

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

**Fink Studio Selection Committee
Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday, July 25, 2018, 4:00 p.m.
2506 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Coral Gables, Florida 33134**

SELECTION COMMITTEE:

Carolina Rendeiro, Member of Economic Development Board
Alex Silva, Member of Historic Preservation Board
Geannina Burgos, Member of Cultural Development Board
Alberto Manrara, Chair/Member of Property Advisory Board
Alex Menendez, Member of Budget Advisory Board (participated by phone)

STAFF AND GUESTS:

Leonard Roberts, Interim Director, Economic Development Department
Dona Spain, Director, Historical Resources & Cultural Arts Department
Kara Kautz, Assistant Director, Historical Resources & Cultural Arts Department
Mariana Price, Administrative Assistant, Economic Development Department

Ignacio Moralejo Ledo, Director, Centro Cultural Español (CCE)
Veronica Alvarez, Communications Officer, Centro Cultural Español (CCE)
Claudio Pastor, Executive Director, Società Dante Alighieri
Wanderson M. Dos Santos, Director of Technology and Marketing, Società Dante Alighieri
Sandra Reynaud, French teacher, Società Dante Alighieri
Andrea Rosario, German Teacher, Società Dante Alighieri
Adriana Sabino, President, Brazil-USA Cultural Center
Rocco Sodo, Ph.D., Deputy Director for Institutional Affairs, Società Dante Alighieri

Summary:

A motion to approve Centro Cultural Español (CCE) as the tenant for the 2506 Ponce de Leon Blvd., otherwise known as the Fink Studio, passed unanimously.

The meeting began at 4:00 pm. Dona Spain led a walk-thru of the H. George Fink Studio, showing the committee members all of the rooms and pointing out the historic features from the more recently added divisions, furniture, etc. Committee members reviewed the following information regarding the property and its potential tenants:



**H. George Fink Studio
2506 Ponce de Leon Blvd.**

The original studio of H. George Fink, a model for Mediterranean architecture in Coral Gables, was designed in 1925 by Fink who was one of the City's earliest and most prolific architects. He was also the cousin of Coral Gables Founder George Merrick.

In February 2016 the City Commission unanimously approved the purchase of this two-story, 4,567 sq. ft. building located at 2506 Ponce de Leon Boulevard at a cost of \$2.6 million. The building is on the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places. The money used for the purchase was from delinquent garbage fees that had recently been added to the county tax bills.

The discussion of acquiring this property began earlier in the year when Historical Resources and Cultural Arts Director Dona Spain became aware that the building was for sale and could potentially be altered for a potential restaurant.

The 2506 Ponce de Leon building is one of only two non-residential properties in Coral Gables where the historic interior has remained intact. The other is the Coral Gables Congregational Church located at 3010 DeSoto Boulevard. All of the original interior furnishings in the building were also acquired by the City.

Due to its historical significance, the City wanted to select a tenant whose use would have minimal impact on the historic interior/exterior and to provide an economic benefit to downtown Coral Gables. The inquiries including several entities, all of which were not-for-profit who understood the City's criteria. After discussions with various proposers, the two active pursuers are Centro Cultural Español (aka CCE Miami), the Spanish Cultural Center and Società Dante Alighieri (aka Italian Cultural Center) in collaboration with Alliance Francaise (French Cultural Center), and Goethe-Institut (German Cultural Center).

CCE Miami was founded in 1996 as a 501(c)(3), a not for profit corporation, and was originally located in Coral Gables up to 2010 before they located to Downtown Miami. Their objective is to promote Spanish

