



**Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust**

Investigative Report

**Investigators:** Karl Ross and Larry Lebowitz

|                               |  |                   |  |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------------|--|
| <b>Case No.:</b><br>PI 13-026 | <b>Case Name:</b> 3400 LLC   | <b>Date Open:</b> |  |
| <b>Complainant(s):</b>        | <b>Subject(s):</b> Opa-locka Mayor Myra Taylor, Rev. John Taylor, et al. | October 7, 2013   |  |

**Allegation(s):**

On or about Oct. 2, 2013, COE received information from a source alleging Opa-locka Mayor Myra Taylor (Taylor) and her family have a hidden interest in the property the city selected to rent out as a provisional city hall. The city terminated its relationship with Dennis Stackhouse, the city's prior landlord at 780 Fisherman Street, and had since moved into the property at 3400 NW 135<sup>th</sup> Street. It was known to investigators at the time the Taylors owned numerous parcels of land in the vicinity of the provisional city hall, though family businesses.

**Relevant Ordinances:**

Among the sections of the Miami-Dade County ethics code that might be applicable to the above-referenced matter are the following, per Sec. 2-11.1:

“(g) *Exploitation of official position prohibited.* No person included in the terms defined in Subsections (b)(1) through (6) and (b)(13) shall use or attempt to use his or her official position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself or herself or others...”

“(n) *Actions prohibited when financial interests involved.* No person included in the term defined in Subsections (b)(1) through (6) and (b)(13) shall participate in any official action directly or indirectly affecting a business in which he or any member of his immediate family has a financial interest.”

“(d) *Further prohibition on transacting business with the [City].* No person included in the terms defined in Subsections (b)(1) through (b)(6) and in Subsection (b)(9) shall enter into any contract or transact any business through a firm, corporation, partnership or business entity in

which he or any member of his immediate family has a controlling financial interest, director or indirect, with [the City]...”

## **Investigation:**

### ***Interviews***

On Jan. 8, 2014, investigators Ross and Lebowitz stopped by the offices of Noel and Laurie Gonzalez, owners of 3400 LLC, located at 275 Fontainebleau Blvd. in Doral.

Noel Gonzalez (N. Gonzalez) agreed to be interviewed in connection with the corporation and its lease with the City of Opa-locka, and explained his reasons for acquiring the property at 3400 NW 135<sup>th</sup> Street in 2007 from Taylor and her husband, the Rev. John Taylor (via a corporation the Taylors controlled, Vankara A Learning Exchange Inc.).

N. Gonzalez advised he was a real estate investor and property manager, and that he learned about the city hall property through a Realtor, Michael Glazer (Glazer). He said he was aware the owners were in financial and legal distress and that they had a tenant with a 15-year lease, a school by the name of Life Skills. He said because of this he considered it a good investment, and paid \$2 million to acquire the property. He said he financed the transaction through a bank, Eastern Financial, and that the mortgage is now held by another financial institution, Space Coast. He said the Taylors did not provide owner financing. He said the tenant, Life Skills, subsequently broke the lease, but Glazer found another school to take its place.

N. Gonzalez said he has had only minimal contact with the Taylors since the time of the transaction and they have no financial interest whatsoever in the property. He did say that there was some confusion about whether his corporation held an interest in adjacent properties that belonged to the Taylors (via another corporation, New Beginnings of S. Florida Inc.) and that, due to an error in recording the legal description, his company, 3400 LLC, was incorrectly identified as the owner of record of the Taylor’s nearby property. After receiving a couple of property tax bills that were not his responsibility, he said that he spoke to Elvira Smith (Taylor’s sister) and that the matter was straightened out.

With respect to the city hall lease, he said he had a sign up on the property advertising that it was available for lease and that he got a call from a city official, possibly the city manager, Kelvin Baker (Baker). He said Baker told him they were going to relocate to make-shift portables; but that he inquired about leasing the property on a short-term basis and that they reached an agreement. He said the monthly payment is about \$12,000. He said he had not been contacted by any member of the Taylor family in connection with the city lease.

N. Gonzalez did say that he was approached by representatives of the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (OLCDC) about purchasing the property, and that they did make a verbal offer of \$2 million. (He couldn’t recall the date). He said he was advised the sale would be contingent on the OLCDC receiving grant money and that no formal agreement was ever

reached because he was not prepared to accept a tentative offer. He said the initial offer was for \$2 million and that he countered at \$2.75 million. He said he was not contacted by any member of the Taylor family in connection with this proposal. He was shown a spread sheet prepared by the OLCDC indicating that Rev. Taylor was the owner or the owner's representative for 3400 LLC, and he stated that Rev. Taylor does not represent him in any capacity. He said he did not know why the OLCDC made this notation. N. Gonzalez was advised not to discuss the investigation with any of the affected parties, and provided a contact number.

Note: During a Nov. 6, 2013, interview with City Manager Baker regarding another matter, Baker did discuss the city's decision to lease the property at 3400 NW 135<sup>th</sup> Street, and his account was consistent with the account provided by N. Gonzalez. He did state that the city was aware the property was available due to a sign on the property. He said the city has identified the site of its new city hall and that construction should begin shortly. He said that property sits west of the old historic City Hall building, next to Sherbondy Park.

