



**City of Coral Gables
CITY COMMISSION MEETING
September 14, 2021**

ITEM TITLE: ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS

MEETING DATE: August 11, 2021

SUMMARY OF MEETING:

QUORUM: Reached in person

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 10:05am

Introductions – Ms. Elejabarrieta

Ms. Palacio-Pike asked Ms. Elejabarrieta if there were any new reports. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised there were none, however due to there being a new board member, Ms. Samantha Duran, as well as presence of citizen advisory Ms. Bonnie Blaire if they would like to take a moment to introduce themselves.

Ms. Blaire introduced herself as one of the Board's Citizen Advisor. Ms. Blaire stated she had also served 25-30 years on this Board in its various forms. Ms. Blaire also stated that she is currently running activities for the past 1-1/2 years at the Senior Adult Activity Center for their Social Group, mostly virtually due to pandemic. Ms. Blaire stated this has been possible with assistance from Ms. Debbie Dietz of DIG, Center of Independent Living, as well as from Ericka (Community Recreation Department). Ms. Blaire stated she has continued to participate on this Board and expressed gratitude regarding being able to attend meetings. Ms. Blaire stated Board has historically conducted wonderful things under the amazing leadership by almost everyone present, especially Mr. Sando who was a fabulous Chair. Ms. Blaire stated she wrote the revised Resolution which defines the Board. Ms. Blaire advised the Board was called Handicap Parking Advisory Board.

Ms. Dietz introduced herself to the Board. Ms. Dietz advised she works at Disability Independence Group (DIG) a disability advocacy center. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated that even though Ms. Dietz is not a board member; she attends most meetings and her as well as husband are an asset/resource to the city on all issues regarding disabilities.

Ms. Palacio-Pike introduced newest board member Ms. Samantha Duran. Ms. Duran then introduced herself. Ms. Duran stated that she is an English literature and political science double major at the University of Miami and is very involved with Democrats in Miami-Dade, being the disability coordinator as well as the deputy social affairs director for Miami-Dade Young Democrats, secretary of Democrat Disability Caucus Miami-Dade Florida and Chair of Disability Support Group at Miami-Dade Democrat Party where she writes resolutions. Ms. Duran stated if it would be possible to obtain documents and information regarding various issues, such as city's ADA transition plan as well as the Barrier plan. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised information being requested by Ms. Duran is available on City's web site and she would provide link to Ms. Duran of same. Ms. Duran asked if it would include for example sidewalks and Ms. Elejabarrieta explained what is included. Ms. Duran asked if it would be possible to go forth regarding discussion of sidewalks and Ms. Elejabarrieta stated that is a more complex matter which requires further discussion and best if experts on the subject are invited to a future board meeting. Ms. Duran stated she has also seen other city's which have audio crosswalks and believes these would be very beneficial. Ms. Duran also stated she has seen pictures of stores such as groceries where they provide sensory sensitive hours and wonder if an ordinance can be passed by city for stores to offer this. Ms. Elejabarrieta explained that there are potential legal issues in telling stores what to do or not. Ms. Blaire advised that there are already entities providing this, such

as Coral Gables Cinema. Ms. Blaire stated perhaps their example is a positive way to create awareness. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated that Publix is very disability friendly business. Ms. Palacio-Pike feels that perhaps reaching out to them would be good because they already provided a similar service for the elderly during the pandemic.

Mayor Vince Lago joined the meeting.

Ms. Palacio-Pike welcomed Mayor Lago and stated she had reached out to Mayor Lago regarding the Advisory Board on Disability Affairs and promoting the Board. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised Mayor Lago currently has a listening tour to hear citizen concerns. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated this morning she took a second and snapped shot the agenda for meeting and placed it on Crystal Academy's social media platform Facebook where members of the public saw it. Ms. Palacio-Pike thanked Mayor Lago for attending meeting and supporting the Board.

Ms. Palacio-Pike continued with introduction of board member. Ms. Haley Moss spoke regarding a conference she recently attended. Ms. Moss advised she was able to participate virtually at this year's conference. Ms. Moss stated that the sessions she really liked the most were those regarding employment and stated that it is not about getting people in the door and that the illusion the corporate world has that once it hires someone with a disability their work is done, is not realistic. Ms. Moss stated what is important that once hired, to keep the person as an employee, they must be provided with training, interaction and further assistance. Ms. Moss stated one of the things which made these sessions powerful was that they were presented by persons with disabilities who are inside these companies. Ms. Moss spoke regarding initiative where major companies state they will take a pledge for disability inclusion in whereas every year the company will make a concerted effort to hire and maintain persons with disabilities as well as make workplace accessible. Ms. Moss stated what is interesting is seeing culture shifting where disability inclusion is being taken seriously. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated it would be great once the Chambers ex-officio for Coral Gables is established, for them to perhaps reach out to this entity which is in Palm Beach and start a conversation.

