

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-1
July 11, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Marketing Manager for Economic Development, Solanch Lopez

Public Speaker(s)

Estelle Lockhart
Nicole Kost
Josh Goodman
Maria Cruz
Sam Joseph
Alejandra Milian
Cecilia Slesnick

Agenda Item 2-1 [12:43 p.m.]

A Resolution of the School Community Relations Committee requesting that the City Commission include a formal educational investment fund budget line item in the Fiscal Year 24 City budget for public schools within City limits.

Mayor Lago: Let's move onto item 2-1.

Ms. Lopez: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Solanch Lopez, Marketing Manager for Economic Development and Acting Staff Liaison to the School Community Relations Committee. This is a resolution of the School Community Relations Committee requesting that

City Commission Meeting

the City Commission include a formal educational investment fund budget line item in the Fiscal Year FY 24 City Budget for the public schools within city limits. This is a discussion that came to the SCRC in their May meeting by members of several PTA and PTSAs. I know we didn't have any board members that were able to be here today, but we do have some of the members of the PTA and I believe that they wanted to speak on the item.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Do we have anyone signed up to speak?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir. First speaker is Estelle Lockhart.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Lockhart: Good morning. Thank you to all of you all and for your time, not only today, but also in private meeting with us during your office hours last week. We really appreciate it. My name is Estelle Lockhart, I live at 1515 Capri Street in Coral Gables. I'm also the past PTA President at Little Carver, as well as VP of Advocacy. I'm also a proud parent of a rising 5th grader there. First, I just want to recognize the commitment that you personally and the city has made to education, whether it's the Literacy Festival, which many of you read at, whether it's the Page Program, Internship Program, as well as committing police officers to the Gables schools, when the School District was struggling to meet the state mandate after Parkland. That is no small task. In addition, our amazing School Board member Mari Tere Rojas has advocated for schools in this community for many, many years. In addition, Mary Snow at the Coral Gables Community Foundation. So, we have no lack of enthusiasm for education. However, in being active in many leadership roles in this community, what I have seen and all of us coming together is PTAs have seen is a plan, that's what's missing is a coordinated plan, which many municipalities have. So, as we know our schools and the funding for schools come from property tax. So, our property taxes go to the city, you all, as you were stating the data, take that money and give it to the county. So, we're based off of county schools, however, we're a city, we're here, right. So, Mayor you had said that the city has a small percentage of students who are going to our city schools, that data is from 2014 when we were doing controlled choice. So, what we're asking for is, we have many well intentions, leaders, we have a lot of great things going on in our community, but it's time for a coordinated effort, it's time to have a city with educational goals and a plan like many other municipalities do. So, this resolution is just a start, it's a drop in the bucket, it's a start of a larger discussion. Let me give you some examples. Our money goes to the county to oversee 500 schools. We cannot expect them to take ownership of what's happening in our city where we have seven schools and ten area schools, that's our job, that's your job, to set the goals for our city. The City

City Commission Meeting

of Miami Beach twenty years ago, made an educational compact with the School Board. They hired a Chief Education Officer whose been a fulltime employee for 20 years. This person is the main coordinator of what we would call the SCRC here in our city. The School Community Relations Committee is also the liaison for all non-profits in the area, the Chamber, etc., is all housed under one roof. This is a fulltime position and has been for 20 years. You can see it by going on the City of Miami Beach's website. They have all of their measurable goals there. They dedicate one and-a-half million dollars a year to their schools. We don't have a line item. We're asking for, like I said, the tip of the iceberg. We're asking for a start. City of Key Biscayne same thing, \$4.5 million; City of Miami Lakes, started smaller, was supporting STEM programs, crossing guards, \$100,000. What we would like from you all is to take leadership on this. To task staff or the SCRC with coming up with a state of the union. What is happening educationally right now? Where are the gaps? Where are the redundancies? Coming up with more current data than what the Mayor gave from 2014. Where are we? What are we already doing? What can we be doing better? Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question.

Mayor Lago: I want to hear everyone and then.

Commissioner Menendez: Actually, it was for her.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Go ahead.

Commissioner Menendez: You mentioned Key Biscayne, Miami Beach, the monies – where are those monies applied to? What do they use those dollars.

Ms. Lockhart: They are all very different. The City of Miami Beach, the list is extensive. They decided 20 years ago to make all their schools IB schools. That's \$15,000 per school, plus professional development. So, we're looking at about \$20 grand per school. They do STEM initiatives, they coordinate programs with their library so that they are cohesive to what's going on in the schools; and its broad, its education with a capital E, okay. It's not just schools. Key Biscayne largely, it was the \$4.5 million bond to improve, to bring more capital to MAST buy those seats, but then they also, for Key Biscayne K through 8, are redoing the field, they have water drainage issues, so its capital.

Mayor Lago: But they haven't approved reoccurring revenue, like every year. That was just a onetime bond.

Ms. Lockhart: The bond for MAST was and that's ongoing, that hasn't been paid yet.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: But I'm saying that would be extinguished.

Ms. Lockhart: Right, but the Key Biscayne K through 8, for example, that's under their Fiscal Year right now, \$100,000. Miami Lakes is a lot more nitty-gritty. They do crossing guards for \$30,000, it ranges from 40 to 70 in the last couple of years. Its everything from spelling B's, chess tournaments, a stipend for a vocabulary class, I mean they've gotten really nitty-gritty. The point is, they're all measurable, they have a plan, they have goals.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll just let you know, in addition to, obviously you said the Page Program, the Internships, the things we do. Last year we started a Codemania, which is a coding competition which schools were invited to. So, I appreciate the fact that you acknowledge that we have done, continue to do work for the students.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker Nicole Kost.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here.

