

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
May 26, 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
Assistant to the City Manager, Naomi Levi**

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-1

A Resolution amending Resolution No. 30201, by revising the purpose, membership, qualifications and quorum requirement of the School Community Relations Committee.

Mayor Cason: School Community Relations Committee. Madam City Manager, this is item G.-1.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I'm going to have Naomi Levi come forward, and then when she's done, I have one minor change that I'd like you to consider, but I don't believe you'll think it's a significant change.

Naomi Levi: So, hello, again, Commissioners, City Manager, Mr. Mayor. I'll be brief because I'm sure everybody's ready for lunch. As a bit of context, previously, the School Community Relations Committee only considered Coral Gables City [sic] High and Ponce de Leon Middle School, and for the most part, they handled neighbors' complaints, whether it dealt with signage or noise or traffic, things of that nature. But we've heard the direction of the Commission, and we'd like to repurpose this board to take a more active role in improving the public schools in our community. Under the amended resolution, the board will not only have a broader purview, but we hope that it will also have the ability to look comprehensively at the schools in our community and find ways to make them better. For example, do physical improvements, like landscape and lighting to after school programs to tutoring or even volunteer opportunities. We also intend to use the board as a review committee for the education compact with MDCPS (Miami Dade County Public School System). The compact was entered into almost 10 years ago and is due for a second look. So, we hope that we'll have a group of passionate, engaged individuals appointed to this important board who'll make thoughtful recommendations in a ways to not only help Carver, but schools citywide. So, thank you to the Commission for its leadership in this area and for allowing us a chance to make a meaningful difference. If you have any questions about the board, I'll be happy to answer them.

Mayor Cason: So it'll be the same number of people; we would just broaden the scope?

Ms. Levi: It's fewer people.

Mayor Cason: Fewer?

Ms. Levi: Originally, the board had 15 members, but with that many members, you have issues with meeting a quorum requirement.

Mayor Cason: I don't think it's ever happened.

Ms. Levi: Yeah. It becomes difficult to kind of get everybody on board in decision-making, so it'd be reduced to five members.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Seven members.

Ms. Levi: Seven members, one from each Commission member, one from the City Manager, and then an ex-officio member from the School Board, who would also be appointed by the City Manager.

Mayor Cason: OK, sounds good to me.

Commissioner Slesnick: The one change that I'd like you to consider in Section 4, and I'll just share it with you. It says that the committee members, your appointees and mine, should include members who reside or work in the vicinity of the represented schools, and what I'd like you to consider is that the membership be residents or members who reside in the City of Coral Gables or work in the vicinity of the represented schools. I think that there are a lot of residents citywide that have a very strong and passionate issue, and I wouldn't want to limit only those that are residing around the school. So, I'd like it to be resident citywide.

Mayor Cason: OK.

Commissioner Slesnick: And I wanted to ask our City Attorney or our City Clerk even, does this mean that the appointee does not have to live in the City? It says "work."

City Attorney Leen: Item G.-1? Let me see.

Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark: I can actually share with that. Because this is an evolutionary ordinance, in the past it was only those that were around the area. We're suggesting that it be residents citywide or those that work in the vicinity, and by definition, I believe that would mean that they would not have to be a resident in the area, but they could work in the area.

Mayor Cason: Yeah. I think we have one or two boards where there's an exemption for residents, if I'm not mistaken.

City Attorney Leen: Yes. The way that we've interpreted this in the past is some boards just say City residents. And under our Charter, the Commission either in the Ordinance or Resolution adopting the board has to make an exception to that, or there's a waiver process which requires a four-fifths waiver in Code. I would interpret this, as the City Manager indicated, to say that you're making the decision now that they don't have to live in Coral Gables, as long as they work in the vicinity of these schools. So, you wouldn't have to do a waiver to appoint someone that doesn't live in the City of Coral Gables.

Ms. Levi: And that's also important to mention, because we've included Francis S. Tucker Elementary and Sunset Elementary, which aren't technically within the city limits, so there may be some people who are not residents who'd be interested in the being on the board representing those schools.

