



**City of Coral Gables
CITY COMMISSION MEETING
July 8, 2025**

ITEM TITLE: ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS

MEETING DATE: May 7, 2025

SUMMARY OF MEETING:

QUORUM: Was reached

STAFF:

Raquel Elejabarrieta – Human Resources Director
Ericka Sanchez - Administrative Assistant Human Resources & Risk Management
Catie Hastings – Community Recreation – D.E.I. Coordinator
Sarah Espino – Community Recreation – Administrative Operations Supervisor

GUEST:

CITIZEN ADVISORS:

Debbie Dietz, DIG – Disability Independence Group, Inc. (Via Zoom)

PUBLIC GUEST: None

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 10:02am

MEETING ABSENCE:

Justine Chichester
Jennifer Durocher, Director of UM-NSU Card

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:

April 2, 2025
Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2nd Vanessa Bedoya / Approved unanimously.

SECRETARY'S REPORT: None

BOARD MEMBERS' REPORTS: None

NEW BUSINESS:**Open Discussion – Board Goals – Ms. Mary Palacio-Pike**

Ms. Ward Sando stated she would like to address the young adult population and asked if there is still the program available. Ms. Hastings advised this is still in place and ages vary from younger to older adult.

Ms. Palacio-Pike asked if the Supper Club has a good number of attendees. Ms. Dietz stated there are approximately thirty members. Ms. Ward Sando asked what the age for the Supper Club was, Ms. Dietz advised it commences at age sixteen.

Ms. Palacio-Pike asked if it would be possible to add, as one of the goals for this year, at the Chamber, to have a breakfast participation where we talk about employment for individuals with disabilities. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated that a few years ago, Mr. Dietz was going to give a speech about the benefits of employing someone with disabilities, from a business perspective, however, it did not take place. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated if we start working on this now, it may be able to take place. Mr. Martinez stated perhaps it can be ten minutes dedicated to it, and he will be addressing this with the Chamber or the Foundation. Ms. Dietz stated they were ready to go; however, the time was never provided. Mr. Martinez asked Ms. Dietz to provide any information available so that he can discuss it further with the Chamber or Foundation.

Inclusion- Summer Camp: Ms. Palacio-Pike

Ms. Palacio-Pike asked for next year's summer camp whether there will be more inclusive opportunities, including shadows for children with disabilities. Ms. Espino advised Ms. Hastings negotiated with FIU to have interns specifically in the field for shadowing. Ms. Espino stated the difficulty is parents who have difficulty dedicating a two-hour meeting with Ms. Hastings to address the proper accommodation. Ms. Espino stated if the case load is there, along with the shadows would be amazing.

The Board conducted further discussion regarding the shadow component and summer camp programing. Ms. Espino advised there are current on-going conversations regarding looking at other possible resources and the process does take time. Ms. Elejabarrieta asked if the board could allow staff to review and get back with them.

Ms. Dietz stated if it is possible regarding goals, can the issue of crosswalks be addressed. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised it would be placed on the agenda and further discussed at the upcoming board meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:**Update: Parks & Recreation**

Ms. Hastings advised the upcoming of the Summer Camp which will commence with an event at Crystal Academy this weekend. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised the event will be a "Family Fair" (Exhibit 1 Flyer), first of its kind at Crystal Academy. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised of other schools and entities which will participate. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated there will be information available about services provided by the various participants, some will be selling products created by individuals with disabilities, and there will be art, food and teachers available.

Ms. Hastings stated they have been struggling to obtain participants for their tweens and teens' programming and the families suggested doing something bigger and go somewhere. Ms. Hastings stated an event to Puttshack at Brickell was scheduled for April, however, due to the low registration the event has been rescheduled a few times, and the current date is for June 20, 2025. Ms. Hastings advised play, pizza and drinks are included. Ms. Hastings stated it is called The Mid-Summer Social and open to participants ages 9 thru adults.

Ms. Hastings advised tickets for the 4th of July Sensory Friendly event are currently available on the website. Ms. Elejabarrieta asked if there was a limited number of tickets, Ms. Hastings advised it was limited to 30 cars. Ms. Elejabarrieta asked if the event was at capacity last year and Ms. Hastings advised it was.

Ms. Palacio-Pike asked if there had been any registration for children with disabilities for the summer camp. Ms. Hastings advised they have received one who contacted them directly and a meeting has been scheduled.