Ms. Kost: Good afternoon. I'm Nicole Kost, an active Coral Gables parent at Coral Gables Prep Academy parent and PTSA member, which serves Gables residents and families. Coral Gables Prep Academy is located here in the City of Coral Gables. It is a beautiful historic site, celebrating its 100th year. As such, it does require maintenance and continual updates to help maintain that property. The lower academy PE field needs updating. It could be a beautiful green space in our city, in this city. It should be maintained and quite to add the beautification to courtyards and upper campus are also needed. We can also touch on a police presence for dismissal or if there is construction happening around the school, it would be nice to have an extra police officer to help with the traffic flow at dismissal which is only about two hours for the upper and lower campus. A commitment to public education in a community is a reflection of its values. Many cities such as Estelle has mentioned, in the surrounding area, including Miami Beach and Pinecrest do provide direct funding to their public schools and other educational initiatives. The National Bureau of Economic Research conducted a study that said for every one dollar spent on public education, property values rose by \$20. So, its advantageous for the city to make an educational investment and make it a priority. I'm asking Coral Gables, Mayor, Commissioners, to provide leadership, coordination and a financial commitment to promote educational excellence in the city. Educational commitment should be a priority. It benefits its residents and makes a stronger community and making it an even greater place to live. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Joshua Goodman.

Mr. Goodman: Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Josh Goodman, I'm a parent of two daughters at Little Carver, as well as Vice President for advocacy at the PTA at Little Carver. I'm going to repeat some of the things that Nicole and Estelle said, but I also, first of all wanted to just thank you for your engagement on this issue. I met with several of you on Friday and have had conversations over the past few months and years about education, and it's good to have that. I think we all now need to come together and sort of raise the bar a little bit. The resolution that is before you today, I want to give you some background on it. It was really the product of months of conversation of PTA volunteers from now six area public schools, who came together for the first time in 2021, when we organized a grassroots candidate forum. Many of you participated. It was the first of its kind and it really got a conversation among the PTAs started about what we can do collectively as PTAs and as a city to promote educational excellence in our city. I also think its illustrative to just give my brief family history. I move to South Florida in 2019. I knew nothing about this area, but like many perspective families, my wife and I prioritized schools, and we chose Coral Gables whose reputation had travelled far and wide, because we wanted to be in a community that values education, civic engagement, and social responsibility. It stretched our budgets to live here, but we really never thought of living in any other place. We found an amazing cohort of teachers and administrators, but we've also seen how the public schools really lack sometimes basic necessities: leaky roofs, broken drinking fountains, no safety fence to keep out threats, and we've also seen how sometimes the schools have fallen behind in other areas of scholastic enrichments, such as our Spanish language program, arts education, the list is pretty extensive. This resolution we hope though is, the start of a conversation and a process, not the end. One that addresses, not only the many basic needs that are currently falling through the cracks, in which the city is in a position to help address, but also raise the bar for education, so that the City Beautiful can also be the City Brilliant. Right now, as been pointed out, there are a number of city sponsored educational programs that Estelle mentioned and are great indeed. The Literacy Festival, my family goes every year. I'm aware of a lot of activities at the Youth Center as well. But they really lack complete coordination and more importantly there's no strategy, no goal, no north star guiding all of these desperate efforts. And while we know that the schools are administered by the School Board, the city has a role to play in filling some of the gaps, which sadly are growing, not diminishing given the unfunded mandates coming from Tallahassee, Universal Voucher Programs and other budget constraints that are beyond all of our control. Thankfully we live in an economically prosperous area. Families and businesses are moving to South Florida every day, but Coral Gables, to remain an attractive option, residents and businesses can and should do more to promote our public schools and put us on the same level as neighboring municipalities, such as Pinecrest, Key Biscayne, Miami Lakes, Miami Beach where Estelle pointed out, there is a Chief Educational Officer, 20 years in the job, overseeing one and-a-half million dollars in programs. I want to clarify; this is not a money grab. We aren't looking for a handout to fund pizza parties. The schools, the PTAs, the School Community Relations Committee, the

City Commission Meeting

[Date]

5

July 11, 2023

Agenda Item 2-1 – Resolution of the School Community Relations Committee

Requesting that the City Commission include a formal educational investment fund

Chamber of Commerce, philanthropic foundations all have a role to play, but it's your job as City Commission to provide the leadership, the vision, the coordination, to bring together all of these efforts in the interest of children. So, our ask is very simple. Set a timeline and a directive to the SCRC or perhaps a member of the city staff to provide a thorough needs assessment of public schools and an inventory of existing educational opportunities in the City Beautiful, with the aim of crafting a long-term strategic vision for scholastic excellence. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Any other further. I just want to ask you a quick question, Josh, on that front. The other cities that are providing some sort of funding, does the city or municipality cut a check to the School Board and then those things get funded, or do they hire or does the city hire somebody who basically is like a liaison between the School Board and the city. How does that work?

Mr. Goodman: So, I think it's a holistic thing. I mean there's different programs. Certainly, there is some intergovernmental coordination and obviously anything that would involve schools, funding of the schools themselves would have to go through the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, I think it's called, Martha Mountainair heads it.

Mayor Lago: Let me give you an example. A leaky roof, this is your example.

Mr. Goodman: Sure.

