

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting

Agenda Item I

January 11, 2011

City Commission Chambers

405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Maria Anderson (Absent)

Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.

Commissioner Wayne “Chip” Withers

City Staff

City Manager, Patrick Salerno

Interim City Attorney, Lourdes Alfonsin

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

I – City Attorney Item [Start: 10:19:57 a.m.]

Mayor Slesnick: There is an item I would like to address with my fellow Commission members and that is the process of selecting the new City Attorney, and by the way, I’d like to welcome Lourdes Alfonsin as our Interim City Attorney; Lourdes congratulations on being selected as Interim and we are delighted to have you with us here today.

Interim City Attorney Alfonsin: Thank you.

Mayor Slesnick: You are supposed to keep us out of trouble Lourdes.

Interim City Attorney Alfonsin: I’ve tried for a week and two days.

[Laughter]

Mayor Slesnick: I mean during the meetings, OK. Anyways, I would like to talk about our next step and I think that our next step if I’m not mistaken, that we had agreed to is to have a round-

robin series of interviews, personal interviews with the top candidates that we had selected, where I think we did this, if I remember correctly, from the City Manager's position each of us would be put into a room or a place within or around City Hall, and the candidates would circulate for half hour or thereabout interviews between us; these would be private interviews off the record, and following that series of round-robin interviews it would be my hope that we could then narrow the field to whatever your decision is, let's say three people, and then do public interviews with those three people. I hope that's kind of the procedure as you all see it.

Commissioner Cabrera: I concur with your process. I just want to take a step back and let the audience know that what has transpired is, that the five of us reviewed the 29-30 resumes and came back with a rating of what we consider to be, I think the decision was the top seven. Not everybody had seven, I had five, I think everybody also had...

Mayor Slesnick: Six.

Commissioner Cabrera:...you had six, I think Mr. Kerdyk, Mr. Withers and Ms. Anderson may have had seven; and what happened was we came back, and I was very pleased to see this for the most part, I was pleased to see that we have three number fives, three people that received the highest score, which means that each Commissioner considered them a finalist; followed by one number four, and then followed by two number threes. So, therefore we have our seven. Subsequent to, and incidentally the HR Director put this together and did a fine job of outlining the process for us or graphically illustrating the process. Subsequently to that we received anywhere between three to five additional resumes, and I would like to discuss that as well as a courtesy to those applicants. Now, I'll take a step further and tell you that I would like to work off this list of seven, and if for some reason...no, you may be correct, I'm not good at counting, that's why I'm in insurance, you've got three fives, you've got two threes, and one four, that's six. Six – so I'm willing to work off the six unless someone has heartburn with that, but getting back to what I really wanted to hit on is, the others that have applied since the first allotment of resumes, I'd like to keep those people there if in fact we can't make a decision based upon the top six; and I just want to know how you all feel about it.

Mayor Slesnick: I went through all the newly filed applications and it would not change my votes as I have voted to get to this six.

Commissioner Cabrera: It won't change mine either.

Mayor Slesnick: But on the other hand, I sure don't mind keeping them in the pot as we are doing with the others, if we can't come to a decision.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, yes.

Commissioner Withers: How did they evaluate against the criteria the City had established?

Commissioner Cabrera: Which ones?- the new ones?

Commissioner Withers: The new ones.

Commissioner Cabrera: The new ones. I looked at all of them, I actually made a few phone calls to people that I knew that may know these people, and I just decided that they weren't going to be...

Commissioner Withers: No, no, no, not how you did it, but how did the City; the City put them into three different categories.

Mayor Slesnick: And one of the new applicants was the second category, "Not as qualified", and then the rest were, "Not qualified".

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, that's what I saw. They called them secondary candidates and I'm trying to find the other tab, forgive me for a minute, it's here...

Commissioner Withers: I just wanted Don to confirm, that's what I remember.

Commissioner Cabrera:... "And applicants not meeting the minimum qualifications".

Commissioner Withers: That's our third category.

