

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting  
Agenda Item F-4  
December 16, 2014  
City Commission Chambers  
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Jim Cason**

**Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.**

**Commissioner Pat Keon**

**Commissioner Vince Lago**

**Commissioner Frank Quesada**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark**

**City Attorney, Craig E. Leen**

**City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman**

**Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Raquel Regalado, Miami-Dade County School Board Member**

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Agenda Item F-4 [Start:10:24:41 a.m.]

Discussion regarding West Lab

Mayor Cason: All right, we're going to move, since we have Rachel Regalado here from the School Board and can't stay all morning, we'll move into F-4 and F-6, and then we'll get back to the other pulled items.

Ms. Regalado: Thank you so much.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor.

Commissioner Quesada: Welcome.

Commissioner Lago: How are you?

Ms. Regalado: Thank you very much. I'm wonderful. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you. As many of know, we've talked about this for several times. I want to thank those of you who attended the Attendance Boundary Committee. I think the summary that was done by your staff encompasses exactly what occurred, and I want to thank you for that. Here today in case you have any questions and just to make a point about the different issues that were discussed and what I believe should be distinguished. I think it's wonderful that you attended the Attendance Boundary Committee. I think that the conversation about Control Choice is long overdue. My only concern is that that is a conversation that is going to take a certain amount of time and possibly some legal action when we talk about changing it. As you know and was explained by the Attendance Boundary meeting, Controlled Choice was a result of several litigations involving Miami-Dade County Public Schools and...

Commissioner Quesada: Can I stop you for one second?

Ms. Regalado: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: Just so whoever's listening, who wasn't there because I know the Mayor wasn't there, Commissioner Lago wasn't there; they got the briefings just so we can sort of summarize for the people in the audience and the people at home, Commissioner Keon, the City Attorney, the Interim City Manager and myself who am I missing?

City Attorney Leen: Abby.

Commissioner Keon: Abby.

Commissioner Quesada: Abby.

Commissioner Keon: Our outside counsel.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm sorry. Our outside consultant, Abby, was there. I apologize. I always forget your last name.

Ms. Corbett: Corbett.

Commissioner Quesada: Corbett who does a great job for us. We attended the ABC, or the Attendance Boundary Committee, where the School Board -- two weeks ago now? And we went because we were discussing the controlled choice requirement that the City of Coral Gables residents currently experience. So if you live in Coral Gables and you want to send your child to a public school, you enter into a lottery system, and you either end up attending Sunset Elementary, Coral Gables Preparatory, or Carver Elementary. And you could live right next door to Carver and end up going to Sunset or Gables Prep, or you could live next door to Sunset Prep and end up going to one of the other two. So we, as Commissioners and staff, we've heard many complaints and many concerns related to this. So the Attendance Boundary Committee is a committee that looks at these issues and then determines whether the boundary should be changed, and as it stands right now, and I think this is what, you were getting into it, and I'll pass it right back to you. I just want to give everyone the background, that we are the only district in Miami-Dade County that still adheres to this controlled choice system. And there are a lot of frustrations because when you find out what school your child is going to attend, it could be after the private school deadlines, after the magnet school deadline, so you're almost stuck if you're not happy with where you end up, so it causes a lot of frustration for residents. So we went on behalf of the City and behalf of the residents to see if we can make a change, see if we can create districts in the sense that if you live next to a certain school or closer to one school, you attend that school. We were really there just to let the Attendance Boundary Committee, which supports the School Board, to let them know what the concerns are and see if we can make a positive change. Did I catch about --?

Commissioner Keon: Yes, and I think we relayed the concerns of our residents, our concerns as representatives of those elected of those residents to the ABC and asked them to study it. Now, what the outcome may be, you know, we don't know. We may find that there is, you know, a

solution that we haven't thought of, whatever. But we know that the process that is currently in place does not serve our citizens well.

Commissioner Quesada: Correct.

Commissioner Keon: And Abby did a particularly good job in preparing and providing the background and the information and everything else with it, and so I'd also like her to speak after this.

Ms. Regalado: Definitely. That's fine.

Commissioner Quesada: One more thing before I pass it right back over to you. For those watching it at home, this does not affect your students if they're currently enrolled in one of these Public Schools. These are future applicants. I don't want to scare anyone that you're going to get pulled out of school.

Ms. Regalado: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: So with that, thank you for being here today.