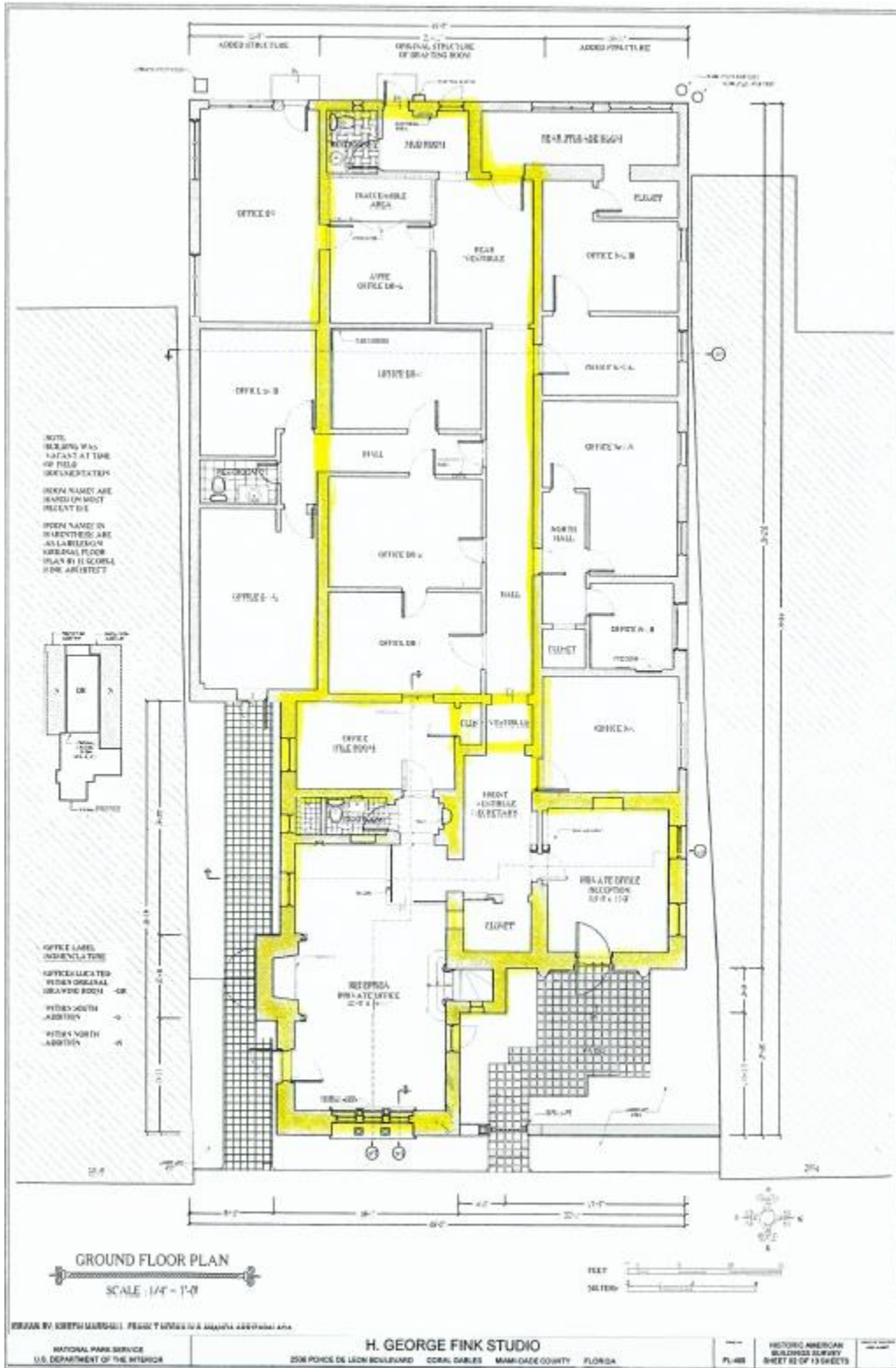
culture, as noted by their mission statement, "... is to promote the social, human and economic development in South Florida through the cultural exchange of institutions and creators from Spain, Latin America and Miami providing a platform for dialogue and education for the city." The organization is sponsored by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID) and is the only one of its kind in the US. They promote the culture through a variety of programs that include art exhibits, music, literature, conferences, performing arts and educational programming all of which are offered free to the public for ages 4 to 80 years old.

