

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting  
Agenda Item G-1  
January 12, 2021  
City Commission Chambers  
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli  
Vice Mayor Vince Lago  
Commissioner Pat Keon  
Commissioner Michael Mena  
Commissioner Jorge Fors**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias  
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria  
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos  
City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Samuel Joseph**

---

Agenda Item G-1 [10:14 a.m.]

A presentation by Samuel Joseph, on the Summer Family Literacy Festival (SFLF) in Coral Gables.  
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Next item, and we have a time certain 10 o'clock item, is G-1, presentation by Samuel Joseph on the Summer Family Literacy Festival in Coral Gables.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mayor. As the sponsor of this item, I've had the pleasure of working with Mr. Joseph, who is also one of my appointments to a City board and has served us faithfully and done a great job representing us on the Summer Family Literacy Festival. He's been doing a wonderful job planning on this over the last two years. And with the effort of a lot of people in this community -- and I want to thank staff and I want to thank the School Board, Mari Tere Rojas, her team. We're about to hopefully bring this to fruition. COVID -- once we get COVID in place. And obviously, our staff is here that they've -- Fred and his team, who deserve a lot of the credit and have done a great job on this and the ACM and the CM for really, you know, giving us a lot of rope to try to get this done over the last -- I think it's been like two years we've been working on this, right, about that? So, I want to left Sam have the floor. As an advocate of the library, my kids go there -- well, they used to go there a lot more than they go now, but we're going to go back. This is something -- literacy is something incredibly important to all our community, not only just Coral Gables. And I think that this Summer Family Literacy Festival is just going to, you know, be a catalyst to bring people together around reading, which is something that, again, is very, very important. There's a lot of young kids, all they want to do is just be on the iPad or be on the computer. Picking up a good book is something that may be a lost art for many and I want to introduce people -- I want to introduce as many young kids to reading, and that's what our staff and Mr. Joseph has been working on. So, Sam -- I don't know if Sam is here yet or.

Samuel Joseph: I am. Thank you, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Lago: Sam, how are you, sir?

Mr. Joseph: Can you hear me?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: How are you, sir?

Mr. Joseph: I'm doing well. I'm doing well. Thank you, Vice Mayor. Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, it's always a pleasure and an honor to be before you. I'm very excited to talk to you about the Summer Family Literacy Festival. I am going to just cut my camera just because it's easier for me to read from my notes and I don't want you to have to see my bald head the entire time. But I do want to thank you for putting this on the agenda. The Summer Family Literacy Festival -- I should start out by saying thank you to the Commission because this was one of your initiatives that you really spearheaded when you reauthorized and kind of restructured the School Community Relations Committee back in 2015. When you restructured our committee, you gave us work, specific work to do, our school improvement projects. And one of those projects was to look at our school libraries and how we could help support them because they're in desperate, desperate need. And so borne out of that initiative and working with our school partners and talking to the community to find out what folks needed in the area, we -- this project was born, Summer Family Literacy Festival. First of all, it's been called a book fair, a literacy festival. The purpose of the event, the festival, is to really promote family literacy as a solution and an alternative to the student summer slide, which has been extremely exacerbated by COVID-19 so much so that there's talk of a lost generation. We also want to highlight and promote and celebrate the work of our libraries. The Coral Gables Library, which is in the Miami-Dade County Public Library System, is actually one of the busiest libraries in the system, the most used. Our Coral Gables Little Libraries Project just started up in the parks and has become very popular. And all of our school libraries -- most of our schools are Readers are Leaders schools and so most of our school libraries are used pretty heavily. We also wanted to assist our schools and families and community stakeholders at the worthy goal of having all of our kids reading at grade level by third grade. I don't think people appreciate how important this statistic is. If we don't have kids reading at level by third grade, the data is astronomical in terms of the negative impacts not only for that student and their family, but also for the community. So, we're looking at ways, whether it's partnering with the Children's Trust, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and other community partners to look at how do we get our kids up to snuff and reading at grade level. And then we also, as a world-class, you know, community, we want our families to have access to some of the best programming that's available, not only here in Florida but in the country. And we also want

to highlight the City Beautiful and all the assets that we have. We have quite a few literacy related options, businesses and hotspots around the City. And we are a Reader are Leaders city. And so, we want to promote that regionally to the county and out into the rest of the community and world. So, the event itself, it will be a City of Coral Gables event that the efforts of which are planned through the School Community Relations Committee and the Library Advisory Board. And the event itself would be administered by the Community Recreations Department. Fred Couceyro and Catalina and all those folks out there, I have to give them an extreme heavy thank you because they -- when we talked about this idea, I at first thought, well, I hope they like it and I hope they will agree that it's something that's worthy for the City. They immediately took to it. And thus, we're going to do a pilot project this summer of this event. And so I thank them for their confidence. As you all -- and I'm not going to go through all of the project partners and all of the sponsors and vendors. You guys have been provided a printout of the planning that's been done thus far. I do want to highlight a couple folks. Obviously, our Coral Gables Library will be the center and focus of the event. We want to promote it, especially the renovations that are happening and we look forward to our new library coming into fruition very soon. We'll also highlight our school libraries. Miami-Dade County Public Schools who's always been a faithful partner with us from the day one in this project, with all of their departments, starting with Mari Tere Rojas, the School Board member who has tirelessly worked on behalf of our schools in Coral Gables and on this project. We're lucky enough to have the folks from the Miami Book Fair International providing some technical support in helping us do this because we don't do these kind of events. The Miami-Dade County Public Library System, Dave Lawrence, the folks at the Children's Trust and we're also going to be working with the Miami-Dade Ready to Learn Program, just a lot of people coming together to say that, yes, we believe in literacy. We believe this is important and we want to do our part to make this a great event. And then you'll see in terms of some of the folks who we've been working already in terms of sponsors and vendors, we've been working with Books & Books. I'm going to be meeting with Mitchell Kaplan hopefully very soon. We want to set up some meetings with our Chamber and also with the Foundation, who are always doing great work at keeping up programming for our city. And then also include some of our outside partners, whether it be the County, state and federal sources. This is a big initiative and a