Mayor Lago: There's a leaky roof and that's a priority that you mentioned. We have a billion-dollar GOB fund that was voted by this community to provide a half penny money to provide issues of the School Board. It was voted successfully. I think they have about 20 percent left of that GOB fund to address, and we have 36 percent of our tax base, the largest portion of our tax base goes to the School Board; 30 percent goes to the city; 33 percent goes to the county; 2 or 3 percent goes to the state; and 36 percent goes to the School Board. So, you have 36 percent of every dollar already goes to the School Board, plus a billion-dollar GOB, as you can attest, it was used, a portion was used at Coral Gables Senior High. How would I fix a leaky roof for a school that you deem appropriate and why shouldn't the GOB fund handle that issue?

Mr. Goodman: I think GOB should, and I think what we're basically seeing is if we can galvanize all the resources which is not just financial, it's actually, I think a lot of it is just having a centralized area or person who can coordinate all these efforts to hold accountable the people whose job it is to fix whatever problem. So, I don't think we're asking the city to do things that it's not even able, probably legally to do, but to be manning the fort, to make sure that the people doing their job are doing it.

Mayor Lago: So, what do you think about the idea that we discussed when I met with you. I know you incorporated a portion of that into your comments. Why not sit down with the PTA and the Principal of every school and have a conversation where we put together a letter, I was hoping to

City Commission Meeting

show the letter here today, but I didn't ask my staff to pull it. We put together a letter that deals with pending issues with the city: bridges, the Underline, certain things that were pending, roadways that needed to be repaved and we put together in my office, put a comprehensive letter together some point of this year and we sent it to the Commission of the district, along with the Mayor, and they're slowly going checking off items on that list to address it. Don't you think that the best thing that we should do before we put – I don't want to put the cart before the horse, asking for money when we don't even have a list of items that you view as important in regards to the public schools, like educational programs, outstanding maintenance issues, things that I think we should write down on a list, write everything down per school and say, these are items that we view as important and then go and sit down with the School Board Superintendent, which we have a good relationship with and say, are you handling A, B, C, D on the bond? – do you have future in your five-year capital plan, are you going to handle E, F, G, and H? – how you going to handle I and G, how are you going to handle these issues, the pending issues. Oh, we don't have funding for that. Oh, we don't offer, we can't have that type of, we're not dipping our toe into that issue, and then maybe the city can get involved in that. But asking for money now when we don't have an actual actionable plan that I have seen per school, I think to me is, makes me feel a little more comfortable if I had from every single school a breakdown. We would like to do these three programs. For example, the City of Coral Gables, when we had the Parkland issue, the Commission and I sponsored the item, through the Manager, asked that the police be present at every single school for eight hours during the school hours, as we waited for the School Board to address the issue of hiring additional officers, School Resource Officers, so they can meet the need, because they are very short. So, we stepped in. I think we were the first city to step in immediately and get that done. Our officers did not leave, they're still there, they still spend time at the schools, but they did not leave until the School Board was ready and they had already hired the individuals in question to address their needs school by school by school. So that's an emergency issue, a public safety issue. What I would like to do is put together a plan, come to me with a plan, the PTA in conjunction with our board here in the city and say look, these are the items that we have for the following seven schools that we view as important: programming, maintenance issues, and then we sit down with our School Board member and with our Superintendent, who's new, and say, how can we move forward together on this issue, without just saying hey, give me \$200,000 and just put it in a bank account, and we'll see how we address it. I prefer to have a plan of action and see if we can get them to do a lot more than just \$200,000.

Mr. Goodman: I don't think we're in disagreement. I think when we started this process, we were ignorant, we still have a lot of things we don't know, I think even basic data about how much our schools are used by residents is something that's sorely lacking. I'm in agreement with you. We need to come up with that needs assessment first and that's what we let the Commission to provide the leadership on, because we need to have someone, whether its staff, whether it's the SCRC, holding us all accountable to come up with those needs and then also go one step beyond. We

City Commission Meeting

don't want this to just be an exercise in fixing leaky roofs and repairing drinking fountains. We want to put; we want to aim as high as we can. Sort of I think the model to follow, quite frankly is Miami Beach. We're still in the process of learning about it and I'm sure we'll share back with you guys what we do learn, but let's aim high. Let's just not fix the leaky roofs, but I'm in agreement. We need a thorough needs assessment and the ask for you guys is, give us some direction, give the SCRC some direction, so that someone can coordinate to find out what exists, and what we need.

Mayor Lago: So, for me, personally, I feel comfortable and you're talking about taxpayer dollars and a major chunk of every dollar that people pay in this community goes to the School Board already. Let's just say, let's just say that the number of 13 percent is wrong, in reference to Coral Gables residents are in schools. We all know the numbers for the public schools have dwindled dramatically, significantly over the last five years. So, I agree, we should get revised numbers to see if its 15 percent, 12 percent, 11 percent, what are the actual numbers. I'd like to see that.

Mr. Goodman: I think its close to 15 percent.

Mayor Lago: 20 percent.

Mr. Goodman: I mean at our school it might be around 50.

Mayor Lago: 15?

Mr. Goodman: 50, 5-0.

Mayor Lago: So, you think 50 percent of the kids in your school are Coral Gables residents.

Mr. Goodman: Believe me, we put forth public records requests two months ago.

Mayor Lago: I don't doubt you. It could be maybe 60, but I'd like to see...

Mr. Goodman: We do too.

