

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-6
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)

Abby Corbett, Sterns Weaver, Special Counsel

Agenda Item F-6 [Start: 4:00:30 p.m.]

Report regarding City's Presentation at ABC Committee Meeting regarding elimination of controlled choice and creation of attendance boundaries for Coral Gables Prep, Sunset Elementary and Carver Elementary, and outcome of meeting.

Mayor Cason: You have some remnant of F-6 again?

City Attorney Leen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Item F-6 relates to the ABC Committee meeting with the Control Choice issue. Before, Board Member Regalado was here and spoke and we never finished making our presentation of staff regarding what occurred, and Commissioner Quesada and Commissioner Keon spoke very eloquently about what occurred. But I wanted to emphasize once again, that the controlled choice district that exists really in Coral Gables and a little bit outside of it is the only one remaining in Miami-Dade County. And I thought that we gave a very effective presentation at the ABC Committee meeting, and I don't

think it can be overstated that I thought it was very significant that the ABC Committee voted to target those three schools; and by targeting, they didn't vote to advise on those three schools. They treated those as different things. We were able to achieve as much as we could.

Mayor Cason: What was the vote? It was like 16-1.

Commissioner Keon: One.

City Attorney Leen: It was like 16-1, there was only one dissenting vote.

Commissioner Quesada: To clarify what target means, target is the highest action that they could take, and I don't know if...

City Attorney Leen: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: It means that they will take action for the next school year.

Commissioner Quesada: For the next school year.

Commissioner Keon: For the coming school year. Where advised with the other category, which means they would gather additional information, but not necessarily take action.

City Attorney Leen: And Mr. Mayor, there was a real debate, and ultimately, they did decide to target those, which was the most that we could have achieved. I thought it was a very significant decision on their part. And I asked Abby to prepare a memo, which has been provided to you in your packets, and I was hoping that she could talk a little bit about what that means, and where do we go from here.

Abby Corbett: Right. Sure. Good afternoon. Abby Corbett with Stearns Weaver. I think it was a great meeting also; vibrant debate; we learned something; committee learned something; and ultimately, we got what we asked for, which is targeted status for the three schools: Coral

Gables Prep, Sunset Elementary, and Carver Elementary. And what that means now is that community meetings will be held in January and they'll still be voted, there's still a long process, a long road to go, but we do know that the community is largely supportive of doing away with controlled choice and drawing lines for these three schools, so we feel good about this step; headed in the right direction. From here, there's going to be community meetings in January. We don't have the exact dates yet. When we get those dates, we're definitely going to want to reach out to the constituents, bring people in for these community meetings, so all the voices can be heard. And then it goes through some other steps with the School Board. Goes back to Attendance Boundary Committee, the region superintendent, Dr. Payne makes some recommendations, the community can make recommendations. The schools' principals from each school are directly involved in the process. Then it goes through a diversity committee at the School Board, and ultimately, then it goes to superintendent staff and, ultimately, it goes to the School Board itself. So we have a lot of steps to go, but the fact that it's on targeted status, like Craig said, means that the intent is to potentially take action for the next school year. So we're definitely on the fast track for, we're hopeful.

Mayor Cason: After all these meetings are held, how many people, how many more Coral Gables residents would be likely to get their kids into the schools they want?

Ms. Corbett: Right. Well...

Mayor Cason: Do we know what's sort of the best outcome?

Ms. Corbett: So the "devil's in the details" with these things, because what we have now is one big line for these three schools, one big boundary, and people in our lottery to get into one of those three schools. What the Boundary Committee is going to do, based on recommendations from the community, from the schools, and from the superintendent staff, is ultimately decide how to draw the lines, and they're going to have to draw a geographic line around Carver, around Coral Gables prep, and around Sunset.

Mayor Cason: A smaller one, maybe?

Ms. Corbett: Yes, it will be...

Mayor Cason: Because the larger it is, the fewer Coral Gables residents.

Ms. Corbett: Right. So there's potential, and the School Board staff has warned us. I don't know if that's the right word. Reminded us that there will be people who are on one side of the line or another who are ultimately unhappy. That's how it always is when you draw lines. And they've also mentioned that because Sunset Elementary has a small home school, there's not going to be an opportunity to send a lot of kids there, because that building is largely taken up by the magnet program.

Commissioner Keon: I think there's 1,100 children at Sunset Elementary and there is only one class per grade, which is either 20 to 22 students per grade, K through 5, that it's actually the home school. So that's a very small...

Mayor Cason: But it looks like we have something like a thousand Coral Gables kids that are going to public schools outside of Coral Gables.

Ms. Corbett: Right. And to answer your question, we don't know exactly. It totally depends on how the lines are drawn. It could be that some people, I personally may be included in this group of Coral Gables residents who may get drawn into a school that's not one of these three. There's all kinds of other neighboring schools, and those lines might have to be tweaked as well. We talked about Tucker; that line may get moved. That's all up for debate.

