

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
February 26, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison, Naomi Levi-Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Sam Joseph
Cecilia Slesnick

Agenda Item G-2 [0:00:00 p.m.]

A discussion regarding expanding and funding the Coral Gables History Tours program, administered through the School and Community Relations Committee, to fourth graders in Coral Gables.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Quesada)

Commissioner Quesada: So, Mr. Mayor, Item...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, we're going to take G-2 first.

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Agenda Item G-2 - Discussion regarding expanding and funding the Coral Gables History Tours program, administered through the School and Community Relations Committee, to fourth graders in Coral Gables.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you so much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Quesada: It should be relatively quick. We have some members of the Cultural Affairs Board.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I'm sorry. Which one do you want to take?

Commissioner Quesada: G-2.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: G-2, yes.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: G-2, first.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah, my apologies for being behind, everyone that was here for this item on this. But, thank you for being here. You know...

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Commissioner Quesada: You know something? I'm just going to let you take it away. I want you to...

Sam Joseph: Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: Explain.

Mr. Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, Commissioner Quesada and the rest of the Commission, and also, the viewing public. My name is Sam Joseph. I chair the School and Community Relations Committee, and I'm honored to be here today to talk on G-2. G-2 is an effort to expand a pilot program that we started almost four years ago now. When -- after getting out of our controlled choice issues and revamping the School and Community Relations Committee, we made a commitment to our friends over at George Washington Carver Elementary. Actually, Dr. Johnson -- I'll never forget her. We asked, well, what could we do as a city to really make you feel like a Coral Gables school. And she said, Sam, the one thing we've never done is actually crossed US-1 and actually gone to see the city, which is our namesake. And so, we changed that for them and we -- for two years, we've piloted the Coral Gables History Tour that brings fourth grade students from George Washington Carver Elementary, almost 200 of them, on what I think is the most exciting and educational experience a student can have. They get to tour the historic sites and nationally designated landmarks in our own backyard here in Coral Gables; Coral Gables Museum, the City Hall, Merrick House, DeSoto Fountain, Venetian Pool, Coral Way and the Biltmore Hotel. And then they also hop off as part of those tours, not just driving by them and learning about them, but actually going into these facilities, including City Hall, where they have a private audience with public officials. I want to thank the Mayor...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very nice.

Mr. Joseph: I want to thank you, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and we also had School Board Member Mari Tere Rojas here. The students were overjoyed. They couldn't believe that they got the chance to personally not only meet you, but to also address issues with you. And I know I heard from you that they had some pretty good questions for you, sharp questions. They also get a chance to visit the Biltmore Hotel, where the Biltmore has been very generous in, again, providing them not only a tour, but an opportunity to learn about the operations that are happening there. And then they round out that visit at the Coral Gables Museum, where they learn about the history of the "City Beautiful" and why we're so proud to live in this great city. So, I've told you we've done

this two years with close to 200 students at one of our seven elementary schools. The item that's before you is to expand this and make it permanent so that all of our elementary students who are either going to school in the Gables proper or are served by Gables students will get an opportunity like our Carver students to be proud about where they live, where they come from and hopefully come back and help take care of this great city because a lot of the questions that -- the answers they got, they're ready to act on. And so, we hope we're building our future leaders.

Commissioner Quesada: So, Sam, I know the numbers, but just so we can discuss it here publicly, what numbers -- how much is it going to take to make this a reality permanently?

Mr. Joseph: We're talking about seven schools, approximately close to 1,200 students, and we're looking at -- It would take about \$21,000 in total right now currently to have all seven of those schools, all those fourth-grade classrooms participate. For us, as I was telling Commissioner Quesada, that just seems a shame for us, as the "City Beautiful", for us as the city with much to not be able to do this for our kids and for our families. And so, I really appreciate the Commissioner...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's a wonderful idea.

Mr. Joseph: Coming to the table. And the investment is -- I think we get a lot more out of the investment that we're going to put in financially in terms of the low voter participation rates that we've had, 26 percent in the last campaign. These kids are really learning what civics is about, how to be a good citizen and also the history.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me tell you a story. I gave a talk to my grandson's kindergarten class on government and mayors and Coral Gables. And I started by saying we -- mayors are more important than the president and senators and the governor because we pick up your garbage every day. And has anybody ever been sick in your house? There was a little boy over there. We sent rescue. Has anybody ever had a fire? Another little boy. We sent Fire to your house, and that

was fine. Four or five days later, I was listening to my grandson and he said, hey, my grandfather, he's the mayor. And a little boy asked him, what do mayors do? He says to him, well, he picks up our garbage.

(LAUGHTER)

Mr. Joseph: No. Look, they don't forget it. And that made an impression and those children will remember that. The hundred or sixty or so that we've taken on these trips, we've changed lives forever. And I -- to me, again, for the small investment that we put into it, we're going to get much, much more...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Mr. Joseph: Out of it. I do want to say some thank-yous because I didn't -- we didn't do this alone, the School and Community Relations Committee, and neither did the City. First of all, I want to thank the Commission because you guys gave us the School Improvement Projects. You approved them and you made this a priority for us. I also want to thank other City staffers for their help. Naomi Levi-Garcia, who is our savior; Dona Spain and her department who worked with us to craft this. I also want to thank Mari Tere Rojas, Iraida Mendez-Cartaya, Bob Brazofsky, Matt Sabatella from the School District, and our Coral Gables Museum folks who, when we approached them immediately said yes, we're on board and we can do this. John Allen, Cecilia Slesnick, Angela, all those folks. It takes a village and this village made this happen, so thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: Two...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Quesada: Two quick points. You know, it was my mistake. You know, I thought we were also including private schools as well, but obviously, from what you're saying it's no.