Mayor Lago: I'd like to see the numbers. So, I think that we should get those numbers, do a needs assessment, sit down with our School Board member, sit down with the Superintendent and say look, these are the needs, this is what we see as important. How can we work together to address all these issues? I will get you a copy of the letter that my office wrote to the county, to the Mayor. The Manager has it, all the members of the Commission has it, its online, a memo that we wrote, and it had pictures, it was like 20-something pages, pictures, line item by line item: The Underline, here are all the issues that we're dealing with. The following roads: these bridges. Our Public Works Director who is not here, was the one that helped me put it together. These bridges are the responsibility of the county, they are faulty on all these different fronts; and it was a litany of

different things that were put together. That's an example of a letter that you can show immediately and say listen, we need some accountability on these issues. Its unacceptable that you have a school with a leaky roof on it. I'm just giving you an example. I want to be more comprehensive and to have like actual bullets in the chamber to go after all this kind of stuff which is important. I've been doing work at the School Board for 15 years. I have a contract with the School Board. I have a CM at Risk contract and I have a job order contract with the School Board. Trust me, it benefits my company to do work at the School Board, and I know that there are needs, but I also know that you can't ask for money without an actionable plan. That's all I'm saying, and I have mentioned to you before.

Mr. Goodman: And frankly, we're in agreement. This is a little bit premature, the resolution. We want to get this process started in the right way though and I think the only way to do it is to have you guys hold the staff or the SCRC, but someone needs to be directed to do that thorough needs assessment and we will provide all the help we can, as PTAs.

Mayor Lago: So, can I give everybody the good news on the Commission?

Mr. Goodman: What?

Mayor Lago: Can I give everybody the good news, that you're my appointment to the SCRC.

Mr. Goodman: No. That's very kind, but no.

Mayor Lago: I have an opening. I asked him to be my appointment, because he's such a good leader, he has so many great ideas, and I asked him to be my appointment on the board, and he said.

Mr. Goodman: I cannot because of my professional obligations.

Mayor Lago: But I need you there.

Mr. Goodman: Well, I would be willing to do it, if it was a Commission appointment, but I can't do it named by anyone.

Mayor Lago: So, let's do this.

Mr. Goodman: We would love to have more of an input as PTAs on this SCRC.

Mayor Lago: You gave me an out. You gave me an out. So, Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Can we consider this gentleman for the Commission as-a-whole appointment or the Board as-a-whole appointment if one exists, I don't remember right now, there's 30.

Commissioner Fernandez: I will make a motion.

City Clerk Urquia: Its agenda item G-7.

Mayor Lago: Give me one second. I just want to make sure that's the item number.

City Clerk Urquia: G-7.

Commissioner Menendez: Its not too late to turn and go that way.

Commissioner Fernandez: You have a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll second the motion.

Mayor Lago: G-7 – ready to go. There is a motion on the floor, we have a second.

Commissioner Menendez: Did he say yes?

Mr. Goodman: I have to check with my employer. It would be more appropriate as a working journalist not to do it on behalf of anyone.

Mayor Lago: We're talking about education. Listen, rising tides raises all ships. So, we want more money, and we want more people invested in the future of this community which is schools. When they came to me and they talked to me, and they said Vince, we have this major issue, obviously is a horrific issue that happened at Parkland, we need to have our officers there. It was going to cost the city hundreds of thousands of dollars. I sponsored the item with the leadership of the Manager, we pushed this through, and we got it done. So, I'm asking you, you have all these great ideas, you spent your afternoon here waiting to talk about this. You said that you would serve on the board if you were the Board as-a-whole. We have a motion and a second. Are we ready to party or what?

Mr. Goodman: I'll get back to you. I have to.

Mayor Lago: The roll call.

Commissioner Menendez: You could say your three minutes are up and just.

Commissioner Fernandez: We could take the vote.

Mr. Goodman: I'll let you know.

Commissioner Fernandez: If he can't the Clerk will let us know when there's a vacancy.

Mr. Goodman: I personally would like to, upon approval.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: So, we have a motion and a second contingent to approval by his employer.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry, who seconded?

Mayor Lago: Vice Mayor Anderson.

Mr. Goodman: But just on the data point, we have public records requests in with the city, as well as the School Board. I haven't heard back from the city yet, School Board gave a very partially and very incomplete answer. Requesting this data that we all know is critical to just starting the conversation.

Mayor Lago: But what I'm telling you is...

Mr. Goodman: Anything you can do to get the request of data is much appreciated.

Mayor Lago: So, listen to me, listen to me. If you sit on that board, you have an opportunity to use the board and direct the board internally to push this agenda forward, but I would not vote for this, I will not vote for this and I don't think my colleagues are going to vote for this, especially in a budget season right now. I know what you're trying to do and you're asking for \$200,000.

Mr. Goodman: No, no. We're not asking for...

Mayor Lago: That's what you told me.

Mr. Goodman: It was a – we're not asking.

Mayor Lago: I don't want to think that I put that in. You told me that Friday.

Mr. Goodman: Initially we thought that, but we are not asking for a set amount. The resolution is not for an amount.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Whatever the amount is, whatever it is, fine. I'm just regurgitating what he told me.

Mr. Goodman: Sure.

