

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
January 23, 2018
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Director of Parks and Recreation, Fred Couceyro
Public Service Director, Brook Dannemiller

Public Speaker(s)

Betsy Tillman, President of the Garden Club

Agenda Item H-2 [2:37:57 p.m.]

A discussion regarding Betsy Adams Garden Club Park
(Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

Vice Mayor Keon: H-2, discussion regarding Betsy Adams Club Park, Commissioner Lago.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Vice Mayor. I sent on January 16th a memo to my colleagues that dealt with Betsy Adams Park. My issue here is a very simple one.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm sorry to interrupt you during your introduction of your item.

Commissioner Lago: It's all good, go ahead.

Commissioner Quesada: The memo the e-mail the pictures, I'm totally in support.

Commissioner Lago: OK – perfect.

Commissioner Quesada: See – some of us do read your memos.

Commissioner Lago: I have ADD, so are you like me, just looked at the pictures or you actually read the substance. I hope that you read it too.

Commissioner Quesada: Absolutely not. (Laughter)

Commissioner Lago: I think you are ADD too. So look this is really quick. I think this is no fault of anyone, I just think obviously as Peter and staff has mentioned before, construction costs have gone out of control over the last two years and obviously we have budget constraints, we are the government at the end of the day. So what we are looking at here is, you see the amount of usage that's happening here every day, the residents are extremely happy.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And the park hasn't even opened, which is wonderful.

Commissioner Lago: Not even open – and I've gotten a few phone calls. I know that some of you have because inadvertently you and I were copied on an e-mail together. Basically stating that there are concerns about children running into the street and some of the scope that was missing. I spoke to the Manager, I spoke to staff, some of them were lighting, was a rock wall bench, picnic tables, stone seawall, a drinking fountain. The Manager has assured me that some of those will be coming in this year and I asked for next year if we have some money in the budget that we can swing this way that we can include some of the scope, because the way that I see it, from the resident that told me, we showed the residents the scope of the project and I think that taking that scope away now will be a little bit difficult to swallow.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So just as clarification sir, with respect. We have agreed that we could apply for grants from the state and we are absolutely able to do that, but we have not set aside monies, additional monies. We've spent over \$600,000, the bids came in over \$900,000, including contingency. We had been told by our designer, our outside designer that it would cost about \$506,000, so clearly we had a budget issue that we had to address. We reduced the scope, we did reach out to Betsy Adams and her family, we did reach out to the Garden Club, we should have reached out to the neighborhood, like to reach out to the neighborhood again to talk to them about pieces of the scope that are critical to move forward and how we could budget that.

Commissioner Lago: So we failed, which is OK, its fine, it happens, we failed in reaching out to the residents, but I think they should have been notified.

Commissioner Quesada: But hold on a second. I remember when we approved this park, three years ago, four years ago, right when both of you just came into office, right?- is that correct Vince?

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: We had community meetings at the location with some designs and I remember going to those meetings, I remember being there, and I remember the Adams family was there and the residents that were there, and I remember it was an overwhelming sentiment that the residents wanted it to be a passive park, and there were only like two or three families that wanted activity, so this is going back three or four years now. So, I'm happy to see that now that people are using it, they are realizing that it can be an active park, but I'm surprised about the pricing, it's a lot of money.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It's the pricing that caused the challenge for us but we are happy to go back to the neighborhood and meet with them on that. I just didn't want to give the impression that all of the scope that had been originally proposed has been, we have figured out a plan forward for it.

Vice Mayor Keon: It was unaffordable. I have two cards from two people that would like to speak, Maria Cruz...

Commissioner Lago: She left.

Vice Mayor Keon: Maria left – the other is Betsy Adams who is President of the Coral Gables Garden Club.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Betsy Tillman.

Vice Mayor Keon: Betsy Tillman who is President of the Coral Gables Garden Club who would like to speak, Betsy and Neeta Norman, did you want to speak also Neeta?- OK.

Ms. Tillman: I'm Betsy Tillman; I'm the President of the Garden Club. I don't have much to say, I'm just happy to be here and I just want to tell you guys how excited the Garden Club is about this park and how excited Betsy Adams is. I know that we are not probably getting everything that was originally thought of, but money doesn't grow on trees and we understand that, we

support everything. If you all haven't driven by this park, even though it's not open, to see the activity at this park and to see the families that are walking to the park, playing in the park, to me this is what needs to happen all over the Gables, it really does. It really brings the communities together, it makes people know each other, talk to each other, it's a beautiful thing, and so, thank you.

Vice Mayor Keon: Betsy can you talk about the Garden Club's effort quickly to put benches in the park.