Commissioner Quesada: So we have the community meetings, so absolutely, when we find a date for the Coral Gables community meeting affecting these schools, we need to do a separate e-blast just for that. I don't know if we want to do any other kind of notice, but it's really important for all the neighbors, as many neighbors as possible to be at that meeting. I think it's so important. So that's between January 12 and 23. On our side, from the staff side, from preparing for our February 6 no, February 12 is the big hearing for us. The 12th?

Ms. Corbett: The 12th is the tentative date for the next ABC meeting, where recommendations by the community will be presented to the board. Although, I'm not sure that date, they talked about the...

Commissioner Quesada: I was looking at it earlier. I don't have it in front of me now.

Ms. Corbett: Yes, that's what's on their agenda, but a lot of schools were targeted throughout the district this year. They've got a lot of meetings.

Commissioner Quesada: I guess what I'm getting to and it's just so that we deliver a strong, consistent message, a clear and concise message. Last time when we went in there, I think we did a good job, but we were all sort of rolling with the punches. And for those of you who were not there, it was all of us basically, you know, shooting from the hip or gathering information. We knew we were sort of working together to get what we wanted and we got it, we were successful, but it was a battle. I think we need to be considerably more...

Commissioner Keon: Prepared for trial.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm sorry?

Commissioner Keon: Prepared for trial.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes, we need to be prepared for trial. We really do. I mean, a clear and concise PowerPoint presentation for the key points that we want. Because there are so many members of that committee, it's very easy to lose their attention because, what is it? 25 members or 20 members? So I think, if we have a handout also, I think we should tentatively draw some lines on our own. We should look at the flow charts or the flow data. We should look at traffic patterns. We should implement our trolley route. I mean, I really want to have a killer presentation, so that when we're done with that presentation, they have to say "yes." So we can be unified, and I think if Cathy, obviously, you're the one organizing that charge with Abby;

work together on that. But I really want to implement, I think we gained a lot of ground talking about the traffic aspect. We gained a lot of ground with the board, showing that Coral Gables residents do actually want to attend, you know, public schools in Coral Gables. If we can quantify that somehow, if we can really get the accurate numbers and Dr. Payne, the regional director for the School Board, was really trying to beat us up with numbers. I don't want to say - - "beat up" isn't the right word. He was trying to educate everyone with the correct numbers. But I feel like we really need to show all the information that benefits us there. And we were a little cut off guard in that regard, so I really want to come back and really have every answer. So, Abby, if you can work with staff...

Ms. Corbett: Absolutely.

Commissioner Quesada:...to really make sure we have a killer presentation.

Ms. Corbett: Right. And they do encourage community organizations, including municipalities, individual schools to submit plans. The one advice that the School Board staff gave us is to work with the communities of the three schools together and try to submit a joint plan.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Ms. Corbett: This is their opinion. That, that would ultimately be more persuasive to the School Board staff and the ABC and the region superintendent than competing plans from the different groups representing the different schools. And this one particular staff, however, suggested that if we give competing plans, the regional superintendent may just go with their own plan.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Ms. Corbett: And this is the point of the community meetings, too. We can talk to people.

Commissioner Quesada: Of course.

Ms. Corbett: See if we can get on the same page with a joint plan.

Commissioner Quesada: But in conjunction with all this, at each one of those community meetings that we have between January 12th and 23rd, if we can have a staff member there taking some pictures to show how many Coral Gables residents actually showed up; and if we can have a sign-in sheet to show who exactly are the Coral Gables residents that were there, so that we can quantify and we can identify all the people that were there. Again, in that room, I felt there was hesitation, whether they believed us or not that the Coral Gables residents actually wanted to attend public schools. In this way, we can defeat any argument with, you know, the signed names or the checklist and say, "At this committee meeting there were 300 participants; 250 were Coral Gables residents." So that way, I think it sends a much stronger message, an unambiguous message that we are really unified, we really want this to happen.

Ms. Corbett: Right. And in terms of turnout at these committee meetings, Commissioner Keon and I talked about the fact that the School Board, it seems only notified certain people who they think might be affected, people whose kids are currently in that school.

Commissioner Keon: Are in the school.

Ms. Corbett: We want other...

Commissioner Quesada: No, we're going to blast it. I will, I mean, I have no problem walking the neighborhoods right before those particular meetings.

Commissioner Keon: Well, we need to work with the City Manager to find a way to contact all our residents that are affected by, you know, these three schools. I don't know if it's from, you know, the highway north or how we do that. But, you know, we need to identify that area and we need to notify all the residents that live in that area, so that they can participate too. I also think we need to...the Sunshine meeting that we are going to have with the Commissioners that want to attend and the University of Miami, we really should have that as soon as possible, because I think that, that discussion is going to play into this also. Because I really do believe

West Lab is an important part of this discussion.

