



CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING

Meeting Minutes of October 10, 2022, 8:30 a.m.

Public Safety Building, Community Meeting Roof

2151 Salzedo Street, First Floor, Coral Gables, Florida 33134

Historical Resources &
Cultural Arts

2327 SALZEDO STREET
CORAL GABLES
FLORIDA 33134

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

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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 8:44 a.m. and attendance was stated for the record.

Everyone introduced themselves.

APPROVAL OF ABSENCES:

A motion was made by Ms. Lam and seconded by Ms. Reese to approve the absence of Ms. Ehrenhaft.
The motion was unanimously approved.

OPENING STATEMENT:

Chair Meagher read the following excerpt from an interview with Richard Merrick. Solomon hired some Bahamian workers who were also new to the area. These men wanted to stock up on groceries and other household items at the local store in Coconut Grove after their first week on the job. As you know, Solomon paid his workers in store vouchers, so the workers would spend their paychecks at the Larkins' store, which was owned by pioneer W. A. Larkins. (now South Miami, but it was known as Cocconut Grove back then). With their vouchers in hand, the new workers asked Solomon if he would loan out his wagon and mule so they wouldn't have to carry all their purchases to their new home, which was probably the barn because Solomon offered free housing to single workers in one of his barns. Solomon agreed, so Maude was hitched up to the wagon and she took the men to the general store. When the men came out of the store after shopping, they discovered, to their horror, that Maude and the wagon were nowhere to be found. They remembered then that they hadn't tied up the wagon, as they weren't going to be in the store that long. So, these poor men had to walk all the way back to the Merrick House, which was about four miles and around an hour of walking. I am sure they were very nervous to mention to Solomon that Maude and the wagon were missing but Solomon chuckled and told them to go back to Cocconut Grove as he might know where Maude had gone - few blocks over from the store to the congregational church. Sure enough, when the workers finally reached the church upon their four mile return trek, there was Maude calm and content in the shade of a large tree on the property. Chair. Meagher said the traffic was less chaotic then and Maude could just wander about as she liked.

Chair Meagher said they had two visitors that would present first. She introduced Trina Oropeza from IMAGO for the Arts, who had attended the first presentation of "100 Voices" on October 2nd.

Ms. Oropeza introduced herself and thanked the board for having her at the meeting. She founded her company 7 years ago in Coral Gables. Originally a for-profit company, this year they changed to a non-profit. They do book presentations, guided tours, art classes for kids, exhibitions, an after-school program and a bookstore. The program is integrated with music, art and literature for kids and their families. The program is mostly in Spanish. Since creating the non-profit, the book presentation will be their first formal event. The book is entitled “Cuentos Bailable”. Each story is a song and originated from the different songs from different countries. The book has won a lot of prizes, and they will be at the book fair for the fourth time. The book is entitled Ediciones Ekaré. Ekaré means storyteller, like the Indians in Venezuela. Illustrated by Ramón París, both he and the CEO of the editorial will be at the Book Fair. Ms. Oropeza’s request is to have the book presentation on November 22, 2022, at the Merrick House. They will bring the music teacher, who will do the songs with the children. The book has eight songs, all of which are on Spotify. It is a modern storybook that integrates technology, it will be simple but very special and emotional for all.

The following questions were asked by various members of the board and answered by Ms. Oropeza:

Question: Were they interested in renting the house?

Answer: Yes, they were starting as a non-profit, so it was hard for them to rent the house, but they thought it was worth it.

Question: Would it be an inside or outside event?

Answer: Either way, since it would be November the weather would be nice.

Question: When would it be?

Answer: Tuesday before Thanksgiving at about 5 or 6 pm, children could go home from school and then come to the presentation.

Question: How many people?

Answer: No more than 40, as it is a Tuesday afternoon. Events are usually on the weekend, but the Book Fair is the weekend before and everyone associated with the book leaves on Wednesday, so Tuesday is the only possible day.

Question: How long will the event run?

Answer: One and a half to two hours at the most. The author and illustrator would sign and dedicate books to the children after the presentation which would be 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Question: Will there be actual dancing going on? Where will it be happening? The time is an issue as the time will have changed and it might be dark, and the outside lighting may not be sufficient.

Answer: Yes, there will be dancing.