Ms. Espino advised of the upcoming Coral Gables Family Literacy Festival, May 17, 2025, 11:00am to 3:00pm, at the Youth Center. Ms. Espino advised of the Memorial Day Memorial also at the Youth Center. Ms. Espino stated they are also concentrating on the preparation for the summer camp, including the hiring of staff. Ms. Espino advised the Venetian Pool is still closed due to renovation, however there will be camps at the Youth Center, Tennis Center and at Country Club, which does have a pool and water aspect to it. Ms. Palacio-Pike asked if the Country Club camp was also under the Parks & Recreation umbrella. Ms. Espino advised it was, and Ms. Hastings stated it would be the best one for participants with disabilities due to its size. Ms. Espino stated at this camp it is small with approximately 10 participants due to the size of the location. Ms. Palacio-Pike asked what the age for participants would be and Ms. Espino stated it was 7 to 12. Ms. Espino also stated the Golf Camp is held at this same location. Brief information regarding the process for registering was discussed.

Ms. Palacio-Pike said perhaps going forth, this board's goal should be to further discuss the possibility of the city having a truly inclusive summer camp for participants with disabilities. Ms. Ward Sando provided information about services in the past provided by the JCC for their summer camp. Ms. Ward Sando stated their camp had an inclusive concept and they also had a separate camp with lots of teachers specifically for participants with disabilities. Ms. Ward Sando stated her family attended this camp; however, this service was stopped and therefore they could not continue to participate.

Update: School Community Relations Committee – Ms. Ana Lam

Ms. Lam was not present at the meeting. Ms. Palacio-Pike shared a document received from Mr. Sam Joseph regarding an item that the School Community Relations Committee was discussing. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated this item is about retaking the 2017-2018 discussions regarding expanding autism offerings in the public school system and creating a center for autism within the public school system. Ms. Palacio-Pike expressed her concern regarding what happens once the participant turns 22 years old. Ms. Ward Sando stated she believes the schools do not provide any assistance for participants past 22 years old. Ms. Ward Sando shared various experiences their family had. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised she will not be able to attend their upcoming meeting, and that it would be great if someone could. The board went on to further discuss this subject.

Taste of Success Experience – Mr. Eddy Martinez, Ex-officio Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Martinez advised the board he had the opportunity to speak with the Chamber of Commerce Foundation regarding the upcoming Taste of Success Experience. Mr. Martinez stated he will be looking forward to addressing the foundation regarding including disability issues into their program. Mr. Martinez stated the foundation is not doing anything for the summer and he will wait until the fall to address this.

Ms. Elejabarrieta shared with the board a video of an interview Mr. Martinez and his son had with NBC 6 regarding the Summer of Success program and the upcoming Taste of Success Experience.

Ms. Palacio-Pike spoke of a coffee cart started at a school in Kendall at the library which is managed by students

with disabilities. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised she reached out to Mr. Baker, Miami-Dade Public Library System Director, and asked if it would be possible to do such a thing at the Coral Gables Public library. Mr. Martinez mentioned Commissioner Lara works with Best Buddies which have a coffee cart as well and would like it to be part of the Taste of Success Experience.

Ms. Bonnie Blaire mentioned years ago at all the courthouses, there was an organization which ran it, it was people with disabilities which managed it. Ms. Blaire stated the concept is there and it is a wonderful idea.

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Ms. Palacio-Pike stated this has been postponed indefinitely. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised that the bills which we wanted amended did not pass. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated one was the statue reference making autism training be mandatory for all law enforcement officers and amending the current statue so that if someone commits a battery or assault to someone with disabilities it be considered a bigger offense. Ms. Ward Sando stated regarding assuring cameras be included in the self-contained classrooms, it was passed by the house, however, did not make it to the senate. Ms. Ward Sando stated perhaps the Senate can pick this up once again in the future. Ms. Blaire stated it sounded like it arrived late and perhaps they did not have enough time to review and hoped this would be carried over for next year. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated they will try again next year to obtain changing the language regarding battery or assault.

Police Training - Ms. Debbie Dietz

Ms. Dietz provided an update regarding creating safety training for individuals with disabilities. Ms. Dietz advised after conversations with the Chief; officers were assigned to work with them to assist in facilitating this program. Ms. Dietz stated the title as of now is called "Fight Like You". Ms. Dietz advised it is going to be done in a series of three courses and according to how it goes, you will be invited to the second training and then the third. Ms. Dietz advised the goal is to have the first training in the summer, second in the fall and the third in the winter, like January/February. Ms. Dietz advised they will be providing the board with updates as the program develops.

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting Adjourned 11:02am

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

NEXT MEETING: June 4, 2025

ATTACHMENT(S): Minutes of May 7, 2025