

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
March 11, 2014
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Vince Lago

Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

City Manager, Patrick Salerno

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Nanette Zapata, Chief Operating Officer, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden

Mary Snow, Executive Director, Coral Gables Foundation

H-2 [Start: 11:13:32 a.m.]

Resolution authorizing entering into an Agreement with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Inc. to participate in the Million Orchid Project and to authorize the Fiscal Year 2013-2014 Annual Budget Funds to support this project.

Mayor Cason: Moving on to Item H-2, Mr. Manager.

City Manager Salerno: Thank you Mayor, Commissioners. Item H-2 is a Resolution authorizing entering into an Agreement with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Inc. to participate in the Million Orchid Project and to authorize the Fiscal Year 2013-2014 Annual Budget Funds to support this project. Want to just briefly say, I want to thank Vice Mayor Kerdyk for bringing to the City's attention this exciting and unique opportunity, and I'm sure he would like to discuss the matter with you all.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Thank you very much City Manager. I want to thank your staff for assisting me in bringing this to City Hall. We are really fortunate to have Fairchild Garden as a corporate citizen in the City of Coral Gables – really when you think about having one of the two top botanical gardens in the world sitting in your City borders, that's something great. I have today Nanette Zapata who is going to do a presentation on this orchid program that we have where we are going to establish throughout the City. I also have here with us Mary Snow from the Coral Gables Foundation because what this is going to be, this is basically a partnership between the Fairchild Gardens, the City of Coral Gables, and the Coral Gables Foundation through the Partnership Program that's going to help supplement the \$30,000 that we are going to expend on it on a yearly basis; and what Nanette's going to tell you and I won't steal all her thunder, but the fact is that they are going to put 50,000 orchids in the City in our swale areas, in our common areas for each year for five years, that's 250,000 orchids. Why are they putting these orchids? - she'll tell you about what kind of orchids they are, but basically in the 1900's as I understand, there were many, many people that came down from New York and they basically denuded our trees. One time all these trees that we had here had orchids in them and they took the orchids out and they took them back to New York, so what this program is, they are basically going to put these native orchids back into these trees, and I'm going to tell you the only other City in the world that's doing this is Singapore, basically Singapore. Singapore is the other City in the world that's doing this. So, Nanette why don't you talk a little bit about the program?

Ms. Nanette Zapata: I have a presentation. I was hoping we could pull it up. Good morning, my name is Nanette Zapata, I'm the Chief Operating Officer at Fairchild, it's my pleasure to be here, and I really want to thank all of you for moving this project forward, especially Vice Mayor Kerdyk and the City Manager and Cindy Birdsill, who was great getting all the documentation and everything. We are very excited about this project because as Bill mentioned, Miami was very lush, it continues to be very lush, but certainly 150 years it connected from Key Biscayne all the way down to the Everglades, and so when urbanization took over a lot of that lushness was lost, and especially in the orchids, and I have some slides that you see that I'll show you that depict how these orchids were taken away; and what this project is, it's called the Million Orchid Project and our goal is to establish a million orchids throughout Dade County and a good portion of those will be right here in the City of Coral Gables, and we are working with volunteers and scientists and graduate students and it's a very comprehensive project unlike anything that this country is doing, all the other countries like Singapore. It's also, a few minutes ago you were talking about gathering places and the Coral Gables Museum being a place where people come together and Fairchild is that place where people come together. We have 45,000 members, we have 1,500 volunteers. Today the reason I'm here and not the director, the science director is because we have over 800 students visiting Fairchild participating in environmental immersion day, so it's definitely a place where a lot of really great things happen and most recently this incredible program, so let's take you through it. So these are all native orchids. These are all