Ms. Regalado: No, my pleasure. At the Attendance Boundary Committee, like you mentioned there was discussion. My appointee to that committee, Laura Wides-Munoz, made a motion for the district to study the impact that Controlled Choice has on Coral Gables residents. That is forthcoming. The Attendance Boundary does not meet until February, and that is why I wanted to speak to you about West Lab. West Lab has sort of been thrown into this mix. However, it is a separate and distinct issue. The West Lab expansion has to go forward. As you know, I was before you over a month ago when we had several West Lab parents talk about their desire to turn that school into a K-8. Commissioner Lago, as you just mentioned, many of these parents are going to have to make a decision come February whether they're going to pay for a private school option for their children if West Lab is not expanded or slated to be expanded. At the School District level, we have to make, in my estimation, a decision and communicate that

decision to the parents of those fifth graders so that they can make a clear choice in February. If we do not make a decision on the West Lab K-8 expansion, they will then go to private schools or other Public Schools, and we will have to wait until the following year when those fifth graders are then able to become sixth graders to have the conversation about the expansion of the facility. As many of you know, we've met with University of Miami and with Baptist Health Systems. Baptist Health is going to be the contributing the larger part of the amount needed for the K-8 expansion at West Lab. West Lab was the first choice school. It happens to be in the City Coral Gables. However, it is a school that is open to all Miami-Dade County residents, even though there is a core group of Coral Gables residents that have been attending West Lab because of way that the lottery is conducted at West Lab. As you learned during that public hearing, unlike other Public Schools where the lottery system is electronic, the West Lab lottery system for many years, has been standing in a line for hours waiting to get your number in the hopes of entering that lottery. That has allowed a lot of Coral Gables residents in the area, because of their proximity, to get into that line a little bit earlier than other people who live further away. However, once West Lab enters the electronic lottery, that will change, which is why I brought the issue of the West Lab expansion to you several months ago, and I hope that you will continue to consider your participation in said expansion. My viewpoint is that the School District has to make a decision. I know that some of you have also spoken to the University of Miami. Our talks with University of Miami, I think, have resulted in a very good compromise. As many of you know, one of the issues that the University of Miami has been what occurs to the Lincoln Trail property that is zoned for multi-residential. That has always been an issue with the residents that live adjacent to that property; that have been using that vacant land for several years. What we're discussing with the University of Miami right now is splitting our two parcels, allowing them to build facility on a part of the parcel, closing the road in between the two parcels so that we would be on the other side. That way, they wouldn't be landlocked by our new construction, and the residents would get a buffer that they can continue to use. More importantly, the concession made by UM (University of Miami), is that they will not be building residential or multi-residential facilities, but rather administrative buildings particularly for the expansion of their business school, which is something that I've spoken to the local residents about and they're very happy with because of the transit issue and the traffic. Obviously, there's some concerns with the K-8 expansion and what impact that would have on

the traffic in the area. The University of Miami has made a large investment to ensure that the traffic congestion in the area has been kept at a minimum. One of the benefits of splitting the parcel with the University of Miami is that we'll be able to create a roundabout, the closing of the street, and ensure a fast and easy access in and out, particularly for the elementary school children which, as you know, are the ones that have the tendency to create more traffic and traffic congestion. We're working with the University of Miami to ensure that the traffic issue is resolved, and that the parking lot that will be built for Baptist will also be accessible by foot, which is something that we can do if we place it on their side of the property, as close as possible to the hospital. In that way, we don't have that much traffic back and forth from the employees that are going to be using the parking lot. So, I just want to keep you abreast of the different conversations that we're having so that you understand that we are moving forward. I continue to hope that the City of Coral Gables will make an investment. I really do believe that the purchase of residential seats could be something that's very beneficial for West Lab. As to the Attendance Boundary Committee, as I've said on many occasions, I understand your frustration. I have mentioned it at the School Board also. I thank you for your participation and your request. I look forward to the response from the Attendance Boundary Commission, and I hope that it will one that is positive for Coral Gables. However, I fear that it will be a longer process than what we're doing with West Lab, and I want to ensure that we keep the two issues separate going forward.

Commissioner Keon: It's -- I think it's hard, well, did you want to address West Lab?

Commissioner Lago: I wanted just to make sure that School Board member was aware that I had put that on the agenda for today.

Ms. Regalado: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: As a discussion item, amongst the Commission. I don't know if you want to have the discussion right now. I think it would be --

Commissioner Keon: I think it all goes...I think it all kind of belongs together.

Commissioner Lago: Everything comes together. My main focus is going to be in regards to two things. Number one, what is your exact schedule? What are we looking at? What are your milestones in regards to the direction you're headed right now, in reference to the bond money that's allocated from the bond funds. Because I want to obviously not spend money on design if we're going to move in a direction of buying these seats, because obviously, the proposed project would change significantly. So that's number one. And number two, I want to find out -- I wish Vice Mayor Kerdyk was here so we could find out the appetite of this Commission so we can finally put this to rest. If you tell me that, you know, we need to have a decision made within the next three months because a PO (Purchase Order) or work order has been given to an architect to start doing conceptual drawings, then obviously we need to move quickly in regards to that.

