

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C-1
March 27, 2018
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Historic Preservation Officer, Dona Spain

Public Speaker(s)

George Volsky, Coral Gables Resident

Agenda Item C-1 [9:09:14 a.m.]

Mayor's Comments

A discussion regarding the relevance of art and culture in the City of Coral Gables, including governance and procurement issues.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli:...not necessarily the same cast of characters, you know bring up the usual suspects. This is not – I'd like to have something different and something meaningful, which hasn't been done in Coral Gables, that's my presentation on this. Any comments?

Vice Mayor Keon: I agree. Well, I would like to see more art and more culture here also. I think that in a City that is walkable and has the downtown that we have, you know there is usable art, there are designs for chairs and for benches that you see around the world that are exceedingly interesting other than just the regular artwork that people propose and what we have seen. We should utilize some of that type of art also in our public arts and maybe a little bit more expansive a view of what is art. I also would like to – I'd like to see cultural events or things that

are billed as cultural events go through cultural affairs, instead of just through the Parks Department for permitting, because I think maybe there are things that programs and things that we hold here that are billed as cultural affairs that are not necessarily cultural affairs. They are a set of booths that sell, that have vendors who sell things. I think the Kiwanis event is never billed as a cultural event. It is billed as exactly what it is and does very well in the City and they have a very good mission, but there are other events that are billed as cultural events, they are just vendors that are collected together and it's an opportunity for people whoever is putting it on to make money from all the vendors and not necessarily a cultural event, so I'd like to see that. I'd also like to see maybe some of the parks activated, like Kerdyk Family Park. It's really a large open air space that has a gazebo in it and whatever else, that there could be, I don't know if its three times a year, whatever, that there could be a musical event there...to people that you could bring in from the outside. The University of Miami is a wonderful resource for us. Also maybe the park across the street that it could be activated. The Farmers Market brings in a lot of people, but in the other times of the year, maybe twice a year there could be an event of some sort, a musical event of some sort that could be held outside when the weather is nice that would bring, I think that recognition to our City too. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: If I may Mayor, thank you Vice Mayor. Again, like I've told you on multiple occasions, I support you in this endeavor. I think it's spectacular. I had the privilege of going to New York for the Art Fair that happened last month and I'll be attending the May Art Fair, which is a free art fair in New York. And again, I'm not comparing New York to any other City, I think that would be a disservice, but there is an opportunity here and we were able to accomplish that with your leadership in regards to the Carlos Cruz event. Everybody was clamoring about how beautiful it was and what a change, and what I mean a change, it was a positive change for the City of Coral Gables. I think there are certain things that we can do and I was going to bring this to your attention via memo, but I'll bring it to your attention now. Having Chelsea back, one of the things I was reading up about the Bloomberg Challenge was that there is a Bloomberg Mayor's Art Challenge that is due sometime in April. So, it's something that I think we should hopefully get involved in. I know it's a little short notice, but maybe we can find an artist that wants to go along with us in this RFQ. I think it's an RFQ, Request for Qualifications, and maybe we can deliver something and hopefully we can become involved in that challenge. Another thing that I think is incredibly important and it's something that you and I have discussed before in the past is the idea and the option and the opportunity of taking advantage of some of the wonderful galleries that we have in Miami-Dade County, and coming to some sort of accord with them and saying, let's showcase the beautiful sculptures that you have in storage, why don't you put them out in some of the parks in the City of Coral Gables.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: [Inaudible]

Commissioner Lago: I know there is a liability issue there and some legal hurdles that we need to jump, but when you look at, for example, in front of Bayside you'll see dozens of sculptures that were installed, I don't know if it's a short term or a long term, but they are there, and they belong either to a collector or they belong to a gallery. That opportunity that we are affording that gallery or that collector is another feather in their cap or another opportunity to say, this work was shown publicly and exhibited publicly. So, it brings up the value of that work. I support you and I think we should keep doing as much as possible.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The first thing we have to find to do, I fully support your idea, is find a place to put it, and then when we try to put some of these things some places people complain that we need another fountain or another stature of George Merrick. So first, I would like to have a mission statement that we all can buy into and then I fully support your...

Commissioner Quesada: I'm fully supportive as well. I guess my main question is how does it typically work? If you want to show art, do we pay the artist or is it free, because they are get exposure?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: As many ideas as you can come up with. Sometimes the artist gets a long term loan; sometimes we were offered six Baltero sculptures, which were on Park Avenue in New York and other places, and Bayfront Park as a six month loan; sometimes we acquire it if it's worth it and the artist gives us a good price.

Commissioner Quesada: Obviously, we are all in favor of this. I guess the big issue is just content for lack of a better term, to how do we get it, so our advisory panels...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's not the problem; the problem is identifying where to put it and getting the community to buy into it.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, we are going to be doing priority sessions with the Commission attached to budget, and so this would be a really good one for us to identify potential costs and how that fits in the overall budget priorities we are talking about, because I think, I give credit to the Historical Resources and Cultural Arts Department, because we have not given them a lot of resources in order to make that significant leap in art identity for the City; and so, costing that out, prioritizing that against some of the other projects that are critically important to the Commission, I think would be a very interesting process.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right.