movement that's happening around the country. The host site, we're looking at the Coral Gables War Memorial Youth Center, both indoor and outdoor. We'd like to have a youth alley, where, you know, book exchanges, author readings, lectures, illustrator demos, bookmaking workshops, really fully engaging the audience in literacy. And then you'll see a list of the guest authors, performers that we want to invite. Two that I want to highlight, Arva Moore Parks, we want to do a memorial session, a panel discussion hopefully by the Coral Gables Museum to really highlight all that Arva has done to promote the City Beautiful and Miami's history. Obviously, we want to get some of our local talent, like Dave Barry and Dave Lawrence and other prominent authors here to talk with both our students and families about their works and how to get involved. So, what you'll see in the five-page document that was sent to you is really almost four years' worth of planning and work to get our pilot project event, which will be on Saturday, May 29, going. And as you'll see, what we're looking at is an all-day event. You know, opening ceremony, a book and street fair and then evening activities and really involving folks in a full-day of literacy fun. In closing, I just wanted to go over the next steps with you guys. We've -- we'd be very interested in doing a Sunshine meeting with the School Community Relations Committee and the Commission, any Commissioners who are interested in participating in the public to really get more ideas about what folks would like to see in the pilot project event. And then from there, we'd like to resubmit our plan to the Commission for your purview and approval sometime around March -- February or March. And then it's planning and go time. We want to execute this in May and then come back with results to the Commission about how the event went, what we gained from it and then what in the future we can do to make it even better. At the end of the day, I'm really very, very excited about this project and I want to thank all of my colleagues on the School Community Relations Committee who have been helpful over the last three and a half to four years as we've been planning this. The Commission, as a whole, the Commission before you, you as a Commission, have all been very helpful. And certainly, the Vice Mayor, thank you very much for putting this on the agenda today so that the public could learn a little bit more about it. In closing, I would say, if you, the Commission, can help us with -- you know a lot of people and you have a lot of sway. So, if you could talk to some of the folks who are on our list who you know to let them know about your thoughts on this event and where you want it to go, we would love to have

them come on board and then any ideas you have for making this better, we would like to hear. Thank you so much for your time today. I'm here to answer any questions that you have.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Sam. I think it's a wonderful, wonderful idea. It's a fantastic project and you have our full cooperation. And all you have to do is ask. I think I speak for the Commission, but you know, I'm sure they each have their own thing to say. I congratulate you and thank you for your wonderful service to this community. And this is a great, great idea, as you say, starting to read -- I mean, pilot programs and such is, you know, fantastic. A literacy festival at that age and making it fun at the Youth Center is a wonderful, wonderful project. You know, just let us know what cooperation you wish from us and I'm sure that the Commissioners will agree with me that you will have a hundred percent cooperation from us.

Vice Mayor Lago: And Mr. Mayor, thank you. And everyone knows that you're a voracious reader and that you read a lot. So, what I wanted to try to do was I wanted to help Sam in an effort to garner up as much sponsorship as possible because obviously it's going to cost money and we're trying to raise money privately in regards to this. And I also received an email from a resident who was listening who asked me that, you know, can we donate books. Because, again, a used book is just as good as a new book. I get a lot of used books and I read them and they're just perfectly fine. So, people may want to donate books that potentially could be sold and we're here to support any way that we can, Sam. So, count on us any way that we can help you and just when you have that Sunshine meeting, please send it out to the City staff, send it to myself. We'll include it in social media so we can get as many people to not only join the meeting but also get engaged in regards to sponsorship and just get the word out there because this is going to be -- like the Mayor said, it's going to be a great opportunity to extend and expand literacy within our community, so great work. Thank you.

Mr. Joseph: Mr. Vice Mayor, real quick, you mentioned the book donations. Thank you because I did leave that off. Two things: Yes, we want used books because we are going to donate those

books to needy communities. And every child who attends the event will leave with a book. That is the...

Vice Mayor Lago: You know what we can do...

Mr. Joseph: Goal of this event. We have made that commitment.

Vice Mayor Lago: You know what we can do, Sam. Right now, I don't have a problem somehow, some way we can collect those books. I don't have my office here in the City, but I can offer them to have City Hall, or we can talk to Fred and Fred can potentially put some sort of like drop off at the Youth Center, just as long as it limits the interaction between people, and I want to be fair. Because if I don't have a problem doing it in my office here in City Hall, we can put a box out there and just have people come and then leave it in the front desk. And I'm here every day, so I can just take it upstairs. But let's coordinate that before the meeting on Zoom with the community so that we can already have that ironed out with Fred and his team. And I just also -- again, I wanted to thank Fred and Carolina. You know, they've done a great job, so they deserve all the credit.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, very, very much, Sam. Great job. Alright. We're going to take a five-minute break, a ten-minute break. We're ahead of schedule, so let's take a break.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.