

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-5
July 7, 2015
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)

Agenda Item H-5 [11:27:42 a.m.]

Discussion and possible action regarding the City entering into preliminary funding and participation discussions with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, University of Miami, and other non-profit entities, for the possible expansion and reconfiguration of the Henry S. West Laboratory School located at 5300 Carillo Street, including the establishment of a Pre-K through 8th grade campus, provided Coral Gables residents receive certain priority consideration.

Mayor Cason: OK. Let's do H-5 then.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I'm coming to address you on the item because it is a project that is being managed out of our office, and first I'd like to recognize Arrida ____ Mendez, she is here from the School Board. The School Board has been a wonderful partner in several initiatives and we are excited about this one as well. In fall 2014, the City Commission began an important process of working with the School Board and the community to remove control choice and return to the concept of neighborhood schools. The issue was access and predictability and for families, so that they could go to the public schools closest to their homes.

Coral Gables Prep, Carver Elementary, and Sunset Elementary are once again neighborhood schools and Sunset Magnet now has a geographic preference for those three areas, although it remains a countywide magnet. All of these schools offer excellent educational opportunities for our families and we look forward to an active partnership moving forward. We thank the Superintendent, the School Board, and their staff for their willingness to look at new solutions for old issues as our City becomes better partners with the School Board and parents to make great things happen across the county for our educational institutions. As the new academic year comes near, you have asked us to study boundaries for our families in the Craft Section and come forward with possible recommendations for the ABC process in the fall. We will work with your new School Community Relations Committee on preparing a suggested action. You had also asked us to look at West Lab with the hopes of increasing access for our Coral Gables residents, being a countywide magnet with no geographic preference; West Lab was not a part of the controlled choice conversation now is it subject to the ABC Boundary Review. West Lab is located at 5300 Carillo Street; families from throughout the county apply through a lottery system. Of the 325 students enrolled currently in the school, approximately 18 percent of the students are from Coral Gables, this is by chance not by formula and more than 250 Coral Gables families remain on the waiting list hoping to be selected through the lottery system. A series of needs are coming together that may provide an exciting opportunity to bring increased access to West Lab for our Coral Gables families and I wanted to talk about those. Through the Board Member Regalado, the West Lab PTSA has expressed a strong desire to become a K through 8 campus and the School Board has a willingness to consider this. Approximately \$4 million has been allocated to West Lab for renovations from the recent School Board bond issues, and the University of Miami is interested in discussing a possible swap for some of the School Board property. The university may also be interested in re-establishing its education connection with West Lab and it's interested in having a pre-K offering so what we are talking about is the possibility of a pre-K through 8. Baptist Hospital, Doctors Hospital being close by is interested in obtaining more parking to better serve its existing patients and its employees and not intrude on the residential neighborhood around it. There is an opportunity to master plan any possible expansion that could result in more recreation space, wider sidewalks, better lighting, improved traffic management, to not only benefit the school, the university, the hospital, but also the surrounding neighborhood. If we look at all of these needs and combine it with the City's desire to have increased access to West Lab for our families, it's important for us to come to the table to formally participate in the conversations, both in the master planning process and also in the financial plan. This will require an inter-departmental approach involving the City Attorney's office, Historic Preservation; we do believe that the West Lab buildings are historically significant; we want to put our solution hats on for that. Public Works – it could result in a realignment of Carillo Street, it would involve the Planning Department, comp plan, land use, zoning. What we would be looking at is a possibility of creating a very innovative overlay that would be more like a planned area development that would accomplish all of the needs that the

School Board would have. All the requirements that university would have, acknowledge the development agreement with the university and really come forward for this site only with a very innovative and appropriate type of redevelopment solution that works for all of the parties involved. We have Parks and Recreation that we would also bring in and Communications, as well as Economic Development. We understand that if we're proposing a possible financial participation that we have to have a good return for our residents, for our community, and also for our future. So we would be bringing Economic Development Board in and its departments, so that we could understand what the return on investment would be if we become financially participating. What we also understand though, we can't do this by ourselves. We need to reach out to the nearby community, as well as the larger audience. We would be conducting a series of public meetings, gaining input from nearby residents as well as parents that would be interested in this concept. We would propose that we go to the table, we are Baptist, we are University of Miami, where School Board are that City is an active participant in those discussions, that we bring back feedback to you, and that we continue to stay forward with the possibility of expanding West Lab, of gaining priority seats for our residents through that expansion, recognizing some important form of financial participation, but that we master plan it in a way that allows the University, the School Board, Baptist Hospital or Doctors Hospital, in this case, and the neighborhood to best benefit from this important possibility. We are not proposing today a specific direction, we are not proposing today a specific amount that we would be proposing, but we believing that this kind of opportunity does not come often. When the Baptist and University and School Board want something and we can bring together a four-way partnership that benefits all, we think that Coral Gables would lose out not being at the table. There is a meeting that the School Board has organized for July 20th when all of the parties are going to be there. We've already spoken to the City Attorney and City Attorney will be joining us, but we wanted to provide you an update of where we are that the conversations are respectful and positive, that the City is interested in furthering those discussions and reporting back to you. So if you have any questions as to where we are today, I have met individually with School Board representatives. I have met individually with the University of Miami, I have met individually with Baptist of Doctors Hospital, and this would be a meeting when all parties would be at the table with our solutions hats on to best serve our children. Happy to answer any questions.

