

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-3**  
**April 12, 2016**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Jim Cason**

**Commissioner Pat Keon**

**Commissioner Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Frank Quesada**

**Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark**

**City Attorney, Craig E. Leen**

**City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman**

**Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

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Agenda Item F-3 [Start: 10:56:40 a.m.]

Discussion on Special Olympics Program  
(Sponsored by Commissioner Keon)

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: How about Special Olympics? Commissioner Keon, you had placed an item on regarding the discussion of Special Olympics, are you prepared to take that up now or would you like that later?

Commissioner Keon: Sure. We can do it.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Item F-3.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. It is much in line with the Proclamations that we did this morning and the awareness of Autism Month and whatever. When a number of people came to speak to us about autism and the services and things provided to children with special needs. One of the things they talked about was the role of recreation and athletics and the socialization that comes

with it, and the lack of programs and resources in this particular area. Doral is the site closest to us that does Special Olympics or really has a program for Special Olympics. Now the program that have is primarily a volunteer program, and there are some different conditions and things that go with each of the Special Olympics that are overseen by the Special Olympics Program, but a lot of it is the ability to have sport activities within our City, and within our own Recreation Department, that would provide the training to allow children to participate in the Special Olympics. So, it's really not a matter of hosting the Special Olympics, although we do host some things, I think at the Youth Center they host basketball for Special Olympics and the Tennis Center is used in the facilities in the City, are coordinated with Special Olympics to use them, but the children going to do the training for it, are going like to Doral, which is pretty far from where we live. So what I would like for the Manager to work with our Recreation Department, and particularly, we have a facility such as the Youth Center, and we are working very hard to make, to have programs available to children with disabilities. We've changed the language and some of the regulations related to having children accompanied by caretakers that are being shadowed, to be able to participate in our tennis program as of last summer. We have a golf program that is specifically for children with autism and children with other disabilities, can participate in it that is taking place at the Granada Golf Course, and the staff that are doing this program have been trained through the CARD Center as to how to work with children with disabilities and children with autism, so they have a successful experience in this light. But it was looking at possibly the kinds of programs that we could offer in our community to children that are autistic or children with special needs where they could have the actual training, so that they could participate in the Special Olympics, and it could be basketball, seems to be a pretty popular sport for that, bowling is a very popular sport, but we don't have a bowling alley, but maybe with the resources that we have, how can we use the resources that we have to allow children with disabilities to fully participate in recreation?- and my hope in doing so, I also so often in recreational programs in municipalities, public programs, I really would like, and I'd like your input on this, because I don't know how you may feel about it, and particularly people that have maybe competed in sports you may view it a little differently, so I'd like your input. I really think that the philosophy of a public recreation program and public recreation facilities, our aim is not to win trophies. Our aim and our purpose should be to give children an opportunity to participate in recreational events, that includes sports, it includes art, it includes music, it's not just sports, but I think so often we look at sports programs in terms of who can win the trophy, who is the travelling team, who is whatever, and although those are important and they give a lot of feedback, and we have some very good athletes, but you also have that child that they are not going to go on to play baseball, they are not going on to play, they are not even going to college to play a sport or whatever, but it is the socialization, it's the ability to play on a team, and to interact with other children, and learn to be a team member, it allows some children to develop leadership skills, it is a socialization experience. Those are all the great aspects of a recreation program, so in looking at these things, like a Special Olympics program, and particularly with all