Mayor Lago: Fine. I'm telling you; I want to support you. I want to support your efforts, but it has to be done in a way where I can say, the City of Coral Gables is using taxpayer dollars to fund this initiative and here are the reasons why. We have seven schools, here's the needs assessment. We sat down with our Superintendent, we sat down with our School Board Member, Mari Tere Rojas said he Vince, don't do that, because I have for the school, all those items are already addressed in the Capital Program over the next two years. Okay. Perfect. The GOB has a little bit of extra money, and also, I think more importantly, where I see a good opportunity is using this program

City Commission Meeting

to appoint one person to be a lobbyist for the public school system here in the city but look at it in a way that is on the side of the residents, and the children. Not on the side of an entity, a private entity, the School Board. Somebody who is constantly reporting back to this board through the Commission with a report saying look, I have sent the following letters, I've done this, I've done this, I've done this, I've done this, and if somebody is paid then they have to be accountable. A lot of these boards are volunteer, and people try the best they can, but some people have lives.

Mr. Goodman: I think that's what Miami Beach is really doing so well.

Mayor Lago: But I need you on the board. So, we have a motion and a second and its contingent on approval of your employer.

Mr. Goodman: Sure.

Commissioner Menendez: Well, he said he's doing a couple of public records requests, so I'm voting no, just right off the bat.

Commissioner Fernandez: Just because of the public records requests.

Mayor Lago: Alright, you ready to go, Mr. Clerk.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Congratulations.

Mr. Goodman: Okay. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: I have super exciting news. Its going to be great for the city for the public school's system.

Commissioner Menendez: Can I chime in really quick. So, the one thing that was mentioned was, safety of the kids, crossing school guards, we've been working very hard on that issue over the years on many issues, for all of the schools. That's something I definitely, I think has traction, because we've already been working on it. So, I would like to see what can be done if there's an

City Commission Meeting

ongoing issue how to address that. There are a couple other questions. So, Gables High, the property, who owns, the School Board owns, we don't own the land, we don't own the buildings. So, even if we wanted to repair a leaky roof, its like me going into my neighbor's house to try to fix a roof that they should fix, but they haven't, so I'm on the roof doing it. Legally it's a square peg, whatever in a round hole. The other part is...

Mr. Goodman: Sorry Commissioner, but if we had someone dedicated to holding those people who's job it is to do, holding them accountable.

Commissioner Menendez: And that's what the Mayor was alluding to, that's the leadership portion.

Mr. Goodman: Right.

Commissioner Menendez: That's where you can better leverage what the city can do, is use leverage with the county, with the School Board, on these issues. We can bring groups together in an easier way, because of what we're capable are resources. I think also with regards to, I'm here to defend Fred's team at the Youth Center, they've done, and I know we've mentioned the Literacy Festival, they've done so much for children that go to our schools, after school programming. I don't want it to seem like they're just doing things sort of mavericky on their own, but its all tied historically to having a great school, great schools in our community. So, there's a history of them working with the school and the parents.

Mr. Goodman: My kids take advantage of some of those programs. They do gymnastics at the Youth Center, but my point is, a thorough needs assessment will evaluate the capacity, is there capacity to do more at the Youth Center? – should it be focused on sports? – should it be focused on maybe French language instruction, chess class? I have no idea.

Commissioner Menendez: When I grew up, they had French classes, they had chess competition, they had all those things. Fred, if you want to go, and I still have a couple more things to say after Fred speaks.

Mayor Lago: Well, Mr. Board Member, we have six people that want to speak on this issue. We're going to listen to everybody. A long agenda.

Mr. Goodman: I know. I'm very grateful for your time.

Mayor Lago: A long agenda. So, I want to make sure we...

Commissioner Menendez: Go ahead Fred, just really quick.

Parks and Recreation Director: Just on a programmatic. We always look at what we do with programs we just had a master plan process that kind of showed what the priorities were for the community and what the programs are. We do work with the school system, not only the public schools doing some stuff with the Charter School across the way right there, so we're trying to get them to participate in some of our stuff as well. I work with the Prep, so we do work with some of them. I know we also do the Literacy Festival; we have that event, and we do a few other things, but one thing that we did speak with them trying not to do is, we don't want to compete. So, I don't want – when you said like French class, we try to stay away from some of that educational recreation because historically, not in the last year or two, but a few years back when I would speak with them regularly on this kind of thing. It was kind of like, we were staying in our lane and providing recreation and leisure, and they would do some of the education. Doesn't mean we don't do any education, but it's limited because that's what we wanted to do.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, besides what the director does in the Parks Department, we also have the Police Chief and also is involved financially with the School Board, and we also have crossing guards. Do we engage in crossing guards? How does that work?

Police Chief Hudak: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Who pays for the crossing guards?

Police Chief Hudak: We do. It comes through our – we actually receive money from the tickets, but we are responsible for hiring those crossing guards. If they're not there, then we will supplement them. We have regular off-duty officers. We have our youth resource unit. Even amidst the Margorie Stoneman Douglas Act, we still have officers in the schools, primarily in the high school, because of the size of it. We also do have line items in the FAF accounts and I was speaking with counsel, if we do create a line item per say, I have to see if I can legally use that money anymore, because once we use the seized assets on some of the programs that we fund, the DARE Program, the summer camps that are going on right now, the marine patrol, marine camps, things like that, that we staff, I have to be able to see to make sure legally I can continue to do that, because if we make those a line item, then I might not be able to use those monies. So that would be some research that we would have to do to give this body an answer.