Commissioner Quesada: Of course.

Commissioner Keon: So I think we should have that discussion with UM, so we kind of know where we stand with that.

Commissioner Quesada: Agreed.

Commissioner Keon: On that issue and be able, you know, to move forward with that information also so we have some real clarity with regard to what UM, the conversations UM is having with whom.

City Attorney Leen: One other thing I think that we should do, I would recommend, is for us to put together a resolution for the Commission stating exactly what we want. Right now it's individual Commissioners. It's Commission-as-a-whole in meetings talking about it. But it would be useful to have it in a resolution particularly, if we're going to draw lines, if we want to recommend those. Because when we go, we can bring that to the ABC Committee; they know that you on, behalf of the whole City of Coral Gables as a Commission, unanimously probably, but ultimately, you'd have to decide, backs this proposal. I think it would be useful.

Commissioner Keon: I thought at a prior meeting, where we talked about the ABC Committee, we did make a...

Commissioner Quesada: There was a motion.

Commissioner Keon:...a motion.

City Attorney Leen: There was a motion.

Commissioner Keon: And there was a motion that included what --

City Attorney Leen: The letter. And we wrote a letter based on that.

Commissioner Keon: Where we wanted to be removed from the school choice, where we wanted to draw the district four schools and whatever else. So does that...

City Attorney Leen: Oh, no. That is helpful, and that letter has worked. That letter worked. It was an excellent letter.

Commissioner Keon: So do we take that now as a result of this finding?

City Attorney Leen: What I would propose is that we're going to put together a PowerPoint, as was instructed, and we're going to put together a proposed line. I think we should bring it back to you, though, as a Commission, and you can make your... you could vote in support of it, particular resolution, then we'll provide it to the School Board and to the ABC Committee and the School districts staff, and they would have that. I mean, we'll talk about it more. There's other ideas.

Commissioner Keon: We could also have, you know, a citywide meeting at that point. We could have a town hall meeting on education that we could broadcast prior to...or...I'm not sure. Do we have the town hall meeting to gather information so we have the input of people to know what people want and whatever and then develop a PowerPoint and all that from there or...?

Commissioner Quesada: I think it's a combination. I think at the community meetings, I think we're going to gather, we're going to have a lot of that input, then we'll get back; and then when we have our West Lab meeting, we can have that agenda be rather broad. I mean, the main focus will be West Lab, but sort of a discussion item at the end of it, so we can have any additional input. So therefore, right before we go to that February meeting, we're going to have had the community meetings, we're going to have had that Special Sunshine meeting with West Lab, and we will have all the information gathered. At that point we'll be prepared on all angles.

Commissioner Keon: But the community meetings that we have are community meetings that are organized and done by the school system themselves. What I'm asking is do we, as a city, want to have a town hall meeting on this issue?

Commissioner Lago: I would like to have a town hall meeting.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah, but that's included with the West Lab meeting. What's wrong with that?

Commissioner Keon: Oh, we can do that.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah. They're all interrelated.

Commissioner Keon: As long as we do it. The Sunshine Meeting with West Lab and have it as a town hall meeting. I mean, we may have it outside of this jurisdiction only so people can attend.

Commissioner Quesada: I say yes. I said we have two items on that sunshine meeting agenda: West lab and all other School Board issues.

Commissioner Keon: OK. Because they asked that it be done after 5 o'clock, so that everybody can come. OK.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah, absolutely.

Mayor Cason: OK.

Ms. Corbett: You know, we should have a meeting like that prior to the January, was it 5th through 23rd community meeting, with the idea...

Commissioner Quesada: No. That meeting that we had discussed would be after January 23.

Ms. Corbett: Even if it addressed the controlled choice, it'll still be after the School Board committee meeting?

Commissioner Keon: Well, I think it maybe should be prior to those meetings, only so people are aware of..., even if we have the meeting with the University of Miami before the school system holds their meetings, because they will take count of who is there.

Commissioner Quesada: It's going to be tough. It's going to be tough. Because right now, as we sit here today, and Abby, maybe if you can find this out: when is the ABC required meeting occurring between January 12 and January 23? We don't know right now. If it says January 12th, we're going to have a meeting before January 11th...

Commissioner Keon: We are going to have a meeting before January 12th.

Commissioner Quesada: Which is going to be...

Commissioner Keon: So we'll try.

Ms. Corbett: And there may be more than one meeting, by the way. I still think...

Commissioner Quesada: Of course.

Ms. Corbett: We haven't got a lot of clarity on this, but there may very well be one meeting per each of the three schools.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes.

City Attorney Leen: And we were planning to publicly notice them, so that you could go. I know that several of you want to go to these meetings, so we will do that.

Mayor Cason: OK. All right.

Commissioner Keon: OK.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Corbett: Thank you, Commissioners.

[End: 4:15:30 p.m.]