

**CITY OF CORAL GABLES ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS  
 CITY OF CORAL HUMAN RESOURCES & RISK MANAGEMENT  
 214 Minorca Avenue, Coral Gables FL 33134  
 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2025 MEETING MINUTES**

<b>MEMBERS</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>APPOINTED BY:</b>
	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	
Jennifer Ward Sando	P	E	P										Mayor Vince Lago
Justine Chichester	P	P	P										Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Mary Palacio-Pike	P	P	P										Commissioner Kirk Menendez
Bonnie Blaire	P	P	P										Commissioner Melissa Castro
Vanessa Bedoya	P	P	P										Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Eddy Martinez	-	-	P										Ex-Officio Member Chamber of Commerce

**PZ = Via Zoom**

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

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

**QUORUM:** Quorum was reached

**STAFF:**

Raquel Elejabarrieta – Human Resources Director  
 Eglys Hernandez – P/T Administrative Assistant Labor Relations & Risk Management  
 Sarah Espino- Community Recreation – Administrative Operations Supervisor  
 Catie Hastings - Community Recreation – D.E.I. Coordinator  
 Ana Lam- Crime Watch Volunteer / School Community Relations Committee

**GUEST:**

**CITIZEN ADVISORS:**

Debbie Dietz  
 Jennifer Durocher, Director of UM-NSU Card (Via Zoom)

**PUBLIC GUEST:**

Ms. Pamela Perez-Melms, Cultivate Behavioral Health & Education

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Meeting was called to order 10:05am

**MEETING ABSENCE:**

None

**MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:**

February 5, 2025

Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2<sup>nd</sup> Vanessa Bedoya / Approved unanimously

**SECRETARY'S REPORT:** None

**BOARD MEMBERS' REPORTS:** None

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Ms. Palacio-Pike advised the board that no commission meeting will be held in April. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised the board had discussed to not have a board meeting on April 2, 2025, due to that date being the raising of the Autism flag will be held at City Hall. Ms. Palacio-Pike advised at the March 11, 2025, commission meeting a Proclamation and Resolution celebrating Autism Acceptance Month will be presented and this year it will be accepted by the Fire Department. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated she had spoken with the Fire Department, and they have agreed to accept it. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated it usually takes place around 9:30am.

Ms. Palacio-Pike advised at the raising of the flag on April 2, 2025, Commissioner Raquel Regalado will be present. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated they will have a small presentation at the flag raising.

**Autism April Caravan – Ms. Palacio-Pike**

Ms. Palacio-Pike provided information regarding the upcoming April Autism Caravan on April 11, 2025, however, this date is Friday, so she will need to confirm the date and advise same to board.

**Developing Community Communications – Ms. Bonnie Blaire**

Ms. Blaire spoke regarding discussion at the last meeting of issues, some of the uniqueness this board addresses within our community. Ms. Blaire stated the board needs to think about how to communicate with the board's particular community. Ms. Blaire stated she believes this board has struggled with trying to identify and reach the Board's constituency.

Board further discussed various programs in place, such as G.U.I.D.E. Ms. Lam advised the last time a crime watch meeting was held; she provided the G.U.I.D.E. informative cards to those present. Board members expressed their concerns and thoughts regarding identifying members of the community which are vulnerable. Mr. Eddie Martinez stated he would gladly bring G.U.I.D.E. information to the chamber so it can be shared with others. Ms. Elejabarrieta provided information of process to register with the G.U.I.D.E. program.

Ms. Blaire stated she is not speaking about emergencies, she is speaking of what is the incentive for the rest of the population, people who we want to reach out to and talk about programming and quality of life. Ms. Blaire stated for board to think about how to identify and incentivize our disabled community for them to feel comfortable and look at Coral Gables as their home. Ms. Dietz stated she believes this system is already in place, however, it seems the issue is promoting the information. Ms. Dietz stated perhaps within the mailers sent by commissioners this information could be included. Ms. Sando asked if each individual commissioner can be provided with information to share. Ms. Chichester shared a discussion with Commissioner Menedez at an event and shared information with him of the various programs happening and about having more representation at events. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated she believes each member should contact their commissioner and share information. Ms. Blaire stated it would be best if the message came from a singular voice and perhaps it would be best to reach out to our administrator for assistance with this. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated she will draft an email focusing on April Autism Acceptance Month and provide information such as G.U.I.D.E. and other programs.

Ms. Elejabarrieta stated regarding information of the board to be given to Ms. Pantin as part of the Centennial and who should be speaking, Ms. Blaire was nominated as the spoke person. The Board continued to discuss how to best share information, Centennial program, services available, etc.

