

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items 2-1, 2-2, and G-1 are related
July 11, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro
Assistant Director Parks and Recreation, Carolina Vester
Ericka Koflan, Special Populations Coordinator

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Items 2-1, 2-2 and G-1 are related [10:54:10 a.m.]

2-1: A Resolution by the Coral Gables Advisory Board on Disability Affairs recommending that the City of Coral Gables develop a citywide incentive program recognizing businesses and organizations in the City that have demonstrated a commitment to the principles of inclusion and that have enhanced opportunities for disabled persons to fully and effectively participate in everyday community life.

2-2: A Resolution by the Coral Gables Advisory Board on Disability Affairs identifying a need to combat social and physical isolation of post-secondary aged adults with disabilities and urging the City of Coral Gables to facilitate cooperation with businesses, universities, disability agencies, organizations and other entities and to actively engage resources toward the development of a multi-dimensional cultural, social and recreational opportunities and programs in the City for post-secondary school aged adults with disabilities.

G-1: A Resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida accepting recommendations of the Disability Affairs Board and directing study and action in accordance therewith. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Keon)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We have a time certain item, 10:30 a.m., agenda items, Mr. City Attorney.

City Attorney Leen: Thank you Mr. Mayor. Today we are actually going to combine Items 2-1, 2-2, G-1, and G-9; 2-1 and 2-2 are resolutions from the Advisory Board and Disabilities Affairs. One of them recommends that the City develop a citywide incentive program recognizing businesses and organizations in the City that have demonstrated a commitment to the principals of inclusion and that have enhanced opportunities for disabled persons to fully and effectively participate in every day community life. The second one identifies a need to combat social and physical isolation of post-secondary aged adults with disabilities and urging the City of Coral Gables to facilitate cooperation with businesses, universities, disability agencies, organizations and other entities and to actively engage resources toward the development of a multi-dimensional cultural, social and recreational opportunities and programs in the City for post-secondary school aged adults with disabilities. In addition, there is a resolution sponsored by Commissioner, pardon me, by Vice Mayor Keon, that resolution adopts these recommendations from the Disabilities Affairs Board and in addition to that there is a discussion item regarding the Special Olympics where Vice Mayor Keon is supporting a Special Olympics program in the City of Coral Gables. We have today Ericka Kofkin, who is our Special Needs Coordinator for the City of Coral Gables. Before this begins, I've spoken to you before, I have a child with special needs and I just want to thank the City Commission and the City Manager for making this such a priority. I know what it's like for a parent to have a child and go to the Youth Center and want their child to participate, I think it's a wonderful thing we are doing, I just like to thank you all and with that I'll turn it over to the Vice Mayor and then to Ms. Kofkin. I should also mention we have Maria Elain Whitehurst, who has been a champion for individuals with disabilities, has a child with disabilities. I guess child would not be correct anymore, a young adult, still a child though, and she has been a champion for individuals with disabilities and is on the Disabilities Affairs Board, so she's here as well, I'll just like to recognize her.

Vice Mayor Keon: Thank you. I really would like to recognize our Parks Department and our staff and our new coordinator. We met this week and you have done just a phenomenal job with the issue of inclusion, so I'll let you really carry the weight on this one. We did talk about all of the issues, the resolution that was provided to us by the Disabilities Affairs Board and we talked about the issues related to that. I'll let the staff tell you where we are with our participation in the Special Olympics, the person, Mark, from the Special Olympics met with us also, really walked us through and helped us with identifying how kids can participate in the Special Olympics, so it was very interesting to me with the Special Olympics is, we talk about inclusion and we

encourage children that want to play basketball that have special needs to participate in a team, so it's not a team just for disabled children, but that child can participate in the team, in our recreational program, but the child then can take those skills that you learn by participating in the team to the Special Olympics, because if the Special Olympics is not a five on five team. It is dribbling, it is ball passing, it is shot making, so you can learn how to shoot the ball and be very good at it, although you may not want to pass the ball a whole lot, but you participate in the event that meets the skills set out by the Special Olympics. So, as we talk about inclusion and we talk about having all children participate in all of our activities, every child isn't going to get the same thing from that activity. There are certain skills that one child will walk away with and there are other skills and team-building skills that another child may come, and hopefully in the end everybody that participates grows and appreciates the value of every single child that comes to that program, and we learn the value of that relationship between that child that has special needs and the child who more fortunately has no special need, and those friendships can develop and that sense of inclusion and participation is what makes us a better community. So, that's our goal and I'll let the Parks Department talk about where we are.

