

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-5
September 10, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Robert Ruano

Agenda Item G-5 [12:20:50 a.m.]

An update on the open space area on Blue Road.
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The last item on the agenda is an update on the open space area on Blue Road.

Vice Mayor Lago: This is quick, I know that we've been here for a while. I'm actually impressed that we are finishing early. This is the last item.

City Attorney Ramos: I'm not sure if we did G-1.

Vice Mayor Lago: No, no, no, I pulled that item, because we already addressed the Constitution. I had a walk-through on site with several residents and we've been having some discussions over the last year in regard to the Blue Road open space. If you have not had the chance to get out of your car and walk this city-owned piece of property, this park, its something beautiful on our
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waterway. The owner of the neighboring property has enjoyed a large field, an empty piece of property, which he or she has been able to enjoy at their leisure, the City hasn't programmed it. But the purpose of today's discussion is, and I asked Ed to come and speak really quickly. What I wanted was to in 2020 for the City to allocate the necessary funds in the budget for us in the next year to hold public meetings for the residents to tell us exactly what they want. From what I've heard, they want something simple where children can play, where they can have a moment, where there is the necessary safety away from the waterway, the canal that's there. Have those public meetings and then move in a direction of RFP/RFQ to get an architect, an engineering firm to design the style of the park and then in 2021 fund the programming in the park. The whole purpose is between 2020 was to have public meetings and have the design process commence. So, we can take advantage of this great location, this great amenity.

Commissioner Mena: [Inaudible]

Vice Mayor Lago: We didn't acquire this and as a result of 35 percent amendment to my legislation, we are going to be able to spend some of the money that Commissioner Mena allocated to make this park actually used by the community. People thought this was a private piece of land.

Commissioner Mena: Yes, most people think it's the yard for that.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Good afternoon Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, Ed Santamaria, Assistant City Manager. I'll be very brief. Yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Awesome.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: We can definitely take a look.

Commissioner Mena: There needs to be a significant investment in the basic, sort of infrastructure, right, safety...

City Manager Iglesias: I think we need to look at something very special in this park, because it has water, and we can incorporate the water in a safe way, so I think we need to look at this very carefully.

Vice Mayor Lago: Just want to be very, very clear. My only goal is that December 31, 2020 come around and that we have public input done and that we have already started, we have identified an architect and engineer, landscape engineer, whatever design professional you need to find for the process and that we embark on a design. A design – moving forward so that in 2021 we can start, maybe we don't have the money, maybe we find out it's a million dollar park or a \$500,000 park,

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maybe we need to do it over two years, but I just want to make sure that we embark on the process and at least start having the discussion.

Commissioner Mena: I think that's likely accurate.

Vice Mayor Lago: That's fine. I'm not saying to build this park tomorrow.

Commissioner Keon: I think that it would be a good idea once you start and you make that decision that at least in some way you define what is our area, whether you construct a fence no matter what, from the neighbors, so its defined and there is a fence of some sort that goes along the waterway. So, when you begin this discussion, people realize that it is city-owned property before you even start to determine what will go in that park that you reclaim it as – to anybody passing by, it becomes obvious that it is city-owned property.

Vice Mayor Lago: With that being said. One of the main points, and I don't know how we'll be able to accomplish this, because there isn't anything blocking people from falling into the water there now. When people drive there, they see a no trespassing sign – you see a no trespassing sign, you are sending a message that it's a private lot or the City doesn't own it, nobody can trespass. Again, it's a public piece of property; people should be able to get on that property right now if they want to. They want to sit down and have a picnic under one of the beautiful trees or take their child, throw a ball, whatever it may be, whatever their interests are. Right now, it clearly says no trespassing and I know why we did that.

City Manager Iglesias: The problem I see there, Vice Mayor is that, we have water right there and the classic thing is to put a fence on there, but it destroys the water effect, so we need to look at something really creative there, so we can have the water and the same time safety, whether it's a micro dock or something like that.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I agree. We need to have access there.

City Manager Iglesias: That would provide safety at the same time not take away that water exposure would be very unusual and a beautiful piece of the park.

Vice Mayor Lago: The issue is that we get into this no trespassing situation, when a resident comes and says, hey the City owns that piece of property, but it says no trespassing. It's a public safety issue, somebody may fall into the water, a child may fall on those rocks, yes, but let's do something about it. What I want to be able to answer is say, they call me, they all call me, I live a few blocks away and tell me, Vince, what's going on with this piece of publicly owned property. OK, we are actually right now in the design process, we are actually vetting public comment. You can have an

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answer to them. Right now, the answer, we are not doing anything with the property, and you can't get into it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Ruano you wanted to say a few words. The key word there is few.

Mr. Ruano: How many is few Mayor?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Three.

Mr. Ruano: Three? Robert Ruano, 1544 Murcia Avenue. But I'm actually here on behalf of Bike/Walk Coral Gables, because actually we probably discovered this, the group discovered this probably like five years ago. We've been talking about it and not that we discovered it, because other Commissioners, other Commissions have been discussing this property before. We've been taking groups out there on our monthly bike tour, actually we have one on Sunday, hope you come out. But we've been taking them out there for about four-five years, everybody loves it. This is, as the Vice Mayor said, its almost a one-acre property. I met with the Risk Management Director about two years ago out on that property. So, all it needs basically, at least to control it is a four-foot fence. So, I'm glad that we are going to do this. If you do this and start the design, this is historic, because although money has been allocated for this property in the past, it keeps moving forward into the future. So, it would be great if you could...

Vice Mayor Lago: If we budget the money for it.

Mr. Ruano: If you can start design, work with the community, the neighbors, figure out what they want, but the goal is obviously open it up. You bought a lot of properties, here's one that you have already.

Commissioner Mena: Are you saying Bike/Walk Coral Gables doesn't abide by no trespassing sign. Just kidding.

Mr. Ruano: Actually, I was conferring with the Chief and I think it says no unauthorized vehicles. I may be arrested one day.