

DAVID A. DOHENY

915 Alava Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida 33146 • (305) 667-3044

[dadoheny@aol.com](mailto:dadoheny@aol.com)

24 January 2011

To the Coral Gables City Commission:

Re: Coral Gables Museum

Congratulations to the City of Coral Gables for its initiative in creating the Coral Gables Museum in the restored municipal building. The Museum has great potential as a nexus for preserving, recording and teaching our citizens about the unique history of Coral Gables for this and generations yet to come.

However, I am concerned at what I perceive to be a serious flaw in the proposed operation agreement with the Coral Gables Museum Corp., which I understand will be considered by the Commission tomorrow. In order to put my remarks into context, I should note that before I moved to Coral Gables in 1999, I served for a dozen years as vice president and general counsel for the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. In that capacity, I had the opportunity to work with many local government and non-profit groups across the nation and acquired some experience in what has worked and does not work in the field of historic preservation and local history.

As I see it, the principal flaw in the proposed agreement is the lack of any adequate standards for the operation and growth of a local history museum. While the proposed agreement goes into great detail in many respects, nowhere in its 55 pages of text is the Museum Corp. held accountable to the City for creating and adhering to any accepted standards for organizations and operations of this kind. On the contrary, in Article IV the Museum Corp. simply "agrees to operate a general museum consistent with the provisions of the Mission Statement", which in turn provides no operating, fundraising or quality standards whatever. This is so vague as to be almost meaningless.

Although I recognize that the City has the right under Article XXII to terminate the agreement in the event it determines that it is in the public interest to do so, I submit that termination terms are too vague to stand scrutiny in court

should the Museum Corp. contest the termination. That provision also refers to Article XLIII, but I can find no such article in the proposed agreement.

Museums of this kind do not operate in a vacuum. The American Association of Museums has accredited ten museums in Dade County, including Vizcaya, the Historical Museum of South Florida, the Wolfsonian/FIU and the Jewish Museum of South Florida. Such accreditation should be required of the Coral Gables Museum within a reasonable time frame. Perhaps equally appropriate, the American Association for State and Local History provides a variety of support for local history programs nationwide. At a minimum, the City should require the Museum Corp. to obtain accreditation, membership and support from these organizations and meeting their accepted organizational standards, policies and procedures, including governance and fundraising. The agreement should also require that at least one responsible Coral Gables official (or their delegates) serve as a permanent ex officio member or members of the Museum Corp.'s board of directors, to assure appropriate and timely communication between the two entities.

I respectfully submit that the some such amendments will improve the Museum's prospects for success, give the City better tools to evaluate that success and make for a smoother working relationship between the two.

Sincerely yours,

David A. Doheny

Entered into the  
Public Record during  
the City of Coral Gables  
Commission meeting  
of 1/25/11,  
in connection with  
Agenda Item E-3.

WALTER J. FOEMAN  
City Clerk

**Davis, Yolande**

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**From:** Foeman, Walter  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 25, 2011 1:49 PM  
**To:** Davis, Yolande  
**Subject:** FW: Suggested Amendments Coral Gables Museum Operating Agreement

Yoli, please enter into the record. This was referenced this morning.

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**From:** Slesnick, Donald  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 25, 2011 9:48 AM  
**To:** Foeman, Walter  
**Subject:** FW: Suggested Amendments Coral Gables Museum Operating Agreement

For the record...

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**From:** DADoheny@aol.com [mailto:DADoheny@aol.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 25, 2011 9:26 AM  
**To:** Slesnick, Donald; Kerdyk, William; Cabrera, Ralph; Anderson, Maria; Withers, Wayne  
**Subject:** Suggested Amendments Coral Gables Museum Operating Agreement

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**915 Alava Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida 33146 \* (305) 667-3044**  
**dadoheny@aol.com**

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As I see it, the principal flaw in the proposed agreement is the lack of any adequate standards for the operation and growth of a local history museum. While the proposed agreement goes into great detail in many respects, nowhere in its 55 pages of text is the Museum Corp. held accountable to the City for creating and adhering to any accepted standards for organizations and operations of this kind. On the contrary, in Article IV the Museum Corp. simply "agrees to operate a general museum consistent with the provisions of the Mission Statement", which in turn provides no operating, fundraising or quality standards whatever. This is so vague as to be almost meaningless.

Although I recognize that the City has the right under Article XXII to terminate the agreement in the event it determines that it is in the public interest to do so, I submit that those termination terms are too vague to stand scrutiny in court should the Museum Corp. contest the termination. That provision also refers to Article XLIII, but I can find no such article in the proposed agreement.

History museums do not operate in a vacuum. The American Association of Museums has accredited ten museums in Miami/Dade County, including Vizcaya, the Historical Museum of South Florida, the Wolfsonian/FIU and the Jewish Museum of South Florida. Such accreditation should be required of the Coral Gables Museum within a reasonable time frame, by the City. The American Association for State and Local History provides a variety of support for local history programs nationwide. At a minimum, the City should require the Museum Corp. to obtain accreditation, membership and support from these organizations and to meet their accepted organizational standards, policies and procedures, including those related to governance and fundraising. The agreement should also require that a responsible Coral Gables official (or his/her delegate), to be named by the Commission, serve as a permanent ex officio member of the Museum Corp.'s board of directors, to assure appropriate and timely communication between the two entities.

The amendments suggested above are intended to improve the Museum's prospects for success, give the City the needed tools to evaluate that success, or lack thereof, and make for a better working relationship between the two.

Sincerely yours,

David A. Doheny

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