

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item H-3**  
**January 8, 2008**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Slesnick Donald D. Slesnick, II**

**Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.**

**Commissioner Maria Anderson**

**Commissioner Rafael "Ralph" Cabrera, Jr.**

**Commissioner Wayne "Chip" Withers**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, David Brown**

**City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez**

**City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman**

**City Clerk Staff, Billy Urquia**

**Fire Chief Richard Cook**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Stan Hill, President of Miami-Dade County Fire Union**

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H-3 [Start: 12:06:42p.m.]

Status of Village of Pinecrest request for fire services from the City of Coral Gables

Mayor Slesnick: Mr. Cabrera will be joining us in a minute, he's outside, so Chief, David, do you want to.

City Manager Brown: Yes, thank you Mr. Mayor. I've asked Chief Cook to brief the Commission and the viewing audience and the people in television land about the beginning and ongoing negotiations with the request from the City of Pinecrest to provide them fire service; and so in an effort to provide a detailed account I've asked Chief Cook, who's been our point of contact with the City of Pinecrest to go over start to finish, what has happened, where we are right this moment, Chief Cook.

Chief Cook: Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, I'm going to brief you today on what's going on to this point, and hopefully it will clear up some lack of information, or misinformation, or fill in some areas that people don't know about at this point; I have to ask you to forgive me for my voice, I have a little sinus thing going on here, but I'm going to try to do this chronologically, so I'll move around through this. Basically we talked about how did this thing start, and you know the first and foremost is the Village of Pinecrest came to us in August, early August and sought fire services from Coral Gables. Obviously, it was a surprise to myself as it was to the City Manager, and the City Manager sat down and asked me if I would set up some parameters on what it would take for Coral Gables to do that; and some of those parameters would be this new request

for fire service must not have a negative impact on the present level of services provided to Coral Gables; there must be no cost to the City of Coral Gables obviously; the service must generate positive income to the City of Coral Gables; and also there is no obligation at any time or mandate that the City of Coral Gables completes this request unless the City Commission decides its in our best interest to do so. Having said that, I'll give you a briefing on what we found as far as what it would take to provide the Village of Pinecrest to have fire service. With the income that would be received from the Village for fire rescue service, the City would purchase new AOS fire pumper; an AOS rescue truck, that would be placed in the Village full-time; the City would also staff these vehicles full-time obviously 24/7; seven days a week with one officer and three firefighters on the pumper, and one officer and two paramedic firefighters on the rescue truck. These two units would be dedicated to the Village full-time, something that they actually don't have at this time right now. The City would also provide a full-time, forty hour per week fire safety inspector to the Village. Now I'll talk a little bit about the process, just so that we can know chronologically how things happen. The Village Manager approached the City of Coral Gables Manager, David, in mid August and inquired about the possibility. I was called into it; and at this point the Village Manager told us that on 7/10/07 they'd already passed an ordinance and filed to withdraw from Miami-Dade Fire Rescue District, which is probably Dade County. The City Manager notified the Commission in early September of their request, and that they were assigning me to evaluate the possibilities of providing this fire service in the guidelines listed above. I completed the task along with my staff and I presented to the City Manager, then sat down with the Pinecrest Village Manager and gave him a proposal for what our service could be, including number of personnel needed, the cost, number of vehicles and how we would do it. The Village Manager then asked if I could put together a draft interlocal agreement that way he could present the basic proposal to his Council, and they could look at it also. Again, the City Manager keeping the City Commission alert as to the progress of what's going on, and all parties aware that there is still no obligation on the part of the City to proceed. My staff and I presented a draft proposal to the Village Council at a special meeting that was called. At this meeting was a presentation from Coral Gables, a presentation from their present server, Miami-Dade County. At the conclusion of this meeting, the Village Council voted to take the question of opting out of Miami-Dade Fire Service to their residents; they decided to let the residents vote on it. They also voted to conduct three open public meetings on the issue with the residents as informational sessions for their voters. At that would be both Coral Gables and Miami-Dade County, to provide information so the voters can decide. The Village of Pinecrest will conduct this municipal election on March 4, 2008, to consider the option of opting out of fire service coverage from Miami-Dade County. Again, part of the reason for them going through that process after they filed their ordinance in July, Miami-Dade County filed an ordinance stating that no municipality can opt out of their present service. So this is the route that they told me they have to take. Obviously if the above vote is positive to opt out of coverage from Miami-Dade Fire, the Village would then probably have to consider some legal action against the County, because I'm not sure that that two would agree on whether opting out is legal or not, that's not in my realm to consider. If the above process is complete, and it's the will of the Coral Gables Commission to proceed, the agreement would then be executed; it would be an interlocal agreement. Upon execution of the agreement, keeping

in mind that the City is under no obligation to complete this process, the City would then hire the needed personnel to purchase the proper....

Mayor Slesnick: Excuse me, could we turn the phones off please or take it out of the room. Thank you.

