

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item A-1
November 17, 2009
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Commissioner Maria Anderson
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.
Commissioner Wayne “Chip” Withers

City Staff

City Manager, Patrick Salerno
City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Assistant City Manager, Maria Jimenez

Public Speaker(s)

Maria I. Nardi – Chief of the Planning and Research Division Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation

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Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Maria Nardi represents the South Florida Park Coalition, which really brings together city, county, state, and federal park agencies, to establish greater partnership in collaboration among agencies to build a more livable and sustainable community. Just recently they had a South Florida Park Coalition meeting in the City of Coral Gables and I think the Mayor was there representing the City, along with several other Mayors, including the Mayor of Miami-Dade County. They talked about how we could work to connect the parks throughout the County, to make it friendlier to the residents of Coral Gables and not only City but Miami-Dade County residents themselves. Maria, why don't you go ahead and tell us a little bit about the South Florida Coalition.

Ms. Nardi: Thank you Mr. Mayor and Vice Mayor Kerdyk for asking me to make this presentation and good morning to all of the Commissioners. This presentation I'm about to show you started about three years ago now in 2006, where Miami-Dade County set out to create a new parks master plan, it was way overdue, it was thirty years old and we certainly needed a new one. This time though, what we did was create a master plan, which is not a typical parks master plan, this one is a fifty year vision. Typically, parks master plans are about nuts and bolts, they look at each park, how many fields here, how many facilities in this place, but what we're looking at is a vision with the County as a whole, a vision about livability, creating a more sustainable community. And with that we learned some lessons that we incorporated into the master plan and we've been sharing with everyone and as part of the South Florida Park

Coalition, it is something that we bring to this Coalition, which will help us achieve collectively a more loveable community, as somebody once said for all residents. So with this, I will show you several images, and will go through them very quickly, but I wanted to give you some idea to what I was making reference to. We start with some of the challenges, which states that if we continue to build the way we build, we'll go from the image to the left to the right, which talks about population density, and if we continue stroll, we're going to be losing a whole lot of open space. What that translates for us is we can relate to is a whole lot of traffic, and also as we see development patterns, Coral Gables one of them, that is changing for the Parks and Recreation Department, what we talk about is providing services and how to provide different kinds of services to the different types of densities that will continue to unfold. With that comes great challenges, like environmental issues that we're also dealing with, and the picture that everyone can relate to most, is the one of the kids all the way to the right, we call that nature deficit disorder. We base all of our studies in the three legs of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental, which form the foundation of this plan. So how are we responding to change with all of the challenges that we have? In our research from looking at model tested cities, we learn that a great park system is not just composed of parks, but it's also composed of other elements, which include five different elements: parks, public faces, natural/cultural areas, greenways, and water trails/streets. So the first layer, I should say the guiding principles are equity, accessibility, seamlessness, sustainability, beauty, and multiple benefits, and I'll talk about each one of them. Imagine Miami-Dade County, where parks are accessible to everyone, regardless of age or ability; and before I go further, I love Coral Gables and it is certainly an inspiration for my work, the work of George Merrick is certainly time tested and there are a lot of lessons that I learned from here. What we are talking about parks, is that locally everyone should have access to these activities from where they live. What we're looking at is that we have different kinds of concepts: urban, suburban, and rural, and your experience in them is going to be very different and how we provide for high quality of life is going to vary. In an urban setting, you're going to walk your dog on the sidewalk, meet friends in a restaurant/café, in a suburban setting, you may drive them to a dog park, in a rural setting you will let dog off the leash and run in your five acre lot. In this setting we looked at Dadeland Mall, this is a hypothetical case study; it's a fifty year vision, and we said okay, how would we apply these principles if Dadeland Mall is no longer viable as Dadeland Mall? We looked at it, and what we would do to change this is talk to developers; and we would ask them to give us meaningful public space, and we would also ask them to have it be a connected system, with tree lined streets. We would also ask for those sites to be connected outside the development area to larger parks and to schools, and we would also ask that amenities, like the canal, be seen as a real asset, and not something people turn their backs on and transforming it into something like this. We understand that parks are a catalyst for the economic viability and the transformation in an area. We know that by simply adding sidewalk, trees, and benches, you are already transforming the character of that neighborhood. And that certainly invites the possibility for affordable housing and work force housing along that area. At a regional scale, we are talking about in the future where to site these kinds of facilities, and may not all be green space, but they certainly could be a gymnasium or indoor facilities. We would like for those to be connected to transit, to offer people the opportunity to get out of their cars and use transit more often, contributing to the economic or sustainability of our community.

