

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comments
April 12, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Larry Kries

Hanan Galindo

Marlin Ebbert

Greg Hamra

Mark Trowbridge

Agenda Item C [Start: 10:13 a.m.]

Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, we'll move onto the Public Comment. How many comments do we have?

City Clerk Urquia: So far, six Mr. Mayor. First speaker is Ms. Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Before I start, the name is Mrs. Maria Cruz, just to make clear. I don't want to be the Maria Cruz, now I'm Mrs. Maria Cruz. Okay. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. And I'm here again, because I made a commitment to myself and to twelve police officers, twelve female police officers, that I would not let this slide. And I'm here, its going to be five years this summer, that

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twelve police officers, twelve female police officers were vilified, chastised, embarrassed, and along with the Police Chief, and we are still waiting for a resolution. I look for papers that I have saved and the papers no longer the right color, its turning yellow already; and these twelve female officers are still waiting to be made whole, and we owe them to make them whole. Just to say, sorry it happened, it should have never happened, is not enough, okay. We do it for other people. We need to make these women whole, and I believe the Chief also deserves a very public apology from all of us, not only you all elected officials, but from the residents, because what they went through, and if you Google the names, it still comes up. That is wrong. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Larry Kries.

Mr. Kries: Good morning. My name is Larry Kries, K-R-I-E-S. My wife, Linda and I live at 748 Catalonia Avenue, where we've lived for over 25 years. I'm here today, not only on our behalf, but also some of our other neighbors and several of whom have also come to speak to you about Catalonia Park. Our home is located at the corner of Catalonia and Anderson, and we have a direct view of the park. So, every evening, I'm looking out the kitchen window at the park, and it's a free-for-all. I doubt that many of you have spent any time hanging out at the park, but if you were to come and hang out at the park, you'd see that we have dogs, and I can't even blame the dogs, by the way, but I can blame the owners of these dogs, who are not obeying the rules, not following the signs that are posted, and they just let these dogs run wild. You can go, you can look, you can see where they've torn up the turf. You can see waste. Its disgusting. And it's a shame, because it started out with a lot of potential, but it's gone downhill. I, along with a number of my other neighbors were involved in the original design of the park, and in fact, we even had a vote one day of what we wanted on the park. Some of us, because our homes are closer to the park than others, got a weighted value for our vote, but at the end of the day, Covid came, we came back and I don't know what happened to the design of the park, or who decided to make the changes, but they made changes to it, and there was never ever a discussion originally about the park, basically becoming a dog park. And it's treated as a dog park, and though its not perhaps as bad as it was before because some of the signage was altered, nonetheless, its treated as a dog park. So, what we want is, we want it to be what its supposed to be, which is a park for myself and others who live in the neighborhood and I have nothing against dogs, nothing against dogs, dogs are great, man's best friend, but I do have a problem with this, as do my other neighbors who also, by the way, are dog owners. So, we've got people coming from, I don't know where they come from, and you can look and see the cars they park wherever they want to find a parking spot, they create parking spots, so they can come and let their dogs run wild. So anyway. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you. I understand from Commissioner Anderson that there is an effort to put, to try to create a true dog park. We are very supportive of that. We would like to come up with a solution, but I'm going to tell you, we have to change what's going on there. Its out of control. So, enforce the rule. I live by rules and laws. I'm sure you do too, but I've got to tell you, we have a lot of people in Coral Gables who apparently can't read because they are not following any of the rules. Anyway, thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you for being here. Your concern is a priority for this Commission. It will be enforced, and we will find alternate solutions for individuals who have dogs so that they can enjoy themselves here in the city.

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Mr. Kries: I appreciate that.

Mayor Lago: And I give you my word and I give you the Commission's word on that front. Commissioner Anderson, you wanted to say something and then Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Anderson: We do have a couple of items on the agenda today, one to address Catalonia Park and I have frequently walked there and spoke to both dog owners and non-dog owners about their desires for that park. And you're correct, folks that come there and despite versing with them about not letting the dogs off leash, making it their daily visit to go there. So, we have to find a solution and we need to find it fast in order to resolve this problem.

Commissioner Menendez: I've gone by there a lot and my concern, number one is the safety issue with so many dogs unleashed, a large number of dogs and you have toddlers, grandkids that are two years old running and no matter how well behaved, you just never know, and no one wants to see a tragic incident.