Chair Meagher loved the concept. She suggested the dancing could take place on the side of the house on the driveway under the portico where there was lighting. The children could congregate under the portico and flow out to the driveway which would give them a lot of room to dance.

Chair Meagher read the following that the board needed to consider: *Before making any recommendations for use of the House or grounds, the Coral Gables Merrick House Governing Board will carefully consider potential impact on historical materials in the House, staff availability to supervise the use of the House, and the availability of staff from other departments to carry out the event.*

Children dancing inside the house made her very nervous.

Ms. Cason loved the idea of having it outside but was concerned with the sound. Ms. Seipp said when they had the other events, they brought speakers for music, and it worked well. Sometimes people sat in the front lawn, and the presentations were on the porch, and everyone can hear. At Christmas they had singers and Santa. Ms. Burke said they could also use the porch depending on the number of kids.

Ms. Oropeza hoped for more than the 10-15 kids she thought would come, but since it was the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, she doubted it. Ms. Seipp suggested having the presentation and the book signing on the porch on the side and the dancing under the portico. Ms. Bondurant asked if they would like to have a tour for guests. Ms. Oropeza said yes. Chair Meagher said it would be a quick tour, downstairs only.

The following are the requirements to rent the house:

1. \$500 refundable security deposit.
2. If the organization does not have insurance, they must purchase a one-time insurance policy. In either case the City of Coral Gables must be listed as the additional insured.
3. Rental is for a minimum of 3 hours, anything over 3 hours is charged at \$30 per hour.
4. They will have to submit the application to the Special Events Committee, that meets once a month

Ms. Oropeza said they would have no food, only drinks. Ms. Bondurant said they would have a short tour. Ms. Oropeza asked to have a guided tour in Spanish for an adult group, on another day, maybe a Saturday, not in November, but they did not have a date. Chair Meagher said she could contact Ms. Bondurant.

Ms. Oropeza said they have a singing presentation with a core of children in December called “Parranda Navidena” and could she have it at the Merrick House. The board had the following questions:

Question: Was it only children and was there dancing?

Answer: It was for the families and there was no dancing. just singing.

Question: What date?

Answer: December 15, 2022.

The Holiday Open House is on December 11, 2022.

Question: How long would it be?

Answer: 45 minutes to an hour.

Question: Were they looking at the Merrick House for the two events because it is historic? Would other sites work as well, and had they seen any other sites.

Answer: The other sites are the Coral Gables Museum.

Chair Meagher is hesitant about the December date as it is a lot to ask of the docents as there are several events between now and December, including the Holiday Open House on the 11th. It was suggested that they contact the museum or Books & Books. Ms. Lam suggested they do a small performance at the Holiday Open House. This would bring the Spanish element into the city. Ms. Oropeza said they could do a shortened program instead of the whole repertory, and that she would speak with the teachers. Ms. Lam suggested a 10-minute presentation.

Chair Meagher said the board needed to approve the rental and Ms. Oropeza would have to submit an application.

A motion was made by Ms. Lam and seconded by Ms. Seipp to approve the rental of the Merrick House for the November 22, 2022, event for the book Cuentos Bailables.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Meagher introduced Mr. Gillis from the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables.

Mr. Gillis introduced himself and said that he attended the first presentation of the “100 Voices” and congratulated the board and asked if they could partner for an event in the spring. He was planning a program for the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables know as Tertulia- named after the literary salons of 17th Century Spain. The Coral Gables Tertulia presents interesting and educational topics that promote the understanding and importance of historic resources and the presentation of the friendly exchange of ideas and information. They are featuring an international theme in the fall and the coming spring. He would like to partner with the Merrick House Board about the Alhambra Water Tower for this event. It would not be their event, but they would work with the board to come up with a mutual time and the specifics. Chair Meagher asked if they had speakers in mind? Mr. Gillis said he would have something related to the “Tales of the Alhambra”. He had someone in mind but needed to get a date.

Chair Meagher said she sees a lot of potential for partnering with HPACG. HPACG has its membership as potential audience members, and they could potentially get more people and tie it in with “100 Voices” which would be one less event to plan for. It fits in with the mission of “100 Voices” which is a combination of stories of living in Coral Gables and historic information.