On or about April 7, 2014, COE corresponded by e-mail with Dr. Willie Logan (Logan), executive director of the OLCDC regarding any involvement with the Taylor family relating to the properties owned by 3400 LLC. A copy of a spreadsheet detailing alleged real estate transactions prepared on behalf of the OLCDC was attached.

Logan advised that the spreadsheet was prepared by a real estate agent working on behalf of OLCDC, and that, to the best of his knowledge, the only reason why Rev. Taylor's name would appear on said document would be because in cases where the OLCDC was unable to locate the property owners, they might list the name of a nearby owner in order to attempt to make contact with the owner in question. Adjacent properties are owned by the Taylor family through Vankara and New Beginnings of South Florida, the family church.

In his reply, Logan stated: "I never heard of 3400 LLC and know nothing about the LLC. Often we had trouble tracking down the owner and would contact property owners next to the owners to assist with contact info for the property owner."

He further advised that all pending transactions described in the spreadsheet were rescinded when redevelopment plans fell through for the Nile Gardens housing project located to the south of the subject property. He said he was not aware the Taylors previously owned the subject property belonging to 3400 LLC. He confirmed OLCDC had a deal pending to buy other nearby property from the Taylors, but added the entire deal fell through, when OLCDC decided not to submit a grant application for federal CHOICE funds in 2012. He said this happened because the owner of Nile Gardens refused to participate in the effort.

***Document/Audio/Video Review:***

A review of Florida public records shows that 3400 LLC is an active, for profit corporation. It was founded on or about May 16, 2007, and identifies its officers as Noel Gonzalez and Laurie Gonzalez. The principal address is 275 Fontainebleau Blvd., Suite #105, Miami 33172.

A review of public records shows that 3400 LLC owns the property in question at 3400 NW 135<sup>th</sup> Street, Opa-locka, FL. The assessed value of the property was \$798,181 in 2011. The records show the property was purchased in June 2007 for \$2 million.

A review of public records shows the Taylors acquired the property in question on or about July 14, 2000, through Vankara, A Learning Exchange, Inc., a family run company. The address shown on the agreement is 330 Seaman Ave., the Taylors' official residence.

A warranty deed dated June 29, 2007, shows the property was transferred to 3400 LLC on or about this date. The document was signed by a member of the Taylor family.

A review of available public records did not show any business relationship between Noel and Laurie Gonzalez other than the transaction involving the subject property in 2007.

A copy of a Special Commission Meeting agenda dated September 4, 2013, contains an item to authorize the city manager to relocate city offices to 3400 NW 135<sup>th</sup> Street at a cost of \$12,673.33 per month, with an estimated total moving cost of \$80,500.

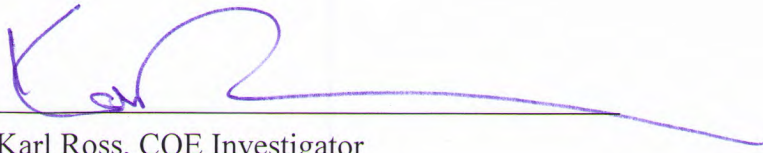
**Conclusion(s):**

The explanation provided by Logan of the OLCDC would account for why Rev. Taylor's name is listed as the "owner" of the subject property at 3400 NW 135<sup>th</sup> Street, which is now under lease to the city.

Further, the owner of the property, N. Gonzalez, clarified his relationship with the Taylors, noting that it was confined to his purchase of the property in 2007. He further advised that clerical mistakes led to him being billed for taxes on Taylor family properties, but he said these errors were rectified and that neither he nor his wife have any ties to the Taylors.

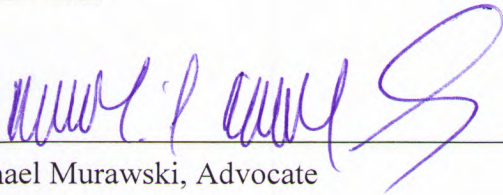
N. Gonzalez said the Opa-locka city manager or other representative contacted him about renting the property for use as a temporary city hall and that at no time did he deal with any member of the Taylor family and that he has no financial relationship with any family member.

Given the lack of any nexus between the present owner of the temporary city hall property and the Taylors, who were the previous owners, the inquiry should be closed at this time.

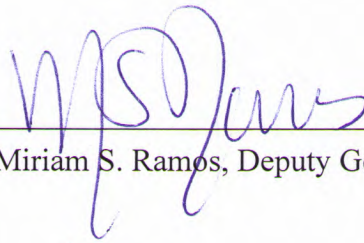


Karl Ross, COE Investigator

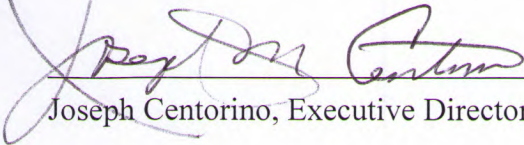
Approved by:



Michael Murawski, Advocate



Miriam S. Ramos, Deputy General Counsel



Joseph Centorino, Executive Director

4/15/14  
Date

**CASE  
CLOSED**

Date: 4/15/14