

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
January 26, 2010
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Commissioner Maria Anderson
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.
Commissioner Wayne “Chip” Withers

City Staff

City Manager, Patrick Salerno
City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

F-2 [Start: 9:28:52 a.m.]

Discussion regarding the city’s “Green” efforts
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera

Mayor Slesnick: We have two items under City Commission Items, and they both deal in the area of “green,” and I’m going to ask if Commissioner Cabrera would go first because he wants to talk about an overview thing, and I had a specific item within that overview thing, so Ralph.

Commissioner Cabrera: Thank you Don. This morning I bring this up for a couple of reasons; first and foremost the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce has really taken a very active approach to “greening” efforts throughout our community and have well established a committee that has been meeting now for a number of years; and unfortunately while the committee has done a lot of good work in terms of recommendations and framework, a whole lot has not really taken place; and in the interim some of us on this Commission beginning with Commissioner Anderson has also done some initiatives to try to formulate what I would call a game plan or a framework, in which this City can take an active part in “greening” efforts. I also had learned that our City Attorney has had some dialogue with the folks from the Chamber. I know that our Mayor, Don Slesnick, has a, I guess it’s a roundtable committee, that meets on a regular basis; incidentally my son is still waiting for that invitation, he has not forgotten, he really has a laundry list of things that he wants to share with the committee; but in all seriousness, the reason I bring this up is I’d like us to somehow, somehow as a group, and this doesn’t have to be a part of the strategic planning session, or whatever we end up doing with planning in the city, I’d like us as a group to try to come up with some sort of an outline, foundation, framework in which to

move forward, because what's happening is everyone around us is moving forward with "greening" efforts, everyone is taking a very strong position and maybe the city is already doing some wonderful things. I can tell you that from my last meeting with the Chamber's "Greening" Committee Chair, which occurred last week with the City Attorney, they are planning an inaugural Echo Expo on Friday, February 5th at the Hyatt Regency in Coral Gables; and we happen to be one of the partners, and I had no clue that we were partners in this effort, but this will be a publicly held, I guess, conference or expo, and I see some great opportunities for us; incidentally not only is the City of Coral Gables participating in this, so is the Coral Gables Museum because their logo appears. I don't know what the city's involvement is, and quite frankly my own involvement with this process in the past has been that when former Manager David Brown was with us, I asked him to please provide me with a list of what each department in our city did in terms of trying to "green" its efforts, and I did get a very comprehensive list by department, showing me what we were already doing, and I was impressed with it, but I think we could certainly do a lot better, and incidentally if we don't do anything today or if you don't find that this is something that's worthwhile, I can tell you that the Chamber has a consultant that would be willing to come to the City of Coral Gables and at no cost to the city provide an audit to determine some needs and present conditions, and some opportunities for "greening" efforts within our city. So that's really the gist of this conversation; I really can't discuss it with you all privately, so I thought I'd bring it up just to find out where we are as a group?- and where do we want to go with this?- and Don, I know you've done a lot of work behind the scenes, but I'm not that familiar with your roundtable because obviously if I attended it would have to be a publicly noticed meeting, and Maria has worked with Sally Jude, in fact Sally Jude was here with a number of friends that were interested in getting involved.

Commissioner Anderson: Whenever....yes, you're right, you're right...sure – sure.

Commissioner Cabrera: I'm just getting it all out there; that's really the purpose of this discussion to see how we can move this process forward and give the Manager the appropriate direction so that he and his staff can follow up with our wishes.

