



Memorandum

File #: Item # 2020-115, **Version:** 1

MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable Members of the Town Council

From: Honorable Mayor Tim Meerbott

Date: June 17, 2020

Re: Supporting the Cutler Bay Properties Acquisition Proposal No. 4 Application Recommended by the Environmentally Endangered Lands Project Review Committee and Requests the Land Acquisition Selection Committee to Expedite the Process.

REQUEST

A RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF CUTLER BAY, FLORIDA, SUPPORTING THE CUTLER BAY PROPERTIES ACQUISITION PROPOSAL NO. 4 OF THE MIAMI-DADE COUNTY'S ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS PROGRAM; PROVIDING FOR TRANSMITTAL; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Miami-Dade County's Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) Program's focus is the protection and conservation of endangered lands. Concerned about the continuing loss of pinelands and other natural areas, Miami-Dade County voters approved a Property Tax that was collected between 1990 and 1992 to fund the acquisition, protection and maintenance of environmentally endangered lands. These lands (secured for preservation) support a diversity of species, outstanding geologic and natural features, and function as a sustaining component of our ecosystem.

The EEL Program and its partners have brought more than 20,700 acres of environmentally endangered lands into public ownership and manages 2,800 acres of natural lands within Miami-Dade County Parks, for a total of more than 23,500 acres protected. According to the EEL Program, the following acquired lands are of most significance: Biscayne Coastal Wetlands, Castellow Hammock, Oleta River Corridor, Rockdale Pineland, and South Dade Wetlands.

Annually, the EEL Program considers proposed acquisition sites by the public. Proposals by government agencies are reviewed semiannually. Each site is inspected by County staff and citizen volunteers who are members of the Land Acquisition Selection Committee (LASC). Following a public hearing, LASC recommends sites for purchase to the Board of County Commissioners. Once approved for acquisition, a purchase is negotiated with the owner. The EEL Program works only with willing sellers to purchase land.

On May 27, 2020, the EEL Project Review Committee discussed the Cutler Bay Properties Acquisition Proposal No. 4 (*Attachment “A”*) to define the preliminary boundaries of the proposal and unanimously recommended that the Property be added to the list and forwarded to the Land Acquisition Selection Committee (LASC). During the meeting, Council Member Duncan, Council Member Coriat, and I addressed the Committee and ensured the Town’s commitment to the successful acquisition of the 8.45 acres in Cutler Bay (the “Property”) for Park, Conservation, and Resiliency purposes via Resolution No. 20-19.

On April 22, 2020, the Town Council approved the purchase of the Property (via Resolution No. 20-18) with the vision to preserve the vacant land for its environmental value, to further the Town’s resiliency efforts, and to prevent any development from occurring on it. The Property includes and is adjacent to the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) Project, an area that has been identified by the US Army Corps of Engineers as a natural buffer to deal with sea level rise. The BBCW project is also a part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP). The CERP is the largest environmental restoration program in United States history whose objective is to improve freshwater flow in Florida and to correct the balance among the water flow types to ensure a healthy and sustainable natural and human environment.

The vote marked an important environmental and resiliency milestone for the Cutler Bay community. In acquiring this piece of land and preserving it as an open space, not only will this prevent any development from materializing on it, but it will also prevent the traffic that would have come along with it. This acquisition greatly complements the Town and County’s environmental conservation and resiliency objectives, by allowing the Property to be preserved and to continue protecting environmental and built resources within the Town and County.

The idea of preserving the Property in its natural state and preventing its development has been a longtime rallying cry echoed in the Town and County. For years, it has been an important environmental issue fought for by many residents, past and current Council Members. The Town has always been focused and committed to our Green Master Plan, resiliency efforts and protecting our environment.

The Town whole-heartedly supports the efforts of the EEL Program in the protection and conservation of endangered lands. Therefore, I strongly request my fellow Council Members to urge the LASC in recommending the approval of this Property to the Land Acquisition List, and to expedite the LASC meeting so that we may comply with our tight timeline of securing financing for the acquisition of the Property and to protect this Property from potential development.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Town Council adopt this Resolution, supporting the Cutler Bay Properties Acquisition Proposal No. 4 Application recommended by the Environmentally Endangered Lands Project Review Committee and requests the Land Acquisition Selection Committee to expedite the process.

ATTACHMENT(S)

- Attachment “A” - Cutler Bay Properties Acquisition Proposal No. 4