That's the first layer; the second layer is public spaces. I think we can all relate to what that means. In the County we all have a great opportunity with our transit stock, that were built in the

seventies, and we are grateful for that, because we have an infrastructure to build on, but we have surface parking lots, that we're talking about maybe transforming them into green spaces. How amazing would it be if we would have a green space there or a farmers market perhaps? Build the economic agriculture base of our community. Invite mix use development around it, and propose parking garages around that and this actually happened in Orlando, Florida, where you have parking garages around that area. Connecting to schools is also important; every time I give this presentation I mention Coral Gables High School, because it's a place I go and run around the track, and it is certainly something that we are working with the School Board to create greater partnerships. To make sure that our access to those sites are not dependent on the principle, but it's actually a goal of both agencies.

The third layer of cultural and natural area, we are challenged, because we have to balance access and conservation. And we are talking about sites that are stretched throughout the County, that look like on your left. They are not seen as real access to the community and we are proposing to transform that, by providing sidewalks and trails within the parks, plant trees along the street, having buildings in the future face that area, and see it as real access, as opposed to turning their backs to it.

So the first sites you saw are the free spaces, now I'm going to show how to connect them as a system. Greenways and trails, the County has about 500 miles, and we've already built about 130 miles, and we have 25 miles that are underway. These miles spread throughout the County and currently we have been in some discussions with some of you regarding way finding, and we've created a way finding system, a universal way for people to maneuver through the different trails and have a unified experience throughout Miami-Dade County as a whole. These trails signage will be located everywhere, we have already partnered with the City of Miami, and the City of Doral is also going to be working with us, as well.

Commissioner Cabrera: We've actually met with Miami-Dade County staff and our City Manager staff to go over this. I'm trying to remember the gentleman's name...

Ms. Nardi: Kevin Kirwan.

Commissioner Cabrera: Kevin, Yes.

Ms. Nardi: We have a very ambitious trail, its connecting the two national parks together. Metropolitan Area of Miami-Dade County is the only area in the country that has two national parks, which are bordered by two national parks. What we would like to do is connect these national parks together, and it's the first trail in the country that will do so. It is a 42 mile loop and it proposes to cut through Homestead and different cities, and much like Pinellas County, it brings incredible viability to that area. Currently, the trail looks like this use, and we are proposing to use it as a multi-use trail, with an equestrian trail and bicycling and walking use. We are proposing what we are calling the western greenway, which stretches from the north to the south end of the county. To provide a meaningful trail that connects from north to south and protects the Everglades. This would be a series of trails that are under that are under that green area that already exist. The concept is to build on the agriculture area that already exists there, the Napa Valley concept, our version would be Carrabolla Valley or something like that.

Great streets is the last layer that I have to show you and when I started working on project I learned that twenty percent of the right of way of the public realm is in the right of way. This is significant, because when you consider that is designed just to move cars and the opportunities to move people is really significant. What we propose to do is incorporate a concept that's happening throughout the nation called "Complete the Street Concept", and what that is saying is that you design your world not just for cars, but for people and cyclists. And what that would like, and keep your eye on the curb, because keep in mind that the curb would not change, but over time in development, remember this is a fifty year vision, we would ask for something to change, in order to achieve what we have here in Miracle Mile. Putting the buildings to the front, the parking in the back, providing a bicycle lane, whatever it may be, but it certainly creates a different level of quality of life for residents in the area.

Another typical section in Miami-Dade County, if you noticed a tiny little person in the background that's grandpa, I think he's fishing. What we're looking at here as well is create linear parts, and how do you really propose to do that? And it's very simple with landscape, with some widening of the sidewalks, working with South Florida Water Management District, which we've already began to do. You really change the quality of life for that area, and encourage walking and healthy lifestyles.

Another area which is really familiar to you here, how to change these simple gestures in many years to come, discussions with FPL to bury the power lines, and to add trees on the streets etc. It's something that requires work, but we can certainly start now. This actually happened in (inaudible) Avenue, they have expanded the sidewalks and what they have is transformed that entire neighborhood. You can see from this image that it's a linear park, and its community and users have a different sense of play.

