



For Immediate Release: January 9, 2014
Contact: Joseph Centorino, Executive Director
(305) 350-0613 or centori@miamidade.gov

Homestead Mayor settles campaign violation charge

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust today accepted a settlement with recently elected Homestead Mayor Jeff Porter over a complaint (**C 13-31**) that one of his campaign flyers in the November election violated the County's Mandatory Fair Campaign Practices Ordinance. The complaint was brought by J.C. Planas on behalf of opposing mayoral candidate Mark Bell, who claimed that the brochure falsely alleged that he and his wife, County Commissioner Lynda Bell, had received a "\$25,000 gift courtesy of the taxpayers of Homestead." In fact, the grant was issued by the Homestead Community Redevelopment Agency to the historic Redland Hotel, an entity owned by Mr. Bell. The brochure in question had used an imitation check showing a direct payment from the CRA to Mark and Lynda Bell. The actual check was made payable to the hotel. As part of the settlement, Mayor Porter pled No Contest to the allegation, and agreed to pay costs of \$350 and accept a Letter of Instruction regarding the violation.

The Ethics Commission found No Probable Cause to a complaint (**C 13-35**) that employees in the Miami Beach City Clerk and Information Technology offices violated the Citizens' Bill of Rights by failing to respond to a public records request in a timely manner. In September, Michael Burke sought information on property owned by then-Mayor Mattie Bower, but his request referred to a non-existent address and didn't include a specific-date range. The investigation also determined that city staffers communicated with him through the email address from which Burke submitted the request, but one he admittedly doesn't use often. While dismissing the charge, the Ethics Commission will recommend that the City establish a clearer process and procedure for handling public records requests.

No Probable Cause was found to a complaint against Evan Ross alleging that he lobbied members of the North Miami City Council without registering to do so. The investigation determined that last summer, Ross, who is a paid representative of CH2M Hill, led Councilwoman Carol Keys on a site visit of property the company had previously contracted with the city for environmental clean-up. Since there was no pending city action on which to advocate, no lobbying took place and the complaint (**C 13-36**) was dismissed.

The Ethics Commission was created in 1996 as an independent agency with advisory and quasi-judicial powers. It is composed of five members, serving staggered terms of four years each. Through a program of education, outreach and enforcement, the Commission seeks to empower the community and bolster public trust.

###