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ROOTS IN THE CITY LEADER UNDER FIRE AS PROJECT LOSES FUNDING



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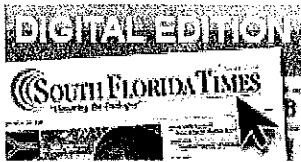
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Written by CYNTHIA ROBY
Special to South Florida Times

The urban garden pioneer who launched an ambitious farming and landscaping project with substantial money from the city of Miami has come under fire and his Roots in the City has lost its funding. At a meeting on Monday, the city of Miami Community Redevelopment Agency decided not to renew Marvin Dunn's contract for the landscaping component which was expiring the next day.



At the meeting held at the Doubletree Hotel, 1717 N. Bayshore Dr., Miami, City Commissioner Marc Sarnoff said of the \$100,000 awarded to Roots in the City for 2010, \$49,000 went on upkeep of the land, \$13,000 on wages and \$37,000 on administrative costs.

THE COLOR

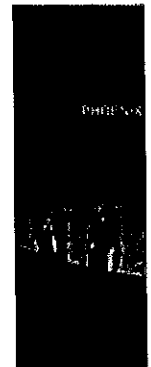
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The money for administrative costs went to Dunn's son and a chief operating officer who lives in Atlanta, said Sarnoff, a member of the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) which provided the money.

"To me, that is not a good use of CRA money," Sarnoff said.

Dunn said in an e-mail Tuesday night that he could not attend the meeting due to a medical emergency involving his mother.



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"My presence would not have made a difference," he said.

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Dunn said his son has worked for Roots in the City for 15 years and the organization has had the same



87°F

Partly Cloudy

Feels Like: 94°F

Humidity: 61%

Wind: SE at 13 mph

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business manager for almost 18 years, since it first started.

"During that time, we have worked on a dozen city of Miami grants and contracts and this has never been an issue, particularly since I have never been paid for any work on any Roots project funded by the city," Dunn said.

The CRA's Executive Director Pieter Bockweg said at Monday's meeting that the budget provided in the grant agreement with Dunn allocated \$51,134 for training and administration costs. Of that amount, \$13,000 was to go towards stipends for trainees in the project. The rest was to cover the cost of the three workers assigned to the landscape training program that formed a component of Roots in the City.

The CRA is reviewing invoices for expenditures submitted by Roots in the City, Bockweg said.

The CRA provided \$100,000 annually between 2008 and 2010 in grants to the landscape training program located at Northwest Third Avenue and 10th Street in Miami's Overtown neighborhood.

"The grant is not for a jobs program but a job training program," Bockweg said. "And the way it's being run, people are not graduating and they are supposed to be graduating."

Since 2008, eight people have graduated and four got jobs, after \$300,000 was spent, Bockweg said.

"Conceptually, I like the idea and the sound of Roots in the City," Sarnoff said. "But I don't think I can support any further extensions of this program."

The South Florida Smart Growth Land Trust, which owns most of the two acres on which Roots in the City operates, is sticking with the project, Dunn said.

"Except for the CRA land that we farm, which is a fairly small piece, we will continue to farm the land available to us," he said.

Dunn said he is "not going to fight a war with CRA," adding, "If they don't want Roots in the City involved with them, we won't be involved."

City Commissioner Richard P. Dunn, who chairs the CRA, made the motion to deny the extension of the grant. He was apparently caught off guard by Sarnoff's figures.

"Given the tone and tenor, the revelation of what I've



POLLS

Is Easter Ir

Yes

No.

Not

heard here today ... the activity of Roots in the City or the lack thereof, it's a dirty, lowdown shame that I was almost made a scapegoat in this," he said.

He was referring to the fact that Marvin Dunn -- no relation -- had in the past accused the CRA of wanting to cut off funding because a charter school was being planned for the site.

"Dr. Dunn has done a lot of credible work in our community. I'll give him his props. But clearly the people of Overtown have spoken and they are speaking today," Commissioner Dunn said.

Some Overtown residents who spoke at the meeting came out against the project, arguing that even the garden component was of no benefit to the community.

"In the beginning, I thought it was something that would enhance the city ... it cleaned up several lots," said Pastor Willie Williams, owner of Just Right Christian Barbershop. "But enough is enough. The collard greens and other fruits and vegetables are being contaminated, I believe by the construction. The derelicts are walking all around throwing things in the garden. It's not safe to eat. Who is going to fix a meal for their family from that area? If our families get sick, who are we going to sue?"

Commissioner Dunn said that he did not want to "hurt" those who were employed by Roots in the City.

"We need to look at ways, possible replacements to pick up where this project left off. The people in District 5, particularly in Overtown, need jobs," he said.

Marvin Dunn said the CRA's decision "effectively ends our relationship" with the agency.

He said the decision would not affect the Roots in the City Overtown Farmers Market, which would open as usual. But the organization will abandon its work at its main garden, at Northwest Third Avenue and Ninth Street, a part of which is located on CRA land.

"We will continue to farm on other vacant properties in Overtown and will seek support from other sources," Dunn said.

He said because of the CRA decision, four of Roots in the City's Overtown workers were being laid off and the organization will divest itself of any assets acquired using CRA funds and arrange to return those assets to the CRA as soon as possible.

"I will offer no resistance to this decision. No press

conference. No demonstrations... We will make it on our own. I will keep my dignity and they can keep their money," he said.

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