So through these five layers we are proposing to change the buildable livable community. I'm going to take you through some quick test benchmarking that we did. Chattanooga, Tennessee this was before and this is after, investments increased and property value increased...Seattle Washington, same thing investment in the public realm has transformed the area...Chicago is the green poster child. How are we going to implement this? So this where I come and to talk to you about South Florida Park Coalition. We are working on shaping it and putting these elements into our policy and practices. One of the things we're looking at is working with the different agencies, and one of the things we have is working with all of you through the South Florida Park Coalition. What I am asking of you today is to adopt the South Florida Park Coalition Charter, which is city, county, state, and federal agencies coming together and working to build a livable community. And with that I will end thank you.

Mayor Slesnick: Well thank you Maria and I am so proud that we have a Coral Gables resident spearheading much of this project. And as Vice Mayor Kerdyk stated, I was at the last Coalition meeting and it was certainly one of inspirational discussion between cities and counties, and where we're headed with linking our parks and trying to make it possible for people to utilize parks throughout the County and stay on green trails and waterways to get there. That's something we didn't talk much about today, but the waterway trails is also part of this.

Commissioner Cabrera: I had a senior moment earlier with Kevin. We are actually good friends we cycle together, but I had not associated his name with your presentation today. What I want to ask staff was had we made any other strides with regards to the wayward signage that the County met with us about? May I Mr. Manager, may I ask the Assistant City Manager?

Assistant City Manager Maria Jimenez: I think funding was the challenge sir.

Commissioner Cabrera: I recall now...members of the Commission, Kevin Kirwan works with the Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation Department, and he was kind enough to meet with Maria Jimenez and I regarding a wayward signage program, which is very unique and user friendly. What I recall that happened was that the cost of the wayward signs was around \$25,000.00 and the County would do the installation for us. What we discussed was going back to the County and asking them if we could use road impact fees. Do you know Ms. Nardi if road impact fees is a funding mechanism in order to be able to purchase these wayward signs?

Ms. Nardi: I don't know, but I can get back to you on that.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well I was supposed to ask that, so you know what I will do is with staff, I will contact the County and see if that is a possibility. The last time we met was about two months ago, and I may have Public Works Department in the County very briefly and I need to follow up on it. Maybe we can have some sort of presentation to the Commission, to see if we have a consensus among us. It is primarily for usage of parks, bike lanes, and were there some historical significance in the signage?

Ms. Nardi: The trail signs are mainly for trails, but they indicate a map, and the maps indicate historic sites, schools, commercial centers, and other areas that might be of interest to the bicyclists.

Commissioner Cabrera: I can tell you that the presentation and signs themselves are very tastefully done. Even though you had in your PowerPoint, it really doesn't do justice to the signage. Maybe what we can have the Commission do is review it. There may not be an appetite to move forward with this if the signage is not something this body wants to do, but I can tell you that I think you will be impressed when you see it. Thank you.

Commissioner Withers: Can I ask you a question about the Matheson Hammock Development Area....do you know where the County and the state are on that?

Ms. Nardi: The building that was presented to you, not quite sure when it was, was taken back to the drawing board. They are making the building smaller, and from what I understand at this point it is not moving forward because it is tied to funding.

Commissioner Withers: How about on the west side of Old Cutler...the development of the dog park?

Ms. Nardi: I don't have much information on that, but I can get back to you on that. I have not been directly involved with this project, but we met with the community a while ago to hear their concerns. There were two main concerns: some folks who wanted the dog park and then some who had concerns about parking because of having a dog park in the area. We are trying to balance and have a happy medium between the different desires from the community.

Commissioner Withers: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Maria, living in Coral Gables you certainly know how much attention the City pays to its open spaces, parks, bicycle trails, and just quality of life for the residents of the City and Fred Couceyro is doing a great job for the City, supervising those overall plans. I understand that you have a draft resolution in front of us, and I would like to ask staff to go ahead and put this on the next meeting agenda, so we can consider that resolution. Certainly if there is anything I can do or staff can do to help perpetuate this in the County that is something we would be interested in doing.

Ms. Nardi: Thank you very much and I must tell you that Fred has been a critical part in helping us in developing this South Florida Park Coalition Charter. He is a really great leader for this effort. We have other agencies/entities that have signed on to this charter that I just wanted to mention to you: North Miami, Miami Gardens, Doral, Hialeah, Sunny Isles Beach, South Miami, the University of Miami School of Architecture, Miami-Dade County School Board, Everglades National Park, and Biscayne National Park. Our goal is to be able to report back at the next Great Park Summit in March of 2010 all inform them of all the cities that have signed on to the charter, so we can all move collectively to build a better community. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Thank you very much.

Mayor Slesnick: Thank you.

[End: 1:59:40 p.m.]