

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item A-2 and F-1 are related
March 28, 2017
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)

Dr. Michael Alessandri, UM CARD Center

Agenda Item A-2 and F-1 are related [9:57:17 a.m.]

Time Certain 9:50 a.m.

A-2: Presentation of a Proclamation declaring April 2017 as “Autism Awareness Month” in Coral Gables.

F-1: 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 and residential communities consistent with these principles. (Sponsored by Commissioner Keon).

Mayor Cason: We are going on to move onto A-2 and F-2, which are related. Let me first, we’ll have a proclamation declaring April 2017 as Autism Awareness Month, and I’ll read the proclamation:

WHEREAS, on April 2, 2017, people across the country and around the globe commemorated “World Autism Awareness Day” (WAAD), sanctioned by the United Nations in 2007, as a day of promise and a time for us to lend our hearts and minds to all of those who live with autism; and

WHEREAS, “World Autism Awareness Day” shines a bright light on autism, as a growing global health crisis, with activities that help to increase and develop world knowledge of the autism epidemic and impart information regarding the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention; additionally, WAAD celebrates the unique talents and skills of persons living with autism, and is a day when individuals with autism are warmly welcomed and embraced in community events around the globe; and

WHEREAS, by bringing together autism organizations from around the world, we will give a voice to those millions of individuals worldwide who are undiagnosed, misunderstood and looking for help; thus as part of this global effort, Autism Speaks, is especially proud to sponsor the annual “Light It Up Blue” campaign, wherein we celebrate the progress made as the world’s leading autism science and advocacy organization.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JIM CASON, as Mayor of the City of Coral Gables, along with the members of our City Commission, do hereby proclaim April 2017 as:

“WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH IN CORAL GABLES”

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

Mayor Cason: City Attorney.

City Attorney Leen: Thank you Mr. Mayor. Before I continue with the proclamation, I’m going to also read Agenda Item F-1, which is 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. This is sponsored by Commissioner Pat Keon. I would just like to start the brief presentation by mentioning, Mr. Mayor that one of my fondest memories with you was when my daughter was here for “Government Day.” I have a beautiful picture of her and you together. You always showed such kindness and consideration and thoughtfulness toward the children that came here with autism to do “Government Day” and that always touched my heart and I appreciate the attention you brought to them. I’d also like to thank Commissioner Keon and the Commission as-a-whole, for highlighting individuals with special needs, not just autism, all special needs. Coral Gables is really a leader in trying to promote principles of inclusion, both in terms of the principles that we’ve established and that we have fought for and stood for, now for several years, and also our declaration of principles, but also in very specific things that Coral Gables has done. Coral Gables is well known in the police community for being leader nationwide on issues related to autism, both through the wallet card program, which is done with the Disabilities Independence Group (DIG). In addition to that, the City is coming out with a whole new set of standard operating procedures for its police department that will be the leading set of SOP’s in the United States on interacting, recognizing, and treating with dignity individuals with autism when they come into contact with the police, or hopefully not, but sometimes into the criminal justice, they’ll always be treated with great respect. The other thing I would like to mention today is that we have several people in the

audience who are here to accept the proclamation. We have Dr. Michael Alessandri from the University of Miami Nova Southeastern University CARD Center, Center for Autism Related Disabilities. CARD is right here in Coral Gables at the University of Miami. It is one of the leading centers in the United States, again, that's a common theme, a lot of stuff leading in the United States and that's here in Coral Gables; one of the leading centers in the United States, and certainly in Florida as well related to autism; and for many people it's the only service they ever receive related to autism, because there is still a lack of services provided nationwide, so a lot of children when they are diagnosed their parents bring them to the CARD Center and they meet with Dr. Alessandri and Dr. Alessandri helps them find other services or to the extent that they are available and can help them, and there are things available, but also personally through CARD provide services to them in the sense of helping them come to terms with their situation, realize it's not the end of the world, realize there are a lot of positive aspects to autism and that that child deserves to be included. It's a tremendous service that he provides, he's done that for I believe 10,000 kids at least, and so very special person. We also have Mary Palacio-Pyke, who has devoted her life to having one of the leading autism centers in Florida right here in Coral Gables, the Crystal Academy, my daughter goes there, my son used to go there. They have a non-profit there where they provide services to individuals, everyone should know about it. There needs to be more of those throughout South Florida; and then we also have Marie Elene Whitehurst, who is one of the leading advocates for individuals with autism. She has a child with autism and her and her husband have also devoted tremendous time to helping individuals. So anyway, I just wanted to thank everybody; I wanted to thank all of you for always making this so important, its means a lot to me, and I was hoping that you can come up and I wanted to let Commissioner Keon speak a little bit about this, because she has made this a focus of her being a Commissioner, she's made this a focus of hers.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you. I think that we will all be better off in the City, the State, this country, this world if we think of every child as our child that all children are our children. So, thank you for all that you have done. You know, we have taken some very positive action in the City with regard to inclusion. We have much, much more work to do, but I am very proud to tell you that our Parks and Recreation Department is in the process of extending an offer to someone to work at our Youth Center that role will be inclusion. It is to make sure that all children that come to that center have an opportunity to play; they have an opportunity to participate, have an opportunity to make a friend, have an opportunity to sit down and have lunch next to somebody. So, I think that we have really stepped up our efforts on behalf of all children in our community; we still have more work to do. We know that we need to address the issue of housing for children that are autistic and that are disabled, and we need to begin to work with our Chamber and our business leaders to find jobs for these individuals too. So, we have done a great job and are truly committed to all of the next steps too.

