

## CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING

**Meeting Minutes of September 12, 2022, 8:30 a.m.**

**Coral Gables City Hall, City Commission Chamber**

**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, Florida 33134**

Historical Resources &  
Cultural Arts

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MEMBERS	O 21	N 21	D 21	J 22	F 22	M 22	A 22	M 22	J 22	J 22	A 22	S 22	APPOINTED BY
Ana Lam	P	P	-	P	P	P	#	P	N	N	P	P	Mayor Vince Lago
Barbara Reese	P	E	-	P	P	P	P	P	O	O	E	P	Vice-Mayor Michael Mena
Bonnie Seipp	P	P	-	P	E	P	P	P	M	M	P	E	Commissioner Rhonda Anderson
Carmen Cason	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	A	E	E	E	P	Commissioner Jorge L. Fors, Jr.
Mary Beth Burke	-	-	-	P	P	P	P	P	E	E	P	E	Commissioner Kirk R. Menendez
Alexis Ehrenhaft	E	P	-	P	E	P	P	E	I	I	E	P	City Manager Peter Iglesias
Joanne Meagher	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	P	G	G	P	P	Board-as-a-Whole

**LEGEND:** A = Absent; P = Present; E = Excused; \* = New Member; ^ = Resigned Member.  
- = No Meeting; # = Late meeting arrival.

**STAFF:** Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer; Kara Kautz, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer; Gay Bondurant, Docent Coordinator.

**RECORDING SECRETARY/PREPARATION OF MINUTES:** Nancy Kay Lyons, Administrative Assistant

The meeting was called to order by Chair Meagher at 8:45 a.m. and attendance was stated for the record.

### APPROVAL OF ABSENCES:

A motion was made by Ms. Lam and seconded by Ms. Reese to approve the absence Ms. Cason at the last meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Ms. Lam and seconded by Ms. Cason to approve the absences of Ms. Seipp and Ms. Burke. The motion was unanimously approved.

### OPENING STATEMENT:

Chair Meagher read from the preface of Arva Park's book: When I moved into a historic Coral Gables home in 1970, I never dreamed that someday I would write a biography of George Merrick. Many thought the purchase was a mistake. By this time the city had lost much of its historic ambience and George Merrick was largely forgotten. The home, which I later learned was designed by Walter DeGarmo, one of Coral Gables' most vaunted architects was a bargain because it was rundown and in what was then considered a declining neighborhood. The move opened my eyes to what was around me and marked the beginning of my study of and love for Coral Gables. (Fast forward to 1974) I was chosen to lead the new City of Coral Gables Preservation Board. With no model to guide us we forged ahead. Fortunately, the board included many who had known George and others who had grown up in Coral Gables. We learned fast and soon focused on the Merrick House, which was in serious disrepair. Our crusade to convince the city to buy it from the Merrick Manor Foundation put me back in touch with Eunice Merrick. She introduced me to George's brother Richard who became our most valuable resource as we struggled to restore his boyhood home and open it to the public. Although considerably younger than George, they were very close. Through his eyes we were almost able to reenter the past and get to know his remarkable family. These early preservation efforts helped spur a growing appreciation of George Merrick. As a result, more people began to worry that Merrick's original ideals were being ignored and compromised. Under the leadership of Mayor Bill Chapman, the Coral Gables Commission appointed a new board that studied the problem and created what was called the "Mediterranean Ordinance." As a member of the board, I began a long study of George's unique Mediterranean style.

Chair Meagher said it was critically important that they remind the City that not everyone remembers George Merrick and with many new people moving to this area they need to be educated on the city's history.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

A motion was made by Ms. Lam and seconded by Ms. Cason to approve the minutes of August 8, 2022, with corrections.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Meagher had difficulty putting items in the display case, the key was misplaced. She requested Ms. Kautz to add the cleaning of the display case, washing of the front doors, screen doors, side light windows and the other two doors to the cleaning person's responsibilities. She also contacted Mayor Lago regarding trash pickup.