Ms. Regalado: To respond to your question, we have not commissioned any architectural drawings. I have commissioned some initial drawings as to the splitting of the parcel and the zoning use of the splitting of the parcel, what would be needed to pose a street so that we can enter into an agreement with the University of Miami and Baptist. That is a necessary component that does not impact the size of the building that will be built. We have also requested some information regarding the density when we talk about the size of the building, and we're looking at mimicking some of the architecture at the existing buildings around the University of Miami so that it will look like it is part of the campus, but that does not impact the actual school space. However, like I mentioned to Commissioner Quesada, my concern is that the parents of the children who are currently at West Lab that would be filling the first year of that extension, they would be the fifth graders becoming sixth graders, are going to have to make a decision in February. They're applying to magnet programs now by January 15, but by February, they're going to have to decide which schools they're going to attend. If I am unable to have an agreement signed with the University of Miami, Baptist, and hopefully Coral Gables, it's going to be very difficult to be able to offer them that expansion. That being said, if we lose that fifth-grade class, then we would have to wait until the following year so that the incoming fourth graders would then fill those fifth-grade seats, and that's my concern and has been from the onset regarding the timing. The ideal situation would be to enter into an agreement during the early parts of this year so that we can have construction in the summer. As many of you know,

Miami-Dade County Public Schools is subject to the Jennifer Lunsford Act. As such, it makes it very difficult for us to build schools during the school year. We can do it, but it's a little bit more expensive; and the logistics, especially when you're dealing with small children, get a little complicated. In the case of West Lab, the plan that we were considering will tear down most of the facility, and that's something that would have to occur in the summer, which would then put us another summer waiting for the actual construction. Now, what we have done in other areas is put the incoming sixth graders in a portable. However, that gets us into a bunch of issues regarding portables, your rules for portables, the University of Miami's appetite to have a portable sitting there for a year waiting for the following summer to have that construction. That is something that the School District can do. We've done it at MAST (Marine Academy of Science Technology) Academy. We put the new incoming grade in the portable. Most parents are fine with it. However, this is not something that I want to delay for another two summers. I really believe we have a fantastic opportunity here. And I like I said before, the commitment that I'm asking for the district is one of a stem curriculum that will then feed into Coral Gables Senior High, so the sooner we get that started, the easier it is to create the second component at the senior high where we will be discussing architectural drawings in the next 12 months.

Commissioner Keon: Go ahead. Do you have anything else?

Commissioner Lago: No, no. Basically, I had a discussion with the interim City Manager and the City Manager yesterday, and we had a discussion in reference to what the cost would be, you know, and we discussed it in reference to our current bond situation. And these are kind of discussions that we're going to have to... policy decisions that we're going to have to make as a Commission. And I don't know if we're ready to make them or even fully vet them today without the Vice Mayor.

Commissioner Keon: Well, I don't think that we could fully vet them yet, there's a great deal of information yet that needs to come forward, but I have a number of concerns. I have some concerns with some of the things that you said. I mean, particularly with the University of Miami and whatever agreement they make with the school system. Isn't the entire parcel of the University of Miami except for that small parcel of land that was conveyed to the school system,



doesn't that come under the UMCAD (University of Miami Campus Area Development), under the development agreement between the City and University?

City Attorney Leen: I'd like to say two things in response to that. First, on the broader issue of what is the School Board's authority over zoning. The School Board for a long time, and they based this in state law, has a lot of authority over zoning. Nevertheless, I've developed an argument, which we're using in the County right now, which I think is a good argument; I think it's valid, that we do need to be involved to the extent that we have a higher standard of zoning in this City. And with the County, what we've been able to do is work out with them an ability to review what's going forward under the County Charter, which is based on a Constitutional amendment to the State Constitution, so in my view, could take precedence over a state statute granting them primary zoning authority, but I do believe we should be involved as a matter of comity, at the very least, in making sure that what's ever being placed there, we've had a look at and we've been able to give our comments and perhaps even our approval. On the specific issue of UM, we certainly have zoning authority over UM. We do have a development agreement with UM. We also have a design plan with UM related to their campus. And anything that's under UM's authority or jurisdiction would be under our jurisdiction because UM is in our city. So we have the zoning authority for the City.

Ms. Regalado: Craig, if I could just add something --

Commissioner Keon: So anything --

Ms. Regalado: But if I could just add something really quickly to explain the legal aspect of it. University of Miami entered into an agreement many years ago with the School District, giving us the property that is now West Lab. Any agreement that we have with the University of Miami would be an amendment to that existing compact. The land that we would be taking and exchanging with the University of Miami, we would then have dominion as owners. We would exchange part of the parcel that would go to the University of Miami and part of the parcel that would go to us. Our legal opinion and our Legal Department has said that, as Craig was just explaining, once the property becomes ours, we have the ultimately decision as to what to do

with the property. Of course, we want your input. We want you to be involved. We want you to be happy with the construction that we have on that parcel. However, what our Legal Department has said is that your approval pertains only to University of Miami part, not to the School District part as to the conveyance.

Commissioner Keon: But we understand that.

City Attorney Leen: I just want you to be aware, though, that's not exactly -- I understand that. To the board member, I do understand that. And I'll talk to the School Board Attorney's Office.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

City Attorney Leen: And the School Board attorney is one of the top attorneys in this area, and I respect him greatly, but I don't completely agree. I do think that for example, anything that's currently in UM's jurisdiction that's being switched to the School Board may be subject to certain agreements, may be subject to certain covenants. I don't believe that the School Board can just extinguish them by...

