

CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING
Meeting Minutes of August 12, 2024, 8:30 a.m.
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, 2nd Floor, Coral Gables, Florida 33134

MEMBERS	S 23	O 23	N 23	D 23	J 24	F 24	M 24	A 24	M 24	J 24	J 24	A 24	APPOINTED BY
Bonnie Seipp	E	E	P	N	P	P	P	A	A	N	N	P	Vice-Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Carmen Cason	E	P	P	O	P	A	P	A	P	O	O	E	Mayor Vince Lago
Mary Beth Burke Vice Chair	P	E	P	M	P	P	P	P	P	M	M	P	Commissioner Kirk R. Menendez
Margaret Groves	E	E	E	E	P	#	P	P	P	E	E	E	Commissioner Melissa Castro
Alexis Ehrenhaft	E	P	P	E	P	A	E	E	P	E	E	P	City Manager Peter Iglesias
Genevieve Orr	P	P	E	T	P	P	A	P	P	T	T	P	Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Joanne Meagher Chairperson	E	P	P	I N G	P	P	P	P	P	I N G	I N G	P	Board-as-a-Whole

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

STAFF: Anna Pernas, Historical Resources Director, Kara Kautz, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer;
 Gay Bondurant, Docent Coordinator, Yvelisse Bonilla, Administrative Assistant.
 RECORDING SECRETARY/PREPARATION OF MINUTES: Yvelisse Bonilla, Administrative Assistant

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 8:38 AM by Chair Joanne Meagher. Attendance was stated for the record.

ROLL CALL:

In attendance were Ms. Seipp, Ms. Meagher, Ms. Burke, and Ms. Ehrenhaft. Ms. Orr was present via Zoom.

OPENING STATEMENT: Excerpt from the book, “Bubble in the Sun”

Determined to rebuild his business and salvage his reputation, Merrick teamed up with his younger brother, Richard, then just twenty-seven years old, to launch a chain of middle-class vacation, fishing, and retirement communities around Florida and the Caribbean. It would be called Caribee Colony. The prototype would be built on twenty acres of land on Lower Matecumbe Key, land that George had bought as a gift for his Peacock in-laws some years earlier. The pilot colony, with its Samoan huts and “South Seas enchantment,” opened in January 1931, only to be largely destroyed by a fire a few months later, ruining its prospects and any hope of expanding the concept into a chain of properties.

At this point, Merrick was so financially constrained that a bank foreclosed on his house in Coral Gables and then auctioned it off on the Miami courthouse steps. He and Eunice were forced to move in with her mother until they could find a more modest home of their own. And yet somehow their marriage survived these ordeals. Meanwhile, his troubles were starting to take a physical toll. “His hair is white, and the recent years have not dealt kindly with him, but the great frame which was hardened on the rocky groves of his father has not dropped,” one local journalist wrote. “He like his city, has had to change his sights a little, but he’s still there on the firing line.”

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Ms. Burke, seconded by Ms. Seipp, to approve the minutes for the May 13, 2024, meeting with amendments. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Merrick House Activity Report June 2024 -
Ms. Bondurant read the June 2024 House Report. The report was shared with the Board in advance of the meeting and is included as an attachment to the minutes.
2. Merrick House Activity Report July 2024 -
Ms. Bondurant read the July 2024 House Report. The report was shared with the Board in advance of the meeting and is included as an attachment to the minutes.
3. Holiday Ornaments – Staff shared a photo of ornaments that the Economic Development Department is working on, with a suggestion that the Board look at producing them next year.
4. Craig Johnson Memorial – Taking place on August 22, 2024. Board members offered to bring baked goods and coffee for the event.
5. 100 Voices – Dan Finora from Coral Gables High School, will be the speaker on Sunday, September 22, 2024. It was noted that a new videographer is needed. Mayor Don Slesnick has agreed to speak on October 27th. Mr. Slesnick will be speaking on the sister cities program.
6. City Commission – Ms. Meagher noted that “Merrick Minute” to start January 2025. A Board Member will read a statement at the opening of the Commission meetings.
7. Electrical Issues – It was reported that some of the fixtures toward the front of the house (front bedrooms and hallway chandelier) are not working. Ms. Kautz submitted a work order to Public Works and will follow up.
8. Meeting Time – It was suggested that Board meetings could start at 9:00 am rather than 8:30. Staff will check if the meeting time is available.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Stag Painting – Ms. Meagher forwarded website information for Guerri’s Antique Restoration. Staff is requesting an itemized invoice for the work planned.
2. Furniture – Working with Disar on the purchase order. Entrance table - veneer coming unglued, \$225-350,
3. Staff Tours – Ms. Meagher will remind employees that tours are available at the Merrick House.
4. Althea’s Garden Brigade – Staff has a waiver and is waiting for the City Attorney’s office to obtain their final approval.
5. Cinema 360 – A local company is currently looking for funding for this project, a documentary of the history of Coral Gables.
6. Veteran’s Day Concert – Scheduled for Sunday, November 11, 2024, at the House. Staff has had issues with getting the band paid as they are not registered as a city vendor.

DISCUSSION ITEMS: None.

CITY COMMISSION ITEMS: None.

Coral Gables Merrick House Governing Board Meeting
August 12, 2024

ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:42 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna C. Pernas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "P".

Anna C. Pernas
Historic Preservation Officer