

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-1
March 28, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner James Cason

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Cultural Arts Specialist, Catherine Cathers

Public Speaker(s)

Jose Valdes-Fauli

Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Item H-1 [12:22 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission requesting a proposal for artwork with an all-inclusive budget of \$1.25 million from the artist Frank Stella (recommended by the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 5 to 0).

Mayor Lago: Let's go to agenda item time certain H-1. I'd like to see if we can catch as many before 1 o'clock.

City Attorney Suarez: H-1 is a Resolution of the City Commission requesting a proposal for artwork with an all-inclusive budget of \$1.25 million from the artist Frank Stella.

Ms. Cathers: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Catherine Cathers, Arts and Cultural Specialist with the city. I'd like to provide a brief background and then hand it over to Mr. Jose Valdes-Fauli, who is here as an appointed member of the Cultural Development Board

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to speak on their behalf and answer any questions. In December, the Arts Advisory Panel discussed Mayor Lago's interest in inquiring work by the artist Frank Stella and recommended requesting a proposal from Mr. Stella, plus two additional artists. The panel agreed that work by an artist of this stature would require significant budget and should be prominently placed. In March, the Cultural Development Board reviewed the panel's recommendation and did not accept it in whole. The board discussed the scope of the project, recognize the panel support of the artist Frank Stella, and made a motion recommending a proposal for artwork valued at \$1.25 (million) from Frank Stella. So, a little bit about the artist. Frank Stella was born in 1936 in Massachusetts and since his first solar gallery exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1960, Stella exhibited widely throughout the U.S. and abroad. Early in his career, his work was included in several significant exhibitions that define the art of the postwar era. Frank Stella's work can be found in notable public collections and museums too numerous to read here, but they are listed in the supporting documentation. We would like to propose that the artist consider Ponce Circle Park as a location for the work, as it would compliment the exceptional artworks being installed at the Plaza and further establish Coral Gables as a leader in the arts and a destination to view worldclass artworks. We are especially interested in the artist proposing a piece from the Star series, which is meaningful to the artist visual vocabulary. He started exploration of the Star in the early 1960s on paper, becoming increasingly prominent in his work, into the 2000s and continuing to this day. Funding for the proposed artwork is through the Art Fund, which is generated through Art in Public Places in private development program and would come back to the Commission as a separate item, along with the proposed design.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Good morning. Good afternoon, we are trying in the Cultural Affairs Council, we are trying to see if we can, instead of investing in smaller works to put in different buildings all over the city, to try to concentrate on major works so that we have major monuments in the city through art. Frank Stella speaks for himself. Frank Stella is one of the major painters in the world and the country. Frank Stella is in all the major museums in the world and in the United States. He practices modernism and minimal art and abstract expressionism, and we frankly think that this is a much better investment for the city than doing smaller works in different places and investing most of the money in one particular piece, that is important enough major area of the city. So the Cultural Affairs Council, which I'm here representing, recommended that we purchase Frank Stella work and that we allocate \$1.25 million dollars from the Art Fund. This is not – this is money that is in the Art in Public Places fund. It is money contributed by the developers when they are doing their buildings to the Art in Public Places fund. It is not taken from the city's budget or from the city's operating expenses and can only be used for public art.

Commissioner Anderson: So, it's not taxpayer dollars, right.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: Excuse me.

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Commissioner Anderson: It's not taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: This is not taxpayer dollars. This is contributions to the one and-a-half percent of the building values of the buildings that are being constructed in the city. This is a program that the city has, which is modeled after Miami-Dade County program that was started many, many, many years ago, and it is a program where the fund with public art in the different places and buildings.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a repetitive question to piggyback on Commissioner Anderson. So, once those dollars come from the developer's art fees, they go into that fund, they can only be used for that purpose.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: That's correct. That is correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: Just a matter to your point, which I think is a fair point of whether you spend that sum of money on a few pieces of art or one more monumental piece of art, which your point is well taken. I agree with you. I would like to see sort of a few more like significant pieces as opposed to volume, have more like, I think everything we have is quality, but have something more significant that people can engage with. I think even with the temporary installations we've seen just the last few weeks in Ponce Circle Park, you see that it kind of brings people out to the area in a nice way. I have just one question which is, Mr. Stella is obviously one of the most reputable artists in the world, does that kind of sum, which I recognize is a lot of money, but relatively speaking does it get you a piece of art that has the scale that you would want to see somewhere like Ponce Circle Park, you know you don't want to spend that kind of money. I get that its like buying the best of the best, but can you get something of scale that's appropriate for that space?