right here from Florida and...the one that we have most blooming right now, we have a good portion of those taking place right now, because we have three partners thus far. We have City of Coral Gables, we have Bruce Matheson who this project is near and dear to his family's heart, and the American Orchid Society whose residence is now at Fairchild, and then of course we have all the volunteers. We are talking big, big donors. So, this is a project that's moving forward with these particular four orchids and every one of these orchids will be diversified throughout the entire county area. So these are actual images – this plant is actually blooming on our, one of our oak trees at the Garden. This is the Cowhorn Orchid, this is the Dollar Orchid, *boothiana*, and the *cochleata*, the Cockleshell Orchid, and all of these will be throughout the City of Coral Gables with an emphasis on three of them, the least of which is this one; this one will be installed....but there will be some in the city limits to ensure that we don't have any missing pockets throughout the entire county. Now here we have images; we have these in our archives. Fairchild archive is probably one of the most robust in the entire country. It really has a good portion of the agricultural history of this county, certainly a good portion of the horticultural history of this county and this City, but everything that came through South Florida is captured in our archives, and so especially a good portion of writing and images, and you can see how orchids – you can already see toward the back here how lush it still is and some of the foliage from the front has already been removed, but you can see just buckets and buckets of orchids being literally ripped off of trees. Two truckloads, two car loads with horse and carriage buggies – now we've modernized a little bit and we have a car and so it's a little hard to see because of how dark this image is or the TV is rather, but there is about 8 or 10 bags here of like potato sacks, orchids, fresh orchids just ripped right off of the tree. Now for the sake of disclosure, this woman here is Marian Fairchild, so she was David Fairchild's wife and of course everybody knows Fairchild Garden is named after David Fairchild, so obviously this was something that was just being done as a way of life, orchids were easy to transport, easy to take back home to New York once they stop blooming or repairs because conditions were not appropriate. They would just get tossed and more would be removed; and so here we are, last year – about 18 months ago we came to the Commission and you approved the science village and one of the labs in the science village is the micro propagation lab and this is it; and so these....and in those labs are hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of thousands of orchids getting ready for blooming, and so these are just a handful of some of the volunteers. This gentleman here you may recognize, his name is Martin Bulbs, he has a big nursery down in the Redlands area and he has been training all of our volunteers along with our science staff, and the reason this is important is because like all charitable organizations most of our costs are in operations and personnel and in order to run a program like this you would have to hire 25 people and that's not something the Garden can afford to do. So thankfully, as I mentioned we have 1,500 volunteers and many of them have tremendous life experiences, professional experiences in labs and one of our scientist is in fact the former director of the crime scene lab here in Miami-Dade County. So they've all been trained and they know how to handle and prepare these flasks for propagation.

That's an autoclave, that's a big machine that keeps everything very sterile. Here we have again, one of our volunteers just preparing the flasks. They are in there every day, every single day. In fact, this flask was, I just noticed, it was flaked on December 31st...They are there every single day. So why do we have to run these, this project through a lab? These little dots right here, those are the actual seeds, it's almost impossible to create proper conditions. One of these little seeds or a handful of these little seeds have to find the exact right location on a tree somewhere with the right perfect conditions, the right fungus that they need, the right light, the right everything in order for it to bloom naturally, given the conditions of Dade County it's almost impossible. So we have to create those conditions. You can see the fruit right here, it opened right there and it spread. So in order for us to give this restoration project a good go, we have to create these conditions in the labs; and there you can see from one fruit, this is a month after installation within the flasks, and this is six months, that's where we are, almost where we are with this one; and so from here you get one fruit, you get ten bottles, 50 bottles, and 250 balms of plant material, that's tens of thousands of plants. So this is the first batch in our nursery coming forward getting them growing. The next phase would be to pop them up and get them to growing size and installation size; and so as Mr. Kerdyk mentioned this project has been incredibly important to Singapore; Singapore has very different rules than Miami-Dade County does certainly, and it's an entire citywide, countrywide project and it's on all the streets, you can see these orchids blooming in all the streets, beautifully maintained and just exquisite care and it just adds an element of surreal feel to the entire City. It's a garden City and I think that's something that is important for Coral Gables to be a garden City, all the landscaping that is already going in and...it's a wonderful moniker to achieve. So this is where we got the idea of micro-propagating our lab, our orchids in our lab, and you can see these are all from Singapore. This is what you can expect in time, not this particular orchid, because that's endemic to Singapore, but this concept. This orchid is called the Tiger Orchid and it was completely extinct in Singapore, native to Singapore, but extinct it was only found in Malaysia; they brought it from Malaysia and started repopulating it and re-enforcing their City. So there is a conservation component that's incredible too. This is the largest orchid in the world, that the Tiger Orchid and look at how big this plant is; and so this is what you can expect over the next five years, bucket trucks, personnel in the bucket trucks and selling the trees, maybe not this close, but certainly onlookers watching the process take place. So from a horticultural and conservation perspective it's thrilling to be able to restore these orchids, a million orchids, it's a very ambitious project, from a partnership perspective I can't tell you how excited we are to have the City's support to know that it's being spearheaded right here in our City boundaries, and from a communal point of view, I think it's going to be fantastic to have citizenship walk by see these trees, look up and know that they are part of something bigger, they are part of an ongoing blooming extraordinaire within their City. So the next phase, we are going to have a big kick-off event on April 22nd, which is Earth Day, we are looking to install some of the plants right here next to us, right here in the park, and we'll have larger plants because these are not quite ready, they are still too small. One of the things

