

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
March 28, 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

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-1 [12:02 p.m.]

Discussion regarding Catalonia/Salvadore Dog Park. (Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez)
(Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto time certain at 11 o'clock, item G-1.

Commissioner Anderson: This is a discussion item on Catalonia and Salvadore Park; and we had a Sunshine meeting in the park area, discussing both the condition of the park there and the desires of the community, and also the need for strong enforcement when the park goes through its transition period. City Manager, do you have an update for us on when the Salvador dog run will be done?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes. Our Public Works Director will give you the schedule, provide the schedule Commissioner.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

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Public Works Director Diaz: Good morning, Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director. We broke ground last week and completion scheduled for July.

Commissioner Anderson: July?

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: I thought it was June.

Commissioner Menendez: I heard June too.

Commissioner Anderson: I heard June. I heard mid-June.

Public Works Director Diaz: Sixty days for completion and thirty (30) days to finalize the final punch list. So, we are in April, May, June, the end of June, the very end of June.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay. Kind of push it along a little faster, because the community...

Public Works Director Diaz: We can try to push it along, yes.

Commissioner Anderson: The community is up in arms over the use of the space, the misuse of the space. It's become a very...

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes – 60 days for start to completion and 30 days, we're fine, so that's the schedule, three months.

Commissioner Menendez: And as Commissioner Anderson said, we had the Sunshine meeting. Thank you to City Clerk for being there, Deena, Public Works, and we've been addressing the issue of Catalonia Park for some time. We've been looking for solutions, temporary solutions with the idea that we will provide more dog parks, obviously at Salvadore Park. There is a boom in dog ownership in Coral Gables. I think everywhere we go, everyone we talk to, the number of dog owners, maybe five years ago wasn't that big of an issue, but now it's a major issue, and we need to address it, and be fair about it. So when we had our meeting with the residents, it was a Sunshine meeting open to anyone, but mostly it was residents around that area; and they understand and they communicated that there are folks that are not following the rules and regulations of unleashed dogs, and folks you know, its almost a situation that is almost unmanageable, that's why its so important to bring online Salvadore Park. The interior fencing that, thank you to Fred and your team and the city staff, we put new sod there, because it got worn out. The interior fencing, yes, you did it in 24 hours and we really appreciate it. It's fantastic. For the residents that are missing sod on their front lawn, you know where Fred got it. But the reality is that interior fencing from day one was temporary, so we can transition and try to keep some semblance of peace and order, but unfortunately, its becoming more and more difficult. So at that discussion, at that meeting, the idea was and correct me if I'm not correct on what I'm about to say was, once Salvadore is open,

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or the dog play area there, the permanent dog play area, we remove the interior fencing at Catalonia Park and my understanding from meetings ago, at that point we transition Catalonia to be primarily a children's park and have the dogs owners go to Salvadore. What I'm trying to say is, I want to put it on the record and we can have a resolution, on the official steps that we plan to take so that the community understands, they are not surprised, but also very importantly, we talked about Police, Code, and Community Recreation come up with a defined enforcement plan that maybe it could be an attachment to the resolution, because we can't just think and hope that people are going to follow the rules and regulations; 99 percent of them do, but the one percent that don't really create chaos for everybody else. So, I want to come up with a defined plan on how we're going to transition and how we're going to enforce, and that was our conversation, Fred, you were there with the residents who attended the meeting.

Commissioner Anderson: And I'll just add, you know, for Code Enforcement to deal with all those individuals that chose not to follow the rules is going to be a little bit of a tough calling for them, because some are not so nice and sometimes – so I lean towards you may have to have police come in for the initial whatever, 30-day period or whatever period it is, to get the message across, because we have people on both sides of the fence, pardon the pun on it, the temporary one taken down temporarily or now until and some never want it taken down and some that want to turn it all into a dog park forever, but I believe in respecting the community there that voted there and following through on that request, and nor do I want to go back on what our word was when we initially slated this. But we do need a strong, clear enforcement plan, clear language of what's going to be going forward in that park, whether it be no dogs or unleash. Those words have to be in front so people have the message without having to read an entire paragraph.

