

LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

September 3– September 7, 2012

MIAMI-DADE LEAGUE OF CITIES

This month the MDCLC's Board of Directors Meeting was hosted by the Village of Miami Shores and held at the Miami Shores Country Club.

The following presentations were included on the agenda:

Miami-Dade County Public Schools:

Assistant Superintendent Iraida Mendez discussed the impacts of MDCPS financial plan, which successfully closed a \$60 million gap without cutting teachers or elective classes, and additionally calls for a reorganization of its top administrators.

Mendez also spoke about a proposed \$1.2 billion bond referendum to fix rundown school buildings and improve technology across the district. She further stated that the board approved the review of the costs and benefits of studying a disparity in contracts with minority and women owned businesses. The feasibility study is said to be the first step toward policy changes to ensure fair and equitable opportunities to all by the time the district gets the money it need for capital improvements.

Miami Dolphins:

Senior Director of Government Affairs Eric Knowles spoke about the Miami Dolphins 40th Anniversary tour and encouraged folks to buy season tickets. The tour includes photo opportunities with the 1972's perfect season Super Bowl Trophy. Knowles also spoke about improvements to the spectator experience as well as positive community outreach efforts.

Florida League of Cities Defender of Home Rule Award Presentation:

This special award was presented to State Representative John Patrick Julien for his continued efforts in preserving Miami-Dade's Home rule.

Citizens Insurance:

MDCLC President Luis Gonzalez spoke about Citizens backlash over raising rates; private insurers looking to Citizen's surplus; higher premiums for customers; and excessive spending for Citizens executives.

MIAMI

On Thursday, the Third district Court of Appeals overturned an injunction issued by Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judge Abby Cynamon that voided City Manager Johnny Martinez's declaration of financial urgency in July. The injunction was issued after the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) sued the city, arguing that the commission, not the manager, should have invoked the law.

A consequence of the injunction being overturned, the commission can now make unilateral changes to employee contracts to balance the \$484 million budget, while filling a \$40 million gap.

Meanwhile, City Attorney Julie Bru said that she and other top level administrators were encouraged by recent talks with the city's four labor unions; and further indicated that they anticipate coming to a concessions agreement, so that extraordinary measures would not be required.

FOP Vice President Javier Ortiz said that the union plans to move forward with a separate lawsuit related to the city's 2010 declaration of financial urgency, alleging that Miami had no ground to invoke the law.

The first budget meeting is scheduled for September 13.

MIAMI SHORES

Under the village manager's proposed spending plan for next year, Miami Shores will have to fill a budget shortfall of nearly \$1million by using funds from its savings.

Under his proposal, Village Manager Tom Benton is recommending that the tax rate remain flat at \$8.76 per \$1000 in taxable home value. That includes 76 cents per \$1,000 to cover the Village's debts and contributions to Doctor Charter School.

Benton predicted a shortfall of \$905,000 down from last year's \$1.13 million. He recommends that the council cover the deficit by using funds from its savings account, which currently contains \$7.6 million. According to Benton, the village of its size with a \$12 million General Fund budget should keep a Fund Balance of at least \$3 million.

Under the proposed budget the village is not expected to see any cuts in services, increases to the millage rate, garbage rates, or storm water utility fees.

MIAMI BEACH

Miami Beach has had a long time battle with flooding in low-lying area every time a storm hits. City leaders are considering a \$206 million overhaul of an antiquated drainage system, which is said to be increasingly compromised by rising sea levels.

South Florida counties and cities, as well as the South Florida Water Management District which oversees flood control for the region, are beginning to plan projects to keep the coastline dry as sea level inches up.

In 2009, South Florida political leaders and planners in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe counties formed a "climate change compact" to work together to confront threat of rising sea levels.

A number of studies have also been done by insurers, environmental groups, government and universities, which have singled out Miami-Dade County at the top of the list of at-risk cities, with tens of billions of dollars of property that could be damaged by heightened storm surge or flooding.

Currently, Miami Beach Mayor Matt Bower says her biggest concern is figuring out how to fund the much needed projects; further stating that it is not fair that the city have to bare the financial burden on its own.