Mr. Sando stated it is wonderful Mayor Lago was taking the time to attend this meeting as well as recognize and support the Board. Mr. Sando stated Board has done great things, small things, but important things. Mr. Sando stated one of the Board's main goals has been to have some type of connectivity to City, Commission, and leadership so when the Board is doing things, the city is hearing us. Mr. Sando stated the City Commission was very responsive when they recognized Board wanted to have an Adventure Day which was a day to recognize someone with disabilities and it is very appreciated.

Mr. Sando stated one of the things he would like to make Mayor Lago aware of is regarding public schooling for children in the autism spectrum. Mr. Sando advised Board member Ms. Moss as well as himself are also board members of the UM Wallet program. Mr. Sando advised his children are on the autism spectrum and even though his family have been residents of the City of Coral Gables for the past 17 years, their children have not been able to attend public school within the city. Mr. Sando explained the reason for that has been the public schools within the city do not have what is called a self-contained classroom. Mr. Sando stated these are children who are going to school and are in a general ed curriculum however need the support due to being on the autism spectrum, requiring certified teachers who can provide this assistance and be able to teach them in a self-contained classroom. Mr. Sando stated he has had his children in the public school system for the past 12 years.

Mayor Lago stated he has often visited Crystal Academy, and it is a wonderful school. Mayor Lago stated while visiting Crystal he noticed there were children who have different disabilities, some physical, they are of various ages however they are together in the same room. Mayor Lago asked Mr. Sando if when he was speaking regarding autism, are these children grouped by grade level or cognitively ability, for example his daughter is a second grader therefore all the kids are second graders as well. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated she knows exactly what Mayor Lago was asking and that is one of the reasons why Crystal Academy was created due to there was nothing like it available. Mayor Lago stated his question is based on school board; he has a great relationship with Ms. Rojas as well as other School Board members. Mayor Lago stated he is asking this question based on delivery of

the Board's objective; is it on one classroom or does he need to deliver on fifteen classrooms. Mayor Lago stated people say it is K-12, however it really is not, its Pre-K 3, 4, parents, each one that have children need to go to work. Mayor Lago stated the cost of taking care of children, especially those with special needs is significantly more than ever. Mayor Lago stated he needs Board to educate him going forth so that he can support these initiatives, especially at this time were there are plans of spending several million dollars in investments at places such as Coral Gables Senior High School. Mayor Lago stated he would like to be more educated in this matter so that he can be aware of what exactly is needed. Mayor Lago stated there are projects being worked on and would like to do different things regarding autism. Mayor Lago stated Mr. Craig Leen set the bar high, and his efforts have been part of making the city what it is today regarding understanding the needs of the disability community. Mr. Sando stated that reputation has drawn acceptance as well as recognition not only within the city but also throughout the county. Mayor Lago stated it is also due to the efforts of the Board. Mayor Lago stated he has heard from other cities such as the City of Miami as well as other communities what this Board has done.

Mr. Sando stated for example, regarding Coral Gables Elementary school located right down the street, his children are unable to attend it because they are on the autism spectrum and require a self-contained classroom. Mr. Sando stated for the past 12 years his children have had to attend a Miami-Dade public school called Blue Lakes Elementary located in the City of Miami on 93rd and Miller, because they have an autism academy as well as having self-contained classroom. Mr. Sando stated that he is lucky he works in Dadeland and has been able to drop them off, making it work. Mr. Sando stated he is not sure if this is a county issue or city issue, however, feels that there should be an option available for families and children who live in Coral Gables of receiving education within a self-contained classroom in the City. Mr. Sando stated even though Miami-Dade County has made available education for these children; what is wanted is for the City of Coral Gables to have the ability to also provide education in self-contained classroom for families in need of it. Mayor Lago stated City is currently in a very good position and believes not only that everyone deserves it but has the right to an education. Mayor Lago asked Ms. Elejabarrieta for assistance regarding funds provided approximately four years ago from County Commissioner Ms. Rebecca Sosa for the City. Mayor Lago stated it is a good time to perhaps get together with Commissioner Sosa in regards how to best move forward with the legacy that she would like to leave. Mayor Lago stated if there can be a school found which can utilize these funds. Mayor Lago stated it is very important that this be addressed either via public school, private sector, or City. Mr. Sando stated he believes during past discussions it was indicated these funds allocated to the City may be tailored for adults and if proposal could be changed. Mr. Sando stated he was glad Mayor Lago brought up this issue and would like for Board to have some type of involvement with conversations regarding these funds. Mayor Lago stated that he will be asking City manager regarding these funds. Mayor Lago requested Ms. Elejabarrieta address with City Manager and provide information to him via email.

