

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-1
January 12, 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
Government Affairs Manager, Naomi Levi**

Public Speaker(s)

Samuel Joseph

Agenda Item 2-1 [9:43:44 a.m.]

School Community Relations Committee meeting minutes of November 20, 2015
requesting action from the City Commission.

Mayor Cason: Okay, 2-1 is a recommendation from the School Community Relations Board that Dana Peterson be appointed as Commission as a whole representative, and there's a bio in the...

Vice Mayor Quesada: You know what I would like to do on this item because you're talking about -- this is 2-1?

Mayor Cason: 2-1.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I mean, I know we have Sam Jonas (sic) here. I'd like to hear from him, if it's okay with you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Cason: Sure.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Related to all these items that they're -- all the action items that they're requesting. Or Naomi.

Government Affairs Manager Levi: Well, I'll just give a brief introduction. Both of these items were brought forth for the Community Relations Committee. They're both supported by a unanimous vote of the Committee. The two items are: One, a submission of Dana Peterson as the Commission as a whole appointment. We just respectfully ask that you consider her credentials and advise whether she would be appropriate to join the committee. And the second item is to please review and advise on your approval or any input you might have to the school improvement projects. And so, there are seven projects in total. They range from focus areas, depending on, you know, what is the strong point of each committee member that will be responsible for that project. And they include Coral Gables history tours, mentorship opportunities, improving the landscape and the physical appearance of the schools in our community. And so, Sam, who is our board chair, who has kind of led the charge on many of these items, would be the best person to give a little further explanation as to what those projects entail.

Samuel Joseph: Good morning. Thank you very much for having us here this morning, Mayor, Commissioners, and also City Clerk and Attorney. As Naomi mentioned, we embarked on an ambitious agenda as the School and Community Relations Committee. And one of the first things I did was to gather all of the members together and really look at what their goals were, what their skills are, and then how we can match projects to what they were looking to do to help make this City -- keep this City on the excellent educational path that it's on. So, we came up with these seven projects, as Naomi mentioned, ranging from school beautification all the way

down to looking at how do we inform the community about all the wonderful things that are happening in the educational landscape in the City. And then, assigned members specifically to those projects to really spearhead, guide them and make sure that we meet the goals that we set out together as a group. And we know we have two years, and we know not all of the projects will be completed in the two years of our appointment, but we look forward to that progress continuing for the years beyond when we're then. And then, obviously, we have a lot of work to do and we would like to make sure we have a full complement of members on the committee to get that work done. And so, we hope you'll take a lot at Ms. Peterson's background. And if you feel she fits what we're looking for, hopefully, bring on a new member onto the committee.

Mayor Cason: That's a tremendous CV. I love it. Couldn't find a better person, so do we have a motion for Dana Peterson to be the Commission's appointee?

Vice Mayor Quesada: So move.

Mayor Cason: Vice Mayor makes the motion. Commissioner Slesnick seconds. City Clerk.

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Vice Mayor Quesada: I want -- I'm looking at number -- item two that you have, the Committee requests to approve the school improvement projects from the City Commission. So, I'm seeing all of the items that you have in the minutes. You guys want us to approve that you guys move forward with these projects? Is that what you're requesting?

