

MIAMI BEACH

7605 Collins Avenue Property Future Uses Sunshine Meeting
7605 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach, FL 33141
September 17, 2024
3:30 p.m.

Attendees, in alphabetical order:

Members of the City Commission:

- Rosen Gonzalez, Kristen - Commissioner.

City Staff:

- Atencio, Luis – Aide to Commissioner Magazine.
- Barbou, Regis – Assistant City Clerk.
- Budin, Jacquelin – Aide to Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez.
- Carpenter, Eric – City Manager.
- Curitore, Thomas – Code Compliance Assistant Director.
- Llanes, Javier – Operations Manager for Property Management.
- Miro, Elizabeth – Interim Director Facilities and Fleet Management Department.
- Murillo, Sara – Aide to Commissioner Bhatt.
- Premdas, Charles – Facilities Zone Manager.
- Sanchez, Kevin – Administrative Officer Public Works Property Management.
- Singer, Jani – Office of the Inspector General Investigator.

Members of the public:

- Shafer, Larry.
- Weiss, Sharon.

AFTER ACTION

The meeting began at 3:45 p.m.

Attendees gathered on the first floor in the now vacant living room of the house.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez welcomed everyone. The reason she called this Sunshine Meeting is to see what can be done with the property they are visiting today located at 7605 Collins Avenue. She would like to have a tour of the property, but before beginning the tour she asked City Manager Carpenter to explain what the current plans are for this property.

Eric Carpenter, City Manager, stated that they are ultimately in a bit of a holding pattern to see what the City Commission wants to do. At this point, the Building Department has purchased the property, and it sits on their balance sheet. It is up to them to move forward with the design and refurbishment to make this property more conducive to City services. There is money in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year for the Building Department to make renovations. Still, they would have to do a selection of a design consultant and execution of either a Job Order Contract (JOC) or if they decide to go with something significantly larger. They would have to do a full design and construction contract.

EXHIBIT "A"

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked whether as of now the Building Department is the owner of this property.

City Manager Carpenter replied that unless there is direction given by the City Commission otherwise, the game plan is to have the Building Department move in. Currently, the Building Department has a much smaller space in the facility by the fountain in Normandy Drive. Were they to move into this property, they would not use 100% of the space at this property, and they could then determine what other services they can use this space for.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez thanked City Manager Carpenter for the information. She asked Interim Director Miro to lead the tour of the property.

Elizabeth Miro, Interim Director Facilities and Fleet Management Department, agreed and stated that she would start the tour on the first floor.

The tour began in the living room and moved through the kitchen into the recording studio, which is located in the northeast section of the house.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that it seems to be a very expensive house for how small it is.

City Manager Carpenter replied that the house is not as valuable as the land it is on. This property sits on a big chunk of land that was not incorporated into the Altos del Mar Park.

Sharon Weiss, a member of the public, asked City Manager Carpenter for more information as to how this property was not integrated into the Park.

City Manager Carpenter replied that before the Park was built this block was full of residential properties just like the homes that can be found between 77th and 79th Streets. However, when the City went ahead and built the Altos del Mar Park, this was the only property the City was unable to acquire. Back when the Park was being built it did not make sense to purchase the property once it went above a certain price point, but now one would probably pay pennies on the dollar to get the property back then, as opposed to what the City eventually paid to acquire this property.

The tour continued into the recording studio.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked whether this house would have to be renovated to be ADA compliant given the layout of this house it may be very expensive to bring this house up to the required specifications.

City Manager Carpenter replied that the property would have to be made ADA-compliant only if it is intended to be a public-facing building.

The tour continued to the common area in the southeast portion of the house facing the pool.

Jacqueline Budin, Aide to Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez, asked what would happen to the pool.

EXHIBIT "A"

Interim Director Miro replied that the pool would have to be closed off and repurposed for additional space depending on the needs of any potential facility. If this place is to be commercialized, they would have to make modifications to it.

The tour continued back to the recording studio.

Larry Shafer, a member of the public, stated that the Surfrider Foundation could use a portion of the recording studio and the bathroom for their water testing lab. They would have to have a separate entrance, but he believes this could be a good use for it. They would, however, not need the entire house, just the portion he highlighted in the recording studio and the bathroom.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked whether the City could buy this property from the Building Department.

City Manager Carpenter replied that the City could do so.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked whether it could be a ceremonial purchase because purchasing it outright would come at a monetary loss.

City Manager Carpenter replied that he would have to consult with the Office of the City Attorney on that question because he does not know how that would work. He would rather err on the side of caution, but it is something that can be looked into.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that this house is a weird space for an office. She would prefer to demolish the house and add the property to the Altos del Mar Park.

City Manager Carpenter replied that he believes that that is the long-term plan, but the question is what do we do with this property in the interim.

