

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
February 10, 2015
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, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-1 [Start: 9:56:16 a.m.]

Discussion regarding the excellent work of Code Enforcement Field Supervisor Michael Kattou, assisted by Code Enforcement Director William Ortiz and Alberto Diaz (a Coral Gables contractor and resident) in aiding an elderly Coral Gables resident.

Mayor Cason: Item F-1. A couple of days ago, a lady, a citizen came in to talk about Code Enforcement, and it was very refreshing because she said that Michael Kattou and William Ortiz and Alberto Diaz, a Coral Gables contractor, they had originally gone to the house of an elderly gentleman, about 89 years old, who is bed-ridden, who had some code violations, and they talked to the resident and apparently one of the relatives, Maria Soler Wasserman, talked to them about the condition of the resident, that he was bed-ridden for over a year, and couldn't really get to fix these problems. So these three individuals Michael Kattou, William Ortiz, and Alberto Diaz, the contractor, on their own went and fixed the house. They fixed all the code violations, they painted the house, they didn't tell anybody, they didn't ask for any kind of recognition, but I thought that was not only a wonderful and generous thing for them to have done, but it raised an

opportunity for us. I asked them how many more people like that are there in the Gables and they came up with a list of six or seven other homes in similar situations; somebody that's old, not much income, and not able to fix the violations that they have identified. So in talking to the City Manager and thinking about this, it's a possibility that we could work with volunteers and maybe some suppliers and what we did in MacFarlane Homestead with these homes. Cathy you had a source of volunteers, I understand.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Yes – and the wonderful thing is, the more we learn about Code Enforcement the more we learn this is one of other instances where our Code Enforcement officers have gone above and beyond, George Pino and William Ortiz also helped a woman that was struggling with a roof issue after she had already exhausted all services; and so what we'd like to do is look at how to put together a program where the City is able to reach out, but in a way that we follow some procedures that would be important. We have been contacted by non-profits in the City that are interested in rolling up their sleeves and helping, and so in addition to developing an item about Code Enforcement and the good work they do at a future Commission meeting. I would also like to talk about the possibility of formalizing a program like that.

Mayor Cason: Yes – because a lot of students are looking for community service opportunities to come in and say where can I volunteer?- so I think we can get volunteers, we can probably get a number of our companies to provide paint or other supplies and go out and spruce up these homes.

Commissioner Quesada: How about we do something a little bit – let's try to organize ourselves a little bit here. Maybe we can do something through the Coral Gables Community Foundation, have them be the lead, they do so many different projects throughout the City; they have the manpower, they have the volunteers, to really help us organize. I'm thinking maybe through them. Also if there are any suppliers that will donate whatever materials that are needed, if we can find a way to thank them publicly, give them some exposure, if they are donating product maybe we give an E-NEWS release saying, thank you to these companies for donating these products. I think ideally, if we can have one of the non-profits that we work closely with, such as the Coral Gables Community Foundation or any other organization you guys think, that's the one that comes to mind because they are so involved in our community. Maybe we can have them sort of be the lead for us and then we work with them, because I know they do a lot of good work in the City.

Mayor Cason: Sounds good. I think – this complements what we've been doing on abandoned homes, on foreclosed homes, this fills in the gap where people really can't do it themselves, and helps improve property values, and I think its service opportunities.

Commissioner Lago: I think what Frank said is the best route to go. Right now I'm working with Coral Gables Community Foundation in regards to a very similar project for a church that needs a re-roofing, a small portion, and I think that we need some person to be the liaison to bring this all together, because we could probably get a lot of items donated from suppliers and we could probably get monies from residents who are always giving in this community, but I think one of the big concerns that we really need to focus on is having somebody who can deal with certain subcontractors, who are so specialized that we need to go out and ascertain these individuals, or these firms and have them give maybe a reduced rate, their time, providing the materials and they can provide their expertise at a nominal rate, also.

