Memorandum

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Supplement to
Agenda Item No. 7(A)

Date: March 4, 2008

To: Honorable Chairman Bruno A. Barreiro and Members,
Board of County Commissioners

From: George M. Burgess
County Manager

Subject: Supplemental Information regarding Vizcaya Museum and Gardens

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Attached please find a letter from Cathy Jones, Chairwoman of the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens Trust regarding agenda item 7A on the March 4, 2008 Board of County Commissioners agenda, which pertains to the proposed amendments to rule 9.03.

Assistant County Manager

Attachment

VIZCAYA
MUSEUM & GARDENS

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens
3251 South Miami Avenue
Miami, Florida 33129
Tel 305-250-9133
Fax 305-285-2004
www.vizcayamuseum.org

miamidade.gov

TO: Honorable Chairman Bruno Barreiro
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Cathy Jones, Chair, Vizcaya Museum and Gardens Trust C.L.J.

DATE: March 4, 2008

RE: BCC Agenda Item 7A, Pertaining to Rule 9.03

I am proud to serve on the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens Trust, an agency and instrumentality of the Board of County Commissioners, and I appreciate your support of our ongoing efforts to make the County-owned Vizcaya as good as it possibly can be. Vizcaya has attained the prestigious and significant honors of accreditation by the American Association of Museums (AAM) and designation as a National Historic Landmark. This speaks to the value and integrity of the historic property and the hard work of Miami-Dade County's elected officials, employees, and volunteer stakeholders.

Over the years Vizcaya has been used excessively for special events, some providing income to the museum, others with fees waived or reduced. These events have taken a toll on the fragile property. Rule 9.03 of Section 2-1 was established in 1995 to protect this County asset by carefully controlling the incidence of fee waivers at Vizcaya. In our shared role as stewards of Vizcaya, I urge you to exercise caution in adopting amendments that weaken the rule's effectiveness in protecting the County's interests.

During Vizcaya's reaccreditation process in 1999, the American Association of Museums expressed grave concern about the overuse of Vizcaya for special events even after the establishment of Rule 9.03. Specifically they noted that:

- Special events cause wear and tear to the fragile property.
- Vizcaya should be made accessible to the community primarily through educational programs; not through special events that are limited by fee or invitation.
- Special events divert resources from the museum's mission of collections care and public education.
- Fee-waived events undermine the museum's fiscal stability.

In the nine years following this report, the BCC, the Vizcaya Trust, and County staff have worked hand-in-hand to reduce the impact of facility rentals at Vizcaya. Fees have been increased with the intent of fulfilling AAM's mandate. Rules have been strengthened to better protect the museum's facility and its collections. The Trust has focused on making Vizcaya accessible through programs that benefit the entire Miami-Dade community, such as its annual Free Summer Sundays.

Trust members recognize the value of and need for accommodating important events at Vizcaya, and Rule 9.03 establishes a judicious method for approving these. In the nearly 13 years since its adoption, this rule has caused remarkably few conflicts or problems. Increasing the incidence of unfunded events at Vizcaya would reverse the County's hard-earned progress of the past decade. The subject ordinance proposes amending the rule in two substantive ways, one of which seems sensible and overdue, the other of which causes concern:

- The proposed amendment states that the fee waiver rule will not apply when Vizcaya's budget is fully reimbursed for events from another County source. This provides the BCC with more flexibility to use Vizcaya for events of Countywide importance, while preserving the museum's fiscal stability and the integrity and value of this irreplaceable County resource. I encourage you to adopt this change.

- At the public hearing before the Recreation and Culture Committee in February, Trust members shared their concerns about lowering the threshold for unfunded waivers and reductions from unanimous to 2/3 vote of those members present, as this could significantly increase the number of events at Vizcaya. Based on public discussion at the last Trust meeting and on Trust members' presentations to the Recreation and Culture Committee, I hope you will, instead, consider maintaining the current requirement of unanimity, or establishing a threshold of at least 9 or 10 votes.

Thank you for reflecting upon this recommendation and for your ongoing support of Vizcaya Museum and Gardens.