Chief Cook: A little bit about the cost, the truth concerning the cost, because I've seen different things flying around that. There's been some concern in reference to what the citizens of Coral Gables pay for service versus what the citizens of Village of Pinecrest would pay for this services, and obviously by trying to figure out this cost by dividing the number of residents into the cost, is like mixing apples and oranges, it just can't be calculated that way. The first year's cost to the Village of Pinecrest includes approximately eight hundred thousand dollars (\$800,000) worth of equipment needed for Pinecrest, such as the rescue trucks, and the supplies on it and the pumper. It also must be noted that on a daily basis Coral Gables has a minimum of eleven fire units on duty everyday, whereas the proposal for Pinecrest would only be two units. The City also operates a support staff of eleven (11) personnel, which Pinecrest would not have to have, because that's part of the deal. The City also has three fire stations on a daily basis, which Pinecrest doesn't have at this time, but one of the most important issues in looking at this whole thing is the differences that our communities have themselves. City of Coral Gables has over forty (40) high rise buildings or business of eight stories or more, Pinecrest has none. City of Coral Gables has over fifty (50) mid rise buildings or businesses between four and seven stories, Pinecrest has only four; the City has over seventeen thousand (17,000) residential units in the City, and Pinecrest has about sixty-two hundred (6,200) somewhere in that range. So the differences in what we serve and what we provide coverage for are completely different. Obviously Coral Gables is much bigger and requires much more service. Another factor that you have to look at is amount of calls for services; Pinecrest averages about twelve hundred (1,200) calls per year for the last four or five years somewhere in that area; while the City averages over seven thousand (7,000) calls. Generally, Pinecrest has on the EMS side over five hundred and ten (510) life threatening calls for services; and on an average three to four hundred (300-400) people to transport by EMS; again these are small numbers when compared to Coral Gables. As a draft proposal, we put that out, there is still no real obligation on the part of the City to proceed with this process; and as I stated earlier, it is like taking apples and oranges, the service we provide to Pinecrest would be totally different to what we provide to Coral Gables, we can't figure out a cost based on the number of personnel divided by the amount of money. And all these as noted earlier, any cost for services related to this proposed service would be borne completely by the Village. I'll talk a little about – I read something about mutual aid in the newspaper, so I'll address that; there is apparently some misinformation that someone is circulating around, stating that Coral Gables Fire Department depends on a daily basis on Miami-Dade County for back-up and routine and major fire calls. That information is basically false, and I'll elaborate a little bit. I'll talk a little bit about mutual aid; it's a process where each Fire Department in this County has the ability to call on its neighbor for help when needed. Our staff calls on a routine basis if we have a high rise fire; we do call on a routine basis on a high rise fire just to make sure we have the personnel there. It's easier to send them back to say we don't need you,

than to get into a high rise fire and not have those people there. We use mutual aid for Miami, Key Biscayne, Hialeah, Miami Beach, Miami-Dade County, on a routine basis, not so much Miami Beach or Key Biscayne, but we have provided them with mutual aid in the past. We also call mutual aid if we are busy working various emergencies at the same time, and have them back-up the fire stations to make sure our fire stations are covered. That's how mutual aid works; it works both ways, we provide mutual aid to the other departments, they provide it to us. More importantly the Coral Gables Fire Department handles over ninety-nine percent (99%) of our calls without ever calling mutual aid at all. I just wanted to clear that up; that was something that was out there; we all do utilize it, and its there on a daily basis if needed. And that's pretty much where we're at. I'll entertain any questions you all have.

Commissioner Anderson: I have – when the Manager started telling us about this several months ago, I forget when it was, one of the concerns I had, and I still have, and first of all if it were to come to fruition it probably would be several years from what I understand it based on the legalities, and depending on the agreement I would be supportive for the income, but my concern is perception and reality; I think what's been a problem for many people is they perceive that we are going to have dilution of services, and you know that's a realistic perception, and perception becomes reality. Another thing is there has to be some education; if this were to go forward, this has to be educated, and I think there has to be some really strong lines of distinction. When we are, whatever, I'm sorry, the number of firefighters that would be assigned to Pinecrest.

Chief Cook: There would actually be twenty eight (28) firefighters.

Commissioner Anderson: Twenty eight (28); how I would begin to distinguish and further do that is through a different tax system, so that we know they are the Pinecrest; whether they rerun them, but they have to be dedicated some way to the Pinecrest with a patch, with a uniform, and there has to be some real strong definitions as to what the responsibilities are. Because right now if we are overseeing it and we are wearing the same uniform people are going to have that perception that we are diluting our services. So my concern is if we proceed into the future that we make sure that we do things right and that we educate, and that we distinguish who's who, whether they are ours we have to distinguish it clearly through an agreement and through some other vehicles to make sure that people know that Coral Gables is receiving its fair share, and its proper share of fire rescue services, and that Pinecrest under the agreement does the same. I just want to make sure there are lines of distinction, and that perceptions are cleared up, and that we really do what we say we are going to do.