Government Affairs Manager Levi: Right. The intent of the request is that we receive the blessing of the Commission to see these projects to completion. In terms of a timeline, we are hoping that we can achieve the projects within the two-year term limit of the members. And of course, the success of the projects depends largely on cooperation from some outside entities from Miami-Dade County School Board staff, but it seems like we do have the support from many of them on these projects, so we anticipate that a two-year term would be appropriate.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So, here's what I suggest. First of all, let me just read them out loud into the record so people are aware of what they are. So, the "City Beautiful" Schools Initiative, public/private partnership to help renovate and maintain school grounds and facilities. I mean, that's a no-brainer. The "Community Schools" Project, to open school campuses to public usage/access; no-brainer. Financial Literacy Initiative, to be implemented in the middle schools and high schools, great. Mentorship/Community Service Programs, great. Coral Gables history tours, great. Special Needs Services/Programming Initiative, partnership to help bring special needs services and programming to the City of Coral Gables; again, all great. And Community Education Initiatives, where you'll be seeking out different methods educating the public on issues related to education. I mean, I think they're all great initiatives. I think the only one problem that you have because you have potential partners that are outside the City. What I would like to do is I think that you should sort of have a Commission liaison. I know you have staff that you're working with, and Naomi, I'm assuming it's you, since you're standing up there with Sam. But just in case you need, you know, an elected official to participate in some of these, I would suggest leaning on Commissioner Keon.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Quesada: No, it's because it really is -- education is really something that you're really been at the forefront of.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Quesada: And you've done a great job, and you've swayed all of us to jump on the bandwagon with you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So it's just a thought. I'm just saying -- I don't know if we need to vote on that or not, but I would say -- your chairperson -- Are you the chairperson of the board?

Mr. Joseph: I am, sir.

Vice Mayor Quesada: You should have constant communication with at least one of us, and I would suggest Commissioner Keon, but any one of us is...

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Quesada: You're more than welcome to.

Commissioner Lago: Just to answer your question, I support you 110 percent in regards to Commissioner Keon, but Sam is my appointment to the board, and I just wanted to make sure -- I was going to mention this before.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Quesada: You just go lucky with him now.

Commissioner Lago: No, no, no. Let me -- first off...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Because we all wanted him.

Commissioner Lago: I have to give a lot of credit to the City Manager, who helped -- gave me a little bit of help in regards to my selection. But Sam and I have been in contact for some time, and he has been an incredible ambassador in reference to public school education and fighting along with Commissioner Keon in reference to the issue of school choice. So, I wanted to commend you on all your efforts over the last few years. But, you have represented -- not only myself, but you represented this Commission with dignity and class. And what you're proffering today, you know, is really why we're the City Beautiful. It's setting the bar high. And Naomi has done an incredible job making sure that we bring this full circle. So, I think that Vice Mayor Quesada's idea -- I don't want to throw more work on top of Commissioner Keon, but I support...

Commissioner Keon: I'll gladly share the load, yes.

Commissioner Lago: And with...

Commissioner Keon: You have to.

Commissioner Lago: I think you're in good shape...

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: Because I've met several times with Sam. He's briefed me on what's going on, and he's doing a lot of the heavy lifting with Naomi, and they're...

Commissioner Keon: Yes, they are.

Commissioner Lago: You know, I think our efforts would be very minimal at this point. They're doing a lot of the heavy lifting themselves so...

Vice Mayor Quesada: But just in case you need additional...

Commissioner Lago: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Quesada: An elected official to reach out to another elected official, sometimes it may be easier for us to get in touch with another elected official, feel free to reach out to any of us because I know Commissioner Slesnick has really spent a lot of time and effort on education, so has the Mayor; we all have. So, feel free to reach out to any one of us.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: You know, Vice Mayor, I see this as a real show of the commitment this Commission has in forwarded education. And you challenged us to make the School Community Relations Committee meaningful. And the fact that you're saying make sure that you know that you have direct contact with the Commission and their ear is not -- is a reflection on how good Naomi, you're doing with the School Committee Relations Committee because as a City Manager member, she is their representative and the awesome job that Sam is doing in bringing together very committed residents to make our City better. So, I look at the Commission wanting to be involved as they like where you're going and they want to make sure that they can help you get there. So, it's very positive comments.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah, and I would like just to dovetail off what the City Manager said. I want you to always understand, and the entire committee, just like we're doing with the sustainability group, is that we support you 110 percent. This board is going to have actual teeth, you know. This committee is really going to get things done. This is not just, you know, something that, you know, we're putting you to work on something. We want to really make significant changes, like Commissioner Keon helped -- you know, was instrumental in getting started the whole issue with school choice, along with yourself so...

