

City of Coral Gables City Commission Budget Workshop
Agenda Item F-2
August 23, 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
Historic Preservation Officer, Dona Spain
Government Affairs Manager, Naomi Levi

Public Speaker(s)

Iraida Mendez-Cartaya
Jaime Torrens
Sylvia Diaz
Samuel Joseph

Agenda Item F-2 [0:00:00 a.m.]

Discussion regarding Miami Dade County Public School matters including Coral Gables Preparatory Academy's capital improvements, status of the geographic preference at Sunset Elementary School, update on the Henry S. West Laboratory negotiations and information regarding the School and Community Relations Committee's Candidate Forum for School Board seat District 6.

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Mayor Cason: F-2, City Manager.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: F-2 is actually Commissioner Keon's item. She asked us to place the -- for discussion purposes, several items with the School District. We're pleased that they're here in attendance. And as it's noted in your agenda, Coral Gables Prep Academy's capital improvements, the status of the geographic preference at Sunset Elementary School, update on the Henry S. West Lab negotiations, and then separate and apart from the School District, we're pleased with the School Community Relations Committee's community forum -- candidate forum that will be Wednesday, tomorrow, for the District 6 seat at the School District, and that will be at the theater at the Coral Gables War Memorial Youth Center, beginning at 6 p.m. So, Commissioner, this is your item. How would you like to proceed?

Mayor Cason: And let me say, after this, we're going to have -- we'll have our lunch break as soon as we finish this.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah. I only put it on the agenda, because I -- you know, we addressed a number of these issues in the spring, and I wondered what the progress was on these issues now that we're back in school again, so it's been three months. So, it was more an update on what is happening with each of these things, because, you know, high quality public schools are exceedingly important to us. And congratulations on starting a new year, a big year ahead. But these are particular concerns to us with regard to boundaries after the, you know, moving from school choice -- I mean, area of choice into boundary schools, and you know, the different issues that we dealt with. And just to sum up, you know, where we are and what are the issues sitting on our plate that we still need to continue discussions with the school system about.

City Attorney Leen: I know one issue that came up -- and I know that we have Iraidia Mendez-Cartaya, who's here who can answer these questions, is my understanding. But the -- related to Controlled Choice and then specifically the magnet preference for Sunset -- and then there were

several other issues that followed from that as well, it's our understanding -- and she's here so she can confirm this -- that right now the preference for Sunset, which is a geographical preference for...

Commissioner Keon: In a Choice area.

City Attorney Leen: Is through the 2017-2018 school year. And I know that the Commission had the question, and the City Manager and myself, whether -- what would be the criteria that would be looked at to determine if that would continue. Is there a possibility it may continue? And I know that that was one of the reasons we called this. In addition, there was the issue related -- and this is an issue -- there was a dispute over this. At one point, although we resolved the dispute and, you know, we're trying to work together on this, but there was the issue about the Coral Gables Elementary, the windows, and then we learned about the roof, and we wanted to hear -- I know the Commission wanted to hear the status of that as well. And then, finally, there was West Lab and what is the status of that.

Mayor Cason: Thank you for being here.

Iraida Mendez-Cartaya: My pleasure. Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, members of the Commission, Madam Manager, Mr. Attorney, good morning and thank you for having us today to address very important things. And you're right, yesterday we had the opening of the schools and it was flawless, as the Superintendent mentioned to the community, so we're very proud and we're very excited to have another great school year. Here to address the various issues and with me I have Mr. Jaime Torrens, which is our chief facility officer, Dr. Sylvia Diaz, who is the Assistant Superintendent for Schools of Choice, Dr. Strickland, who's Administrative Director for the Schools of Choice, Dr. Bentolila, who's Administrative Director for the Central Region Office. To specifically address capital improvement on Coral Gables K-8 Preparatory Academy is Mr. Jaime Torrens, and followed by that will be Dr. Sylvia Diaz, who will talk about Sunset Elementary.

Jaime Torrens: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. I guess it's still morning. I'll give you a brief update on the GOB project at Coral Gables Preparatory Academy. Going back a little bit -- in August 2012, before the voters were presented with the Proposition 222, which was a \$1.2 billion General Obligation Bond for improving and renovating our schools, there was a deficiencies list for every school that was prepared and posted for public information regarding each specific project. The list for Coral Gables K-8 center at the main campus at that time included replacement of windows, replacement of exterior doors, reroofing, air conditioning upgrades, as far as -- as well as a number of other items that were necessary, because that campus obviously was built in 1924 and had a number of updates and improvements over the years, but really was in need of some additional renovations. So, as part of the GO Bond program, in the first year of the appropriation, a little over two and a half million dollars was appropriated for Coral Gables Preparatory Academy at the main campus. This project included renovations, which were -- included the window replacement, as was originally identified as a deficiency, air conditioning upgrades, fire alarm system improvements, exterior painting and installation of classroom technology. Subsequent to that, an additional \$500,000 appropriation was made for a new roof. To date, the roof in Building 2 has been replaced with a roof -- with a similar tile, Spanish S tile that was there before. It had been installed, I believe, in the late '80s. There's additional reroofing and structural work that is going to be completed on the additional buildings, on the auditorium, the cafeteria. Actually, some structural repairs have already been completed in the main campus, and there's restoration of other areas of the school that will be ongoing. We've accomplished a lot at Coral Gables Prep since the inception approval of the bond, and the investment of this two and a half million dollars. However, the window installation has been basically on hold for over a year. The City has agreed to purchase different windows than the ones the District had purchased for some areas of the school. I believe there was a general authorization of \$250,000 to do that. However, at the present time, we have a situation where we have water intrusion in the existing building and basically deterioration of the learning environment for the students because we have either old windows, and in some cases, windows that were removed and not replaced yet. So, we've been working with your attorney,

