

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-2
January 24, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Lisa Bennett, Chair of Library Advisory Board

Agenda Item 2-2 [12:49:36 p.m.]

Library Advisory Board Meeting of December 14, 2016 requesting action from the Commission.

Mayor Cason: City Manager would you – Library Advisory Board.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, I'm going to ask our Library Advisory Board members that are presenting this resolution, in addition to our Asset Manager, Leonard Roberts, and Leonard could you get that microphone from that person.

Mayor Cason: And is Lisa Bennett here still?- probably abandoned ship. OK. Let me ask Lisa Bennett to come up. We got ten minutes, if you can summarize what it is you want us to do in terms of the library.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: This was a very involved item, but now we are moving on to the Library Advisory Board, it's important for us to have the Chambers quiet.

Mayor Cason: Everybody that wants to talk about that please leave the Hall, so we can get on with this. Go ahead.

Ms. Bennett: My name is Lisa Bennett and I'm the Chair of the Library Advisory Board. Myra Silverstein is also with me and our Assistant Secretary from staff Eileen Hernandez. We had other Board members here this morning, but we were going by the agenda and we got pushed back, so they had to leave, I'm sorry. I would like to read the Executive Summary of what we are asking for and then it will be more particular as I go forward. The Library Advisory Board requests action by the City Commission to expedite renovations to the Library due to the deteriorated condition of the exterior and interior of the building, the outdated and unattractive interior fixtures and furnishings, the poor use of space for public and employee use, and in adequate technology upgrades and computer availability appropriate for 21st century library. To the extent the County is responsible for the library and despite the LA based communication with County staff regarding these problems. To date the County's efforts to maintain and improve the library have been deficient. Consequently, the LA Board strongly request that the City Commission take action to bring our historic landmark library up to the standards that residents expect of Coral Gables public facilities. There was a walk-through of the library, Commissioner Slesnick was there, the City Manager was there, Dona Spain, other staff members, some of the Board members were there. These are the comments that were in the summary of that walk-through. Deteriorated conditions of the entrance, outdoor lighting fixtures, broken floor tiles, damaged coquina wall, well water stains and molding on the building exterior, fountains inoperable, interior mildew smell, poor air conditioning, worn carpeting, dim lighting, outdated wallpaper, and poor space usage with lack of space for tutoring, studying or meeting. The second story storage area, have you ever been to the second story?

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Cason: No.

Ms. Bennett: A lot of people don't know there is a second story. It is supposedly used for storage, but for the walk-through the staff people and the Commissioners were kind of taken aback by what was being stored up there. We have some photos in this presentation that we put together for you.

Mayor Cason: And we've seen them.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And the Commissioners have it in their packet.

Ms. Bennett: Do they all have the photos?

All: Yes.

Mayor Cason: We all agree it's a mess.

Ms. Bennett: OK. It's a mess. OK. Going forward then. We are familiar with the interlocal agreement that's also in your package and we know that the agreement says that the County is supposed to maintain and repair most of these items. The City is more involved in the landscaping, that is also the primary responsibility of the County and they do not do what they need to do. The landscape services for the City has tried to supplement what the County does, Mr. Ballerman tries as hard as he can to make up for the shortfalls, he says that what they spend on landscaping is about ten percent, of what it should cost. So, what we think should happen now, I have spoken to – well there are a whole bunch of e-mails in the package; we started this project, if we can call it a project, it was our goal in the beginning of the year 2016, but actually it goes back to 2014 after the Mayor, the County Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on the future of the libraries, we started talking to the County. Ms. Abergast who is the Head Director of the County System came and talked to us at a Board meeting, and we have been trying to determine if there is a plan by the County to do any of this work. Since the walk-through in March, it's going to be a year now since the walk-through, things have gotten so much worse and if you look at those pictures you'll see how much worse it's become; and it's the Library Advisory Board's position that this building needs renovation, not just a bandaide approach. I talked to Ray Baker, who's one of the Assistant Directors of the County System a few days ago, before this meeting, because I wanted to see what the last word he had for us, and they have money allocated supposedly for the air conditioning system, those portable air conditionings. If you look at that picture with the wires hanging down the side of the building, if you had that in your house you'd have Code Enforcement there, but for six months that has been the situation at the library. It's shocking, it really is; and he tells me that there is money allocated for a new air conditioning system and maybe, they are hoping by the summer they'll begin some kind of moving forward with that. They do not have a contract; they have not found the lowest bidder. So anyway, we think that – I asked him, aside from the air conditioning, what else have you got a plan for the library. He said, possibly they have \$300,000, they could replace the carpet, fix the fountains, which he thinks is going to cost \$100,000, and then do some painting and some furniture that matches and buy some more computers. This isn't just a bandaide approach; they do not have a real plan for our library and if you look, go on their website look at the Aventura North Dade Library what that looks like, what their computer section looks like and compare it to ours. It's very sad. He told me that, I asked him are there any municipalities that have collaborated with