that we are learning from Singapore is there is a direct correlation between the size of the plant when it goes in to its survivability. So we want to wait for as long as possible before we install, so that they are a good size so that they have a better shot, but we'll have additional material brought in, we are going to purchase additional material so we have a really great experience on April 22nd and I hope you all can join us for. I can answer any questions.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I'd just like to say one more thing is that like I mentioned, we are so fortunate to have one of the two top botanical gardens in the City of Coral Gables, and since we always reference Merrick. When Merrick had his fortune, he lost it, the one thing that he always kept consistently supporting was the University of Miami and Fairchild Gardens, those were his two things, and Fairchild Gardens is certainly here. I personally believe this is like a game-changer as far as aesthetic beauty in the City. The residents, let me tell you they are going to go nuts when they find out, when they get 50,000 orchids in the swale areas in the City of Coral Gables on a yearly basis, 250,000 over 5 years. We are very fortunate, I think you are fortunate to be in the City of Coral Gables, but we are very fortunate to have Fairchild Gardens here. I like the fact that the City is going to step up to the plate so to speak, and be participating in this organization, and I was going to say that Mary Snow and the Coral Gables Foundation through the Partnership Program is also going to be part of this initiative, so I'm very thrilled as you can tell, very, very thrilled.

Mayor Cason: Fabulous really, fabulous. In fact, we mentioned this concept when we were in China when we were competing for the most livable and I hoped that, that something to do with our getting silver, but I wanted to ask a couple questions. After you put one into a tree, for example, will more grow eventually?- so you really are going to seed it with one and in over ten years the tree could be filled with....

Ms. Nanette Zapata: Oh yes. They pop off each other, its call a popping, but essentially you have one and I'm sure most of you have orchids and you've seen that, and that's what will take place. Now one of the things we will be doing is installing above reach height...

Mayor Cason: Are we going to allow people from New York to still come into our City?-(laughter).

Ms. Zapata: New Yorkers are good people. So just to reference how important – I don't know if it's just biological or attraction to plants and especially colorful blooming plants like these, but just this weekend we had 11,000 people at Fairchild buying orchids during the orchid festival...

Mayor Cason: How many people?

Ms. Zapata: 11,000.

Mayor Cason: Wow.

Ms. Zapata: And we have major events every few weeks and we have 11, 12, 13,000 people, so we are talking about gathering spaces and we are talking about pulling together the residents of Coral Gables as well as the Chief Operating Officer of the Garden, I don't think there is a better institution that does it like Fairchild hands down.

