



# GABLES GOOD GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2016

GABLES  
GOOD GOVERNMENT  
COMMITTEE  
*Founded February 2009*

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**Jorge Alvarez**  
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**Jeannett Slesnick**

### BOARD MEMBERS

**Richard Leslie**  
**Patrick Morris**  
**Dorothy Stein**  
Mayor **Dorothy Thomson**

## Slesnick Forum Draws Concerned Crowd



Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick recently hosted her second community forum at the Biltmore Hotel. The February 18th event attracted nearly 300 people.

This being almost as many as the over 300 at the first forum in October 2015. Advertised with the title "**Cranes, Codes and Collaboration**", plans and drawings showing current and expected developments were posted for viewing.

In a survey conducted several months ago, Commissioner Slesnick identified the area of most concern to responding residents as "**over-development**" and "**traffic.**" Slesnick invited panel members to be prepared to respond to questions pertaining to those topics. The panel consisted of Former Mayor and GGG Board Member Dorothy Thomson, EWM realtor Christopher Zoller, Economic Development Director Javier Betancourt, and Planning and Zoning Board member Frank Rodriguez. After making brief statements, the panelists responded to questions from the group. It was no surprise that questions focused on zoning

changes allowing development in manner felt to be excessive. The message from most of the panelists included the sentiment that zoning changes need to be addressed with a planned approach which includes public input and truly incorporates the public opinion. In answer to the repeated expressions of frustration from the crowd that many Commissioners have not incorporated what appears to be the overwhelming opposition to recent developments, Mr. Rodriguez advised that the residents must learn about their candidates and vote in the next election. **(See sidebar on page 2.)**

Commissioner Slesnick also provided a new publication containing information about each presently active building project. The current booklet is a specific update from the one provided by GGG one year ago.



**Above: A full house at the Biltmore Hotel for Commissioner Slesnick's second Town Hall Meeting.**

Gables Good Government Committee was organized to support issues and causes that preserve and improve the quality of life in Coral Gables and promote the effective and efficient management of its government.



# City Calls for Transportation Plan

From the 2015 City of Coral Gables election for the positions of Mayor and two Commission seats the following results were found:

Of the total number of registered voters, 30,663, slightly more than 25% or 7,803 cast ballots.

The highest percentage of votes cast in any precinct was 39%.

In the precinct with the highest number of registered voters, 3119, only 20% voted.

At the present time there is no system for a "run-off" in Coral Gables.

The winner of a multiple contender race is the candidate with the most votes.

**YOUR VOTE MATTERS!**

One of the top concerns of residents in Coral Gables is traffic. The City has hired a consultant to prepare a Comprehensive Transportation Plan for the entire City. As part of that effort, residents will have plenty of opportunity to provide their input.

Starting the week of March 14, the City will begin to publish dates for you to participate in community meetings. These meetings are only one venue

where the input will be heard and gathered. There will be other "pop-up" meetings but you can now begin using **Traffic@CoralGables.com** to provide your ideas and comments.

**FUN FACT:** Of the estimated 580,000 auto trips in Coral Gables each day, only 210,000 actually pass through Coral Gables. That means that 370,000 either start or end in the City. Only 36% is truly "cut through traffic"

**Coral Gables Transportation Plan**

Comprehensive      Multimodal      Integrated

**TRANSPORTATION MATTERS**

<p><b>RECENT PROGRESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection and review continuing</li> <li>• Creating content for the plan webpage</li> <li>• Conducted stakeholder interviews with City Commission members</li> <li>• Discussion of methodology for traffic calming analysis</li> <li>• Set up email site for input to the plan: <a href="mailto:traffic@coralgables.com">traffic@coralgables.com</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>UPCOMING ACTIVITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch webpage providing plan information</li> <li>• Continue interviews with stakeholders and city departments</li> <li>• Continue reviews of conditions in the field</li> <li>• Finalize traffic calming methodology</li> <li>• Completing the statement of purpose, goals and objectives for the plan</li> <li>• Define community meeting timeline</li> <li>• March 26, Pop up transportation planning meeting at Farmer's Market</li> </ul>
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GGG Committee Directors, Tom Snook, Treasurer and Don Slesnick, Founding Trustee, on board the *USS Midway* in San Diego Harbor while attending the American Bar Association's 2016 Mid-year Meeting.

Middle person not identified.



