



For Immediate Release: April 11, 2013  
Contact: Joseph Centorino, Executive Director  
(305) 350-0613 or [centori@miamidade.gov](mailto:centori@miamidade.gov)

### Former Journalists to Join Ethics Commission Staff

Two former Miami Herald journalists will soon join the investigative staff of the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust. Executive Director Joseph Centorino announced at today's monthly meeting that **Robert Steinback** and **Lawrence Lebowitz** will begin work in early May. Steinback spent a quarter of a century at Miami's flagship newspaper in a variety of capacities, including reporter, assistant city editor and columnist, and most recently served as a deputy editor at the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama. The Pulitzer Prize-winning writer earned an Economics Degree at the University of Rochester and a Master's in Journalism at Northwestern University. Lebowitz wrote award-winning investigative stories during ten years at the Miami Herald and also reported several years for the South Florida Sun-Sentinel and other publications. The Boston University graduate has been co-owner of an eco-tourism company.

"We received more than 100 applications from very well-qualified individuals to fill the investigator positions that were open due to recent staff attrition, but these two stood out," said Centorino. He added, "The Ethics Commission has been well-served previously by journalists, whose training, experience, knowledge of local government and ability to ferret out the truth have proven to be a winning formula for our agency."

In other action today, a local engineering firm that made recommendations for a master plan to upgrade Miami-Dade County's water treatment facilities sought an opinion from the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) as to whether it may offer a design-build plan to install a 48-inch water main at the Alexander Orr plant. CDM Smith, Inc. was advised in 2007 by an earlier Request for Opinion (**RQO 07-43**) that it could bid on the Professional Services Agreement to develop the master plan as long as the company was not ultimately responsible for recommendations at the Orr facility, where it had the engineering services contract. Since the Water and Sewer Department, not the firm, made the recommendation for the upgrade, the Ethics Commission issued an opinion to **RQO 13-05** that CDM Smith has no conflict providing plans for the new water main.

Last month, in response to questions (**RQO 13-03**) regarding a food and beverage contract at the Miami Beach Convention Center, the COE said it could not provide *binding* opinions regarding organizational conflicts of interest unless the contract established its authority to do so. Today, Commissioners approved a Letter of Instruction that provides proposed language for use in future contracts that would give the COE that authority. The Letter, which will be sent to county and municipal attorneys and heads of procurement, also explains who may request an opinion and when. The Ethics Commission will determine organizational conflicts based on standards established by the Federal Acquisition Regulation, which prohibits a government contractor from being awarded any contract in which its independence of judgment might be impaired.

The Ethics Commission determined that attorneys who have contributed to the political campaigns of Palmetto Bay Council members *may* participate in quasi-judicial settlement meetings and doing so would not violate the Village

Charter that prohibits individuals from lobbying for four years after they donate to candidates. In response to **RQO 13-04**, the COE noted that the Palmetto Bay Village Code specifically excludes attorneys who appear at quasi-judicial proceedings from the definition of lobbyist.

Probable cause was found in a complaint (**C 13-05**) against a member of the Coral Gables Advisory Board on Disability Affairs in 2010 who failed to file the required source of income statement, despite repeated reminders to do so. Linda Scarcell could be fined as much as \$500.

Similar cases were filed against two other individuals who served on Coral Gables advisory boards in 2010 and also failed to file source of income statements. The complaints against Alberto Menendez (**C 13-07**), who was a member of the Coral Gables Emergency Management Board, and Enrique Lopez (**C 13-08**), who was on the Coral Gables Green Task Force, were dismissed with prejudice after they finally provided the required paperwork.

*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.*

###

[Type text]