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## ARPA-Funded Gift Card Distribution Discrepancies

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Mon, May 1, 2023 at 7:25 PM

To: Mark Antonio <mark.antonio@citynmb.com>

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Dear Mr. Manager,

I finally received a response to my second [Public Records Request 2022-1210](#) for a complete accounting of Paule Villard's ARPA-funded Publix gift card giveaway/campaign event.

A total of \$225,000.00 of federal funds were spent to purchase Publix gift cards in the face amount of \$150.00 each. Since Publix gave the City a discount, a total of 1,562 cards valued at \$150.00 each and one (1) card valued at \$75.00 were purchased.

According to the new database, a copy of which is attached hereto, I was provided in response to my request, the following cards were distributed:

- 1,158 were given out during a three-day drive through event in October, 2022.
- 170 were distributed either by certified mail or hand delivered (including the two recipients who received 2 cards "in error" less 5 cards that were returned as undeliverable)
- 111 were delivered with turkeys in November, 2022

Furthermore, the fourth tab of the database entitled "Turkeys - Inconclusive," lists a total of 34 recipients of turkeys, but no one in the prior administration seems to know whether or not gift cards were included in those deliveries. In addition, the last three entries of that page do not show a name or an address. Apparently, no one in the prior administration seems to know who those turkeys and/or gift cards were given to. This mass confusion is truly unacceptable from what is supposed to be a professional government agency.

According to the City's database, only 1,439 of the 1563 gift cards purchased with Federal APRA funds were accounted for, which means that 124 gift cards are still unaccounted for. At a face value of \$150.00 each, it appears that **\$18,600.00** of Federal ARPA funds are missing.

However, according to the attached February 8, 2023 Memo from Francisco Medranda to the former City Manager, he wrote that the City still "holds" 66 cards. Taking those into account, assuming they have not since been used or distributed, there are still 58 cards still unaccounted for at a face value of **\$8,700.00**. Since Mr. Medranda stated in his Memo that "the City is ready to reimburse the Federal government" for all gift cards that are unaccounted for, by copy of this email, I am making a **Public Records Request** to the City Clerk for documentation showing that the City still "holds" a specified number of gift cards, as well as a copy of said reimbursement check to the Federal government for unaccounted gift cards.

Furthermore, Mr. Medranda's Memo explains:

### **Turkeys Distribution Database Set Findings**

Upon further review, the Turkeys Distribution database appears to be inconclusive and approximately 111 to 150 gift cards could have been delivered during the November 18; 21-22, 2022 distributions. Note that in preparation for the distributions, the Mayor and Commissioners provided a list of names and addresses of residents to receive a gift card and a turkey ahead of Thanksgiving Day.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the three different database sets presented herein, it is concluded that a total of 1,441 or a total of

1,480 Publix Gift Cards were distributed to the NMB community. Therefore, the City should have a remaining balance of either 121 or 82 gift cards. The City currently holds 66 gift cards valued at \$9,900. Based on this number, the City is missing either 55 or 16 gift cards valued at \$8,250 or \$2,400, respectively. Currently, the City is ready to reimburse the Federal government the former value from a non-departmental account.

Note: At the time he issued his Memo, Mr. Medranda stated that he accounted for 1,441 gift cards as being distributed. According to the new database, it appears that only 1,439 were actually distributed.

Lastly, a second problem appears on page 3, lines 45 and 46 of the database entitled "Turkey Distribution." Instead of a name and address of the recipients of those two gift cards, there is merely a notation that reads, "**Commissioner personally gave out, no additional info.**" This is completely unacceptable. The public needs to know exactly who received those two \$150.00 gift cards, and whether or not these individuals were residents of the City of North Miami Beach. For all anyone knows, she gave them to her personal friends or family, or even kept them for herself to purchase groceries. Either way, those two mystery gift cards must be accounted for or reimbursed to the Federal government.

Mr. Antonio, as you can see, this gift card distribution was not managed properly whatsoever. All taxpayer money, especially Federal funds, must be used for **a public purpose** and used only for the **benefit of the residents** of the City. The former City Manager had no use for the proper procedure as he carelessly misspent and overspent the residents' tax dollars on a daily basis. It is my hope that he will be held accountable upon the completion of attorney Michael Pizzi's investigation.

As a private sector employee, I keep the books for all of my employer's businesses in Florida, some of which have revenue in excess of several million dollars. I can assure you that every single one of those bank accounts are balanced literally to the penny each and every month. I am also expected to give my boss a full monthly accounting of each of those businesses, and I can also assure you that not a single dollar has ever gone missing. I would not be working for the same gentleman since 1978 if I didn't take my responsibilities as a good steward of his money seriously.

By the same token, it's even more critical for public employees to take ownership of their positions and be good stewards of the taxpayers' money. If they cannot do their jobs properly and professionally they should be fired immediately.

Mr. Antonio, I commend you for the strides you have made thus far in an attempt to repair the extensive deterioration of the City's finances due to the last two years of fiscal mismanagement, malfeasance, and outright corruption in the City of North Miami Beach. However, there is still much work to be done, and only a forensic audit will uncover the full extent of the damage. In my limited capacity, I know I have only scratched the surface.

I know I speak for all the residents of the City when I urge the Mayor and Commission to make sure that the perpetrators do not go unpunished.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Kienzle

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## 2 attachments



**2022Gift\_Cards\_Database\_Main\_Homebound\_Turkeys.xlsx**  
147K



**CM Memo re ARPA Projects 03-04-22.pdf**  
246K