Mayor Lago: And if I may just add to that also. Again, its not a city-run program, but the Coral Gables Community Foundation had gone in the last three years or four years since we started doing the scholarships. This year they gave \$500,000 in scholarships to Coral Gables residents. I cut a check for \$30,000, and I know that Commissioner Menendez cut a check for \$10,000, at one point he's probably cut more checks. So, we are putting our money where our mouth is, we're putting our money where our mouth is, and I have to commend Mary Snow, Meehan, Torre, a litany of people that are on that board that have taken that to \$500,000. If you see the faces of some of those

City Commission Meeting

individuals, my whole Commission was there. You see people who have never, they are the first in their family to go to college and you're handing them a \$10, \$15, \$20,000 check, which is such a relief, that they can use that money over the next year and its renewable. We are helping these people through the entire process of college. I tell you that I agree that something has to be done and I'd like to see something done, but I want to be organized. I want to be organized before we vote on anything, because I don't want to do a feel-good resolution.

Mr. Goodman: No, we don't either. I think Mayor, when this came to you before we've had this engagement, even in the last 72 hours, we've learned a lot. There is still so much more to learn, but all these different desperate efforts which are really some of them really positive. You guys have all mentioned some of them. I think now its time to bring it under one roof and say, is this the direction we want to be going? What's the goal? Is the goal, for example, like Miami Beach, having all the elementary schools IB certified? Could be. I don't know.

Commissioner Menendez: And that's where I'm headed with my suggestion with a resolution, because we're talking about leadership, we're talking about bringing everybody together to create that vision, to identify that vision going forward, but the way the resolution, basically says, create a line item. I think the resolution should ask us to do that, to assign somebody to work with you so you can come back, and we can move forward, but just to have a resolution that says, create a line item really doesn't get us anywhere. So, my suggestion is perhaps go back to the board, reword the resolution, based on all the information so that we can support it and we're going to say, we're going to work together on that path.

Mr. Goodman: I think we're in agreement. Like I said, it was a little premature.

Mayor Lago: Yes Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: One thing I can say is, we're all very passionate about education and while it would be nice to have the stats on how many residents are going to public schools right now, the reality is the better we make our schools, the more people would be able to go to the public schools and make it a choice. So, while the numbers would be nice, I think we can look forward to an escalating pattern going forward. The wording on a resolution doesn't accomplish anything now. What we need is a precise plan, as the Mayor had said. I gave you the example of what the Rotary did for a group in Liberty City, called the Bee Reading Program. And they took young children that couldn't read at all, didn't have parents that had the time, to spend the time with them with reading and have escalated them dramatically, gave them a sense of purpose, because if you can't read, you can't get anywhere. A need was identified specific to what was needed in that community, specific for that school, and it was funded accordingly. We have a lot of passionate members in our community. Easy things like beautification can be handled by a number of clubs. I know that the Coral Gables Garden Club planted trees at schools, but without the coordination

of the School Board and why we need somebody as a liaison in there, and we do have a liaison to the School Community Relations Committee, schools do things without consulting and chopped down those trees that were indeed planted. So there has to be a comprehensive plan on everything, whether it's a Bee Reading Program that we need, whether we want an IB Program, or otherwise. I can tell you that the City of Miami Beach did do a community-wide survey in order to determine what some of the desires were for the community. We absolutely want excellent education. So, I'm going to ask that this be put back on the August agenda to see how we can move forward and for staff to go ahead and work.

Ms. Lopez: Sorry, on that date the SCRC is not meeting in July and I'm not sure what the timeline is between Commission and the SCRC.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Do it in September then.

Mr. Goodman: This is a process. Its not something urgent, but I think if you guys can instruct the SCRC today, to come up with a revised proposal and if I'm on that committee, I will gladly.

Mayor Lago: You're on the committee.

Mr. Goodman: To instruct them to come up with a plan for a needs assessment and inventory of opportunities, I think as a potentially future member, I'm sure we can do that.

Mayor Lago: Can I offer a little bit of advice and the board can do as they please.

Mr. Goodman: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Whatever they'd like to do. Invite the School Board members, both, that represent the city. Have them come and you work in conjunction with them, pay them the respect that they deserve and that they want to be engaged in the process.

Mr. Goodman: Yes. We've met with a few of them already on this issue and then we have existing relationships and they're always at the SCRC meetings or a representative.

Mayor Lago: It doesn't hurt to invite them.

Mr. Goodman: Yes, of course.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Goodman: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk next.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Maria Cruz.

City Commission Meeting

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Since I was very involved in the City of Miami Beach most of my life. I'm going to tell you how we did it. What they were talking about we did. We started with the Chamber of Commerce. We opened an Education Committee of the Chamber and at that Education Committee, which I ended being the Chair for many years at the end, we invited the Principals of all the school, not just the PTA, the Principals, the PTA, community people, okay, and we met once a month during the school year. And then the city all of a sudden had this epiphany and said, oops, we're going to have an Education Committee in the city, which you already do. But what they did differently is that they hired a person who happened to be one of my ex-students, to be the Education Chief for the city and this is not just asking for money. This is to coordinate all private and public schools for the benefit of all the kids. And I'm going to tell you, the city provides grant writing, that doesn't cost you all any money, the city provides the School Board is very agreeable, because they signed a compact when they did the international studies, okay. It's a doable thing is what I'm telling you, and do not concentrate on just the money. You have in this city such good resources, okay, that if you were to get the Coral Gables Community Foundation, if you were to get all the parties in a room, okay, the city would not have to come up with all the money. The city would choose what money they want to use in favor of getting this done and is doable. I'm telling you, we did it. The Chamber is completely we only do the Teacher of the Year now, because the city has taken over everything else, and they had one person, one person only, okay, and she's the one that coordinates, she's the one that calls the meetings and the School Board shows up and they get anybody who they need to come in, you know the Facilities Director for the School System, they asked him to come and talk about it, and I'm telling you it's doable with very little money from taxpayers. You have the resources here and please don't say how many kids are here. Today, in today's world, kids do not have to go to the school in their neighborhood. They can go to any school, okay. What more satisfaction can you have when there are kids in areas that do not have access to what we have can come and learn with us and be better citizens later.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, all great ideas. Perhaps you want to join in on meetings with the School Community Relations Committee.