To read more please click the link:

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/09/01/2980388/rising-sea-come-at-a-cost-for.html>

STATE OF FLORIDA (state pension fund case)

According to the Miami Herald:

The Florida Supreme Court heard oral arguments Friday in a case that could determine whether state legislators face another \$2 billion budget deficit next year, or whether state workers face another cut in salaries.

The lawsuit, *Scott v. Williams*, was filed by the Florida Education Association after lawmakers passed and Gov. Rick Scott signed into law a bill in 2001 that imposed a 3 percent tax on 623,000 teachers, police, firefighters and other government worker salaries to offset the state's investment into the Florida Retirement System.

Lawmakers argued at the time that the change was needed to fill a \$3.6 billion budget gap and bring Florida in line with 47 states that require their government workers to contribute to their pension plans. The savings was then plowed back into the budget, not into the retirement fund.

But Leon County Circuit Court Judge Jackie Fulford ruled in March that the pension changes were unconstitutional because the changes violated the contractual rights of the FRS employees, took private property without full compensation and impaired their collective bargaining rights. She ordered the state to halt the practice and reimburse workers with interest.

Attorney General Pam Bondi and Republican legislative leaders immediately challenged the ruling and stopped collecting money from employee payments. It's now up to the court to decide and that could take months.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/09/07/v-print/2989834/court-hears-case-challenging-changes.html#storylink=cpy>

FLORIDA LEAGUE OF CITIES:

During the Florida League of Cities 86th Annual Conference, Sweetwater Mayor Manuel "Manny" Maroño was sworn in as the League's 91st president by Florida Gov. Rick Scott. In his installation speech, President Maroño announced his platform for the upcoming year. An excerpt of his speech follows.

“ . . . Over the course of my term as president of the League, I will be focusing our efforts on reforming local government police and firefighter pensions. The state has imposed huge expensive and unsustainable unfunded mandates on local governments by requiring cities to provide our friends and constituents who put their lives on the line as police and firefighters, an unprecedented level of pension benefits. The Legislature has tied our hands and forced cities to raise millage rates or cut essential services by imposing these pension benefit requirements on us. Like you, I believe in a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Likewise, I believe that police officers and firefighters do a job that many of us would not sign up to do. They deserve the highest level of pension benefits a city can afford to provide them. It is not the job of the Florida Legislature to set the level of benefits for local government employees. That is called an unfunded mandate and shows complete disregard for the home rule authority granted to cities in Florida's Constitution. Gov. Rick Scott is well aware of the position cities are in as a result of the unsustainable pension benefit mandate. He and his staff are committed to try and help make revisions to the law that will remove the handcuffs this mandate imposes on Florida's cities. This governor cares about Florida's cities and has stepped up on our behalf. His attendance at our conferences speaks volumes about how he views the important job you do as local government officials. He is the first governor in at least the past decade that has made time to attend a League conference. We need to remember that as we work on our legislative initiatives for the 2013 session. I will be working closely with Gov. Scott on reforms to Florida's local government pension system. But, we cannot do this alone. I ask each of you to get fully engaged on this important issue. If we work together and reach out collectively to the police and firefighter representatives, I know we can save the pension system, have more control

of our budgets, and provide these honorable public servants a fair and reasonable pension. I want to thank everyone here for taking time to attend the conference – hopefully we have all learned a lot of good stuff to take back to our cities. I also want to thank everyone in advance for taking time to strengthen the League’s advocacy effort. Take time to meet with your local legislators, share your concerns, offer to help them, and when the League lobbyists ask you to call your legislator and tell them how a piece of legislation will affect your city, please call or email your legislator. I am excited about serving the League as president and equally excited about visiting your local or regional league to see first-hand what great things you are doing for your citizens. Thank you! I look forward to working together over the coming year.”

SAVE THE DATE:

MIAMI-DADE LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: MDCLC Board of Director’s meeting
When: Thursday, October 4, 2012
Where: TBA

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: Second Annual Best Practices Conference
Where: Sofitel Miami Hotel 5800 Blue Lagoon Drive, Miami, FL 33126
When: Friday, October 5, 2012

The cost to register is only \$55.00 and includes sessions and discussions featuring winning strategies for improving municipal services, entrance to the exhibition hall, a continental breakfast, luncheon with a guest speaker and a cocktail reception at the end of the conference.

LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

September 10– September 14, 2012

MIAMI

On Thursday, the City Commission gave preliminary approval to the administration's proposed budget, a spending plan that does not include furloughs or layoffs.

A shift in the financial strategy came earlier in the week, when the city reached a tentative agreement with the police and sanitation workers unions that will generate approximately \$13 million in savings. Negotiations are still in progress with the firefighters and general employee unions.

According to Mayor Tomas Regalado, if the city is able to reach agreements with all four unions, the budget will be balanced. City Manager Johnny Martinez indicated that the deals should be concluded before the final budget hearing on September 27.

Additionally, the city saved \$20 million by eliminating 27 vacant positions, renegotiating information technology contracts and cutting back on bulky trash pickups. Departments were also asked to trim their budgets.

Revenues from property taxes are also expected to rise by \$2 million. Nevertheless, the city had to work to fill a \$40 million budget gap due to a spike in pensions and healthcare costs.

So far, the city had agreed to a tentative deal with the police union that will save \$11.5 million next year. Much of that savings comes from increasing the amount employees contribute to their pension plans, taking some of the burden off of the city. In exchange, officers will get a 3 percent pay increase in 2014. Budget administrators hope to strike a similar deal with the fire union.

The commission also agreed to a tentative tax rate of \$8.47 for every \$1,000 of taxable value, a slight decrease from last year.

Coconut Grove Playhouse

According to the Herald:

On Monday, the state of Florida announced that after stalled efforts to revive the historic playhouse, it intends to reclaim the property within 30 days from the non-profit board that unsuccessfully ran the theater.

In a letter to board Chairwoman Shelly Spivack, Al Dougherty, deputy secretary of Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, said the state board of trustees will exercise its reverter rights to take back control of the property, citing the "the extended closure of the Playhouse" and its condition of disrepair.

The letter comes after months of negotiations led by Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez, who hoped to assume control of the playhouse and reopen it in collaboration with a private developer. The negotiations were stalled in July, when a principal creditor rejected a financial settlement offer from the county.

On Tuesday, Gimenez remained hopeful that the state, which did not explain what it intends to do with the property, will eventually give control of the playhouse to the county, which has earmarked \$20 million in voter-approved bonds for its restoration. The county's intention has been to subsidize the theater's operations by developing its parking lot.

To read more, please click the link:

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/09/11/2997547/state-of-florida-says-it-will.html>

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

On Thursday, MDCPS Superintendent Alberto Carvalho spoke before business leaders at the Beacon Council, making them aware of the positive turn around that MDCPS has experienced, including greater financial stability and improved academics. Consequently, Carvalho says that the public schools deserve to be rewarded through a \$1.2 billion bond issue that will be placed before the voters in November.

Carvalho's speech was the latest step in a public-relations effort leading up to the November 6 vote. Earlier in the week, Carvalho spoke to a homeowner's group in Kendall, and a district-produced promotional video was played for parents at school Open House nights.

If approved, the bond issue will pay for physical renovation to aging schools as well as technology enhancements across the district.

In reference to taxes, Carvalho emphasized that the impact to homeowners would be minimal, citing that a home valued at \$185,000 would pay no more than \$9.70 in additional property taxes during the first two years of approval. "Future years' tax burdens would be similarly modest".

CORAL GABLES

On Tuesday, city commissioners unanimously decided to reduce pension benefits for some officers and require a larger annual pension contribution from current officers, saving taxpayers an estimated \$1.9 million per year.

Commissioners imposed the changes after 18 months of negotiations between the police union and City Manager Pat Salerno came up empty.

All officers' annual pension contributions will increase from 5 to 10 percent of wages. The union had refused any increase. According to the city, Miami and Miami Beach police already contribute 10 percent of their wages to their pensions, while South Miami pay 15.6 percent.

Officers who are not vested (fewer than 10 years of service) will no longer be able to retire on 75 percent of their working pay after 25 year. Instead, they will get a maximum of 67.5 percent after 25 years. In response, Sergeant John Baublitz, president of the Coral Gables Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 7, said reduce benefits will make it harder to hire first rate officers.

Officers on the new plan will calculate their pension benefit based on their average pay during their average pay during their last five years of service, instead of three, and overtime and unused vacation time won't be included in the formula.

