

The Proposed Coral Gables Art Cinema

Introduction

The City of Coral Gables has constructed a 600-car public parking facility in the heart of the downtown and has dedicated a portion of the ground floor space for a (proposed) small non-profit art cinema that would also be available to small and emerging non-profit groups wanting to present their talents but unable to find or afford the appropriate venue. Located immediately across from Books & Books, close to the proposed Coral Gables Museum, down the street from Café Abbracci and next to the Colombian Consulate, this new addition to Aragon Avenue will help further transform the street into an accessible and affordable cultural enclave for the public to enjoy. Once finished, the multipurpose auditorium will seat 144 patrons, be fully handicapped accessible, and capable of serving as a venue for film screenings, boutique or niche film festivals, lectures, book readings and other cultural events.

The art cinema will have its own street level plaza space, and entrance way, and will have easy access to the adjoining public parking facility. Hurricane impact windows and a handicapped accessible elevator to the internal mezzanine are already in place. The Coral Gables City Commission has a \$250,000 line item in the Capital Improvement Budget for the Art Cinema build-out. This money was originally placed in the 2006/2007 CIP and rolled over to this year. In addition, a \$250,000 donation has been pledged through the Coral Gables Foundation (the Harry and Mary Perrin Fund, Donald D. Slesnick II as Personal Representative) subject to the renaming of the plaza immediately in front of the Art Cinema's main entrance to *Perrin Plaza*. The total amount earmarked for the City's portion of the build-out is \$250,000 (plus the Perrin money). Any fees required over this base amount will come from additional underwriting by the Tenant, or from Tenant's grant or fundraising efforts.

Following the completion of the Building Improvements, the Coral Gables Cinemateque, the non-profit entity recommended to run the facility, will be responsible for securing, funding, installing, and maintaining approximately \$400,000 in cinema-related equipment, including sound, seats, lighting, concession equipment, and projection equipment. (The equipment will be donated by International Cinema Equipment and MAGNA-TECH, leaders in the cinema equipment industry with clients that include Paramount Studios, Sony-Columbia Studios, Warner Brothers Studios, 20th Century Fox, Universal Studios, and Walt Disney Studios. Government and university clients include The National Archives, the US Navy (16 professional installations from Hawaii to Connecticut for the US Navy and the US Marine Corps), the White House Communications Agency, Columbia School of Broadcasting, State University of New York-Stony Brook, the University of Colorado Performing Arts Theater, and The National Archives, the US Navy, and the University of Wisconsin Student Union Theater.

Proposed Lease Terms

Although originally envisioned as a management agreement, the proposed document is in the form of a lease agreement to better reflect the relationship, terms and conditions shared between the two parties. The lease agreement calls for a ten year term plus two five year options. Rental fees would be \$15,000 per year for the first ten years, with CPI increases beginning at Year 7. Two five year option periods are also available. Option 1 would commence immediately following the conclusion of the base term with rent at \$20,000/year with annual CPI increases. Option 2 would also be for a five year period, beginning at \$25,000 with annual CPI increases. Rent would be payable on the anniversary of possession date. An annual report documenting programming and marketing activities will be submitted along with the annual rent. Permit parking discounts and a validation program are also being recommended.

Cultural spaces can't compete in Market Rate World.

With no art cinemas in downtown Coral Gables and only a limited number of small cultural venues, this project addresses multiple needs in an affordable, inclusive, and sustaining way. Previous operations in Coral Gables (Astor on Laguna Street, Cinematheque on Alcazar Avenue) were constrained by private leases on private lands and were forced to close due to escalating rents, uncertain lease terms, increased taxes, competition with multiplex venues for titles, and strong land development pressures. Even though audience support and revenues remained strong, these operations could not compete economically for the control of private land against high rise condo developments and mixed use projects able to pay top dollar. With current downtown retail rents quoted at \$60 psf and land sales surpassing the \$300 psf mark, the only way this important community cultural use can be safely and viably reintroduced into the downtown streetscape is by creatively incorporating it in government projects, like the ground floor of the City's recently completed 600-space parking garage. The only Coral Gables cinema that can currently accommodate the technical requirements (Bill Cosford) has a heavily booked calendar, a hidden location, and a large capacity of 256 seats, making smaller showings look empty. The University of Miami School of Communications (Dean Sam Grogg) is in charge of the Bill Cosford and has been passionately supportive of the proposed Art Cinema believing that it does not compete but rather complements the Cosford.

Exciting Year-round programming proposed.

