

**CITY OF CORAL GABLES ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS
CORAL GABLES HUMAN RESOURCES & RISK MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT**

254 Minorca Avenue, Suite 214
Coral Gables, FL 33134
WEDNESDAY, February 4, 2026

- MEETING MINUTES -

MEMBERS	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	APPOINTED BY:
	26												
Jennifer Ward Sando	P	P											Mayor Vince Lago
Justine Chichester	P	P											Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Wilfredo Jauregui	Z	E											Commissioner Richard Lara
Bonnie Blaire	P	P											Commissioner Melissa Castro
Vanessa Bedoya	P	P											Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Eddy Martinez	P	P											Ex-Officio Member Chamber of Commerce

Z – Zoom

P – Present
E – Excused Absence
A – Absent
(-) – No Appointment
(*) – No Meeting

STAFF:

Jose Rodriguez – Human Resources & Risk Management – Interim Assistant Director
Eglys Hernandez – Human Resources & Risk Management – P/T Administrative Assistant
Yanessa Rodriguez – Community Recreation – Administrative Operations Manager
Catie Hastings – Community Recreation – D.E.I. Coordinator

CITIZEN ADVISORS:

Debbie Dietz, Citizen Advisor (Via Zoom)

PUBLIC GUEST: None

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 10:02am

MEETING ABSENCE:

Wilfredo Jauregui
Dr. Jennifer Durocher, University of Miami

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:

January 7, 2026
Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2nd: Jennifer Sando / Approved unanimously

SECRETARY’S REPORT:

None

BOARD MEMBERS’ REPORTS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

Autism Acceptance Month –Jose Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez advised of proclamation and resolution regarding celebrating April as Autism Acceptance Month to be presented at commission meeting, however there will not be a meeting in April. Mr. Rodriguez advised presentation can be brought forward as an item to the March 27, 2026, commission meeting. Mr. Rodriguez provided copy of previously presented resolution (Exhibit 1) and proclamation (Exhibit 2). Mr. Rodriguez asked the board to review, bring back any suggestions regarding wording and nominate who should be the recipient. The board conducted further discussion and advised they will present further information at the March 4, 2026, board meeting. Ms. Blaire provided suggestions regarding wording to Mr. Rodriguez and stated perhaps board would consider as the recipient Coral Gables Community Foundation. Ms. Blaire advised they have several scholarships and programs they fund. Mr. Martinez stated he will contact them and research further.

Mr. Rodriguez advised that due to renovation commencing at City Hall, the raising of the flag will need to be done at another location. Mr. Rodriguez provided two alternative suggestions; one option could be in front of the Public Safety Building (PSB) and second option could be at the flagpole located at the Youth Center. Board agreed best place would be in front of the PSB.

Ms. Palacio-Pike advised County Commissioner Regalado has advised she would like to sponsor all the flags for all the municipalities and have a main event at Government Center. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated she still prefers having the event in the city. Mr. Rodriguez stated the courtyard at the front of PSB is not a big area and it is not possible to host a large event.

Board agreed to further review and revisit discussion at the March meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

Audible Crosswalks – Ms. Justine Chichester

Ms. Chichester spoke of presentation provided at the last commission meeting and feels that it has brought back the discussion to the forefront. Ms. Chichester expressed gratitude for everyone's participation. Ms. Chichester stated Assistant City Manager, Ms. Carolina Vester, expressed she would like to assist and requested further information from the board. Ms. Bedoya stated she was happy the issue regarding time allowed for crossing was brought up and how it was stated that at the trolley stops audible crosswalks are going to be placed. Mr. Martinez stated he would like to include into the conversation the issue of having to push the button at the current crosswalks for them to function and how he sees several people who are unaware this needs to be done, just standing there waiting for light change. Ms. Blaire stated this issue has been discussed in the past, in previous meetings and needs to be included once again.

