

CITY OF CORAL GABLES
Economic Development Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 6, 2016, 8:00 a.m.
2121 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Suite 720, Coral Gables, Florida 33134

EDB MEMBERS	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	COMMISSIONERS
	'16	'16	'16	'16	'16	'16	'16	'16	'16	'15	'15	'15	
Scott Sime	P	P	P	P						P	P	P	Mayor Jim Cason
Olga Ramudo	P	E	P	E						P	P	P	Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick
Stuart McGregor	P	P	P	P						E	P	E	Commissioner Pat Keon
June Morris Chair	P	P	P	P						P	P	P	Commissioner Vince Lago
Alexander Binelo Vice Chair	P	P	E	P						P	P	P	Commissioner Frank Quesada

A = Absent
E = Excused Absence
P = Present
X = No Meeting

STAFF AND GUESTS:

Javier Betancourt, Director, Economic Development Department
Leonard Roberts, Assistant Director, Economic Development Department
Belkys Perez, Marketing & Events Specialist, Economic Development Department
Mariana Price, Administrative Assistant, Economic Development Department

Meeting Motion Summary:

A motion to approve the minutes of the March 2, 2016 meeting passed unanimously.

A motion to approve the acquisition of the six proposed properties to be used as passive parks under the NRP vision was voted for approval 3-1.

Mrs. Morris brought the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

1. Review of the March meeting minutes (Action)

Mr. McGregor made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 2, 2016 Board meeting. Mr. Sime seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

2. New protocol for reaching quorum (Action)

Javier Betancourt proposed a new protocol for determining quorum and whether or not a meeting will be held or canceled. Quorum must be achieved by midday the day before the meeting. In either event, an email will be sent out before the board meeting to confirm or cancel the meeting.

Mr. Binelo made a motion to approve the new protocol. Mr. Sime seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

3. Neighborhood Renaissance Program – Land Acquisition for Parks (Action)

Leonard Roberts presented before the board six vacant lots which are being considered for purchase as part of the Neighborhood Renaissance Program. The departments for Public Service, Parks & Recreation, and Economic Development came together and determined three criteria for considering land for purchase to become passive parks: (1) Safe & Accessible: one must not need to cross a major thoroughfare to reach the park; (2) Spacious: the park is of sufficient size to accommodate the surrounding area as a passive park; and, (3) Need: there are demands for open space in the area. The three departments have narrowed the selection down to six different spaces that meet the time period, dollar amount, safety and accessibility, spaciousness, and proximity to other parks. Four other parks have already been acquired previously; these six spaces represent the second wave. Mr. Roberts presented each of the six spaces individually, showing their locations, appraisal values, the prices the City is willing to offer for each, and why they were ideal locations for passive parks. The proposal for acquisition of these six spaces will also be evaluated by the Property Advisory Board, Budget Advisory Board, and Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, and then go on to be presented at neighborhood meetings and the City Commission.

Meetings will be held in the neighborhoods of each of the six locations to give residents the opportunity to voice their approval or disapproval of the purchase. If a majority of residents disapprove, then those opinions will be respected and another property will be considered. It would be up to the neighbors to decide what features they would want added to their local passive park (e.g., benches, gazebos, butterfly gardens, etc.). A covenant of the NRP states that the money must be used by a certain date which is soon approaching. The Commission requested that some of the NRP funds be specifically allocated for the acquisition of parks. These acquisitions would be an investment, increase the quality of life for the City, and also increase the property values of the surrounding homes. The most recent space purchased for passive park use is the Lisbon Neighborhood Park on 1015 Lisbon Avenue.

Board member Scott Sime stated that the City currently holds over \$80 million in reserves, and that when the NRP was created, it was passed as a bond that was paid for by the residents.

Chairwoman June Morris expressed her reluctance over using the funds for acquiring these land parcels, stating that the money might be better used elsewhere (such as repairing the assets the City already owns, e.g., fountains, coral structures, landscaping, etc.). Mrs. Morris and Mr. Sime highlighted how previously acquired parks were donated to the City, not purchased. She expressed concern that acquiring more land would not only eliminate the property taxes collected, but also require more resources for their upkeep and that taking on this type of liability

for the City with the uncertainty of the future (economically), is ill-timed. Mrs. Morris stated there is already plenty of green space within the city.