In addition to daily film shows of independent and Hollywood motion pictures 7 days a week (excluding holidays), a monthly Student Filmmakers Exhibition will be programmed with independent filmmakers, allowing local and emerging filmmakers to showcase their productions in a professional cinema environment at minimal expense. Conversations are under way with representatives of the University of Miami Department of Radio, TV and Film for opportunities for enrolled students to enrich their education by interning in a real organization that would be dealing with all aspects of the media. An Actors' Studio (as seen on Bravo Cable Channel), utilizing UM Film & TV school students as the production crew is also envisioned.

Special screenings for children's films scheduled to coincide with the school calendar, along with a weekly program of classic presentations of the best 100 years of the American Cinema, accompanied by observations and insights from area Film Professors are planned. A complimentary program would also be offered for screenings of classic Cuban (and/or Spanish) films. The Cinemateque also looks forward to complementary programming with the Museum— airing films that reinforce exhibits upon request.

The space would be made available to all qualified users whose purpose is to enrich the cultural and artistic experiences available to the community, including film festivals, small chamber concerts, recitals, and lectures. Because Coral Gables is home to more than 26 consular and trade offices, this would include important international educational and cultural exchanges, as many of the governments have already expressed strong support for the project as will it provide an affordable venue for the international community (including Coral Gables' 26 Consulate and Trade offices) to present their artists and tell their stories. But this access and storytelling opportunity would not be exclusive of those diplomatic interests in Coral Gables – it would be available to the more than 75 consular or trade offices positioned in the tri-county area and also to those that may not have a Florida presence. The facility will also be offered for authors, writers, and lecturers to review and showcase their work in conjunction with Books & Books and other literary organizations. (See Attachment 1)

Affordable and open access.

This project will have important local and regional benefits in addition to positive international results. The immediate community will be served with the addition of year-round cinema offerings. It will also serve existing and emerging artists wanting affordable yet professional venues to present their talent. There will be a revitalization benefit as well, as people park in the garage, enjoy an event, visit the museum, and stroll downtown for a meal or shopping before returning to their cars.

The project will benefit the education arena through programming, competitions, and internships. School-age children will enjoy coming to the cinema for age-appropriate screenings or lectures and then crossing the street for a visit to the captivating Coral Gables Museum. College students (UMiami, FIU, MDC, and Barry are all in easy access) will enjoy the internships and the many presenting or participating opportunities for young talent that will become one of the hallmarks of the facility.

The facility will be state-of-the-art in construction and access, insuring full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities goals, and a more inclusive audience. (One enthusiastic supporter who is wheelchair bound is helping with the practical applications of access to insure that we don't just meet the code, we meet the spirit.)

Strong Support from the Cultural Community.

Cultural leaders from throughout Miami-Dade have embraced this project. These include George Neary, Associate Vice President, Cultural Tourism, Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau; Carol Ann Lafferty, former Managing Director Miami

international Film Festival; UM School of Communication Dean Sam Grogg [along with Professor William Rothman (Motion Picture Program) and UM School of Communication Assistant Professor Ron Van Gravite (Motion Picture Program)]; Claudio Pasteur, Italian Cultural Center (and also on behalf of Claudio DiPersia of the Italian Film Festival); Philippe Timon, Alliance Francais; Maria Dolores Ortega, Director Centro Cultural de Mexico; UM Frost School of Music Professor Paul Posnak; Mitch Kaplan, Owner of Books & Books; Barbara Stein, Actors Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre; Laura Bruney, Executive Director Arts & Business Council of Miami, Inc. Originating the request was the City's Cultural Development Board that remains steadfast in support for the project. Not surprisingly, it was also been celebrated by national travel writers including Herb Hiller (Florida: Beyond the Blue Horizon; Highway A1A--Florida at the Edge) and Mark Ellwood (The Rough Guide to Florida 7, The Rough Guide to Miami and South Florida). Enthusiastic letters of support have also come from residents and local businesses.

Concluding Observations

The City of Coral Gables appreciates the value that the Coral Gables Arts Cinema will add in terms of increased cultural offerings and the enhancement of quality of life. The City also realizes that incorporating the cultural space at the ground level of a city-owned parking garage enhances the garage operation by providing street level interest and taking benefit of off-peak parking hours. But, as important, the City acknowledges that a cultural project like this can only be viable with artificially low rents or public ownership and significant capital underwriting due to the equally high cost of build-out. By providing tax exempt, city-owned space with a finished layout and securing the technical equipment and furnishings in advance of opening through in-kind donations, the arts cinema budget will only have to meet ongoing operating costs rather than be burdened by overwhelming capital costs, thus making it a sustainable and affordable endeavor. The "operations only" budget also insures that other non-profit cultural groups have access to the space at affordable rates, resulting in an even greater benefit for the community.