Commissioner Menendez: We don't want confrontations. Its not this issue, not this situation, but in the past, I know for example, at the Youth Center we talked about it years ago, we had staff trying to monitor the field on Sundays and they had to call the police because the folks that were using it incorrectly, basically threatened the staff member, and unfortunately things haven't changed, and residents shouldn't be enforcing our rules, we should be enforcing our rules, and for peace and safety and well being of everybody. And if there's any way expedite Salvadore Park dog play area, let us know.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll do our best.

Commissioner Menendez: We'll pass whatever resolution needed to move things, because somehow, someway we need to make both ends meet and in an efficient and effective way.

Public Works Director Diaz: They broke ground last week, so we'll push them.

Commissioner Cason: I have a question. What can Code Enforcement do, particularly if people involved are not Coral Gables residents, for example. I can see what police can do, but probably

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you cite somebody for doing something wrong with the dogs, but they don't even live in Coral Gables. I bet you a lot of those people aren't.

City Attorney Suarez: A Code Enforcement citation can be issued and there's a fine associated with it.

Commissioner Cason: Do they have to pay it if they don't live in Coral Gables?

City Attorney Suarez: Yes. Of course, they can pay for it. The challenge is then enforcement if they don't pay, because its not a, it wouldn't be a lien against the property.

Commissioner Menendez: How do they cite a non-resident?

City Attorney Suarez: They issue a citation under the name of that person.

Commissioner Menendez: But if that person is belligerent, let's say, they don't want to cooperate or participate.

City Attorney Suarez: Then they can't, they don't have the person's name.

Commissioner Menendez: That's a real world – I don't live here, you can't cite me.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think we have to rip the band aid off, because I think we're creating the sort of situation by trying to appease everybody. I think we went temporary with this until Salvadore. I would agree that once Salvadore is open, I won't be here, it will be your decision, but I would say, I would go no dog at that point here, because if you continue doing this unleash, you are going to continue having those situations.

Mayor Lago: Everyday when I drive by the park in front of Coral Gables, I forgot the name now, Catalonia, I apologize, everybody has their dogs without leash every day. We've got to make a decision on what we're going to do. We've got kids, toddlers – I get calls all the time. It's a tough situation, but for the first time ever, we're delivering four to five dog parks in this community. We got to have spaces for everybody.

Vice Mayor Mena: And you've got to be willing to look them in the eye and say, look, we're not going to have... We want to have them, we want to have enough options for people. I think its reasonable to say, look, we pushed, like Commissioner Anderson leadership on the issue, to have this at Salvadore Park, its going to be great, but that means that this one then goes back to...

Mayor Lago: And there's also a big park that we're in the process of negotiating right now that hopefully will come online in the near future that's a great opportunity to have dogs there also in a certain area running free. You got to also understand that little parks like Catalonia cannot have kids and dogs running round loose and every day I go by there, there's always a German Shepherd

that's constantly loose there. One day something's going to happen, like Commissioner Menendez said, someone's going to get bit, and its not the dog's fault, its usually the child's fault. A young child that grabs a dog by mistake, it just happens.

Vice Mayor Mena: And you're going to have to resod every few months because its not a big enough piece of land to really be a dog park that's functional in the right way.

Commissioner Menendez: You wanted to have that enforcement plan detailed worked out.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: We'll provide that to you at the next Commission meeting.

Mayor Lago: We have a pretty long list. We have an update, the park will be done in June. We'll have a detailed breakdown in regard to enforcement as per Commissioner Menendez request, and we'll bring it to the next Commission meeting. Mr. Clerk, do you have that. Can we put that on the next Commission agenda.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Anything else from the team? Okay. Perfect.