Mr. Roberts responded that the funds that would be used to purchase these parks have already been set aside since 2012 for this very purpose; this money was acquired through a bond that was voted on by the residents themselves. Moreover, the Historical Resources & Cultural Arts Dept. has released an RFQ for the restoration of the City's fountains, for which they have separate money allocated for this purpose. The City currently owns four other parks which also have their own funds for maintenance; money is not being pulled away from those parks for the acquisition of new ones.

Mr. Sime suggested that the board vote on the six properties individually. Mrs. Morris expressed her desire to speak with more people about this and suggested that residents may prefer to see their taxes go down instead of acquiring more parks. Mr. Betancourt emphasized the need to have a vote from the board since the item has been slated for the next commission meeting. Mr. McGregor stated the importance of maintaining and improving the properties the City already owns. Understanding that the money must be spent, he asked what other options they had for spending the money. Mr. Betancourt explained that a lot of the NRP money—aside from the \$5 million for these parks—has already been set aside for maintenance and improvement purposes. Mr. Sime also offered the perspective that acquiring these spaces would decrease the supply of houses which would then increase the demand for houses, thereby increasing their value. He cited the example of Key Biscayne purchasing public land and converting it into beautiful public spaces.

Mrs. Morris read aloud the three questions for the Economic Development Board:

Questions for the Economic Development Board:

1. *Is the proposed use in keeping with city goals and objectives?*

This transaction is appropriate in keeping with the City's NRP vision of improving the quality of life by investing in its neighborhoods. This use is in keeping with that goal.

2. *What is the economic impact to the city including, i.e. is the proposed use in keeping with a public purpose and community needs, such as expanding the city's revenue base, reducing city costs, creating jobs, creating a significant revenue stream and improving the community's overall quality of life?*

In preserving the City's quality of life by investing in parks is expected to increase surrounding property values as a result of the improved quality of life. The properties will be taken off the tax rolls, resulting in a loss of revenue of \$15,000 annually, but the benefit outweighs the cost.

3. *Are there alternatives available for the proposed disposition, including assembly of adjacent properties and can the project be accomplished under a private ownership assembly.*

There are alternatives for the sites to be used as development, but in keeping with the City's objective in improving neighborhoods the use is considered appropriate. A private developer use as a private park would not be considered highest and best; hence, it's appropriate for the City to acquire.

Mr. McGregor made a motion to accept the three questions and answers and also to vote in favor of the acquisition for the six spaces for passive parks, which was seconded by Mr. Sime. The motion was voted 3-1, with Mrs. Morris providing the dissenting vote citing the need for more study and discussion as to the merits of these purchases.

4. South Dixie Highway Corridor Master Plan - Discussion

The Economic Development Department was assigned a project by the City Commission to study the US-1 Corridor being that there is a lot of concern from the community about development taking place and its potential negative impacts. In an effort to understand what should be done, not only in terms of land use and development but also green space, transportation, and economic development issues, the city is engaging a firm, Perkins and Will, to develop a master plan for the corridor (which includes the street plus the immediate properties on either side). The scope will be influenced by substantial public engagement from both commercial property owners and nearby residents, which will be likely divided into north, central, and south sections of the corridor. The intensive public workshops will collectively determine what the vision is for the corridor. Mr. Betancourt suggested an overlay district, or series of overlay districts, could result depending upon how differently the character is defined along the corridor. This is not meant to be a transportation study (which is already taking place citywide).

Mr. Sime asked what the outcome of this study would be to which Mr. Betancourt answered that the report will have an assessment of the issues on the street with recommendations to resolve them. The Board discussed how the upcoming Underline and FPL projects may impact the study. The University of Miami is also very interested in providing input for and the outcome of the US1 Corridor Master Plan as they too own properties along the highway.

5. Other City Business

Mr. Betancourt announced that the City of Coral Gables won the REAL (Real Estate Achievers & Leaders) Award for a Community/Municipality by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. He also informed the board that the Department's Marketing & Events Specialist, Belkys Perez, was named Employee of the Month for April 2016.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mariana Price, Administrative Assistant - Economic Development Department