The board asked Mr. Gillis the following questions

Question: What would the event consist of? What would you do at the event?

Answer: It would be very similar to what you did at this last event. They will have a presentation. They did not need a tour, but if docents could be there to greet the members. He thought they will get people coming to do a tour on a separate weekend. If possible, they will have refreshments.

Question: Would it be centered on the book or the actual architecture?

Answer: They are planning two different ones; they are trying to get a house on Alhambra Circle to give a presentation on the Alhambra Water Tower or it could be at the Merrick House. The “Tales of the Alhambra” is where they took the names of all the streets, it would depend on what day they agreed on and if he could get the speaker for “Tales of the Alhambra”.

Ms. Seipp thought it was interesting and a good idea and a nice tie-in, she believes a lot of people will attend. She proposed moving the “100 Voices” to the second Sunday of the month, due to a personal conflict with Evensongs at Trinity Cathedral. She suggested to have the joint event on the second Sunday in either January, February, April or May.

Ms. Seipp recommended not to hold anything outside in May because of the heat. Chair Meagher said refreshments would be outside and the event inside. Mr. Gillis suggested January or February. Some ideas of the name of the event were discussed. Mr. Gillis said typically they did not charge, instead suggested they asked for a donation. Chair Meagher said they would discuss it. Ms. Seipp said the fee was a way to get people to show up. Mr. Gillis said that at the October event he had to pay at the door as he couldn’t get the Eventbrite website to work. Ms. Lam asked if they could have a suggested donation instead of charging. Chair Meagher said they could still have the event on EventBrite to encourage people to reserve but make it a free event. Ms. Seipp suggested noting on the site: Space Limited, Reserve Your Spot.

Mr. Gillis asked what the limit was. Ms. Bondurant said there were 24 people at the October 2nd event. Maximum capacity is 50.

A motion was made by Ms. Seipp and seconded by Ms. Burke for the Merrick House Board to collaborate with the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables for a Tertulia Event about Tales of the Alhambra in January or February of 2023.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Meagher said they would work out the details, and Mr. Gillis said he had someone who could do graphics.

The board thanked Mr. Gillis for coming.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Ms. Lam and seconded by Ms. Cason to approve the minutes of September 12, 2022, with corrections.

The motion was unanimously approved.

HOUSE REPORT:

Ms. Bondurant made the following Monthly Activity Summary for September 2022:

1. The month started with the House being open on Labor Day because of a new docent. In the past it was difficult to get coverage for the long weekends.
2. The month was relatively uneventful.
3. Ms. Bondurant shared comments from around the world. She had taken the sign-in book and made a list of the different countries that visitors had come from. They had visitors from Italy, Hong Kong, Australia, England, Azerbaijan, Dominican Republic, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Canary Islands, Jamaica, Spain and Russia. She read some of the compliments from the book.
4. All three docents have conducted at least one complete tour and know the procedures for conducting a tour, completing the paperwork and opening and closing the house. She will continue to try and pair them with veteran docents for a while longer.
5. Two issues in September were the alarm and the phone. The phone has been out for at least two weeks.
6. Ms. Bondurant was unable enter the house on Saturday due to the back door lock malfunctioning. (Everyone will have to be given new keys when the lock is replaced).
7. The weekend problem caused an issue, as Ms. Bondurant was unable to reach Ms. Kautz or Chair Meagher, so she called the police who called Public Works and they got hold of Ms. Kautz. Once Ms. Kautz came, the problem was rectified but they did not get into the house until 2pm and they had to turn away 7 people for the 1pm tour.
8. Ms. Bondurant suggested posting a restriction on the Merrick House grounds regarding access to the property at night. She suggested signs stating, "No trespassing from Sundown to Sunrise", this would deter persons from entering the property to camp out or engage in more egregious behavior.
9. Ms. Bondurant asked if the board wanted to have a fundraising event to auction off one of the stop signs. She suggested doing it as part of another event.
10. Summary of tour/sales activities for September 2022:
Number of visitors for tours: 45 (35 Adults; 3 Seniors; 7 Students 12+)
Sales: *1 Garden Book (funds go to the Villagers), 4 Poetry Books "Song of the Wind on a Southern Shore", 1 poster and received \$54 in tips.
11. Ms. Bondurant said she had made it clear to Ms. Kautz and Mr. Adams that when she took this job, she would not be the caretaker of the house, but she sees the following items that need to be addressed.
 - i) Broken Lock.
 - ii) Pressure Cleaning: The ramp on the west side of the house is covered with algae. The whole area needs to be pressure cleaned.
 - iii) There needs to be a backup person to call in an emergency. Ms. Dona Spain's name is still on the police's list of persons authorized to enter the house in emergencies. This needs to be updated.