Commissioner Keon: And the development agreement that currently exists, under the City.

City Attorney Leen: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Though I think the City still has jurisdiction -- I mean, what happens on that parcel of land that is currently conveyed, you know, I --

City Attorney Leen: I think we have a part to play, it is what I am saying.

Commissioner Keon: You know, certainly is under the jurisdiction of the school system, but anything that is currently not currently covered under that covenant before the University of Miami can enter into another agreement. We have an agreement with them, which is a development agreement which they would have to come back and amendment in order for them

to be able to do that. So I think that we play a very significant role in what happens on that site with regard to land use and zoning. The other concern that I have...one, I know the University of Miami has put a lot of resources into Ponce Middle School, and you know, it was our understanding that they didn't want to do anything that would undermine Ponce Middle School, as a high-quality middle school; that they have a lot of personnel. They are now at Ponce working with Ponce to bring it back to a real school of excellence. The other concern I have is that...

Ms. Regalado: Let me just quick, before you continue, if I could just answer one thing, because I think it's important to understand. The agreement that we have with the University, the agreement that we're considering with the University of Miami, honestly, is not to create a situation where they're landlocked. However, if there should be a zoning issue with the splitting of the parcel, we're within our legal right to just build on our existing land --

Commissioner Keon: Absolutely.

Ms. Regalado: -- with the agreement with Baptist. I think that that would be detrimental to the University of Miami, because they would not be allowed then access to the Lincoln Trail property. We talked to them about an easement. However, they do not believe that that would be enough. We could as the School District, with the agreement that we have with Baptist, just continue with the K-8 expansion. University of Miami is not providing us with any funds for that expansion. The conversation that we've had about splitting the parcel really is to the benefit of the University of Miami and to ensure that we are not impacting the traffic in the area by putting the parking lot closer to Doctors. However, the School District could just make the decision to go ahead with the K-8 expansion in the existing West Lab parcel, unfortunately, to the detriment of the University of Miami.

Commissioner Keon: OK. But I think that's a discussion that the University of Miami needs to have with the City, and I'm sure that --

City Attorney Leen: All I'm saying at this point is I think we have a part to play.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

City Attorney Leen: We've always worked this issue out with the County. We've worked it out with the School Board. School Board understands that we have a very high standard of zoning; that that should be the centerpiece of our city and what we stand for as a people. So they'll work with us, I'm sure. I don't think it will come to, "Oh, well, we have this authority, we have that authority." I am looking at this issue, though. I do think we have more authority than we've thought in the past.

Commissioner Keon: My other concern with regard to West Lab is when we look at, if a decision is made to draw geographic boundaries for our schools, we really need to look at the number of seats that are available, elementary school seats available within our feeder pattern for our residents. Now, I don't know exactly how many school-age children there are in the City of Coral Gables. We did some based on some assumptions, based on what our population is, based on the last census status, we know the school-age children, and you know, we think that there's probably about 6,000 elementary school-aged children, in our city. And we know within the schools that we currently have, we have between Sunset, Carver, and Gables, we probably have about 1,600 maybe seats, you know, in the City, and we know we have probably about 6,000 children. Now, granted there's, you know, south or east of Dixie, of the highway or the southern end of our city, those children are not affected by this choice issue because they do attend schools with geographic boundaries, and it's Pinecrest and into Palmetto, in that area, so it's really this end of the City, but it's also the most dense portion of the City. So the likelihood is there are former elementary school children and granted, not every child is going to make the choice to go to public school. There are many parents, for whatever reasons, will choose a private school. Whether they want a religiously based school or whatever, they will make choices. But we have a concern and we really would like to see with the drawing of boundaries and with the community meetings that will be held to look at this issue, and we'll ask the school system to look at is do we really have enough elementary school seats to service, you know, our community, and do we need additional elementary school seats? And I think if we do because West Lab sits, you know, in the middle of our city and is surrounded by a residential population

where there are lots and lots of children, you know, that may be a place where we would have to have a discussion with the school system, because we know that the use of West Lab as a countywide school is a decision that the public school system has made. There's nothing that mandates that. It's a choice that the school system has made; and, you know, maybe there is a compelling argument to affect that choice that the school system has currently made. So I mean, that's why we would like to kind of go through the process before we would, you know --

Ms. Regalado: I understand. I understand your point.

Commissioner Keon: -- make a commitment on or make decisions. Because I think there is a great deal of information that still, you know, needs to be looked at, and I think there's a lot of discussion within the community that needs to be had to really determine, you know, where we are in the regards to... I mean, I am truly astounded in the times from when my children were school age to the cost of elementary school today. I am astounded that it is in the schools that are servicing our community. To send a child to first grade is \$18,000 a year to send a child to first grade. I mean, and I know that the school system agrees with us, you know, as a representative of the City of Coral Gables that providing high-quality public education is an absolute necessity within our community, and so that's why I ask that...I know that we're working together. We have good relationships with the School Board, with you as a representative, with Marta Perez as an elected representative to really look at meeting the needs of the residents within our community.

