

CITY OF CORAL GABLES
Economic Development Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 7, 2009, 8:00 a.m.
Development Department, 95 Merrick Way, Suite 450, Coral Gables, Florida 33134

MEMBERS	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	COMMISSIONERS
Richard DeWitt	P	P	P*	P	P	P	X	P	E	A	P	E	Mayor Donald D. Slesnick II
Ray Zomerfeld	P	P	P	E	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	Vice Mayor William Kerdyk, Jr.
Gladys Diaz Jourdain	P	E	P	P	E	P	X	P	E	P	P	P	Commissioner Maria Anderson
Dr. Al Smith	P	P	P	P	P	E	X	P	P	P	P	P	Commissioner Rafael "Ralph" Cabrera, Jr.
James Casey	E	P	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	E	P	E	Commissioner Wayne "Chip" Withers

*Present via telephone.

STAFF:

Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark, Development Director
 Jessica Wotherspoon

A = Absent

E = Excused Absence

P = Present

X = No Meeting

()= Special Meetings

GUESTS: Carol Ellis-Cutler, Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce; Gretel Salas, IT Department; Linda Blanco, Building and Zoning Department

RECORDING SECRETARY: Nancy C. Morgan, Coral Gables Services, Inc.

Meeting Motion Summary:

**Minutes of the December 3, 2008 meeting of the Economic Development Board were approved.
 The meeting absences of Board members Richard DeWitt and Jim Casey were excused.**

Economic Development Board Vice Chair Ray Zomerfeld called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. A quorum was reached.

I. Meeting Attendance:

Dr. Smith made a motion to excuse the absences of Mr. DeWitt and Mr. Casey. Ms. Diaz Jourdain seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

II. Approval of December 3, 2008 Economic Development Board Meeting Minutes:

**Dr. Smith made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 5, 2008 meeting as presented.
 Mr. Casey seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

III. Presentation on the City's website online permitting feature by Gretel Salas (IT Department) and Linda Blanco (Building and Zoning Department):

Ms. Rivenbark restated the Board's objective to help businesses in the City, and its interest in furthering streamlined City permitting responses to businesses' and homeowners' needs. During many Board meetings, issues related to permitting difficulties generated strong concern as well as a unified determination to seek and present possible solutions to facilitate timeliness and improve the experience of those navigating the permitting process in the City. Ms. Rivenbark explained that the Board was pleased with the concept of online permitting and using technology to accomplish this objective, adding that Ms. Salas and Ms. Blanco would informally brief the Board on the current status of the online permitting process.

Using a laptop for display purposes, Ms. Blanco opened the City website, oriented the Board to its features, accessed online services and explained the range of services available through that link. A new feature of online services, she explained, was permits and inspections, currently live in the system for Public Works, Fire, Parking,

Historical Resources, Building and Zoning. More departments will be added to the link. The link allows for online payments, inquiries regarding properties and applications, permits applied for/issued/closed and code enforcement violations. The link is a good tool for homeowners who want to view properties, for contractors/developers and homeowners for permitting processes and allows for many payments to be made online so people do not have to go to City Hall to pay fees and fines. This feature has reduced Building and Zoning Department telephone calls and daily activity by over 25%, and it is anticipated that the introduction of a new voice recognition system (IBR) will generate an additional reduction in direct public activity at City Hall. In summary, work load (which was at approximately 160% capacity) reductions are being achieved by the application of technology. A kiosk is in place in the Building and Zoning Department for public online access, it was suggested that a kiosk be set up by the IT Department during the Farmer's Market. Additional online features include:

- City-approved paint colors;
- Permit cards may be printed and posted in appropriate places;
- A tutorial is available to help people through various processes;
- Garage sale permits may be purchased and printed through the site;
- Information about permitting/related issues is available online 20 minutes after the action takes place;
- The program does not allow a certificate of occupancy to be issued unless all issues are completed.

Ms. Diaz Jourdain suggested easy-to-understand icons to help people navigate through the different items as the jargon is not always easy to understand. Mr. Zomerfeld encouraged extensive publicity about this service through the City's e-newsletter, Chamber of Commerce, AIA and numerous other local groups, and to ensure that City employees (especially the City Hall receptionist) know about the services so they can direct the public to its uses. Ms. Blanco said that two familiarization sessions were held in Commission Chambers to orient City employees to the system in August. Ms. Rivenbark suggested that Ms. Blanco talk with the Interim City Manager about scheduling a 15-minute overview at the end of a Commission meeting.