## **HOUSE REPORT:**

### **August 2022 Monthly Activity Summary**

1. House reopened from its July hiatus, on Saturday, August 6, and received a steady stream of visitors through the course of the month, welcoming, on one day, a couple from Azerbaijan.
2. Two new docent trainees continue to show commitment to the Merrick House and in September will be expected to fully participate. A third docent who started late is also showing promise and enthusiasm. Having two additional people in the schedule makes an enormous difference in relieving docents from the pressure of having to serve three and four times a month.
3. On Monday, August 8, Ms. Bondurant attended the Merrick House Governing Board meeting and gave a brief report on the activities at the House involving the docents and trainees. An announcement was included, asking Board members to consider becoming docents which will allow the House to open some days during the week. One member voiced interest.
4. Summary of tour/sales activities for August 2022:  
Number of visitors for tours: 73 (54 Adults; 11 Seniors; 8 Students)  
Sales: \*6 GEM Poetry Books; 7 packages of large note cards.  
Total receipts for the month: \$417. (\*+ a \$75 check from HPACG to pay for 5 GEM poetry books was found, which was dated in June 2022. The check was deposited with this month's receipts.)
5. Merrick House Trust Fund Balance: \$51,000+.
6. Bruce Ehrenhaft is a new docent.
7. Kurt gave two tours last weekend and google reviews said tours were great.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

1. **Ribbon Cutting:** Ms. Kautz has not received a response from the Mayor's office. 5 pm on a Sunday does not seem like a good time to request the elected officials' attendance. Chair Meagher suggested that they ask the Commissioners and Mayor Lago if a weekday would be better. Ms. Kautz will check availability. Chair Meagher suggested inviting the presidents of the Sweetheart organizations. Ms. Cason suggested inviting the docents. No food will be served.
2. **Donations:** Ms. Cason had them at home. She notified donors to fill out the forms if they were accepted. The board discussed the donated items.  
A motion was made by Ms. Cason and seconded by Ms. Lam to accept six (6) donated items and return one item.  
The motion was unanimously approved.  
*Donated items accepted:* Reading glasses, Shaving kit, Curling iron (two pieces), Tool to tighten shoelaces, Opera glasses, Inkwell  
*Item to be returned:* Picture frame
3. **"100 Voices Merrick House Lecture Series":**
  - a) Eventbrite Link is live. Chair Meagher requested the announcement for the event be put in E-News the following week with the Eventbrite link. There are 46 tickets available on Eventbrite for each event.
  - b) Flyers need ADA information and QR Code on the bottom.
  - c) 7 tickets have been sold, 6 for November and 1 for October.
  - d) Jeanette Slesnick has the flyer for Jeanette's Journal. Chair Meagher will email the flyers. Board members were requested to send it to their contacts. Ms. Lam requested Ms. Kautz to print the flyers. Ms. Reese said she would take the flyers to the Garden Club.
  - e) Ms. Kautz said the call for speakers would be in E-News on September 14, 2022.
  - f) The house will be set up the Friday before and tours will be given around the chairs.
  - g) The announcement will be put on the house phone message and on the website.

- h) Ms. Lam volunteered to tell the Principal at Coral Gables Elementary School about the November 6, lecture and Ms. Cason will contact the High School. Ms. Ehrenhaft will contact Coral Gables Junior High School.
- i) Chair Meagher suggested including an introduction our own history prior to the lecture. She suggested that different board member could do the introductions.
- j) Ms. Kautz said she would check on filming the lectures.
- 4. **Piano Repairs:** Chair Meagher located someone to look at and possibly repair the piano.
- 5. **Book Treatment:** Books in glass cabinet in the living room have been removed and Melissa Boe is fumigating them. She will provide an estimate to fumigate all the books in the house. This will allow the board to decide how much of the trust fund money to spend and how much to request from the Villagers. Some books have been returned as work on them has been completed but would not be put back until all the books have been fumigated.
- 6. **Holiday Open House:**
  - a) Date of Event: December 11, 2022.
  - b) Garden club is decorating on Monday, December 5; Tree will be delivered on Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022; Board members will decorate the tree on December 7, 2022.
  - c) Ms. Lam volunteered to contact the previous vendors. She is looking for a candle vendor. Chair Meagher will contact Nick Cabrera to ask about a candle vendor.
  - d) Ms. Reese will contact the Carolers.
  - e) Symphonettes will help at the event.
  - f) Bell ringers will be on the porch.
  - g) Chair Meagher left a message for John Adams (Santa).
  - h) Candy canes will be given out by Santa.
  - k) No one is allowed to bring dogs or food into the house.
  - l) Ms. Lam said the Orange Bowl Parade was the same day, but they will try and have kids at the event.
  - m) Postcards will be sent out.
  - n) Apple cider and water table will be repeated. No free cookies. No cappuccino vendor. Rita Tennyson (caterer) will be providing food.
  - o) Merchandise table will be in front of front doors.
  - p) Ms. Kautz will provide Ms. Ehrenhaft with the contact information for Scout Troop 7.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