Commissioner Lago: Since we are discussing this right now, maybe you can, it doesn't have to be now, but you can give me a little bit of clarification in the future. I was under the impression that on some of the projects that we had voted on the past, the art hadn't been selected yet, it was kind of still in flux. Are we going to be able to see the work that's been chosen or if they are going to make a contribution to the art fund that's perfectly fine, but if they are actually going to program their own art, is that going to come before the Commission for approval?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Of course.

Commissioner Lago: I haven't seen anything in a while.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I'm not an expert in the Art in Public Places program.

Commissioner Lago: We have somebody here who is.

Preservation Officer Spain: You have to approve all of the public art. The Art Acquisition Fund is there, it goes, if it's a private project and they elect to not pay the money and actually do art, that goes to – first the artist has to be approved by the Art Advisory Panel and then the art itself goes to them, it goes to the Cultural Development Board and then it comes here.

Commissioner Lago: I see certain projects have come before us, like about a year ago or a year and-a-half and now they are under construction. I just wanted to make sure they were going to come before us for the art approval.

Preservation Officer Spain: There isn't anything under construction that you all haven't approved, as far as I know.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: My problem is that the way, the things that I have seen that have been suggested and I hear the Art Panel rejected them, but I wonder where they came from. They were the most boring, ugliest suggestions to public art that I have ever seen and I'm very glad that the Art Panel rejected it, because if not, I would have moved to reject the Art Panel if they had approved this – Miracle Mile art, art suggested for Miracle Mile.

Preservation Officer Spain: They are not going through with those. They decided not to go through with any of those on Miracle Mile.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I know and I'm very glad and I congratulate us for not going through with that.

Preservation Officer Spain: They didn't believe it was...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Who suggested that?- who brought those things to the fore.

Preservation Officer Spain: It went through the process.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Well it's a failed process, if that's all that they could come up with.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Sir, I understand the challenge that you are asking for. Let us work amongst staff to come up with a game plan that helps identify moving forward how that mission is identified, how those priorities are put in place?- and how we can visualize the results of that plan. So let us move on that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I gave you a book on Rafael Barrios, which maybe you can circulate to the Commissioners, art that was for many months on Park Avenue, New York, and its beautiful sculptures, and the artist lives here, lives in Wynwood or somewhere, and they'd be willing to either let us buy it for a good price or give it to us for a while, or I don't know, a two year loan, something like that. That's the type of opportunity, not necessarily that we would chose that, but the opportunity that I would like for us to pursue, as opposed to getting some horrible benches on Miracle Mile that somebody suggested.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: We understand the mission. Several years ago a Botero sculpture was on loan from a gallery. We took the liability, they did not charge us, and we provided police security. So we have done that before. We understand what you are talking about. Let us go back and talk and come back with some exciting possibilities.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You've heard that the Commission is very much for the idea and let's proceed.

Commissioner Lago: Can you give me a list of projects that have been approved and the actual art that's being chosen.

Preservation Officer Spain: Sure absolutely. I think they are online, but we are happy to produce that. We'll send it through the City Manager to all of you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Something like the plaza, previously Mediterranean Village, previously Old Spanish Village, they have a development agreement of an obligation of the millions of dollars, but it is not upfront, it is before TCO. So, obviously that hasn't even started that selection process, but as it does, obviously...

Commissioner Lago: I'll give you a quick example and it was before their time. The building adjacent to La Palma, which was being completely redone, that had a plaza with a water fountain and some other features. That came before us, we didn't approve it, and then it just stayed in limbo. What ended up happening with that?- that was probably over a year ago.

Commissioner Quesada: You are saying...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The plaza is finished.

Commissioner Quesada: It's related to a Gables residential project.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: The Columbus Center had an expansion.

Commissioner Lago: Columbus Center.

Preservation Officer Spain: They never got approval for that plaza. When it was transferred to my department that was the first people that I met with, that was the very first project, but they opted out of doing art and they just paid.

Commissioner Lago: For example there are other projects on U.S.-1 that are going up, are being built right now.

Preservation Officer Spain: And we've met with them; they have been to the Arts Advisory Panel, the two projects.

Commissioner Lago: But, it hasn't come before the Commission yet.

Preservation Officer Spain: It has not, but it hasn't been approved yet and so that's going to be a recommendation to you and we are working with them.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. Thank you, thank you very much.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Anybody wants to say anything on this? George please – George Volsky.

Mr. Volsky: Good morning.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Good morning.

Commissioner Lago: Good morning.