Mr. Kries: We've been very lucky there hasn't been an accident.

Commissioner Menendez: I agree with you 100 percent and it's a chaotic situation and the city, as the Mayor said and Commissioner Anderson and colleagues agree, we need to take definitive actions. I'm very much interested in Commissioner Anderson's item with regards to finding a dog only site, so that Catalonia can be restored quickly to what it was intended to be.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may, just want to add a few points. That park came about, because I drive that area every single day, and I saw when the lady was putting up the for-sale sign on that lot, called the then City Manager and we acquired the park, which is in my opinion, one of the best acquisitions that we've had in a very long time, because of the location of the park. Its very well used. That park was never intended and was never designed to have the capacity that its facing at the present moment. So, I'm not a parks expert, but I know a little bit about construction and if you're going to have a dog park with that many dogs, you are going to have a lot of wear and tear and you see kind of like the degradation of the landscaping on the property. So, you have to build these parks with the thought that, are you going to do it for humans, or are you going to have it for dogs. If you have it for dogs, you have to use different materials and you've got to push the scope in that direction. The Vice Mayor has been working, in regard to dog parks, for five years. He took the reigns on the issue of the Underline, after we got the Underline funded and we are going to build a beautiful linear park. It should probably take a year or so. Meg Daley has been working her entire, the last ten years to bring this to fruition. There will be a dog park there, in the Underline. There will be another dog park that we are working on that Commissioner Anderson is proffering today, and we are going to be discussing and tweaking it to make it the most welcoming dog park where people can have a good time, but it can make sense and its something that is in the line of the City Beautiful. It falls in line with what our expectations are. Currently, we have in Catalonia is a park that should be for humans. If you want to bring your dog, its on a leash, make sure that its not running wild, and right now there are way too many people using that park, along with way too much traction. And we cannot continue to spend the money to fix and fix and fix and fix, we

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have budgets, and we are trying to be as tight as possible to make sure we don't have any cost over-runs. It's a priority. I promise you we are going to deal with it. The Commission is behind it, and they want to find a resolution for it.

Mr. Kries: I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

Mayor Lago: Always.

Mr. Kries: A couple of my neighbors are here as well. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: No. Please. Thank you. Who's next Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Hernan Galindo.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Galindo, thank you for being here.

Mr. Galindo: Thank you very much Mr. Mayor. Good morning Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. My name is Hernan Galindo, I live in 818 Catalonia. I've been living there for over 36 years. And I won't be repetitive with the issue with the dog park, because I think Larry has summarized it right on. I just want to add one more thing to what he said. Its also, apart from the safety issue, its become a health hazard. We can't take our grandkids there. They come out speared with dog waste all over them, and I know that the city is trying to find solutions. I encourage some alternatives. I think they are trying to do something at Salvadore Park for the time being. And the city has tried enforcement, but the enforcement thus far has been warnings, and warnings don't work. You have to go out there and you have to give citations and let the word get around for the time being until a solution is found. Thank you very much for your interest. We appreciate it very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Mr. Galindo, appreciate you being here. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Elida Galindo.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much for being here. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Marlin Ebbert.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Ebbert.

Ms. Ebbert: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Ebbert: Good morning. For the record, I'm Marlin Ebbert, I live at 6510 San Vicente Street. I've been to many Commission meetings. I must say that I was very moved this morning. It was just a wonderful first hour. All the tributes to people and the Mayor for the Day, Seanna Dan is a friend of mine's granddaughter. I had dinner with her last Thursday night. So, I will make sure that

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she knows about this. I'm here, I sound a little bit like a broken record, I've here to talk about item I-1, which is the construction that's going to take place at the Granada Snack Shop and the Pro Shop. I want to continue to urge the city to make it as sustainable as possible using recycled materials, low flush toilets, hand dryers, automatic lights, automatic thermostats, rain barrels, composting, I mean we can do so much with that small building and really make it a sustainable star. It can be for all of South Florida, it can be a very special building. I did mention last, I don't know, last fall, I guess, that there is a \$20,000 grant that's now in the hands of the Villagers to be awarded to a sustainable project, but we are a countywide organization and the grant will be very popular. So we need to apply for it at this point. The last time I talked about it, it probably could have been ours easily. And Mr. Mayor, I took a trip to Palm Beach, I went up to the Surfside Diner.