Chief Cook: Yes ma'am.

Commissioner Cabrera: Chief, I'm going to ask a couple questions and then come back and ask some more as my colleagues bring up topics that are of interest to me and I may want to segway. Let me get started by asking, and I was out of the room when you started your presentation so if you've said this already, I apologize to you and the

audience. What was the genesis of this?- was it the Village of Pinecrest coming to us, or was it us going to them?

Chief Cook: No sir; the Village of Pinecrest came to us their City Manager in August, and asked us for fire service.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK. Here's what I surmise from that response that there was a level of dissatisfaction with the present services that they were receiving.

Chief Cook: I don't believe that is the case; I believe the case was monetary.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK. So it was a financially driven decision to come to Coral Gables.

Chief Cook: As far as I was told.

Commissioner Cabrera: Alright, just want to get that out in the open. When the Manager spoke to me very briefly about this, and it happened right after the budget cycle, the two issues that were appealing were, one, the ability to generate revenue without increasing taxes or increasing the cost of services to the citizens; and two, I was, I don't know, I don't want to say lead to believe, but I came away believing that by having a station under our supervision in Pinecrest it would improve our capabilities to Kings Bay, and since Don Slesnick already brought up an old vote, I'll bring back the Kings Bay vote for a second; one of the concerns that I had for not supporting the annexation of Kings Bay was our ability to provide fire services, public safety services; so I came away with the impression from my very brief conversation with the Manager that this in fact could enhance our capabilities to the southern communities.

Chief Cook: What would happen is we would still provide service to Coral Gables; if we mutual aid the units in Pinecrest would then be able to respond in mutual aid.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK, so they will play a supporting role.

Chief Cook: They could play a supporting role; they would not automatically...

Commissioner Cabrera: Be dispatched.

Chief Cook: ...respond to Coral Gables. Yes.

Commissioner Cabrera: I need to better understand that; that's still kind of vague to me; you want to jump in, go ahead.

City Manager Brown: Did you hear the discussion?- were you in the room when he talked about how mutual aid works?

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes. I only missed his first ninety seconds.

City Manager Brown: The mutual aid is where it would come in, we would have it; if we needed help we could call on Pinecrest station to help us.

Commissioner Cabrera: But that station – OK then that causes me to segway, this causes me to segway into something else; that station would not be a twenty four-seven (24/7) station?

Chief Cook: Pinecrest? Yes sir.

Commissioner Cabrera: It would be. OK. I haven't seen the contract; I know there is one floating around, a draft of a contract, but I haven't seen it.

City Manager Brown: A very rough draft.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK.

Chief Cook: Yes sir, it would be full time, twenty four-seven (24/7).

Commissioner Cabrera: We have a hundred and forty nine fire fighters today.

Chief Cook: Yes sir.

Commissioner Cabrera: And this would call for an additional twenty-eight (28).

Chief Cook: Twenty-eight (28) plus a fire inspector.

Commissioner Cabrera: Right. What if, now I'm going to play some "what if" roles; what if we go and we jump on this Pinecrest bandwagon and we make this whole thing into a reality, and we experiment for the sake of calling it an experiment, doesn't pan out, based upon what I read in the Miami Herald we would then take those twenty-eight fire-fighters, because we would no longer be needing them in the experiment because it was one that we weren't going to follow, and we would somehow assimilate them back into our fire department.

Chief Cook: Yes sir. David and I were discussing that on how we would have a level of service; they couldn't just stop in one day or a year, we'd have to have a way to...

Commissioner Cabrera: A transitional period.

City Manager Brown: Commissioner, that's where the draft is a draft. Mr. Lombardi and I would have to agree that if some period of time in the future, whether its five years, ten years, fifteen years the agreement ceases to exist, then I would ask Pinecrest to be responsible for the cost of those firefighters on an ongoing basis until such time they could be assimilated back into our force through retirements, or whatever, or that they

take the firefighters with them for whatever purpose they would have fire service not provided by the Gables.

Commissioner Cabrera: I just see that as being a very long drawn, and I'll tell you why, because every year one of the charts that you love to show us in terms of personnel is fire, police, and general employees. In fire, and this year I even commented on this during the budget cycle, fire has stayed constant at one hundred and forty-nine (149) for the last thirteen, fourteen, possibly fifteen years; and that's because of the physical plant in the apparatus that requires us to add firefighters. I have a real strong concern if this experiment would move forward and we did this, that somehow the citizens of Coral Gables would be financially protected from the financial liability of absorbing twenty-eight firefighters and having no place for them to go and work.

City Manager Brown: I had that same concern and without that kind of guarantee we have a problem.

Commissioner Cabrera: My last question for now is, if we go forward with the experiment, maybe we shouldn't call it an experiment, the initiative, because I don't want to sound bias in either direction, but if we were to go forward, how would this impact our ratings; the ratings that you constantly are striving to meet, and achieve, and maintain?