Ms. Tillman: The benches in the park – one of our issues had been, and I believe it's been resolved, thanks to Fred, the Coral Gables Community Foundation has their bench program and they had wanted to put benches in and I don't believe the Garden Club or Betsy Adams really wanted to see the Foundation's name all over a park that was really supposed to be honoring us. I believe that the Foundation has decided that that's OK that we can do those benches, they will still be using having people being honored on the benches, but there are two plaques and one of them usually says that the Coral Gables Foundation Bench Project and they have allowed us to say the Coral Gables Garden Club on that side and the other side will of course be whoever has donated the bench.

Vice Mayor Keon: Thank you. So there is a plan to put benches, to have benches placed in the park and they will honor both the honoree and the Garden Club too.

Ms. Tillman: There is not one that is honoring the honoree because there is a plaque.

Vice Mayor Keon: But I mean whoever the bench will honor.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And it's a beautiful plaque that tells the story not only of Garden Club and the history from the beginning with the City founder's wife being a founding member, but also about Betsy Adams specific role in creating entrances through the Garden Club that never were previously built; and so, I think the Garden Club has signed off on that, Betsy Adams has signed off on that, her family has signed off on that, and it really captures the story and to why it was so appropriate for this to happen.

Ms. Tillman: It's a beautiful plaque, I mean it grabs you and it's wonderful, so thank you guys, Donna did a beautiful job.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Absolutely. There were like pet-waste stations, we were already going to do that, that's been the install process, there was a question about handicap parking, we've already committed that we will be doing that. There were some comments about

shade, we are going to figure out how to do that, but the idea of a mister, and we'd really like to get back to the neighbors to talk about that.

Ms. Tillman: I think the only thing about the one thing, maybe some people worry about is that there is no ability to fence it anymore with the budget.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So we are doing a hedge around the area because there was concern about children running out into the street, and so that part of it, Brook Dannemiller and Public Works has already identified how they would accomplish that piece of it, so it's not exactly what was originally envisioned, but we think that people would be really happy with where it is.

Commissioner Lago: Just a quick point, Mayor, if I may. In reference to the shade trellis there were a few items that I had put down that was missing from the scope. The shade trellis, I have no issues with that being missing from the scope, because again, I've gone to the park three times already and there are beautiful lush tree, there's a beautiful mango tree, there is a beautiful oak, there is more than enough shade if somebody wants to get away from the beating sun. In reference to the misting system, I don't have an issue at all with the misting system not being part of the scope; I think it's a little excessive, we are not running a water park here. In reference to the pet waste station, I imagined obviously that the City was going to come through with that, it's a very simple allocation, the cost isn't that big. The coral rock benches, as its put in here, I know that probably we are going to streamline that request and move in a direction that you are headed in.

Mr. Couceyro: We will have the dog waste station; we are going to install it. We are also, as Betsy said, we worked with her on the benches, and we are putting those together. We also ordered a picnic table and the park sign; you know the one that's similar to our City standard sign, and...

Commissioner Lago: What about a fountain, drinking fountain?

Mr. Couceyro: That hasn't been...

Commissioner Lago: So this is going to be my ask for next year and I just want to lay it on now, because I'm going to make a capital request in next year's budget, kind of like what we did with Monegro this year. I'm going to request and I'm going to put it in a memo format that for next year, we include in the budget a drinking fountain and that we have some sort of simple conceptual drawing that can be brought before the Commission for a coral rock wall or some sort

of stone seat wall, excuse me, I apologize, that we can take a look at it and get simple pricing on it to see what the actual cost of that would be and if we can fit it into the budget next year.

Vice Mayor Keon: I'll only warn you that the issue with drinking fountains in public parks is that children fill them up with sand and they fill them up with bar chips; they are a constant source of repair and non-functioning in parks.

Commissioner Lago: Scratch the fountains, scratch the fountains. All I would like for next year is to just see how we can kind of get a simple drawing, simple, make it simple and I'll tell you why, because there is a Commissioner on this dais who used to be the Vice Mayor who concocted this beautiful park on Edgewater that I used to enjoy for three years while I lived on Edgewater and we used to go all the time and now everybody has park envy, there is a lot of park envy, a lot of park envy. So I'm not asking for something as grandiose as that park, I'm just asking for a simple...

Commissioner Quesada: But if you think about it, the wall is pretty simple there.

Commissioner Lago: It is, but the trellis is not simple...

Commissioner Quesada: No it's not. The total price of that was what \$1.2 - \$1.3 (million)?

Commissioner Lago: No.

Mr. Couceyro: I think it was around there.

Commissioner Quesada: It was \$1.2 (million).

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Ingraham was how much?

Commissioner Quesada: No, but what I was saying is considering the size of the two parks it was relatively.

