

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-5
August 29, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

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)

Agenda Item G-5 [5:12:16 p.m.]

Presentation of updated abandoned property report and replenishment of City Commission abandoned property list.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: G-5, presentation of updated abandoned property report, Vice Mayor Keon.

Vice Mayor Keon: You know we don't need to go through all of this. There are two items I'd like to ask Dona. These homes on Florida Avenue, one is a non-homesteaded property, it seems like it has been on this list for a very long time, because it's a historic district could you please take a look at this and give them some direction; one is at 117 Florida Avenue, it was added to this list in 17, but it's been ongoing for quite a long time.

Ms. Spain: Typically those go to the Historic Preservation Board for demolition though. I know that the last one that was done is an abandoned property that was demolished, the neighborhoods wanted to know why it hadn't gone to the Historic Preservation, I will look at that...

Vice Mayor Keon: Would you look at this one at 117 Florida Avenue and see what they are doing and this one is at 134 Florida Avenue, it's says that the person does not qualify for a County grant and you were looking at assistance, it doesn't qualify based on income limits. You are assessing whether – the house sounds like it is in pretty bad condition.

Ms. Spain: That's a contributing property, I believe in the district and we tried to get grant money for that with the last go around with the County, but the property didn't qualify for affordable housing money.

Vice Mayor Keon: OK. So is the house...

Ms. Spain: Is that on the abandoned property list?

Vice Mayor Keon: Yes it is.

City Attorney Leen: Yes that's what we are discussing right now.

Vice Mayor Keon: That's what we are discussing. You need to make a decision on this.

Ms. Spain: That should not be demolished.

Vice Mayor Keon: What are you going to do with it?

Ms. Spain: I apologize, was I aware of this?

City Attorney Leen: We always consult with Historic Preservation on abandoned properties, so we either though have to find a bank that can be held responsible or we have to hold the property owner responsible or we have to fix it ourselves or we have to demolish it, that's basically the four options we have.

Vice Mayor Keon: This has been a long time on the list too, this has been 3, 4, 5 years this is ongoing.

Ms. Spain: I have to look it up, I apologize.

Vice Mayor Keon: OK. Somebody needs to come back with an answer on this house, OK, so there are two on here on Florida Avenue, we need an answer on these houses, if you can take a look.

City Attorney Leen: My apologies, I should have told her about it...

Vice Mayor Keon: Talk with Craig first...what we need to do, but get them off there.

Ms. Spain: I'll look at it tomorrow.

Vice Mayor Keon: Get them fixed. The others are currently on here, they added more to this list, because there are properties that seem to sit in Code Enforcement for long periods of time. One of these houses has the 18th extension from Code Enforcement. You know particularly, if there is no Homestead Exemption on these homes and they are not owner occupied homes, you know what, Code Enforcement you need to determine administratively what is an acceptable period of time and if they are not responsive to Code Enforcement then you need to turn them over and take action on these homes, particularly those that there is no Homestead Exemption.

City Attorney Leen: May I say one thing about it. So this list, first we wanted to commend Code Enforcement actually and you did too, I remember, because they've done an excellent job dealing with a lot of properties in Coral Gables. This list is the worst properties and by worst I mean the ones that we've had the most difficult time getting compliance or that they are causing harm to the surrounding community, they are abandoned properties, they are deteriorating, and a number of these my office is involved in directly and sometimes we do grant extensions, you know, because either they are in a court process or you know, the only alternative then is too often either demolish or to impose fines again, which the goal is not to impose fines, it's to get injunctions. But, what I wanted to tell you was the Vice Mayor has asked that this list be replenished, so we've asked each Code Enforcement Officer with the support of the City Manager's office, Peter Iglesias, and with Code Enforcement, Will Ortiz to replenish the list. Each of them go out and look for individual properties, which are abandoned or which are deteriorating and put them on the list; the second thing we've asked is that the ones that we are having a lot of trouble getting compliance to look at using our forfeiture ordinance, because the one thing I wanted to mention was, remember 1411 Mantua, which is also one of the items that we are going to talk about; 1411 Mantua that house was in disarray – the porch, the roof was falling down, it was in a terrible state. The City put it on this list and then also instituted its forfeiture ordinance with regard to that property and I wanted to report to you that not only was the property demolished, but that the City just entered into a settlement, a final settlement where the City is being paid \$65,000 to cover all of our special assessment cost for doing that, and so, it's a very effective ordinance, because if they hadn't done that they would have lost the property, because we had instituted this process. So the other thing is, we wanted to start looking for some of these properties that were having trouble getting compliance to come to you with forfeiture and to ask that you initiate the process as to those as well.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So Madam Vice Mayor, we have a staff meeting Thursday with all departments, why don't I ask the City Attorney to present this list? We as a collective unit can go over it, see what our departments should be doing to make sure that there is progress happening, but we can review all of the properties on the 31st which is two days from now.

Vice Mayor Keon: We should never have properties in the City that are badly deteriorating that affect the quality of life in the neighborhood or affect the value of homes within that neighborhood and not having them be – or not knowing about them or are not being involved in seeing that they get repaired, because they are in violation of our Code.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's a very good point.

Vice Mayor Keon: And, if they happen to be abandoned or they are non-homesteaded there are different actions we can take. Now if they are homesteaded properties and the person doesn't have the means or the ability to try and remedy it, but we can help them with that remedy. So, there are different actions and different courses that we will take depending on who occupies that home, but particularly when these are built or bought or purchased as spec homes or in the downturn of the market people have walked away from them, I think we need to take care of them now. They can't sit and wait and get 18 extensions, because if it was your next door neighbor you wouldn't want to see it not for one second.

Commissioner Lago: Quick question – we went to the County and Commissioner Suarez helped us get close to \$600,000 to rebuild two of these homes, are those homes on this list?

City Attorney Leen: As far as I know, those homes are not on this list, because those homes are owner occupied, they are not abandoned, these are just abandoned properties.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you. By the way, we are still waiting, I know we are not talking about that now, but we are still waiting for those homes, it's been like two or three years.

City Attorney Leen: May I say one other thing just to make sure you are OK with this. So, the way I read our mandate with this list is we are going to replenish a list, eliminate every deteriorating abandoned property in Coral Gables, if they are historic we are going to try to get them fixed up by the bank or we are going to seek forfeiture of them, and if they are not historic we are going to seek demolition, but also the Commission is OK with us bringing lawsuits, because we don't bring those to the Commission, we just institute the lawsuit to seek their repair and we usually will sue the bank.

Commissioner Lago: May I make a request of the City Manager?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes of course.

Commissioner Lago: Madam City Manager can you do me a favor please and request from staff for an update in regard to the monies that we were able to get from the County from Commissioner Suarez. I think we are talking about we are going on three years now and those people, I don't think anybody is living in those homes, but it would be nice to see if we could get those off the ground. Thank you.

[End: 5:20:36 p.m.]