

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-8
February 14, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner James Cason

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Community Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-8 [2:24 p.m.]

Update regarding Phillip's Park renovations.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez)

Mayor Lago: G-8 is our last item under City Commission items and then we'll move onto the final item.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you Mayor. We have the Community Recreation team here. Please Carolina, Carlos come up here. I want to recognize you all. First off, before we get to G-8, I want to just commend your team on such an amazing event Saturday night at the Coral Gables Country Club for the Daddy/Daughter Dance. It was spectacular. I mingled with a lot of the families, the dads. In leaving the venue after the event, I stayed the entire time was that good. I could hear the girls just gushing about every little detail that you added to create the atmosphere of the Beauty and the Beast, even the music, the decorations. It was spectacular. The 20 years I've been involved, I got to go to ten with my daughter. It was so special. I was moved because we've

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gone from the Women’s Club to Fairchild Tropical Garden to the UM Alumni Center, now its where it should be, home, in our city landmark building and you brought life to it, you brought memories to it. It was amazing. I know you have a, I think, video recap like a minute long, but what an amazing job. I’m so proud of you all.

Commissioner Anderson: Amazing team. Thank you for all you do.

Director Couceyro: Thank you.

[Video Presentation]

Commissioner Menendez: That was spectacular. Congratulations again.

Director Couceyro: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: I decided to go over, and I know some time goes by and when time goes by, I just want to reinform the community of the plans for Phillips Park, and I think its important, because its such an important asset to the city. As we’ve discussed before, its an extension of the Coral Gables Youth Center. It’s a site that can be programmed and we’ve talked about North Gables, I think most of the day today, and how the residents there feel that perhaps we’ve overlooked them, overlooked their area, and I want to reassure them that the plans for Phillips Park which we approved last year will be moving forward. So, Fred, by all means, please.

Director Couceyro: If we can bring up, we have a presentation. So, as we’ve discussed, we worked on a concept plan, we’ve worked with the designers and looked at the cost estimates and we’ve kind of also met with, and I’ll go over this with the communities and other user groups as to how the park would be used. So, just going to present really quick where we are and what the next steps are. Just a quick status update.

Commissioner Anderson: And while you’re doing that, let’s just remind people that in the North Gables we also have ribbon-cutting this Thursday for the dog park off of Ponce, which street is that on Fred?

City Attorney Suarez: 1505 Ponce.

Commissioner Anderson: 1505 Ponce.

Director Couceyro: 1505 Ponce, yes. So, this is where we are, real quick, Phillips Park, in case anyone needs to know that’s an overhead. Currently, right now, we have a larger natural grass field, basketball court and two tennis courts with a pavilion and a bathroom facility and a playground. So, some of the proposed enhancements that we’ve looked at that we’ve discussed and presented is, an expansion slash replacement of the current building, and I’ll get to that as we go through the plan, and introduce the building with activity space, office space and indoor

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restroom facilities. We are looking at adding pickleball courts, a splash pad playground component, removal of the dugout structures, installation of an artificial turf field, and a secondary pavilion for additional rentals and parties and uses and also a lighting and CCT camera system that would be installed. Some of the proposed improvements on what we already have there is an expansion relocation of the playground to provide a more expansive, more adventure-type area; removal of one of the tennis courts and a relocation of basketball to provide a proper fenced in court; resurfacing and new hardscapes for both the tennis and basketball courts, wider multi-use walkways going up to six feet, and some additional landscaping; brand new perimeter fencing and park furnishings, and also some shade structures for the splash pad and the playground. So this is the concept overhead without the trees and I'll give you a little bit more in depth. As you can see, we are looking at having all of the different components that we talked about. The field will be right in the middle as it is now. It will be artificial turf, so you can actually have an enclosed area and have it be used more extensively. We did have conversations on the different uses of the park. The splash pads playground, whatever we call it, I'll show you some pictures in a second of what we want to do in terms of concept, but as you can see its got a winding walkway all the way around, the pavilion over on the southeast corner is the small one that we allowed in. We will refurbish the existing one, that's over near the northwest corner. There is the extension of the building and also the courts, as we see it; and the playground, which we hope to be one of the center pieces of that design, which will be a nice, large, inviting playground, a fun area for all the kids. So this is just pointing out everything where its going to be, where the picnic pavilion is. We are going to have pedestrian gates as we do now and all the different items; the pickleball courts are the small ones, you can see the tennis lines and the basketball court lines as well, and the little blue circle there and the low mid of the slide, that is our water splash pad. So, these are some of the inspirations that we're looking at for our playground. We want something that's a little bit more modern, that's going to be a lot of adventure, a lot of activity, a lot of climbing, a lot of different surfaces, not your normal platform slide design that we've done in other ones in the past. As you know, with Salvadore and a couple of other parks, we kind of move away from just your regular platform design and we've added rope climbers and we've added different things and that's what we want to continue to do. We've gotten a lot of positive feedback from our participants on that; and what we really want to look at is have something be a showpiece. So, I want to build it up. I want to get it a little higher, those towers are a possibility or something like a gigantic climber like that, that goes around. We'll work with the community and we'll present some options, as we go to a real design, this is just concept, but that's kind of what we're looking at. We're looking at something that's a wow factor that gives us something that people are going to enjoy to go there. We set a nice precedent with Salvadore and we've got to keep it going with Phillips. These are some of the things that we are looking at for swings. Swings are a big part of Phillips. There are some swings there. The neighborhood made sure let us know we wanted to keep the swings, so there are some cool swing designs that are being put out there that we might look at, and if you want to go away from the belt swing to some other swings like those uni-directional swings or the partner swing

