

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-1
November 12, 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 Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Assistant to the City Manager, Solanch Lopez

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item 2-1 [12:10 p.m.]

The School Community Relations Committee minutes of September 20, 2019, requesting that the City Commission increase the board's membership from seven members to nine members.

City Clerk Urquia: Really quick, Mayor...

City Attorney Ramos: Sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, are you going to discuss 2-1 before you...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What?

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Agenda Item 2-1 - The School Community Relations Committee minutes of September 20, 2019, requesting that the City Commission increase the board's membership from seven members to nine members.

City Clerk Urquia: Agenda Item 2-1. You missed that one as well.

Commissioner Mena: 2-1? Where's 2-1?

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: I'm sorry.

City Attorney Ramos: Page 5.

Commissioner Mena: Oh, here it is.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. 2-1, School Community Relations minutes requesting the City Commission increase the board membership to seven -- from seven to nine members.

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Hello. Solanch Lopez, Assistant to the City Manager, acting liaison for the board while Naomi Levi-Garcia in our office is on maternity leave. In the September meeting of the School Community Relations Committee, the members made a motion and voted unanimously to request the Commission to increase their committee member number from seven to nine in an effort to better manage the numerous initiatives that the committee has taken on, with the suggestion that those two additional seats be committee as a whole, serve as a whole appointments as our board currently doesn't have any.

City Attorney Ramos: If the Commission wishes to do this, we'll bring back in December some legislation to make it happen.

Commissioner Keon: I have a question about that. When they wanted to expand it, I thought the first reason they wanted to expand it was because they were nine schools or something.

Commissioner Mena: That's what I thought.

Commissioner Keon: So, our -- if they're going to have two additional people, are they individuals that have children in the schools or like who are these people?

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: So -- no.

Commissioner Keon: Who are the people they're looking at adding?

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Right now, we're not looking at anybody specifically. We wanted to get -- they wanted to get approval from the Commission to expand the number of members first and then they'll start looking at options. The first time that they brought over trying to increase their number, it was originally to 11 because we have 11 schools that they focus on, to serve one per school. The Commission did not want that. They no longer want that either. They want to all focus on different initiatives, not school specific. So, this is increasing just to nine members because currently they have a lot of initiatives that they're trying to tackle, and they need more assistance in membership that way. So, for example, as part of the cover memo, we included the different projects and initiatives that they are focusing on, including their City Beautiful schools initiative, community schools project, financial literacy initiative, mentorship, community service program, the Coral Gables histories tours, special needs services/programming initiative, community education initiative, school libraries book drive initiative, technology initiative. And as of a few months ago, they voted on three main yearly goals that they want to focus on specifically, which is the teacher's awards, a summer family literacy festival and to strengthen connections to the PTAs. So, because of all those initiatives, they're asking for two additional members.

Commissioner Keon: I know, but I think they need to go back to look at what their mission was when they were established and -- because I don't think their mission was that expansive. So, I

would like to see them go back and actually look at what the mission of the School and Community Relations Board was and what they're supposed to be doing. And if they want to expand their mission and they want to do that sort of thing, that's another process. I'd rather they do that. But given that the mission that was established for that board, I think the things that you're talking about are outside of what that mission was. I don't know how anybody else feels about it. And you know, if they want to do that and they want to talk about it and we want to have a board that does all those things, I mean, that's fine. But I really think that we need to be very careful and very respectful that we are dealing -- when we deal with schools and we're talking, particularly, our public schools and our public schools are chartered by the state, with their own government and regulating body. And so any time that we move toward working with the public schools, we have to respect that we are there as guests in their legislative (INAUDIBLE) and not -- it is not our role, as a local government, to -- we need to be careful and considerate of that elected body and their own superintendent in that body when we start dealing with schools. And what we may want -- and what a lot of times the things you're talking about are under the -- you know, really fall under the auspices of a PTA within a school, a given school. And you know, what's our role? What's our role as a City? What's the role of a board that we establish? And I think it's -- I'll be honest with you. I hate to vote one way or the other because I guess I don't understand it.

Vice Mayor Lago: Solanch, may I ask you a quick question? First off, congratulations on your award.

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: I didn't get a chance to tell you that. What they're requesting to expand their scope, it seems pretty passive. It doesn't really seem like it's anything that's serious that we should be treading so lightly on. If anybody -- to me, if anybody wants to get involved and volunteer on a board, especially when you talk about our public schools and it's going to work to better the education in the public schools, I'm all for it. How did they vote on that? Was it a unanimous request or was it a...

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Yes. So, our former Chair, Sam Joseph, brought it back up as a discussion. It was -- the motion was made by Mary Snow and seconded by Sandy Dimitris, and then the board as a whole voted.

Vice Mayor Lago: Are you looking for action from us today? Is that what you're looking for?

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: Are you looking for action from today?

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Approval...