and with the Manager on an interim solution, which is installing the windows that we have already purchased at the site while the City proceeds with the, you know, specifications that are being developed for the windows that would meet the City's criteria. So, we're hopeful that could come to conclusion pretty soon, because we would like to make sure the building is tight and we're in the middle of hurricane season and we feel we're particularly vulnerable in that regard. Another issue that I know had come up was the issue of the playground. A new playground is being installed at the school that's been allocated \$140,000 for this.

Commissioner Keon: Which playground is that?

Mr. Torrens: There's a new playground that's being installed.

Commissioner Keon: Where is that one being installed? We don't know?

Mr. Torrens: I can't say exactly where it is...

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

Mr. Torrens: But there is a new playground, \$140,000 budgeted for it. It's in design, and we can get back to you with the exact location of it. We expect that it will be completed in early 2017. The -- an important piece to this also, is we know that this is an old building that needs a lot of attention, and the District's commitment to Coral Gables Prep is now being highlighted in our proposed five-year capital plan. We're including an additional appropriation of \$8 million in the capital plan for Coral Gables Prep. This is funded in fiscal year 2020, and it's to undertake additional renovations -- you know, there's additional interior renovations that are needed, exterior repairs. So, with this additional investment, it will represent an increase of more than 300 percent of the original commitment under the bond. And we feel very strongly about doing this, and this is something that we're proposing to our board. In addition, you have the other campus, which is the Merrick Campus, which had an allocation of about \$400,000. That was in

year two of the bond, that included some renovations, including air conditioning upgrades, a new PA system, some exterior improvements and classroom technology, and that project has already been completed on the Merrick Campus.

Commissioner Keon: Could you help me again with the eight million? The eight million goes to the existing buildings or does that go to the -- a need to build out for the middle school...

Mr. Torrens: No.

Commissioner Keon: Part of...

Mr. Torrens: This is...

Commissioner Keon: This is...

Mr. Torrens: Exclusively for the...

Commissioner Keon: Exclusively for the existing...

Mr. Torrens: Existing building renovation of -- yes.

Commissioner Keon: Of the renovation of that building.

Mr. Torrens: Absolutely.

Commissioner Keon: And it's an \$800 million allocation over how long?

Mr. Torrens: Eight million dollars.

Commissioner Keon: Eight million, I'm sorry. Eight million over how many years?

Mr. Torrens: It's budgeted in 2020. It's all budgeted in that year.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, in 2020?

Mr. Torrens: Correct.

Commissioner Slesnick: Are there any plans for expansion of Coral Gables Elementary Campus?

Mr. Torrens: No. At this point, we don't have any plans for expansion. It's just renovation of the existing campus.

Mayor Cason: How's the work at the high school?

Mr. Torrens: The high school, we have about \$11.2 million allocated for Coral Gables Senior. We're in the process now of advertising for an architect and CM to do that work. We expect the advertisement to be out next month, month of September, hopefully commissioning by the Board later this year and getting to design early next year. And we did a piece in collaboration with some funds we received from the City on the bus depot, and we already were able to renovate the auditorium and make some improvements there. But we're looking forward to getting into the big project over there, which is definitely much needed.

Commissioner Lago: Mr. Torrens, could you give us -- first off, thank you for being here. Could you give us a little bit of an update in regards to Carver, and if there's any proposed upgrades to the facility, because I've gotten some questions from the residents in the neighborhood.

Mr. Torrens: Sure. Just a second. I brought my whole list here. I wasn't sure which other ones you were going to ask me about.

Commissioner Lago: No, no worries. Take your time, take your time.