Ms. Cruz: I would love to do it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

Ms. Cruz: I spent my whole life doing education.

Commissioner Fernandez: Perhaps I – I was going to hold my comments to the end but piggybacking off of what you said. I actually met with the education person in Miami Beach. We had an SCRC Sunshine meeting in Miami Beach, so that we could be there, visit, see how they operate.

Ms. Cruz: ___Rosenfelt.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct. And their Education Committee in the city is their most powerful advisory board. They actually have three members of the Commission that actually sit on that board, and most of the members of the current Commission have sat on that board at one point or another.

Ms. Cruz: Actually, every Commission member appoints a member.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct. So, this is something that has been coming for a while in the SCRC, it's been discussed for a while. The city has done a very good job of whenever there is a priority and the Mayor has taken leadership in a lot of these things, Coral Gables Senior High School renovation is a perfect example. When the first project was announced, we only had \$11 million dollars, and today, I think we're at \$57 million dollars, because the city basically said, its not enough, we need to make sure we have a better facility. With Coral Gables Preparatory Academy, when I was the Chair, had numerous meetings with the School Board member to make sure that the renovation took place prior to the centennial, and we expedited that process. This Commission, the prior Commission and even the prior Mayors have done a really good job of ensuring that our education is a priority and that we're moving it forward; and I agree with my colleagues. I think if we are going to be expending funds for this, there really has to be a plan. This had come up before. The Mayor actually attended one of our SCRC meetings and we had that discussion about funding and that was his recommendation at the time, to come up with an actual plan and how the money was going to be used. So, I agree, I think that's the course of action.

Ms. Cruz: What I'm hearing though.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: How many more, just want to get a consensus from the Commission – 1:30 we have probably 20 items left on the Commission agenda.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a 1:30 time certain.

Mayor Lago: You have a 1:30 time certain. How many more individuals do we have to speak on this item?

City Clerk Urquia: Five more sir.

Mayor Lago: So, I ask you to please wrap it up.

City Commission Meeting

Ms. Cruz: What I'm saying is, this is not just the money from the Commission issue. This is not just building. This is educational programs that each school can share, they learn from each other, and it's a wonderful, wonderful thing, if you can put it together, one person to coordinate would do it.

Mayor Lago: Alright, Mr. Clerk, who's next?

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Mr. Sam Joseph. He's on Zoom.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Joseph, good afternoon.

Mr. Joseph: Hello, can you hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Mr. Joseph: Thank you. Its great to see you, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor and the rest of the Commission and all those who are watching. Look, I just wanted to say a couple of things on this initiative and really, I feel like an old person, because I'm going to do a little history. This city has done a lot in, again, focusing on education and it started back in 2014 with helping with the controlled choice issue and seeing through advocacy for the residence and making sure that we had a fair opportunity to attend all of our schools. The restructuring of the SCRC in 2015 was another major accomplishment from the city to look at how do we make this an effective committee, that is looking at the entire educational landscape, not just our public schools, but all of our educational landscape. And I think the committee, well speaking after having just rolled off of it, I think the committee has done a fine job of really making the connections between all the stakeholders and letting them know that there's a new day in the City Beautiful. We not only talk the talk about excellence, and being the best in everything, we're now going to walk the walk and do what it takes to make sure that our residents and the rest of the community, because they are public schools, have access to the best. I will tell you that based off of performance and enrollment numbers, we've been making amazing gains since that restructuring and since partnering with our School Districts, not only in dollars allotted, \$57 million dollars for our schools, but also in the number of kids, residents, and also outsiders that see our schools as their future, their possibilities for success for their children. The SCRC actually did visit Miami Beach back in, I believe it was 2015 or 2017, and actually the City Manager was in attendance at that meeting, and we learned a lot about how our schools really are connected to all aspects of, not only the county, the city and the school's budget, but also our residents, and that the first question that folks ask when they are moving into a area is, how are the schools, and particularly the public schools, because that's why we've been seeing the fantastic property value going up as we have. We have excellent schools, but what we don't have is the coordination of initiatives, the coordination of all of these wonderful entities doing great work, to really focus on what does the City Beautiful want out of its educational

outcomes, how do we make sure that our kids have access to the best City Beautiful possible, and see themselves as the catalyst to making that excellence, and I think everybody's talking the same language. Let's stop focusing on the money and talk about how does that coordination happen and how do we make sure those relationships keep growing and get better and better and more productive for our city and for our schools and residents. Thank you very much for taking up this item. I'm with you. I hope it gets restructured so that it properly sets up the infrastructure we need to maintain the excellence that we have.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Marty Goldstein.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Goldstein. On Zoom.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Goldstein the floor is yours. Good afternoon.

City Clerk Urquia: It does not seem.

Mayor Lago: We can come back to him.

City Clerk Urquia: We can come back. Next speaker, Alejandra Milian.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Milian, the floor is yours.

