

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-4
January 12, 2016
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

**Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick**

City Staff

**City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias
Historic Preservation Office, Dona Spain**

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-4 [2:38:16 p.m.]

Discussion regarding Board of Architects' Best Practices Manual.

Mayor Cason: Let's move on to H-4.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: We waited until you're really tired to present an item like this. So, I know you've put a lot of time into it. Approximately how long do you think this discussion will be?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I'll try to make it very brief, about ten minutes max.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: If it's the will of the Commission, we'd like to present it today, standards for Board of Architects review. If you would rather, we can postpone it to another meeting. Whichever is your preference.

Mayor Cason: Why don't we do it now because we're shorter than normal and we only have two other items after this.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Excellent.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah. Could I have the PowerPoint, please? And today happens to be a very good day because I'm following up on many, many discussions that are reflected in the content of this document. And the first one is that I'm able to prepare this for you because of the very good work of all the people that have shaped Coral Gables and have been mentioned today. Frank Button is there. Number two, (INAUDIBLE), the architect of this building, and George Fink also is on this list. So, the work that I'm showing you is a collection of all of their efforts in a way that is meant to be a draft. This document is not final. Hopefully, it will never be final. We can always add to it. And I want to thank my staff and Megan McLaughlin has worked very hard on this. And I would like it to be a living document that could be used by many, many people. The way that I have organized it, there are several chapters: the Zoning Code, Town Planning, Urban Design, Architecture, Landscape, Sustainability, and a Bibliography. What I'm trying to say is that design is much more than just architecture. Design deals with many issues that we're involved with in our current discussions, and if we look at them comprehensively, as this city at the very beginning did and we continue to do, I think we will be very successful. My personal interest in this topic began years ago when I inherited some books from the 1920's and from an architect who practiced in Florida at the time and did some really fantastic projects. But what I found most interesting was that the red book right there is called the Lesser Known Architecture of Spain. Imagine doing a book and you call

it the Lesser Known Architecture of Spain. It's not the masterpieces. It's not the great -- it was the lesser known architecture, and that was the essence of what Arva was talking about in terms of the Mediterranean style being invented based on this modest and very interesting models. And in our Code, we have eight buildings that are mentioned by name, including Fink's office building, as models of this. In fact, it is so important and so incredibly effective that that is in the Code. I think it's the best thing I've ever seen in any zoning code ever, the fact that by name you list the best examples, and then, hopefully, that inspires people. So what we've been able to do is do some original research of the drawings that were used to design these buildings and put it all together in this book, the book of the best practices as a start. Now, Frank Button has been mentioned and the museum downtown has some of his original drawings, and this is just as an illustration of the kind of resources we had. This is Frank Button's drawing from July 1921. If you look at it closely, the golf course is not fully designed. But you can see, for example, the entrances on Coral Way. And then you look at a drawing from 1921, also in October, a few months later, and then you can see how he has been working on the design of the landscape very carefully trying to shape the City, et cetera. That is the story of this City. That is a story that cannot be told anywhere else, the fact that design was very important at the very beginning, very thoughtful and that we still have it. We still have it because we follow some of the original ideas such as, for example, in the Zoning Code, we also have frontages, particular frontages on streets. What a sophisticated urban design idea. Well, that's in the Zoning Code. I don't know of any other Zoning Code that looks at things in such detail. But what I find even more interesting is that I included this -- I didn't know you were going to talk about George Fink's office, but I actually found the picture that is closest as a model to the design, and that picture comes from the Lesser Known Architecture of Spain book. So, it is very clear that all of these architects had a very, very thoughtful and sophisticated understanding of the models and did a fantastic job and then were very talented. This image was already shown today and you can see that that center area is expanded with a composition that is quite interesting.

Vice Mayor Quesada: You know what I noticed in this picture and I noticed it before? We lost the clock on the building through the years.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes, the sundial there. I think...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: But that was the construction drawing, so it may never have been installed, but we'll check on our (INAUDIBLE).

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Absolutely. And then the urban design component is that Merrick had a real interest in putting things in context. It's not just isolated buildings. It's buildings, plus the street, plus the other buildings next door. And this is a really important tool, and here we have the Biltmore -- a very early version of the Biltmore and the Congregational Church and the area in between, which still exists. There are some cars parked there most of the time. But this was one of the techniques that that (INAUDIBLE) was teaching at the time. This was called the (INAUDIBLE), the sketch, which meant show the building in context. Show how it creates public space. Show how the City builds one building at a time. The early work of Coral Gables is full of that. Then, of course, the architecture, another one of the chapters. We all know that. We understand it well. This is one of the great models of the Code, the City Hall. But we also have the residential drawings of Walter deGarmo, which happened to be at the downtown museum also. We scanned all that and it's available as a resource for inspiration for people. So, that is one of those fantastic resources we have. We also have drawings of the Biltmore, some of the construction drawings, the original construction drawings that were used to build the great masterpieces of the City, and some of the construction details. And this is where we get into that discussion of tile roofs, metal roofs, perhaps, and where it's appropriate?- how do you detail it correctly?- what kinds of things should be done? So, all of that is there. We have the examples of the different windows; for example, porches and arcades; the proportions of arches, how it's done properly. And we're using, as you can see, City Hall, real buildings because they're so well done. We're trying also to collect some of the texts, some of the earlier writings that explain the quality of the architecture. In fact, some of it even talks about environmental issues that we would describe today as LEED certification. Well, back then, Button and all those architects were talking about that. And the kind of imagery that they used