Ms. Weiss stated that she spoke with Fire Chief Abello about what she would be looking for in alternative locations for Ocean Rescue, and one of the things she mentioned was an area large enough for their meetings. This house has a suitable open area for those meetings, which is better than the trailer Ocean Rescue currently meetings in.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez agreed that the living room in this house could be used for meetings. Mr. Osvaldo Garcia of the CWA could not make it to the meeting today because he is on vacation, but she believes he would want to look at this location and see if it is suitable for them.

City Manager Carpenter stated that there is a service that can be provided from this location, but the question is how long we want to relocate something here, and how long until we realize the ultimate goal once we do something with the North Shore Branch Library. Do we then do something with the Parking lot, and do we connect this property with Ocean Terrace Park and connect it down to Bandshell Park and become part of the L-shaped park system that goes from Parkview Island to 77th Street?

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that they could potentially use this property as a Recreation Center.

City Manager Carpenter replied that they could use this for storage or a location for one or two offices, but he is unsure if this property would be a good fit as a recreation center.

EXHIBIT "A"

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that the Building Department bought this property. How would we feel if Surfrider would like to use this space?

Mr. Shafer stated that Surfrider does not need to use the whole property. They could use the areas he pointed out earlier in the recording studio and the bathroom. Currently, Surfrider uses a temporary space on 1680 Meridian Avenue, it is like a WeWork cubicle, for which they pay. They do water testing and provide the results for free. If the City were to give Surfrider a space, they could save \$1,000 a month, and they could then use that money to test at more locations.

Ms. Weiss stated that if Surfrider were to become accredited, they could then sell the water testing to other municipalities.

Mr. Shafer stated that the State of Florida wants an accredited lab. This property would be a good use for Surfrider. They would only need to use the recording studio and bathroom and do some modifications such as installing a locking door and adding a sink and a shower. This would be a technical lab where testing is done, and the shower would be needed in case something has to be showered off.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that she believes there could be windows in the recording studio.

City Manager Carpenter stated that he believes the recording studio used to be the house's garage. That is why there are steps leading up to the main area of the first floor of the house.

Mr. Shafer stated that anything is better than the current Ocean Rescue trailers. He does not believe they would want to stay in the trailers for another five years while they wait for the negotiations with the County to go ahead to build the new shared facility. That is a realistic thing that both David Gomez, CIP Division Director, and David Martinez, CIP Director, agreed on. One thing about this proposal to move Ocean Rescue to this location is that as soon as the new facility is constructed, they can move out immediately.

Ms. Weiss stated that if Ocean Rescue were to leave the West Lots, residents could gain the Parking spaces back.

Mr. Shafer agreed with Ms. Weiss. If Ocean Rescue were to move to this location, that would mean that North Shore would get its parking spaces back. Currently, Ocean Rescue is taking up 25 parking spaces in the West Lots. He does not believe this is an unreasonable ask. He clarified that he is not a politician and does not speak on behalf of his neighborhood, but he knows his neighbors and they have been vocal on wanting those parking spaces back. Ocean Rescue is taking up half a parking lot, and we have more people coming in using parking spaces. Not to mention when the new rules kick in, people will buy Altos del Mar parking passes that will load up the West Lots, which are already full for weekends, holidays, full-moon parties, etc. 25 parking spaces may not sound like a lot, but it is very meaningful for our neighborhood. This is why they wrote the proposal. He would like this to stay on the table, and he believes that aside from Ocean Rescue, Surfrider could benefit from using this location. Surfrider tests the water and Ocean Rescue works in the water that is not a bad tie-in. He is sure they can get along and each use their separate space.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that Ocean Rescue is currently in a large parking lot, which she has not visited in some time, but she believes they have a lot of equipment stored there.

EXHIBIT "A"

Mr. Shafer stated that he has photographs and videos of the location that he can share with everyone.

City Manager Carpenter stated he visited the site not too long ago, and he believes there are opportunities to free up parking without relocating the trailers, but ultimately, he wants to make sure he does not put the Fire Chief at a disadvantage. We will be in the process of determining what we will be doing at this location. This is not ready for primetime so to speak. This will take time, money, and making sure everything works from an operational perspective.

Mr. Shafer thanked City Manager Carpenter. He is glad to see this is still on the table. This idea first came out of Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez's recap meeting.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that in theory this is a good idea, but there is still a lot to get done legislatively. We need to remember that this property belongs to the Building Department; we need to determine whether the Administration and the Fire Chief are on board with having Ocean Rescue move to this site; and lastly, does Ocean Rescue even want to move here?

City Manager Carpenter replied that he does not have the answers to those questions yet, but it is important to show that this property can work for Ocean Rescue's needs as opposed to just asking them whether they would move to this location. We need to remember that change is hard.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked whether the house provides enough space; are the trailers bigger?

