

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting  
Agenda Item H-1  
March 11, 2014  
City Commission Chambers  
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Jim Cason**

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

**Commissioner Pat Keon**

**Commissioner Vince Lago**

**Commissioner Frank Quesada**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Patrick Salerno**

**City Attorney, Craig E. Leen**

**City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman**

**Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**George Volsky, Coral Gables Resident**

**Chip Withers, Former Coral Gables Commissioner**

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H-1 [Start: 10:47:50 a.m.]

Resolution authorizing a grant to the Coral Gables Museum

Mayor Cason: Mr. Manager Items H-1 and H-2 are yours.

City Manager Salerno: Thank you Mayor. Commissioners we received a request dated February 27<sup>th</sup> from the Museum making a request for a grant in the amount of \$100,000. The agreement that the City has with the Coral Gables Museum dated February 8, 2011, provides for grant requests to be made by the Museum. I did receive a request previous to this; they have reactivated and requested of the Commission a grant in that amount. The matter is appropriately set before to be considered.

Mayor Cason: OK we have Mr. Volsky, please no more than three minutes.

Mr. Volsky: A number of people want to speak to me among them Mr. Sanabria and he asked that his three minutes be allocated to me, because I think this is a very important issue and remind you except the Vice Mayor, some of you don't know the history of the Museum. This is as you know a gift from the nation to us built in 1938 by the federal government WPA Building, which was given to the City. In virtue of the contract which took more than two years to prepare, which I believe....it has been given to private groups to administer. Although I'm against – incidentally the whole procedure seems to me, I've never seen anything like this. Normally when someone asks for money it goes before the Commission, the Commission approves or reduces or increases conditions, and then there is a resolution. Here there is no resolution approved by the City Attorney even before you looked at it, and in addition to this that under Article 15 they have the right to do this, it's extremely ambiguous. It says to qualify and....funding by the cities, Coral Gables organization shall at a minimum prepare a proposed budget to the City Manager no later than March 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. It doesn't say fiscal year, I think – I believe when money is concerned this is a fiscal year that rules in the City, not calendar year. This includes anticipated and projected revenues including the distribution of the City and expenses. I only received from the City a very simple letter. So in other words while the Commission, while the institution has the right to do this, I believe it's not done properly, it's been approved. I don't know why by the City Attorney made into the motion already before you even consider it. In addition to this, I want to be helpful because I'm very much concerned about something which you young members don't know. About 20 years ago, you were still maybe in high school, that institution was going to be privatized and I and I'm speaking as Chairman of Coral Gables Cultural Office Council, which is an Advisory Board to this City, we passed a resolution and asking City Commission to approve that this building be done only for cultural activities and Vice Mayor Kerdyk was one who approved this and before this his father was a great supporter of culture. Anyhow, I think there is a hopeful side as it is and I'm going to forward you the letter. More than 4 years ago, January 24, 2001, by David Donny, I think most of you know Mr. Donny he is a retired lawyer and was in Washington, Vice President General Counsel of the National Trust of Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C., and he writes the principle flaw of the agreement between the City and the Coral Gables Museum is that it lacks any standard, adequate standard for the operation and growth of the Historical Museum...that the City should require the Museum to obtain accreditation, why?- because an accredited Museum can get and he says, it can get support from local history museums all over the country. Originally, the plan of this Museum that you might not know, was that it started with my friend Chip Withers who was discussing with Historical Museum of the County to be a sort of associate. This would mean that *ifsofacto* this museum would be accredited because if we get all the resources from that museum and the accredited because the Historical Museum is accredited. I was going to change gear in the middle we wanted to have our own museum and it went from....you know how much money we already spent for the museum?- we've already spent \$10 million, something which perhaps you haven't looked at it. There is in the budget a museum division. Since 2003 and 2004 when