PINECREST

On Tuesday, after much debate, the village council voted to keep the tax rate flat at \$2.20 per \$1,000 of a home's assessed value. Aventura is now the only Miami-Dade municipality with a lower tax rate.

Village Manager Yocelyn Galiano Gomez had proposed a \$16.6 million budget for the new fiscal year, commencing Oct. 1. Her plan includes \$2.5 million for several major projects, including an expansion for the Pinecrest Community Center, a multi-agency taskforce for the police, and installing wi-fi in Pinecrest Gardens.

However, Gomez warned that revenues could take a hit next year because a statewide referendum in November could deeply impact revenues. If approved, the referendum would limit the increase in assessed values for commercial property, set limits on the maximum tax rates for commercial property, and provide a temporary tax-break for first-time homebuyers. Gomez indicated that this would impact Pinecrest as well as other local governments.

The budget also set aside \$31,790 for a red-light program, which is to pay for a police officer to monitor the cameras part-time. A private company would cover the equipment and installation. Nevertheless, this program was a source of contention for some residents over privacy rights. Mayor Cindy Lerner, who is a proponent of the program, emphasized that the target of the cameras were not the resident but those who drove

recklessly down US1. She further stated that this is not a revenue creator but a method to alter behavior. Additionally, she said that most of U.S. 1 has red light cameras except for a stretch of the street in Pinecrest, which has become a “safezone” for running red lights.

The council will discuss the budget once again at the final hearing scheduled for 7 P.M. on Sept. 25 at the Pinecrest Municipal Center, 12645 Pinecrest Pkwy.

CUTLER BAY

On Monday, the town council tentatively approved a tax rate of \$2.80 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. That’s down from the \$2.93 recommended by interim town manager Rafael Casals, but still an increase of about 9 percent from this year’s rate of \$2.57. According to Casals, the new tax rate would bring an additional \$372,000 in revenue.

The tax increase required four of the five council members to approve. Casals’ original proposal was defeated when council member Peggy Bell and Vice Mayor Ernie Sochin voted no, citing concerns for seniors. However, Mayor Ed MacDougall said town residents are willing to pay more because the budget includes money for a new high school, something the community has long sought.

The budget includes \$2.7 million to help the county school board add high school grades at Centennial Middle School starting this year. The town had previously been zoned for Southridge High School.

The council also approved the proposed budget for the 2012-2013 fiscal year, which accounts for \$53.3 million in expenses.

Council members also decided to delay the start of principal payments on Town Hall and the building next door for another two years. According to Casals, this will save the town \$882,000 for the 2012-13 fiscal year.

With this new savings, the town has planned to take \$1.7 million from its reserves, instead of the previously budgeted \$2.3 million. This money will be used to cover the payment made for the town’s new high school. This will leave over \$13.5 million left in the town’s reserves.

MIAMI BEACH

Early this week, the Miami Beach City Commission voted to reduce the tax rate for the next fiscal year. The adopted rate stands at 6.1122, or .0533 mills below last year's rate. Additionally, commissioners unanimously approved a \$400,000 decrease to its budget.

On September 27th the City Commission will take a final vote on termination negotiations with the former City Manager. For the most part, negotiations have concluded except for a request to accrue pensionable wages through March 2013. Meanwhile, over 50 applicants have submitted resumes for the City Manager position. The City Commission will consider the applications at the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting on October 24th.

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

The University of Miami was awarded a \$20 million grant that places the university among 60 elite institutions in a research consortium funded by the National Institutes of Health.

According to a press release from the Miller School of Medicine, the Clinical and Translational Science Award will give UM the ability to turn research discoveries into functional therapies and treatments.

"It is a great honor but it also makes great sense for UM to be a member of a research consortium that is building the nation's new paradigm for translational health research," President Donna E. Shalala said in the release.

The extensive effort to win the grant was backed by U.S. Congresswomen Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. As a member of the consortium, UM will establish the Miami Clinical and Transitional Science Institute (CTSI), led by Jose Szapocznik, chair of epidemiology and public health at the medical school.

Szapocznik and his team will work toward "promoting diversity, ending health disparities, and training minorities in clinical and translational research," according to the press release.

"The more we incorporate knowledge derived from multiple racial/ethnic groups, the more rapidly we can understand and solve medical puzzles," Szapocznik said in the release. "Our goal is to catalyze research opportunities to mitigate the factors that affect the susceptibility, progression and adverse consequence of disease in our majority-minority patient population."