Mayor Slesnick: Maria.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, I'm happy that you brought that up. I've been working on that, actually with the Manager, actually laid out a framework after we had that June meeting where Sally Jude appeared, we talked potentially about a "green" committee or "green" task force whatever that turned out to be, and laid out some particular framework for that; and I kind of put it on hold because we had something that happened interveningly which is called the budget, and that hampered – it took a lot of our time, it took a lot of the Manager's time. I think that this would be – I think this is good you brought it up; I think this would be an ideal global picture view for our planning session because this is going to require monies. It's not that we don't do it; I think we have to, I've made that commitment to work toward that and I have ideas on how to do it. I think there are some ways we can actually engage the citizenry in other ways that could be public/private partnerships before we do this taskforce because I'd like to all put it in perspective from a financial standpoint. I know that we are going to be facing some really severe

challenges coming up in Tallahassee if certain legislation happens, and I want to make sure that when we plan, we plan appropriately for the “greening”; and I think “greening” has to happen not only in an educational campaign for the citizenry, and that’s the public/private partnership that we can do, but I think we have to explore a variety of things, and I’ve laid it out and I’m happy to share with you the e-mail, I’ll have the Manager forward some of the e-mails and that’s something maybe we can do at the planning session, but I think it follows along the line of what you want to do and I’d like to help us all achieve this goal.

Commissioner Withers: I think there is...if we take it on as a company and do the changes that we would want to embrace, it is an expense. So I agree with you on that, Maria, it should be budgeted, etc. But I also think the other side of the equation is that we as a governing body can move forward in some areas that really don’t cost us anything...

Commissioner Anderson: Right.

Commissioner Withers:...And those would be affecting legislation to developers giving them bonuses like we do for Mediterranean or whatever....

Commissioner Anderson: Building incentives.

Commissioner Withers: Yes, things like that or homeowners, and I’m not saying I’m in favor of this, but like we do a historic preservation tax rebate, maybe we come up with an innovative way to give a rebate to eco-friendly homes or however. So I think there are some ways that we can move the initiative forward, and Ralph I know you said you didn’t think it should be a part of necessarily the workshop in the future, but I think it’s a neat initiative, and I think it’s something that should be one of the key components.

Commissioner Cabrera: You know I misspoke; you know I think it should be part of any planning process...

Commissioner Withers: I do too.

Commissioner Cabrera: But you know, I guess, without looking and sounding frustrated, what frustrates me is that we are not going to even meet until March and we’ve been messing around with this “greening” issue for a couple of years. You know, I remember Dave doing a really fine job of giving us a list of all the things that we were doing, and then I see the Chamber moving forward and then I see the level of frustration that they are finding with us because they have tools that we can begin to use that won’t cost us any money. You have heard me say that they will perform an audit at no cost to the City of Coral Gables. So there are a lot of things that are being done and I don’t know, I don’t know how much longer I’ll be serving the City, but the point is I want to try to move something forward.

Commissioner Withers: Understood.

Commissioner Cabrera: I already know how rotten our finances are, I already know how things are in shambles, I already know about the dysfunctions that are occurring around here, but that doesn't mean that I stop moving forward, that's kind of what I'm trying to do, but I agree with you and Maria, I think it needs to be an integral part of the planning session. I've got to tell you both, Don this morning before the meeting knowing that I was going to bring this up, was kind enough to speak to a friend of his, Peyton White Lumpkin, who...

Commissioner Withers: Who?

Commissioner Cabrera: Peyton White Lumpkin.

Commissioner Withers: Oh, OK.

Commissioner Cabrera: Who has participated in a countywide committee to try to bring you know the "greening" efforts forward...

Mayor Slesnick: She happens to be the Chair of the Greater Miami Chamber same as Annabel.

Commissioner Cabrera: Oh, I'm sorry; I thought she was involved in the County.

Mayor Slesnick: Well she is involved, but I mean that kind of ties the loop together.

Commissioner Cabrera: I got it. I have not had the opportunity and I'll do the same as Maria said, offered, I'll make sure that the city circulates this draft, but they've literally put together an outline, and from the little that I've been able to look at before joining us all in the Chambers, there are ten pages of a very well put together template on some of the things that can be moved forward; you know, legislation is involved and interlocal relationships are involved.

