

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-11**  
**May 21, 2024**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**  
**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**  
**Commissioner Melissa Castro**  
**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**  
**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**  
**City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Historic Preservation Board Chair**  
**Elvis Fuentes, Executive Director, Coral Gables Museum**  
**Maria Cruz**

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Agenda Item F-11 [11:56 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing funding in an amount up to \$500,000.00 as matching grant funds to the Coral Gables Museum for completion of certain capital improvements. (Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez and Co-sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-11, time certain 10:00 a.m.

City Attorney Suarez: F-11 is a Resolution of the City Commission authorizing funding in an amount up to \$500,000.00 as matching grant funds to the Coral Gables Museum for completion of certain capital improvements.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, three minutes.

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Board Chair: First of all, I'd like to thank everyone, Mayor, Vice Mayor, the Commissioners for all your help and all your support for the Museum throughout all the times. I realize the or we realized the city has many issues regarding the historical properties and we're one of them. I would also like to thank Zeida; she has been a Godsend to us and the Museum. She has been a true trooper and has really helped us along with the whole process. So, I would like to thank her. She's been tough, but fair, and we like that, and our issues which Elvis, I'm going to turn over to Elvis to discuss are very serious issues, because we rely on borrowing – when we do an exhibit, we have to borrow whether documents or art or pieces from other museums and our reputation in the museum world is not good at this moment. There are organizations in town that we rely on borrowing that will not lend to us, because of the water damage, the leaks, not being able to control the humidity in the museum and now to top it off, it has not gotten out and the city has been very responsive, by the way, but we have termites. So, to tell people who have loaned us works for an exhibit that they are going to get it back having had it exposed to termites is very serious. So, what we have done is, we have done an analysis of the work that needed to be done, and the amount of money that would be needed, the city independently did their own, and we pretty much agree on most of the things of what needs to be done. So, Elvis is going to be doing a presentation on some of the items. We have an opportunity to apply for a grant from the state and with a matching fund from the city, we have an opportunity to be able to get a million dollars for the museum. So, Elvis is going to be making a presentation, but again, I want to thank you all, because I understand that we're not alone in the historical buildings of the city that the city needs to fix, but you know ours is a very serious problem and the reputation of the museum.

Mr. Elvis Fuentes: Thank you so much for the opportunity and I want to thank every one of you, including also Mr. City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr., visited the museum in the first week after starting in the job. So, I really appreciate the support that we have received, so I'm going to try to be very quick. We have a presentation. So, since its opening in 2010, Coral Gables Museum has never addressed the issues of degraded facilities due to tear and wear of windows, the state of the ceiling, damaging floors and walls and due to leaks, aging fixtures and equipment such as HVAC systems, ceiling lamps, all additional dysfunctional bathroom and kitchen fixtures, damaged flooring in our offices, etc. These issues have affected the museum operations and capabilities, in particular related to the conservation of artifacts. Its image has also diminished, as our Chair mentioned, giving the impression of being an institution in disrepair, which is why it's so important to renovate and upgrade some of our facilities. The City of Coral Gables on our building tackled the problem of roof leaks by repairing the roof over the historic building last year, however, no work has been done in the Fewell Gallery. We now have a much more controlled situation, but the historic building is far from being watertight. We have identified a potential capital improvement grant from cultural facilities from the Florida Department of State, which requires matching funds one-to-one with a cap of \$500,000. This is what Mr. Valdes-Fauli was mentioning. We believe that we can make the case for a successful grant application given the historical importance of our building and the cultural that Coral Gables Museum place as the only museum devoted to celebrating the civic arts and its history in the region, all of South Florida. We are very grateful for the City Commission continued support for the work that we have been doing for the last two years and we only strive for serving our community better. Outsource Florida Premiere for Civic Arts – we are growing our collection of artifacts that reflects the mission and development program to

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expand our knowledge of Coral Gables history, leading to the centennial of the City Beautiful next year. A major step is the acquisition of the Phineas Paste collection for which we currently are preparing a fundraising campaign and several other artifacts, such as photographs, architectural drawings, memorabilia and original artworks related to our city's history or the subject of civic arts. The museum collection also lacked appropriate storage facilities and display cases, as our galleries do not have adequate climate control and monitoring system. This created a problem in terms of conservation of our permanent collection holdings and the ability to reserve temporary loans from other museums and public collections for the purpose of presenting an exhibition of interest to our community. Likewise, climate conditions in the galleries where we present original artifacts, including permanent collection items are less than ideal with some areas exposed to sunlight, while others have high levels of humidity due to porous...walls. On the other hand, our visitors have less than ideal experiences in public programs, such as concerts, talks, film screenings, due to insufficient conditions for adequate acoustics, lighting, or professional lighting equipment in the community meeting room and other exhibition spaces. Nearly half of our visitors, 47 percent, come to the museum to enjoy public programs of great varieties, such as concerts, artist talks, panel discussions, and art workshops. Most of these take place in our community meeting room, however, this room has suffered from water damage to the floor, walls and windows. So, I'm going to just go very quickly about the items.