Marisel Losa, president and CEO of the Health Council of South Florida, will co-chair the CTSI community advisory board with Shalala.

MILITARY AFFAIRS

On Thursday, OIA attended the first meeting of the Miami-Dade County Military Affairs Board, Chaired by Commissioner Jose “Pepe” Diaz. The Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioner’s adopted Ordinance No. 12-37 to create the Miami-Dade County Military Affairs Board.

The purpose of Military Affairs Board (MAB) is to provide the Board of County Commissioners with recommendations regarding military affairs in Miami-Dade, and to promote measures to enhance the quality of life for active, reserve, retired and disabled military personnel and their families, and families of deceased military personnel in Miami-Dade County. Additionally, the MAB will advocate on behalf of military personnel regarding, health care; housing; housing and business loans; pension benefits; education; employment; incarceration; reintegration; unemployment benefits; disability claims; vocational training; and insurance.

The MAB will also cooperate with any federal, state, county, or municipal government, agency or instrumentality; and create a standing committee relating to the Base Realignment and closure process (“BRAC”).

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PAMETTO BAY

September 2012 marks the 10-year anniversary since the Village of Palmetto Bay incorporated. On Friday the village will celebrate and honor the dozens of residents who played a role in this Village's foundation.

The “birthday party” will kick off with a three hour cocktail to be held from 7 to 10 P.M. in the Palm Room at the Palmetto Bay Village Center 18001 Old Cutler Rd.

SAVE THE DATE:

MIAMI-DADE LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: MDCLC Board of Director's meeting

When: Thursday, October 4, 2012

Where: TBA

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: Second Annual Best Practices Conference

Where: Sofitel Miami Hotel 5800 Blue Lagoon Drive, Miami, FL 33126

When: Friday, October 5, 2012

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LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

September 17– September 21, 2012

MIAMI

On Friday, the last of Miami's four labor unions gave tentative approval to a new contract. Now the city can balance its \$485 million budget before the new fiscal year begins in October.

While the general employees' new, two-year contract does not include pay raises, it reduces the amount city workers must contribute to their retirement plans from 13 to 10 percent, and lowers the co-payments for doctors' visits. Bargaining unit members will also have three furlough days restored and their take-home cars paid for by the city.

Meanwhile, Miami will save nearly \$10 million by changing the actuarial formula used to calculate the city's pension contribution.

Earlier in the week, the firefighters union gave a tentative approval to a two-year contract that restores frozen pay increases. Firefighters will continue to contribute 10 percent to their retirement plans.

That contract will save Miami \$8.5 million through revisions to the pension formula and the Deferred Option Retirement Plan, known as DROP.

City officials said the agreements were necessary to close Miami's \$40 million budget gap.

Miami reached tentative agreements on two-year contracts with the police and sanitation workers unions last week.

Both will save Miami millions of dollars, mostly through changes to the pension formula.

The four bargaining units will vote on their respective contracts in coming weeks.

The last step will be for the City Commission to give final approval at a budget hearing Thursday.

PINECREST

On November 6th, village voters will choose among several candidates vying for two Village Council seats as well as voting on three charter amendments.

Councilmember Bob Ross is being challenged by Germaine Katherine Butler and Jennifer Wollman for Seat 1.

Robert A. "Bob" Hingston and James E. McDonald are running for seat 3. Vice Mayor Nancy L. Harter, the incumbent is retiring after eight years of service due to term limits. She is currently the longest serving member on the Village Council.

Mayor Cindy Lerner was automatically re-elected to a four year term when no one else filed to run for the mayor's seat during the qualifying period that concluded at 12:00 PM on August 17th.

Voters will also decide on three charter amendments proposed by the Charter Revision Commission. The commission was appointed by the Village Council, pursuant to the requirements of the Village Charter.

To view the proposed charter amendments please click the link:

<http://pinecrest-fl.gov/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=4517>

FPL

Pinecrest has been in an ongoing battle against FPL regarding transmission lines that have been proposed along the US 1 corridor. Most recently, Pinecrest Mayor Cindy Lerner said that state Senator Miguel Diaz de la Portilla, R-Coral Gables, and Florida Power & Light, are behind a series of negative robo-calls to her constituents. She further stated that she is being attacked because of her stance against FPL.