the County that have produced the kind of improvements that we need for our library. He suggested Bay Harbor Island and Sunny Isles where the cities have actually spent money and the County has spent money and they've collaborated, and there is nothing in that interlocal agreement that prohibits that and the agreement for that matter can be amended as long as both parties agree. It's not written in stone. We are the landlords and the County is the tenant. Our building is historic, it's in the heart of the City, right across from the Youth Center, walking distance to City Hall and the Venetian Pool, and it's been part of our history and our culture since 1927 when the Merrick family and colleagues started it. It's very important to the community; some people think that libraries aren't important, because of the digital revolution, but that's not the case. It's a very exciting time for libraries and if you just Google 21st century libraries and see what people are doing around the country to make libraries extraordinary with all this technology, it can be done, and it can be done in a historic building. We don't have an engineer's report on that building, but its big, it's dedicated space and has a lot of square footage. The upstairs if that were renovated that could be used for the librarians to work in, freeing up more space for the downstairs. We need rooms for people to collaborate. Some of the things – there are so many things that the library does for young people, for students that it's just how can you be a world class City without a world class library. So, what we would like you to do is first, to appoint someone from the City, either a new employee or someone who can work it into their existing brief to be responsible for the library, to know what's going on, to be the point man or woman for whatever is going to happen with the library, that would be very helpful. Instead of having meetings with different department heads, different people at the County and its all over the place, there is no focus. So that would be helpful; and then I think that what you should do is think about an investment in this building and in our future and in our children's future by investing in the library. I heard today that the fountain, the sculpture at the circle cost a million dollars. Mr. Baker said, I said how much would it cost, if all you can do is some redecorating for \$300,000, what would it cost to really renovate that building and make it a beautiful stunning library?- and he said well, you know it would cost a million dollars at least. But what is a million dollars?- look at what we are spending on Miracle Mile and how important that library is.

Mayor Cason: Well I think nobody disagrees with you in terms of it's an embarrassment to the City, its run down. I think it needs to be, somebody needs to fix it. I think we ought to start with the County; we give more money to the library, I think than anybody else. When we discussed this when they were cutting back on the budget, we are very, very generous on what our taxes go to the library system. We don't necessarily get back the equivalent amount. So, I think we ought to go to the Mayor of Miami-Dade, I think we ought to work through our Commissioners.

Commissioner Keon: I did. I spoke with Commissioner Suarez, because it's in his district this morning and the Chairman of the County Commission, Chairman Bovo, has also he will make his aide available to us to discuss the issues. I sent them, the City had put together this little

summary of what has been done and what needs to be done, and I sent them this summary, so they would be very happy to meet with us; and I think the focus of the library system and the County has been on the regional libraries and a lot of their dollars go into the regional libraries and some of the smaller libraries that existed in cities and in municipalities before we had a regional library system, I think they probably don't have the priority that the regional libraries do and looking at the County with the issues that the County deals with and the bulky billions that they have in their budget that I don't think it's an intention that we should fall apart over here. I think it just doesn't always rise to the level of attention that we need it to, but they seem to be very willing to have a conversation with us now to look at what we need to do and make a plan to see what will be done and what we can do and once we meet with them or staff meets with them, they will come back and give us the County plan, but we do have their attention and we do have their support to move forward with this.