Commissioner Keon: While you're looking there, I can go back and ask you about the -- I think for the City it was -- we were surprised over the window issue and whatever else, you know. And I think it was -- I'm sure when you're purchasing materials as you're going through, I don't know that you distinguish, you know, that a school is on the National Register of Historic Places or that it's not, and I know it's not, and it's not that -- you know, I don't think it's your intent to ignore that. I think it just maybe isn't highlighted in the course of your planning when you're, you know, ordering things and you think these are the things for the schools. This is the windows. We need this many windows and we order them. But you know, when you look at the extensive renovation and the quality of the renovation of Miami High, which is just beautiful -- I don't think that there's another high school in this county that is as beautiful as Miami High is. It is spectacular; beautiful, beautiful building. And interestingly, the same architect that originally designed Miami High, two years earlier, is the group that designed Coral Gables Elementary, so it is the same group. So, it would be appropriate that -- and it was the same -- actually, it was the same windows and there was the -- that are at Miami High or were designed for Miami High that were designed for Coral Gables Elementary. And I think it would have been -- it would be nice going forward that, you know, you would note those schools that are on the Historic Register, so that they can remain. You know, and if there is an issue with dollars that before things happen that you would have -- you know, that we would work together between the school system and the City, so that we can preserve our historic buildings, and continue to use them for the purposes they were built, but in the style in which they were originally built would be a wonderful thing. I mean, I don't know how you do that, but maybe going forward we could really ensure that we do that so that, you know, it doesn't happen again. And I'm sure that the windows that were at Miami High, you all have that -- do we know that, Dona? Do we know the sources for those and all of that information?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: We do, so it should be easy to cost out, okay.

Mr. Torrens: The -- no, thank you. I appreciate always -- I always appreciate collaboration from our municipalities. The issue with Miami High, even though it was built about the same time, it was not built with wood windows. Coral Gables was built with wood windows that are unmaintainable. I think the City, on some of your own properties, are probably facing some of the same issues. The windows at Miami High were replaced with metal windows, as originally installed. The ones at Coral Gables Prep, there are a number of different types of windows, because it was built over a number of years. It wasn't all built at once. So, some of the windows, I believe, have been reviewed by Ms. Spain and found to be basically in geometry, basically identical to what was originally there. The objection, I believe, came into some of the windows that the geometry was a little different as far as the windows that were being installed now. The concern there became later with the current codes and wind impact resistance. And some of the original -- the layout of the original windows, the way they were configured really was very difficult to almost impossible to get an NOA for those windows. So, we're working with your team right now. I think they're struggling with some of the same issues that we did as far as obtaining a window that meets that -- the wind load requirements of our current code, and still be respectful of the original design of the school, so...

Commissioner Keon: But I really want to convey to you how grateful we are for that collaboration, that you know, you sit down with, you know, our staff and with our Manager and with us and that you're willing to come and have the conversation with us on these issues, so we're very grateful for that. Thank you.

Mr. Torrens: Thank you. And if I could get back to Commissioner Lago's question on the -- on Carver. You asked about the elementary or the middle?

Commissioner Keon: Carver?

Commissioner Lago: Carver, the one -- excuse me.

Commissioner Keon: Elementary.

Commissioner Lago: Elementary, I apologize. Excuse me. You caught me off guard there.

Mr. Torrens: There's almost a million dollars allocated for that project. It was in year two of the bond. I believe most of the work there is underway right now. I could get you an update on that later. I wasn't -- I thought we were going to focus on the...

Commissioner Lago: But I want to take advantage of the fact that you're here.

Mr. Torrens: No. I'd be happy to...

Commissioner Lago: And since you did mention there's forthcoming projects in 2020 happening, I wanted to be able to just emphasize how important that school is to the City and now that we have it back on the trajectory, it's an A school, I want to make sure that we provide the necessary facilities for all the proper learning to take place there, so that's important for us.

Mr. Torrens: Absolutely. And as far as the middle school, you have about \$4 million that's in the current year right now, so those projects will be going into design very soon, similar to the high school, but we'd be happy to give you periodic updates through Ms. Mendez-Cartaya to let you know...

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Mr. Torrens: How things are going.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you. Dona, did you have...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I just wanted to comment about the Miami Senior High School. They were originally steel windows, but I think the big difference in how it was approached for the replacement was the color because they...

Commissioner Keon: Was the color?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Took the time to scrape down to the original color of the existing old steel windows and then replicated that in the new windows. I mean, yes, it's a lower profile, but the big thing that sticks out that's inappropriate about Coral Gables Elementary is the white windows. And we actually, the City, paid for a lab to do the testing, so we know what the original color was.

Commissioner Keon: So, we know what the original color is?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Alright.