Ms. Milian: Good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Ms. Milian: Good afternoon. I hope everybody is doing well. I appreciate your time during this meeting to take up on this item. I wanted to add to what Ms. Maria said. I, for one, my school is not in the city limits of Coral Gables. I am the President of Sunset Elementary and we do host quite a lot of Coral Gables residents in our school, but we are a magnet program. We also are located in an area where we're unincorporated Miami-Dade County, but we're blessed to have Mari Tere Rojas as our representative who tries to help us as much as possible. Being as we're not in the city limits, we would like for the city in some way to include us as well, since we are having residents attend our school and we the PTA provide so many educational programs. We provide the accelerated reader program. We provide the kids with agendas. We have multi-cultural events. We have a music fund. We have a program for the dads, all-pro dads. We host a science fair. We have peer-run club. We have field day. We have the Green Initiative and the beautification project for our school, where we have done ___ cards, tables. We're right now in the process of resurfacing our pond to add coy fish. The kids are also planting outside and learning how to plant plants and

City Commission Meeting

we're also trying to do a butterfly garden. So, part of our reason for wanting to be a part of this, its not just about leaky roofs, because right now Sunset has been going under construction for three years, and it's been a process, but its more about the school programs that help enrich the kids' lives and their education. The programs that they love. The kids love the accelerated reader programs. The kids love the science clubs and those are things that the PTA has taken on, and just to give you an idea. To do the multi-cultural event and the exchange student program cost us, the PTA \$6,500. The accelerated reader program cost last year \$11,000. So just to give you an idea of how much effort the PTAs in our community are doing it's a lot, and the discretionary funds that the school gets are not a lot. You're looking at \$5,000, that's all that Sunset gets, and we have 1,200 students. So, I know that this is a big ask, but I would appreciate it if you could also include Sunset, Tucker and David Fairchild, which also hosts residents of Coral Gables students.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Cecilia Slesnick.

Ms. Slesnick: Hello.

Mayor Lago: Hi.

Ms. Slesnick Hi everyone. Sorry, my camera is a little wonky. First of all, thank you so much for this morning. It meant a lot to our family. I wanted to speak on this. I am a proud member of the SCRC committee and have been on the committee for several years. So, I will just echo a little bit of what has been said. This is not about leaky roofs or the water fountains, although we could speak about that at nauseum, right. I am a product of the public school system having gone to Coral Gables Elementary and then Carver, and then Gables High, myself. My children are students of the public school system starting their educational careers at Coral Gables Prep and my daughter is now at South Miami, my son is still at Coral Gables Prep. And I can tell you that this is about amplifying the discretionary funds that the schools have, so that the engagement that comes out to the students can be amplified and that it doesn't all fall on the PTSAs. So, not only am I a resident, 721 Navarre, I'm sorry, I forgot to mention that at first, but an alumna, but I also say on the committee which Coral Gables Prep had to form called the "Eagles Nest Fund" because it is our job to help fundraise for things that the PTSA cannot fundraise. So really when the SCRC started talking about going to the City Commission and thank you all so much for all of the work that you do in and out of the city, we wanted to come to you all because we recognize that we need the city's support in order to make some of the programmatic things happen, and I apologize, I could not attend the SCRC meeting last month. It was the first one I've missed this year, lots going on in the family, but our goal is to have a detailed list from all of the Coral Gables feeder schools PTSAs of what that wish list is; and when we initially started to talk about it, we were really looking at how the city could help amplify the discretionary funds in order to bring these programs

City Commission Meeting

to the students without it being so much of a burden, because we can get into the beautification aspect of it, which Dan can talk about a lot as well, and I know that there are a lot of people ready to speak, but I just want to thank you all for even considering this and I know that the next time the SCRC meets, each and every one of you are invited to join us. Every member of the PTSA at any of the school feeder pattern schools are invited to join us in person or on Zoom. It is an open meeting and thank you all so much for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, I know we have a long meeting. We haven't had lunch. We'd like to get to one more item before we go to lunch at 2 o'clock. I think we've all spoken a lot, given direction to the board. We have a new board member. Happy about that, a big deal for us. Someone who has a very vested interest in this community on many different fronts. So, I would like to hear back in September after we've had a meeting from the board, and Solanch, could you help through the Manager, would you be so kind to run point on this so we can make sure that this is actually making progress and actually coming back in a fashion, which again, makes sense and is comprehensive.

Ms. Lopez: And we do already have a request through the Principals directly and through the District for the list of those items that they need, just that most of the Principals are out on vacation due to the summer, so we had already planned on coming back.

Mayor Lago: And another ask, if I may, through the Manager again. I would like to know in depth, in depth what other cities do, and I would like to show what we do. For example, they mentioned crosswalks. Spoke to the Chief. We also pay for crosswalks, individuals to help with crosswalks. I want to talk about all the things that we do, Coral Gables Community Foundation, the scholarship donation, which are pretty significant. I don't know if any other city donates half-a-million dollars a year to kids within their municipality for their next step in life. A lot of things like that. I want to see what we do and compare with other municipalities and if we're falling short in one form or another and there is something that we can do, I'm all in favor of it.

Ms. Lopez: They gave us some examples at the last SCRC meeting, but I'll request a more detailed breakdown.

Mayor Lago: Put it together in a memo so its comprehensive and one document. So, what are other cities doing. What does the board recommend and then let's go and sit down with leadership so that we can devise a plan that makes sense.

Ms. Lopez: We'll work on it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Commission Meeting

Ms. Lopez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Through the Manager always. Thank you.