Ms. Bedoya asked if during the process of gathering all this information, could a quick video be created. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated Ms. Pantin advised videos are not popular compared to all that must be done to create them and do not get a lot of views. Ms. Lam stated she disagrees with the idea that videos are not popular. Ms. Lam stated in the past when videos were utilized, she received a lot of positive comments. Ms. Sando stated she knows of someone who has a lot of followers and perhaps can provide them with information to share. Ms. Dietz stated it would be fun to do something with other similar boards. Ms. Blaire stated the board should put on their thinking hats and try to come up with ideas of how to reach our special community, how to identify them and let them know the services available.

#### **Legislation / Training-Defensive Course for Individuals with Disabilities – Ms. Elejabarrieta**

Ms. Elejabarrieta advised of the meeting which took place in December 2024, with Chief Hudak, Ms. Debbie Dietz, Ms. Justine Chichester and herself regarding self-defense classes for people with disabilities. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated during the meeting, it went from classes to researching and creating legislation. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated Ms. Dietz was able to locate a statute stating making it a felony “Anyone is convicted of an assault on a person sixty-five years and older” and Ms. Dietz suggested if this could be amended to say, “a person of sixty-five years old or disabled.” Ms. Chichester stated the Chief Hudak was very receptive to the idea and helpful. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated they are also continuing to explore possible training courses.

Ms. Lam provided information regarding M-DCPS Mental Services

#### **Next Board Meeting- Ms. Elejabarrieta**

The board discussed and agreed to have a meeting on April 2, 2025, 11:00am, after the Raising of the Flag presentation somewhere in City Hall or next door at 427 Biltmore Way.

Ms. Lam shared information regarding the upcoming Coral Gables Woman’s Club Annual Children’s feast, April 5, 2025, 11:00am to 3:00pm. Ms. Lam stated that there will be a dental clinic for children of the community which do not have Medicaid. Ms. Dietz stated prior to inviting people with disabilities to assure the venue is accessible.

#### **OLD BUSINESS:**

G.U.I.D.E. Participation – Ms. Elejabarrieta advised there currently approximately seventeen participants.

#### **Crosswalks – Ms. Elejabarrieta**

Ms. Bedoya asked regarding the crosswalks for people who are blind. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated an audit has been conducted around the business district and has identified what is needed. Ms. Blaire asked if audible crosswalks had been approved. Ms. Elejabarrieta provided information on the ones which have been approved such as on LeJeune, Minorca, Andalusia, Bird Road, Valencia. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated this is FDOT and design is set to begin in 2025, first in design and then so on. Ms. Blaire asked regarding the ones on Miracle Mile and Ms. Elejabarrieta advised those are not yet approved. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised she will follow up and provide an update at next month’s meeting. Ms. Elejabarrieta stated that the project on the Segovia side of coral way to make the path on Granada accessible will be breaking ground sometime before this summer. Ms. Elejabarrieta advised the Anderson side is a county project, and they are planning on breaking ground at the end of this year.

#### **Parks & Recreation – Ms. Sarah Espino**

Ms. Espino shared pictures of a My Squad event where participants went to a UM Baseball game. Ms. Espino advised the upcoming Battle of the Badges April 12, 2025, will be open to anyone who would like to participate. Ms. Espino stated they are currently working with the police department due to there is another event on same day and there may not be enough police officers available to participate. Ms. Espino stated they are trying for a weekend because the board prefers that, however it is more challenging than if it were during the weekday.

Ms. Espino advised board of the upcoming Gentle Easter Egg Hunt taking place on April 19, 2025. Ms. Espino advised currently Ms. Hastings, and her staff are promoting our programs at a disability fair hosted by Key Biscayne in hopes of generating more of a case load for our summer camp program.

Ms. Espino advised Ms. Hastings last Saturday had the Parent-to-Parent event, where a bunch of people signed up for the email. Ms. Espino advised their main way of pushing out information is via email and how two separate groups have been created, making it easier to obtain information directly. Ms. Espino stated one email group is the Adult Activity Center and the other is Accessible Recreation. Ms. Espino provided further information regarding other programs, Leo's Wonder Lab, ESports Tournament, etc. Ms. Espino advised of the upcoming event for the Teen Group which will take place at the Putt Putt Golf. Ms. Espino stated parents will be able to have their kids participate and there will be some staff there. Ms. Espino stated parents will be allowed to stay. Ms. Lam stated any information Ms. Espino would like to provide; she would share with the School Community Relations Committee.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Meeting adjourned at 11:05am  
Motion to Adjourn: Bonnie Blaire / 2<sup>nd</sup> Justine Chichester / Approved unanimously.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None

**NEXT MEETING:** April 2, 2025