City Attorney Leen: If I could say something here. The -- I think that the issue that has come up -- and we have had some legal discussions about it and we've been seeking to collaborate, but I think that the issue that has come up is that a lot of this, both the windows and now the roof, were part of your bond, and your capital plan and they've been out there. But we're asking, I think, from the City's perspective, without getting into the legalities, is, as a matter of collaboration, when you're going to be basically touching the structure, which is Coral Gables Prep, Coral Gables Elementary, that you would confer with Dona Spain. Dona, as our Historic

Preservation Officer, knows that when we're dealing with the School Board, as opposed to a private party, we have to balance the interest from our perspective. We need to think about your interest as well, which is obviously providing weather-tight appropriate, Code appropriate building in an efficient time. We understand that. But you know, she is an expert in this field. This is her area, and it is an historic landmark -- a local, historic landmark. And so, all we're asking is from a collaborative perspective, that you come here before it's done. Because I think with the windows, a lot of this issue may have been resolved if we had known in advance, because she could have given you her comments at the beginning, and then you could have decided whether to do it or not. And if you decided not to, then we would have had to work that out with you, but I just feel like -- I think that the -- this has come up a couple times is the concern that when we learn about it, there's really nothing we can do at that point.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: It's after the fact. And particularly, the (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Keon: And although we recognize that they are different jurisdictions, we also know that even different jurisdictions can work together to provide a far better product in the end without really imposing one upon the other, and so I think that's all we're looking to have done.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes. And in fact, as far as...

Commissioner Keon: So, thank you.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: The roof goes, in 1982, there was a concern of the City Commission at that time. They passed a resolution urging the School Board to use true barrel tile. The School Board went to the Historic Preservation Board. They were originally going to do cement tile, but they -- it was a compromise to use the S tile that's out there. So, in the past, they have come...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: To the City...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: To talk about those issues.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I would just like that to continue.

Commissioner Keon: Right. And also, I guess I have a concern about -- in the reroofing of the area over the auditorium and some of that, that is barrel tile roof, and we'd like to have a discussion to ensure that it is replaced with what is there, because it is historic.

Mr. Torrens: No. I think that the -- and I appreciate the comments, but I think that what we're doing now with the roof is replacing what is there now, the original roof, which probably...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I think it's S tile now and they're replacing it with S tile, not really the most appropriate...

Commissioner Keon: No. Over the -- is that what's on the...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I believe it's an S tile even on the...

Commissioner Keon: I didn't think that that was what was on...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: You can correct me if I'm wrong.

Commissioner Keon: Well, I mean, I'll leave you to that -- I thought that was still the barrel tile.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: In '82, they had the original tile on it from the 1920s, and they replaced that with an S tile, which...

Commissioner Lago: But let me...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Is not really appropriate.

Commissioner Lago: I agree with Commissioner Keon, and I think that some -- I think what we're missing here too is the issue of what's the delta here in regards to what we want and what the School Board has budgeted. And like everybody here knows, the firm that I have the pleasure of working with for the last five years does work for the School Board, and the School Board does an exceptional job in reference to providing an education and providing the necessary upgrades and facilities for students to enjoy learning and reach their highest potential. But there comes a point in time -- and if you're in the construction and design industry, our Assistant City Manager can tell you, Dona can tell you, that there is a significant cost difference between an aluminum window and a wooden window that meets NOA requirements in regards to wind load calculations. It is significant.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: But I'm not suggesting that they install...

Commissioner Lago: No, no.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Wood windows.

Commissioner Lago: I know. I know you're not. But I'm just saying, beyond the fact of collaboration between the City and, obviously, the School Board, which I think is essential and we need to work hand in hand when we're dealing with historically significant buildings, I would

like to see from the School Board basically what they're planning for certain schools, and then they sit down with our staff and basically say, okay, well, this is your wish list and this is what you want to get done. Well, there is a delta in between what we can afford and we have budgeted for this project. How are we going to get to that certain level? And that way, we avoid kind of situations like we got ourselves into with the windows.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I would very much like to know what the \$8 million is for, if it impacts the exterior of the building. That's our concern is the exterior.

Mr. Torrens: It's interesting that the comment was made that the wood windows were an issue at the beginning. There was a request that we actually replace them with wood windows.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Actually...

Mr. Torrens: And once it became clear that that wasn't feasible...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: No.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, Commissioner...

Mr. Torrens: We went back to the aluminums.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Just so that we don't get into...

Commissioner Keon: We know that you're not going to replace them with wood windows.

Commissioner Lago: No, we know, we know.

Commissioner Keon: It's fine, it's fine.

Commissioner Lago: And if I may...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Lago: If I may, Madam City Manager. Just give me one second, okay. I've had a conversation with Dona, and Dona and I go back and forth jokingly about the wood windows in this building.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yeah, we can have that conversation again also.

Commissioner Lago: You know, and we've had that conversation back and forth. Again, I understand. I'm in the business, okay. I understand how difficult it is. We're not taking away from it. And maybe that's not the appropriate discussion for now. We're going off. But the whole point of this and why we're happy you're here -- and I know that you have a very busy schedule, especially with everything that's -- school has just started, so I wanted everyone to acknowledge the fact that school started yesterday, and I appreciate you being here taking the time and bringing so many of your staff to be here. We just want to collaborate with you in the future. We want to hold hands on certain projects that have historic significance. And in reference to the other projects that do not have any historic significance, you continue to do the great work that you do.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I just need to clarify that the suggestion was not to buy new windows. It was to restore the wood ones.