Ms. Regalado: Right. I totally agree with you. And like you know, and I've said it before, I've been talking to Coral Gables residents about this for over four years. And Mr. Mayor, you'll remember, the minute that you got elected, this was the first conversation that I had with you regarding the need for choice, real public choice in Coral Gables. So I'm the first one that has been beating the drum for a very long time. However, you know, I think it's going to be very difficult to get the district to change West Lab prior to the K-8 expansion, and that's why I've said, the K-8 expansion provides you, affords you, with the opportunity to have a conversation about residential seats, but the current allocation has to continue. I understand your need for more time to further vet this issue. I'm just putting it in perspective. The Attendance Boundary

is going to come back in February. The fifth grade parents in West Lab will have to write a check in February. All that I ask you, I have done everything that I can as a School Board member to meet with all the parties involved and to try to come up with an agreement that works for everyone. I have made a lot of concessions, and I have spent a lot of time trying to find a solution that is beneficial for everyone, including the residents of Coral Gables and the University of Miami, who is our partner. However, if you need more time, than I need you to allow those parents to come here and tell you what their issues are because...

Commissioner Keon: I truly understand this.

Ms. Regalado: I'm not going to be responsible for...

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Ms. Regalado: You understand my point? I've done everything in my power.

Commissioner Keon: I understand they're paying and having to write that check, you know, to go into sixth grade if they don't feel they have a choice. I will tell you, we have a greater pain that we have a huge group of residents that are writing that check in first grade.

Ms. Regalado: I agree with you.

Commissioner Keon: So, you know they're writing that check in first grade.

Ms. Regalado: All I'm asking is for a public meeting so those parents can come here so that you can tell them...

Commissioner Keon: Absolutely.

Ms. Regalado:... "Listen, we've gone through Attendance Boundary; we need more time. This is why we need more time." Because, again, I deal with this every day.

Commissioner Keon: No, I understand.

Ms. Regalado: And I have done everything in my ability to make this as timely as possible.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Regalado: So, you know, if you guys want more time, I'm happy to do it. I mean, we can postpone the bond, but understand that if we pass a certain point, once we get to mid spring, then we push into the following summer. So now even if you make a decision in June, I can't move that fast.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Regalado: I can only do so much. So I'm just asking you to understand my limitation to sort of where we're coming from.

Mayor Cason: We understand your dilemma. There's a lot of information we don't have. For example, I don't know how many non-Coral Gables residents are at West Lab. I mean, what's the potential there if there were a change to be made to allow that to part of the schools which Coral Gables residents can choose.

Ms. Regalado: I would not recommend making West Lab part of the choice paradigm. That's one of the reasons that I've talked about, you know, the possibility of purchasing residential seats. West Lab was the first magnet school in Miami-Dade County. Because of that historical point, I think it will be very difficult to get the district to agree to making it a residential school. However, I'm happy to bring that conversation. However, understand that, historically, it's going to be very difficult.

Mayor Cason: But, you know, the other side of it is our residents spend \$97 million every year to the School Board, and we have roughly 3,000 kids in public schools. And we're paying

almost \$33,000 a student. You can go to Gulliver for \$24,000. I mean, we're spending so much of our money, the vast majority of people don't have kids now in school.

Ms. Regalado: Right. Well, first of all...

Mayor Cason: And we're asking, we would be asking them to pay more taxes in order to send, I don't know how many we're talking about, a chance to go to West Lab. That's a lot of money.

Ms. Regalado: Respectfully, Mr. Mayor, you weren't here for the public meeting that we had the parents here. And one of the things that I've impressed upon all the municipalities that I've asked to make a commitment to our public education system is first and foremost, the education of children, irrespective of their residence, is to the benefit of all members of Miami-Dade County.

Mayor Cason: Of course.

Ms. Regalado: That being said, and that is why at that public hearing, I spoke at length about the investment that the Village of Key Biscayne has made and the impact that it had on their property values. That is a clear example on how a municipal investment can raise property values. And if you want to talk to the representatives at the Village of Key Biscayne, they'll be the first ones to tell you that the first thing that every realtor says is "your child can now go to MAST Academy." That is a selling point that has brought their property values up more than 17 percent in the last year since the MAST expansion. I believe that West Lab will have the same impact for the residents that live near it that will be able to offer that as a potential, because that hasn't been the case with...

Commissioner Quesada: But that's assuming there would be a geographic preference for West Lab.

Ms. Regalado: Which is the investment that I'm asking you to make, all right. Again, you guys have to decide.



Commissioner Keon: I think the enrollment at West Lab is currently only 282 kids. I mean, it's really a very small number of kids, and it's a really relatively small school.

Ms. Regalado: Well, that's why I'm tearing it down and making a new one.

Commissioner Keon: The issue may be we need a larger school. And if we work with UM, we need a larger school for...