**Tell Your Friends About GGG**



# Unspoiled Fink Studio Interiors Revealed



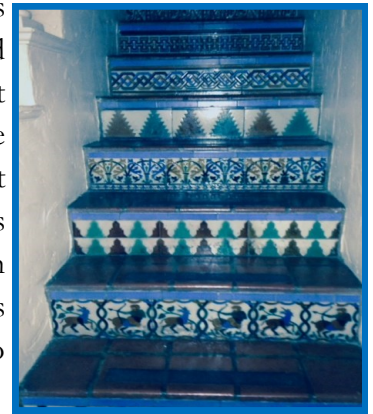
It is said that H. George Fink, considered the “official architect” of Coral Gables, at his peak was designing upwards of 40 houses a month. Many of those, it can be surmised, were given life in the drafting room of the studio now located at 2506 Ponce de Leon Blvd. Some 90 years ago the cousin of Coral Gables founder, George Merrick, designed and had built what is now referred to as the most outstanding example of Mediterranean architecture in the city of Coral Gables. This building is unique in the City with its delicate columns and lacey capitals defining Gothic windows, with sculpted faces above the main entrance and our only gargoyle perched on a corner below the coffered soffit.

Entering the building by passing through a small, intimate garden allows a brief but noticeable break from the busy sidewalk and major thoroughfare on which the studio is located. The visitor senses immediately the specialness of the interior as the cozy area with its decorated, exposed-beam ceiling and warm colors of



the original tile floor form a “jewel box” effect. Moving on to what is now the reception room and coming from the small foyer entrance into this dramatic space with soaring high ceilings almost makes one gasp. At every turn there is color. Not a riot of color but a com-

fortable palette of hues which are soothing and quiet. Furnishings are soft. Mirrors reflect muted sunlight. Twin miniature columns draw the eyes upward and punctuate the wall to hint of the staircase on the opposite side. Treatment on the staircase startles as ceramic tile in every earth color covers the risers and gently curves up to the second level.



According to Dona Spain, Historical Resources and Cultural Arts Director for the City, the idea of the City purchasing this most unusual of structures and then the actual purchase and final closing of the real estate process happened in an amazingly short time. She credits the City Commission and the City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark, for making this decision a reality.

Thus, on Saturday, March 19, 2016, the City Commission, represented by Vice-Mayor Frank Quesada, conducted a ribbon cutting ceremony thereby declaring the building a possession of the City of Coral Gables and its residents. It is still occupied by several private businesses and will remain so into the foreseeable future. In attendance for the event were notably, **Elaine Fink Schumacher, the granddaughter of H. George Fink, members of the Kitchens Family who’s relative, Dr. F.E. Kitchens** purchased the building from Fink in 1923. Dr. Kitchens was one of Coral Gables first doctors. He maintained his offices in this location until the late 1960’s. **Arva Moore Parks**, well known local historian and author, made remarks relative to the relationship of George Merrick and his cousin George Fink and which can be further studied in her recent book, *George Merrick, Son of the South Wind.*”

*“Coral Gables, Miami Riviera”*

# Can You Quantify Charm?



Ponce de Leon Blvd. & Miracle Mile

neighborhoods from out side of the city were also ranked as some of the most charming. Honestly, it seems like the data is spot on.

**#1 The Miracle Mile Area of Coral Gables. Peak Charm Score of 97.**

Well, the website *RentLingo* thinks it has figured out the mathematics behind what makes an area “charming” and it has ranked Miami as America’s most charming mid-sized city. That’s a nice counterpoint to the recent assertion by U.S. News and World Reports that Miami was the eighth worst city to live in America! So how exactly do you determine “charm” by using cold, hard data?

“The Charm Index pulls in data on crime, local businesses and institutions such as museums, libraries, and the availability of active lifestyle amenities such as gyms, parks and bike paths,” says the site.

