

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item C-1**  
**February 27, 2018**  
**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, Miriam Ramos**  
**City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman**  
**Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Miami-Dade County Commissioner, Rebeca Sosa**  
**Jennifer DeRoche, Director, UM CARD**  
**Mari Palacio Pike**

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Agenda Item C-1 [9:30:38 a.m.]

Mayor's Comments

Conversation regarding autism and Coral Gables contributions to the situation and possible suggestions.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And now, I'd like to go onto our Time Certain 9:15, it's now 9:30, and ask our County Commissioner, very distinguished, Rebeca Sosa to come up to the podium. Rebeca will tell us a little bit more or a lot more about it. She has been very, very involved as we have in the fight to help with autism. One out of every 68 kids today suffers from autism; and we have a very fine Crystal Academy private school in Coral Gables, but there is also a great need and one of Rebeca's staff told me about it, a great need for daycare centers; and Rebeca you want to talk about this?

Commissioner Sosa: Mr. Mayor thank you, Madam Vice Mayor, Commissioners, administration, it's a pleasure to be here and to see your working government commendations on your selection and the challenge that you have. You are champions and you are going to continue to follow that path for the wonderful residents of the City Beautiful. Mr. Mayor thank you for allowing me this opportunity and I have been giving you a hard time before. I, as a teacher, feel a very deep necessity and try to walk in the shoes of those parents who have children with autism; and someone who was here many years before, Craig Leen and that now is in an incredible place and we are proud of him. I owe him everything I know about this. I owe him a lot, because he taught me a lot about what it meant to be a father or a mother or grandparents. We have students in our schools with autism, we have specialized schools, but the problem is that sometimes it comes the time with some of them cannot continue in school, and that is the biggest problem that parents have. It's an incredible challenge for them, because it means that that child, that youngster have to stay at home and one of them have to quit their job to stay at home, which means less resources to be able to help those children. So, we came up with the idea with all of you and I thank you for that, to be able to do a daycare for those who cannot go to school anymore, so parents can continue working to be able to provide for them, and then you will be the one saying, they are here, they are taken care of, and this is the best way to do it, and I gave you \$1.5 million dollars as a contribution from the County to be able to accomplish this dream that I thank you Mr. Mayor for your support and to all of you Commissioners. Let's make it a reality. Let's walk in those shoes. We don't have a daycare for youngsters with autism in Miami-Dade County. Coral Gables will be the first one and I have to say that Board Member Mari Tere Rojas had to leave to another meeting, but she wanted me to share with you that you have the full support in everything we decide to do. It's up to you. It's in your hands. I will follow your lead, all of you, I'm just one person here to support the idea, to do that contribution, but it's going to be the City Beautiful that will not only take care of sea level rise, thank God, and not only take care of the beautiful canopies and the atmosphere that you have in your City, but you are taking care of those that really need your help. And, I thank you for that from the bottom of my heart.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much Commissioner. It's a very much, I think of an unrecognized need that daycare center when you have the specialized school, who do a wonderful job, but this is also for the parents, for their children, for the economic ability to take

care of the child and we thank you for your initiative. Commissioner Lago, you are a good friend of the Commissioner, would you like to say a few words too?

Commissioner Lago: Sure, why not. Chairwoman, I appreciate you like always being here and being present and always representing us with such dignity and class. Since I've been elected over the last four years, you have been reminding me, if not on a weekly basis, on a monthly basis not to pester me saying, hey, I did offer you \$1.5 million dollars, when are we going to finally get that money to work? So, you could have taken that money and use it for all the other necessities that you have in your District, your District is expansive and it has needs outside of the City of Coral Gables, but you always stayed committed, you stayed the course. You understood that eventually we'll find the perfect way to spend that money, and it's interesting because like you mentioned Craig Leen, and it's so appropriate that you mention him, because Craig has really been such an advocate on behalf of individuals with autism, and especially, we always forget about Crystal Academy has always done a great job in kind of fostering that relationship. We always forget about the parents, who have to go to work every single day to pay for the expensive and much needed type of care, because it's very specialized. So, I think that with your monies and your commitment over the last four years, which we can't get this accomplished without that money. So, I just want to say thank you for sticking with the City of Coral Gables. I knew eventually we would deliver on something that would make you proud; and I want to say thank you to the Mayor, because I know this came through the Mayor's office, as the Manager said, and I know that Vice Mayor Keon has also been advocating on behalf of all my colleagues, Commissioner Mena, Commissioner Quesada. This is a team effort, but thank you for giving us the \$1.5 million dollars and I know it's been tough to find an actual delivery, but we got it done, so thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Sosa: Thank you Mr. Mayor for your support to all of you. I have to tell you that I am very proud of the work you are doing and I am honored to represent part of the Gables and I will always walk next to you to be able to represent them at the County level.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And I have a comment for you, a threat. Our work starts now.