Mr. Volsky: I think we've got to listen to the Mayor and the comments of the Commissioners. It is a two track issue here. One is what is happening here physically in the City, another is what the Mayor is suggesting, a vision of the City, its role within the County and I would say even within the state; and they just thought that it could be, the City could be what this calls for, obviously with a lot of thinking, a focus of culture of the state. I mentioned to you to propose a small city in the Alps called Davos, which I used to be there before Davos became Davos. Now it's a center every year of world economy. I believe that the City of Coral Gables could be thinking about calling some kind annual or biannual cultural conference of the state. We are the largest city or county in the state and we are without a doubt culturally predominant in Florida. We have a space for it. I'm not talking about hundreds of people who have very beautiful space in the Biltmore, which we own, and we could call upon the best brains in the state to think what the state could do to be relevant culturally, it is not; and even now I would say that we are more or less doing well, but the County says it's not doing well at all. I've observed cultural life of this County for more than 50 years. We created the first Arts Council of the County. I don't know – I would like to ask Cathy Swanson, 25 years ago when Mr. Valdes-Fauli was Mayor, we created the basis for; I would say beaurocratic setup in the City, cultural setup. Ms. Swanson what is the budget of the Cultural Board today?- 150?- 175?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: What you are talking about are the total grants, it's more than \$175,000.

Mr. Volsky: \$175.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It's more than that.

Mr. Volsky: But, the point is that it was the last time when Mr. Valdes-Fauli was Mayor it was 150, so actually we are spending less money today than we were spending 25 years or 20 years ago. So this is one local aspect. What I'm thinking about bigger picture and I would suggest that pursuant to what the Mayor has articulated that you as a body form a group of persons interested in culture, not only from – basically from Coral Gables, but also from other parts of the County to think about what I've just mentioned, the possibility of calling, perhaps even Latin American

culture, but converting Coral Gables into being sort of cultural Davos of Florida or perhaps Florida and Latin America. So, this is something that could be – You mentioned some of the things, there are small things which can be resolved beaurocratically, if you will, with one voice.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me give you an example. The longest day of the year, June 21, and Paris at least, they have street music, we had a minute ago, two beautiful kids come and read a proclamation, Reading Day in Coral Gables. We can have music by school kids, by University of Miami quartets, by schools and have music in our parks, have music – and I'm not talking about, I hate to say a name, but Chilino or whoever. I'm talking about kids performing and creating music in Coral Gables, that would be beautiful. Why don't we plan on that and have somebody and I'll find that somebody, because it's easy to say somebody, to organize this and go to the schools and say, its June, its after school, but maybe they have summer camps where the kids perform. Let's have that in Coral Gables, in front of City Hall, Hartnett Park, and parks everywhere, and Miracle Mile on the corners, I think that would be beautiful, that would be a wonderful thing for us to promote.

Mr. Volsky: Mr. Mayor, we have one facility which is not being used culturally. It's an auditorium at the Coral Gables Elementary School, which after two o'clock is always empty, because they close activities at that time. There was a time maybe 20 years ago and I pursued this with the School Board, they wanted to do this, but for some reason the price was too high, it was I think \$10 million dollars, which today is pocket money actually, and we didn't do it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: This shouldn't cost us any money.

Mr. Volsky: Well anyhow. There is, as I said, a two track solution; one is local things we can do, another things is, I'm suggesting the long range project of converting this City into a sort of cultural Davos, if possible, and for this I would imagine would need a lot of thinking and we have to go out of the box and get the best people to do it, maybe get a dozen individuals from all over the County and the City of course, and come up with both the solution for local things and for state or even national or multi-national.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you George, thank you very much.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Mr. Mayor when we were talking about the \$175,000 that's for 33 grants that you all allowed to be administered. What we can do is also calculate the projected amount for Art in Public Places, just like you saw the amount for Parks and Recreation Impact Fees; we can give you a projected amount for the Art in Public Places component, because I think that would be helpful in the large scale funding.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Mr. Volsky: Let me point out something in Art in Public Places. Art in Public Places is extremely, extremely expensive.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Yes sir.

Mr. Volsky: Extremely – and we have the, you know what the prices are, I think Commissioner Lago knows fairly well that a painting of any value goes several million dollars, we don't have that; and art possibly sculptures are even more expensive. So that is it. So, we have to look for people who would come and offer their art permanently or for a while to be exhibited here. Again, this is a thinking process suggestion, which people who know about art nationally and internationally could suggest to you and to everybody.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you George.

Commissioner Lago: And in reference to your comments. I agree with you wholeheartedly. We have a lot of affluent and educated people in this community who are very involved in the arts, but they are not going to lend us or give us their sculptures unless we continue on the trajectory that we are in right now with similar projects like the Carlos Diez project and certain other things that we have in the works. For example, the B.I.D. is working on a great project, which I think is going to bring a lot of awareness in reference to arts and culture to Miracle Mile, but before we can ask somebody to let us a multi-million dollar sculpture or multi-million dollar painting, we have to make sure, number one, we have the capabilities to ensure that nothing happens to that object; and number two, that we're are very serious.

Mr. Volsky: For that there are even federal funds for...

Commissioner Lago: And, it's also a tax haven for people who may want to donate a piece of work that could benefit the City.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Mr. Volsky: There are many things that can be done, but we need to focus that and present this thing in a logical and viable idea. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you George.

[End: 9:31:44 a.m.]

