

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-8
April 12, 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
Building Director, Bill Miner
Plans Processor, George Pino

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-8 [Start: 3:29:08 p.m.]

Presentation on the Mobile Permit Program

Mayor Cason: H-8, mobile permit service program.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Which is amazing by the way.

Mr. Miner: We want to give you a quick update on the mobile permit program. Can we have the slideshow please?- we'll start there.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And you know Vice Mayor, this is amazing and what is doubly amazing is it came from our employees as an idea of how we can better serve our residents; residents that may be older or infirmed and need extra help. So I'm really proud of the initiative that the employees have.

Mayor Cason: You guys won't be eligible for about 20 more years, but those of us over 65 come to our house now.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I can't commend enough, it's beyond spectacular. It's perfect.

Mr. Miner: As the City Manager said it was a staff initiated activity. We have Jorge Pino, George Pino and Dayron Garcia...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Well you need to initiate more because we always screw it up, up here; you guys always get it right.

Mr. Miner: But the City Manager is our champion, in terms of advice and other ways which you'll see as we move forward. I've spoken about this in other forms with many of you, and you understand that it's an initiative to move the Building Department, or a portion of the Building Department out of City Hall, and out to the community to make it mobile and to provide a special service to a special type of resident free of charge. It came out of our focus group meetings last year, where we were challenged to find ways to be more connected, to reach more to the community, and this thought came out of these two gentlemen. It addresses the needs of special needs customers, folks that have mobility problems and of course seniors. We have thirty five (35) customers to date, and I think that number is growing every day, we are almost at the 40 mark, but that's three dozen mobile permit instances which is amazing, given the fact that this is a demonstration project, we really haven't put it into high gear. The primary purpose is to; again, bring properties into compliance with Code, to close open permits, to improve government outreach to our residents, to work with our Ombudsman and the City Manager's office to respond to outstanding concerns from our residents. We want to make sure that people understand it does not replace the formal relationship between the owner, the builder, the contractors and the designers of projects. We still have many, many projects, most of our projects, in fact need to go through a traditional process of documenting the design, submitting it to the Building Department, going through the normal inspections, but there are certain types of projects that need special attention. Our targeted customers, as I said, are our seniors, disabled residents, residents with transportation restrictions. Sometimes, there may be child care issues involved. Our Victims Assistance Program has been dovetailed into this and we have several cases where folks who are eligible under the Victims Assistance Program have called up, and we've responded. We also make it available to folks who are referred to them by you, our City Manager and by some of our Boards. In the McFarlane historic neighborhood is also an area that we thought ought to have taken benefit of this special service. We are trying to keep it simple. At first, an eligible permit type are ones that are less complicated, that require just some simple paperwork; kitchens and bathroom renovations; replacement in-kind where we are taking

something out and putting something back in without additional design work; interior finishes such as flooring, drywall, ceiling materials...

Mayor Cason: On flooring, I thought a year or so we discussed an issue of permits for flooring inside and decided that we didn't have to have a permit, is that correct?

Mr. Pino: Mr. Mayor, that would be for commercial, for condominiums, they still require permits, yes sir.

Mayor Cason: OK.

Mr. Pino: They require permit to do the soundproofing that's installed and our fire inspectors still want to go out to the property and inspect those as well.

Mr. Miner: And sometimes flooring in a bathroom, a residential bathroom involves relocating fixtures temporarily and so forth, so we will help in those cases, and also just general maintenance in the area of power, washing, painting, and landscaping. The program has been briefed to several groups. You see the dates here; Code Enforcement Board was very excited about it, they will be referring cases to the mobile permit coordinators. We spoke to the McFarlane historic neighborhood; they saw a need to address it and will be taking advantage of it. I spoke to the Chamber of Commerce realtor showcase, and you were in attendance. The B.I.D. also had a realtor brokerage forum recently, I had an opportunity to talk about it then and the folks who were very, very excited about it was the Senior Advisory Board. They have put it in their newsletter now, helping us to get the word out, and then the Disabilities Affairs Advisory Board was held last week, and they too see a great benefit in the program. This was a real surprise, this was an early Christmas gift from our City Manager, and that was setting aside one of our energy efficient electric cars, Nissan Leaf, one of the first to come off the line that is dedicated to the mobile permit program, and we can't wait to get the keys and get our hands on this and get out and make use of it. So this will be marketing the program, as well as our green consciousness, which we've talked about earlier today. These two gentlemen, oh, we have brochures and flyers that have been developed recently. This is an example both English and Spanish, its double-sided, we are going to put copies out here, we are going to hand them out at events, this has just been prepared by Public Affairs, done a fantastic job helping us with the branding. So these two gentlemen are our gurus. I wanted to give them an opportunity to say a few words about it. Before I do that, we want to run a video that we've done that we think will also help us market it today.

