

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
July 26, 2016
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
Historical Resources Officer, Dona Spain**

Public Speaker(s)

**Robert Behar, Architect
Maria de la Guardia**

Agenda Item G-1 [12:18:10 a.m.]

A Resolution approving the concept for a donation of public art to be sited in Balboa Plaza, in conjunction with Townhouse on Valencia project located at 444 Valencia Avenue and Beatrice Row, project located at 2509 Anderson Road in fulfillment of the Art in Public Places requirement for public art in private development, (unanimously recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel approval/denial vote 5 to 0 and the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote 5 to 0).

Mayor Cason: G-1 – the artist is here.

Historical Resources Officer Spain: As you remember, we passed a resolution combining the Art in Public Places piece onto projects, the Valencia Townhome, the second phase of those and the Beatrice Row, and the result of the combination of the fees is a wonderful project by Roberto

Behar, R&R Studios. This comes to you as a recommendation from the Arts Advisory Panel, the Cultural Development Board; and last Thursday a Certificate of Appropriateness was issued by the Historic Preservation Board because it is adjacent to Balboa Plaza. So I think Roberto has a short PowerPoint, hopefully that we can queue up, then you can learn about the project.

Mr. Behar: Thank you for your time. My name is Roberto Behar, I'm a Professor at the University of Miami School of Architecture and this is a project that my partner and wife...with the support of historical construction and de la Guardia Architect. These are a few of the projects that we have done; the first one in the Miami Design District, so called "The Living Room," a project downtown Denver, Colorado, and for Miami just for you to have an introduction of how we work. This parking garage in Providence, Rhode Island, before and after images; and just to give you a hint that our project at the airport, which you may all know...also realized with artificial flowers. Each of the projects relates to the event. We attempt not to repeat ourselves and for each and every one of our projects to be directly related with the place where the project is located. A little bit of repercussion that our work has had over the years. We are proud to say that our projects have had a good reception, both by Architectural and Art Publications, not only by Architectural and Art Publication, but also by popular media, such as Guides to Miami and L Magazine....Design, Work Paper, etc., etc., a few books on our work, but perhaps most importantly is the project at hand today, which is located as you know in Balboa Park, Balboa Plaza, I'm sorry. Balboa Plaza is punctuated by a beautiful tree, a beautiful Banyan tree that is perhaps one of the most recognizable features of this triangular site. But the project is first and foremost inspired in Coral Gables itself. Together with Maurice ____ I am the author of "Coral Gables, An American Garden City" still today after many, many years one of the best on the City Beautiful; and to the right, the project that perhaps is more directly related with the project that you are going to be seeing in a second, which is one of Merrick's family homes and I call your attention toward the bench below the balcony in the house. It's a beautiful bench done in....stone, but I think it's quite important as we did the book we discovered the bench, I began to realize how important the public realm is in Coral Gables, not only because of the landscape project, but also because of things such as that bench that provide a private residence shares itself with the public realm in the form of a bench, welcoming others, if you wish, to take a minute and continue walking through the City. To an artist to the first one on your left....on the right....that also explore things of displacement of the interior towards the outside, nature indoors, and what we are proposing for Balboa Park what we call Mid-summer Nights Dream. A bench that recalls benches at home. The idea of the project is to bring about an element of home toward the public realm, an element that we know, such as the sofa into the public realm. In this case, build as in Merrick's time with the most typical four materials here in Coral Gables olidic limestone. Two lamps that we also designed are located to the side, two unique lamps; I should say are located to the side, painted in the traditional forest green. As you can see the size of the bench is a super

bench in a way, it's one of the largest benches in the world perhaps, sofa, thank you Maria, and we are quite sure it will become one of postcards of the City.

Mayor Cason: Can you actually sit on it. From the pictures it looks like little people on top.

