



Broward County

Legislation Text

File #: 21-1070, Version: 1

Broward County Commission Regular Meeting

Director's Name: Dale V.C. Holness

Department: County Commission

Information

Requested Action

MOTION TO DIRECT County staff to support the African American Research Library & Cultural Center's (AARLCC's) 20th anniversary celebration including countywide programming related to the AARLCC's mission. (Commissioner Holness)

Why Action is Necessary

Approval by the Board of County Commissioners ("Board") is required to direct staff to support AARLCC's 20th anniversary.

What Action Accomplishes

Directs County staff to support AARLCC's 20th anniversary

Is this Action Goal Related

Yes

Previous Action Taken

Summary Explanation/Background

This agenda item is goal oriented. The Broward County Board of County Commissioners envisions "A sustainable system of world-class intermodal transportation, infrastructure, quality human services, public safety, affordable housing, recreation, arts and culture, complementing and balancing our natural resources and environment." This item supports the Commission Value "Cultivating community culture, arts, recreation and life-long learning" and the Commission Goals to "Provide diverse artistic, cultural, educational, and historical amenities and programs that contribute to a vibrant, multi-cultural and economically-viable community, including an annual signature event" and "Improve access to business development, educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities and amenities to the economically disadvantaged."

The African American Research Library & Cultural Center is a place where all Americans can learn about the richness and diversity of the African American experience, what it means to their lives, and how it helped us shape this nation. Samuel F. Morrison, the former Director of the Broward County Libraries Division, wanted to build a library by and about African Americans for the Broward community and the world at large. Not just any library, but a state-of-the-art facility for research, lifelong learning, community gatherings, cultural events, and technology training. Morrison believed in his vision enough to inspire an entire community to follow his dream, no matter how difficult the

struggle.

Morrison was hired in 1974 as Assistant to the Director of the Libraries Division and was later promoted to Deputy Director. In 1987, Morrison moved to Chicago to become the city's Chief Librarian but returned to Broward County three years later to run the Broward County Libraries Division as its Director. In that role, he created what is now one of the showpieces of the Broward County Libraries Division-the African American Research Library & Cultural Center.

A visit to the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History (a special library of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library), in what was once the heart of Atlanta's African American community, inspired Morrison into action: he truly felt that Broward County deserved a similar facility. At the time, there were only two such research libraries in the country-Auburn Avenue Research Library and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City (a special research center of the New York Public Library). While the primary focus of the new library would be on the rich cultural influence of the African Diaspora in the Americas, collections and programming would include the contributions and influence of world civilizations to reflect a holistic approach to knowledge acquisition, literacy, and learning.

In 1996, funds were already earmarked for the construction of a library in Fort Lauderdale's Sistrunk Boulevard area to replace the Von D. Mizell Branch Library, but the planned structure, a small branch library, was a far cry from the major research facility, cultural center, and historical archive that Morrison imagined.

When approached in 1995 about more money to build a bigger, better library, the Broward County Commission pledged both the land, located on N.W. 27th Avenue and Sistrunk Boulevard, and \$5 million-\$7 million short of the projected \$14 million it would take to build the new African American Research Library and Cultural Center. By casting a wide net throughout the community, the fundraising committee for the African American Research Library and Cultural Center was able to gather donations from members of the corporate world, the church community, civic organizations, and individuals, including fraternities, sororities, and service clubs. A \$1 million gift from businessman/philanthropist Wayne Huizenga helped up the ante and encouraged other businesses to contribute. Fundraising events such as a benefit dinner/birthday party for Morrison were held, raising even more cash for the project's growing expenses. Grants were applied for and won, and staff curated special collections, including items from:

- Actress Esther Rolle, whose family donated a collection of her personal possessions, historic items such as documents relating to the civil rights movement, and evidence of her professional and personal achievements.
- The Alex Haley Collection, complete with eight unfinished manuscripts by the author as well as photographs and memorabilia from the Roots mini-series.
- Historic collections such as the Council of Elders Collection, which preserves the oral history and tradition of Broward County's African American pioneers, the Sixto Campano Sheet Music Collection, and the Dorothy Porter Wesley Collection, which includes art, women's studies, and reference books related to Africans in the United States, Africa, Brazil, and the Caribbean.

To celebrate its 20th anniversary and to support its special collections and upkeep, the African

American Research Library & Cultural Center has created an Advantage Marketing Packet, which will be distributed as additional material.

If approved, this item will direct County staff to support the African American Research Library & Cultural Center's 20th anniversary celebration, including the library's programming that benefits the entire County.

Source of Additional Information

Heidi Richards, Chief of Staff, District 9, 954-357-7009

Fiscal Impact

Fiscal Impact/Cost Summary

None.