

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-7
March 10, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Sam Joseph
Gianna Figueroa

Agenda Item F-7 [Start: 3:09 p.m.]

Update regarding Little Library from High School student Gianna Figueroa
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Last item on the agenda, am I correct F-7, update regarding little library from high school student Gianna Figueroa who's here with us today. I sponsored this item, and we have our dear friend who's also coming up here with us Sam Joseph, who brought it to my attention and again has been doing a lot of great things in the community in regard to education and this is just one of the many.

Mr. Sam Joseph: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commission, Mr. Manager, Madam City Attorney and Clerk and all those in the audience and those watching. Thank you for having us here today. I am excited for you to get to meet my friend and work partner over the last six, seven months on this wonderful project. Gianna Figueroa is a senior at our beloved Coral Gables Senior High School. She is on the board of Interact and she contacted me over the summer, last summer.

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Interact had been actually recognized at the Coral Gables Family Literacy festival as one of our literacy laureates, one of the organizations we wanted to highlight because they were doing a lot around literacy and Gianna being on the board she accepted the award and I got an email over the summer saying, hey, Mr. Joseph it was great, thank you for recognizing us but I have this idea about how I can expand on one of the projects that we were working on and would you mind helping me through this process. So, after seeing her work and meeting with her and her teacher, I was blown away and told her you had me at you've got a project. So, thank you Mayor and Vice Mayor for being a sounding board for us, our very first sounding board around the project and over the last six months we've met a lot of people and introduced us to a lot of the community but we wanted to officially give you an update on where we are right now and where we're headed and how you can help us get over the hump. So, without further ado Gianna Figueroa.

Ms. Figueroa: Thank you so much for having me. I don't know if it's possible to maybe project my presentation.

Mayor Lago: Of course. Did you provide the presentation already.

Ms. Figueroa: I have it here.

Mayor Lago: Oh, here it is.

Ms. Figueroa: Okay. Hi everyone, like Mr. Joseph said, my name is Gianna Figueroa. I'm a senior at Coral Gables Senior High School and I'm here today to present my expansion of the mini libraries project. So, the story behind the project, like Mr. Joseph said, at Gables, I'm part of my school's Interact Board and each board member is in charge of running their own community service project. So, I decided to do mine as a campus book drive out of my love for reading and belief that literacy fosters community. So as a result, this book drive restocked too many libraries on campus; one for the Little Cavaliers, which you can see in the photo on the left and then one for our high school students which you can see in the photo on the right. Fast forward a few months in May, the Interact club was honored to receive the Coral Gables Students Laureate Medal at the 2025 Coral Gables Family Literacy Fair, and this made me realize that this project has a lot of room for growth and that I would like to take it to greater heights. So, I look to expand towards the city and over the summer I emailed Mr. Joseph, who I secured a partnership with. Overall, the goals of the project are to establish five mini libraries by the end of the school year and more importantly we don't just want to establish these mini libraries, we want to ensure that they have a long-lasting impact so each place where one is built will be maintained in the future. I also brainstorm some project branding, so it includes a logo with the idea of a sun and a mini library inside of it and the project name which I've changed to Bright Books for Blocks. And then I also brainstormed a bookmark which includes the logo, the project name, and the slogan, which is *"Books are just treasures waiting to be discovered."* And then in terms of the mini library locations, the mini libraries will be placed in nearby parks surrounding the following five schools,