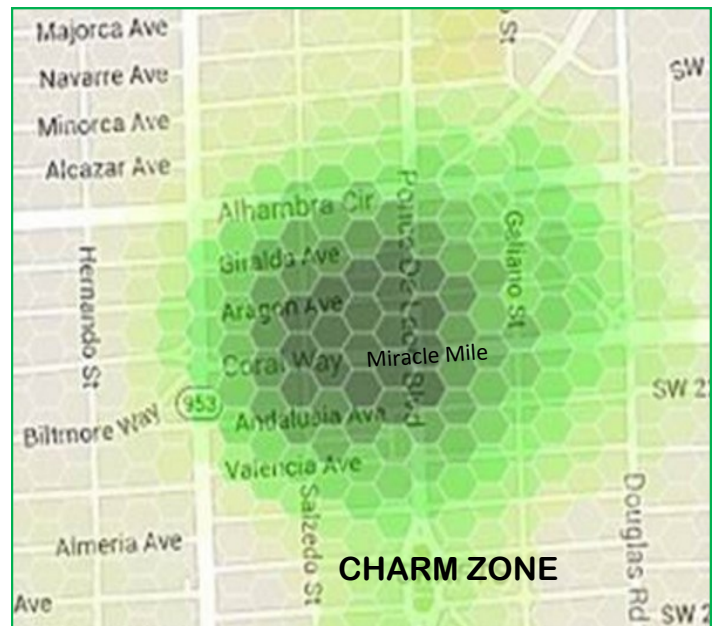
Four main factors, in particular, were taken into account: Store Price: Cheap versus High End; Store Ratings: Poorly Rated versus Highly Rated; Business ownership: Chain versus Local; Lifestyle: Sedentary versus Active. The site says the charm index varies even from block to block.

Oddly, Miami came in as the most charming “mid-sized city”. This is defined as any city between 200,000 and 500,000 residents, but

Coral Gables infamous zoning and building codes pretty much mandate charm, so it’s really no surprise this came out on top. Sure, a few chains have found their way into the mix but Miracle Mile has retained its distinctive character of classy restaurants and chic boutiques.

The area is home to a Books & Books, Actor’s Play House at the Miracle Theater and Coral Gables Museum.

Thanks NewTimes.



## HOW TO JOIN GGG

Send a letter to: Gables Good Government  
1825 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Box #448  
Coral Gables, FL 33134  
Email us at [DSwain@MilianSwain.Com](mailto:DSwain@MilianSwain.Com)

## ANNUAL DUES LEVELS

\$50 Individual / \$75 Household  
\$250 Sponsor or Advertiser / \$500 Donor  
\$1000 Corporate Donor



# Coral Gables Wins REAL Award



At their March, 2016 meeting the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce presented the **2016 Real Estate Achievers and Leaders Award** to the City of Coral Gables. The City is proud to be recognized as **Municipality/Community of the Year** and was chosen among several contenders. The criteria for receiving this award are based on the following: the structure of the municipality's legislative body, number of resident, total number of developer projects, sustainability programs or initiatives implemented, and its unique approach to support development.

Seen left Marina Folia, Executive Director, Business Improvement District of Coral Gables and City Commissioner, Jeannett Slesnick accept REAL award.

## Early 2016 Sees Two More Projects Requesting Review

A letter to Building and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias dated February 18, 2016 is requesting a review by the Development Review Committee. The project, referred to as Villa Madeira, proposes to replace two existing four unit, two story apartment buildings. Those structures have been deemed non-historic by the Historic Resources Department. The developer plans to construct a six story, eleven unit, luxury apartment project.

In addition a request, dated March 3, 2016, has been made to the Development Review Committee and proposes a project to be known as Merrick Entrance. This development is to be located at 390 Bird Road and 4012 Laguna St., Coral Gables. At the present time the properties in question are vacant and the current zoning allows for Commercial and Industrial and Industrial Mixed Use. The planned use is identified as Mixed Use/ Office and Retail.

For additional information go to [WWW.CoralGables.Com/Planning and Zoning/Development Review Committee Agendas](http://WWW.CoralGables.Com/Planning and Zoning/Development Review Committee Agendas)



Villa Madeira proposed for 335 and 341 Madeira Ave.



**Why is the City of Coral Gables Conducting a Streetscape Project?** Just as businesses today must continually reinvent themselves in order to stay successful, cities need to do likewise. Cities that thrive in the 21st century will be differentiated by their lively neighborhoods and business districts, cultural and recreational attractions, great sense of place, protected natural areas and deep pride in local character. Coral Gables must position itself to be the city of choice now and into the future. To achieve this, creating a more vibrant main street district is key. Miracle Mile's pedestrian experience has remained mostly unchanged since its inauguration in the 1950s. Today, not only does the physical environment need to be addressed, Miracle Mile is also experiencing more competitive economic challenges with the growth in regional sub-markets that are providing other options and

choices to residents and visitors. Further, the street requires updates to its infrastructure to fix: drainage, sidewalks and landscaping. Additionally, as part of the transformation, a section of Giralda Avenue, known as "restaurant row" will also be updated.

For answers to other questions on this subject see: [CoralGables.Com/Streetscape](http://CoralGables.Com/Streetscape).

This is not a City of Coral Gables publication. No public funds were used to publish this document. It may contain errors and omissions.