Mayor Lago asked for any information regarding number of children, young adults within the City Coral Gables who are on autism spectrum. Mr. Sando stated Ms. Moss and himself are part of the UM Card, which includes thirteen thousand families within Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe counties. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated via UM Card program, perhaps looking up zip codes of registered families would facilitate number of families within the City of Coral Gables. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated also can be done once families register on the upcoming GUIDE service. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated GUIDE is the register where residents can either register themselves or someone who lives with them that have disabilities. Ms. Elejabarrieta explained information provided will be place in CAD so when emergency Police or Fire go out to location, they are aware of any special services required by individual. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated Board has been working on this for a while and even though there have been some delays, goal is to launch it in October, Disability Awareness month and depending on participants, this will facilitate a better understanding of number of individuals with autism or any other types of disabilities that are within community.

Mayor Lago stated since Ms. Elejabarrieta mentioned October, once information is gathered, a meeting between Miami-Dade Commissioners such as Ms. Sosa and Mr. Regalado, School Board members and this Board members can be scheduled to discuss how to best proceed with this need. Mayor Lago stated it is best to be done once

information is made available of how many families need service. Mayor Lago stated he will advocate for this service but must understand what is exactly needed. Mayor Lago stated it to educate everyone, it would be best if a memo specifying exactly what is needed, how many families this would benefit be completed and presented to expediate issue.

Mr. Sando asked Ms. Blaire if Ms. Blaire was aware of the process in changing the curriculum of a school and whether each school could add a self-contained classroom themselves or whether they have to go through School Board. Ms. Blaire replied it would have to be via School Board. Ms. Blaire agreed first it is important data is collected. Ms. Blaire stated there are broad disability percentages and it is known that between 18-22 percent of the United States population have a type of disability, because we are here in Florida it is closer to 20-22 percent. Ms. Blaire stated a few years ago a study was done utilizing data from a City of Coral Gables census which was conducted. Ms. Blaire stated point is to utilize data available from census, UM Card, or other various sources. Mayor Lago stated it is important to get this type of information such as percentage out there to educate public. Ms. Blaire stated this information is established. Ms. Blaire stated Mayor's idea is good, however it would be best to do so in some type of context, such as applying it to business environment, school environment, law enforcement environment, first responder environment, hospital environment, which is done all the time with Baptist Hospital. Ms. Blaire stated this brings it back to the audible crossing signals in Miracle Mile. Ms. Blaire stated when renovation was done, this Board was able to sit in the room with personnel conducting renovation, and said the audible crossings would be put in, they were not. Ms. Dietz stated no one is listening to some of the suggestions being presented and therefore not being implemented. Mayor Lago stated that is why he is conducting the Listening Tour. Mayor Lago stated for the past seven years, his office has had in place Open Door Friday where everyone, employees, residents, members of different boards can come in without an appointment and talk about issues, as well as ideas to better the city. Mayor Lago stated as Board members, he is beyond grateful for their service to the city and their concerns are not falling on deaf ears. Ms. Blaire stated she wanted to make it clear (that on the issue of the audible signals), the deaf ears were not from the city, it was from the county.

Ms. Elejabarrieta discussed the analysis that was conducted to approximate the number of City residents with disabilities using published census data. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised applying the percentages to residents as well as increasing it a little bit due to having an older population, it was determined total using 50,999 residents that the city has 7,385 residents with disabilities. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated majority are hearing disabilities (6,630), estimated vision disability 653, cognitive disability 1,428 and ambulatory disability 2,351. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised these numbers were provided by former Board Chairperson Ms. Vanessa Liebl who had a statistician come in and work with census information applying those percentages to the City of Coral Gables. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated this information will be circulated and in October perhaps utilize this data along with the GUIDE program, Adventure Day for All, in a positive way to bring awareness.

Mayor Lago advised on the next City Commission meeting sidewalks regarding certain areas around Ponce Middle will be discussed. Mayor Lago stated there are students crossing there and it is a nightmare. Mayor Lago stated even though there are some residents who oppose sidewalks, he feels it is a travesty when there is a resident on a wheelchair which must go across the street to use the sidewalk and then come back. Mayor Lago stated it has been getting better where some sidewalks have been connected and there is a million dollars available for sidewalks.

