

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-1**  
**May 24, 2016**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Jim Cason**  
**Commissioner Pat Keon**  
**Commissioner Vince Lago**  
**Vice Mayor Frank Quesada**  
**Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark**  
**City Attorney, Craig E. Leen**  
**City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman**  
**Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Diana Herrera**  
**Michael Trowbridge**  
**David Pike**

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Agenda Item F-1 [0:00:00 a.m.]

Discussion item recognizing Coral Gables Television for its exemplary documentary (Embracing Autism: A Coral Gables Story), and encouraging jobs for individuals with special needs by Coral Gables businesses and civic entities.

Mayor Cason: In order not to waste Mr. Trowbridge's time, we will move to F-1.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

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Agenda Item F-1 – Discussion item recognizing Coral Gables Television for its exemplary documentary (Embracing Autism: A Coral Gables Story), and encouraging jobs for individuals with special needs by Coral Gables businesses and civic entities.

City Attorney Leen: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. This is a discussion item recognizing Coral Gables Television for its exemplary documentary called Embracing Autism: A Coral Gables Story, and encouraging jobs for individuals with special needs by Coral Gables businesses and civic entities. It's sponsored by Commissioner Keon. I know we have in the audience today Diana Herrera, from Coral Gables Television. We also have David Pike and representatives from Crystal Academy to talk about the second part of the resolution. They were also featured in the video. And we have Mr. Mark Trowbridge from the Chamber of Commerce to talk about the second part of the resolution relating to business and civic entities. With that, I would turn it over to Commissioner Keon.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you very much. I'd like to ask the Manager, did you recognize the Gables TV and the people?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: We have Diana here, and we have Mike. We have Maria Rosa, and we have -- is Michael Rocha here as well? It was a fabulous video. And I know it was very moving. We're going to bring them forward. We will be bringing them back later for some more recognition. But today, I know it was important to you, Commissioner Keon, to bring the talent forward so that you could give your appreciation.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah. I really would like to thank you for your work on this. You know, since I've been in office, I've had numerous discussions with the different managers that have been here over Gables TV, and I think what an opportunity it could be that, you know, it maybe hasn't always been. And when you see the work that you did on this, it is evidence of the quality of work and the type of work that you can do. And so I'm very grateful to you for it. And I think the whole community is. It is a very moving story. Embracing Autism, it is primarily Craig Leen's wife and children who are both autistic. It's a very touching, very endearing story that I got a couple of emails on from people in the community who I didn't know had children that are autistic that do and that, you know, were looking for services. And so, you know, they --

different people call now or will email on different issues related to autism and how can we help and what can we do. And so this would sort of move this second part of this item, but I really would like to thank you very, very much. For anyone who's listening, it's on the City website under Gables TV and it's called Embracing Autism. You can watch the video online. It's really wonderful. Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: A suggestion that you might look at making this available to other cities around the country that are interested in the subject. And I'm sure there's -- if they knew that there was a film and there's maybe a national association that you could inform that we have this film. In addition to what we've been doing with the cards and so on, it might be a way for this to be expanded even more.

Diana Herrera: Yes, Mayor. And thank you, Commissioners, for -- and City Manager for all your support because you support ideas like this and it makes us proud that we invest our labor and our sacrifices and our creativity in building something like this that impacts the community and that helps in the advancement of our city. Because I believe that a city, in order to be beautiful, it has to be beautiful from within, just like a person, right? We can't be all about aesthetics. We have to have a heart. And our City Beautiful has a heart and it has a heart for the elderly, for the disabled, for everybody. It recognizes the importance of living in a good community and providing the well-being for everybody. So, I thank you all for supporting our job and to this. And Mayor, to answer your question, yes, the video is available in YouTube and also on Facebook. And we've been trying to feature it to different networks. We recently forwarded it to PBS, so it can be featured in WLRN Channel. The only concern that they had that it was very Coral Gables oriented. And this is only like the last five minutes of the video that features specifically Coral Gables and what we're doing to improve the lives of individuals with autism, but they feel that it's very Coral Gables centered, and sometimes -- they want to feature it. Some other cities may have an issue with featuring that. But it is available in YouTube, so anybody that has internet access can see it. And as of right now, the video has 15,300 views in Facebook and it has over 2,000 views on YouTube, and it has been shared over

300 times and it has numerous comments from the City residents and from people all over that have commented on the story and have made very positive remarks saying that the story's not only compelling, but it's also informative and that was our goal, to inform people and also to make them expose the reality about autism and how families live with this hardship and how we can help them to overcome these hardships and make them a better place for everybody. So, enormous credit to Attorney Craig Leen for putting his family out there. It's not easy when you have an autistic child to put it out in the public and to have it in the eyes of the public. I lot of people prefer to keep them hidden under the blankets and don't tell, don't share, and this is not how we improve the lives of these kids. And fortunately, Attorney Craig Leen has been very intelligent about understanding this and putting the kids out there so we can all understand the hardships and how we can help them make a better living for them. Thank you so much.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

City Attorney Leen: If I could add something...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I'm sorry, go ahead.