Commissioner Lago: So my request is pretty simple, just for next year, through the Manager please, something simple, it doesn't have to be too decorative or ornate, just something simple. I think the residents in this area deserve it. My other statement is as we move forward, because I know that we have some empty pieces of land that are going to be turned into parks. Look at Durango Park, let's not over offer people and then we have to come back and not actually give them what we stated; Durango Park, I use it all the time, it works really well, it's a passive park, the features there are down lighting, coral benches, some beautiful shade trees that are there and I

see people using the park every single day. We don't need to be so elaborate as we did with the Betsy Adams Park, by the way it's beautiful, I've used it a bunch of times, it's great, leave it the way it is, but if you want to save money we can go the route of Durango Park, that area has been transformed because of what has been done to Durango.

Vice Mayor Keon: Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: A few quick thoughts. We have a park just north of Eighth Street, small little park.

Vice Mayor Keon: Rotary Park.

Commissioner Quesada: There is a fence around it.

Mr. Couceyro: No. There is a fence around half of it.

Commissioner Quesada: Half of it, a play area, so I would ask Commissioner Lago if you haven't seen that in a while, check that one out. That's got to be a cheaper fence; and then also, Salvador Park, some areas there because I use, I take my kids there quite a bit.

Mr. Couceyro: Salvador Park it's the entire park.

Commissioner Quesada: OK – but I'm not saying we do the entire park. What I'm saying is that achieves the safety and maybe the economic cost, its wrought iron, so maybe if we don't like the look maybe we put some shrubbery around it. I don't know, but I'm just saying, I'm agreeing with Commissioner Lago, trying to think outside the box here, we've got other examples in the City that are cheaper than – because there is a lot of traffic on that street, the last thing we want is to create that.

Commissioner Lago: There was actually a motion, there was actually a recommendation that was made from George Kakouris at, what Board is he on, I apologize.

City Attorney Ramos: Historic Preservation.

Commissioner Lago: He actually made a recommendation because there were so many concerns coming in reference to the kids playing in that area.

City Attorney Ramos: Code Enforcement.

Commissioner Lago: Code Enforcement, I apologize, Code Enforcement.

Vice Mayor Keon: On Ingraham Park where that whole field area is, where the kids play, there is no wall. That wall is only along the front in front of the fountain.

Commissioner Quesada: It continues, it continues.

Vice Mayor Keon: It's all the way along Edgewater?

Mr. Dannemiller: Its 18 inches with 24 inch....

Mr. Couceyro: It's not very high, but it continues all the way across.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So we hear the concerns about a wall. The good news is many of the things that you had hoped, we had already incorporated.

Commissioner Lago: Or we scratched them because it made sense.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I understand sir. And so we'll come back to you, if it's alright with you rather than defining what type of wall, we recognize that we need to create whether in a manner appropriate and acceptable to the Commission a walling effect and we'll come back and show you designs.

Commissioner Lago: And let's show the community.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Yes sir.

Commissioner Lago: Maybe we can get away with not having to build a rock wall, maybe we can build a nice picket fence, something that makes sense and that's a lot cheaper, as long as the residents understand that we'll be proving some of the other amenities, some of the other amenities will be provided, now give us a little leeway with regards to the rock wall.

Mr. Dannemiller: The Board of Architects would need to chime in on the aesthetics as well.

Commissioner Lago: I expect it.

Vice Mayor Keon: OK. Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: One last item to the ladies in the Garden Club. When I was working with the Adams family to get that park named after Betsy and the Garden Club, something I always discussed with her is, I would love for the Garden Club to sort of get a piece of that area of the park and change the flowers, change the foliage every now and again on the season, so....

Vice Mayor Keon: Create a butterfly garden.

Commissioner Quesada: ...so if we can get something so that your organization can sort of make it your own with the seasons or however it is, I thought that would be a lot of fun. Is that too cheesy?

[Laughter]

Mr. Dannemiller: On the break we were just discussing that, identifying a couple of areas where we could do flowering plants that Betsy Adams would like.

Commissioner Quesada: I think the Garden Club can work on that and we can work with them to change it seasonally or whatever, just something along those lines, something to make it a little bit different than the other parks.

Mr. Dannemiller: Absolutely, we can do that very easily.

Vice Mayor Keon: There is a representative on the Landscape Committee from the Garden Club, yes?

Mr. Dannemiller: Yes.

Vice Mayor Keon: Yes, there is so maybe they can report back to us on the Garden Club through the Landscape Committee, the person can come back and tell us.

Commissioner Quesada: Sounds great. Thank you so much.

Vice Mayor Keon: Thank you.

[End: 2:53:44 p.m.]