

# Opa-locka's ethics switcheroo draws laughs amid FBI corruption probe

## HIGHLIGHTS

After first rejecting it, Opa-locka commissioners adopt ethics plan for all city employees

City commissioners reversed course after Miami-Dade's ethics chief made his pitch

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and the Public Trust will conduct the seminars



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The audience couldn't stop giggling over the ethics switcheroo at the Opa-locka City Commission meeting.

Just three weeks ago, Opa-locka's embattled commissioners refused to approve a Miami-Dade County "honor code" to report on suspected corruption and to require ethics training for all city employees.

On Wednesday night, the commissioners — whose city is being investigated by the FBI for suspected corruption and the Securities and Exchange Commission for a questionable bond deal — changed course and embraced the plan to let Miami-Dade County ethics experts spread the gospel of good government.

"I'm sitting here and seeing people laughing," said Vice Mayor Timothy Holmes, who had initially opposed the plan by a fellow commissioner, but reversed his position on Wednesday. "This is not a joke to me. This is real."

The commission, in a 5-0 vote, agreed to let Joseph Centorino, the executive director of the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust, conduct the training seminars after much bickering and grumbling.

Centorino, who approached Holmes to sponsor the proposal and bring other commissioners on board, struck a diplomatic note in his presentation — never mentioning the FBI probe that is targeting certain city commissioners and government employees for allegedly taking bribes.

"We think of it as a gift to the city," Centorino, a former state corruption prosecutor, told the commission. "We are only proposing these things because they would be good for the city of Opa-locka."

Centorino further explained that the so-called honor code, which was adopted by the Miami-Dade County Commission, should compel city employees to report suspicious activity in their government.

"If you're going to be a public servant, you have an obligation to protect the public" from corruption, Centorino said. But "employees don't have to be like police."

Commissioner Joseph Kelley said he was "baffled" by the turn of events because when he had proposed that his colleagues approve the honor code and ethics training, his plan was soundly defeated in a 3-1 vote.

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## THIS IS NOT A JOKE. ME. THIS IS REAL.

Vice Mayor Timothy Homes

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His was the only yes vote. Mayor Myra Taylor, Commissioner Luis Santiago and Vice Mayor Holmes voted against. The fifth commission seat, previously held by Terence Pinder, was left vacant last month when Pinder, facing state corruption charges, killed himself by ramming his city-issued SUV into a tree.

“It didn’t even pass, and it comes back tonight and everybody is happy about it,” Kelley said. “I don’t get that. ... I’m glad the vice mayor put it on the agenda, but I don’t know why we couldn’t just vote on this the last time.”

Holmes, unsettled by his colleague’s remarks, said: “I had a problem with it the last meeting. But I don’t have a problem with it now.”

Then, the vice mayor brusquely told Centorino: “You can go home now.”



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