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so that would be Ponce de Leon Middle School, George Washington Carver Elementary, Francis Tucker, Coral Gables Preparatory Academy and Auburndale Elementary. And all these schools fall under the School Community Relations Committee with the exception of Auburndale, because that was my old elementary school and I'd like to include it in the project. So, in terms of updates over the course of six months me and Mr. Joseph started contacting organizations, School Board members, Commissioners, district staff and administrators at these schools to inform them of the project. So, our first meeting was on September 19th, which was a Zoom meeting with the SCRC, where Mr. Joseph gave a brief introduction to me and the project and then I gave my project presentation, which consists of the slides that I've already shown you. So the story behind the project, the project goals, the project branding, the mini library locations, and the future plans; and then on September 26th, I was able to give the same presentation to the City of Coral Gables Commission, which is Mayor Lago and his staff, as well as Vice Mayor Anderson, which I've included photos of in the presentation. And then in October, on October 9th, I was able to attend the Coral Gables Rotary luncheon where I was able to sit through one of their meetings and learn how the Rotary runs and they also invited me as a guest speaker to give my presentation. And then on October 15th, I was able to give the same presentation to the Library Advisory Board through Zoom meeting and October 22nd, I gave the same presentation to School Board member Geller's Chief of Staff Miss Chrissy ____ through a Zoom meeting. And then in November, November was also another exciting month for the project, on November 8th, me and Mr. Joseph, along with some other Interact Board members attended the Adventure Day Event, which is hosted by the City of Coral Gables in honor of Disability Awareness Month and we were able to share a table with the City of Coral Gables through Vice Mayor Anderson, and we're able to give out books and also raise awareness on the project. I even created a flyer which we gave to people who are coming to the table, and it was basically just again, summarizing the many library locations, the story behind the project, and giving our contact information. And then on November 14th, I was able to give my project presentation to Commissioner Pardo and his staff, which was very exciting at his City of Coconut Grove office. And then on November 19th, I was able to give my project presentation to Commissioner Rosado in Miami City Hall, which was also very exciting. And then from December to January, we also had our final few presentations, so on December 17th, I was able to give my project presentation to the Friends of Gables, which went very well and then on January 5th, I was able to give my project presentation to the Coral Gables Community Recreation Department, which was a very big step for the project because through their program is how we will be able to establish the Mini Libraries, and so, we discussed potential Mini Library locations and things like that. And so, on another note, I'm very excited to announce that Mini Libraries will be coming to the parks near all five schools, and so, I'd like to give a shout out to our sponsors. So, for Ponce Middle School and George Washington Carver Elementary, those ones will be sponsored by Mayor Lago and the Coral Gable City Commission, so can we please have a round of applause for them. And then the Francis S. Tucker Mini Library will be sponsored by Commissioner Pardo since it falls in his District and the Coral Gables Preparatory Academy Mini Library will be

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sponsored by Mr. Joseph and his family, so can we also give him a round of applause please. And then the Auburndale Elementary Mini Library will be sponsored by Commissioner Rosado because it also falls within his District and he's also very excited because he says that he wants it to be Pink Panther themed to match with the school and also his name. And so, I also want to pivot to this Caps Connect article that was written on the project as well as this video. I included links in the presentation, so I don't know if it'd be possible to click on it, but if not it's fine, you can read the full story on CapsConnect.com and also watch the full video on the Caps Connect YouTube channel and I highly encourage you guys to watch. I'm a part of Caps Connect and I know that they work super hard. The writer did an amazing job and so the videographer did as well. And then so, what are the next steps for the Mini Libraries project? So, what's next to come is that it will take around three to four weeks, so 30 days for the Coral Gables Recreation Department to build each Mini Library and once each Mini Library is officially installed, me and Mr. Joseph will be scheduling dates for ribbon cutting ceremonies. And so, with that we'd also like to introduce a community challenge to help us build seven more Mini Libraries. So, the way that it will work is to hopefully sponsor and create some more Mini Libraries in the remaining SCRC schools, which I've included a list of here, so that would be Henry S. West Laboratory School, George Washington Carver Middle School, Sommerset Academy Charter School, David Fairchild Elementary School, Sunset International Elementary School, International Studies Preparatory Academy and Coral Gables Preparatory Academies Lower Campus. So the way that the challenge would work is that first, someone would need to sponsor a Mini Library for one of the remaining SCRC schools; second we would have to wait for the Mini Library to be installed, and then we would celebrate with the ribbon cutting ceremony; and then third the sponsor would record a video after the ribbon cutting ceremony and post it on Instagram announcing the new Mini Library; and then fourth, this is the exciting part they would tag at Gables underscore Interact as well as previous sponsors using the hashtag, hashtag *Mini Library Challenge*, hashtag *Build the Next Library* and hashtag, *Write Books for Blocks*, and then they would challenge two to three organizations or community members to sponsor the next library, and then those who are tagged would have three to four weeks to accept the challenge. So hopefully maybe we can do this by the end of the school year, only time will tell, but who knows. And so, to pivot, as well I'd also like to explain how to sponsor a Mini Library in case anyone is interested. So, here's the overview. Anyone interested in sponsoring the establishment of a Mini Library would have to fill out the City of Coral Gables Community Recreation Department's form, which I've included a sample of here, and then they would also have to present a check of a thousand dollars (\$1,000) to the Youth Center, because the way that the process works is that the Youth Center receives the donated books and then the Library Advisory Board would organize them and check to see if they're age appropriate. And then with this money the Recreation Department would build a two-story mini library and provide the books, and then they would also place a plaque to honor who causes establishment and maintain the Mini Libraries in the future which, is the most important part. And so, on a closing note, what are our hopes and future plans for the Mini Libraries project. So hopefully our future plans are to secure

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book donations and also sponsors and our funding to support the installation of the seven remaining SCRC schools and their Mini Libraries and hopefully to continue expanding within the remaining SCRC schools list and beyond. And then on a closing note again, our final slide is to thank everyone who has made these Mini Libraries possible. So, I put a photo of all the presentations that I've been to and everyone who has helped make this project possible. I am super grateful for all the support, and it really means a lot to me, and yes, that's basically it. Thank you so much for listening. I've included my contact information and if anyone has any questions.