the whole thing started we already spent \$2,034,560. Most of it goes to the museum. There was one resolution...it's simply incredible; one is a resolution – I can give you a copy, in which the museum organization was going to give us, I'll tell you exactly, there are so many documents. I have a file like this in my home. Here it is, \$1,037,689 was in the budget that's your resolution. Subsequently, that thing disappeared, disappeared in thin air, nothing; so in other words in the construction museum we spent \$3 million or \$4 million which over the years becomes \$8 (million), because you know with interest, we are paying, plus \$2 million here, plus I don't know how many. We have never had any real accounting what the museum is doing and frankly I'm ashamed of this, but again, I'm talking about the future and I was talking to Kerdyk and today Mr. Withers confirming that they are moving to refurbishing and doing something entirely different to the museum, which hopefully might result in improving the situation; and I know some museums because...downtown museum...and I would suggest for the best of the country that Mr. Withers and some knowledgeable people in the County get together and refurbish, otherwise this is \$100,000 or whatever you agree, maybe you agree with \$25,000 as it was last year. This Commission, I'm afraid to say, tell you, I don't know whether the museum has provided all the documents. You remember last year or two years ago when the City found that the Miracle Mile Theater has not had insurance. At least when I heard this I was absolutely flabbergasted. What it means if something were to happen there, a fire and some people were hurt, the City would be responsible. I know that currently in the contract the museum is responsible for having a very important policy of insurance. I don't know if they have it. We have never had any comprehensive fiscal report from...I didn't find it and I looked at the record. So, I would suggest that you listen to Mr. Withers who I understand is spearheading the project to refurbish, otherwise it's going to continue to be a "white elephant" and who is paying for it?- I am and...

Mayor Cason: Thank you George.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you George.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much. You have anything you want to say?

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, I do need to say one thing. Mr. Volsky has said that you don't have the authority to do this under the contract. I did take a look at the contract again after I spoke with Mr. Volsky. I just want to state for the record the reasons why I do believe you have that authority and why I signed off on the legality of this proposal. First, you have the general authority to grant funds, regardless of any contract that's within your power, as long as it serves a public purpose. Second, Article 15 itself says that it's in your sole discretion. I didn't approve the funds, this is being presented to you for your consideration, it's within your sole discretion. Third, it's my understanding that the museum and the Manger had met for a while to discuss, and I believe he understands how the \$100,000 is going to be spent. I would defer to him, but

generally if it's OK with the City Manager, I'm OK with this provision too; and finally, notwithstanding all of that, this provision is meant to protect the City, it's not meant to protect the museum and the City is free to waive this provision. I didn't think you had to get to a waiver, because I thought you had the authority already to do it, and I still believe you have the authority to do it, so I don't see any legal issue whatsoever.

Mayor Cason: Do we have any discussion?

Mr. Volsky: Mr. Mayor just one thing, just briefly. As you know, I attend every meeting, and you have the authority; you have the authority to declare war on Crimea, but this document....

Mayor Cason: I'm not declaring war on the museum.

Mr. Volsky:...this document is a covenant with the residents and taxpayers of the City and it says, they have to pay all the expenses, and they can ask for something that you specified...I haven't seen any document to this, and tell me if this is legal. You can say what you want, it's your opinion, but the law says different.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Mr. Volsky. Commissioner Withers would you like to speak?- if there are any speaker cards or anything like that.

Mayor Cason: Yes, we have a card.

Mr. Withers: Good morning, for the record, Chip Withers, 1104 Hardee Road, Coral Gables, Florida. George, I appreciate you being here and you know, you and I have had a relationship for a long time. I couldn't hear everything you said, I don't know if I should blame it on your accent, my poor hearing, or the City's audio...

(Laughter)

Mr. Withers: I know you've had a real busy agenda this morning and it was kind of cool. It brought back a lot of memories, warm feelings from friendly faces, and to see something really cool about honoring someone that saved a life to talking about a multi-million dollar impact to downtown Coral Gables with Armando's project. It just – I don't know how you do it, you juggle it and my hat's off to you, but that's not what I'm here to talk about, I guess. I want to speak a little bit to the museum issue, because in retrospect I have a confession to make and that's back in 1991 when this whole thing started, it has exceeded my wildest expectations. My vision was take a beautiful building, redo it, throw some of George Merrick's pottery in there and his wife's wedding dress and say-la-vie it's the City of Coral Gables, but you know through previous visions of previous Commissions and City Managers and through you all picking the ball up and running forward with it, just today even hearing this item, I think speaks volumes to what the City is all about, and you have to put one thing in perspective. In two years we've