12. She suggested that Mr. Kim Roy (who put together the book with the naming of the streets) who lived across the street from her would be a candidate as a speaker for "100 Voices".

Chair Meagher asked Director Adams if he would contact Public Works regarding the pressure cleaning. Director Adams said he would like to know when it was last done and if it was part of a regular maintenance schedule. Chair Meagher said Ms. Worm would know, but she did not think it was part of a regular maintenance schedule. Director Adams said it was something that should be done regularly rather than when it was needed. A regular maintenance schedule should be created to give Public Works advance notice of what needs to be done. This should include everything like exterior, a/c unit, roof, walls. He did not know what the City requirement was, but for a public building there were things that needed to be done every six months, and if something was required more often it should be done. Chair Meagher said she would work with Ms. Kautz on a maintenance schedule. Director Adams said public safety was of utmost importance. A list should be created and updated regularly.

Ms. Reese asked who the designated person would be to oversee the house in the same manner as Ms. Worm. Ms. Bondurant said she lived in an old house and could not handle two. She said that Ms. Worm had been the person to contact Public Works regarding any issues.

Chair Meagher reminded those present that the estimate for repairing the Venetian plaster in the front hall is \$9500 and inquired as to whether funds could be transferred from the house account to cover the repair and reimbursed by the City (a loan of sorts). Director Adams said he would have to check on that. There is work that Public Works cannot and should not do. He was not aware that Public Works had funding issues, but he would speak with them to determine why it was taking so long to have repairs completed. He suggested they compile a list of the required repairs. Chair Meagher said Ms. Kautz had already done so. Director Adams said it should be in the maintenance plan. He suggested creating a maintenance plan and reaching out to Public Works to see the reality of maintaining the schedule. If there was a costly repair, they needed to know when it would be completed and what could be done in the interim to prevent the damage from getting worse. He would ask Public Works if there was a fund for emergency repairs. Once the maintenance plan and schedule are prepared, Public Works should be contacted to allow them to create a schedule for the work. It will allow them to know what is upcoming and funds can be requested in the next budget. It will not take care of items that come up such as a roof leak, but it will take care of the foreseeable items that occur on a regular basis. Ms. Burke said the board needs to establish a regular maintenance schedule and put together a list of projects that need to be done immediately. Chair Meagher said that she wanted to have the board meet with Public Works. Ms. Seipp agreed. Chair Meagher said she would set up a date for everyone to meet and discuss the maintenance schedule with Ms. Kautz. Ms. Lam said that in her other capacity it had taken Public Works over two years to complete items that they had requested, even though they had submitted approved lists.

Ms. Burke asked if they were willing to get an outside contractor to do the work and pay for it themselves. Ms. Seipp said no unless there was a leak that was causing severe damage. Ms. Bondurant said the plaster was falling off the roof between the fireplace on the porch and the ceiling. Ms. Lam asked if they should bring this up at a Commission hearing or meet with one of the Commissioners to make them aware of the problem.

Director Adams said he would reach out to Mr. Hermes Diaz (Director of Public Works) to find out if the City had a maintenance plan for the House.

Ms. Lam said the deadline for The Villagers grant was on Saturday.

Ms. Bondurant said they had almost 1,000 visitors for the year. The actual count was about 986 and the projection was 600. Director Adams said the projection had been low because of COVID, but he had increased it slightly for this year.

Chair Meagher encouraged Ms. Bondurant to submit her display about the world visitors to web edit so that the information could be put on the website.

Ms. Lyons said Public Works had sent an email to do the pressure cleaning on the ramp and a work order was created.

Director Adams asked if there was a list of persons to contact about issues for the Merrick House. Ms. Seipp suggested sharing the list with the Police Department. Chair Meagher agreed with Ms. Seipp and wanted to meet with Public Works representatives which would foster a good working relationship.