of the discussion that went on this morning, about children with disabilities and the number of children, if UM – the CARD Center treats 10,000 children, and they say that they are seeing an increase in the people coming into them for help at a 10 increase per year. We know that there are a lot of these children and young adults in our community that – it's when we begin to look at all children as our children, we will have so much better a community, you know that these are our children, and we will provide for all of these children. So what I'm asking is not necessarily to propose a particular program, that I'm asking that the Manager would meet with the Recreation staff and look at how we can have programs for children with disability, and maybe expand them a little bit to actually provide the training for – they can decide on what the capability they have as to what sports we could train for and that children could participate in, and it doesn't need to be every sport, whatever, which ones work best in this community and best suited for the program that we have. One of the programs I wish we could develop at the Youth Center is track and field. Track and field is an area that so many children can participate in. I mean, it just has such a wide group of children and that ability, particularly to run for a lot of children is a great stress reliever, the ability just to run and to exercise and to do those things. And so, I'd like us to take a good look at that, especially with looking into the renovation, we'll have an update later, but how we utilize the facility and who utilizes it, and the accessibility of that, I think is something we also really need to look at, and I really would like to see our mission be more one of participation than highly competitive and trophy oriented.

Mayor Cason: But we also have that special relationship with Coral Gables High School in terms of reciprocal use of the field they have a track whereas we don't, so that would be a natural.

Commissioner Keon: You know that track is a wonderful track, and we are exceedingly fortunate that it was residents of our City that covered the cost of that track through Ransom, so that there is a shared use between Ransom and the high school, that the high school can use the pool at Ransom and Ransom uses the track for their home meets, which is wonderful. I just read in the paper that the high school girls water polo team came in second. I think they are training at Ransom in Ransom School, so we have a good relationship with these people, and you know, if we can extend it to that, and maybe as we go into the budget season this next budget, we can begin to look at with regard to staffing is that maybe you can have one staff member that part of their duties can be the issue of children with disabilities or even young adults with disability, because the CARD Center will work with them, with training and with all kinds of things, so that, that issue of all of our children are our children, they are our children, and if we as a community take care of them we will have a better community.

Commissioner Slesnick: Commissioner Keon, I might also point out that the Junior Orange Bowl Committee has a sports ability game every December, and they have a very large committee that deals with this, with hundreds of kids involved. Most of the events are held out of Tropical Park,

but I think there is a lot of people on that committee that would like to participate in this if we start to do something in Coral Gables, and I agree with you about the track and field at the Youth Center, and maybe even having staff devoted to that, because with the seniors moving out of the Youth Center to their own facilities, we'll have more room there too, and maybe the art programs and so forth could be increased at the Youth Center.

Commissioner Keon: I really hope, that in the coming year we really expand the art program at the Youth Center when you look at the budget. That's such a wonderful outlet for children also.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, one thing I had meant to say earlier today, when we talked about inclusion, but I was more focused on UM CARD, I see the University of Miami here again, and then also Crystal Academy. One important part about the inclusion resolution is that it empowers staff to basically look for opportunities to include people with disabilities and bring them to the City Manager. One thing I would like to say as the City Attorney, I hope she doesn't mind, but Cathy you've been wonderful on issues related to disabilities, and you've really said let's help and then the Commission has always set a course, always, of course let's include, and I know that our Parks Department, I see Fred back there, that they have some new programs that are being done and he's working with the City Manager to implement those.

Commissioner Lago: Another example, we found out from Mr. \_\_\_\_ who is a resident of the City of Coral Gables, and works in the City of Miami Beach, he's a great asset here in this community. He's very involved, very engaged, and he came to us, he called me one day and said listen, I'm just having a little bit of an issue, like you said before, my son just wants to run, my son wants to enjoy, he wants to have a good time in Coral Gables, and we didn't have the shadowing program active. We brought it before the Commission, and it was a no-brainer, so to me, what you are saying is just an extension of what Coral Gables already represents.

Mayor Cason: And we have a very active Disability Advisory Board, so you want to make sure that they get engaged in all of this. I think we all agree that we want to be as inclusive as possible, we want to be leaders in that, so I think we all support.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you. And I'll just ask the City Manager to take a look at it and Commissioner Slesnick, particularly with the Junior Orange Bowl and that group, that's a wonderful asset that they can also be involved.

Commissioner Lago: This is really the Advisory Board, great opportunity.

Commissioner Keon: So thank you.

[End: 11:09:31 a.m.]