Ms. Regalado: The plan is to tear it, respectfully.

Commissioner Keon: Adding, you know, a hundred seats to that school is not going to address our issue.

Ms. Regalado: But let me explain. But let me explain a second. The plan is to tear down the existing facility and create a bigger facility. The hundred seats is a hundred seats in kindergarten, a hundred seats in first grade, a hundred seats in second grade, a hundred seats in third grade, in perpetuity, until eighth grade. So it's not just a hundred seats; it's a hundred seats at every single grade level. It grows incrementally when you purchase them, but that's why we need to know what the commitment is in order to scale the building to accommodate that size. What we're looking at right now is building two buildings, one that would be up to fifth grade and the other one be sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

Commissioner Keon: You know, I mean, this is also the issue. I would like us to reach a point in the City of Coral Gables where there is no point in a child's education where they feel they have to leave the public school system because of the quality of the schools. So, you know, I don't want to see it happen, children entering into kindergarten and first grade. I don't know want to see it with children entering into middle school. And I certainly don't want to see it with children entering into high school. If parents make a choice because there is a better fit in their child, that is certainly their choice to make. I don't ever want to see it happen because of the quality of the public schools in our community.

Ms. Regalado: We agree, we agree.

Commissioner Keon I would invest...I mean, I think there is an opportunity to really invest in Ponce. I think UM is heavily vested in Ponce to try and upgrade that entire school, its entire curriculum, to improve the teaching staff and everything else. I think, through your efforts, you teach for America. You're bringing in some great teachers and great efforts, and our concern is that there are enough seats, high quality seats in our schools, and we as a city are willing to really commit to working with these schools and, you know, either through our community foundation develop an educational component to that, that will help with, you know, enhancing the schools and whatever else. We are making a major commitment in response to the outcry by our residents over the quality of the schools within our city and the number of seats available to us that they know when they buy a house, they know where their child is going to go to school.

Ms. Regalado: Right. But, respectfully, those are two distinct issues. If you want to talk about a commitment to Ponce, like we've mentioned, the University of Miami has made a commitment to Ponce Middle School which is ongoing. If the City of Coral Gables wants to participate in that, that's something that I'm happy to talk about, but those are two distinct issues. My point is, if you're not going to participate in the West Lab expansion, I need to know sooner rather than later, because I have fifth grade parents that are going to have to make a choice, and we are going to push forward with a K-8 expansion of West Lab. So, you know, the issue is, you know, your involvement in that and is it going to be to the benefit of the University of Miami, because you need to be involved in order for it to work out for the best interest of the University of Miami, which is our partner and your partner. So I'm just giving you the heads up on the time table of this and the need to make a decision. We've had this conversation many times, and I just feel like we've been talking about this. I mean, I had this conversation with the Mayor four years ago. It's great that you're participating in this now, but understand my frustration as a School Board member, because I don't get calls from Coral Gables residents about the poor quality of schools. I get calls from Coral Gables residents because they can't get into the schools. So I get where you're coming from.

Commissioner Keon: That is it, exactly. There is not enough seats.

Ms. Regalado: Which is why I offered this proposal months ago. Now, if it is not a proposal that is viable for you, that's fine; I just need to know that. Understand that I have an obligation to represent the residents of Coral Gables at Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Regalado: So if you're not going to participate in that, I just need to know so that I can convey it to them and we can move forward. We've already taken proactive steps at the Attendance Boundary Committee. That's going to take a certain amount of time. I've said on several occasions that that is a legal issue that will be resolved legally, and that's fine, but understand that that is not something that is going to happen in a month, in two months, in three months. That is something that is going to impact not the following school year, but the one after that.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Regalado: So I'm just putting it in perspective.

Commissioner Keon: But I think that we have made a commitment to participate. I think everyone on this dais and our residents have made a commitment to participate. Now, what that participation is, and how that participation comes about, and how that eventually plays out is something that still needs to be discussed. But we do intend to participate, absolutely.

Commissioner Quesada: Commissioner Keon, let me get to her point. I'm in favor of West Lab expansion if it's going to include a geographic preference for Coral Gables residents, as what we're hearing from --

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Commissioner Quesada: -- our representative. The only thing I need to hear is what the impact is going to be in the surrounding residential neighborhood, which I haven't heard anything from

residents. Maybe because they don't know about it. Maybe we need to have another public hearing that we all attend or really notify them of what's potentially coming, but I think she needs to know from us I think she's repeated it six times; I appreciate it, whether we're in favor of the expansion or not. And I understand; your point is we need to know more details as to what that is.

Commissioner Keon: Well, I think is we need to know how many elementary school seats do we need for our children, so what is the best...you know, where we're going to put them.

Commissioner Quesada: Here's the thing.

Commissioner Keon: That's the issue.

Commissioner Quesada: You attended the ABC, I attended the ABC, and now we're hearing it from our representative...

Commissioner Keon: They also targeted Ponce for that reason, because of the effect that all of this might have on Ponce, and I think they included Ponce in that targeted...