Chief Cook: We would not change our level of service at all in Coral Gables. Pinecrest has another issue, they are their own community; and as our contact [inaudible] it won't affect Coral Gables as long as we are not providing automatic aid to that facility.

Commissioner Cabrera: So we would not be impacted adversely from say, the ISO coming in here and saying, well we've got to reconsider your ratings.

Chief Cook: Not from conversations that we've had.

Commissioner Cabrera: We need to get some sort of confirmation on that one.

City Manager Brown: As I said, and I would use the same words I used on the financial support of Pinecrest for those firefighters left over; if its going to affect our ratings, I have a problem also, and if we can't deal with that and can't figure out how to protect our ratings, then Mr. Lombardi and I would have to figure it out.

Commissioner Cabrera: This is the last one, and this is the loaded one, OK; here's going to be the problem for me, I know there are people out here that don't like it, and I've got people from the County that don't like it; and I know the politicians are already threatening body bags in Coral Gables, but you know, twenty-eight new firefighters, I think pension plan right there; and I'm going pension, and payroll, and everything else. You know how I feel about the pension plan, and I think how everybody on this Commission feels about the pension plan, I'm not about to go in and add twenty-eight new firefighters with our current system in place.

City Manager Brown: Another excellent point that we have to deal with and I'm not excited about putting twenty-eight new fire fighters on our pension plan either, so that would be another issue in that draft proposal that has to be ironed out.

Mayor Slesnick: Well, not just the draft proposal; we are talking about two, three years down the road, and if we haven't straightened up the issue before two or three years then we are all in trouble.

Commissioner Cabrera: But Don, it's been six years.

Mayor Slesnick: I just said were; I said if we haven't it would rise or fall on the Pinecrest deal, its going to arise or fall here.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, yes. And then I'll come back later about the political ramifications.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes, I have a couple questions. First of all when you made your draft proposal to the Village of Pinecrest, did that detail of the financial arrangement, and was that pretty much agreed upon, the financial arrangement between the two?

Chief Cook: That was part of it.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: That was part of it – and could you elaborate a little bit on the financial arrangement and how that would work out.

Chief Cook: Six million dollars for the first year...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Six million dollars for the first year.

Chief Cook: ...of service in Pinecrest; five point two five million, we did it on a five year basis every year thereafter.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: So the six million dollars would be basically for the first year, and a portion of that, I guess, seven hundred and fifty eight hundred thousand dollars would be for the purchase of new vehicles to service that location; and the other five point two five million dollars would be consistent as it is from that point forward to provide for the personnel, I guess, would be the other portion of that, is that correct?

Chief Cook: Yes sir, that's correct.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: And then of the five point two five million dollars, what profit or excess would come to the City of Coral Gables, what would be the breakdown more or less, and when you answer that question as part of the salary structure, would the pension be a portion of the salary structure when you figure the financial arrangements out?

Chief Cook: All the salaries and everything were figured with pension, full benefits.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Full benefits as it exists right now.

Chief Cook: As it exist right now.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: So then answer my question, taking into consideration that what would be the net for the City of Coral Gables?

Chief Cook: Around two million dollars (\$2M).

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Two million dollars, alright. You started off your presentation by saying that, and subscribe to this as I'm sure all the other Commissioners do; the one thing that you kept into account is that it would not have a negative impact on our existing services for our residents for the City of Coral Gables, correct.

Chief Cook: Yes.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: In your opinion, does the presentation providing the services with the twenty-eight people plus the one fire marshal that goes around, would it possibly impact our services whatsoever to any of our existing residents to the City of Coral Gables, anyway?

Chief Cook: Only on a basis when we put other units such as a building fire when we respond units out of station three or station two to back-up; when we do back that up we are taking them out of Coral Gables.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: So that would impact it slightly or an occasional basis, or how does that work?

Chief Cook: Yes sir. Anytime any of our units respond outside of Coral Gables, no matter where they go outside of Coral Gables, it leaves a void.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Would that be different than what it is right now.

Chief Cook: Right now the only time we would go in there is if Miami-Dade County called us...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: If you were backing up.

Chief Cook: Yes sir.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: So right now you could actually service – you would be servicing a location in Pinecrest, you could actually move in there and then you would have to back-up your units accordingly, is that correct?

Chief Cook: If you responded out of station three for back-up, we would have to move units back down to station's three areas for coverage.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: So it could slightly impact the existing site.

Commissioner Cabrera: But that happens today, you know that right?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: He said it would be more significant if we...

Commissioner Cabrera: You wouldn't believe how much it happens today. I've ridden with them and they've had to do that because of calls – forget leaving the Gables, just calls down south.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: But he's saying it a little bit different, aren't you?- could you expound upon it a little bit further and compare the two as we exist now and what could occur.

Chief Cook: Right now we only respond to those areas outside of Coral Gables when we are called to; if we took over Pinecrest we would respond there as a first call of mutual aid, we'd be the first line.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: First call of mutual aid, so you'd be the first call instead of a backup. So it is a little bit different than how we are right now?