Commissioner Slesnick: I might share before we discuss with my fellow Commissioners that I am passionate about public schools and so forth in Coral Gables, as well as the private ones. I've served on school boards of private schools, too. I'm just passionate about this. I have four or five people that really want to serve on this committee, along with Historic Preservation, which is very popular, but I'm really passionate about getting quality people on here and having the City more involved in our public education system.

Mayor Cason: I think we'll be able to find people living in...most of them living in the Gables.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I say we treat it the way we do every other board, which is, you know...

Commissioner Keon: Get a four-fifths.

Mayor Cason: Bring your names up and if we have to vote...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Need a simple majority if it's a resident. If it's not a resident, that Commissioner that's proposing that individual make a compelling argument why we should take that person.

Mayor Cason: Sounds good to me.

Commissioner Keon: I have a question for Cathy on this, though. The purpose of this committee is that this committee doesn't have really a direct link to the school system. The link is through the City of Coral Gables as an advisory board and who staffs this board.

Ms. Levi: I volunteered to staff this board.

Commissioner Keon: You're going to staff this board. And are we looking at...because we've also talked about with the Community Foundation having an educational fund set up that we can look at and use maybe with regard to our schools so that, this is the opportunity that we would use to maybe look for apply to the Community Foundation for funds. I just want us to be very careful that we recognize that the school system is its own independent legislative body by state Constitution so that, you know, what we are hoping to do is forge a very cooperative relationship with the schools, but whatever we do with them is really through a cooperative relationship, and that we're not in a position to tell them what to do as a city, even though they may reside within our city, and so that we have worked so well with them today, I want whoever is on this board to recognize, you know, that, what the relationship is with the school system; that the school system is its own constitutional body; and that, it's not that we're telling them necessarily about maybe curriculum, although we certainly could through PTA (Parent Teacher Association), or whatever, could do that, but it was my understanding that how we would use, City resources or Community Foundation resources, to assist the schools in our neighborhood that serve our residents.

Commissioner Slesnick: In our feeder pattern.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah. I just really think, too, in the mission statement for this board, maybe that could be addressed, because certainly, it is Dade County School Board that regulates

the schools and so forth, but that we might make friendly suggestions from the board to the Dade County School Board.

Mayor Cason: Suggestions. And community input, help us get community input and from the school as well, things that we could do within our purview.

Commissioner Keon: Within our purview...

Mayor Cason: Within our purview...

Commissioner Keon:...to assist our schools.

Mayor Cason: We talked about Carver earlier on. We did Control Choice and other schools as well so.

Commissioner Slesnick: And one more. The Coral Gables Community Foundation did give out \$35,000 in scholarships recently to Coral Gables students who were attending colleges and so...

Commissioner Keon: But we were looking at, you know, the possibility of, you know, the Foundation using it toward not just for scholarships, but actual assistance to the schools. You know, we know that in this day and age, so often, you know, the classroom budget is borne by teachers, not necessarily the school system, you know. And if there's things that we can do that can assist them with books or can assist them with things that would really improve the experience, the educational experience of these children to see them do it.

Mayor Cason: And help create permanent "A" schools.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. So we have long-term high quality.

Mayor Cason: So, the only question I think would be on the question of somebody lives outside of the Gables. Do we want to do it as a 4-1 vote, make a case, or do we want to --?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It's up to you. If you want to...

Vice Mayor Quesada: I say we keep it the way we have other boards, and if we see a need to change it, we change it.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Then we'll revise, so who reside in the City of Coral Gables, and we'll take out the reference of working in the vicinity. And I'd also like to point out, too, Commissioner Keon, we do have an ex-officio member of Miami-Dade Public Schools, and at the suggestion of the Vice Chair of the ABC Committee, we looked at Miami Lakes and some of the other active school community relations committees in other cities to model these changes, so I think the School Board will say "Bravo, we look forward to the partnership," not that we're trying to tell them what to do.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Mayor Cason: OK. Do we have a motion on G.-1?

Vice Mayor Quesada: I'll make a motion with that minor amendment.

Mayor Cason: Vice Mayor makes the motion.

Commissioner Lago: Second the motion.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Lago seconds. City Clerk.

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Yes.