Commissioner Cabrera: Right.

Mayor Slesnick: So, I think that Commissioner Cabrera asked a good question, and that is, I did review the newly filed ones and did not change my opinion.

Commissioner Cabrera: That's what we talked about when you stepped out...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes, yes.

Commissioner Cabrera:...and my recommendation was going to be that we keep them in the pot, in the pipeline, but we move forward with the six. I thought it was seven, but it's actually six, we move forward with the six that we have, and if we can't make a decision based upon the six

that...but then Commissioner Withers asked, how will they that came in later, how were they classified?- they weren't classified as top candidates, they didn't live up to the top tier, that's the best answer.

Mayor Slesnick: And with six people, and if we aim at about half-an-hour, we are talking about a three hour block of time to devote to this round-robin.

Commissioner Cabrera: I know you tried very hard during the holiday season to reach out to all of us to try to reach some consensus, and I think what you were doing was completely logistical and process bound, but I had talked to the City Attorney and for the sake of transparency I think it's better to have this conversation publicly.

Mayor Slesnick: That's fine, I sure don't mine that.

Commissioner Withers: The goal is to take it to three?

Mayor Slesnick: Let's try to make that our goal, take it to three.

Commissioner Cabrera: Maybe its four, maybe its four.

Commissioner Withers: When does the City do their due diligence on their background checks?- when we get down to the last one?- or when we get down to the three or four?

Mayor Slesnick: It could do either way, but it would seem to me that if we get down to a couple or so, I mean, it takes a lot of time, and effort and money to do that.

Commissioner Cabrera: Then let's do it to the final three.

Mayor Slesnick: OK. Take it to the final three. OK. Now that we are, I think we are in agreement with that. How about if we ask the Manager to have Elsa circulate dates for us to see where we come up with a date to devote a half a day?

Commissioner Cabrera: Why don't we decide what venue we want to use? We have more venues than ever before. We always have City Hall, with its crumbling ceilings, and we have the Coral Gables Youth Center, we now have the museum, possibly the Country Club may become available to us, because I know they have smaller rooms there that may be appropriate for meetings.

Mayor Slesnick: Also the Biltmore has a bunch of good rooms that would be...

Commissioner Cabrera: The Biltmore.

Mayor Slesnick:...that they would loan us the Biltmore there is that one corridor with smaller meeting rooms that has a room that the candidates could wait and we could all each have a room.

Commissioner Cabrera: I would enjoy being away from City Hall to give the candidates a little bit more comfort, this place can be...

Mayor Slesnick: Well we are a little bit on top of each other here too...

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, yes.

Mayor Slesnick:...and if we take up all the rooms which we'd have to because of putting us all a part, we would take up somebody's workspace.

Commissioner Cabrera: Let's decide – can we decide that the Biltmore would be the first choice?- and then followed by either the Country Club...

Mayor Slesnick: I'll ask the Biltmore.

Commissioner Cabrera:...and possibly the Country Club.

Mayor Slesnick: I'm just trying to think of the rooms at the Country Club; I know we have a lot of rooms, but rooms where five of us would sit.

Commissioner Cabrera: And the other place would be the Youth Center, because we would probably have this in the daytime...

Mayor Slesnick: Yes.

Commissioner Cabrera:...it's quieter there during the morning hours.

Mayor Slesnick: The Youth Center classrooms are fine.

Commissioner Cabrera: They are fine too, yes; and everybody knows the Biltmore and everybody knows the Youth Center.

Mayor Slesnick: If you want to try the Youth Center, I don't care.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I certainly prefer the Youth Center based on the other facts.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK.

Mayor Slesnick: OK, we do the Youth Center.

Commissioner Cabrera: I don't really care; I just want to get it done.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I think the Youth Center is close, so is the Biltmore, but...

Mayor Slesnick: I mean, even if we are debating with the Biltmore for future payments, it's still our property, so and we have rights to use it.

Commissioner Cabrera: I don't want to get stuck with this. The Youth Center is good.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: The Youth Center is great.