[Note: Video was shown to the Commission]

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Mr. Mayor, I have to say, this project happened because of George and because of Dayron, but also because of Commissioner Lago. They came to him with an idea, they couldn't get traction, he brought me into it and the reason why they got the first car is because their car kept on breaking down when they were going to do their visit.

Commissioner Lago: If I could just say one thing. I know that you guys have a lot to say, but this is important. How long ago was it when you came to see me?

Mr. Pino: Approximately September/October of last year.

Commissioner Lago: These two gentlemen came to see me and they had, I think that I was on the third floor dealing with a resident and helping them with a permit or you came down and we made an appointment. I know that Bill was involved, I think we probably had like four or five meetings in my office, but they came to me with this idea and the issue was implementation, and they are going to give you a little bit more of the back story, but we've discussed a lot of interesting things today that really define what Coral Gables is all about – Green building techniques, the agenda has been so long that I forget. A lot of great things that really represent how different and what a special place it is to live in Coral Gables. From my understanding, correct me if I'm wrong, I think that we are the only City that I know of that's offering this type of door-to-door service; and we've had a lot of people who have called me and said listen, this is huge, huge for my quality of life, because a lot of people are nervous. A lot of people get scared about coming to City Hall and a lot of people can't do it, due to their day-to-day obligations or they are disabled or they are too elderly and they are nervous to go out there, but having this idea and implementing it and having 35 successful cases, I think it's just going to grow, and this is why people move to the City of Coral Gables. This is what makes us really special. Again, thank you for being allowing me to be a part of this incredible project. This is awesome and I love to tie my name to things like this.

Mayor Cason: Let me ask you if in the future, do we have a way to track permits that have not been closed to actually go out to people and say, you have just bought a house but you may not have realized you have 17 open permits. Can we get that information?- have you ever done anything with it?

Mr. Pino: Well currently when you change hands within properties you do a lien search, and now with Code Enforcement we provide the open permit search to the new property owner to the lien company, which is then provided to the new property owner. At that time currently, I deal with a lot of those multiple cases daily with open permits for new residents, or a resident buying another property in the Gables as well. So we currently provide that information. But within the mobile permit service, when we go to someone's residence, we try to provide that information as

well. We don't want to just go for that, your kitchen or bathroom or whatever you called us for, we also take the opportunity to look at your property and make sure there is nothing outstanding, or nothing that we need to take care of while we are there.

Mayor Cason: In that regard, I think about a year and-a-half ago we had two Code Enforcement officers that I think Madam Manager remember, that as they went around they found people that were invalid that had violations, and they actually went and spent their own time and money and fix the violations; painted the house, fix the porch, which was a wonderful, but again it shows our employees proactively looking to help our residents, which is tremendous.

City Attorney Leen: You know Mr. Mayor, if it's OK with the Commission, I'd like to add something about this program to the inclusion resolution in the Whereas clauses. It's really a wonderful program. I knew that it was a wonderful program; I didn't quite realize how much it would help those with disabilities.

