



**City of Coral Gables
CITY COMMISSION MEETING
August 25, 2026**

ITEM TITLE: ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS

MEETING DATE: July 1, 2026

SUMMARY OF MEETING:

QUORUM: Was reached

STAFF:

Jose Rodriguez – Human Resources & Risk Management – Assistant Director

Eglys Hernandez – Human Resources & Risk Management – P/T Administrative Assistant

CITIZEN ADVISORS:

Debbie Dietz, Citizen Advisor – (Via Zoom)

Dr. Jennifer Durocher, University of Miami (Absent)

PUBLIC GUEST:

Mr. Phillip Church – Sitting Pretty (Producer) Via Zoom

Ms. Shawn Buller – Sitting Pretty (Actor) Via Zoom

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 10:00am

MEETING ABSENCE: None

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:

June 3, 2026

Ms. Chichester stated at last meeting, June 3, 2026, Debbie Dietz had been marked as absent, when she was present via Zoom. Ms. Chichester stated Agenda sheet needs to be updated to now reflect Clifford Friedman as ADA coordinator and not Raquel Elejabarrieta.

Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2nd Wilfredo Jaurequi / Approved unanimously

SECRETARY'S REPORT: None

BOARD MEMBERS' REPORTS: None

NEW BUSINESS:**FIU Embrace Disability Conference – Eddy Martinez / Jose Rodriguez (Exhibit 2)**

Mr. Martinez shared with the board information he received from FIU regarding upcoming Embrace Disability Conference. Mr. Rodriguez reminded board members that if one or more board members would be attending, to please advise us because that would require it be noticed. Mr. Martinez shared information regarding activities he will be conducting with Summer of Success program.

Mental Health Awareness – Ms. Vanessa Bedoya

Ms. Bedoya stated she wanted this to be something that everyone is talking about. Ms. Bedoya stated that when discussing disabilities, this should be included in the conversations.

OLD BUSINESS:**Sitting Pretty – Director Training – Ms. Justine Chichester (Exhibit 1)**

Ms. Chichester provided information regarding Sitting Pretty play and how beneficial it would be to utilize it as training. Ms. Chichester presented guest present via zoom. Mr. Phillip Church, Sitting Pretty Producer, provided further information regarding this memoir written by Rebekah Taussig. Mr. Church stated when he first encountered this, his thought was to bring each of the eight chapters from the book to a play and as done so with this representation of Chapter 3, More than a Defect. Mr. Church expressed the importance of this story being shared. Mr. Church stated the two objectives currently are to get this presentation down to a forty-five-minute and a video which can be shared in schools and to advocate for representation in the arts.

Ms. Chichester stated she feels this is a great tool to be utilized as training because as an audience you leave with a sense of purpose and better understanding. Mr. Church stated that it would be best to coordinate a walk thru of purposed sight for training. Mr. Rodriguez will be scheduling sight visit.

Ms. Buller stated there is always another generation of exquisite people growing up disable or about to become disable with extremely powerful stories. Ms. Buller stated that the disability community is growing day by day and after researching further, the National Institute of Health stated that every year there are approximately eighteen thousand people who suffer spinal cord injuries, and over one million in half suffer head injury each year. Ms. Buller stated just from these two disabilities, the disabled population grows every year. Ms. Buller shared with board her personnel experience. Ms. Buller stated she believes this presentation facilitates the opportunity to review this through a social model. Mr. Church stated these three actors in play are not able people utilizing wheelchairs, they are actual wheelchair users and believe this provides a different impact on those watching. Ms. Palacio-Pike thanked everyone for information and how her son learned how to speak via music and theatre. Ms. Sando stated her daughter has utilized music as a tool to speak and express herself.

Ms. Sando asked what the difference between a medical model and a social model of disability is. Ms. Chichester explained that as a person with a disability it seems that your life is led by attending medical appointments, medical procedures, etc., and this is identified as medical model. Ms. Chichester started being part of a presentation like this, bringing disabilities into real life, seeing it as value, as part of social life is considered a social model. Ms. Blaire stated medical model to her is when many years ago the medical world said oh you have a disability, let's fix it and now we are aware it is not about fixing it, it's why the social model has become so strong. Ms. Blaire stated

the use of theatre is not only inspirational, but also educational as well. Ms. Blaire stated perhaps one of the things that can be done is compile a list of books and films addressing disabilities which can be recommended to others.

Employment Pathway Summit – Mr. Eddy Martinez (Exhibit 3)

Mr. Martinez stated he has been in contact with the Chamber regarding Employment Pathway Summit. Mr. Martinez stated he has also been in contact with taskforce from Miami-Dade County Commissioner Raquel Regalado's office. Mr. Martinez stated he is trying to coordinate who would be forefront of this project and location. Mr. Rodriguez stated the city can provide the use of the CMR. Mr. Rodriguez asked who the audience would be and Mr. Martinez stated it would be businesses from city chamber as well as other nearby chambers seeking employees who would be invited to attend. Mr. Martinez stated that at this event, employers can receive information as to benefits which are available when providing employment to people with disabilities.

Mr. Martinez asked for direction regarding who would be presenting this event. Ms. Blaire stated she believes Mr. Martinez would have a lot more flexibility working through the chamber regarding this exciting proposal.

Ms. Vanessa Bedoya stated this is a phenomenal idea and why not work with the different schools and have people with disabilities host this event. Ms. Bedoya spoke regarding city perhaps applying for grants for such events.

Mr. Rodriguez asked if there would be presentations from organizations participating and Mr. Martinez stated logistics continue to be developed. The board continued to further discuss this topic.

Adventure Day – Mr. Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez stated it has been concluded that for this year, Adventure Day will be hosted as usual. Mr. Rodriguez stated that the cost of Police for a Walk/Roll was approximately fifty thousand dollars.

School Community Relations Committee – Ms. Mary Palacio-Pike

Ms. Palacio-Pike stated there is not much update. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated there are openings at Coral Gables Elementary, however, they will not open an autism classroom, and she wanted to state that for the record. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated the Compact, which had disability embedded in the document, has been approved by Miami Dade County Public School Board and will be going to commission or city manager's office next. Ms. Sando stated district is going through changes. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated perhaps having Ms. Chichester would come to the next School Community Relations Committee meeting to introduce the possibility of having Sitting Pretty video presented at schools. Ms. Palacio-Pike spoke of perhaps having City of Coral Gables host a summit next year like the recent one held at Village of Key Biscayne or even extending invitation of other board members from various cities to attend the director's training schedule for October. The board further discussed this matter.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

NEXT MEETING: August 5, 2026

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 11:02am

Motion by: Vanessa Bedoya / 2nd: Jennifer Ward Sando Approved unanimously

ATTACHMENT(S): Minutes of July 1, 2026

*City Commission Agenda Cover Memo
August 25, 2026*