City Attorney Leen: So, what Coral Gables has done is it has a resolution, the current principles of inclusion for individuals with autism and other special needs. It lists a number of core principles, I'll just name a couple – respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, including the freedom to make one's own choices independence of persons, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, and it takes a position that inclusion is an attitude, an approach, and a mindset, which welcomes and facilitates participation by those with disabilities and special needs, and encourages accommodations beyond those required by law. And what this does is it tells City staff and I have to thank the Commission as well as the City Manager has made this a priority, it tells City staff that you can include, that you can grant accommodations, that you should go above and beyond to try to do so, and in situations where you cannot, you should bring it to the attention of the City Manager and the City Attorney and we will do our best to try to accommodate that individual to the extent we can, but we always try to, and we always treat that person with great respect and dignity. I'd also like to recognize our ADA Coordinator, Raquel Elejabarrieta, she is our ADA Coordinator, this has been a focus of her work, and so I would just like to express my appreciation. Dr. Alessandri did you want to say a few words?

Dr. Alessandri: Good morning everyone and thank you once again. Coral Gables has been the most consistent leader really across the country in terms of municipalities focusing on autism and disabilities; and I want to thank Mr. Leen who is a very good friend and a tremendous supporter, Commissioner Keon, Mr. Mayor we wish you well, the whole Commission, thank you. Every year I come here and every year I say to you, I'm proud to work in Coral Gables and I'm proud of the collaboration that we have together. But today, I'll hope if you'll indulge me for just one moment to acknowledge a real champion, someone who was a resident of Coral Gables, someone who two weeks ago lost her life due to a pulmonary disease, and her name was Michelle Cruz, I think some of you know her and if you don't know her you should learn about her. The reason we are all here today, the reason that autism is what it is in South Florida has a lot to do with the efforts of Michelle Cruz. Michelle brought, along with Marie Eileen, the very first walk-a-thon for autism to Florida, it was the second ever in the country and she brought it to Miami-Dade County that was probably 17 years ago. She also, along with Marie Eileen, everything is with Marie Eileen, her great partner in the autism world, hosted the very first annual event that supported our organization CARD, 15 years ago. Michelle was a remarkable leader, she lived here in the Gables, you should all be proud that she was part of your community and she's going to be tremendously missed in the autism community and beyond. So, thank you for that and thank you for all you do for autism.

Mayor Cason: Thank you. Thank you.

[Applause]

City Attorney Leen: Lastly, I would just like to also let you know that we have – Stephanie Throckmorton has recently joined my office, she used to work at Disability Florida, so she and Raquel are working together on a lot of these issues, so Stephanie thank you very much. So, with that I thought we could take a photo.

Mayor Cason: Great. Do we have a motion on F-1?

Commissioner Lago: So moved.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Lago makes the motion, Commissioner Slesnick seconds – City Clerk.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

City Attorney Leen: And everyone should know that Mayor Cason’s last Commission meeting is actually a meeting coming later this week, or pardon me, next week, “Government Day,” what’s the date? – April 5th where the Mayor will work with a number of students from Crystal Academy who have autism, who will be passing very important laws, Mr. Mayor, including what happens when your brother or sister steals a toy, how should that be treated, what should be the punishment, if any, and other important laws like that, such as texting while driving, if a parent text while driving, the children will vote on what should happen. So, please stay tuned.

Mayor Cason: We need to have some very drastic punishment in the past.

[Photo-op]

[End: 10:08:32 a.m.]