Lerner, a former Democratic member of the state house of representatives, has been an outspoken critic of FPL's plans to place 8-story-high transmission lines along US1. She accused Diaz de la Portilla, whose Senate district includes most of Pinecrest, of putting the interest of his lobbying business (he's a lawyer and lobbyist at Becker & Poliakoff, who represent FPL) before the wishes of his constituents, who are against the FPL's plans.

Lerner has indicated that she is organizing a coalition of municipalities around the state to pass resolutions opposing FPL's early cost recovery, which could result in higher rates. The Miami-Dade League of Cities and Broward League have already passed resolutions opposing the rate hike. Lerner further indicated that she was working with the Florida League of Cities to also pass a resolution in order for it to become a priority next legislative session.

Lerner also expressed her belief that it is unethical for a lawmaker to lobby against a city he or she represents in the Legislature.

NORTH BAY VILLAGE

Voters in North Bay Village will no longer have to vote for city commission candidates in November. Two candidates recently dropped out of the only two contested commission races; therefore, the remaining candidates will be elected unopposed.

Treasure Island Commissioner Stuart Blumberg announced his withdrawal at the village's budget meeting last Thursday. A few days after, at-large commission-seat candidate Mario Garcia announced his withdrawal from the race, leaving the vice chair of the city's Planning and Zoning Board, Jorge Gonzalez, unopposed.

Garcia cited job related scheduling demands, while Blumberg (appointed at the beginning of the year to fill in for former Commissioner Frank Rodriguez, who resigned), alluded to nasty behind the scenes politics. Blumberg's opponent, Wendy Duval, will automatically become the new Treasure Island Commissioner.

Mayor Connie Leo-Kreps and Commissioner Richard Chevrony, who was appointed to the at-large seat but was running for the North Bay Island seat, will be elected unopposed after failing to draw challengers.

Vice Mayor Eddie Lim is up for reelection in 2014.

Residents can still vote on several proposed charter amendment questions.

NORTH MIAMI BEACH

On Thursday, former North Miami Beach Mayor Myron Rosner was arrested on allegations of campaign finance fraud relating to his failed 2011 reelection bid. He was being held on \$8,500 bond.

According to the State Attorney's Office, the charges against Rosner stem from the use and payment for advertising bus benches placed throughout the City of North Miami Beach.

Rosner, 52, has been charged with grand theft, illegal campaign expenditures, false report of expenditure, knowledge of unlawful reporting of contributions and expenditures, illegal contribution, worthless check, insufficient funds/campaign expense and two counts of unlawful compensation or reward for official behavior.

The case was investigated by the State Attorney's Office, Miami-Dade Police Department's Public Corruption Investigations Bureau and the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics.

"All of our campaigns and elections need to follow the laws outlined by the Florida Statutes," Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle said in a statement.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY AND CITY MANAGER ASSOCIATION

On Friday the MDCCMA held its monthly meeting at the City Hall Restaurant in downtown Miami.

Those cities represented included, Pinecrest, Doral, Biscayne Park, Miami Beach, Sunny Isles, South Miami, Miami Springs, Sweetwater, West Miami and North Miami Beach.

The Agenda included two speakers:

Miami-Dade League of Cities Director Rickard Kuper spoke about the upcoming Best Practices conference and urged city officials and staff to attend. The Best Practice Conference is aimed at improving municipal services, and will be broken down into a series of sessions as follows: Sustainability, Ethical Dilemmas, Pension, Budget & Finance, City 101, Legislative and Legal. Please see the “*save the date*” below for more information.

Former Pinecrest Mayor Evelyn Greer gave a synopsis of the Charter Review Task Force recommendations and outcomes. Greer specifically spoke about the incorporation and annexation issues. She encouraged the cities to educate its constituents on the importance incorporation and further stated that penalty free annexation had to be fought for. She mentioned that the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners ignored the CRTF recommendation on annexation, even though, it had passed with a 2/3 vote; thereby, not keeping the promise to forward the language onto the ballot.

The MDCCMA will determine when and where the next meeting will take place. So far, the agenda will include a state legislative session recap.

REGIONAL

Twenty former governing board members of Florida’s water management districts sent a letter to Governor Scott that urges him to reverse another round of looming budget cuts.