Chief Cook: Yes sir.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Here's how I would be for this overall situation in taking into account, certainly there are many ramifications it would have to go through, and we are just talking conjecture right now, but in my opinion if we were to move forward what I would look for doing is taking the two million dollars that we receive, and I would ask you, Chief Cook, or how is the Chief at that point to come up with a way that we could upgrade our fire department, and take a portion of that two million dollars and allocate it to the fire department, not specifically for the operating budget to balance our budget, but to upgrade that so that we could provide better services for our existing residents of the City of Coral Gables; so when I ask you that question, and two years from now you can say, Commissioner, not only did we do this with the Village of Pinecrest, but we upgraded the services to the City and this is how we did it by doing this, and on a consistent basis, that's how I would be comfortable in doing that because I want to provide better services to our residents.

Commissioner Cabrera: But then you would need to do that – I mean, Bill, you bring up a really good point, but the only way to really do that is to show that prospectively not retrospectively, because I think what you are saying to the Chief is, you know, two years from now after this is over, or three years whatever the time frame is, you want to be able to justify that the financial benefits were committed to improving.

Mayor Slesnick: I think he is say in about two or three years is when we would actually enter into the agreement.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK, but wouldn't you want it prospectively – so you are asking for this prospectively? I didn't get it that way; I didn't understand it that way Bill.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I'm saying that I would only be comfortable doing this if when you sat up here in two years from now and said, yes we are working with the Village of Pinecrest and we are taking over, and we are providing better services because we are taking a portion of the money, and we are improving our services for the residents for the City of Coral Gables, basically is what I'm saying. Thank you.

Commissioner Withers: Where are you going to build the new fire house?

Chief Cook: That has not been determined yet; what we plan on doing is keep our staffing where our units are on the western edge of the City, Sunnyland and Pinecrest City Hall, during peak hours.

Commissioner Cabrera: And more importantly, are you going to put a metal roof?

LAUGHTER

Commissioner Withers: Would you put a rescue unit there, stage it there?

Chief Cook: A rescue unit and a pumper; one would be at Pinecrest City Hall, and one would be at Sunnyland.

Commissioner Withers: And the folks on the equipment would sit in the equipment or...

Chief Cook: No, no, we would rent out – until they built something we would – they would stay in their headquarters, they have a spot in their Pinecrest City Hall for the rescue crew. The engine crew would have to rent something out of Sunnyland for now.

Commissioner Withers: So the twenty-four hour on – forty-eight hour off, would that change, would they be eight to five people?

Chief Cook: No, no, they would be twenty-four-seven (24/7).

Commissioner Withers: So they would sleep where?

Chief Cook: They would come back at night to station three.

Commissioner Withers: And we don't have to modify existing facilities for that at all?

Chief Cook: No sir.

Commissioner Withers: Did you figure in a – and again we haven't see an agreement, so maybe this will all come out in the wash; I'm assuming the six million bucks (\$6M) the first year pays in full the eight hundred thousand dollars?

Chief Cook: Yes sir.

Commissioner Withers: Do we own that equipment or what would the arrangement be?

Chief Cook: No, we do not.

Commissioner Withers: They would own it?

Chief Cook: No, we would own it, yes; it would all be Coral Gables.

Commissioner Withers: OK, and then I would assume after five years if the agreement severed they would own it.

Chief Cook: No sir, we would own it; it's Coral Gables.

Commissioner Withers: Is there anything in that five point two million for replacement equipment?

Chief Cook: There could be an escalating cost, but we don't have it in there yet.

City Manager Brown: It's still a draft.

Commissioner Withers: But I think that's important.

City Manager Brown: It's very important.

Commissioner Withers: What about if Pinecrest decides to annex other areas or grow, or whatever, what's – or if they decide to rezone U.S.-1 and go thirteen stories, or who knows what, is there accommodation in the agreement for...

Chief Cook: We haven't looked at that or thought of that part.

City Manager Brown: We've not gotten that far.

Commissioner Withers: What about as we go into training of our firefighters and their firefighters, I'm assuming.

Chief Cook: We'll keep them up to date just as we do our own – same as we do all stations.

Commissioner Withers: And that's part of the five point...

City Manager Brown: Yes sir.

Chief Cook: Yes sir.

Commissioner Withers: How do you project that? How do you figure that in?

Chief Cook: We know how much training and what they have to do and that's all a part of what our staff does on a routine basis.

Commissioner Withers: Of the twenty-eight can you kind of give me the rank and file numbers?

Chief Cook: There would be four officers, excuse me eight officers, eight driver engineers...

Commissioner Withers: That's sixteen.

Chief Cook: That's sixteen; there would be four – up to twenty-eight firefighters, and what am I missing?

Commissioners Withers: Are there Lieutenants, Captains, Chiefs?

Chief Cook: Lieutenants.

Commissioner Withers: Now, would there be any cross pollination of our folks, and their folks as far as advancement opportunities?

