

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
September 13, 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)

Commissioner Rebecca Sosa, Miami-Dade County Commissioner
Dr. Alessandri, University of Miami CARD Center

Agenda Item F-1 [1:01:36 p.m.]

Discussion with Rebecca Sosa, Miami-Dade County Commissioner, District 6, regarding coordination between Miami-Dade County and the City of Coral Gables as related to autism and other special needs.

Time Certain: 1:00 p.m.

Mayor Cason: If everybody will please take a seat, we are ready to resume. It's my pleasure to introduce Commissioner Rebecca Sosa whose been a great friend of Coral Gables, my friend, and a friend of all the Commissioners here for a long time whose always been looking out for ways to help the City of Coral Gables. She's been extremely generous, we've worked very closely with her on a lot of issues and I think she's here today to tell us another project she has, it can be very helpful, and I'll ask the City Attorney to lead in.

City Attorney Leen: I just wanted to welcome Commissioner Sosa, who I used to work with when I was an Assistant County Attorney, and I think so highly of Commissioner Sosa. Some of you may not know, but before she was Commissioner, she used to work with special-ed students, and she was a teacher in the public schools, working with special-ed students, and that's a very important job. I have two children who had been diagnosed with autism and both of whom had teachers that cared about them deeply, and worked with them even one-on-one extensively and changed their lives and helped their lives. So she comes to this with that background, which is already very special. In addition, Commissioner Sosa has always been interested in helping individuals with special needs through her public advocacy and as a public servant. So she, Commissioner Sosa was the one who sponsored the autism resolution, which is very similar to the one done by Coral Gables, and that was sponsored by Commissioner Keon and strongly supported by the entire Commission, and she said such eloquent words there. Cathy and I, the City Manager and I, went and we had a meeting with the Commissioner, and she mentioned the fact that she would be very interested in having, really providing funding that she has that could potentially be used for an activity center for individuals with autism and other special needs. And I remember the way that she said it, she made me quite emotional, I remember, she is a very kind person. So anyhow, I thought it would be great if she could come here, so the City Manager and I wanted her to be able to come speak to you, so she's here today and I know how welcome she is in the City as our Commissioner. She represents a lot of residents of our City, and part of our City. So with that I would just turn it over to Commissioner Rebecca Sosa.

Commissioner Sosa: Thank you Craig. Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, administration, don't believe everything he says, but believe what I'm going to tell you. For me it has been always an honor to represent the residents of Coral Gables at the County level, to make sure that we understand the needs of our City here, over there in that big beurocracy that exist at the County level. As a matter of fact, we are working right now on a resolution for the MPO, Metropolitan Planning Organization with the hope that after my resolution is adopted we work with the Governor, so we can have representation of our City at the MPO, and for small cities, and not to have duplication of representatives only from one City more than one, because that creates an unfairness and an unbalance for the rest of the municipalities. So, hopefully that is going to pass and then I will keep you posted. Thank you for those words. Do you remember that as part of the GOB, I decided to set aside funding and specify the funding on the ballot to the residents, so they voted knowing that I was setting aside funding for District 6 for the hospital, Jackson; for example, right now very soon we are going to have another arm of Jackson Hospital very close on Eighth Street near, between Ponce de Leon and 37th, so we are going to have a wonderful space over there to serve the community. At the same time, the link with UM, the doctors of UM and Jackson make a difference in this County. Then besides that, I OK'd funding for multi-purpose facilities throughout the District; we have been able to build a multi-purpose facility with 42 apartments for elderly in Hialeah, a multi-purpose facility for sports in Miami