This year, the Florida Legislature removed a year-old revenue cap that reduced district budgets statewide by 30 percent; a measure that environmental groups hoped would help restore some of the lost funding. Instead, some water district boards that have been appointed by the governor have continued to cut back.

The South Florida Water Management District, which just settled a federal lawsuit by agreeing to \$880 million in new projects to reduce the flow of pollution into the

everglades, gave preliminary approval to a \$600 million budget that includes another 2 percent cut in its property tax rate. That follows a \$100 million cut last year. A final budget hearing is scheduled for September 25.

While the governor has not responded to the letter, last week the governor's office announced final state approval for everglades cleanup plan reached with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Gov. Scott said the plan was to pay for the work with existing state and district revenues without new financial impacts to Floridians.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Associated Press

FORT WALTON BEACH -- Gov. Rick Scott says \$850,000 in grants will be awarded to 11 Florida communities with military installations.

The 2012-2013 Defense Reinvestment Grants are intended to maintain those bases and support efforts to diversify the economies in those communities. Enterprise Florida administers the grant program.

Scott's office said Monday that the military and defense sector has a \$60 billion economic impact on the state, providing more than 686,181 jobs.

The counties receiving the grants are: Bay, Brevard, Clay, Duval, Escambia, Okaloosa, Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, Orange, Pinellas and Santa Rosa.

Click the link to read more: [Read Monday's announcement on defense grants from the Governor's office.](#)

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LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

September 24 – September 28, 2012

MIAMI

On Thursday, the Miami City Commission passed the city's \$485 million budget, which didn't conjure much debate.

However, commissioners voiced some concerns over a \$45 million payment on a loan to finance its share of the PortMiami tunnel. The Omni CRA is responsible for the expense and is looking for private financing but if that effort fails, the city would be responsible.

The budget was balanced by closing a \$40 million gap, which was possible by eliminating vacant positions, cutting spending and changing the formula to calculate the city's pension contribution.

Additionally, four labor unions agreed to an estimated \$20 million in employee concessions as part of the new two year contract.

The new tax rate is \$8.47 for every \$1000 of a property taxable value (a slight decrease from last year).

The commission approved the budget 4-1, with Commission Michelle Spence-Jones voting in opposition. Spence-Jones said that the city needs to find new ways to collect revenue to avoid additional cuts to employees' salaries and benefits.

In other business, longtime City Clerk Pricilla Thompson is retiring after 32 years of service. City Elections Coordinator Dwight Danie will replace Thompson through January, when the commission will approve a permanent replacement.

Commissioners also approved an agreement allowing the Pennsylvania based convention center management firm SMG to take over operations at the James L. Knight Center. The city will pay \$78,000 for each year of the three year contract. The previous operator, Global Spectrum, lost its contract in the competitive bid process.

Commissioners also agreed to an agreement to allow the television series Burn Notice to film for a seventh season at the old Coconut Grove Convention Center. However, the one year extension was approved in exchange for \$450,000 in rent, an increase of \$210,000 over the current year.

CORAL GABLES

At a Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfast held on Thursday, Darla Thompson (Cherry Bekaert & Holland) was sworn in as the new Chairperson.

Additionally, Mayor Jim Cason presented the State of the City Address.

The Mayor indicated that the city, like most businesses, would continue to make difficult decisions.

He also said that pension reform costs are down more than \$4 million annually and the city has a workforce of 791 employees. He discussed partnerships with businesses such as Bacardi USA, which generously provided \$50,000 toward this year's Fourth of July fireworks celebration, the first in several years.

He also discussed Neighborhood Action Plans in which the community will be split into eight zones to address community needs.

Many roads have gone from "pothole heaven to newly paved paradise".

The new trolley, its expanded route, the renovated and restored Alhambra Water Tower, new trees on Ponce and other beautification, the driver's-license unit at the library and park improvements were among the items the mayor discussed.

"Seniors are the fastest-growing segment of our population," Mayor Cason said, referencing plans to build the city's first senior center.

He finished by saying, "Our best days and greatest opportunities are emerging before us."