Commissioner Withers: You know what would be neat is, can they say what effect it has on your budget?- does any of those initiatives say that its revenue neutral?- or whatever, on any of those initiatives.

Commissioner Cabrera: This I think is more of an outline that's a macro set up, so it doesn't have – I mean, it has objectives and policies, but no, it doesn't have budgetary line items attached to it. But let me circulate that; Don you are OK if I do that?

Mayor Slesnick: Absolutely.

Commissioner Cabrera: And again, the goal here is to try to focus and funnel us all in the right direction, because I think there are a lot of people and groups that are trying to move us into a more aggressive "greening" posture, and for whatever reason we've got other priorities and that's why we can kind of set the direction here, and that's what I was hoping.

Commissioner Withers: I wanted to ask the City Manager just one thing. Is that something that would fall under the Sustainability Director?- or where would you see that falling under?- if we made it part of our mission, part of our master plan.

City Manager Salerno: Our Sustainability Director focuses on the economy, so sustainability is a variety of areas from the environment; we don't have specifically a staff person identified that is our environmental or "green" sustainability individual. Cindy Birdsill's focus is economic which is different in that regard.

Commissioner Anderson: About a week and-a-half ago I've been working also with a group on this issue, and it wasn't just Mrs. Jude, I was working with some other citizens who have that involvement as well, and they forwarded me an ordinance that they were preparing in order to develop that "green" taskforce, and it's something we might, I'd be happy to pass around, something we might adopt it and hold it and wait to see what we do at the planning session, but begin to plant the seed of commitment. I think it's a very valuable one, I'm glad to have it circulated as well along with my original memos, demonstrating leadership on it and then maybe holding it in abeyance, this particular thing, for the citizen involvement until we just have a few weeks to go to do that, and I want to make sure when we give them the go ahead, the proverbial green light, pardon the pun, that we have the teeth to be able to commit to that, and that includes things that Chip talked about, you talked about – capital projects, how do we explore land use or Zoning Code changes, new technologies to apply to our commercial and residential structures, incentives for building "green", incentives for eco-friendly purchasing practices or explore more eco-friendly purchasing practices which cost more, so we would have to ramp those in a very reasonable timeframe, if that were to happen. I hope that we can do that. Transportation projects incentives, bike paths something near and dear to your heart, trolleys, public outreach programs. There is a program called "Dream in Green", that I think offers incentives for citizens to do more eco-friendly things in their home that are offered in other cities, like City of Miami did it with Home Depot. So, I mean, there is a variety of things we can do, and if we want to make a commitment maybe we need to look at this particular ordinance or a structure by which we do this. I'm happy to bring it forward because I worked on it since pretty much last year.

Commissioner Cabrera: I'd like to defer to you on it because I do know from the little that I've heard, I know you've taken a lead on this issue, so by all means.

Commissioner Anderson: We can work together.

Commissioner Cabrera: I know we can, I know that, I know we are capable of doing that, but I know that you really have taken the lead on this and want you to know that I would be happy to have you continue with that process. We are six weeks and one day away from our planning meeting, according to...

Commissioner Withers: March 10th.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, we all got a memo from the Manager...

Commissioner Withers: March 10th, Wednesday.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, March 10th six days, I mean, six weeks and one day.

Commissioner Withers: If Bill wasn't going to China for six weeks we could do it tomorrow.

Commissioner Cabrera: There you go. (Laughter) And I think between now and then, between today and six weeks, there are a couple of things: number one, I'd like to be able to review what my colleague has done and perhaps put that together in a package for all of us along with the information that Don obtained, and incorporate the Chamber because the Chamber has done a lot of good work you all, and they really are chomping to work along side of the City of Coral Gables on this project; and perhaps, I was originally going to invite the Chamber's President and the Vice Chair of this committee to be a part of today's meeting, and then I decided at the last minute it would be better for us to have this informal discussion and then make some decisions together as a group rather than to impose the Chamber on all of us. I'm hoping that maybe by the next Commission meeting they can make a brief five to ten minute presentation on some of the things they can do along side of us, so they can be incorporated into the process that Ms. Anderson's already started.