created an institution. To me institutions have longevity which we really don't have as far as the museum, but I'll take the age of the building as longevity. As far as economic value, I think this institution, and just to correct George on something, basically for every dollar the City put in, in developing this museum complex, the museum complex put in about three and-a-half to four dollars. The City did front the money. The money is being paid back on the museum's portion. As far as the economic value of what it spins off, we've never done an economic study, maybe we should, but I challenge you just to take a two or three block walk around the neighborhood and see what the existing businesses feel about us being in downtown Coral Gables. They love us. They love the life we bring to Coral Gables on the weekends, life we bring on Sunday. Just today this bike thing would have never happened, it just didn't happen by concept. We had an art-cycle exhibition. Chris Rupp is with me today reached out to the cyclist and here, "walla", we have an incredible cycling event in Coral Gables. That would have never happened. I'm getting ahead of myself. So as far as the economic benefit goes, I don't know how it's measured, except with just the acceptance of the businesses and neighbors. The other thing I think institutions bring is social value and I don't know if you are one of the 4,500 people on e-mail blast that you can see the events that we have day after day after day, and the good news is most of those are free, the family days, the movie nights, but if you really want to go out and invest about ten cents a day is what a membership cost, you can then get further benefits of free exhibitions. When we have a new exhibition, or you pay a couple of bucks for one of these bicycle track events. Chris and I had breakfast this morning, talking about if I'm fortunate to be in a Chairmanship position this May. Some of the planning we did, and she reminded me just in this magazine today, right in the centerfold of the magazine is the exhibition that we are having at the Coral Gables Museum, and nicely juxtaposed to that is all your pictures, so it ties – and the value of that is building brand value and to me that's the third and probably of all institutional things, one of the most important things that an institution brings to a City. As far as building brand and you know everything that Coral Gables stands for, as you know, whether you are building a fire station that looks like a multi-million dollar home, whether you are putting a new median down Alhambra or down Ponce, or renovating the Youth Center, everything that this City stands for is excellence and that is building the brand of Coral Gables to me, and what we've tried to do the past two years with over 40,000 people through our doors, 40 exhibits, and all this other stuff that's going on, is to build the brand of Coral Gables, that's one of our main focuses in this institution and I'm almost finished, but let me just kind of illustrate what I mean by that. If you look at our business partners over the past two years, forget about the for-profit, the Baptist Health Systems, the Wells Fargo, the Northern Trust, forget about the corporate people that partner with us, but look at the not-for-profits in the foundations, practically every consulate. We just had the elections for Columbia in our Coral Gables Museum. Look at the partners that want to be a part of our brand which is your brand. You've had the National Preservation and Historic Trust, I know I probably butchered that name, OK, you've had the Miami Marine Stadium folks, you've had the Dade County School Teachers come to your museum to learn to teach our kids, so just

people coming to us because they recognize the brand that the City of Coral Gables has in the City of Coral Gables is I think speaks volumes as to the brand that we've developed in two short years. So again, I wish I could have addressed more of George's comments, I really honestly didn't hear them, but George the invitations are open for you and me to sit down and discuss this in much detail as you would like, and I do thank you just for the opportunity of listening to this request and I'm open to any questions.

Mayor Cason: Thank you Chip. Any discussion?