City Attorney Leen: No, no, please.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Well, I just wanted to clarify when Commissioner Keon has "complained" to me about CGTV, it's that she wants more CGTV and less outside programming on the City's television. That's how pleased she has been with your special initiative. So, it really speaks well to the good work that you are doing.

Ms. Herrera: Thank you.

City Attorney Leen: I would just like to add that, you know, I love what you did with Embracing Autism, with the video, with really, the film. It's a documentary. And you know, I decided to

have my family be in the documentary, along with some other families from Coral Gables. But for me, the decision was because, you know, every time I see it, you do feel a certain sadness. It's not a bad sadness, but it's -- you recognize that you're putting this out there for lots of people to see, so I get asked about it a lot. People come up and talk to me and you talk about it, and it can get -- there's a part of you that can get tired talking about it over and over because, you know, every time you're reliving it a little bit. But -- and there is a lot of -- there is part of the experience, which is -- which can be trying, which can be difficult, and you always have to fight for your children. But most of it, like 98 percent of it is beautiful and wonderful, and I think that's what the video shows. It shows the difficult parts that everyone needs to know so that there's understanding and sympathy and empathy toward people who have children with disabilities, both cognitive disabilities and physical disabilities. But there's also recognition that that's not a negative thing. That's a positive thing. It's just your life's a little different and some days it could be more difficult, but it's also you have these experiences that you never would have seen otherwise. And so, I really wanted people to see my children -- even though it exposes a lot of my life -- because -- and also, my wife's life, and for her, it was even a little more difficult, I'd have to say, and I have to thank her for allowing that because I've been so blessed -- I mean, I've been really blessed to work for the City of Coral Gables, which has been a hundred percent supportive of my children with autism. And I have wonderful insurance. I have a great job. I have the ability to spend time with my kids. My children go to a therapy center and school that's right nearby, Crystal Academy, which is literally right here. My wife is a child psychiatrist who works in the area of autism and cognitive disabilities right nearby. So, my life is wonderful. But I will tell you, I have met many people whose lives are not as wonderful. Even though they love their children and that's wonderful, they don't get a lot of support, and they have trouble getting insurance to cover their children's therapy. They don't put their children into intensive therapy because they can't afford it. And so, my goal is to let people know about the importance of therapy, that there is insurance that can provide and to try to advocate for that to help people so that they can have a better life. And so that's why -- that's the main reason why we did it. And I'm so thankful to the City for being so supportive of that. And I didn't think this would come up a second time, so I don't -- I won't go too long. But I just -- I

mean, what an honor to work for the City and the support that you've shown. And this documentary is one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. So, a lot of people have contacted me. City of Miami did a resolution based on this documentary. Miami-Dade County League of Cities did a resolution based on this documentary and what this Commission has done. We're really a leader. I'm hearing from all over the United States. I hear from different entities, Palm Bay, I mentioned. They're going to be doing a resolution like this. The School Board is going to be doing a resolution like this. Miami -- the Florida League of Cities was interested. What we did, it's really leadership. Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: That was our principles of inclusion, the...

City Attorney Leen: The principles of inclusion.

Commissioner Slesnick: Thank you for sharing.

Commissioner Keon: The principles of inclusion that we passed.

Commissioner Slesnick: Thank you for sharing your family in this...

Commissioner Keon: It's been very successful.

Commissioner Slesnick: Mr. City Attorney. And also...

City Attorney Leen: My pleasure.

Commissioner Slesnick: I'm grateful -- it probably hones in on Coral Gables a little bit more because Crystal Academy is in our city limits and we're fortunate to have it here in Coral Gables.

City Attorney Leen: And now today you're taking it a step farther by talking about jobs.

Commissioner Keon: Right, so we have one more element here we'd like to talk about and ask Mr. Trowbridge -- thank you so much. It was wonderful.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Ask Mr. Trowbridge if he would come because, you know, as the head of the Chamber, he is in a position to communicate with so many businesses in our city. And I'm really happy to see we have a few business leaders here in our city that employ people, and so I hope that they will all take that to heart. I think Riviera Country Club is here.