Commissioner Quesada: So let me finish my thought, though. We both attended the ABC. We've heard it from our School Board representative. We've heard it from numerous residents: they want to get in; they can't get in. She's providing an option where we can get more students in. Now, you just mentioned that we need to know how many more students want to get in. To quantify that, I think is going to be a very difficult task. We're hearing it from every angle; from our School Board representative. I hear it from residents. I know Commissioner Lago has said it. I know you have said it. And there's significant amount of need from what I hear in the community. To quantify it, if you're looking for a quantifiable number, I don't know how we can quantify that. If that's what you need to hear before you give your approval or denial of moving forward with West Lab, I don't think you're going to be satisfied with that request, because I don't see how we can quantify that.

Commissioner Keon: Well, I would like to see West Lab, be one of the schools with geographical boundaries within our feeder pattern for our city. And this is true of any school in Miami-Dade County. If the school is under-enrolled, people from outside of the boundary area can apply and can come in and can attend the school. So the fact that, you know...

Commissioner Quesada: But that's not the case with West Lab. From what I recall the last time we discussed West Lab...

Commissioner Keon:...as a result of the whatever comes of the Attendance Boundary Committee or the issues surrounding West Lab is that, you know, how many children do we have that...could you fill all the seats at West Lab?

Commissioner Quesada: OK. Let me stop you for one second.

Commissioner Keon: Could we?

Commissioner Quesada: The last time we discussed West Lab, someone mentioned that on the waiting list of West Lab, and correct me if I'm wrong, there are 250 Coral Gables residents.

Ms. Regalado: Yes. That was for the kindergarten.

Commissioner Lago: Out of four hundred and change.

Commissioner Quesada: OK.

Ms. Regalado: Right.

Commissioner Quesada: So to answer your question, could we fill it if there's a hundred additional seats? Absolutely.

Commissioner Keon: But do we have an obligation to lobby on behalf of our residents to have enough free public education, high quality, free public education elementary school seats in our city to accommodate anyone who chooses to send their child to the public schools?

Commissioner Quesada: We have an obligation to our Coral Gables residents that want to send their children to public schools. I believe that.

Commissioner Keon: To work with them to...

Commissioner Quesada: Yes.

Commissioner Keon:...and work with the school system to ensure that we have enough seats to send our children...available to our children for schools.

Mayor Cason: What's the estimated cost for West Lab?

Mr. Regalado: Well, your attorneys have the numbers. I guess it was the last memo. I don't know what the last number was.

Commissioner Lago: It was about four and a half million dollars for 32 spaces, my understanding. We went over that with...

Ms. Regalado: Twenty-three thousand dollars per seat. However, those seats are in perpetuity. It would start gradually with the kindergarten, and every year you would have more seats. Now, as to the investment, and I understand your ideological question regarding that. You know, Miami Beach has invested in curriculum. They paid for AP/IB (Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate) in all their schools. Pinecrest has purchased seats. The Village of Key Biscayne has purchased seats. The City of Miami has made an investment with land swaps in the City of Miami, providing Miami-Dade County Public Schools with access to parks, and that has been part of their designation. However, many of these cities, geographically, are different than Coral Gables. The issue that Coral Gables has is because of its location, once

attendance boundary comes in and circles, you're going to go outside of the boundaries at Coral Gables. That does not occur in Pinecrest. So I understand that a lot of this has to do with the geography of the planning. This is an issue that is unique to Coral Gables, but ideologically, you need to make a decision whether this is a viable investment. Again, other cities have done it. Miami Beach is our oldest compact. They made an investment for curriculum of AP/IB. How much does AP/IB cost? The application alone is \$100,000. The City of Coral Gables did not have to do that with Coral Gables Senior High. That was done over 25 years ago by the district. And Coral Gables Senior High does have residential seats in the AP/IB program that was not paid for by the City of Coral Gables, because the situation was different at Miami-Dade County Public Schools. So this is not unheard of. You just have to make a decision on how do you want to participate. And the only thing that I ask you is and maybe the way to resolve this is having a meeting in January. Maybe we can have a Sunshine Meeting in January where we bring the University of Miami, where we talk about the options, and at a minimum, hammer out the issue with the parcel, and then you can decide whatever you want on the seats. The only thing that I ask is at the end of that January meeting, if you have not made a decision as a board on your involvement monetarily regarding the seats, then that we have a sunshine meeting where you can tell the parents of West Lab the reason for the delay. So the delay is not on my side. I've really done everything that I can. Baptist is a hundred percent in. If you're going to engage regarding the zoning and the splitting of the parcels, which I think is to the benefit of the residents. And Commissioner Quesada, to your point, I have met with the residents that live near the Lincoln Trail.

Commissioner Quesada: OK.

Ms. Regalado: A lot of them are renters. The big pushback there was by the owners of those properties that did not want competing, multi-residential on that parcel, because they rent out...

Commissioner Quesada: Right.