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: That's a great question and that is something that we considered and we were told and guided by the fact that that would get us an important piece.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: That's what we were told.

Mayor Lago: To Mr. Valdes-Fauli's point, we've had conversations with the gallery, multiple conversations with the gallery who represents him. I think when you talk about monumental artists around the world, he's probably one of the top three most important artist living today. How old is he?

Ms. Cathers: 86, I believe.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: He was born in '36.

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Ms. Cathers: I believe he's 86.

Mayor Lago: You're talking about this gentleman, along with Richard Serra, some incredible, incredible titans in the art world. I think that I've asked Catherine, I was going to...your blessing to explore opportunities to see what it would be – we start negotiating, we try to figure out what works, what we can get, but I'd like to bring back to the Commission all options that are on the table and have the Commission, along with the board decide, do we go a little bit more, or do we go a little bit less in regards to the expenses. I don't just want to pigeonhole us going after sculptures that one particular value. I want to see the range and have it presented to the boards, the boards give us their guidance and then we come back. This is money that is not taxpayer money. This is money that can only be used to buy art. What I would like to do is, I would like to buy the best work; work that is in every major museum, is in every major sculpture park, that is something that is exhibited and it is one day when you walk into, for example, you drive in New York and you see a Calder sculpture, people know it's a Calder. This is the type of scope and breath that you get with the work.

Vice Mayor Mena: And I think that location, Ponce Circle Park, really merits something of that stature and its lacking right now.

Commissioner Cason: [Inaudible]...A replica of something else anywhere else in the world?

Ms. Cathers: I believe it would be either an existing piece or a commissioned piece.

Mayor Lago: The original – the original work that would be...

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: It would be an original piece.

Ms. Cathers: It would be an original piece. I don't know whether it would be in a series or not, but we would have that information.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: I would like to clear up again, Commissioner Anderson's point and Commissioner Menendez' point that this money cannot be used for sidewalks, cannot be used for green areas. This is money that is strictly for art in the Art in Public Places fund.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add. When it comes eventually, depending on obviously the direction we go, with regards to Ponce Circle Park, I personally would like, if we get there, where it would be placed because we were at the "Moon over the Gables" the last couple of weekends, and the use of the park for that event was amazing. Obviously, you had the moon on the south end of Ponce Circle Park and it looked almost like a music concert of folks filling most of the park. So, I want to make sure whatever art piece, obviously significant art piece we put there works well with the use of the park. I think it's a great location, but I just want to make sure we

take into consideration the uses we'll have for the park, so it blends in, but it doesn't interfere with crowds or stuff like that.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: We will be back on the placement and what we pick and if the budget was accurate, if its again, too much, too little, we'll be back.

Vice Mayor Mena: Just the beginning – yes, I know, just the beginning.

Commissioner Menendez: Just something popped in my head because...

City Manager Iglesias: We are working on two phases in the park; the first phase would be the streets and provide accessibility to the park; the second phase is the park itself. Commissioner, we can incorporate that into our design. We'll work with...

Vice Mayor Mena: I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor we have a member of the public requesting to speak on the item, Mr. Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good afternoon.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. First of all, I want to beg your indulgence, especially Mayor Lago, because I'm probably going to get under some people's skin, but nonetheless, I don't know why we didn't have the Public Comments first. I would have made my public comments and I'd be out of here before we're talking about this, but I'm boxed in now. This kind of huge purchase of art should be postponed, tabled, set aside, nullified for the time being, because we have higher priorities, and that's going to get into my public comments, so I don't want to zap myself out of a public comment by doing. So here's where, I've got to beg you, Mayor Lago, for forgiveness, because in order to avoid killing myself on my public comment, I'm going to go back to South Com. We sold the South Com residence to generate in part money for art. I think that was a huge mistake. Unfortunately, with my wife facing communism in Peru, which we have to fight every day, its bankrupting us. Do you know that we now have four to five communist countries in Latin America. Mayor Cason, you helped fight that and yet despite all the efforts – so we need to be in touch with South Com, and we might have known that Columbia is now semi-communist, Mexico is going that way, Nicaragua has gone communist, not only Cuba and Venezuela, but Peru went communist, they put the guy in jail, its still being fought. We needed to be in touch with South Com. We have higher priorities than spending all this money on art. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you sir. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor. We have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Cason: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Ms. Cathers: Thank you.