Ms. Weiss stated that the trailers do provide a big space, but when she spoke with the Fire Chief, she said they need a bigger space for meetings when they discuss shifts and duties for the entire day.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez addressed Ms. Weiss and Mr. Shafer and stated that if they want something to happen legislatively, they will need to get other members of the City Commission on board. She supports what they are proposing, but she cannot do it alone. The aides for Commissioners Bhatt and Magazine are present at this meeting, perhaps they can talk to them about this. She believes that Commissioner Suarez would also be attentive to their request.

The tour continued back to the living room.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez noted that the downstairs area is relatively small. She asked to see the upstairs.

The tour continued to the second floor.

City Manager Carpenter noted the small half-bedroom located on the west side of the house.

The tour continued to the master bedroom located on the east side of the house.

City Manager Carpenter commented that this is the best space in the house and provides a lot of space. Unfortunately, this area is not ADA accessible unless an elevator is installed and those are expensive. He believes this could be a great space for storage or offices, but not suitable for public-facing purposes.

EXHIBIT "A"

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that she would like to see this property serve the public and not just be used as storage.

City Manager Carpenter replied that given the constraints of the house having poor ADA accessibility, making this open to the public would be difficult. They could potentially have the first floor accessible to the public and have the upstairs used for staff offices, but everything is still up in the air about what the future of this property will be.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked City Manager Carpenter if he liked the idea of having Ocean Rescue here.

City Manager Carpenter replied that if Ocean Rescue does not want to be here then he does not want them to be here. It is up to them to decide whether they would like the space or not.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked if there were only two bedrooms on the second floor.

City Manager Carpenter replied that there are only one and a half bedrooms in this house, and although the master bedroom is of considerable size the half bedroom is very small.

Interim Director Miro stated that there must have been some modifications made when the house was renovated in 2019.

The tour continued making its way from the master bedroom to the half bedroom.

Ms. Weiss stated that she understands Ocean Rescue not wanting to relocate if the County would have the new facility ready in a few months, but we are talking about something that will take about five years to complete. She believes this is a good site to house Ocean Rescue.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked Ms. Weiss to speak to the Fire Department and Ocean Rescue about that. She believes if Ms. Weiss gets Osvaldo Garcia, the Head of the CWA, on board with relocating Ocean Rescue here, then it will be easier to get the Fire Chief to agree to the relocation. Otherwise, this house is in the hands of the Building Department.

Ms. Weiss agreed with Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez. She believes this property is better suited for the needs of Ocean Rescue as opposed to the Building Department.

Mr. Shafer believes that financially an Ocean Rescue relocation will work. If we put functionality first, then the accounting will follow. They have made it clear that they would like Ocean Rescue as an option to relocate to this location, which would eventually lead to the residents of North Beach getting their parking spaces back. If Ocean Rescue does not want this property, then they can look at other options.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked Mr. Shafer if he had considered coming to the City Commission meetings and speaking at the Stanley Sutnick Hour and expressing his proposal.

Mr. Shafer stated that he had already done so.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked Mr. Shafer when he did so because she does not recall seeing him at the Stanley Sutnick Hour.

EXHIBIT "A"

Ms. Weiss stated that Mr. Shafer spoke at the latest afternoon Stanley Sutnick Hour.

Mr. Shafer stated that this is a meaningful proposal and the merit is independent of the labor put in. He believes Ocean Rescue will realize that this property is better than operating out of a trailer. It is that clear and easy. He recalled David Gomez and David Martinez bringing up the issue of Ocean Rescue needing space to park their vehicles such as jet skis and ATVs.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez agreed with Mr. Shafer, that there is a problem with Ocean Rescue having to relocate its equipment and vehicles.

Mr. Shafer replied that he believes the City could block the street next to this house and use it for parking Ocean Rescue vehicles.

Ms. Weiss stated that the street Mr. Shafer is referring to is a dead end. It can be used to park Ocean Rescue vehicles.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked Ms. Weiss whether she had spoken to the Fire Chief about this property and whether she had expressed interest in using it for Ocean Rescue.

Ms. Weiss replied that the Fire Chief had not expressed interest in the property.

Mr. Shafer stated that the Fire Chief is not interested in this property and the residents are not interested in her using the West Lots, and if he needs to raise his voice at the Stanley Sutnick Hour to get his point across to the Fire Chief then he will do so. The Fire Chief does not get to rule everything because she has a large and powerful Union behind her. He is sorry, but the residents want Ocean Rescue off the West Lots, they need the Parking spaces back. If the Fire Chief chooses not to show up, then that is up to her. If she wants a reputation of not caring about the residents then she will hear about it from the residents. It is not an option to take parking spots away when residents are supposed to follow new parking regulations.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez adding to Mr. Shafer's point, stated that it looks like the permanent facility is about a decade away from being built.