Michael Trowbridge: Yeah, Mark is here.

Commissioner Keon: Mark is here. I think there's Realtors Real Estate people that are here. There's lots of things they can do. I'd like to introduce Mr. David Pike also and ask him to come up because he can talk to you a little bit about these children that are autistic that have these cognitive neural issues and what actually makes them good employees. But when we were discussing it, the biggest issue that parents talked to us about with kids that have finished whatever level of education that they have finished, graduated from high school or whatever, is the inability to find them jobs. And it's, you know, you don't -- it's how not good it is for them to just sit home and like watch TV or play video games or whatever and how much, you know, they want to be a part of a community. It's just like the same reason that all of us and people go to work. Yes, you go to work to earn a living, but you know, it also provides you with socialization and engagement and all those things. And every one of us needs all of those things in our lives. So, it's jobs. And one of the good things with hiring people that have these disabilities is most of them are covered by Medicaid almost entirely. They have Medicaid so employers don't have to pay for health insurance. They don't have to be covered under health

insurance. And to receive Medicaid, you can only earn a certain amount of money, so it's primarily part-time work. You can only work a limited number of hours because you're really limited in how much you can earn, and it's really not a lot of money, which is a shame because it's not a lot of money. And there are many, many jobs that they can do. And -- so I'm going to ask David to talk a little bit about these kids and why they could be good employees. And there are -- and the types of jobs that they can easily do. And I've said so often, I have a nephew who lives in New York who is disabled and a local florist hired him when he finished high school to help unload flowers and, you know, they taught him how to unload the flowers, put them in the refrigerated containers, whatever. Then they taught him how to set up the containers when they do -- when they have an event that they're supplying flowers for. He can clean up or whatever. He walks to work. He walks home. He takes his mother to McDonald's for lunch. He thinks that's a big spend, but you know, it gives him -- he has so grown and his communication skills and all his skills have improved so significantly since -- and he has been working -- he will be 40 this summer. He's been working since he was 18 years old. It makes such a difference in their lives. And we need to talk to employers and ask them to give these kids a chance, you know. The only one we really see in our community is Publix is usually pretty good about it, but there are so many small businesses that could employ, you know, these children. There's landscapers. There are all kinds of work that these kids are capable of doing. Mr. Pike, can you talk a little bit about why they make such good employees?

David Pike: Certainly. At Crystal Academy, we're working on interventions for young children, for children from diagnosis up through their teen years to help them optimize their capacities. But what I'd like to bring your attention to is you made the remark that it is such a sad waste of their lives if they're at home playing video games. I think that I would like to answer that it's an even sadder waste of resources in our community. These are intelligent -- I say to my staff over and over again, these children are autistic; they're not stupid. They're very clever. Their problem is in their sociability as they get to be adults and jobs. They don't know how to just greet you. They aren't comfortable chatting with you. They don't see the purpose. Now, the converse of that is they're extremely focused. All of us have heard stories about the car wash --



and God love the amazing people who have been at the vanguard of hiring autistic people, the car wash, the bakery, the mass storage unit, and the simple operational tasks that are so well performed by adults in our autism community. I would like to suggest that we broaden our thinking a little today and bring up a couple of examples you may not be aware of. There's an organization in the Netherlands formed by an ex-telecom executive whose son is autistic. He went looking for an opportunity for his son and ultimately formed a highly successful beta testing site for a variety of industries in technology. So, imagine, if you will, you're handed a box of 200 brand-new cell phones and a list of 100 things you're supposed to check on every single cell phones. We must admit to ourselves, as neuro typical people, by about the 50<sup>th</sup> phone, you're going to be looking for ways around the list. But autistic people, who are described as naturally and deeply loyal, consider attention to the details of that administrative list and that set of instructions to be -- they are pedantic in how important it is to do every single task, every single time. In fact, he says the greater issue he has in managing his staff is in getting them to get up and take a break, not to not perform their tasks excellently, expertly every single time. Another example of what we might be missing, it is beginning to be more and more in the news that the Israeli military is using autistic people to review satellite images. They are doing this because a computer can see when a pixel changes and a smart analyst can look at a picture and tell you a lot about what's going on. But they're finding that autistic people can sit and watch these images go by image after image after image and only they are able to say, wait, that truck moved. And they're able to see this and they're being utilized for this because they have this incredible ability to remember details and to process them over and over again exactly the same way. Temple Grandin said you hear a few facts. You, the neuro typical world, hear a few facts about an issue and you're able to draw a sort of -- a picture that you get from bits and pieces of the facts. The problem -- and I can't do that, she said. I need all of the facts before I get any picture whatsoever. The difference is once you have your few facts, you're not listening anymore. I will remember every fact forever. And that's the value that they bring to the table. So, what I'd like you to consider -- and please, please know that we in the community applaud every effort you make to engage the -- people overcoming the challenges of autism in our community in every way. Please recognize that I think it's time for a shift in our perspective,