Chief Cook: Yes, they are still Coral Gables Firefighters.

Commissioner Withers: So a Lieutenant could go from the Pinecrest Division over to the....and vice versa?

Chief Cook: Yes sir. It's very similar like Palmetto; Miami-Dade County supplies Police to Palmetto Bay; they pay Palmetto Bay on the side, but they are still Miami-Dade Police Officers.

Commissioner Withers: Pay scale is the same?

Chief Cook: Yes sir.

Commissioner Withers: So would you use Coral Gables officers ever in Pinecrest on twenty four on and forty-eight off, or would they simply...or would they be assigned to both areas?

Chief Cook: They could be, yes. On vacation, sick, things like that, you assign someone else.

Commissioner Withers: So it might be difficult to do the names on the shirt sleeves?

Chief Cook: It's usually done on vehicles.

Commissioner Withers: On vehicles. OK, that's all I have.

Mayor Slesnick: We are going to finish this report; we are not going to take public testimony, but we do have a special guest with us who has waited patiently with some of his members; and he says he is representing himself, are you not representing the IAFF today Stan? OK, well we have the President of the County Fire Union with us, Stan Hill, and out of courtesy I'd like to just invite Stan to say a few words about this. I don't remember, Stan, you've been here once before, I think.

Mr. Hill: This is my second visit to City Hall.

Mayor Slesnick: That's what I was going to say; well, welcome Stan and I'd like you to know and I'd like you to take back to your members that we in Coral Gables do appreciate the professional services that the Firefighters of Dade County offer the citizens of Dade County, and we appreciate it when you all do provide us with the needed back-up through our interlocal agreements.

Mr. Hill: I personally run about six or seven calls in the Gables myself as part of my job as a Metro-Dade Firefighter. I live on Gables edge just outside of Coral Gables, and in my twenty-five years of firefighting I've come to realize a lot. I work for Miami-Dade Fire Rescue; we represent thirty cities and the County. I was at the Pinecrest presentation; there was another presentation that our Fire Chief made and I'd like to suggest this Council hear that presentation also before you make any decisions. In it were circles of responses, something that I'd never really thought about this issue, but looking at it I think there is a lot you can learn about your own fire service by taking this presentation that you don't know. I was surprised at some of the gaps in coverage you have; I was surprised at some of the other things. I started looking at the map of Gables and realized that you are basically a long rectangle, very narrow and very long; and when you have a fire on the south end all your units have to cut through traffic and rush hour that's not ideal; when you go north, and I've watched your units running up Old Cutler Road and all that over the years. I think that the fabric of our fire service is being disrupted by this proposal and in so many ways, we will still have existing stations that have to provide service, but we will miss components of the response areas, they've been built with a different idea, so guess who's paying for this savings of Pinecrest, me and all the taxpayers like me who are left in the County, and I think this is a County-wide issue that can't be dealt with at the City; but in looking at it and realizing that many of our units could cover your City better than your own units; I think that you need to be educated on the fire service problem; and I would suggest you carry this item and invite our Fire Chief to make the same presentation you made to Pinecrest and take a look at it. I also think that six years after 9/11 there is community lessons that we haven't absorbed. We have different radio systems that can't communicate with each other; we run high rise

– we had a hotel fire here a couple years ago, some of the people in the audience were on that fire; we can't talk to your firefighters, they can't talk to ours. That's an issue and that's a major public safety issue both for your residents and for our residents. We have the second closest unit to my house would be one of yours, but they won't come to my house. The units I work at often closer to the Gables but we won't come there, those are issues. And the other issue is you need to really look at the water supply problem in Pinecrest and take a look at it because if you don't understand this issue, and that's forty percent (40%) of your ISO rating, you could be – I'll just say this, we have a low ISO rating because we cover Pinecrest and Galloway Glens and areas that don't have hydrants; you don't have that problem in the Gables, you'll be inheriting that problem. It could affect your property insurance rates for all your residents. I'm saying all of that because at the end of the day we have to – those of us left on the other side of the Red Road line, like me, will end up having to pay for the service gaps created by this proposal so it affects me as a taxpayer. One other item, in the County there is an ordinance that says that whenever we take over a service we take the employees with it, if you were to take over service we would have a problem, and I would hope you would take a look at taking employees from us. So with all that said, I just want to raise those concerns, but I would really suggest you hear the other presentation before you make a decision.

Mayor Slesnick: Well Stan, thank you very much; that was well said, and I want to make it clear to you and the members that you have with you that unlike one other city in Dade County, which we won't name, this has not been a campaign by this City going out to rob fire services of other cities. We responded, I think you heard the Chief, we responded to a proposal, I know there are difference of opinions on whether we should even respond or not, but I just wanted you to understand that this is not some kind of campaign that we are carrying on with the League of Cities or something else.