They have proposed leasing the Fink Studio for \$4,000 a month and contributing an additional \$2,500 a month to repay the City for certain renovations to the building with a lease term of 10 years and total monthly payments of \$6,500 a month. They will continue to retain their downtown Miami operations to offer microtheaters which are not allowed in the City. Their current annual operating budget is \$1,000,000 and is funded by AECID, state and local grants, sponsors and ticket revenues. The City reviewed their credit application and experience and has determined they are a credit-worthy tenant. They are currently an active corporation according to sunbiz.org.

Dante Alighieri Miami was incorporated in 1997 as a 501(c)(3), a not for profit, and has been in Coral Gables since then. Their mission is to "promote the study of the Italian language and culture throughout the world.." Dante Alighieri was formed in Italy and has branches throughout world. They offer language courses from beginners to advanced literature, in addition to their cultural activities. Their revenue sources are mainly from language classes, but also generate from membership, gift shop, and bookstore sales. They are anticipating a café in the future. They do plan on adding concerts, art exhibits, book presentations, theatre, cinema, lecturers, and food and wine programs. No further information was provided regarding the French or German cultural use of the property.

They have not proposed written lease terms, but have verbally discussed the ability to pay \$2,900 a month in rent and would consider a 10 year term. They are asking for the space in its "as is" condition and will not be doing any capital improvements. A budget was not provided for their operations. The City reviewed their credit application and experience and has determined they are a credit-worthy tenant. They are currently an active corporation according to sunbiz.org.

Floor Plan



Mr. Ignacio Moralejo, Director of Centro Cultural Español (CCE) Miami gave a video presentation of their organization. The CCE is a cultural center that belongs to a network of 17 different centers in Latin America and two in Africa. CCE is more focused on culture instead of language. They are a non-profit organization founded 23 years ago, and their office used to be in Coral Gables. The office they have in downtown includes a gallery where they host cultural activities, and two containers that host “micro-theatres” for a more intimate cultural experience. Some centers depend completely on the Spanish government, and others, like this one, are more independent organizations. Should the CCE be selected for negotiating a lease with the City, they would maintain their micro-theatre project, located at the same place their current offices reside, on Biscayne Boulevard and 15th Avenue. Each container runs a play for up to 15 people at a time. Ms. Rendeiro asked how many people would work transfer to the Coral Gables location, to which Mr. Moralejo responded five people. The CCE works to provide programming from all different disciplines, including visual arts, music, plays, lectures, etc. They incorporate programs with other South Florida institutions. During the summer, they have a program dedicated to kids, which involves music and art. The benefits to the City of Coral Gables includes that the City would be connected to a global network of these centers in Latin America, including the Dominican Republic, Mexico, etc. They believe they would have a positive impact on the area, from artists and families to students. Mr. Manrara asked the CCE if they have any activities that are for-profit. Mr. Moralejo said they only charge fees for events that serve to increase the turnout and commitment of RSVPs. Ms. Burgos offered that they could still charge fees and be a not-for-profit organization. They offer translation for some of their programming, but most of their activities are conducted in Spanish. When asked how many people their events attract, Ms. Alvarez said it depends—if it is an art exhibit it could be up to 200 people, if it’s a lecture it would be a much smaller number. They can anticipate the turnout to their events with Eventbrite. Their current location offers no nearby restaurants for patrons, so they are excited about the foot traffic that a location in the middle of Downtown Coral Gables would provide.

