

CITY OF CORAL GABLES ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS
 CORAL GABLES HUMAN RESOURCES & RISK MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT
 254 Minorca Avenue, Suite 214
 Coral Gables, FL 33134
 WEDNESDAY, March 4, 2026

- MEETING MINUTES -

MEMBERS	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	APPOINTED BY:
	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	
Jennifer Ward Sando	P	P	P										Mayor Vince Lago
Justine Chichester	P	P	P										Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Wilfredo Jauregui	Z	Z	P										Commissioner Richard Lara
Bonnie Blaire	P	P	P										Commissioner Melissa Castro
Vanessa Bedoya	P	P	P										Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Eddy Martinez	P	P	P										Ex-Officio Member Chamber of Commerce

Z – Zoom

P – Present
E – Excused Absence
A – Absent
(-) – No Appointment
(*) – No Meeting

STAFF:

Jose Rodriguez – Human Resources & Risk Management – Assistant Director
 Eglys Hernandez – Human Resources & Risk Management – P/T Administrative Assistant
 Fred Couceyro, Director of the Community Recreation Department (Via Zoom)
 Yanessa Rodriguez – Community Recreation – Administrative Operations Manager
 Catie Hastings – Community Recreation – D.E.I. Coordinator

CITIZEN ADVISORS:

Debbie Dietz, Citizen Advisor (Via Zoom)
 Dr. Jennifer Durocher, University of Miami (Via Zoom)

PUBLIC GUEST: Mr. Ernie Martinez

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 10:03am

MEETING ABSENCE: None

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:

February 4, 2026
 Correction: To change Dr. Durocher’s absence, notice on minutes to citizen advisor’s section
 Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2nd Wilfredo Jauregui / Approved unanimously

SECRETARY’S REPORT: None

BOARD MEMBERS’ REPORTS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

Mental Health Assistance for Children – Ms. Vanessa Bedoya

Ms. Bedoya spoke of the end of voucher program of assistance program regarding mental health issues at Miami-Dade County public schools. Ms. Bedoya stated she believes the program is still in place, just under a different name and would like to find out who is now in charge of program. Ms. Palacio-Pike extending invite for Ms. Bedoya to attend the upcoming School Community Relations Committee meeting where there will be representatives from the school board present.

OLD BUSINESS:

Adventure Day – Fred Couceyro, Director of the Community Recreation Department (Via Zoom)

Director Couceyro addressed board regarding moving forward with Adventure Day and asked board to identify their goal for this event. Ms. Sando stated goal as described by her husband, Mr. Blake Sando, former Chairperson, was to have this event to celebrate people with disabilities in the community. Ms. Sando stated it has turned into a resource event. Ms. Bedoya stated she believes the event has covered both celebration and resources. Ms. Palacio-Pike shared she feels it has become a resource fair and there are many of those, mostly taking place at same time. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated that in past board discussions, Ms. Bedoya suggested merging this event with the Literacy Event which would help with the number of people attending. Director Couceyro stated he feels combining this with the Literacy Festival is that the message or purpose of Adventure Day may be lost.

Board continued to discuss and agreed to place this item on upcoming April meeting agenda, as well as have board members bring back suggestions. Ms. Blaire stated if board is thinking of merging this with another event, the board's message needs to be made clear. Ms. Blaire stated once message is established, board can let parks know and ask staff to come up with ideas to achieve message. Ms. Blaire stated title of event is Adventure Day for All, if perhaps changing the way it is looked at like an adventure, which can be different every year.

Director Couceyro stated staff will look further into the adventure aspect of this event going forth, requested board to further discuss and provide ideas at upcoming April 1, 2026, meeting.

Fight Like You Safety Training - Mr. Jose Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez provided update regarding this training program which Ms. Dietz (DIG) and police department have been working together.

Upcoming Elections – Mail In Ballot: Mr. Jose Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez provided updated information regarding mail in ballot county procedures. Mr. Rodriguez stated if a voter requires special mail in ballot, they will need to go into the county's website, register to receive mail in ballot, which is valid for two years, and there request the special mail in ballot, for voters with disabilities. Mr. Rodriguez stated the city clerk's office has an election page which provides updated information and language will be added to stated process of requesting special mail in ballot.

Ms. Dietz stated the website and information which has already been distributed had no mention regarding requesting a disability mail in ballot. Ms. Dietz stated this matter was discussed as soon as it was first initiated at board meetings approximately a year ago and nothing was done to address it prior to information being distributed now. Ms. Dietz stated there is no information or even mention how someone who has a disability can vote and it is a form of voter suppression. Mr. Rodriguez stated that anyone who has registered for a mail in ballot will receive their ballot. Ms. Dietz stated ballots are being sent out with no real explanation of why they're different or what has changed. Mr. Rodriguez stated he will be contacting city clerk's office and work on language which can be added to the city's website. Ms.

Dietz stated there is a timing issue on this and it is getting close. Ms. Chichester expressed her extreme concern regarding this matter, especially after the board has brought up this issue several times, nothing has been done and feels this is extremely detrimental to our voting system and society, for all people.

Autism Acceptance Month – Proclamation / Resolution – Mr. Jose Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez advised board presentation will be taking place on March 10, 2026, at the commission meeting and Ms. Raquel Elejabarrieta has agreed to be this year's receipt of proclamation.

Ms. Palacio-Pike shared that she was finally able to visit and meet with staff at Ponce Middle School, and she was informed that each school has its own website. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated currently there is no clear pathway where someone can utilize to see resources and services available to people with disabilities. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated she had shared this concern with the mayor, and he advised he will be addressing this at the next commission meeting on March 10, 2026, indicating staff to work on this. Ms. Chichester stated she is very grateful for Ms. Palacio-Pike's voice and actions regarding these issues.

Autism Flag Raising event – Mr. Jose Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez advised Autism Flag raising event will be held on Thursday, April 2, 2026, at 9:00am, at Public Safety Building in front courtyard. Mr. Rodriguez stated there is a board meeting currently scheduled for the prior day, Wednesday, April 1, 2026, so if the board would like this meeting can take place after the flag raising event, it can be postponed all together, or hold both regular Wednesday meeting and Thursday, flag raising, for board to decide. Board determined meeting for Wednesday, April 1, 2026, will stay as is and the flag raising to take place on the next day as scheduled, Thursday, April 2, 2026, 9:00am. Board was advised all calendar invitations will be sent out after today's meeting.

Audible Crosswalks – Mr. Jose Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez stated he is still awaiting to hear from Lighthouse for the Blind staff regarding scheduling tour. Ms. Vanessa Bedoya stated she would be happy to reach out to them and follow up.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. Ernie Martinez introduced himself as a community activist and former board member of this board as well as others. Mr. Martinez wanted to address various issues regarding situations a person in a wheelchair can experience. Mr. Martinez stated his concern was also being issued a ticket at a local parking lot in city. Mr. Rodriguez advised the parking lot Mr. Martinez was speaking about is a private one, therefore they can charge for parking.

Accessible Street Parking – Mr. Wilfredo Jauregui

Mr. Jauregui spoke regarding lack of accessible street parking around city.

NEXT MEETING: April 1, 2026

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 11:13am

Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2nd: Wilfredo Jauregui / Approved unanimously