GUIDE: Ms. Palacio-Pike

Ms. Palacio-Pike advised there is an opportunity to promote this program in the Herald Neighbor's Section during month of August. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated there is a reporter willing to assist with this. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated even though it will be going forth in October, it would be great to take this promotional opportunity now. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated information will be made available to Ms. Palacio-Pike so that she can make it available to Herald.

Mr. Sando asked recap regarding information being asked regarding registration for GUIDE. Ms. Elejabarrieta

stated it would be standard information such as name, address, age, any sensory cues, type of disability. Mr. Sando asked if a picture could be provided. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised a picture is not one of the requirements but can be provided by family. Ms. Kofkin stated information such as if there is a specific area that person may have gone to in the past.

Adventure Day for All –Ms. Ericka Kofkin

Ms. Kofkin advised Adventure Day for All will be hosted at a new location this year, Salvadore Park. Ms. Kofkin advised new date will be Saturday, October 23, 2021. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised this will also be the official ribbon cutting of the City’s first inclusive playground. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated there is more shade and it may have a similar feel to the literacy festival. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated as per Board’s request, farmers market vendors were approached regarding participating and there are a few which have already agreed to do so. Ms. Kofkin advised there will not be any rides this year, due to playground equipment already available. Ms. Kofkin advised there will not be any food trucks, therefore no issues with generators. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated resource fair will be set up as well providing information of services available for persons with disabilities. Ms. Dietz asked regarding parking. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised it would be at Saint Phillips and regarding accessible parking, there will be plenty of temporary parking marked as accessible.

Mr. Sando asked regarding if there are no rides or food trucks, what type of activities will be available. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised participants may be bringing in activities. Ms. Kofkin stated there will be activities available such as tennis demo and other activities which have been made available before on tennis court. Mr. Sando asked regarding availability of food. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated there will be food and drinks available from the farmers market vendors.

Ms. Palacio-Pike stated one of the most popular areas at the literacy festival was the reading area. Ms. Palacio-Pike asked regarding time. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised at this time it has not been determined however two time slots have been provided, 10:00am- 2:00pm or 11:00am-3:00pm. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated would later time be considered. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised she agrees the later time would be best.

Ms. Palacio-Pike stated regarding messaging promoting event, feels it would be best to include everyone and without excluding people. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated in the past it was just so much into disability that it was missed by the community. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated if perhaps having it as Adventure Day at City of Coral Gables instead. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated city would like to keep it as Adventure Day for All because it goes in connection with the whole theme regarding recreation for all and Board can brainstorm how to best proceed. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised city learned a lot regarding marketing Literacy Festival and will apply same to promoting Adventure Day for All. Mayor Lago stated it would be a good idea to reach out to Mr. Samuel Joseph, member of School Community Relations Committee, regarding the Literacy Fair which just took place, and he can be of assistance.

Mayor Lago stated best thing he has heard from Board is importance regarding “for all”, inclusion to all. Mr. Sando stated that is one of their main goals. Mr. Sando stated he grew up in a non-disability family, never interacting with anyone with a disability. Mr. Sando stated one of the things Board is trying to do is to create exposure where the disability community as well as the non-disability community benefits. Mr. Sando stated it is important to bring in the non-disability community as much as possible into these events. Mayor Lago stated this is a great opportunity for families to meet.

Update: Senior Adult Activity Center – Ms. Ericka Kofkin

Ms. Kofkin stated there are ongoing meeting regarding creating program for adults with disabilities. Ms. Kofkin advised it will be four separate evening events taking place throughout the fall. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated further information will be provided at next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Ms. Alvarez