Commissioner Lago: Again...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And so just -- what I would not want to do is get into an argument because we are really working -- the School District and the City are really working on creating that collaboration that you want.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And so, and the more information, the more sit-downs and conversations, the better. I just didn't want to get into a (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Keon: No, no, no, no. And we understand that it's hard to put hurricane-resistant glass in wooden windows and the Code being what it is, that you know, you can't do that. It's also a functional building. It's an educational facility.

Commissioner Lago: But it also...

Commissioner Keon: It isn't just whatever. So, no, we truly understand that.

Commissioner Lago: But it also comes to the point where, again, maybe I'm to blame, because I didn't go by there to visit the school today. But there are still certain windows that haven't been installed, correct?

Mr. Torrens: Correct, and that's why I...

Commissioner Lago: Okay, so I mean, again, we...

Commissioner Keon: We're waiting.

Commissioner Lago: Got to -- school has started and, you know, when you're inside a classroom, you need to make sure that there's the proper not only light, but there is the proper

temperature for students to learn, that it's weather tight, that there isn't situations where mold can get in. There's a lot of issues, so we need to move forward on this issue expeditiously.

Mr. Torrens: I appreciate that and appreciate the collaboration now with your Attorney and the Manager on proceeding with the windows while the ones that are acceptable to the City are procured, and we totally support that.

Commissioner Keon: That's fine. Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Is there a requirement -- because, again, you're talking about different window structures. Have you spoken to our Assistant City Manager in reference to structural requirements that may be needed to install the new aluminum windows?

Mr. Torrens: Sure. No, structural -- obviously, the structural integrity of the building, we couldn't install the windows if it were not structurally sound.

Commissioner Lago: But we haven't done that work, have we?

Mr. Torrens: No, absolutely. They are structurally sound...

Commissioner Keon: They have.

Mr. Torrens: For accepting the windows.

Commissioner Lago: Okay.

Mr. Torrens: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Alright, thank you. Thank you very much for that presentation. Appreciate it. (INAUDIBLE) continue?

City Attorney Leen: Well, there are two more.

Mayor Cason: I know...

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: Mr. Mayor...

Mayor Cason: Continue with the other...

Commissioner Keon: Go ahead.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: The next presentation has to do with Sunset, and there's definitely -- obviously, our priority is the safety of our children and our -- the protection of our infrastructure. But -- and there's definitely room for collaboration. We hear you and we will do so, work continuous -- continue to work collaboratively. But Dr. Sylvia Diaz is here to speak to Sunset.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you. Did you have another question, though?

City Attorney Leen: Oh, no, no, no. I just wanted to make sure that the -- I was just telling the Mayor I think there's two more, but he knew that, so it's my mistake.

Sylvia Diaz: Good afternoon. When Controlled Choice was -- when the Board voted to end Controlled Choice a couple of years ago, we also offered a geographic preference to the residents that reside in what is now the Carver Elementary and the Gables Prep area. I'm happy to report - - and that was for two years. And I'm happy to report that this past year, for the magnet application cycle, that we were able to offer admission to all of the kids in those areas who applied to Sunset Elementary.

Commissioner Keon: Good.

Ms. Diaz: So, we were able to offer all of them slots, and so that's good news. The geographic preference will be in place again for this year's magnet application cycle, which will begin on October 1. Parents need to submit their applications by January 15, and they'll be notified after March 15. Now with the change in boundaries for Sunset, there are -- that the number of magnet seats on that may change somewhat. There may be -- what we're experiencing or what the principal is reporting that she's seeing more of the neighborhood kids are coming back to the school, so we don't know exactly what the number of magnet seats will look like going forward, but we know that we will continue for this next round to give preference to those folks who are living in Carver Elementary and Gables Prep boundaries.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you very much. I mean, I think also what you're seeing is the -- with the school -- it's such a great school. It's such a -- I mean, it has a wonderful reputation. The academics in the school are wonderful. The parental involvement is great. The teachers are great. So, I think that the people that live -- it's actually not only in -- right in the Gables, but you know, the City is looking at annexing that High Pines area and the area that's behind Sunset Elementary, which was traditionally the boundary for that school prior to -- previously, before it was made Choice. So, and I think you see more and more of those people wanting to come back. I know that I have so often heard parents say that live in that area, that if they thought they had a chance of getting their children into that school, they wouldn't send their children to any other school. They would send their children to that school, because it is a high-quality school in their neighborhood, so that would be a real preference for them. I think what happens is, because they're concerned that they, you know, may not know in time, that if they're not going to get in, the other opportunities for other schools or private schools or whatever are closed to them, so, I mean, that's the real concern. But knowing, you know, going forward, if we will continue to benefit from that 25 percent preference, they know that there is a chance that that school in their neighborhood, there is an opportunity for them to go to. I mean, because the home school is a

very small school with only one grade per class, I think that the people that live in the area sort of traditionally look at Sunset as kind of their school even though it's a magnet, but is that 25 percent really gives them a feeling that they have a chance to send that child to school, and that really would be -- if you would ask them, that would be their first preference.

