approved by Miami-Dade County. And as you can see on the next slide, a total of 60 applications. They were mostly concentrated, as we anticipated, in the retail, restaurants and offices. Let me just point something out, point of history. When this whole crisis started, one of the first things that we did as a department and a city was to do an assessment, a business assessment survey. And one of the things that we found out quickly was that a lot of our small businesses lagged behind on technology. That will be the next grant that I'll be talking about. And so, we needed to move very, very quickly. And as you can see, a significant number of applications came from those three business establishments. A total \$1.8 million were requested, and we were only able to allocate to those 60, 800 plus thousand dollars. As of today, we have been reimbursed by the County almost 75 percent of the \$801,000, and that is \$602,658.85, which is very important. We were very, very cautious as we did this. We did not go out there and started, you know, distributing checks without making sure that the application was first approved, and second, that we were getting reimbursed. As of today, there's only seven applications left; out of those seven, five are already in the QAQC, meaning that they're going to get approved, and then we have two that we're still working on. So, hopefully before the end of the month, we'll be able to be close to 60 applications, if not, 58, and almost 95, 96 percent completion rate. The Technology Grant, as I just mentioned to you, this is probably from a long-term perspective in impacts, I think this will probably be the most impact grant, and I'll tell you why. The first one is to help people in the short-term. The second one is to make our business community more resilient and look towards the future, not only with this crisis, but future disasters and future crisis, make sure that our businesses are prepared to be affected or to function under these type of conditions and become more resilient. And what do I mean by that? It's that ability to be able to communicate with their customers and supplier in the most efficient and effective

manner or cost-effective manner. So what we did was right away we partnered with our friends in Silicon Valley, the University of Miami and Google, with the assistance of our IT Department. And we developed a program that is divided in three groups: the technology -- digital technology webinars, the online technology of streamlined business process webinar, and the innovative e-commerce technologies for small business. And we have already started this process, these webinars. Yesterday, I think we had the -- it was the kickoff for this program, and we're already getting a lot of the businesses to participate. In addition to that, not only did we want to provide that information, that education out to our business community, but we're also going to give out 20 -- I think it's 29 vouchers for them to be able -- and this will be for the retail -- to be able to participate in this virtual sale of their products. The four entities or partners working with us on this is Digisults, and that's the Google partner that we entered into a partnership, Dr. Sara Rushinek, with the University of Miami, and Adaptable Security Corp, Silicon Valley partners. And they're very important because they're going to touch on the cybersecurity. And then obviously, the licenses is going to be provided by CommentSold, and that is basically once they go through the program, they learn the skill set, then we're going to select 29 of them, and they're going to be able to use the platforms, and they're going to be successfully market their businesses through these platforms and social media, and then there's be a digital channel associated with it, which means that, you know, you're going to be able to virtually go into their business and be able to see it, you know, and be able to shop from there. With that, again, I would like to thank you on behalf of our team and thank the Manager's office, thank all of the departments and everybody involved. We have not stopped. We continue to work on this, and we continue to expand our efforts. With that, if there's any questions, I'll be more than happy to respond.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very, very much for doing a wonderful job and making us proud and our community. Thank you. Are there any questions?

Commissioner Keon: No, I'm particularly impressed with the help that you've given with IT to the small businesses.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: A wonderful job.

Commissioner Keon: That's such a bonus for them. Thank you.

Commissioner Fors: I have no questions, but as I told you already, I'd like to say publicly that I had more than one business unsolicited contact me to say how impressed and how happy they were with the way that the City and your department administrated the program. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah. Julian, I want to echo the sentiments of Commissioner Fors. You and I have walked many businesses in the downtown. And if you'd like to see a beautiful example of what your department has done, which is to be commended, go to Zucca, and you can see probably one of the beautiful structures that I've ever seen erected, and when you talk about construction in such a short amount of time. So it was -- you know, they're reaping the benefits of it. People are out -- they're eating outside, and it's a beautiful structure that, again, coincides with a beautiful building next door as well. You made it happen, your team made it happen with the City Manager's team, and the other dining has been a -- I know we're talking about money and, you know, technology and everything, but what you've done with outdoor dining and the permits has got to be commended. Your team has done a wonderful job, so I congratulate all of you. Thank you for that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Economic Development Director Perez: It's totally a team effort. And I'll never forget that day that you and I were sitting there, and they were trying to think, and we were telling them and explaining to them...

Vice Mayor Lago: Exactly. We spent a few hours.

Economic Development Director Perez: All the things that could be done.

Vice Mayor Lago: We spent a few hours there.

Economic Development Director Perez: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: And they were ambitious. They were ambitious and when you...

Economic Development Director Perez: Correct.

Vice Mayor Lago: Would drive by and you stop and eat there -- I know the Mayor likes to go there once in a while...

Economic Development Director Perez: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: You can see that they really put their heart and soul into it, and they made an investment in this community, so -- and it's paying dividends for them.

Economic Development Director Perez: I think that this whole thing is -- you know, even in situations like this where you have, you know, a crisis or a disaster, it's the fact that you sit there and you think strategically and very methodical and very calm and collect. And I think that that was a good example of what we did that day there. You know, they were going in different directions, and we were able to sit there and methodically, you know, go through this whole process. And I think that that's credit to, you know, the whole team and credit to our City Manager and everybody involved that we always stayed very, very calm, you know, as we went through all of these programs.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: With the permission of the Chair, I just want to recognize the fact that the reason that we were so successful in this endeavor is a reflection of two really outstanding leaders in our organization; Diana Gomez, who is a...

Vice Mayor Lago: Yep.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Long-time person here at the City, as our person that's the head of finances, but also Julian Perez, who's only been with us now -- about a year and a half now, Julian, something like that?

Economic Development Director Perez: Two months. A year and...

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: A year and two months. A little bit -- it seems like a year and a half, right? And so, it's only with their outstanding leadership, and also, a very, very solid team that I'd like to recognize. Guys, please stand up, please. So, you have Zeida Sardinias, our Asset Manager. You have Paula Rodriguez, who is now Finance. Paula was indispensable in this entire process. You have Yennis Gomez, who's one of my former colleagues at the City of Miami. We are City of Miami exiles living here in Coral Gables. And we have Belkys Perez, and they really deserve recognition for the hard work that they all did. But really, the folks that put this on their backs, Julian Perez and Diana Gomez, and I want to thank them for that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very, very much. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. You've done a wonderful job.