Mr. Behar: Yes. Those are kids. We are also, thanks to Historic Constructions and de la Guardia Victoria Architects they are also relocating some trees from the architectural project site into Balboa Plaza and it's quite important because it helps further define the edges of the plaza, it will help further define the edges of the plaza. Some of the first working drawings of the bench, and last but not least, another image of the Mid-summer Night Dream. Thank you.

Commissioner Slesnick: Can you go back – one more. There are steps up to that bench on the front, the little tiny ones?

Mr. Behar: One step, yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: One step. OK.

Mr. Behar: Yes. The sofa is about 30 feet tall, it's a public sofa. The idea of the project as in many of our projects is to make the public realm a little bit more personal as to help citizens feel a sense of ownership of the public realm.

Historical Resources Officer Spain: Maria de la Guardia is the architect for Beatrice Row, which is one of the projects and directly across the street.

Mayor Cason: A question about the stone. It looks beautiful white now, but look at the outside of this building, which is made of the same stone, is it going to stay white?- are you going to have to power wash it?- how are you going to keep it that color?

Mr. Behar: Well as you know olidic stone periodically, not too often though because it's a natural material may need to be washed, but it is the most natural of any of the materials here in Coral Gables. As you know, the very first house is Merrick's house included was olidic stone, stone that was taken from what is now Venetian Pool, so we plan to use a similar stone.

Maria de la Guardia: I think the idea is for it not to stay as this pristine white stone because actually olidic rock when it first comes out of the ground is quite bright, very white and quite bright and then it starts to oxidize as it's exposed to oxygen. I have an olidic rock house across from Salvadore Park and things grow on it and I select what I let grow on my stone house, and so

I'm imagining that ferns are going to start growing and birds are maybe going to drop things and it will be sort of a living sculpture.

Mr. Behar: Yes, that is pretty much how we intend, to be absolutely sincere. It's pretty much in the tradition of Coral Gables. It's very important for Rosario and I for you guys to know that the project is inspired in Coral Gables. It's not a project that is foreign to the City, but one that it takes something that is very, very – its first of all part of our domestic landscape, makes it part of the public environment and in so doing make something that is quite common extraordinary. This relationship between the everyday life and the extraordinary, in a way is in this case based on the architecture of Coral Gables, in traditions that we find here in town, and for us it's a very important project, for Rosario and I it's a very important project, well in part because I spent more than half of my life here in the Gables as I teach at UM, also because of the book that took me a long time to do, and I got to know the City quite well actually.

Ms. De la Guardia: I think what...said, he's taken an urban streetscape element all to a degree where it has now transformed, it's no longer an urban streetscape element, but now he's turned it into a sculpture by affecting, by the design, by the dimensions, by the scale, by its relationship, very specific relationship to the Banyan, which is probably one of the prettiest Banyans in the Gables, because the amount of light it sits in an area that's very open, the amount of light has allowed this Banyan to grow in a very sort of symmetrical round geometric form, rather similar to the ones along the golf course where they have the space and the light and they are not mutilated by constant pruning, but they have that big mushroom, and leads me to another point. At the beginning we questioned his location of the bench where it sort of gives its back to the Banyan, so we thought; well should we be looking at the Banyan. But upon further study we realized that it was quite genius, the positioning of bench, because what is happening as you look at the site plan, what is happening is that the tree location, the trees on both sides is creating a window, a frame at the end and you have this opening where you see right through this window onto the Granada Golf Course, and at the end of that view you have those very spectacular Banyans that are tossing down the golf course, so the positioning when you sit on the bench you think that you have your back to the Banyan, when in reality you have this beautiful window and beautiful frame perfectly framing this long...past Coral Way and onto the Granada Golf Course. So we thought that it was quite...The other thing that I wanted to point out is that this park – you have all of this...traffic coming from the residential areas that need to cross Biltmore Way in order to do their exercise and walking and running around the Granada Golf Course...and Biltmore Way is really...to cross by foot. Its four lanes, plus parking, plus – it's just impossible. So all of that pedestrian traffic in the residential area comes over to this park, because its where Biltmore Way narrows from four lanes, plus parking, to just sort of a two lane country road which is...