Mayor Lago: What was your impression?

Ms. Ebbert: It's a lovely diner. Well Palm Beach is quite special. It was a beautiful, beautiful morning, but it's a totally different situation. You know there are shops on either side and around the corner is their main street. So its very different from what we have here, but I took lots of pictures. I got lots of good ideas, some bad ideas, and I also do want to say that as of yesterday, nobody in the city has reached out to Rita Tennison. It was reported in this month's Coral Gables Magazine that the city was dealing with Rita. People have called me and said, wonderful, she's gotten the job, and I've said, oh no, contrary, nobody has talked to her yet. So, she is exploring other options. If you want to see Rita there, I think the time is now to speak to her. You keep saying you want a win. This could be a win-win. I'm finished. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: This is one of the many things that are our priorities here in the city that we're getting accomplished, and this will be a win for the city. Just to put it again on the record, I had a meeting with the City Manager, like a do, a weekly meeting with his staff, my staff to discuss this issue. Currently, we are going to be making renovations to the site. We are going to be addressing water, sewer. We are going to be demolishing the interiors, addressing the glazing issue.

City Manager Iglesias: Grease trap.

Mayor Lago: Grease trap, thank you. We're putting together the necessary infrastructure to put forth what this Commission discussed, and I'll put it on the record again. I think Rita Tennison is the perfect person to run that facility and to partner up with the city, to build a hometown diner, like the one that we talked about in Palm Beach. Doesn't have to look the same, just a simple diner, no frills, except for the simple fact that they serve great food, and everyone is welcome. And every time that I've had the opportunity to go there, you literally have to wait an hour because everybody around the neighborhood, yes, its situated in the downtown, but I brought it up because I think it's a hometown feel, and it doesn't have to be something fancy. It just has to be welcoming and it has to have great food. So that's what I'm looking for. To do that, I think its going to take probably \$3-\$400,000 in interior remodeling, outside of all that infrastructure work which is already budgeted for. That is a priority and I've asked for my colleagues to support me and taking the opportunity here in the Sunshine to get that done before the years end. I can't be anymore clear, but we can't sign an agreement. The Manager has to be the one that signs the agreement with Rita. I've urged our team to start having discussions in regards to what they want to see there. I know

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there has to be a procurement process, because this is a city building, but I don't see that many people being interested and I'll tell you why, because there is going to be significant requirements. And what are those requirements? We are not going to build additional parking. We are not going to provide for a massive restaurant, which is going to have late nights and is going to result in disruption in the neighborhood. We've been very clear on this. So, its not really a bountiful opportunity for restauranteurs. We have those opportunities in the downtown and as you can see, Miracle Mile is basically all full. Our downtown is full. There isn't any opportunities to even lease space. We are in a good point, and I think that we have to find the right partner for this location to deliver something, that again, doesn't have to be the most profitable, but has to be something that's representative of our City Beautiful. Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: I'd like to join the Mayor and urging the administration. I think we can do things on two tracks. One is the structure, the other is, the vision and the plan going forward, in terms of running the facility. I think we should move forward and that way we could provide greater clarity to our community as to what direction, how we are going to move forward into the direction we've discussed as a Commission. So, I too urge the administration to see if we could identify who would be the ultimate manager, who would run it. We all know, I think, what we would like to see.

Ms. Ebbert: I just think its maybe time to just start a discussion, just to reach out a little bit, just so that she doesn't hear it from me, that she's hearing it from an official.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, Commissioners, we have item I-1, that we have a presentation and budget discussion for the Pro Shop. It does require a bit of an investment and its not something that – and we also looked at the procurement issue. So, if we want to do a sole source, if we want to fund this, I think we can certainly discuss it in our item I-1 with a presentation from Public Works and CIP.

Ms. Ebbert: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Greg Hamra.

Mayor Lago: Greg, good morning. Its always great to have you.