Mayor Cason: You would come back to us on August 25th?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Well they are going to need to move forward at different timelines. I understand that there may be a possible Special Commission Meeting set for Streetscape, if we need to come in and get specific direction from you, I know that the Commission because of the importance of this issue would be willing to call together a small Special Session, so we could stay on track. We don't want to slow down their progress, but at the same time we don't want to keep our community away from the participation element.

Commissioner Keon: To begin with, I would really like to, I know Arrida is here from the Superintendent's office, I hope that she will take back our sincere gratitude to the Superintendent and to the School System for the work that they have done with us to date in removing the choice and setting boundaries for our schools. I think that high quality, free public education is one piece that the City or enough seats is one piece that the City of Coral Gables is missing. We have heard the statistic that 57 percent of the children that live in Coral Gables go to private schools and we know that the public school system offers a very, very viable alternative to private education in this community. You are an award winning system, we want you to be our partner, we have tremendous respect for the public school system and for what it offers to all children, and we would like to see even more of it within our community and have even more of our children attend these schools. It is a tremendous issue for business moving into our community is the availability of public schools and we as a City and each and every one of us as elected officials has just great respect and a real desire to see the opportunity for additional seats for the children within our neighborhoods, particularly in this northern more dense part of our City, where there are more and more children. We could not appreciate you more and we could not be more grateful to you for what you have done with us and we really look forward to continuing that partnership and that work because it serves each and every one of us for the school system. The more children there are in the public school system, the better it is for our public school system. The University of Miami as such a significant educational facility within our City is looking to partner with us and to bring the early pre-school and some of their early learning programs to it. We know Baptist Hospital and Doctors Hospital has been a great partner to our City, we would like to do what we can to help and to serve them, but mostly we want to serve the residents that live in our community and their children and we know that there is nothing we can do even more than a high quality education. So I'm very excited that we are moving forward with this, that we will also go back and look at some of the boundaries with regard to the Craft Section and some of the other issues within our City, but the School System is a very, very important partner to us in providing for a great City. So I'm very appreciative to the Manager for continuing with us in this effort and we do truly respect the School System's desire to do this administratively and to work through the administration of our City. Thank you so much and thank you to the Manager for continuing this effort.

Commissioner Lago: I just wanted to echo Commissioner Keon's comments and I wanted to thank the Superintendent and his representation here today. I have a quick question, I'm not sure maybe you are the correct person to pose this question to you, but over the many discussions that we've had over the last year and-a-half, one of the items that was brought forth was the issue of the bond referendum dollars, which is about \$4 million in reference to the proposed renovations at West Lab. I know that there was a schedule in reference to when those bond dollars are going to be used and when they were going to commence designing. I want to make sure – I hate to use

the word derail, but I think we have to try and maybe set the time back because every dollar is so crucial and I want to make that we take advantage of this and maybe push it back or see what the scheduling is for the School Board Member.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And without putting the School Board on the spot, we had a very good meeting on Friday with their Department of Facilities, and the question of the \$4 million could it be used only for renovation?- would it be timely?- and they are very positive that as they look at expanding, increasing the number of students, adding new building that a small portion of it would be that \$4 million that has been earmarked for it.

Commissioner Lago: I just want to make sure because we had a Sunshine meeting here, Commissioner Keon and myself and one of the items that was discussed was the issue of this is a very tight timeframe, the schedule is in place, the monies have been allocated, and I know that that has a lot more moving parts. We have Baptist in the mix in reference to a park garage, we have the City of Coral Gables requirements in reference to maybe solidifying seats for our residents and also now there's been a whole new program change potentially in that we are trying to solidify right now. So I just want to make sure that those \$4 million are still there and that we are not wasting money, let's say on design, because design is expensive, if we are going to design it lets design it once, once we've really ironed out the program for the school.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I understand sir. And the \$4 million won't begin to pay for all of the cost that will be involved, but it's an important part from the School Board.

Commissioner Lago: Let's say if you put 10 percent in reference to usually that's about the average for design cost, that could be \$400,000, if we can save those \$400,000 and not let the ship sail in one direction and then we say, OK, we are not going to do that and now we are going to go in a different direction, those are \$400,000 that we can allocate to doing something incredible.

Commissioner Keon: But I don't think they....I think they have put that on hold. It's my understanding they have put that on hold until we come to some agreement or non-agreement, but some decision is made as to where we are going to go with this.

Commissioner Slesnick: And how large would this unit be?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It depends on what role the City would be playing in it, to determine what size the school they would....

Commissioner Lago: After we discuss with the neighbors, the University of Miami, all our partners in this project. I just want to make sure because every penny counts.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And we appreciate the ownership when you say “we” design, it would be the School Board designing, but every penny counts and to make sure that it’s a quality project.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Any questions?

Commissioner Lago: Great work. Great work.

[End: 11:43:48 a.m.]