Board Chair: Let me interrupt. I'll try to move faster for the benefit, but this is what the museum looks like right now. The walls of the museum that are just mold infected and there's a lot of water seepage coming in and the city brought in someone to say that to do an estimate on re ceiling the museum, which is a process that needs to be done every few years and hasn't been done in 20, and the estimate – and it's the city's estimate, its \$342,000. Go to the next Elvis. The next is the AC equipment – The AC equipment at the museum has outlived its life. It needs to be replaced. There was an event where we had, you were all there. There was an event for Dorothy Thomson and the AC all went out. Now it's leaking, so it needs to be replaced now, that's \$127,000. Then we have, next are the repairs in the Fewell Gallery. When the roof was replaced in the museum and they say that the roof of the museum was replaced, its not accurate. Part of the roof of the museum was replaced, not all of it. So, the Fewell Gallery, the ceiling, the roof was not replaced, and the floor also needs work because of the damage from all the leaks of the ceiling. That's another \$70,000. The community meeting room, the floor is coming up. You've all been in there. We've tried to fix it, make it look as best as we can, but again, the floor needs to all be replaced. That's another \$40,000. And then we really need an emergency generator as a backup. Art and documents, you cannot have without temperature control. So, that's one of the items that we're also applying for. And then the renovation of the bathrooms and the kitchen, which are in terrible, terrible shape, and that's another \$345,000. And the next is the lighting system in the Fewell Gallery that needs to be redone and acoustical platters put in, that's another \$49,000. And then the window shades. And false wall construction and other items. The ultimate is that the total amount comes up to a million-one.

Mr. Fuentes: A million-one-seventy-nine (\$1,001,079).

Board Chair: A million-one-seventy-nine (\$1,001,079). And this is what we're going to be presenting to the state and to you all and if we get the commitment – before we can go to the state, we need the commitment from the city. And that's what we're here for pleading today.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may, ask you a few questions. I don't have an issue with the request. I just want to make sure that's its done properly so there aren't any issues later with procurement. Who's handling the procurement of this effort.

Board Chair: Zeida will be handling; the city will be handling the whole thing.

Mayor Lago: Zeida, you want to come up here.

Board Chair: She's handling the whole.

Asset Manager Sardinas: Good morning, Mayor and Commissioners. So, they are working on their grant application. We still have to review the grant application. We're doing this right now in order to be able for them to have the resolution in hand to submit with the grant. We still need to review all of this and then whether the city is going – if the city conducts the work, then it will go through our regular procurement that we conduct to do the work. If they are going to conduct the work, then...

Board Chair: We don't. It's the city's building, it's the city's project, it's historic.

Asset Manager Sardinas: Yes. So, if that's the case, then it will go through our regular procurement process through Public Works and the maintenance, the General Services Department.

Mayor Lago: I walked the site. I saw the exterior. I saw the interior. I've seen the issues; I think everybody has. I've even walked on the roof when the previous director was there before his passing. This is a long time coming. All I care about, besides obviously preserving the building, is that it gets done in the appropriate way and all procurement gets followed.

Asset Manager Sardinas: Correct. Definitely – and the city is going to handle that.

Mayor Lago: Now that we have it on the record, because I got two phone calls about how this was being handled. The second thing that I want to make sure you're going after the grant, thank you for that, that's great. You are going to be investing this money in a city asset. I think its beautiful. Let's make sure that we have sufficient amount of money in contingency, because project costs have gone up and down, up and down, up and down. If they go in our favor and they go down, great, we have money for other things that we could use to restore the building. But if they go up, make sure that we have a little bit of money, maybe ten percent, seven percent, six percent, five percent in contingency just to cover an increase in labor or material costs or whatever it might be. That's just my recommendation.

Board Chair: We agree. We agree. We feel very comfortable with Zeida handling the process.

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Mayor Lago: Everybody feels comfortable with Zeida.

Board Chair: And we have had, you know, as long as she is involved, we don't want to have any responsibility for anything.

Mayor Lago: One of the issues that I may have missed when I stepped out to speak to the Police Chief to me with two residents was, we walked the site about a month and-a-half ago, I mentioned that there was some electrical work in the Plaza, some down lighting that was missing, that you had the wires exposed there. That was something that we talked about. Also, there was some landscaping lighting that was also not working and missing. So, I want to make sure that you consider that kind of stuff before, because that could potentially be a big-ticket item. It could be \$10,000, \$15,000, there were some issues there that we brought to the attention of staff, the Manager was present when we discussed those issues, and they were on the stairs. As you go down, you have some down lighting that is there and that was missing, and they weren't working.

Commissioner Castro: There's no doubt that this building needs improvements and I'm totally on board with it. I want to just clarify for the people that are watching that this money that they are asking for is coming from TDRs.

Asset Manager Sardinas: Yes ma'am. Right.

Commissioner Castro: So that's what we're going to be matching. And maybe you can explain a little more about the state grant, like what are they requiring, a match and what else? What other requirements?