Mayor Cason: And I'd be happy to write a letter, a formal letter asking the Mayor to look at the list what needs to be done and ask them to make their best efforts and then we can look at what's the cost involved from our perspective and we've got future possibilities.

Commissioner Slesnick: I like the idea too of having somebody in the City to be directly responsible.

Mayor Cason: Ask the City Manager if that's a problem.

Commissioner Keon: We can work through the County staff, but the Chairperson is – because it's Commissioner Suarez' District out of respect for Commissioner Suarez we'd like him to – and he's been very good with working with us on issues within his District, so they'll make the people available to us.

Mayor Cason: Thank you for bringing this to our attention. It's very well documented; you make the case very well. Thank everybody on the Advisory Board for doing a great job and you've got our attention, we'll follow up and see how we can fix this.

Ms. Bennett: OK. Just remember, the County has fifty (50) libraries and we only have one, and it's more important to us than it is to them and they have limited resources, so we've been talking to them for a year, and I know you have more authority than the little Library Advisory Board, but we need to be on top of this and if they don't do it, it's our library, we own it. A lot of municipalities they don't own the real estate, we own it. If you rent your commercial property to a tenant and they have certain responsibilities as a tenant and they don't follow them, they don't comply with them and the building is out of Code, who's responsible?- the owner is responsible. It's still our building and we should be the final – have the final word on what happens to it.

Commissioner Lago: We are going to give very special attention to this. I'm going to speak with Commissioner Suarez also, and my daughters go on a weekly basis, two and three times a week to this library, so I hear it from my mother-in-law who takes them every single week the current status of the library. After you have educated us more, I appreciate it and I'm going to speak to Commissioner Suarez to make sure this is a priority. I know everybody here is going to do that job also.

Ms. Bennett: Thank you very much.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, Mr. Mayor, because there is an interlocal agreement, I would recommend that you do a very nice resolution supporting these things...

Mayor Cason: Who wants to make a very nice resolution?

Commissioner Lago: I'll make a motion.

Commissioner Keon: Second.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Keon wants to second it – City Clerk let's pass it. We have to vote first, City Clerk.

(Vice Mayor Quesada: Absent)

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 4-0)

Commissioner Lago: Can you please make sure that that resolution gets sent out to not only the Mayor, but to every single Commissioner, including the Chairman of the County and to anyone who is involved with the library, County staff.

Commissioner Keon: Why don't we start with and have the discussion with the County and see what...

Commissioner Lago: It would be nice to send that out, just say urgent, in a very nice – we are not clobbering them over the head, we are just asking them.

City Attorney Leen: I would recommend putting in there a section saying, we are working with Commissioner Suarez.

Mayor Cason: I'd be happy to sign a letter if staff will draft it with the elements that we want, attach the resolution and let's hope that we get something favorable back, if not we'll look at the next option.

Ms. Bennett: Thank you. I'll say one other thing, since I waited all morning. This is the beautiful magazine that we publish every quarter; the only mention of the library in this whole magazine is the phone number and go to the County website right here under Contents. There are pages, pretty color pictures of all our facilities, tennis and swimming and the pool and the Youth Center. We asked the person on staff that's responsible for this magazine, why can't the library have a page in the magazine?- and she said, we don't have room, we can't give you a page, just give us a half a page. There is nothing in this magazine about the library. If you don't know it's part of the Miami-Dade County System, and know to go to their website, you don't know that Coral Gables has a library. The website page for the library, the Library Advisory Board did that about five years ago, before then there was nothing on the website about the library. So I think the library in Coral Gables has become sort of a lost child, because the County is involved and everything is well, the County takes care of it, but they don't all the time, and there is no reason why we can't advertise our beautiful historic library in our magazine.

Mayor Cason: So ordered.

Commissioner Slesnick: And it would be great to have the hours in there, because I keep going to the library on Thursday and it's closed on Thursdays.

Mayor Cason: Alright. Thank you very much.

[End: 1:08:55 p.m.]