Ms. Chichester stated Ms. Carol Brady-Simons had recommended the commission conduct a tour of the crosswalks while being blindfolded. Mr. Rodriguez stated he had spoken with Ms. Brady-Simons and requested information to be able to coordinate tour. Ms. Blaire stated that she believes the board should also participate in the tour. Mr. Rodriguez advised board member Mr. Wilfredo Jauregui stated that as a resident, he will also be contacting the county and requesting audible crosswalks. Mr. Rodriguez advised the city will be assisting Mr. Jauregui with his request.

Ponce De Leon Park – Review of plans – Mr. Jose Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez shared with board final drawings of approved plans and advised no changes could be submitted (Exhibit 3 – Ponce Circle Park Master Plan). Mr. Rodriguez provided information regarding

measures including attempting to slow down traffic, electricity components being put underground at crossing areas facilitating installations of pedestrian beacon lighting in the future and other features of the park. Ms. Bedoya asked if it would be possible request lighting be added to the design, which can serve as a boundary and Mr. Rodriguez stated in the design there is a small three-foot wall which goes around most of the park.

Mr. Martinez expressed other concerns he has regarding the area. Mr. Martinez stated he believes there should be more signage, perhaps flags, indicating to drivers that pedestrians are in the area. Mr. Martinez stated this area seems to be a fourth venue space and feels extra safety measures should be put into place.

Ms. Chichester advised regarding this matter, board should continue to further discuss and have this placed on the agenda.

Adventure Day – Ms. Catie Hastings

Ms. Hastings advised tentative date for Adventure Day is Saturday, September 19, 2026, at Salvador Park and it will continue to be same type of event. Board agreed to continue to place this on the upcoming meeting agenda so that further discussion can be conducted.

Board suggestions reference inclusion & accessibility within the school system – School Community Relations Committee – Ms. Mary Palacio-Pike

Ms. Palacio-Pike advised she will be meeting on Friday, February 6, 2026, at 9:30am, with staff at Ponce de Leon Middle school regarding the self-contained classroom. Ms. Sando and Ms. Bedoya stated they will be attending as well. Ms. Chichester requested Ms. Palacio-Pike bring back to the next board information regarding this meeting and her item will continue to be placed on the agenda for further discussion.

Parks & Recreation – Ms. Yanessa Rodriguez

Ms. Rodriguez advised they are looking at having Holiday Park completely redesigned, keeping a few of the special items such as Santa and the Polar Bear in place. Ms. Rodriguez advised construction at Phillips Park is ongoing. Ms. Rodriguez stated the Youth Center has gone through RFP process which is having solicitors provide bids regarding services for children's programming. Ms. Rodriguez stated they have had in past golf and gymnastics, as well as currently in place a cone of silence regarding soccer. Ms. Rodriguez advised research is currently underway regarding the cost of placing flag poles at city's parks. Ms. Rodriguez advised they are also looking into the renovation of the Ruth Bryan Owen Waterway Park Board Walk as well as possibly adding launch. Ms. Rodriguez advised a reopening / renaming ceremony of Blue Road Park to David Lawrence Jr and Family Park Center on March 14, 2026, 10:00am. Ms. Castings advise March 14, 2026, is also summer camp open house as required for accreditation.

Mental Health Assistance – Ms. Vanessa Bedoya

Ms. Bedoya advised Miami Dade County school will no longer be providing funds for students needing assistance regarding mental health. Ms. Bedoya stated she would like to have this placed on next month's meeting agenda and will try to gather further information to share.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

NEXT MEETING: March 4, 2026

ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 11:06am

Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2nd: Vanessa Bedoya / Approved unanimously

EXHIBIT 1

Resolution – Autism Acceptance Month

CITY OF CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA

RESOLUTION NO. 2025- _____

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA, DECLARING PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS, AND URGING ACTION BY NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, BUSINESSES, AND RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES CONSISTENT WITH THESE PRINCIPLES.

