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North Miami Beach Council approves charter school plan

The North Miami Beach paved the way for the opening of a charter school.

BY NADEGE CHARLES

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North Miami Beach's council swooned with excitement over a passed resolution that would lay the groundwork for a K-8 charter school in the city.

Councilman John Julien thanked a representative from Mater Academy Inc., the organization that would oversee the operation of the school, for making the council's "wildest dreams come true."

In a unanimous vote at the March 2 meeting, the council gave City Manager Kelvin Baker permission to enter into negotiations with Mater Academy to build the school on city-owned property next to Patricia A. Mishcon Athletic Field, 16601 NE 15th Ave.

In exchange, the city, a partner in the deal, would have access to the gymnasium, classrooms, conference rooms and recreational areas during nonschool hours.

North Miami Beach residents would also get first dibs on enrollment.

Many charter schools base their curriculum on a specific field of study, such as the performing arts or medical science.

No such theme has been decided for a possible North Miami Beach charter, but Councilwoman Barbara Kramer hinted at a curriculum focused on science and mathematics, noting the city's water treatment plant would make for an excellent research lab.

As part of the negotiations with the city, Mater Academy Inc., and Civica LLC., the construction firm overseeing the project, has agreed to build an ADA-compliant facility in the school and to invest in future enhancements of the nearby park.

"I believe this school will be a great asset to our community," Councilman Philippe Derose said.

City officials hope to have the school completed by the opening of the 2011 school year.

In other city news, all proceeds collected from red light camera violations starting in March will be placed in an escrow account.

City attorney Darcee Siegel said the move is precautionary in case a court of law finds that red light cameras are illegal and requires cities to repay the money associated with the fines.

In February, Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judge Jerald Bagley ruled that the city of Aventura could not use cameras to fine red-light runners.

"The ruling only applies to Aventura at this point," Darcee said. "If for some reason we are required to refund any portion of the fees, the money will be available."