Ms. Diaz: Well, with the change, though, the folks who live...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Diaz: The families who live in that area absolutely belong to that school and can attend that school, and so, that's why the number of magnet seats may shift over the next few years, because we do need to address all of the kids who live in the attendance boundary.

Commissioner Keon: No, I understand that, but thank you very much. So, now what happens going forward? We know for the next year, you'll maintain the 25 percent, and so what happens after that?

Ms. Diaz: We will look at all of the information that we have after this next round of magnet applications. We'll look at school enrollment and all of the data. We'll work with the region to look at what we do moving forward and to give the Superintendent information.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, so will it be -- I mean, is the concern or what affects you is how many children outside of this area are also applying to that school, so if you have an overwhelming number of children outside of this preference area that you have a need to consider? Is that what changes or...

Ms. Diaz: The preference was provided for the other two areas just as a transitional piece.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Diaz: So that families would still be able to access that school who had anticipated being able to access Sunset in the past, so looking at the numbers, the change with the boundaries and all of that, all of that's going to have to be taken into account when we look at this. I mean, the plan was for it to sunset, but that we would look at all the data, provide that to the Superintendent, so that he could consider it in case that he had different feelings about it.

Mayor Cason: So, you haven't made any decision now?

Ms. Diaz: No, we have not.

Commissioner Keon: No. But you'll let us know going forward...

Ms. Diaz: We will.

Commissioner Keon: If you do, because I think that the community operates under the assumption that they -- you know, that there was a 25 percent preference and we'd like to be able to tell them that -- when and if that isn't the case.

Ms. Diaz: Absolutely. And the sun...

Commissioner Keon: But I think it is a wonderful thing for us to be able to have that and we're grateful to you for it.

Commissioner Slesnick: I just want to make it clear -- I mean, people that live in that community or south of US 1 can also apply -- no, no, no south of US 1, basically can apply for the magnet program. The boundary is south of Alhambra...

Ms. Diaz: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: At the waterway. But anybody in that neighborhood can also apply to Sunset school for the magnet program if they qualify for the language and so forth.

Ms. Diaz: Absolutely. Anybody district-wide can apply for the magnet. The folks -- the families who live in the Sunset boundary have that boundary preference, and that will continue beyond...

Commissioner Slesnick: It's going to continue...

Ms. Diaz: Right.

Commissioner Slesnick: Forever?

Ms. Diaz: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: Okay.

Ms. Diaz: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: Because right now there's a large number of people buying homes south of Alhambra in that narrow section of Coral Gables, and seem to be maybe High Pines would be part of the -- because of the school. And also, the same thing is happening for Coral Gables Prep, and I don't know the numbers -- and you probably don't know them yet, but I understand yesterday a lot more of the children signed up at Coral Gables Prep than you expected because they have moved into the neighborhood. So, I was asking earlier if you plan to expand Coral Gables Prep or the elementary side of it, you know, not right now, but you have land to do it. But by the way, I really would like to see more trees around the playground over at Coral Gables Prep, because I've had skin cancer for 10, 15 years, and it's very open and sunny

out there. And if you're not going to build anything in the playground area, really, more trees should be put around the outside, just a plug for trees. So, right now, the boundaries will be staying for Coral Gables Prep and for Sunset, so if people are moving into those areas, they don't have to be concerned in two years or three years that their children may not get in if they're within the boundaries?

Ms. Diaz: No, they don't.

Commissioner Keon: Commissioner Slesnick, when we went to boundaried schools, the 25 percent was for the whole controlled choice area, so it was for the boundaries that included Coral Gables Elementary and Carver and Sunset, and so that's what they're doing for the next -- through 2017.

Commissioner Slesnick: Right.

Ms. Diaz: And it's for this next magnet application cycle.

Commissioner Keon: Right. Going forward, for the Sunset boundary itself, they will always retain 25 percent; is that right?

Ms. Diaz: Yes, that is correct.

Commissioner Keon: They will always retain that.

Ms. Diaz: That is correct.

Commissioner Keon: It's the extension of the boundary to Coral Gables Elementary and to Carver is what we're talking about.

Commissioner Slesnick: Okay, thank you.

Commissioner Keon: So, you'll let us know when -- if that shifts?

Ms. Diaz: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Appreciate that.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: It's a great school.

Mayor Cason: And we have a final piece that you're going to discuss on West Lab?

Commissioner Slesnick: While Naomi's coming up, could we get the numbers, if they have gone up, for the Coral Gables schools, whenever you -- after the first week or two to see how many kids are actually coming back to the public schools?

Government Affairs Manager Levi: The enrollment numbers...

Commissioner Slesnick: I remember -- yes.

Government Affairs Manager Levi: For Coral Gables Elementary?

Commissioner Slesnick: When we had a bad economy in 2008 and 09, more children went to public schools that year instead of private. But it seems to me that because of the -- being able to go to the schools of the boundaries that you're in, that we are having increased attendance at public schools. I just would like to know that.