Springs, that is beautiful, it came out and incredible for the whole community to enjoy. Now they are going to build a new senior center with that funding in Miami Springs, to expand the park and to be able to join it to Curtis Mansion. Then in the City of Miami we are in the process, yesterday we opened the first one, multi-purpose at West End Park, now we have two more to come that are going to be senior centers, so they can have their lunches and then the children and the adults have their activities; and then we did the same thing in the City of West Miami, and now comes Coral Gables. I have set aside some funding from the GOB and I want to thank the County Attorney and the GOB experts from the County. We have set aside; I believe is \$1.5 million; and talking about the different things that are needed. You know more than I do what you need in your District, and I'm here to help, but talking to Craig, I was saying Craig; we have a crisis in this County. We have schools for children with autism when they are small, we have elementary schools, we even have some middle schools that are more or less prepared, but when they become young adults and they become adults, there is nothing. What about the idea of having a joint venture with UM, with the Police Department in this County that is more qualified and more prepared to know about the needs of autism in Coral Gables, that by the way, thank you for helping our County Police Officers to get trained for CARD...I did at the County level what you did here. I copied you on that one. So thank you for that joint effort to train them, but I was thinking together with the School Board, we spoke to the School Board, to UM, what if we try to see if we can build a day care for young adults educational and for adults, so they can continue that trend and give the ability to the parents to leave them in the morning like in a school, pick them up in the afternoon, so they can continue that growth and development to become more self-sufficient, those who can be trained and those who cannot totally be trained for that will have the environment of understanding, respect, love, safety, and security; and what about if we do that in the greatest beautiful City. It's just food for thought, its ideal, and if at the end of the day that is what you would like to do, that \$1.5 million and if we need anything else I'm pretty sure I can – it's a multi-purpose that can be used for that, and can also be used for anything else that you need, because it's not for one thing. For example, the one that we did at the park yesterday is for education for classes for children, for seniors lunches, for an office lab for young adults, so we can combine whatever you believe as a Board that is most needed, but I just came to encourage you to join forces in doing something that is going to be the first one. You can set history, you are going to make history, because no one has done that, and it can happen if you wish.

Mayor Cason: I think it's a great idea. I think it's a great idea. I hope that we can get UM and other partners. Where does UM stand on this?

Commissioner Keon: Dr. Alesandre is here from the CARD Center.

Mayor Cason: Could you...speak for them, but just an idea.

City Attorney Leen: Dr. Alesandre please come up to the mic, just so I could introduce Dr. Alesandre. He is the head of University of Miami - Nova Southeastern University CARD Center, Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, he's more than the head though, he really is the person whose tremendous motivation and caring for individuals with autism has led him to, I think you have something like 10,000 constituents that you serve and it continues to grow every day. This is his life's mission; he's really a wonderful human being.

Dr. Alessandri: Well, I'm not here on behalf of UM; I'm here on behalf of myself as an interested citizen and fan of this Commission. I've been here many times and have heard so many good things come out of this body that nothing surprises me anymore, although it should, because what you just said is quite shocking and would be anywhere else other than right here. I can speak for the 10,000 families that we have at the Center for Autism; we serve families throughout Dade, Broward, and Monroe all at no cost to those families, we are funded by the Florida Legislature and are very grateful for 23 consecutive years of funding. We are based here in Coral Gables at the University of Miami on the Gables Campus and we would be as a CARD Center, as a center that serves families who live in this community we'd be delighted to partner on any initiative that serves our families. So count me in, count CARD in; the bigger question of the University will have to be addressed...

City Attorney Leen: I would note that I did receive a call from the University of Miami, I believe it was the President's office or someone associated with that, they had an interest as well, they just didn't want to overstep.

Commissioner Sosa: I spoke to them. I was able to speak to them about it, because I thought that it was important in the same fashion that we have to continue working with the Legislature so they can partner with them, expand the funding. This is the first step, if you are interested then we take it from there, we partner with UM, we can partner with the School Board that have teachers that are trained, but we have to do something, because in the greatest nation in the world we offer for every need, and you don't have an idea what it is for parents who have children with autism it's very hard to keep them safe, because they tend to be very active, they tend to have sometimes moments where they cannot follow instructions, and they don't sleep, parents don't sleep, the hours that are needed, because those children don't need to sleep so many hours, so it's something that you are going to change the lives of those parents by creating the center and allowing those parents to do the things that they have to do during the day, when those young people, those adults come home they are rested, they were able to...they were able to work to provide, and we change the behavior pattern of the family. This will be a contribution to families that really need assistance, so I'm here, I just came to tell you, I'm here if I have to redirect the

resolution with the allocation of the funding, I will follow your leadership, because I'm here just to help.