Mayor Lago: Congratulations. Well done, impressive.

Commissioner Lara: Through the mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Commissioner Lara: So, Gianna is a fellow Coral Gables Cavalier. You're making me very, very proud and all the rest of us the alums, because you to quote Mr. Joseph, I'm blown away by your presentation, your energy, and how well thought out, you know the vision is. I think that today's presentation you knocked it out of the park and I think for all the residents that are watching and of course, I hope that we'll be able to help amplify your message as well, so we can get participation and we can build you know, twice as many of those little libraries, not just seven right before the end of the year. You can count on me for support as well.

Ms. Gianna Figueroa: Thank you, appreciate it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You can count on me for support as well. I may add to your list but well that increases the challenge. There's a lot of great places to put out information to teach the public many different things.

Ms. Gianna Figueroa: Thank you so much, appreciate it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: So, I invited her here because I was very impressed when Sam brought her to my office, at office hours and she challenged me, and obviously I said I'm not only going to do one. I'm going to do two personally obviously, and then she said, "How do you want, who do you want to put it under. And I said, put it under my office but we're going to include my colleagues on the Commission. At the end of the day, to me it's a great privilege to be able to give back to a person like you, because you're an amazing human being. You have stuck with it over the last six months, you're resilient, you know you had a plan, you blew through that plan and you're going you're

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taking it even further, so it makes me really happy to be able to bring you here and like what Commissioner Lara said was to amplify, you know a vision that you have. Something that a lot of people who are in high school are worried about, you know different things, but you're not only doing amazing in school, because you're going to be going to an amazing college, but you're also you know really worried about like the future of this community. You want kids to engage in reading, you want people to get off, you know social media, you know a lot of things that we talked about that to me really impacted me and that's why I wanted to make sure that I personally invested in your future, in your success.

Ms. Gianna Figueroa: Thank you. I appreciate it. I really do. I know I've said it a bunch of times, but I really do appreciate it, means a lot to me.

Mayor Lago: It's my pleasure.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Gianna, congratulations on the great work. I'm an avid reader. I'll read 70 to 100 pages a day. My son calls me a nerd, but I'm trying to instill in him the importance of reading as well and that's why Sam and I worked on the Literacy Festival for many years until it finally became a reality, because it's something that's always been important to me. I'm going to see if I can help you get some books. I know a few places that we can knock on some doors to get some, so we'll connect afterwards and I'll see how I can help you to do that. The other thing I wanted to see if we can include this in the e-NEWS, maybe include the video that she created so that we can get the information out there. I know we have a lot of folks in this community who are passionate about education, and they'd probably be willing to help as well and let's see how many maybe it's not seven maybe it's 70 that we're able to open, but let's get you out there and amplify to as many people as possible. Congratulations.

Ms. Gianna Figueroa: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Great work, great work. Congratulations. Thank you, Sam.

Mr. Sam Joseph: Quick, just a couple things. First things because I always want to put a disclaimer out there, everything you saw from her that she presented is her work. I did nothing in helping with design, even ideas, all her work. All she needed was a person who could point her in the right direction, and the right rooms to go in to make sure that your dreams could come true. I'm on the School Community Relations Committee of the city and a proud member and our Chair said it. She said, you know beyond the seven or eleven libraries what we get a chance to do is to help build our future leaders. We have an amazing high school that's producing Gianna just is not the only one. There are amazing kids coming out of our school every single day that could and will be our

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future leaders and they just need a little push, a little help to get in the right rooms, know which way to go to make a difference. Gianna wants to go to Florida, the University of Florida. I told her to dream bigger. I see much bigger, but we can get her to Florida. I'm going to ask the Commission if you would consider, I think she's earned it, a letter of recommendation before she goes off to college that she can put in her portfolio just to let folks know how much she was appreciated and I'm going to leave you with this. Gianna doesn't live in the City of Coral Gables, she attends Coral Gables Senior High, but she lives in the City of Miami. She could have very easily just said, you know what, let me take care of my own, let me take care of my own city. As a matter of fact, she apologized to you and she apologized to me when she first brought the project to say, well, I went to Auburndale, so if you don't mind, I'd like to add Auburndale. So please, if we don't mind, it's your project. The Commissioners in all the municipalities everywhere else were just, they're just so blown away and impressed. We want her back. I want her to go to college, kill the world, get all the knowledge and then we want her back, then maybe you'll be the second female Mayor of the City of Miami, but this is what we produce every single day out of our high school. Please visit our schools, get to learn what's going on. We're an incredibly fortunate community building incredible people. Thank you for your help and thank you for listening to us today.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Sam as always.

Ms. Gianna Figueroa: Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, we are all good to see you again. Congratulations. Well done.