Ms. Blanco explained that new or relocating businesses in the City would be better served by first contacting Jose Gomez, the small business representative who guides residents and small business owners through the permitting process. She will request a link on the site to enable scheduling an appointment with Mr. Gomez.

IV. Presentation and discussion of business survey in Survey Monkey:

Ms. Wotherspoon explained that the Development Department purchased a one-year, Chamber of Commerce-recommended subscription to Survey Monkey, a service that provides sample surveys as tools for generating feedback. She distributed copies of the first survey focused on business outreach, asked the Board to review it and suggest changes to adapt it for use in the City.

During discussion, Ms. Rivenbark said that next year's occupational license applications and renewals would include a request for e-mail addresses, and also commented on the possibility of offering incentives for completing the survey. Board members made several constructive suggestions to make the survey more effective and useful, for promoting it and for producing and distributing the results. Ms. Wotherspoon will incorporate these and other incoming suggestions and reissue the survey to the Board for additional review.

V. Updates:

- a. **Stimulus packages through the League of Cities:** Regarding the City's application to the federal government through the League of Cities for infrastructure project funding from the stimulus package, Ms. Rivenbark reported that it is not yet known if funding will be issued at the state or local levels. The City's State of Florida lobbyist has been alerted if the funding is at the state level and are in discussion with the League of Cities about how to access the funding if it is approved directly for municipalities. The City filed for \$25 million in projects that are ready-to-go, and is also readying other projects tabled for lack of a funding source. As an example, City staff will recommend to the Commission a trolley depot garage (garage revenue would help pay for the cost). Issues relevant for funding are transportation, technology, green initiatives and, the primary issue, the number of jobs created by the package. The City's initial application for \$25 million in projects would create 285 jobs. The City is viewing this opportunity very seriously and will continue to

monitor it. In any event, Ms. Rivenbark concluded, the primary tool from the federal government for economic development will be public infrastructure and jobs. Governor Crist said that if the funding is sent to the State of Florida, the state will fund all of the Department of Transportation projects. The City would tangentially benefit from that effort, but has strongly suggested that the State Legislature decide to lend a more receptive ear for the City.

- b. **Miracle Mile/Giralda Avenue sidewalk program:** Ms. Rivenbark indicated that the BID would likely petition the City to provide design money to move the project forward. They have a concept plan, but without design and construction drawings, it is impossible to determine cost. The City has asked the BID how it would participate in the funding, but the BID has responded that they can't commit to specific funding until costs are known. As a result, they are going to ask to access some of the GOB monies.
- c. **Upcoming small business seminars:** Ms. Wotherspoon reported that staff is working with Action Coach to conduct small business seminars throughout the year, and discussed how the seminars will be promoted. Seminars will primarily be open to Coral Gables businesses and Chamber of Commerce members. Ms. Rivenbark added that technical assistance was identified as one of the best tools that can be provided by economic development agencies. Business survivability will be a prime focus this year. Staff is talking with a web designer about hands-on seminars that will result in completed web sites. Discussion included suggestions for other seminar topics that would help businesses remain viable, and Mr. Zomerfeld concluded that seminars hosted by the City should be more introductory and basic, which would allow the seminar facilitator to further attendees' education on an individual basis.
- d. **Signage:** Ms. Wotherspoon reported that she researched the businesses that received signage permits and surveyed them, the results of which indicated that it takes an average of four months from application to issue date, for business owners to get signage approval. Ms. Rivenbark commented that the City needs to determine how the process can be simplified and expedited.

VI. General City Updates:

- a. **Mom and Pop Small Business Grant Program:** After distributing information regarding this grant (initiated by District 7 Commissioner Carlos Gimenez), Ms. Rivenbark pointed out that attendance at the one-hour January 16 information meeting was mandatory for all businesses wishing to apply for grant funding.
- b. **Country Club property:** After the Commission approved the letter of intent subject to certain provisions, staff incorporated the provisions and issued a draft lease agreement to the proposer. The proposer will respond, after which the agreement will be reviewed by the Property Advisory, Budget Audit and Economic Development boards for input. The results of all boards' input will be brought back to the City Commission.

VII. Additional Business:

Board Goals: The Board will discuss and establish its goals at the February meeting.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

Next Economic Development Board Meeting/Joint Meeting with Budget Audit Advisory, Property Advisory, Historic Preservation boards: Wednesday, February 4, 10:00 a.m., Old Spanish Village Sales Office, 2901 Ponce de Leon Boulevard.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Swanson Rivenbark
Development Director
Secretary to the Economic Development Board