WHEREAS, April is National Autism Acceptance Month;

WHEREAS, Acceptance Month emphasizes the need for public awareness to promote acceptance, celebrate differences, and be more inclusive towards autistic individuals around us;

WHEREAS, approximately 1 in 31 children have an autism spectrum disorder according to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;

WHEREAS, the United States of America is a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which supports the inclusion and accommodation of children and adults with special needs and disabilities;

WHEREAS, the Convention has identified the following core principles of inclusion:

- a. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
- b. Non-discrimination;
- c. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- d. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- e. Equality of opportunity;
- f. Accessibility;
- g. Equality between men and women;
- h. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities; and

WHEREAS, inclusion is an attitude, an approach, and a mindset, that welcomes and facilitates participation by those with disabilities and special needs, and encourages accommodations beyond those required by law;

WHEREAS, meaningful acceptance extends beyond awareness and includes inclusive education, employment pathways, accessible public spaces, and first responder training that supports the safety and well-being of individuals with autism;

WHEREAS, the City demonstrates its commitment to inclusion through its Advisory Board on Disability Affairs, which advises and provides input to City staff regarding matters affecting individuals with disabilities in Coral Gables in an effort to support full inclusion and accommodation;

WHEREAS, with participation from the Disability Affairs Board and the School & Community Relations Committee, the City obtained a self-contained classroom for students with disabilities in a public school located within City boundaries at Ponce De Leon Middle School;

WHEREAS, the City is committed to integrated employment and has partnered with Best Buddies and the de Moya Foundation to hire individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to help people with IDD reach their full potential and become as independent as possible and the City is also working with the Chamber so that City businesses can deliver meaningful employment, fair wages, and career advancement for individuals with disabilities;

WHEREAS, the City has hosted Project Victory students from Coral Gables Highschool and has done so since the 2022-2023 school year. Project Victory is a program developed by Miami-Dade County Public Schools to prepare students with disabilities for financial, personal/social, and/or independent functioning through the acquisition of employability skills essential for success in the workplace. Project Victory students work at City Hall, the 427 Building, and the Public Safety Building and benefit from on-the-job training and real-life experiences;

WHEREAS, the City is committed to the principles of inclusion as demonstrated through the Coral Gables Police Department's collaboration with the Disability Independence Group and UM-NSU CARD (Center for Autism and Related Disabilities) in the development of The Wallet Card Project of the Disability Independence Group, and related training videos, which is a nationally regarded program that assists individuals in informing governmental and police officials of their special needs through The Wallet Card, and trains police officers in interactions with individuals on the autism spectrum and with other special needs;

WHEREAS, the City's Police Department, to further autism education and promote inclusion, acceptance, and understanding, has wrapped a City Police Vehicle with the autism logo

WHEREAS, the City in April of 2021 launched its GUIDE Program. The GUIDE Program is a voluntary program offered to residents with individuals and/or "special circumstances," who live within the City. Residents or parents/legal guardians of a resident can provide information about themselves or about the resident that they are registering that can be crucial to GUIDE the City's first responders to more effectively interact with that individual. Understanding the enrolled individual's disability or complex medical need prior to responding to a scene, allows first responders to continue acting with care and diligence while providing

more efficient services, primarily in cases involving safely locating an enrolled individual;

WHEREAS, the City's commitment to the principles of inclusion also can be seen in the City's Community Recreation Department, where all programs are inclusive. Sensory Friendly 4th of July, Gentle Practice Trick or Treat and a Gentle Egg Hunt have been developed as inclusive activities and are hosted annually. In addition the Community Recreation Department hosts other activities such as My Squad, which is a monthly social gathering hosted by the City for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism.

WHEREAS, the City's commitment is also demonstrated in the passage of a resolution declaring principles of inclusion for individuals with Autism and other special needs each April beginning in 2016 as well as the passage of a resolution declaring principles of inclusion for all individuals with disabilities each October beginning in 2016; and

WHEREAS, for World Autism Acceptance Day in support of understanding and acceptance for individuals with autism, and on April 2, an autism flag designed by students with autism will be raised at the Coral Gables Public Safety Building;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES:

SECTION 1. The foregoing "Whereas" clauses are hereby ratified and confirmed as being true and correct and are hereby made a specific part of this Resolution upon adoption hereof.