that it isn't about what is the list of what autistic people can do. It's about how short the list is of what they cannot do. Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: So, what we would -- Thank you very much. So, what we -- I would ask of Mr. Trowbridge is that he would reach out to our businesses and ask them for a commitment to consider this community for any job. And then we can have resources that can talk to that employer. There are resources with the CARD Center and other people that can talk to that employer about the kinds of jobs they may have available and is this a job that suits this person. Is it a job that suits this individual? Because the more and more we see people with disabilities being absorbed into the workplace and given jobs, you will create a movement to make more and more opportunities for these people. And you know, to start with, and everybody's concerned with economics. This is not a real expensive employee to start with. I mean, even if that's -- you know, you say the -- it has -- they have such tremendous ability for very specific types of things or so many things, and it's not a tremendous cost to you to just try. Let's just start. Let's just get it moving. Let's just give them a chance. So, that's what we would ask.

Mr. Trowbridge: Well, I thought -- first of all, thank you very much for the invitation. And I think, secondly, I thought I'd give you a little point of reference. So, our partners at the Florida Chamber did a study that came out just a couple months ago about people with disabilities, so looking more on the macro level. And what they discovered is that Florida, as you all know, is now the third-largest state in the country and we are growing by leaps and bounds. A thousand people a day move into the state of Florida every single day. And so by the year 2030, the understanding is that our workforce is going to grow and have a need to be two million people larger than where we are today. So, in just 14 years, you're looking at an additional two million people. Today, 1.3 million people in Florida are people with disabilities. And the fact is is that you have an unemployment rate in Florida of 5.5 percent, a national rate which is approximately the same, which in some cases, people might consider it to be full employment. And so what do we do with the percentage of folks who have the ability to work -- because it's not every single person with a disability...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Mr. Trowbridge: In that 1.3 million, but the estimation is that about 700,000 of those folks have the ability and desire to work. And you're looking at kind of between age 16 and 65, kind of that age range of folks who typically are in the workforce. So, I don't know how that number drills down into Coral Gables, or into South Florida, or even Greater Miami, but the reality is is that there's a critical mass of folks who I think would be not only interested in working, but assist us with that full employment statistic, which means that we are looking for folks to hire. So, I think, you know, two fold; one, educating folks on kind of what that snapshot looks at, taking David's comments and understanding that it's not what folks can do, but it's what they can do. And we can certainly make that plea to our businesses. I think, as I shared with you in our conversations, that a lot of folks, they are just not sure what to do. So, there's a little bit of apprehension, a little bit of, you know, lack of education. And meeting folks who are as passionate as David and as others who can share, well, let me tell you what folks can do -- start with that as the key ingredient. So, I think, you know, we can be an advocate for that. I'll be glad to share this report that the Florida Chamber did. There isn't a regular update statewide that lets you know what's happening in the workforce with relation to people with disabilities. It's just -- it isn't something that folks spend a lot of time on. And if you talk to us at chambers of commerce across this county and across the state, the thing we talk about the most is about jobs, talent, talent retention, and getting the right people into those jobs. And there are jobs that are hard to fill, and so maybe we can find the right formula and the right match for folks to come together and fill those job. And we'll begin that process. And I hope that you might be at our board meeting tomorrow...

Commissioner Keon: I am.

Mr. Trowbridge: And make that same appeal...

Commissioner Keon: I will be, yeah.

Mr. Trowbridge: To your fellow board members because many of them represent many of those companies, some of whom are sitting behind us today here on other matters, but are wonderful corporate citizens in this community who give in so many ways, but maybe just didn't think about the opportunity to look at their workforce and open the doors where they haven't been previously opened.

Commissioner Keon: And I think that that's a lot of it. I think it's just, you know, opening that door for them and helping them to understand, you know, what they can do.

Mr. Trowbridge: Absolutely. And by the way, the summer's a great time to have this conversation because people are thinking a lot about seasonal jobs and seasonal opportunities that, you know, where people are a little bit more available and a little bit more open minded. They've got employees going on vacation and, again, just making people aware who are in the business of hiring that this is a segment of our population that is interested in working and has the capacity to do that. You have to have the ability to communicate and train and have the patience to do that and make that a great match.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Mr. Trowbridge: Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you very much. Thank you for taking that out of order. Thank you.