- 1. **Merrick Minute for the Commission Meetings:** Chair Meagher has not received a response from the Mayor about reading a snippet about the Merrick House “The Merrick Minute” at the beginning of the Commission meetings. Commissioner Anderson loves the idea, and hopefully it will start at the next Commission meeting.
- 2. **“Creating the Dream” Arva Moore Parks permanent museum exhibit:** The board expressed concern about the removal of the exhibit. Mr. Adams said the exhibit is being removed, but he was not sure if it would be put back or have some items on exhibit and some available digitally. A concern was the deterioration of items while on display. Chair Meagher said Ms. Levasser (Archivist) did not have an answer either. Ms. Lam suggested inviting Mr. Elvis Fuentes to a meeting to get clarification. Chair Meagher said he was giving the presentation at the Commission meeting the next day. Mr. Adams said they had a staff meeting at the end of last week and the city attorney was looking into it. It appears that the city does not have a say in the museum exhibits. He said the mission statement should be focused on. The Assistant City Manager wants to make sure that items owned by the city or others that will no longer be exhibited are returned to their rightful owners. Chair Meagher said that Ms. Levasser had said there was no list. Ms. Kautz said the city has a loan agreement for the that they loaned. She thought the rest of the collection belonged to Arva Parks. Ms. Reese said the museum should be the spot to highlight things like that and suggested that if the museum will not exhibit it, maybe History Miami would like to showcase it. Chair Meagher expressed her concern about the artifacts as well as the interpretive material on the walls. Answering Ms. Ehrenhaft’s question, Mr. Adams said he thought permission had been received from the Museum Board to remove the exhibit. Chair Meagher said Kirk Menendez was liaison to the board and when she spoke with him the week before, he has no knowledge of it. There is a press release. She suggested the board read the HPACG’s letter which gives history on the exhibit. She had sent information to Dolly McIntyre and Sally Jude.

#### **DISCUSSION ITEMS:** None

**CITY COMMISSION ITEMS:** None

**ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY:**

1. West Wall Repair: There is money left over from the construction of the front wall. The west wall will be repaired with the leftover funds.
2. Venetian Plaster repair: The estimate is approximately \$9500. The damage was caused by a defective dehumidifier. As it appears to have gotten worse, Ms. Kautz will investigate if something else is causing the damage.

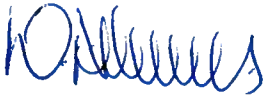
Ms. Cason attended an October 8<sup>th</sup> event at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Gardens. Jennifer Possley, Department Head of Conservation at the Gardens, and Daniela Champney, Vice President of Fairchild's Connect to Protect Network were both present. They have a collection of ferns native to Florida and Susan Rodriguez suggested planting some of them at the Merrick House. Ms. Champney will come to the Merrick House to see if there is an appropriate area for the ferns to be planted. Ms. Kautz said to coordinate this through Greenspace Management. Ms. Cason said she will let Ms. Kautz know what date the members of the Garden Club will be coming for her to coordinate the meeting. Ms. Kautz noted that the ferns along the driveway are prolific, and they tend to overtake the area. Chair Meagher said she wanted to speak with Deena about removing the invasive vines.

The next meeting will be Monday, October 10, 2022.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:01 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Adams  
Historic Preservation Officer