So, I'm going to ask that you guys take back to your next meeting discussing what it could potentially cost and logistics behind including private schools in this.

Mr. Joseph: You got it.

Commissioner Quesada: It's not (INAUDIBLE) today from what I've heard you say, so I don't want to belabor that point. But you can take it back to your committee and come back with us. That's number one. Number two is -- so we're talking about a funding allocation north of \$21,000.

Mr. Joseph: Correct.

Commissioner Quesada: Correct.

Mr. Joseph: Correct.

Commissioner Quesada: And I think the number you had told me more specifically was \$27,000, and I forget what the additional \$6,000 was for.

Mr. Joseph: It actually turned out to be...

Commissioner Quesada: (INAUDIBLE) my recollection.

Mr. Joseph: \$21,000. And actually, I'm going to ask -- I'll ask Cecilia to come up. She didn't want to be put on the spot, but she's worked out -- the Coral Gables Museum actually facilitates the tours, books -- it does the booking for the teachers, everything to make it as easy as possible, so that we can get those students as quickly as possible. She also -- they'll coordinate with City Hall to make sure -- and all the other venues that we're not getting in the way of things.

Cecilia Slesnick: Yes. Hi, Mr. Mayor and Commission. Thank you...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Hi.

Ms. Slesnick: So much for having us. So, the number that we're looking at is somewhere in the vicinity of \$27,000. That's taking into account -- I had a brief conversation with Naomi and we were just saying how wonderful it would be -- the first year that the students came and visited City Hall, the City provided the students with some City Hall -- City of Coral Gables branded material. And she and I were discussing how wonderful it would be if every student that came on the field trip also received the children's book that Arva Parks was a part of, the Boy's Dream, the George Merrick story. We thought that would be nice, but we weren't really sure what the cost associated would be...

Commissioner Quesada: Got it.

Ms. Slesnick: With...

Commissioner Quesada: So, 27's the...

Ms. Slesnick: Gathering that.

Commissioner Quesada: Ballpark?

Ms. Slesnick: 27 is, at this moment, a ballpark. And obviously, I need to go back and reconfigure what the cost would be if we then also included St. Stephens -- I'm sorry, St. Phillips, St. Thomas, St. Teresa and any of the other fourth grade -- because this is a fourth-grade program. We're trying to achieve a state benchmark by introducing the hyper local history, which obviously is really important for us all.

Commissioner Quesada: Alright. So, this question -- thank you, so much.

Ms. Slesnick: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: This question is for City Attorney, City Manager, assuming we have support. Obviously, it's got to be a funding allocation, so how would...

City Attorney Ramos: I would give an...

Commissioner Quesada: How would that work?

City Attorney Ramos: Up to amount.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah. Let's say up to \$30,000 -- not to exceed \$30,000 at this point. And then I just want to make sure we follow the right procedure, if there is support.

Vice Mayor Lago: Of course.

Commissioner Quesada: I guess I'm speaking as...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: If you make a motion...

Commissioner Quesada: If there is support.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You're going to get a unanimous...

Commissioner Quesada: So, I'm going to make...

City Attorney Ramos: If there...

Commissioner Quesada: A motion to...

City Attorney Ramos: If there's support, we can bring back a resolution authorizing an up to amount.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Commissioner Quesada: Got it. Okay, so then I'm going to make a motion to set aside up to \$30,000 a year to provide this program as been discussed by Sam.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And you will bring it back as a resolution. Is there a second to that?

Vice Mayor Lago: Second.

City Attorney Ramos: I can, yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, all those in favor, say "aye."

The Commission (Collectively): Aye.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Opposed? Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you so much.

Vice Mayor Lago: Mayor, if I...

Mr. Joseph: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: If I may...

Mr. Joseph: And just for the record, I want to let you know Somerset Charter School is included...

Vice Mayor Lago: Great.

Mr. Joseph: In that. I wanted to make that clear.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah. If you can just bring us back a breakdown...

Mr. Joseph: Definitely.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: Mayor, if I may. I just want to take a moment of personal privilege. I wanted to comment Commissioner Quesada for putting this on the agenda.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Vice Mayor Lago: And also, Sam Joseph and the museum. Sam is my appointment to the School and Community Relations. He's the chair. This guy does an exceptional job. He's tireless.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Exceptional.

Vice Mayor Lago: He does not stop. We talk on a continued basis. He is -- he represents what Coral Gables is through and through. I had the pleasure of coming to the event that we had here with Cecilia and the museum. It was incredible. The Mayor and I -- I was enthralled by the -- by the engagement and the interest of these young...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: Individuals. I mean, they were interested about the -- you know, about our history. They were interested about leadership, you know, what are our roles. So, I commend you for...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: (INAUDIBLE)

Vice Mayor Lago: Putting this on the agenda.

Commissioner Quesada: It's all Sam. It's always all Sam.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but you put it on. You put it on, so congratulations.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: Hi. Good morning.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you so much.

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: Good afternoon. Just a quick question for clarity on the resolution, do we want to focus on schools that are within Coral Gables proper or...

Commissioner Quesada: Yes.

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: Schools that offer...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no. Schools that are...

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: That also service...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Within Coral Gables proper.

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: Okay, so like not Sunset...

Commissioner Quesada: Because then it starts getting really gray...

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: Not Fairchild.

Commissioner Quesada: Real quick, yeah.

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: Okay.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Commissioner Keon: Well, with the...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Annex, High Pines and Sunset...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Commissioner Keon: Will be in.

Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Levi-Garcia: We can add Sunset. Okay, sounds good.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.