Commissioner Sosa: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli:...to make this a reality and thank you for being here and all of your help.

Commissioner Quesada: Commissioner you've always been great with us, so thank you so much. You are always available, you always meet with our residents, you always help us with whatever is going on, so we can't thank you enough and we can't praise you enough. So thank you so much. If we ever can help you, please let us know.

Commissioner Sosa: Nothing to thank for. This is what those that we represent deserve from us to work together, which is when things really happen, never divide, always together to deliver for them. Nothing can happen because of one person, everything happens because of working together. So, thank you very much all of you.

Commissioner Lago: Absolutely. Thank you. If I could just also take one moment, I want to tell you because I don't really get to speak about this outside of the Commission. I'll take the opportunity to really quickly touch upon it. The Commissioner, I call the Chairwoman; the Chairwoman has been advocating on behalf of the City of Coral Gables and transportation for the last few years. I have the pleasure and honor of serving with her on the TPO and she is an advocate of delivering on the S.M.A.R.T. Plan, let's stop building and let's stop building highways and expressways, let's maintain our expressways, let's maintain our bridges, but let's deliver on the S.M.A.R.T. Plan. She was one of the first to really stand firm on that and she's been advocating on behalf; and like I mentioned to her on many occasions, we have hundreds of thousands of vehicles that traverse through the City of Coral Gables. We can't stop them, we can't stop them, but I just want you to know that she's been advocating on our behalf and she's been doing a great job and we are grateful for that. Thank you.

Commissioner Sosa: And I will continue to do that, so thank you very much. It's wonderful to see you. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Rebeca. Thank you Commissioner.

[Applause]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We have three people that wish to speak; one is Mari Tere Rojas, who we've been told has left. She's our School Board Representative. The next is Susan Marentis, is on autism – Susan. No, she doesn't want to speak. OK. Jennifer DeRoche who wishes to speak – Jennifer. Brief please. Hi.

Ms. DeRoche: Hi. Thank you so much for letting me speak Mayor, Commissioners. I just wanted to say a few words on behalf of the University of Miami Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, which as you know is based in Coral Gables, I'm its Director. We are quite happy to hear this item and the idea of having a center. You know that there is a dearth of services for children with autism after school hours, after they graduate from school; and we want to offer our enthusiastic support and to let you know that CARD is willing to do whatever is needed to help make this a reality and help shape the programming for this new initiative. So thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you very much. And Mari Palacio Pike. Hi.

Ms. Pike: Good morning and thank you again for this amazing opportunity, again thank you. As a parent of a child with autism and seeing what the City of Coral Gables has been doing for my son and for all the children that we are serving at Crystal Academy, this is the perfect City to do this. I mean this City has opened the doors for our children to go into the Youth Center to inclusion camps. Our children actually go into the City, they walk, they take the trolley, and for adults that have this disability and that can offer so many other things to our community, this is a beautiful and for me as a parent, a dream come true if the City actually comes to fruition. So, thank you so much for this and at Crystal Academy again, we are at your service with all our therapists and everything that we know, all the...that we have shared with the UM CARD and we are ready when you are ready. Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you so much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much – and I wish to invite the Commissioners and everybody else on our Farmers Market on Saturday morning, close to the main door of City Hall, there is a stand that sells macaroons and it is staffed and these macaroons are made by children with autism. So it is a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful way to support them and the macaroons are great, by the way. Thank you very much.

[End: 9:41:45 a.m.]