Commissioner Keon: I think that there are some non-profits like Rebuild Miami, that's really what they do, and they use professionals to go in and do the work. I know that people, lots of us in the best of faith want to help other people, but we are not the best painters of the world, or the best carpenters, or the best whatever, and so I think when we are dealing with people's homes I think we just need to be very careful that we really are dealing with people that have contractor licenses, that the work can be permitted, even if we waive permit fees or whatever else, which is maybe the things that we really should do in these instances is to waive permit fees and to expedite permits and do the things that the City can do, because there are people that have non-profits, that have people with expertise that are licensed in whatever, that can do these things. The people that really deserve a "shout-out" is Code Enforcement, because I think for a number of years, unbeknownst to us and unbeknownst to the community, they find a way to help people make it work, that we never hear about, the Manager said. I had been talking to a group of neighbors who were complaining about a particular home because of the roof and it turns out that the woman was quite old, she really didn't have the resources to do the work, and about a month or so later and met with Code Enforcement and Will Ortiz and went back and asked him, was there – had they been able to resolve that issue?-and it turned out that they found people that were willing to – they were licensed and insured and contractors and whatever, that came in and did the work at a very reduced cost and took care of it. I think there is a very informal network within Code Enforcement that really needs to be applauded for their taking on this on themselves and finding an answer to these issues. We should be so proud of them. This is a wonderful day and looking at the quality of people that serve us and the residents of this community, Police and Fire and Sanitation and Code Enforcement, and the good people that work for the City and make it the City that it is. I'm sure that the Manager knows all of these issues and all of the concerns with regard to people going into someone's home and doing work and whatever else, and so will come back to us with a very good program. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Great. So you'll come back to us then with some thoughts, because there are sort of two levels; the first list was really painting and shrubbery, cutting grass and so on and then you get into the more difficult cases where it's a roof fall in or a porch that would fit the

contractor. So I think there is room for both, but why don't you come up with some thoughts as to how we can do it. I think your idea about using existing organizations is fine.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And Community Foundation Rebuilding Together, but you are right Commissioner, that really solid commitment that our Code Enforcement Officers have in making a difference in the community will also do a better job at celebrating that.

Commissioner Keon: We are so proud of them – I mean it really touched their hearts to see people with these issues and these problems and how they went off on their own to find a remedy for this when there really wasn't one available to them. They had to go seek it out and they did it, it's really indicative of a very kind heart.

Commissioner Lago: Let me just tell you also one thing. We are acknowledging one case, but I've dealt with Code Enforcement on a multitude of issues. Just recently with a gentleman who had not pulled a permit for a project. They are extremely understanding; their job is not to incur fines for the City, or make money for the City, that's not the point of Code Enforcement. Code Enforcement is to uphold the beauty of the City, the Codes, everything that makes this City special, and this group of individuals William, Michael, and the rest of the Code Enforcement crew, they really make an incredible effort to make sure that these Codes are upheld and that the individual who is being dealt with, at that point due to whatever Code Enforcement issue, is not hurt. Its very clear what needs to be done and what the timeframe that needs to be done and I've seen extensions be granted, so again we sing their praise, but it something they've been doing for a long time.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor two points just from a legal perspective, and I'll work with the City Manager of course on this. There are two ways to approach this sort of thing, because you can do an ordinance – as the attorney I am always more in favor of a more formal process when we are going to someone's home, whereby we immunize any City actors and we get a waiver or release at least as to negligence, and where there is a formal process whereby people can apply to be part of it, or where the contractor can apply to be part of it, so it's something that we are comfortable with. Another way to proceed is by resolution – you can always give a resolution of support to this type of program and agree to waive fees, but then the City is a little less involved, but I do recommend that there be some ability to immunize City actors. You always need to do that because the City is trying its best to help here, but its important that we don't take on too much liability. You are always taking on potentially a little bit, and that's OK and that's a policy decision and this is for a very good cause, but there are things we can do to reduce that risk, and also to give the property owner notice, and then they can decide if they want to do that or not.

Commissioner Lago: Craig, if I can interject. I think the key point would be defining the scope in regards to whatever we entertain in reference to the work that needs to be done. We need to be very definitive in regards to the scope and make sure like what Commissioner Keon said, we used licensed individuals and then we proceed in a manner there are no open pieces, and I'm dealing with one of those right now, as a matter of fact, of somebody who I helped and I have a back end of some work that was done on a job, which we did it in charity and now we are dealing with a few things that we need to rectify. So I want to make sure that if we open up a permit, we close that permit, the work gets done.

City Attorney Leen: The four ordinances that – like the list that the Commission has on the houses that are under observation and they are under review really by this Commission, and I have to report back to you. You can set up a pretty simple ordinance that does the same thing for ones that you want to provide assistance to, provide certain protections to staff and to the homeowner and then also have a more formal process. You may not want to though, you may want to just have them come before you by resolution or by agreement. That's what I'm going to be raising with the City Manager.

Mayor Cason: So you'll work together with the Manager and come back to us with a proposal. OK.

[End: 10:08:52 a.m.]