



Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust

Preliminary Inquiry Report

Investigator: Karl Ross

Case No. PI 13-039	Case Name: Judy Waldman Invitation	Date Open:	
Complainant(s): anonymous tip and local blog	Subject(s): Homestead City Councilwoman Judy Waldman	December 11, 2013	

Allegation(s):

It had been alleged that the City of Homestead improperly subsidized a private neighborhood event organized by City Councilwoman Judy Waldman (Waldman) – to wit, the December 12 “holiday reception” for newly elected Mayor Jeff Porter (Porter). The mayor and council attended the event, which was also a ribbon-cutting for the Home Owners Association’s (HOA) new clubhouse and a toy drive.

Relevant Ordinances:

The Miami-Dade County ethics code section (g) relating to *Exploitation of official position prohibited*, is relevant in that it could be argued that Councilwoman Waldman used her influence as an elected official to access city resources used in connection with what had been described as a private event that is unrelated to any official City of Homestead business.

Investigation:

Interviews

On December 13, 2013, a request for information about the event and any city involvement was made to Homestead City Manager George Gretsas (Gretsas).

On January 22, 2014, Gretsas advised that city staff assisted by helping set up tables and chairs, as well as by assisting with the invitations, flowers and by publicizing the event. He estimated the cost of the city's contribution to be approximately \$500. Gretsas described the use of city staff and resources as "light assistance," which he said is commonplace for what are considered "constituent events" that are sponsored by elected officials.

On January 24, COE contacted Teresa Timmons (Timmons), administrator at Brookwood Gardens, and she advised that she was unaware of any contribution made for the holiday reception by her employer. She said she would check with her headquarters and get back to COE.

On January 24, COE contacted the Palace Gardens ALF and spoke to Jill (last name U/K), and she said that she didn't know about any contribution but to speak to the facility's general manager, Zack Shaham (Shaham), who would be back in the office Monday. A follow-up call was made to Shaham on February 18, after the initial call was not returned.

On January 27, Timmons called to advise that after checking with her company's finance department, accounts payable department and legal department, she could not confirm that any contribution had been given to support the event in question.

On January 29, Gretsas responded to a request for information and advised that Palace Gardens does have applications pending with the Building Department for paving and grading. He said that neither Palace Gardens nor Brookwood Gardens are city vendors.

On February 4, an e-mail was sent to Waldman advising her as to the inquiry and asking her to respond to questions regarding any private donations to fund the event and whether access was restricted to members of her HOA.

On February 8, Waldman called and advised that she did organize the event in question and that she considered it a city event, not a private event. She said the purpose of the event was to give local residents a chance to meet, not just newly elected Mayor Porter, "but all the elected officials in Homestead." She said she circulated the flyer advertising the event on community bulletin boards throughout her district. She said she also advertised it on her Facebook page, noting that it was similarly advertised on the city's Facebook page.

As for the sponsors, Waldman advised that Audubon Village was the name of her community, saying that she sits on the board of directors and that the community center is frequently used for events for outside entities and nonprofits. She said that a couple of the rooms had been recently renovated with funds from the HOA and not from the city. She further stated that

Palace Gardens provided catering as the company does for many other events involving elected officials, and that Celebrity Rehab provided an in-kind contribution in the form of chairs for back massages and that no cash support was received from anyone. The councilwoman further advised that none of the sponsors, to her knowledge, are city vendors.

Document/Audio/Video Review:

A copy of the invitation for the holiday reception was examined and is included in the file. The invitation indicates that Audubon Village, Palace Gardens and Celebrity Rehab and Medical Centers were affiliated with the event as sponsors, their logos appearing on the invitations.


On January 24, Internet research was conducted into the alleged contributors to the event, Palace Gardens and Brookwood Gardens/ Signature HealthCARE. Corporate records were checked for each entity in order to identify possible contributors.

Conclusion(s):


After consultation with the Ethics Advocate, it was decided the investigation should be closed at this time as the event in question was of a public nature. The investigation showed it is the City's practice to subsidize "constituent events" sponsored by elected officials as such events are ostensibly tied to the official duties of the elected official in question.

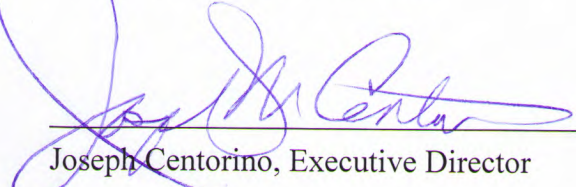
Waldman stated the purpose of the event was to give residents an opportunity to meet the new mayor and other elected officials. She further advised that the event was noticed on social media, including the city's Facebook page and elsewhere in her district.

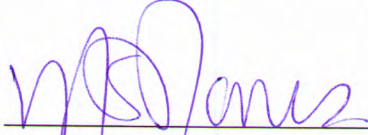
There is no evidence that any of the entities affiliated with the event as sponsors are considered city vendors or have major applications pending before the city.

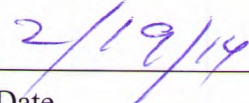

Karl Ross, COE Investigator

Approved by:


Michael Murawski, Advocate


Joseph Centorino, Executive Director


Miriam S. Ramos, Deputy General Counsel


Date

**CASE
CLOSED**

Date: 2/19/14