Mr. Couceyro: Thank you Vice Mayor. We are happy to be here before you today to discuss the beginning of our accessible recreation program. We kind of have a little objective and mission that we'll share with you, it's also on our website, and it kind of highlights the three tiers that we are going to be pursuing with our accessible recreation program. The first step is having Ericka as our Special Populations Coordinator and we also have two support staff that work as counselors and provide that one-on-one attention if we need a reasonable accommodation for inclusion or participation in our programs. What we are trying to do is, as the Vice Mayor spoke is, inclusion is one of our tiers where we will look at having children that need attention in various ways. We are finding out, we are learning a lot as we go. It's not only what you would consider an accommodation; there are some accommodations that come in, there are some nutrition accommodations, there are allergies, there are emotional traumas that participants go through, as well as the physical ones and some of the other ones that we hear about that its wide-ranging that we are finding and it's been really educational for us as we work with these participants to find the accommodations that they need. The second tier is looking at specific adaptive programming and events. One of those programming facets is Special Olympics, as we discussed, Ericka and Carolina, the Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation, they came up with a great idea with the Special Olympics and we were able to meet some facilities or facility availabilities and we'll try to roll out our first sport in Special Olympics which is, we thought of bocce ball, because we have a nice facility that we can use batting cages at the Youth Center, they set up nicely as bocce ball court, so we thought here's something that's underutilized, here's something that we can kind of improve. We were doing a capital improvement project there anyway, so now we can make sure that we could start, that's an easy program for us to start in terms of resources and all ages. It's a sport that can be learned by everyone and not only

children, we can look at adults participating and possibly having a great team for Special Olympics, that would be the first phase.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: If I could just interrupt, so you don't get a series of e-mails a concern that we are doing away with the batting cages. This is shared use, so it can be still batting cages and bocce ball.

Mr. Couceyro: Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Keon: Carolina can explain...that we don't lose batting cages.

Mr. Couceyro: No, no, it would be a multi-purpose surface. So, it would be able to be used for batting cages as well, and it will have all the equipment of batting cages as well.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Is there any action requested from the Commission?

Vice Mayor Keon: There is the passage of this resolution from the Disability Affairs Committee.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You make a motion?

Vice Mayor Keon: Yes, but I'd also like to talk with the Disability Affairs, we also spoke with the Chamber as to looking at issues with both accommodation in businesses, restaurants, or whatever in the City and the issue of a pathway to jobs and employment; and the Chamber is very willing to work with the Disability Affairs Board and we would suggest that you have someone from the Chamber, as well as staff, to get in touch with Mark Trowbridge to work with him. I'll provide you with his memo back to me that talks about specific things that he would like to see you do. We have talked too with the Manager about having Coral Gables TV actually do a video on this type of thing that you can use with businesses to encourage their use. So, I think between Economic Development and the Chamber, they will help the Disability Affairs Board if you assign a person from them to work with them on this issue as well as all of you. So, just for a very quick minute just to give Ericka an introduction I'd like her to just to talk for a minute and then we can ask for a motion on this item.

Ms. Vester: I want to just briefly introduce Ericka. She started with us in May, her position is Special Populations Coordinator, it is a year-round part-time position; and since she started we've just fast tracked and done an amazing job. She has been an inspiration to all of us, Fred and myself learn new things every day from her, and she was actually a guest speaker for the City last year when we were doing a workshop for hearing impaired and Ericka is actually deaf, so she does a very great job of reading lips, she does have hearing aids that help her filter some

of the noise, but it's just amazing because she herself has been able to impact me with her disability. Now I have learned to – I have to adjust my lifestyle where when I speak to her I speak to her face-to-face, and it's one of those things of inclusion which changes people all around us. I have changed my perception and I've actually done it with everybody else, and now when I speak to people I speak to them face-to-face, because I'm used to doing that with Ericka. Ericka has been an amazing, amazing addition. In our program we have Ericka as the coordinator and we have two counselors that provide additional support and we are still limited with that, but what Ericka has been doing a really good job with is she is providing education, she is providing training for our regular staff, so they are able to accommodate and they are getting the skills necessary to do a successful accommodation for all the children; and we actually have 15 cases, 16 today, we have 16 successful cases already, and if you think about that with just three staff members, we've been able to do 16 accommodations since the start of the summer, so we are really fast-tracking. A little bit of background on Ericka – she actually has done several different leisurely programs. She has taught or treats people with physical disabilities, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, she's also help create non-profit to bring free mental health care in the form of art-base therapy to the northeast Florida community, she's taught swimming and other aquatic activities to at-risk youth, and basically her role as a Special Populations Coordinator is to coordinate all these efforts to meet with parents, to meet with the children, to meet with staff, and do the best we can in inclusion, as well as special event programming, and then we are going to go with the Special Olympics as well, so there is a lot of potential growth and we are very, very excited to have Ericka on board to teach us and to support us.

Vice Mayor Keon: We also know that there is an opportunity to do some social type activities at the Youth Center in the evenings, because the Youth Center is open till 10 o'clock that they could have movies and things as a gathering place for the older population, adult disabled, so I am so thrilled with the work that you have done and how quickly you have taken this charge on inclusion and moved it forward and opened it up, you truly deserve to be congratulated on your work.

Ms. Vester: If you have any questions for Ericka.

Commissioner Quesada: I just want to say congratulations and thank you, this is spectacular. I can't give you a high enough accolade, this is tremendous. Thank you so much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's wonderful. Thank you very much. Would you like to make a motion?

Commissioner Lago: So moved.

Vice Mayor Keon: Second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK. Will you call the role please?

Commissioner Mena: Yes

Commissioner Quesada: Yes

Vice Mayor Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

[End: 11:07:14 a.m.]