Mr. Hill: Can I make one more comment? You have excellent firefighters working for the City of Coral Gables and so do we, and we are pretty much – we do the same job, and everything I said I don't want to disparage, this has to do with systems and what is best for the community, and what is best for public safety. I'm looking at this and the more I look at it the more I see that there are bigger issues here than what's good for the Gables, and what's good for Pinecrest, because being somebody who is in a third area, its not good for me.

Mayor Slesnick: And I've never heard anybody disparage the work, the quality, and the professionalism of Dade County Firefighters. I think the Chief in responding to a question made that clear too. I have a couple of particular issues that, that I think have not been addressed; Ralph started to touch on one so I'll hit that first, and that is there are relationship issues that I fear are being challenged here; and whether they are right or wrong, I'm not suggesting who's right or who's wrong, in fact Stan was witness to a conversation that occurred. There are some very hard feelings at the County, and again, they could be dead wrong, they could be right, but we do have a relationship, we are one of the cities in Dade County that's always had a strong relationship with the County, and sometimes we overplay that because we don't get what we think we deserve, like lower speed limits and things. We have continued to have a strong relationship despite the fact

that sometimes we feel like they don't pay enough attention to us, but in this particular case I know that there are some people in the County who have taken a very belligerent attitude toward us being involved at all, whether we have sought this out or not, and I had that expression very clearly stated to me to my face by a County Commissioner in no uncertain terms; and I believe, I heard David, that the County Manager has made similar assertions. So I think we have to view what is the value of that relationship, how it affects it, and what we are doing here to ourselves with the relationship to the County. I think that's very important. The second issue is a relationship issue too, and it's with the people of Pinecrest, and this is where, I think, we've somehow something's gone astray here. It was my understanding all along that the City of Pinecrest was going to put a ballot issue out that said, we either want to stay with the County or we don't want to stay with the County, I'm simplifying it, but that would be it. I've now come to find out that our name is on the ballot. I understand that we responded to a request for proposal, and we did make a proposal, and we did respond to a request and I have to say in answering some e-mails from one of our citizens here, Mr. Namon; I have stated all along I think it is really responsible government to take a look at every opportunity that comes along; I think its also responsible of us to be kind in our response to the City of Pinecrest, they came to us in good faith, I'm just saying as far as we know they came to us in good faith; they are our neighbors, and we did, I think the right thing. We have an opportunity here; we've heard the Chief say to provide Pinecrest with service and actually embellish our own budget. But we were responding to a situation where they were seeking to change their fire service, not us seeking for them to change their fire service; and that they were going to ask their citizens whether they wanted that or not; and that once they change their fire service whether it was just through a vote or through a lawsuit, or whatever else, that we would have responded to their proposal. I am very much concerned that our name goes on the ballot and let's take one case scenario, they may vote no, but let's say they vote yes; we want Coral Gables, and then this Commission decides for all the different concerns that have been expressed here that we are not going forward in the negotiations. If I were a resident of Pinecrest, I would be very distressed that I was lead down this primrose path thinking that I was voting on something important in my life and the City of Coral Gables backs out. I mean, I think once our name goes on a ballot, we are really then so tied in to this proposal, that we cannot extricate ourselves without great embarrassment, and great, great aggravation to the citizens of Pinecrest, and I think our name being on the ballot gives the County every reason to believe that its not what we say it is, that we are out seeking this as opposed to just responding to a neighboring city that asks for our help. I have to tell you David, I don't know how the other feel, but I support not going forward at all if our name stays on the ballot.

City Manager Brown: Well, I can tell you this Mr. Mayor, that I spoke to the Village Manager and I said that if you are going to go to a ballot you need to make sure that you are opting out of the County and not exactly for us. Now when I saw the ballot I was as surprised as you were because I told the Village Manager that the City Commission had not approved the ability in its state to go forward, and we had no interlocal agreement worth even shooting to you because it was, as you know, just a draft. So I was a little shocked too, and I've got a call into the Village Manager, he's supposed to be back

today; Chief Cook was trying to be in contact with him. But I want to see what the tape said in their meeting whether it was strictly the Gables or was it an opt out and Gables.

Commissioner Cabrera: But isn't the ballot scheduled for March?

City Manager Brown: Yes.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK, and you had a lot of questions here today from all of us that need to be responded to and then we've had some testimony from the County representative that causes me to...

Mayor Slesnick: I don't mind if they vote in March about opting in or out of the County, it's putting us on the ballot....

Commissioner Cabrera: No, no, I'm piggy-backing on what you are saying to include us in this mix; I'm with you.

City Manager Brown: That's exactly what I'm going to say... I'm going to say can you get our – can you remove our name and say just opt out and provide an alternate method of service, which is what I really felt they would do, so it would give us a chance to...

Commissioner Cabrera: Let's say – OK. Let's continue with this discussion because this is very productive. So let's say they throw out the name, or they remove us from there question, their ballot question; and then let's say this governmental body decides that at the end of the analysis that we don't think its a good idea, we just think its going to dilute our services, the revenue is just really not there, you know two million bucks really turns out to be eight hundred thousand dollars, whatever, where does that leave Pinecrest?