Commissioner Anderson: Absolutely – and actually I had talked to Sarah awhile back, so that would be perfect to do that, but let's first sit down maybe if you wanted to have a noticed meeting, you and I could sit down and review the documents and maybe put a packet together.

Commissioner Cabrera: That's fine, but I'm serious, I really know that you have done a lot of good work on this.

Commissioner Anderson: That's OK. I have no problem.

Commissioner Cabrera: But the purpose of this was not to take away all the good work you've been doing.

Commissioner Anderson: No, I know that, but I think it might be good to put together some synergistic package.

Mayor Slesnick: It sounds like we have the guts of a package here of several things.

Commissioner Anderson: Well that's why it would be good to sit around and see what's of value and....

Mayor Slesnick: I'd also like to include if you don't mind or at least think about the Garden Club, because they have worked...

Commissioner Anderson: I promised Mrs. Jude they would be involved.

Mayor Slesnick: They are coming together – for those of you who don't know, this would be the third year of the "Green" Festival, I think that's what it's called, and it's combined with our Farmers Market. I'm not sure what date it is, I'm sorry to say that.

Commissioner Anderson: I think they hold their own informal thing...

Mayor Slesnick: It's now in the Farmers Market, so...

Commissioner Anderson: And they've done that for several years, and when I promised Mrs. Jude, I promised her that she would be a part of anything that we were doing as a City.

Commissioner Withers: There is the "Green Chili Cook-off", is that part of...

Commissioner Anderson: We could make that as one of the kick-off events, how about that?- a "Green Chili Cook-off event".

Mayor Slesnick: We can produce a lot of extra gas.

Commissioner Withers: Exactly.

Commissioner Anderson: There you go, and you are going to head it up, that will be yours.

Mayor Slesnick: Also, if I could add to the circulation of this material. I recently wrote an article and submitted it to a magazine about what we've done in the city, which goes back and brings together some of the elements that Mr. Cabrera was talking about, so if we could circulate that article to the Commission, too.

Commissioner Cabrera: So where do we go from here?- I think I heard a couple of things; Ms. Anderson and I are going to have a public meeting together to try to put the whole information that we've acquired. I think she's done a lot more than I have, I simply have only – I did two things one is, ask the Manager to provide me with an audit of what everybody has been doing and that's now two years old, so it's a photograph in time, and secondly, I've spoken to the folks at the Chamber, specifically the "Green" Committee Chair, and so I'm sure she pointed out, Sarah Artecona, being the complete chairperson for the Chamber endorses this effort. I'd like to with your permission also incorporate them....

Commissioner Anderson: Absolutely.

Commissioner Cabrera:and then perhaps move forward; and in the interim how do you all feel about the Chamber coming here and giving us a five to ten minute presentation on some of their ideas?

Commissioner Anderson: On my part, that's a great idea.

Commissioner Cabrera: So we'll go ahead and invite them to the next Commission meeting. They are ready to meet. Annabella Smith....

Mayor Slesnick: Annabella was in my roundtable...

Commissioner Cabrera: Oh, good. She just wasn't able to be here today.

Mayor Slesnick: She's great.

Commissioner Cabrera: She really is, she's got a lot of energy, she's a very accomplished architect and a Coral Gables resident and really has her heart in the right place.

Mayor Slesnick: Maybe invite Peyton to come too.

Commissioner Cabrera: Sir?

Mayor Slesnick: Maybe invite Peyton to come too.

Commissioner Cabrera: I think it would be great to have Peyton be here as well, if she is not too busy with the Super Bowl, oh no, that's another Peyton, but she spells it the same way – interesting – great name, Peyton White Lumpkin, I like it. So that's it for me and I appreciate the dialogue.

[End: 9:48:18 a.m.]