Mr. Hamra: Thank you very much Mr. Mayor and Commission. For the record, Greg Hamra, I live at 2600 Cardena Street in Coral Gables, and I went to Gables High, grew up in Miami; and one of the reasons my wife and I elected to move closer to where we are all sitting right now. I used to live closer to the Mayor's neighborhood, now I live closer to Commissioner Rhonda Anderson's neighborhood, which is right between here and Venetian Pool. And as a volunteer with the city's Sustainability Advisory Board, one of the things I enjoy doing, I'm proud to do is to help improve the quality of life for all of us here in the City Beautiful. And part of that involves and part of that by enjoying, my wife enjoys the ability to walk and bike our way around to get where we need to be. Living here is just wonderful to be able to get to Miracle Mile and farther. And so,

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I find myself more – there is one street more than all others that I find myself on when I leave home, even to come here today, and that’s Valencia going east. I come back through various different routes, but Valencia east towards Publix is probably my number one route, and this is in connection with something I’m glad to have confirmed with a lady earlier that I am officially an organ donor. I signed up years and years ago. I’m glad and happy to be. I hate...I’m just not ready to do it yet. So, competing with the 4000 pound hunk of steel, I and my bicycle would stand no chance. And so, item G-9, I understand is the consideration for a bike lane along Valencia Avenue. I would like to support that and I’m here to simply weigh in for a bike lane along Valencia. I think more bike lanes where and when appropriate could be helpful and improving the quality of life for those of us who elect not to get into our 4000 pound hunks of steel and roll around. Sometimes we have to. I do the same. But when its to get around Coral Gables, what a great way to do it on two wheels and to stay alive.

Mayor Lago: Greg, thank you. Before you leave, I appreciate your advocacy on behalf of Sustainability and solar. You’re on top of it and you are pushing the ball forward, so we thank you for that.

Mr. Hamra: Thank you very much Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Take care.

Mr. Hamra: Take care everybody.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Have a wonderful day. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Mark Trowbridge.

Mayor Lago: Dr. Trowbridge.

Mr. Trowbridge: Well, good morning leaders, Mark Trowbridge from our Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, at 201 Alhambra Circle. Its great to be with you this morning and thank you all, for what I think, as Marlin Ebbert said, just a joyous start to today’s Commission meeting. We too, as a Chamber are celebrating the great work that is going on for those with developmental disabilities and autism and are working with Mary Palacio, and of course, the entire committee to host a breakfast. So, I certainly want to let folks know that we will be hosting a breakfast on the 21st of April, 7:30 a.m. at the Biltmore Hotel. Jennifer Ward Sando is our guest speaker, and we are in partnership with the UM Center for Autism UM-CARD. And so, again that’s on the 21st. If you’d like more information, we’d love to have all of you there, members of our Commission and leadership. We have also invited the City’s Disability Committee to join us, as well that morning. Just a couple of items I wanted to show our support on behalf of the Chamber and thank each and everyone of you for your continued leadership. Very excited that you are looking today to continue the pop-up relationship with Ben and Jewels, a great retail. Pop-up program that was put together through our city and the Economic Development Department. I had an opportunity to sit on that

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selection committee, and I think our committee got it right when they picked this wonderful retailer. We helped celebrate with our Mayor and members of the Commission, their grand opening a number of months ago, and look forward to an opportunity to extend their time with us on Miracle Mile. The Chamber also participated by offering a complimentary membership to assist them in getting the word out about their business. I know that you all are discussing the path forward with our Country Club. I want to thank certainly Commissioner Menendez for looking at ways to allow non-profits to certainly have access to the Country Club for special events that will include organizations in our community, not just our local Chamber, like us, but I think that's a great path forward. And I want to thank Fred and his team for reaching out to us for ways to make that as user-friendly accessible and approachable, as possible. And the last is that I hope that we'll have an opportunity to sit down with each one of you to continue to build upon your incredible support of our temporary outdoor dining. Its hard to believe, but at the end of next month that will come to a planned end, and I would just love the opportunity, especially the Mayor and Commissioner Anderson, you helped continue to put these items on the agenda to see if there is another path forward or a way to continue to encourage folks who are supporting our restaurants but still feel very most comfortably dining outside. So, look forward to that follow up. I really appreciate the work that you all have done to make sure that those restaurants have been able to thrive over the last few months, and I think the Mayor just said it very well, its amazing to be around the downtown at lunchtime, evenings and certainly weekends to see folks back supporting our retail, our restaurants, our local business community. That opportunity to thrive is something that really warms our hearts. Thank you all very much for the opportunity and thank you for your leadership.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Mark. Thank you for joining us.

City Clerk Urquia: That's all, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Alright. Anyone else would like to speak? Don't be shy. Any employees? Alright. Public Comment is closed. We'll move unto the Mayor's comments.