The CCE has collaborated with the Coral Gables Art Cinema and the Gables Stage at the Biltmore Hotel for various events. The CCE also holds cultural events for different Spanish cultures, such as the Cuban, Brazilian, Venezuelan, and Argentinian communities. Mr. Manrara asked them why being in the Fink Studio would be important to them. Mr. Moralejo said there were many reasons, some of which include the building’s central location, which makes it more accessible to pedestrians and a many of their members and program attendess are located more south than downtown anyway. He also mentioned that relocating to Coral Gables would be a natural fit that would make sense, citing the Mediterranean aesthetic and the many roads that have Spanish names. When asked if the CCE receives funding from the Spanish government, Mr. Moralejo said they receive 300,000€/year. During their presentation, Mr. Moralejo shared with the Selection Committee the CCE’s vision for how to remodel the interior of the Fink Studio. One detail of entirely removing a wall in the original drafting room would need to be revisited for historical compliance. Mr. Moralejo clarified that the revenues from the micro-theatre make up more than half of their budget, which is then reinvested into the micro-theatre. The CCE is open almost all year-round, closing only for one week around Christmas.

Claudio Pastor presented a video before the committee of Società Dante Alighieri’s (henceforth “DA Miami”) most recent events and activities. Mr. Pastor told the Selection Committee how his Italian heritage and studies in International Relations influenced him and eventually led him to start the DA Miami Chapter. DA Miami originally began as an Italian cultural institute, but over

the years expanded as the community expanded. They realized there was a need in the community for a cultural center that included more than just Italian culture, as they were reached out to by the German and French consulates to keep their own cultural initiatives going (after funding from their respective governments was downsized due to the economic downturn a decade ago). Therefore, the mission in Miami has expanded to take on a more European role. Additionally, their Brazilian partners have been with them for five years.

Adriana Sabino, President of the Centro Cultural Brasil-USA (CCBU), gave a brief presentation on how the CCBU collaborates with the Società Dante Alighieri. The CCBU, since 2003 founded the first bilingual bi-cultural program with Brazilian academic materials in Miami-Dade. Right now there is a large influx of Brazilians coming into the community. They've been working with Claudio for five years, doing big exhibitions together. She said Mr. Pastor has a vision of bringing people together through culture. They have partnered with Books & Books and created a series of lectures and have also worked with the Coral Gables Museum to create the "12 Stadiums, 12 Cities: Brazil 2014 World Soccer Destination" exhibition to showcase Brazilian architecture. Sandra Reynaud of the French contingent briefly presented on different activities they do with D.A., including teaching French to students, adults, and kids, which they believe is the best way to bring French culture to Miami. Angela Rosario, who came here 20 years ago from Germany, said they attract people from as far as Broward to teach German.

Mr. Pastor said they are in daily communication with their partner consulates, with the Italian consulate being only down the road. They also maintain regular contact with their partner consulates. On the public side, classes take place in the mornings, in small groups. Brazilian, French, German, and Italian classes do not exceed ten students, with the average being 6-7 students. If there's a cultural event, they typically hold it elsewhere, unless it is a boutique event, book presentation, or other small-scale event.

When asked how D.A. intends to use the space, Mr. Pastor said that how they use it is greatly influenced by what would be practical, acknowledging that the building was first an architectural studio for H. George Fink, and understands that the building was slightly different than it is today. He would like to see the center room, that was the drafting room for Fink, opened up again. It also coincides with its original form and he says could be used as a community space. Mr. Pastor thinks the main front room should be kept with less traffic to better preserve it.

Mr. Pastor pointed out that D.A. has an advantage that 85-90% of revenue is generated by language classes. This is what has saved them over the years, as other cultural institutions have dissolved during times of economic difficulty, when the first cuts that governments make are not uncommonly their cultural institutions abroad. The Italian government provides support that fluctuates year to year, so their principal source of income is generated from classes, benefactors and members.

Mr. Manrara asked if D.A. ever does any activities with CCE, to which he said they have done many activities, including one recently held at Caffè Abbracci. Mr. Manrara asked about their expiring lease before the end of the year, and asked Mr. Pastor that since they are already in Coral Gables, why the City shouldn't have the CCE to have the best of both worlds. Mr. Pastor explained that they did not renew the gallery space they had on purpose because they were waiting to see what happened with this space. The space they currently have works for academic