Commissioner Lago: Can I ask a few questions. Before I do, I wanted to commend the Vice Mayor for putting this together. My colleagues here joke with me, they call me "Mr. Green", but I think this is something that is spectacular, I think we should have done this a long time ago, and I commend him for putting this forth. Growing up my father had an orchid house in the back, so I got to learn about basically a whole host of work from grafting, growing orchids in this manner, so it's something that I'm very fond of and now having children I walk down the street and we look at the birds, and we look at the trees on Rabino and we see the canopy and this is something that is going to enhance why we call our City the City Beautiful.

Ms. Zapata: Right.

Commissioner Lago: This is just going to be another component to draw people into the City, so it's incredible. My question to you is this, there are different types of orchids some that grow on trees, some that grow on land on the ground, are we going to do anything in reference to ground orchids?- or is it mostly based on the canopy?

Ms. Zapata: Mostly the canopy. I have to check because I don't know off the top of my head how many terrestrial native orchids are, but our inclination is to give them a fighting chance out of arms reach.

Commissioner Lago: Something that you mentioned when I was reading what was highlighted which is incredibly important, something that I want to highlight again is that you are saying native orchids, that is the key because we are overrun with non-indigenous trees which are snuffing out the indigenous trees that we have here, so it's important that we stick with that plan; and the final question that I have for you. I know that there are some native orchids that have a rather interesting fragrance in the morning, are we going to be including any of those?- like a *sola orfis* or...?

Ms. Zapata: The concepts right now is we are starting with these four...

Commissioner Lago: OK.

Ms. Zapata:....because these are the four plants that are free and seeding.

Commissioner Lago: Perfect.

Ms. Zapata: As more plants come into play – these are very hard to seed, that's the thing and we rely on neighbors or growers to give us material, so the more we...then more will be populated.

Commissioner Lago: The good thing about at least two of those orchids is they grow quickly, so it's not like you'll see – and they flower I think more than once a year...

Ms. Zapata: Correct.

Commissioner Lago:...so you have two orchids from what I know that flower more than once a year and I grow significantly faster than the other orchids, so the trees hopefully in five years when this program comes to fruition will be full of blooming orchids.

Ms. Zapata: Correct – and a part of the other reason for these four is that you'll have blooms throughout the entire year, so we've timed it so that you have 12 months of blooming plants. So, I think the idea is terrific, I think it's a lot of fun, you need to become a volunteer, this is how you grow up; I think it would be fantastic. The fact that this is being run entirely by volunteers is great, we have students in the labs, we have students in the labs all weekend deflasking, working with scientists and we are changing the dynamic, we are creating scientists right here, we are not brain-draining South Florida any longer, creating scientists right here and horticulturists, so there is a lot more to this project than the blooming plant, this is the end result of a great process and is very exciting.

Commissioner Lago: This is something that I see people like young children out on the street to look at the trees, to look at the birds, to look at things which is – and off the TV and I don't think we use the attars anymore, but Play Station 3's and I think that's key for education.

Ms. Zapata: We are going to be doing as well, we are going to be creating walking tours like GPS have...have kids find like, what do you call it when you – scavenger hunt, but with your cell phone, everybody has a cell phone or something where you can GPS and you can send that information, have them find it, and then maybe...and they'll see be able to teach about the pollinator attraction, human, plant and animal attraction, so it's very intricate, it's very involving, it's very exciting.

Commissioner Lago: Congrats. Thank you.

Ms. Zapata: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Ms. Zapata: Congratulations to you all for having this issue.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: And ask Mary Snow to come up and let us know how you are going to be participating.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: And also introduce her because this is the first time we've had the opportunity to see Mary Snow, the new Executive Director of the Coral Gables Foundation here.

Ms. Mary Snow: Thank you for having me. We are excited about this project, the partnership, the fund within the Community Foundation; we are going to partner with the City to support this project...so it's exciting. It's in line with our mission to enhance the quality of life in the City of Coral Gables, so we are excited.

Mayor Cason: Super. Super. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Do we have a motion?

Commissioner Quesada: So moved.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Quesada makes the motion and the Vice Mayor seconds it.

City Clerk.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

[End: 11:34:50 a.m.]