Vice Mayor Lago: Or you're just bringing it to our attention?

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: So, this is the request that they made. It would be...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The request is that we...

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Your approval to...

City Attorney Ramos: The Board is asking for you to...

Vice Mayor Lago: I'm asking -- what was it? I'm sorry. I apologize.

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: It would be your approval to bring the resolution.

Vice Mayor Lago: Listen, I'm more than willing to make -- to sponsor that and make a motion. I don't see really that much that there's an issue. And if they want to expand the breadth of their

board in a positive light for like you told me, it's expanding reading and a book fair and those kinds of things, I don't think it really has any detriment to the School Board or to the City, and I would be in support of it. So, I make the motion to expand the board.

Commissioner Keon: Where are they going to have the book fair though?

City Attorney Ramos: So we're going to have to bring legislation back to you.

Vice Mayor Lago: But I'm saying let's...

City Attorney Ramos: But it sounds like...

Vice Mayor Lago: I'll make the...

City Attorney Ramos: There's consensus.

Vice Mayor Lago: I'll make the motion to bring back legislation, if that's what the board says. Commissioner Keon said where are we going to do the book fair? There's a million and one places we can do the book fair. There's a million and one places -- I mean, I have sat down with Sam on multiple occasions. I didn't want to get into all the weeds today, but they've been having discussions with Books and Books to put together something, you know, that would complement the School Board, that will complement the City of Coral Gables, especially when we have a world-class business, like Books and Books in our own backyard. But that's not really for -- what's up for debate today. I think what's up for debate today it was offered to be today is whether we support the expansion of the board or not.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I think if anybody wants to serve and they want to give up their limited time with their families and their business, I'm in favor of it. And if I don't have a second, then it just dies. That's it.

Commissioner Keon: (INAUDIBLE) the board is. I mean, it's outside of -- I mean, working with Books and Books to have a book fair is an admirable thing. That is not what the purpose of the School Community Relations Board is, so I'm saying if you want to change the scope and the mission of that board, you should. Because when we approve a board or we set up a board -- and I guess it's an advisory board.

City Attorney Ramos: It is an advisory board. And I have the purpose here, if you'd like...

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

City Attorney Ramos: For me to read it. This was updated in 2015. The purpose of the committee shall be to provide an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration between the aforementioned schools and their neighbors, including the City of Coral Gables. The committee shall look for opportunities to improve schools in terms of physical appearance, community involvement and quality of education. The committee will also provide oversight of the City's educational landscape, making sure the City is fulfilling its recent educational commitments and assuming that the needs of students and families are being adequately served by the public school system. Finally, the committee is intended to serve as a review committee for the education compact between the City and Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Commissioner Keon: The whole thing relates to the public schools. That's all I'm saying to you, the whole mission of this board. If they want to expand their mission beyond that, that's -- I mean, I don't really care. That's fine, but they -- but the things that you have mentioned...

Commissioner Mena: Well, what is the...

Commissioner Keon: Are beyond that.

Commissioner Mena: From seven to nine have to do with what you're saying. I don't follow.

Commissioner Keon: It isn't the seven to nine. It's the things that they want to do, why they need additional people. Could you read that again? Why do they want additional people?

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: So...

Commissioner Keon: I thought it was originally to represent more schools, but they're saying it's not to represent more schools. It's to expand their role.

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: It's to handle the various initiatives that they have taken on. The first ones that I'll read, those are as far -- those are their approved initiatives that they have been focusing on for the past couple of years.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: And then, this year, they added on yearly goals that they want to focus on. The three yearly goals for this year being the teachers awards, the summer family literacy festival, and to strengthen our connections to PTAs to get them more involved. The current initiatives they're already working on have been the City Beautiful schools initiative, the community schools project, financial literacy initiative, mentorship service programs, Coral Gables history tour, special needs services programming initiatives, community education initiatives, school libraries book drive initiative and technology initiative.

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

Commissioner Mena: I'll second.

Commissioner Keon: So, that expands the thing -- that expands the role of that...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Fine.

Commissioner Keon: That board.

Vice Mayor Lago: There's a second.

Commissioner Mena: But it's not outside the scope of public schools.

Vice Mayor Lago: It's not. It's not.

Commissioner Mena: I don't...

Vice Mayor Lago: I mean, I have two young kids and we go to...

Commissioner Keon: It's not.

Commissioner Mena: It sounds like they're trying to do a lot, which is good.

Commissioner Keon: They are trying to do a lot.

Commissioner Mena: And that's good. And they need some more firepower.

Vice Mayor Lago: And they want people to get -- they want to probably build some other committees and they want to do some other things.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Do I hear a motion?

Commissioner Mena: I'll second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll, please?

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Assistant to the City Manager Lopez: Thank you. We'll bring the resolution to the December meeting.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. You want to take a break?

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Solanch. I appreciate it.