Mr. Fuentes: Yes. One important part about this grant is that, of course we have to provide proof that it is a matching fund available, and it's one-to-one for regular institution. What is interesting also about that grant is that it allows for, not just repairs, but also upgrades and not just things that relate to the structure or to fixtures, etc., but also equipment. So, what we're thinking is, is a combination, because the city from my understanding of the way the TDRs monies is to be used, has to do mostly with repair, maintenance, etc., but the fact that the state allows for the other upgrades and renovations, etc., then that's something that will allow us to cover some of the basic needs that we have right now.

Commissioner Castro: How long would the application process take? Is there a time limit?

Mr. Fuentes: The state grant, this state grant that we're applying for now is due on June 1<sup>st</sup>, and is for the year 24/25, I'm sorry, 25/26, so its next year actually; and the state fiscal year start in July, on July 1<sup>st</sup> so it would be starting July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

Board Chair: We're going to have to see if once we get the grant approval, how the grant gets paid and then we're going to have to come back to the city and work on the funding or how it gets done.

We're going to have to come back when we figure out how we get the money and how we're going to get the city money before we begin anything, but we'll do that through Zeida.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. Just wanted to thank you all for coming here to do this presentation. I know that Commissioner Menendez and I have been pressing for a number of years to try to get the TDR funds to this museum to take care of many, many issues and the leaks, and windows, and the rock porosity as well as all the other maintenance items that you have addressed. This is one of our crown jewels as well as the Cinema and the cultural arts areas that we have available in our city. So, I appreciate your stewardship on this front and the partnership together with Commissioner Menendez and making sure that we take care of this funding going forward.

Board Chair: We're very grateful. We're very grateful and we appreciate everything you are all doing. I understand that we're one part. I understand this building has priority. I understand there's other things that have priorities, and that's why we're trying to do our best with a matching grant.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to, if you don't mind, since we had our legislative team here a little while ago, and since this is a city property and we are dealing with the state on a grant issue. I don't know if the scope of service for our lobbyist team, Ron Books, can perhaps provide, if needed, guidance or advice in Tallahassee to sort of help on the grant presentation and the application. They do know Tallahassee better than pretty much anybody. So, if that resource is available, even in terms of providing advice, I would like, I think we'd collectively would love to provide that know-how, if needed to your group, to your team. Like you said, it's a team effort, city property. What you all do is needed, so why not expand the team even further.

Mr. Fuentes: In fact, I want to add that this type of grant, so it's not uncommon for this type of grant for cities and governments to apply, because a city, like in this case, owns the building, they give the possibility for the city or us to apply. The only important requirement is the matching funds that are available there, so the more help we can get the better.

Commissioner Menendez: We all want to improve the odds of success all around, so that might be a good step in the right direction to do that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, do we have any comments from the community.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir. Maria Cruz.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, while she comes up, can I just clarify one point.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Attorney Suarez: The resolution as drafted does not state that the funds, the funding and the matching funds would come from the TDRs. It just provides a commitment by the city to fund up to the amount of the grant if it is awarded.

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Mayor Lago: It should come from the TDRs.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. I think that was the intent.

Asset Manager Sardinias: We haven't allocated the funds for TDR, we were going to do it next Commission meeting, because it's the second reading of the second amount of TDRs. So, I wanted to make sure that the ordinance had been heard on second reading in order to then allocate the funds.

Mayor Lago: I don't foresee any issues at all. At the end of the day, the funds are going to be allocated. I'm fine moving forward with that.

Board Chair: Elvis and I had a meeting, I guess about two months ago, three months ago with different opportunities to obtain grants. So, we've been going around and seeing what opportunities that were available and we do get a state grant. We had a meeting with them, two of us with them, to see what other opportunities there were and that's how this came up.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Fuentes: Before we leave, I just want to invite you all and everybody here in the city that we are opening this Friday a new exhibition of Coral Gables artists. It's the first time in the history of the museum that an exhibition is made about just artists residing in Coral Gables, and so, its called *"Visions from Inside the Wall,"* this sort of like island that is so amazing Coral Gables. So, Coral Gables artists today. So, you are all invited, 5 p.m., on Friday.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Once again, Mrs. Maria Cruz and Mr. Clerk, I think my card says Mrs. Maria Cruz. It doesn't say Maria Cruz and I know it's very hard to pronounce the MRS., it's not a four-letter word. There are three letters and a period and I think I made it very clear that is how I would like to be addressed and I think I'm entitled to asked to be addressed like that, and its going to be an issue, I guess Emily Post would say that I should say my name is Mrs. Emilio Cruz Ledon, is that the better choice, I will start using that from now on. I will be called Mrs. Maria Cruz whether the Mayor likes it or not and I would appreciate it if you paid attention. Alright. Good news. He refuses to pay attention, so please don't start the clock till he pays attention. The good news is there are some good things happening today, and the museum very well deserves everything that you can do for it, and I'm sure that most of the people who support it, but please don't let it happen like it happened with City Hall that we had the money and then we didn't have the money. Okay. This money is for the museum period, the end. Make sure that it makes it there and it's not necessary to be pulled to do something else. Thank you.

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Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. I'll entertain a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it. I'll second.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Alright. Moving onto item 2-1.

Board Chair: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Have a wonderful day.