City Manager Brown: Well, I think their options are to renegotiate with the County, or to start their own service?

Commissioner Cabrera: OK. I want to be fair to them.

Mayor Slesnick: It's unfair to them to put us on the ballot and think that, that ties us in, because I think that if I were a citizen of Pinecrest and I go to the polls on this day and I'm voting for Coral Gables or not for Coral Gables, I think that I know what I'm getting, but I think that they are being mislead by saying that we're for sure in this, because we aren't for sure in anything.

Commissioner Cabrera: Let's say that they aren't even being lead, let's say they are not even be informed, they are not being informed or educated, and this is no criticism of the County or for that matter any fire rescue unit in any one of our thirty-some communities; we got the pedigree of being Coral Gables and your average Joe Pinecrest Citizen who doesn't even know, who maybe watching the parade and doesn't even know one is going on might say, hey yes, I'd like to have those nice red trucks instead of those neon green ones; this is a good idea. So its not even a matter of being mislead, it could be just a

perception issue; and that would be so unfair to both communities – to all three communities, the County, the City of Coral Gables and Pinecrest, and that's really, you know my biggest concern the lack of information and education to be able to make an intelligent decision. Hey, listen if it sounds like we think we are the last coke in the desert, I do; I think we are the last coke in the desert, yes, I've lived here all my life, so I feel that way.

Commissioner Withers: I think the County is going to draw a line in the sand on this one.

Commissioner Cabrera: Oh, I think so too; and I think the political...

Commissioner Withers: They saw this whole annexation and cessation from the County take place over the last ten or fifteen years in Key Biscayne, and Aventura, and Pinecrest leaving, it's where the donor community is leaving their tax base.

Commissioner Cabrera: Chip, don't you see mitigation fees wearing out?

Commissioner Withers: I see the County now concerned about the community tax base left now our services are being replaced; I just think, I think there is something ahead of us that is bigger than we think, that's just my opinion.

Commissioner Anderson: I think it's also the County's inability to shrink down when it needs to.

Commissioner Cabrera: Could be.

Commissioner Withers: So, Don you know that issue better than I do.

Mayor Slesnick: I think you are absolutely on target, all of us, that's why our name shouldn't be on the ballot. If the citizens of Pinecrest wish to vote on opting in or out of County services, I have nothing to say about that; I don't live in Pinecrest; other people may have something to say, that's their business; and once they've opted in or opted out, then they know what the future could be possibly, and then we can proceed in conversations if we wish to, but once they walk to the polls and say we want Coral Gables...

Commissioner Withers: Can't be on there.

Commissioner Anderson: I totally agree with that.

Mayor Slesnick: ...And I think it sends the wrong message to the Commissioners, and to the County Manager that it somehow, we have put ourselves in the same position as the other city which I referred to, by reference, as being actively and aggressively fighting the idea of County supplying services, we aren't; that is not our bag, we don't have that in our agenda. So David, my position is, and I don't know if we want to come to a vote, or something but unless they take our name off the ballot, we withdraw our proposal.

City Manager Brown: I hear you.

Commissioner Cabrera: That might kill the deal. Do you have representatives here from Pinecrest?

City Manager Brown: No, no.

Commissioner Cabrera: That's interesting.

Mayor Slesnick: Well, I don't know if they were invited.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, I just think it would have been a good idea to have someone here from Pinecrest so they could report back.

City Manager Brown: Well, I'll be doing that.

Commissioner Cabrera: I know you will, but they see what's going on here.

Mayor Slesnick: How about this; how about if we rather than just taking some kind of vote today, instruct the Manager that by the second meeting in January we get a report back on whether or not the ballot wording has been changed, and if it has not then we will make a decision at that time.

Commissioner Cabrera: That's a good idea.

Mayor Slesnick: And that way Pinecrest is on notice of our feelings, OK Chip, Maria...

Commissioner Cabrera: Bill wherever you are.

Mayor Slesnick: OK, well that's that. By the way I certainly, Chief, I'll only do this for you though, if you would like to some day invite the Fire Chief of Dade County to come in and together you and he, of course you better do it quick if you want to do it, but you, your replacement and he want to give us a combination talk about some of the subjects Stan referred to, and some of the things we might want to be enlightened about fire services, I would certainly say that's great.

Chief Cook: I really don't believe I will have time.

Mayor Slesnick: I mean this Commission would like to be more knowledgeable about...

Commissioner Cabrera: Chief, I sense your seriousness, and listen, you know how I feel about you, I think you are the consummate professional, so absolutely you and your staff have some work to do and I know you are going to get it done.

Chief Cook: We'll do what we need to do, and we'd be more than welcome to come before you and talk with the County Chief.

Mayor Slesnick: Thank you all, and to the firefighters that joined us from the County thank you all for what you do, thank you for your service; and to our firefighters – Mr. Chickalo, please assure our firefighters that we still have nothing but the highest regard for our forces.

[End: 12:54:33 p.m.]