Commissioner Lago: Yes. I wanted to just thank George for being here and also thank Chip. You know we can have dissenting opinions, but at the end of the day we are all here for the betterment of our City, which is what's the most important thing. You know I had the pleasure or I was allowed the privilege by my wife this weekend to go to New York for the Armory Art Fair, which occurs every March and I've had the pleasure of attending probably for like the past 5 or 6 years. We went to the museum, we went to the Momma, I'm not comparing the new museum with the Momma to the Coral Gables Museum, but we can always aspire to be; and there was something interesting which brings back pain to my thought process when Armando was showing his project and that is, these museums are a meeting point for everybody in the community, not only to get education but also to become cultured, to become aware of their surroundings, to really find out what is Coral Gables?- what is the history of Coral Gables?- I don't know everything about Coral Gables. If I don't read or if I don't really understand or I don't sit down with Ms. Parks and take a few moments of her time like I've asked, I always learn a little bit more about the City of Coral Gables. So when you mentioned the economic benefit and that there is really no true measure right now in reference to what the museum brings in economic benefit. Its measureable like you said, walk down the streets in the City of Coral Gables and you'll notice people enjoying the museum. Go to an event which I attended last week, which was the entity that you butchered the name of, it was a spectacular event, it drew people from not only different municipalities, but different states to really learn about what the Everglades is and that's occurring in our own museum, which is essential. So we are not only talking about the City of Coral Gables issue, but we are talking about major issues which affect the entire state of Florida. So besides having the honor of sitting on the Board of the Museum, which I thank our colleagues for allowing me to serve, in two years you've had over 40,000 people attend the museum. The goal of today's grant is to continue that and to make sure that we not only educate residents of the City of Coral Gables, but we educate people outside of Coral Gables about what it is to be a Coral Gables resident, what it is to have your business in the City of Coral Gables, and if we bring in partners like you mentioned before, Wells Fargo, Baptist already has their headquarters here, people become a little bit more immersed in our culture, in what we do in the City of Coral Gables and eventually hopefully we can draw those businesses to the CBD. So, I am in support of this, I think it's a great thing to support our museum. I



appreciate your clarification in regards to the previous funding questions that Mr. Volsky brought up and I look forward to supporting the museum for many years to come.

Mr. Withers: Let me just share two e-mails because I get e-mails, I mean you all get a lot of e-mails too, but one e-mail was from a lady last August, I think, no, I'm sorry, it was in December. They said, I've been meaning to thank you that my child attending summer camp and we didn't have the money to do it, but through a foundation grant my child was able to attend camp at no cost. Again, that's just Coral Gables reaching out that whole branding – and the other thing, I was at the David Fairchild Tropical event, and I apologized because I didn't recognize this lady that walked up to me, so if you are watching please forgive me, but she said, I want you to know that my husband and I plan our social activities around the museum calendar. We decide what event we want to go to and we decide what restaurant we want to go to, and I think that's pretty cool that people actually recognize that and do that. To me it was just off the wall. What we have coming up is some really neat things. We are hoping to energize the City during the World Cup and actually have World Cup watching parties in the plaza on the big screen TV's and invite all the residents of Coral Gables to join in downtown Coral Gables. I think it's kind of cool. We have an incredible exhibition, probably one of the premiere exhibitions in the world of photographs of Mount Everest through the lens of the camera that I understand is....and then we have in conjunction with Temple Judea that was here earlier, we have a really cool and I'm not going to let the "cat out of the bag" on this, but an exhibition that is of prominence throughout the U.S. and the world that has to do with Jewish families that have migrated to the United States after the war and actually embraced African-Americans in educating and assisting in their education. I mean the event is off the wall. These are just a few of the things that we have planned, so we are going to keep it going, we are going to make the City proud and we are going to build that brand because that's what it's all about.

Mayor Cason: And Chip one thing I would recommend as you go forward, and particularly if you have a prominent role in the future of the museum to do what you can to get more corporate sponsors, I think some of us can help you on that and also to get more members, because there are lots and lots of events at the museum. It really has moved beyond just a museum and become a cultural, one of the key cultural centers. One of the things that really attract people to the Gables, restaurants, the fact that you do things with the consulates it's going to help us get more consulates into the City, all of which is good for us. So do what you can to try to energize the – we have 160 corporate headquarters here, I think we can get more of them to support the museum.

Mr. Withers: You heard that right Chris?

Mayor Cason: And I think we can help you on that too. Alright, do we have a motion?

Commissioner Quesada: So moved.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Quesada makes the motion, the Vice Mayor seconds and so does Commissioner Lago, third (laughter).

City Clerk

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Commissioner Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

[End: 11:13:28 a.m.]