programs and small events, but not for art exhibits or larger events. They are incorporated as a not for profit in the State of Florida but have not completed the 501(c)(3) process. Mr. Manrara asked how many members they have, to which Mr. Pastor responded between 600-700 current members. Mr. Silva asked if it is their intent to complete the 501(c)(3) application, which Mr. Pastor confirmed in the affirmative. Mr. Manrara asked if the French consulate relationship is as significant as their partnership with the Brazilian and German consulates. Mr. Pastor said when the French consulate closed, they were asked to continue providing French cultural experiences. DA Miami has paired with the German consulate to offer several art exhibits, film nights with the Coral Gables Art Cinema, and concerts sponsored by the German consulate; they have done the same with French cultural programming. Ms. Sabino added that they want to do more with the City's cultural institutions because they see Coral Gables as ready for improving and augmenting its cultural offerings. The Brazilian, French, and German contingents assist in paying rent to Dante Alighieri. Mr. Manrara asked Ms. Sabino if she sees the Brazilian contingent parting ways with DA in the near future due to the large presence of Brazilians in the community. Ms. Sabino said that she didn't see that coming anytime soon given the current political climate in Brazil.

Ms. Kautz asked if DA Miami offers any children's experiences besides language classes. Mr. Pastor said they have a children's programming division that works with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, that focuses specifically on children's programs in the communities, including special events such as making pizza. This division is funded by the Italian government.

Mr. Roberts then addressed the Selection Committee, saying now that both presentations have been given, they could now discuss and review their observations to make a recommendation. He told the committee that both entities submitted their application and business plan. Dante Alighieri did not provide financial statements, but based on discussions with their existing landlord, it is evident they are financially capable of paying rent. Members then began to discuss the plans for the layout of the building, taking into consideration what kinds of remodeling would be permitted and prohibited.

Mr. Manrara stated that DA Miami is essentially a language school, whereas the CCE is a heritage and cultural center, which is significant given our geographical location in relation to Latin America. He mentioned that UM President Dr. Julio Frenk has also recently said they will be focused on the southern hemisphere. The Spanish roots go deep into this community, with Coral Gables residents being at least 50% Hispanic—who are not only Cuban, but from multiple Hispanic communities as well. CCE already has centers spread throughout South America, and Miami is their only US location. Collaboration with the CCE would be a great binding agent for the City to strengthen relationships with those locations.

Ms. Burgos suggested that perhaps DA Miami has been limited in their cultural offerings because of their location, and that just because they generate most of their revenue by way of language classes doesn't speak to what percentage of that is used towards cultural programming.

Mr. Roberts was asked if the City's intent is to secure a ten-year lease, to which he responded it would depend. A company like CCE, which gets a lot of funding from the Knight Foundation, the State of Florida, Miami Dade County, would require some kind of commitment to justify their funding. Furthermore, funding from the County is not expected to continue.

Mr. Silva asked why it was that CCE couldn't afford a market rate. Mr. Roberts answered that the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) subsidizes a large portion of their rent. Mr. Manrara made the observation that the CCE is a more concrete, solid, and established organization. He pointed out that DA Miami stating they were a not for profit in the State of Florida isn't a thing that exists. Moreover, their pending status as a 501(c)(3) calls into question why they had not already done so in their 22 years of existing in the City. Other members concurred with this discrepancy.

Mr. Roberts stated that DA Miami asked if the Selection Committee had received the letters of recommendation (which were not required as part of the application process), but were also not entirely delivered to staff hosting the meeting. Fifteen letters were submitted on behalf of DA Miami, including from former Coral Gables Mayor Jim Cason, Caffè Abbracci owner Cav. Nino Perneti, Consul Generals of Italy and Germany, the Coral Gables Cultural Affairs Council, and residents, among others.

Mr. Manrara made a motion to approve the CCE as the organization to negotiate a lease with the City, taking into consideration all the requirements of the Historical Resources Department. Ms. Rendeiro seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

It was clarified that this is a Local Historic Landmark and that the interiors are designated historic also. Therefore, all alterations will need to be approved by the Historical Resources and Cultural Arts Department and/or the Historic Preservation Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 pm.