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that's over there, the yellow one, so there's all those options that we'll present as well. In terms of the splash pad, what we wanted to look at is, we don't want a big square tent shade. We want to have like shade sales to have it be an aesthetic design that looks inviting and it looks good within the area. We are looking at having the fountains and the sprays that come up out of the surface and having some equipment, as you can see there's some noodles and there are some intricate designs and little statutes. What we do want to stay away from here, I think is, that our traditional water park theme which is like the building with the slide and stuff, that's not a big enough area, in our opinion, to do it and its not really like a pool setting where you would need a lot more depth of water, so I think if you look at some of these you kind of see those are what we're looking at, which is a contained player that's got a lot of different opportunities for the kids to enjoy all the different, whether its just sprays coming out of the ground, but there's other stuff like little buckets that would fall on your head, umbrellas or things like that.

Vice Mayor Mena: Take a look at what Pinecrest Gardens has.

Director Couceyro: We have. We have.

Vice Mayor Mena: Its somewhat like what you're describing.

Director Couceyro: And that's exactly what – that's part of the same look, you're not having these big playground areas like an adventures waterpark, that's what we're looking for.

Commissioner Menendez: That's a great facility.

Director Couceyro: Same kind of thing. These are just our traditional park amenities. The one thing I will say, these are just things that's just the look, not all of these will be in that park. This is just our trademark design template for all of our parks. So we did have a community meeting, because we went for a matching grant application with the state grant. The concept design was well received. We've made some tweaks based on that. One of the things that we did not reach consensus on, because we've had some of the neighbors there weren't in favor of adding the two pickleball courts, they wanted to keep the two tennis courts and integrate the pickleball, but then as you've seen here before Commission, our pickleball players wanted their own standalone, and we also heard from the basketball players that a fenced in area, over on the side would be better than having it be right in front of the field where the soccer balls were going into their play. So we are trying to reach the most consensus we can with that design, its not 100 percent for anyone, but I think we're making enough groups happy that we can work with that. We will also meet with the community again and we'll continue to look at it.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think as you go through that process, keep in mind that this isn't really, for lack of a better word, a local community park. This is one of our bigger, our second biggest really.

Director Couceyro: Yes, it is. It will become our second biggest.

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Vice Mayor Mena: And so, you know while obviously, the community input around there is really important, you know you also have to look at, we have our parks plan, there are certain features, like the splash pad you just talked about as an example, that we don't necessarily have in the city pickleball being another one, obviously. So you have to look at this as more of like a regional park for our city that has certain functionalities that as citywide we need or want, not just localized, which again, there's important factors to consider for the local surrounding neighborhood, but in terms of the features that you also have to look big picture, which I know you know, but I think its important to state as you go through this process.

Director Couceyro: Absolutely. I think that's something that we discussed and we do the best we can to meet every need of every person and sometimes there's opposing different views, so we do the best we can to reach the best possible solution.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, we have localized input, but we realize this is a regional facility.

Commissioner Anderson: It definitely is, and the good news about that is that dog park is within like a half a block, so you can put a "no dog" sign in Phillips and take your dog down the block here it is in this direction.

Director Couceyro: So, this is where we are, what our estimated cost is and what's next. The total estimated project budget is \$9.5 million based on the cost estimates we are receiving. We've been working with our Master Plan designer to look at that and as you know, the Commission, you voted to get full funding for that in installments and we'll have the full funding available at the beginning of fiscal year 25, which is October 24. We already have \$3 million, so we've already started, because we've worked on the design concept. Our next steps are, we also are awaiting to see if we get that grant and that match, but we are starting to work with what our construction will be in our timeline; we are going to go to community and as you see, we are scheduled to meet with certain groups. I do have the PTA, PTSA, I think I have a meeting with them coming up, because the school is next-door. Where we are is, we've done the concept meetings, we've done the community meeting, we've done the advisory boards, we've done our community associations. We are going to do a proposed community follow up meeting in May, that's what we're looking to do. We want to do it right before summer before everyone goes out on vacation. And then the programming and procurement we can start, because we have some of the funds already, we just have to be ready to go so when the construction timeline will be sixteen months and then whenever its over we'll be able to pay it past fiscal year 25, October 2024, so that's the hope. That's the plan.

Commissioner Anderson: Great news.

Director Couceyro: Any questions.

Commissioner Menendez: I don't know if anybody has a comment or questions. I just wanted to say and I agree with the Mayor, I mean Vice Mayor, and the Manager, it is a regional park and I think its almost like once in a lifetime opportunity, because the experience here in Coral Gables, our park experiences is evolving. Look at Salvadore Park, the impact its had in our community, and this is again, one of those opportunities with such a large piece of land to really transform the experience of families in Coral Gables. If my colleagues would indulge me, I have a question for the City Attorney, can I ask, I guess, make a motion as a vote recommit this body's support for the vision, the project, the timeline, the budget and funding mechanism at this point in time. Could I ask for a recommitment?

City Attorney Suarez: It's a motion you can make, yes.

Commissioner Menendez: If you all don't mind, I'd like to make that motion.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll second it.

City Clerk Urquia: All in favor.

All: Aye.

Vice Mayor Mena: Its very exciting. I think it's a real opportunity. The wow factor you're talking about, I think this is the perfect place for it. It just makes all the sense in the world, so I'm excited to see where it ends up.

Director Couceyro: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: Great job.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.