Government Affairs Manager Levi: We can get you that information. I think on last count we considered Coral Gables Prep and Sunset were both at capacity.

Commissioner Slesnick: They're what, I'm sorry?

Government Affairs Manager Levi: Both at capacity.

Commissioner Keon: They're at capacity.

Government Affairs Manager Levi: At full capacity. So, in terms of West Lab, at the moment, the deal is somewhat in a holding pattern. The terms and the partners may be changing. We are waiting for word from the University of Miami and the School District, which will be having some internal meetings to decide the funding piece of the project.

Commissioner Keon: Okay. Could I ask about the playground you were just talking about?

Government Affairs Manager Levi: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: At Gables Elementary. Which playground is it? Is that the one that's in back of the school of the main building, the -- as opposed to not on the playing fields? Is it on the playing field or the one that's in back of the existing building?

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: When we walked through the school, there was a play field that wasn't being used. That is being removed and a playground is being put in, a new playground.

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: I don't know exactly where on the actual campus it's going to be placed...

Commissioner Keon: Oh, okay.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: But there's a new -- the old one is being replaced with a new one.

Commissioner Keon: And it may just be open space or something may not be there.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: It may be there and it may be somewhere else, but we'll get back to you.

Commissioner Keon: But the old one that was -- is not going to be there anymore. Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Can I ask you a question in regards to what Naomi just brought up about West Lab? I remember when we first had started the discussion, I think it was close to a year and a half ago, I remember that School Board Member Regalado discussed the urgency or pressed the urgency of the funds that were allocated as per the bond.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: Correct.

Commissioner Lago: I know we're talking about millions of dollars. Has that money been set aside and put on hold or are those projects moving forward? The reason why I asked that is because the last thing I would like to see is to see any money spent on potentially buildings that are -- that'll be obsolete and demolished depending on what the outcome of this current plan is on hold right now.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: Thank you for that question. The funds are appropriated for West Lab...

Commissioner Lago: Okay.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: But the project is time sensitive. We do have a plan to enter into -- and start the project, and commissioning the architect by the beginning of the new year, in January or February, so we need to know what the project will look like by sometime this fall. Just to add to what Naomi said just a few minutes ago, we had our last meeting in May, and where we thought there was general consensus on what the project was going to look like, one of the partners expressed some concerns after the fact, and since then, we have not been able to meet. We do have a meeting scheduled -- the School District, with one of those partners that expressed the concern. We have it scheduled for next week. It's been very difficult to get those two partners together based on the conflicting calendars. But we hope to be able to get this project on its way hopefully.

Commissioner Lago: What is the -- what are the monies exactly in reference to the allocation from the bond for West Lab? Do you know what they are?

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: It's \$3.2 million.

Commissioner Lago: Okay, thank you.

Commissioner Keon: I have every confidence that when everyone sits down at the table to meet on this issue, that we will find a very good solution. I really do believe that these last two years of the City and the school system working together in recognizing, you know, the interests of all of these parties and providing high-quality public schools for our feeder pattern, it is -- you know, I think it's really, really important to make sure that everyone understands that this is not just Coral Gables. This is our feeder pattern, and our feeder pattern exists beyond the boundaries of the City of Coral Gables, which makes -- one of the things that I think makes our schools very

unique is that they are -- there's great diversity in these schools. There's great diversity. It's ethnically, racially, and income. There is tremendous diversity in these schools, which is -- you know, I think is a wonderful thing and what is, you know, sometimes the real -- the value of public education is that ability for people to experience one another and recognize the value and the worth and the intelligence and everything else of all of the people across a whole spectrum without regard to income or ethnicity or religion or race or whatever else, that they're all just our kids, so I think it's wonderful. And I mean, I -- and I know that, you know, that you recognize in the school system that our interest is not just -- the schools happen to be in Coral Gables, they do happen to affect our children, but they also affect the children in our neighboring communities, and we care as much for those children also, that they all have a great school experience.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: This project -- the School District is committed in seeing this project come to fruition. And I know in conversations with City staff, they are too committed in seeing this project. However, this project is a very complicated project, because it's not just the City and the School District. There are other parties to this project, and there are also competing interests, so it's a complicated project. We would have done it, I'm sure, just if it was just us two, we would have had this under way and moved on a long time ago, but it's a complicated project with other interests.

Commissioner Lago: Madam City Manager, just a quick question. Will we have City staff at that meeting that the School Board is mentioning?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I think this is a meeting between the School District and the partner. I think that -- I'm sure we'll get briefed after, but I think that there was a desire for the two of them to sit down together.

Commissioner Lago: Okay.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much. Thank you for being here, taking up so much time, and thank you for all the help over the last couple of years on Controlled Choice. It's a wonderful outcome for the Gables and we're appreciative.

Ms. Mendez-Cartaya: Well, we appreciate the partnership and the collaboration and look forward to the continuation of that. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you. Thank you very much.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And Mr. Mayor, we've got our School ...