Commissioner Keon: De Soto.

Ms. De La Guardia: De Soto – so it's where it narrows and crossing is very simple. So this part is on your way to the Granada Golf Course, and so we thought it would be nice to create a place, a sense of place – I'll meet you at the sofa, you know to go running; I'll meet you at 5 p.m. at the sofa; I'll meet you at 7 a.m. at the sofa. It becomes a gathering place or resting place on your way to doing your exercises, either going there or coming back. It's a great place to meet, because it's the place where everybody crosses in going in that direction.

Mr. Behar: And that's why we call our project social sculptures because they participate in bringing people together.

Ms. De La Guardia: The other thing that I wanted to point out is that, as you are coming down Biltmore Way toward the residential areas, you are going again, from the four lanes of traffic, plus parking really wide, and then all of a sudden it narrows down to two lanes to a pretty country road basically. It's also where you go from high density to single family all of a sudden, high density to single family. We felt that the domestic character of the sculpture was very appropriate in the introduction of the single family residential area, so we thought urbanistically it made a lot of sense.

Vice Mayor Quesada: If I could just jump in for one second. You can see the passion behind it. I think it's the most detailed presentation which we've had from artists in the past. I like it. I think it's great. I think your vision was accomplished with the final design. I think it's going to be great for that neighborhood. I see the Arts Advisory Panel recommended approval, the Cultural Development recommended approval, and therefore, I'm going to move to recommend approval as well.

Mayor Cason: Do we have a second?

Commissioner Keon: I second it. I love that that bench is a sofa. I love that sense that – and even your lighting is indoor, I mean it has that feel, like an outdoor living room. I think it's great.

Commissioner Lago: Mayor if I may one brief comment. I also want to commend Vinny, he doesn't get enough credit, he should stand up, because he's first class, he's first class and Vinny's become a friend, but I want to be very sincere that Vinny anytime that he does a project and he's a developer, he's involved but he represents Coral Gables through and through on everything that he touches, and he does not skimp. He could have easily donated to the fund and avoided this harassment, because it is what it is, dealing with the City, any City is harassment, it's not easy, even the City of Coral Gables has made it incredibly simple now on the process on

all different levels, from permitting to zoning to the Art in Public Places to get your endeavors accomplished, but I want to commend you because you do everything first class, you don't skimp, and I want to thank you and I hope that people take note of the effort that you put forth and that you continue leading on this effort.

Thank you for your kind words. One thing about this project that you guys should be aware. You did join dollars from two projects. It was actually a successful way to handle a project getting better and that was because you guys voted on that.

Commissioner Lago: But the great part about it is you are activating a piece of property that everybody drives by is dead. Now people are going to use that, so instead of what we talked about, instead of maybe going to the Granada Golf Course to work out, maybe those people will now activate this park. They don't need to go because now there is going to be lighting, now there is going to be a place for somebody can sit down. This is what we talked about, what Commissioner Slesnick mentioned before about the issue of Durango Park, which is a prime example. I live three blocks from that park on San Amaro; nobody ever uses that park unless you are walking the dog, but now I see people sitting down, a mother sitting down and her kids are throwing a baseball or football, that park is activated, why?- simple landscaping, a few benches, nothing crazy, people want passive parks, but this is an example of activation of a piece of property that has laid dormant for 9 years. We haven't done anything special, we are not invading people's public space, we are not invading, we are not bringing people in who shouldn't be there, but this is just something an activation which just brings people there.

Mr. Behar: And the creativity here is that the townhouse project doesn't have a lot of space to do anything with it, and so this is a great way to putting those dollars into public space that really work well.

Mayor Cason: Thank you. Alright, City Clerk.

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

[End: 12:36:14 p.m.]