Mr. Shafer stated that nothing had been done about it. The neighborhood put the time into finding a suitable location for Ocean Rescue. City Manager Carpenter is trying to play the medium here. If Ocean Rescue says to leave them in the West Lots, then he would ask for them to take the fence back and put it around the trailer to free up parking spaces. He would agree to that because there would be a compromise. However, if Fire Chief Abello chooses to keep Ocean Rescue in the West Lots without changing anything then there will be many irate residents who will complain. The City has to clean up its act regarding the West Lots. He is not speaking out of anger here, but rather pointing out that something has to be done about this.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked Ms. Budin to schedule a meeting with Fire Chief Abello and Mr. Garcia of the CWA.

Mr. Shafer stated that they missed this meeting, so they should at least at some point come to the property and check it out.

Ms. Budin stated that she believes the Fire Department was supposed to send someone to this meeting, at least that was based on prior communications. She will set up a separate meeting with them as well.

EXHIBIT "A"

Ms. Weiss stated that the Fire Chief should at least look at the property. If she rules it out without anyone from the Fire Department or the Union checking it out first, then that is not great faith.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that Mr. Garcia of the CWA could not make it to this meeting because he was on vacation.

Mr. Shafer replied that that is a reasonable answer for why he is not present today.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that if Mr. Garcia is on board with the Ocean Rescue relocation, then the Fire Chief would most likely be more agreeable to it. She does like the idea, it makes sense.

Ms. Weiss added that this house is nicer than a trailer there is space and there are showers.

The tour continued back to the first floor of the house.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez addressed City Manager Carpenter and stated that she, Mr. Shafer, and Ms. Weiss, had been discussing relocating Ocean Rescue and moving them out of the trailers from the West Lots into this location so that it would free up parking spaces in the West Lots. She does not want to put City Manager Carpenter on the spot right now expecting an answer but wanted to see if he had something to add.

City Manager Carpenter stated that he understands what the ask is.

Mr. Shafer stated that a compromise can be reached by fencing in the trailers that are already in the West Lots, which would then free up the rest of the Parking spaces for residents to use at night. He would not choose to remain in the West Lot trailers when there is a luxury home available, but that is up to Ocean Rescue to determine.

City Manager Carpenter stated that they can try and find a way to have the trailers separated from the Parking so that they do not take up so many parking spaces.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that Ocean Rescue may not want to stay in the Parking lot if they move the fence.

Luis Atencio, Aide to Commissioner Magazine, stated that Commissioner Magazine would like to know whether the only proposal for this space is for Ocean Rescue.

City Manager Carpenter replied that the status quo is that the Building Department used their dedicated enterprise fund to buy this property, so any lack of direction from the City Commission to the alternative, the Building Department would remain the primary owner of the house. What would then happen is that they would renovate it and move out of their space by the Normandy Fountain and put the North Beach Office here. They would probably lease out space to other City departments as necessary. This would become the North Beach annex of City Hall.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that if this house were bigger she would agree, but she believes the house is just too small and disjointed.

City Manager Carpenter replied that the space is not optimal, but they will make do with what they have.

EXHIBIT "A"

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez joked with City Manager Carpenter whether he had any interest in moving back to Miami Beach.

City Manager Carpenter replied that he and his family now live in Broward County.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez stated that the answer right now is that the Building Department owns the property. Mr. Shafer, Ms. Weiss, and other residents would like to see the West Lots freed up for parking, but as of now, the Fire Chief has not expressed interest in this property. We are looking at least ten years before the new facility is completed.

City Manager Carpenter stated that Ocean Rescue had been in trailers long before he got this job with the City.

Mr. Shafer stated that there is a joke among residents and they call this "Miami Beach temporary," meaning that here we are temporarily and two decades later people cannot remember when they got there. The Ocean Rescue facility has an eight-foot chain link fence with graffiti. He will send photographs and videos of the location. It is an eyesore and it takes up parking spaces. The new parking regulations mean that people will buy Altos del Mar parking passes. If someone lives in North Shore, they can buy Altos del Mar parking passes and park in the West Lots, but this is limited if Ocean Rescue keeps taking up so many parking spaces.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez asked whether they could get all 25 parking spots back.

City Manager Carpenter stated that as long as we have signage that people have to be out of the Parking spaces before the lifeguards get there, we can free up the Parking spaces say from 6 p.m. until 8 a.m., or whatever times we need.

Mr. Shafer stated that Ocean Rescue can stay in the trailer if they want. He sent out an email that highlighted four locations that they could move to. One option was to co-locate with the County. There are also two northern West Lots that are vacant lots with no parking. He would ask if they move to that location they not use a chain link fence. Also, the fourth option is a luxury home. He knows which option he would pick.

Commissioner Rosen Gonzalez thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.