Commissioner Lago: That's what I wanted to mention. Mayor, if I may, I'd like to invite the chairman of -- Mr. Joseph, who's here, who's been incredibly involved throughout the process, and has been an advocate for, like Commissioner Keon mentioned, not only children in our backyard, but neighboring cities. So, I want to thank you, before you even mention it, I want to thank you on behalf of the Commission because you're my appointee, so you make me look good, besides making the City look great. I want to thank you for everything you do. Thank you so much for your commitment not only this year, but you know, in many years in the past.

Samuel Joseph: Thank you. I appreciate that. It's always good to spread out a little cash at folks if you want people to talk good about you. Thank you for having me up here, and I want to say thank you to the Commission really for having the vision to really re-establish, and reinvigorate the School and Community Relations Committee. It's really been, for us -- we feel the mandate of being out there to talk about yours and the residents' need to maintain quality educational facilities. I thank you, Commissioner Keon, for bringing up how we do -- we have very unique -- we're very proud of our education structure here in the City. We're very proud of our schools, our teachers, but we do have a very unique system here where everyone is part of it, and we know that when we put the right systems in place so success is always on the road; and so that's why we've been able to maintain our success. And we've also been very excited to

start working with our partners at the Miami-Dade County Public School System, specifically Ms. Mendez-Cartaya and her staff. They've been very responsive, and we have, we've been building this relationship that I think long-term will sustain us into our excellence that we maintain every day.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Chair, may I say something real fast? Because I know that the City Manager and I have the same view on Sam. I've gone to a number of his meetings and I know that you just received a lot of praise about him, but it really is incredible the amount of time and attention he puts into these issues. I've gone to several meetings with him as his counsel, and it is the most well organized meeting. We have an agenda, and then there's follow up. And particularly with the special needs initiative, which is wonderful that our city -- it's part of what the resolution of inclusion that you've done, but also in every single other area. And he came with us to the -- when we went to the ABC Committee recently, he came with us, and anyway, I know that the City Manager and I think really highly of him, but I wanted to say that because I've been sitting with him in these meetings, and have been really impressed.

Mayor Cason: And thank you for the distribution of the backpacks too.

Mr. Joseph: Again, another one. We -- I think the thing that really got this committee together, and for us to really understand our mandate was the school improvement projects. You gave us a direction by approving those projects that has now set us all forth on what are more than just work for us. For us, it's a passion. I have a seven year old that goes to Coral Gables Prep that will be playing on that playground that hopefully will be done before the end of the school year.

Commissioner Slesnick: With trees.

Mr. Joseph: With new trees out there. When we walked those campus -- that campus for the first time as a group and to see Commission leaders, to see parents there, school officials, and everyone getting together to say, I see it and we're going to take care of it, and we want to make

sure that our kids have the best, that's what we're about and that's what I'm about. And I hope that's mirrored in the committee and in the work that we do out there in the community on your behalf, by the way.

Commissioner Slesnick: Sam, before you leave, ditto for me, too, on how great you are, and thank you for chairing that committee. We haven't heard about Coral Gables High School, and I'd really like to see if we can spend some more attention on Coral Gables High and raise the grade level this year so that it could be in -- most of our schools are A's and raise that level up from where it is now for this year.

Mr. Joseph: I love that, and I think Ponce and also Gables High, we really haven't talked a lot about, and they are. They both need our support. Middle and high school are the two toughest times, and especially the toughest times to get the best out of everyone, and so whatever support we can provide, we're going to do that. We do have, as part of our community initiatives project, to work on some community service projects with the schools, looking at internships, working with the Chamber to really provide real-world access to work so that our kids know that once they do learn, and they get those great degrees at those higher institutions, come back and build this city and make us even better. I want to leave on this last note. We're doing our first candidates forum. The School Community Relations Committee is very excited about this. The seat -- the School District 6 seat hasn't been open in a long time, and it's our opportunity to really meet and greet the folks who are looking to get into the seat that makes policy for the fourth-largest school district in the nation and one of the important districts for that school district. I would urge all of you to urge your neighbors, family, friends, even if you don't have children, it is the time to come out and ask the questions of these folks that you want to know. When are these playground things getting done? When are our schools going to get even better? And how do we, as a community, help in that process? It's your opportunity tomorrow at 6 o'clock at the War Memorial Youth Center auditorium. Six o'clock, right?

Government Affairs Manager Levi: Six o'clock in the Youth Center theater.

Mr. Joseph: Come on out. We want to hear from you. Send in your questions. Naomi's gathering questions. We'd like the room to be full, and we do -- we want to make it not difficult, but we do want to let those folks know that whoever gets in that office, that we're behind them, but we're also holding them to the fire to make sure that they do right by us and by our children.

Mayor Cason: Thank you, Sam. Thank you very much for that. Thank you for all your work.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Joseph: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you for being here.

Mayor Cason: Alright, let's come back from...

Commissioner Lago: Good work.