Commissioner Cabrera: The Youth Center is fine.

Mayor Slesnick: The Youth Center is fine. OK. Mr. Manager would you speak to your team about making five, actually we'll need six rooms; we need six areas – we need five places for interviews and one place for candidates to spread out. In fact if we had the auditorium for the candidates to spread out that way they don't have to sit on top of each other. I felt a little bit badly about that during the interviews for the City Manager. I think we stuffed everybody in the conference room, it was a little uncomfortable.

Commissioner Cabrera: You know what I do; I've been communicating with the finalists already. I've kept them abreast of where we are in the process, so they've all received e-mails from me, and I'm going to continue to do so because I think that's ultimately my responsibility, not staff's, these are the people that we are going to hire. So I'm going to take it upon myself to let them know that the City will be in touch with them shortly on a possible venue in which to have the interview, alright.

Mayor Slesnick: And I would just ask that if we try our best, I mean, I know that we all have another meeting this month, I know the Manager has asked us to hold a day for briefings on another subject, but we'll circulate dates, we'll try our best to see if we can't get it done.

Commissioner Withers: Did we put a list of questions together that we all looked at?

Commissioner Cabrera: No.

Commissioner Withers: I thought we had...

Mayor Slesnick: The City Manager time...

Commissioner Withers: Didn't we have questions that we all kind of shared with each other?

Commissioner Cabrera: No, we did it afterwards, I shared that with you all afterwards; I shared my questions with you, I gave you copies of my questions, you all didn't share any of that.

Mayor Slesnick: I think maybe we tried to come up before, the public interviews, with some kind of rotational questions or something like that.

Commissioner Cabrera: But not for the private questions. I had ten, I gave them to you.

Mayor Slesnick: Well, I'd be happy to share with you what I intend to ask. As a lawyer I mean, I just wanted to – obviously I'm looking for competence, legal lawyering competence, that's certainly one thing, lawyering competence, secondly is the knowledge of municipal law, and municipal government per say, thirdly is a person dedicated to public service, fourthly is a person who I believe has the personality to be able to get along with five different personalities on the Commission and also the other public officials who they will have to work with and their staff. I mean, all those things are important to me.

Commissioner Cabrera: For me, competence and style are going to be the most important thing. Not how they dress, when I say style, but style of lawyering, professional competence.

Mayor Slesnick: So here we go. Summary is that we have six people that we are going to interview privately among us; we are going to set up a day, the Manager's team is going to help us circulate dates so that it comes from someone other than me, and we'll pick the date that we hopefully all agree on that we can give three hours to this exercise. We'll try to get the Youth Center set up, and from there we'll hopefully limit it down to three finalists, and we'll set a date for a public questioning of the three finalists.

Commissioner Cabrera: In the interim the others that applied they will just stay on standby.

Mayor Slesnick: Stay on standby, yes.

Commissioner Cabrera: Standby – and there will be no more advertising of this position.

Mayor Slesnick: We closed it as of the 31st of December.

Commissioner Cabrera: Just want to get this out on the...I want to get this public.

Mayor Slesnick: We closed the acceptance of applications the 31st of December, close of business.

Commissioner Cabrera: Just want to get it all there.

Mayor Slesnick: And by the way, I guess we should say this too, we wish Elizabeth Hernandez, our former City Attorney well. She has now taken up residence professionally at Ackerman Senterfit one of the fine law firms of Florida, and we wish her well in her new private practice. I know that I miss her already, and I'm sure we will for awhile. We will hopefully be able to have her work with the City on some of the things that she was intimately involved with while she was here. And Lourdes let us know if there is anything you should need in your tenure here. We look forward to working with you.

Interim City Attorney Alfonsin: Thank you. As do I.

Mayor Slesnick: And you've been a delight for the short period of time. So stay a delight. OK? Any other official business, if not, we are going to go down the line starting with Commissioner Cabrera, about any personal items.

[End: 10:33:45 a.m.]