In her remarks, Ms. Thompson told colleagues of several strategic priorities that will be among the chamber's program of work in 2012-13, including:

- Streetscape project / permitting assistance as economic catalysts.
- Implementation of One Community One Goal, an initiative launched by the Beacon Council to map out how the community is going to build its economy through targeted industries.
- Ensuring candidates in the 2013 municipal elections are aware of chamber priorities and that chamber members have opportunities to meet the candidates and make their voices be heard.
- Leading the efforts in the promotion of the city of Coral Gables as a premier destination spot for dining, shopping, arts, culture and aesthetics.

MIAMI BEACH

On Thursday, the City of Miami Beach Commission unanimously approved a \$441 million total budget that reduces the tax rate to \$6.09 per \$1,000 of a home's taxable assessed value. The average homeowner will experience a slight increase to their tax bill as a result of an approximate 5 percent increase to property values city wide.

The additional property taxes collected, with the inclusion of extra tourist tax dollars will provide for the hiring of an additional 12 police officers and some capital improvement projects.

Although the budget was adopted, union negotiations remain pending. Nevertheless, the administration included a line item for an extra \$3 million in savings gained through collective bargaining that just commenced.

Future budgets are also in question, considering that the city's total pension cost will reach \$60 million this year and are predicted to go as high as \$69 million next year.

Despite the numbers, police and fire union representatives have publicly denounced a recommendation that the city replace defined benefits with a 401 (k) type program.

DORAL

The City Council adopted a budget that required eight votes to agree to the final tax rate of \$2.22 for every \$1,000 of assessed value.

The adopted rate is the mid-point from the \$2.24 the council passed during the first budget hearing and the lowest proposed rate of \$2.20, which Mayor Juan Carlos Bermudez presented at the last meeting.

Vice Mayor DiPietro and Councilman Pete Cabrera voted against the newly approved tax rate, which passed 3-2.

DiPietro indicated that the lower rate could cause problems for future councils and impact the city's ability to build infrastructure.

According to the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser, Doral's property values increased by 1.97 percent.

Doral is projected to receive about \$18.2 million in ad valorem tax from the new rate, a \$1.8 million decrease from what would have been collected by keeping the current rate of \$2.43.

Additionally, the council voted 3-2 to adopt a \$58 million budget and filled a \$177,000 gap created by the new tax rate by reducing that amount from the \$7.5 million set aside for the first phase of the planned police department.

Mayoral candidates Cabrera and Luigi Borgia voted against the budget.

HOMESTEAD

After discovering that Homestead's City Hall was full of mold and had excessive levels of radon gas, on Monday, the city council agreed that building a new City Hall was the best option.

Council members determined that it wasn't worth spending the money to fix the old building. Experts contacted by city staff estimated that it would take \$2 million and a one year time frame to fix all of the health and environmental problems.

The plan also calls for City Hall to relocate to land it bought in downtown in 2000. The idea is that a new building in the struggling area could help bring life to the area's businesses.

Now city officials have to decide whether or not to refer to the plans previously approved or start from scratch. The discussion has been scheduled for October 3 at City Hall, 790 N. Homestead Blvd.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

As MDCPS continue to campaign asking voters to approve a \$1.2 billion school referendum, they are also gaining support from their municipal partners.

On September 25, the City of Hialeah council ratified its support of the General Obligation Bond referendum.

The resolution passed reads as follows:

The Mayor and the City of the City of Hialeah, Florida hereby pledge their support for the Miami-Dade County Public Schools' capital bond referendum to modernize and renovate local schools to provide public school students with the tools necessary to succeed in the 21st Century global economy.

Also this week, MDCPS Superintendent Alberto Carvalho made a presentation before the City of Miami Community Relations Board explaining the importance of the bond initiative that will allow for the renovation of facilities, updating technology, building school replacements, expanding student capacity and enhancing safety. The CRB agreed to officially support the initiative.

Also in support is the Great Miami Chamber of Commerce, which adopted a resolution backing the bond referendum.

SAVE THE DATE:

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: Second Annual Best Practices Conference
Sofitel Miami Hotel 5800 Blue Lagoon Drive, Miami, FL 33126
When: Friday, October 5, 2012

Where:

The cost to register is only \$55.00 and includes sessions and discussions featuring winning strategies for improving municipal services, entrance to the exhibition hall, a continental breakfast, luncheon with a guest speaker and a cocktail reception at the end of the conference.