Ms. Regalado:...to University of Miami students, so they were very happy to hear the University of Miami is thinking of building an administrative building there and not something that's going

to compete with their interests. The only other issue was that some of the renters that live there wanted to ensure that there was a setback that was big enough so that they could still walk their dogs and kick a ball, and the University of Miami has already said that that is within the scope of what they're willing to negotiate.

City Attorney Leen: If I may, Mr. Mayor. Ms. Regalado, just for the Commission's consideration, two points that I wanted to clarify. So you're saying, what you said, that the \$23,000 per seat is 100 seats per year, so eventually, we would have 800 seats?

Ms. Regalado: It's 44. Forty-four seats. It's right, it's a million dollars.

City Attorney Leen: So after eight years and we have eight times that, we're not paying eight times the amount.

Ms. Regalado: Exactly.

City Attorney Leen: It would just be the original amount.

Ms. Regalado: In perpetuity.

City Attorney Leen: For the first seats?

Ms. Regalado: Right. In perpetuity.

City Attorney Leen: And the second question I had was from a legal perspective, and if this needs to go to the School Board Attorney, let me know. But if we have guaranteed seats.

Ms. Regalado: They can only go to Coral Gables residents.

City Attorney Leen: Well, I understand that, but does that mean our Coral Gables residents can still apply for the other ones?



Ms. Regalado: Yes. It's a double lottery.

City Attorney Leen: OK.

Ms. Regalado: That's the same thing that happens at Key Biscayne. The residents have a double lottery opportunity, they can apply to the general lottery and they could apply to their residential lottery, and that's why Key Biscayne was, you know...

City Attorney Leen: I understand.

Ms. Regalado:...was interested in that.

Commissioner Quesada: Got it. So the way it would work is the first year, we would have 44 seats and the next year 88, and then so on and so forth.

Ms. Regalado: Right.

City Attorney Leen: We would only pay for 44 every year.

Ms. Regalado: Right. Exactly, exactly. I hope you can discuss it.

Commissioner Quesada: I like the idea of having, I'm sorry to cut you off, I'm just trying to get to the end of this.

Ms. Regalado: Yeah, I know.

Commissioner Quesada: I like the idea of having a special meeting in January to address all the points so that everyone is fully briefed at the same time. We can send out the public notice. We could all come together, and that'll be the meeting where we decide and we move forward. I don't know how the rest of the Commission feels about that.

Mayor Cason: Yeah, because I think we need to hear people on both sides. I mean, some people don't want to pay for it, some...

Commissioner Quesada: So I'm going to make a motion.

Mayor Cason: Yeah, go ahead.

Commissioner Quesada: To have a special meeting in January, a date to be determined. We'll have staff work with all the parties involved, make sure we can get notice out to the community, as well as any other interested parties.

Ms. Regalado: University of Miami.

Commissioner Quesada: University of Miami.

Ms. Regalado: Stakeholders.

Commissioner Quesada: All of the interested parties that we've been in contact with them. At our annual meeting with the University of Miami, we brought this up as a key issue. So that is my motion, to have a sunshine meeting in January. After 5 p.m., on a date that everyone can make it, and University of Miami, a notice to make sure that we meet all the requisite notice provisions; all the City Commission, as well as the School Board members that need to be there.

Commissioner Keon: I think we're also waiting to get the information from the ABC committee from the ABC as to when they're holding their community meetings on this issue too.

Commissioner Quesada: Their community meetings are between January 12 and 23rd, and then they have their next big meeting will be on Thursday, February 12.

Commissioner Keon: No. When they are holding the community meetings with the parents related to the boundaries of these schools.

Commissioner Quesada: That's between January 12 and 23rd. I have the schedule in front of me.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah. Do we have all of the dates and times?

Commissioner Quesada: It doesn't say specifically.

Ms. Regalado: That hasn't been determined yet.

Commissioner Keon: Right, that's what I'm waiting for, is their schedule.

Ms. Regalado: So what we could do is we could have our sunshine meeting after the 23rd. If the 23rd is their cutoff date then we'll just have our sunshine meeting after the fact. And as soon as the district determines the date, the issue is we're waiting for the members of the committee to tell us their availability. They have several e-mails (electronic) have been going around to determine their availability. But if the cutoff is the 23rd, then we'll have our sunshine meeting after the 23rd to ensure that it has been mentioned at the meetings, and I can make sure that it's mentioned at the Attendance Boundary Committee meeting that we'll be having a sunshine meeting; and hopefully, we'll have a date at that point to be able to tell them when that will be.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: OK, thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you so much.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: And one of the items we should add to our legislative agenda is the funding for schools so that this isn't an issue. People are not having to buy seats because the funding is there available to actually build seats, to meet the needs of communities.

Ms. Regalado: And we appreciate that. Thank you for your support.

Commissioner Keon: And thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: So we have motion by Commissioner Quesada. Second?

Commissioner Lago: I'll second.

Commissioner Keon: I'll second it.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Keon seconds. City Clerk.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Yes.

[End: 11:11:23 a.m.]