SECTION 2. The City expresses its commitment to the principles of inclusion of children and adults with special needs and disabilities in all aspects of its governance and services, and seeks to welcome and facilitate such participation.

SECTION 3. The City urges businesses to express their commitment to the principles of inclusion in both employment and commerce.

SECTION 4. The City urges developers, homeowner associations, and condominium associations to adopt policies supporting the principles of inclusion in residential communities.

SECTION 5. The City urges universities and other places of learning to prioritize programs supporting inclusion of individuals with special needs and disabilities.

SECTION 6. The City urges national, state, and local governments to express their commitment to the principles of inclusion as well, and to continue expanding services to children and adults with special needs and disabilities.

SECTION 7. The Advisory Board on Disability Affairs is commended for its excellent work in this area and is directed to review the City's initiatives to promote inclusion on an ongoing basis, and provide input to City staff to assist the City in fulfilling this goal.

SECTION 8. The School and Community Relations Board is commended for its excellent work in this area as well and is directed to continue its Special Needs Initiative and to continue working with Miami-Dade Public Schools and UM-NSU CARD to expand opportunities in Coral Gables for individuals with special needs and disabilities.

SECTION 9. The City Clerk is directed to send a copy of this resolution to the National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, Florida League of Cities, Florida Association of Counties, Miami-Dade County League of Cities, Miami-Dade County, Miami-Dade Public Schools, and municipalities in Miami-Dade County.

SECTION 10. This Resolution shall become effective upon adoption hereof.

PASSED AND ADOPTED THIS _____ DAY OF _____, A.D.,
2026.

APPROVED:

VINCE LAGO
MAYOR

ATTEST:

BILLY Y. URQUIA
CITY CLERK

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGAL
SUFFICIENCY:

CRISTINA M. SUAREZ
CITY ATTORNEY

EXHIBIT 2

World Autism Acceptance Month Proclamation

WHEREAS, Autism Spectrum Disorder is the result of a neurological disorder that can affect anyone, regardless of one's race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic background; and

WHEREAS, Autism Spectrum Disorder affects 1 in 31 children in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Autism Spectrum Disorder is estimated to be the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States of America, according to The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM); and

WHEREAS, early diagnosis and intervention, as well as ongoing support from family, doctors, therapists and educators can positively impact persons living with autism spectrum disorder to achieve better outcomes; and

WHEREAS, persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder should have access to appropriate services throughout their lifetime, so that they may achieve their greatest potential and lead happy and productive lives within their communities; and

WHEREAS, much more can be done to better support individuals with autism as they look to obtain, maintain, and advance in employment, including collaborating among governmental agencies, businesses and partner groups, providing individual and custom support, offering comprehensive training, and conducting better advocacy and outreach strategies; and

WHEREAS, during the month of April, we strive to promote autism acceptance, inclusion, and self-determination for all, and assure that individuals with autism have an opportunity to achieve the highest possible quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the City of Coral Gables is honored to take part in the annual observance of Autism Acceptance Month in the hope that it will lead to a better understanding, treatment, and support for autism, as well advocate for employment opportunities for individuals with autism;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, VINCE LAGO, as Mayor of Coral Gables, along with the members of our City Commission do proclaim April 2025 as:

“WORLD AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH IN CORAL GABLES”

IN OBSERVANCE THEREOF, I hereby encourage the residents of our “City Beautiful” to join me in our continual efforts aimed at inspiring compassion, empowerment and hope for those living with autism, along with their families and caregivers, alike.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the great Seal of the City of Coral Gables to be affixed on this tenth day of March, A.D., 2025.

Vince Lago
Mayor

Rhonda Anderson
Vice Mayor

Melissa Castro
Commissioner

Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner

Richard Laura
Commissioner

EXHIBIT 3

Ponce Circle Park Master Plan



MASTER PLAN