Ms. Bondurant said that should invite each department to send a representative to tour the Merrick House.

Special Events Committee meets the first Friday of every month and Ms. Oropeza has been sent an email with that schedule.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Display Case Key – Ms. Lyons has found a replacement.
2. Maid – Chair Meagher would follow up with Ms. Kautz to see if the request had been made for the maid to do the additional work.
3. Trash – is now being picked up.
4. Ribbon Cutting – was postponed due to weather. Ms. Kautz will provide new dates. Chair Meagher suggested the cutting should take place at the Holiday Open House.
5. Donations – Ms. Cason will bring previously approved donation items to the house. The thank-you letter needs to be written.
6. “100 Voices”:
 - a) The October Event went well. Chair Meagher was absent, due to a funeral, but other members of the board were present.
 - b) November 6th Event – They had a planning meeting with Lon Dowlen, Gay Bondurant, Petsy Mezey & June Morris to discuss the event. They will bring yearbooks and photos to be put out on the porch with other items. Ms. Burke said she will bring her old-fashioned school bell. Chair Meagher said that the photographer who filmed the event was expensive and suggested that they use a student or a professional that would not charge as much. Ms. Seipp said she would contact the Ransom School Photography Department.
 - c) Eventbrite – The decision was made to leave the cost at \$5. The charge on the joint event with Mr. Gillis will be changed to a “suggested donation”.
 - d) Chair Meagher suggested to skip “100 Voices” in March as they were having the tea.
7. Piano – Arthur Marino said Althea’s piano needs to be gutted and redone. It is a 1905-1906 Baldwin, and the piano would have to be shipped for repairs and it would take 2-3 years and cost \$15,000.00. It was decided not to repair it.
8. Gramophone – Chair Meagher will get an estimate to repair it.
9. Fumigation of Books - 39 fumigated books have been returned to the house. The estimate to fumigate the balance of 600 books is \$9 each for a total of \$5400. Chair Meagher will request a Villagers Grant for \$2700. Ms. Lam said to put in for the full amount. The cabinet will no longer be used for books, as it creates a humid environment not conducive for storage of paper archives.
10. Dates:
 - Holiday Open House – December 11th.
 - Garden Club is decorating – Monday, December 5th.
 - Tree Delivery – Tuesday, December 6th.
 - Tree Decorating – Wednesday, December 7th.

11. Holiday Open House:
 - a) Decorations – Ms. Burke suggested not to use live evergreen on the staircase to prevent damage. Chair Meagher said they had plenty of artificial garland. Ms. Bondurant said it was a problem for people grabbing the rail. It was suggested not to wrap the stairs and instead do a swag.
 - b) Merchandise Table – There are a lot of items. The board will price and organize the merchandise on December 7th.
 - c) Vendors – Ms. Lam has secured the vendors.
 - d) Santa Letters – The box is at the house and will be used again.
 - e) Carolers – the invoice has been sent to Ms. Kautz.
12. Merrick Minute – The readings at Commission meetings were postponed because of the storm. Chair Meagher will work with Commissioner Anderson to start the Merrick Minute Series in January.
17. Lunch with Employees – To be organized and promoted.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Partnership with Coral Gables Museum – The Dream Exhibit will be new and improved. Museum Director Elvis Fuentes said he is staying true to the mission of the Coral Gables Museum.
2. Tour of the Merrick House – The Coral Gables Museum Board will have a private tour on Thursday, November 17th at 7pm, and this will be an opportunity for the board to have their input. Each board member will have their own room and serve as docent for that room. Chair Meagher will prepare room notes. Food and drink will be served on the porch.
3. The one vote that saved the Biltmore – Dorothy Thomson will speak at the Coral Gables Museum on Thursday. It is the 50th anniversary of Dade Heritage Trust and Books & Books on the same night.
4. Email of Events – An email with the date and times of the events will be sent out.

DISCUSSION ITEMS: None

CITY COMMISSION ITEMS: None

ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY:

1. Roxy Bolton Fund - \$4,939
2. Trust Fund - \$51,870

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Ms. Seipp and seconded by Ms. Lam to adjourn the meeting.
The motion was unanimously approved.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:58 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Adams
Historic Preservation Officer