Mayor Cason: One thought for the group moving forward is, looking at the library that's at the school, public schools, they don't get much in the way of new books, but Coral Gables residents, a lot of us have thousands of books. It might be interesting to come up with from librarians, what kind of books would they like, can they accept books from the public, and have a book drive. I bet you could get tens of thousands of books from residents who otherwise, when the kids grow up, they wonder what to do with the books. They're going to throw them out. And I think this would be a great way to supplement what else you're doing.

Commissioner Slesnick: On that point, I have a book drive for children's books every year, and I have several hundred books at home that are collected each -- I mean, people just drop them off at my house all the time. So, if there's a school that needs extra books -- and we give them to nonprofits and to some of the smaller church preschools and so forth, but I have hundreds of books -- children's books at home on a regular basis, if anybody's looking for books.

Mr. Joseph: That's a fantastic idea. And actually, I'm going through the process right now with my seven year old of clearing out also. And you're right, we have boxes and boxes. Thank you for the suggestion, Vice Mayor Quesada, and forget it as a suggestion. We love it as a committee to know that we have the support not just of Commissioner Keon, but the whole Commission. And I will say that it has been fantastic to have Naomi staffing us, and it's really made a difference in the relationships that we have with our outside partners. And I'll tell you, it is -- and we've said it on the committee, it's a different day, not just in the City educationally, but also with how we're connecting with our partners out there. And we see success. We see success not only in those seven projects, but all the things that are yet to come.

Mayor Cason: Well, let's have a vote on the -- just to formalize this.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So moved.

Mayor Cason: Vice Mayor makes the motion.

Commissioner Lago: I'll second.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Lago seconds. City Clerk.

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

City Attorney Leen: Also, Mr. Mayor, just as a formal matter, in your last vote, that would also be accepting the minutes. I'm sure everyone understood that because it was pulled. The other thing is if Commissioner Keon is going to be the designated liaison, it does require a vote under our Code.

Mayor Cason: I think that was included...

City Attorney Leen: Or at least an expressed direction.

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

Commissioner Slesnick: Isn't that what we just voted on?

Mayor Cason: I think we voted on the whole package.

City Attorney Leen: Oh, everything together?

Mayor Cason: The seven projects...

City Attorney Leen: Forgive me.

Mayor Cason: Plus Commissioner Keon.

City Attorney Leen: Okay, so...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Are you okay with that?

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, I am. You know, I really..

Vice Mayor Quesada: We didn't let you speak about that. We just forced it on you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you. That's okay. You know, it was such an important issue to me when I was elected, and you know, one of us individually cannot make the changes that need to be changed without the help and the work of our colleagues and their support. And I have to tell all of you what truly a pleasure it is to work with you, and to plan with you, and to talk with you, and to go out to the school system the way we did and do what we did because one individual alone is never going to make this happen. It is a collective effort and all of you are truly a pleasure to work with, so thank you. Thank you so much. We would never get where we are heading up, and it was really a major change to remove school choice. I mean, you had been working on it for years and years and years. And you know, it's when we, as a City, you know, engage with our residents to move things forward is when we can get so many good things done and it really -- it is really due to every one of you working so hard on this initiative and bringing

this whole issue of public education -- the value and the importance of public education in our City. So, I'm really proud of what we've done, and I'm really grateful to everyone for how well we work together and how well we're able to work on behalf of our residents. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Mr. Joseph: Thank you.

Government Affairs Manager Levi: Thank you for your support.

Commissioner Keon: And you've done a great job, Sam.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you, Sam.

Commissioner Keon: Great job.

Mayor Cason: Now we have a time certain at 10 o'clock, which is items E-2 and E-3.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, if I may. Mr. Clerk, please note in the resolution that it's the minutes, the (INAUDIBLE)...

City Clerk Foeman: Yes. I've included it.

City Attorney Leen: And Commissioner Liaison, as indicated by the Mayor's ruling. Thank you.

[End: 9:57:17 a.m.]