as examples for landscape was as sophisticated as the one they used for architecture. And this is how it translates into reality. It's all around us, all around us and very well done, very well preserved. Now, sustainability is an issue that sometimes is spoken of separately from design, but I think if you look at the LEED criteria which talks about operable windows, talks about open space, talks about (INAUDIBLE) and et cetera, all of those ideas, all of those ideas about sustainability are fundamental ideas of Mediterranean architecture and many other types of architecture. But at the very beginning of the design of the city, they were talked about. Now, finally, the bibliography is important because the bibliography, as I mentioned, is where all of these ideas come from. The -- many of the books are actually at the Special Collection at the University of Miami. I own some of those books. I have them in my office available for research. But the important thing is that I don't think we do enough of a good job explaining how thoughtful and how well researched the early work was. And for example, some of the pictures that are in those books, like the detail of this balustrade, if you walk outside and you go down the stairs and turn the corner, you will find exactly the same detail. And it is at such high quality because the models and because of the buildings were shown in those historic buildings - - in those historic books as photographs and line drawings, and that's how the City was built. That's how the City was originally conceptualized. And the Best Practices book that we're trying to grow and develop attempts to be the current, the 21st century version of those early books. So, that's my presentation and I really appreciate your time. If you have any questions...

Mayor Cason: You came out with elements of this about two years ago, if I'm not mistaken...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Mayor Cason: And we had a discussion of the mosque building, was it, and what constituted Mediterranean elements to go into the bonus. So, this is...

Vice Mayor Quesada: (INAUDIBLE) 2990 Ponce.

Mayor Cason: Yeah, remember the -- and so this is an expansion...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: It is.

Mayor Cason: So, the target audience of this is, I would assume, potential builders, architects in general, architect school and UM and anything else and historians. Are you going to put -- is this going to be on the webpage?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes, yes. And like I said, it's something that is updated constantly. In fact, the version I gave you this time is updated from the one that was provided the last time. And it's on the webpage. We have different versions of this already posted, but it is meant to be a public document to be used by anyone who's interested in high-quality design.

Mayor Cason: Is there -- we heard before that Fink developed -- designed 500 homes. Is there a book or is there samples of these for potential home builders looking for, you know, elements of that when they build a home?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: What I've done is I've researched what's available in public museums here locally and I've scanned those drawings. That's original research from that point of view that we put it all together. Now, I have it on the walls in the Planning and Zoning Division, all of those nice drawings. But the thing is that that's much more out there. This is just the beginning of research and, of course, there are many other opportunities to explain all that.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Just to answer your question, we have the Fink file photographs from the 1920's. George Merrick was really good about documenting the building of the City and many of those are residential homes. We also have the original plans of H. George Fink of those buildings that we've designated. I mean, what now takes that amount of

pages is like four pages to build a home. But we do have those drawings, and Ramon is very good about referring people to us.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: And we have also the Walter deGarmo drawings that were scanned recently, which is a lot of the residential...

Commissioner Slesnick: Dona, do you have the original Code books for Coral Gables from the 1920's?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: We do.

Commissioner Slesnick: Someone just gave me one in one of my listings. Their father had been one of the original...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Oh, that's interesting.

Commissioner Slesnick: Planning directors for Coral Gables, and it's very interesting, very thin, little brown book.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Very thin, but very detailed as far as architecture.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes, it is. I mean, and most of those are still in effect today.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes. That's right.

Mayor Cason: What was the reaction of the Board of Architects to this? Are they contributing to it? They love it (INAUDIBLE)?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: So far, they love it. They are helping us. I gave it to them about a month ago as a document. And like I said, if anybody has any better thoughts, we'll add to it. I think it's all very useful. It's the kind of stuff that most people really are able to implement immediately into the projects.

Mayor Cason: I think some of this would fit in with what Walter Foeman's doing with his history projects, collecting examples of historically relevant material. That would be a great way to get -- on our 90th anniversary, maybe we can do some publications of Fink's homes or something.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Absolutely. This is just a start, and hopefully, we can do many things. And Dona has amazing resources too, so...

Mayor Cason: Anybody have any questions, thoughts?

Commissioner Keon: No. I think it's beautiful.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Great, thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Great work. I know you've been...

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Working on this for some time.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Thank you.

[End: 2:51:34 p.m.]