Ms. Alvarez stated she is a Coral Gables resident. Ms. Alvarez stated she understands frustration Mr. Sando expressed because she had same issues with her son. Ms. Alvarez stated parents must conduct research on their own, City does not aid. Ms. Alvarez stated when Mr. Craig Leen was with the city she approached him, and he assisted her son who able to obtain a summer internship at Venetian Pool. Ms. Alvarez stated there is a program through Miami-Dade County Public Schools which pays young adults who are in transition into work force and is offered to kids with disabilities. Ms. Alvarez stated she believes her son has been the only one who has utilized this program. Ms. Alvarez stated City of Hialeah Hall hires interns from this program. Ms. Alvarez stated it shows them how to obtain and keep a job. Ms. Alvarez stated her son is now gainfully employed and believes it is due to having had the opportunity of internship at Venetian pool. Ms. Alvarez stated wanted to advise Board of program and believes its' called Summer Internship Program. Ms. Alvarez stated this is something the city should look into it. Ms. Alvarez stated she would love to have her son come in and speak of his experience with the program. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised upon receiving Ms. Alvarez's email regarding this, she immediately conducted research and found program is through the Children's Trust Fund. Ms. Elejabarrieta explained it is only a summer program and unfortunately, she found out about it too late for this year. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised it is already on her calendar in December to further look over. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised Mr. Fred Couceyro, Community Recreation Director as well as Ms. Carolina Vester, Community Recreation Assistant Director are excited and due to their operation, they believe they will be able to handle for next summer anywhere from five and ten interns. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised she asked if there was the possibility of a fall or spring program and was advised it is only summer. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised Ms. Vester was very touched by Ms. Alvarez's email and glad to hear her son is gainfully employed which she credits a lot his success to the opportunity he had as an intern in the Gables. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated city will continue with this program.

Ms. Palacio-Pike asked what the age group would be. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised it must be high schoolers due to funds utilized are from the Children's Trust Fund, there are limitations as to eligibility requirements, one being they must attend high school. Ms. Dietz advised students get paid and it is an amazing program. Ms. Dietz advised they have participated in the past. Mr. Sando stated he thought it was a non-paid internship. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated the participants get paid then also attend classes where they are taught financial management. Ms. Dietz stated the Children's Trust Fund must have certain percentages of participants with disabilities in what they do. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated when she spoke with the Children's Trust regarding this program, they advised it was not limited for children with disabilities. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised them the city would like it to be for children with disabilities only. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated they were very excited to hear this, and advised it is available to all cities as well as open for all children.

Mayor Lago stated about two years ago he started a PAGE Program at the city, which he sponsored, and Chelsea was instrumental in leading the effort which has been very successful. Mayor Lago advised there are seven participants. Mayor Lago stated they have done it now for three years, however unable to do it Mayor Lago stated about two years ago he started a PAGE Program at the city, which he sponsored, and Chelsea was instrumental in leading the effort which has been very successful. Mayor Lago advised there are seven participants. Mayor Lago stated they have done it now for three years, however unable to do it last year due to Covid; however, it is now available and brought back the cream of the crop. Mayor Lago stated these are young men and woman who are high schoolers and do a great job. Mayor Lago stated the City of Miami has a handful of young adults which have disabilities that work at City Hall. Mayor Lago stated they are hard workers, sweet, friendly, and become like part of the family. Ms. Dietz stated program is called Project Search and the City of Coral Gables can apply to get one. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated this is also done in the City of Hialeah. Mayor Lago stated he would love to sponsor this program along with sponsoring paid summer internship just spoken about. Mayor Lago stated its' important to empower, build, expanding on the interest by placing participants in areas where they are given an opportunity to truly participate in something they want to pursue.

Project Search – Ms. Palacio-Pike

Ms. Palacio-Pike stated she believes the amazing students in the PAGE program perhaps can be role models for

those with disabilities. Ms. Palacio-Pike feels this would be a beautiful partnership between PAGE and young adults which can be participants in Project Search through city next year.

Mr. Sando asked if Project Search is for kids or adults. Ms. Dietz stated it is for children which are over eighteen but younger than twenty-two who are technically still in the public school system, this becomes their placement. Ms. Dietz stated it is a national formalized program which must be applied for and there is currently three in Miami, City of Miami, City of Hialeah, and Metro Zoo. Ms. Dietz stated it is a wonderful program and if City of Coral Gables could get in it, it's unbelievable. Ms. Dietz stated it is like old fashion work study, where you go to school in the morning and then afternoon is at your employment. Ms. Dietz stated it is supported by Best Buddies as job coaches, public school teachers provide training which is very hands on with whichever city or business its at. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised it is through school board. Ms. Dietz stated City of Miami parks runs it in conjunction with Best Buddies and school board.

Mayor Lago stated when attending a City of Miami commission meeting, you can see these young participants interacting with staff such as Mayor with great enthusiasm, which is great. Mayor Lago stated they build a lot of self-worth and have real purpose. Mayor Lago stated he would like to sponsor both programs discussed. Mayor Lago asked Ms. Elejabarrieta to further research regarding these and advise.

NEXT MEETING: September 1, 2021

ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 11:16am

Motion to Adjourn: Mr. Sando / 2nd Motion: Ms. Duran / All approved unanimously

ATTACHMENT(S):

Minutes of the August 11, 2021, Meeting