Commissioner Slesnick: Mr. Mayor, I'd like to add roughly about 80 percent of the homes in Coral Gables, in my opinion, when they change hands and when you have a buyer looking to close, the title company comes up with the open permits, and in most real estate contracts it says, all permits must be closed. Sometimes just for painting or something else, but in the last couple of years our Code Enforcement and our Building Department has been very helpful, especially with Tony Silio on board expediting this, because it used to be you'd have to pay \$250 to go out and open a permit again and so forth, and they've been expediting the less extensive permits and it really has helped a lot, because when you do change property ownership you need to close those permits. I applaud our department and our City for expediting these and making it easier for homeowners.

Mr. Pino: When we have a lot of those open permit cases, we try to use a little common sense, as you can say, and look for life safety issues. If it's a concern that needs to be addressed, we want the homeowner to obtain the permits, close them. If it's something very minor, paint permits, a lot of times...

Commissioner Slesnick: From 1992 or something.

Mr. Pino:...then we will of course close out the permit and...

Commissioner Slesnick: Your department has been very good about helping property owners, and they are appreciative.

City Attorney Leen: One other thing. I would just like to recognize the City Manager and the Building Department for the Construction Regulation Board. It's really been revamped. You should go see it some time, because we are now prosecuting – we are doing the 40 year recertifications, but we had a meeting with Mr. Miner, and we are looking now at like these open permits. One issue is that sometimes it's the same contractor that may have a whole bunch of these open permits, and we are looking at ways to bring those cases in front of the Construction Regulation Board, to stop that happening in our City.

Commissioner Slesnick: I think it protects the homeowner too that some of these contractors that repeatedly don't close the permits and let them go, the homeowners never know that they are not closed until ten years down the line.

Mayor Cason: That's why I was suggesting for those sorts of things where you don't necessarily sell the house, but you have somebody there for 35 years and they don't realize, because somebody could have died and past to their kids and not changed the documents. You could have a whole bunch of them that are just festering there, it would be nice...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: George you've said so much. Why don't you tell one of the stories, because I get e-mails? I get e-mails from children who speak on behalf of how much help you've been to their parents, and why don't you give one story on the mobile permitting that you think is important for the Commission to hear.

Mr. Pino: Good afternoon. And one of the best cases that we've had is one of the cases that actually fits with what the Mayor just supplied, was a case on Lisbon when we had an elderly resident and he was infirmed, going through dialysis, he must have been, I think about 88, and he hired a contractor to put up a perimeter iron fence around his property. Trusting the contractor, the contractor basically went ahead and told him, oh, you don't need a permit. Ten days later Code Enforcement went inside to the gentleman, the gentleman being the resident. He contacted another contractor to do the permitting process to expedite the permit. The contractor charged him "X" amount of dollars; he paid it upfront and disappeared. So once again he basically paid twice. So he contacted me at the time for assistance, we referred him to the mobile permit. This was, I believe, one of the first pilot cases that we had. It was actually a great way to demonstrate what a team effort we had here in the City. We contacted the Board of Architects, our City Architect Carlos Mindreau got on board, he helped out with the elevation, the drawing elevations and zoning assisted us...assisted us, Code Enforcement by stopping all violations, or any kind of process with regard to going to warning to violation, etc. This was, I believe in December of last year. He was hospitalized, unfortunately the resident was hospitalized the last week of December and he passed away. His son contacted us, I want to say it was early January of 2016, and he took over for his dad for the permitting. We were able to issue the permit on January 4th. He was

completely happy about it, he was very grateful. He actually resides in South Carolina or North Carolina, if memory serves, and he stated that in his community there is nothing like that that's offered to its residents. So, I believe you are right, Commissioner Lago, that I don't think there is a jurisdiction that actually has this service currently. And one of the other things that we were going to mention was, one of the other things that we also do is, in addition to obtaining a permit we have a software that we triggers a reminder of two months prior to the permit expiring, so the permit doesn't expire, so we actually keep track of the resident and the project throughout the entire project. So two months before we give them a call, hey how is everything going with that paint permit, etc., and we are able to close it and get the inspections. So it's a full service that we do.

Mayor Cason: That's great – that's great.

Commissioner Keon: Good work.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Great work.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Lago: I commend you on your efforts. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Commissioner Keon: How nice.

[Applause]

[End: 3:46:48 p.m.]