City Attorney Leen: One thing I would perhaps recommend is, perhaps ask the City Manager to look into the matter and designate Commissioner Keon as the Commission's representative, so she can speak with Commissioner Sosa about it, and then it can always be brought back to you at a later time. Then steps can be taken to look into what can be done, particularly with the University of Miami, and the School Board, as I know that there needs to be a plan in place, which really getting more into policy, but a plan in place in the future, which is why I think the City Manager's office needs to be involved too.

Mayor Cason: From my perspective, I think it's great. I think the fact that you are offering some funds that you control is a great way to start and now we need to move forward and see where, when, how.

Commissioner Slesnick: It's a wonderful opportunity and we are so grateful to have you here today.

Commissioner Sosa: Thank you Commissioner.

Commissioner Slesnick: Well you represent our City very, very well and we are proud of your efforts.

Commissioner Sosa: I'm very thankful to all of you and to the City, and very proud of the City of Coral Gables, and I'll be talking and meeting with you and keeping everyone informed and whatever you need, I'm just an instrument, so whenever you have to if you have to do a resolution just to instruct to bring or turn this to the table let me know, I'll sit here to listen to the attorney. All I want is to make sure that once again, Coral Gables makes a difference.

Mayor Cason: So don't give it to anybody else. We want it.

Commissioner Sosa: Mayor, I'm very loyal.

[Laughter]

Mayor Cason: I know you are. You've held onto that for five years looking for an opportunity.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, it is a very generous and a very kind offer. It is a group of families and a group of children that don't receive the level of service that they really need, and they need

a higher level of service than most children do and, finding the funding and the programming and all to do it is difficult, so it is a great gift that you give us to work with our community, because it will not just serve Coral Gables.

Mayor Cason: Do we need a resolution or something?

Commissioner Keon: Yes, we will do a motion.

Mayor Cason: Let's do a resolution formally accepting the offer and moving forward.

Commissioner Keon: OK, but we can make a motion to request the City Manager's office to work with Commissioner Sosa, with the County Commission and with the University of Miami as to how we can best utilize these funds to serve this population of children with disabilities, children and young adults, it's not just children, it's throughout the lifespan of people with disabilities.

City Attorney Leen: And then as we've been doing with some of these, I would recommend designating probably Commissioner Keon, since she was the sponsor of the resolution.

Mayor Cason: Fine. Why don't you make a resolution, you make the motion.

Commissioner Lago: I'll make the motion to appoint Commissioner Keon as our direct liaison with Commissioner Sosa.

Commissioner Slesnick: So moved.

Mayor Cason: City Clerk.

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 4-0)

Vice Mayor Quesada: Absent

Commissioner Sosa: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Before you leave, I wanted to say thank you, Chairwoman, I call her the Chairwoman, besides being the Chair, you've been the Chairwoman for two years, correct?- the

past two years she's done an incredible job, and she's represented this community for a long time, and there is a reason why nobody runs against you.

[Laughter]

Commissioner Lago: Number one, you are everywhere; you ensure that your constituents, even constituents that you don't represent in other Districts their voices are heard, so you are a constant advocate for what makes Miami-Dade County so special, so I really appreciate the time that you give me, because I meet with the Commissioner probably on a monthly basis and I'm fortunate enough to serve on a Board with her, so not only do I appreciate her as a leader, but I appreciate her as a friend. Thank you for everything you do.

Commissioner Sosa: And the same here. Thank you for those kind words and remember when we run for office the least we can do is to work for those who give us the trust to sit on this table to make decisions, but promises are not enough. You have to do tangible things so the community knows you delivered this to us, and that have been always my motive, my objective, and what makes things happen, to be able to allocate all the funding for the benefit of the community. I have my County Attorney here that at the same time we are going to be presenting the resolution redirecting the funding to give you the flexibility to do it as we continue working.

Mayor Cason: Thank you for delivering.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Commissioner Sosa: Thank you very much to Mr. Mayor, the Commissioners, Craig, always a pleasure. I have learned so much from you.

Mayor Cason: Great to see you and come back again.

Commissioner Sosa: And one day we won't have to build anymore of these places, because one day we will eliminate autism in our society.

Mayor Cason: I hope so.

Commissioner Sosa: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Sosa: Thank you Madam Manager, everyone. Thank you very much.

[End: 1:19:33 p.m.]