

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-5
May 19, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Javier Fernandez
Maria de la Guardia
Maria Cruz
Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Item F-5 [Start: 3:05 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving the preliminary design for improvements to Fred B. Hartnett Ponce Circle Park (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Now we move on to time certain item F-5. Thank you for your patience. Five minutes late.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor F-5 is a resolution of the City Commission approving the preliminary design for improvements to Fred B Hartnett Ponce Circle Park.

Mayor Lago: So, I put this item on the agenda. I'm the sponsor of this item because again, this is a pride that we've been trying to work on for some time. And I think that we are right there. We're almost there. And I'd like to have a brief recap and hopefully get a preliminary approval from the

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Commission so that we can move forward and start speaking with the neighborhood and the residents to really get this project started, because this is going to be a game changer for our downtown. Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Javier Fernandez: Mr. Mayor, good afternoon for the record. Javier Fernandez, with offices at 201 Alhambra Circle, suite 1205. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: That's a very nice pin.

Javier Fernandez: Thank you. No, I'm...

Mayor Lago: Congratulations.

Javier Fernandez: A Fantastic gift. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Do you have to give...

Javier Fernandez: I'm going to have to report it.

Mayor Lago: To report that or no.

Javier Fernandez: It's a gift. We've already disclosed it to the Herald. So, I think we're good. Again, thank you for allowing us this opportunity to provide you an update on the progress we've made over the last few months on the reconceptualization. Of Ponce Park, as you all recall, during your approval of the Ponce Park Residences Project, one of the public benefits that was proffered was the contribution and assistance in accelerating, hopefully, the transformation of this long-desired public improvement. Over the last six months we've worked closely with all the cities, internal stakeholders, the Manager, his team Planning, Parks, et cetera, to arrive at this design concept, which Ms. de la Guardia will shortly present for you. And today's goal is basically to get your feedback and sign off on this concept before we proceed to start with our first public meeting, which is currently scheduled to take place in this room here on June 1st. So, without further ado, I will turn it over to Ms. de la Guardia and then sum up at the end with a quick next steps.

Ms. de la Guardia: Thank you, Javier. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Ms. Vice Mayor and Commissioners. And first I want to thank the city and the staff who have. Helped and guided us through this program. As well as thank Allen and Spencer Morris for the opportunity and the city for the opportunity to work on this project. If we can get started. Okay. All right. So that's our cover, next sheet. Okay. We started the design by studying Phineas Paste and George Merrick's 1924 ideas for Crafts Plaza. Although the context and the program today is different, we found that the formal response to the site was compelling and valid. And so, what we found was that they anchored the oblong site with two anchor buildings, one at each end. In this case, in their case, it was two exposition buildings. And so, that created sort of a park, a garden inside. And then they

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enclosed that park with arcades. And so, we found this response to the site as sort of still being valid. The other important thing to note about their project was that these exposition buildings faced both north and south Ponce. So not just what was happening within the park but actually giving a front face to north and south Ponce. Each park in Coral Gables has a different personality. Because of the Odeon as a program, we considered that perhaps this park would be the cultural park of the City Beautiful. We have depicted here some of the activities that we considered might take place in the park. So, we might have picnics. There might be sort of an informal musical gathering in the alleys. There could be seating, lounging, picnic tables, strolling, art in the park, obviously, concerts at the Odeon, as well as perhaps some informal yoga classes or similar activities. In Ponce Circle Park, we have one end anchored by the Odeon and the other end anchored by the Frank Stella inverted puffed star sculpture sitting in an elevated shallow fountain. The green or event lawn in the center is enclosed on the sides by pavilions and arcades and a tree-lined alley that forms a shade bosque for visitors. So similar approach to what Paste was proposing, which was to have two anchors at the end, creating a large lawn in the middle, and then enclosing that lawn to buffer it from the street with arcades on the side. The entry pavilions are located at the important crosswalks, providing a threshold and welcoming the visitors into the park. The Odeon presents a sculptural loggia to South Ponce, while the low wall around Frank Stella's star opens the park towards Miracle Mile, and in this way, inviting the connection. We have named the area around the fountain the Sculpture Garden, as it could host other sculptures besides the star. And just as an idea, we propose perhaps a series of six bronze musicians visible from the promenade, echoing the live musicians on the other side at the Odeon. So, if you can, point out where additional sculptures could go. Okay. A series of renderings are going to take us around the park, around the outside of the park, and then we're going to enter through the star sculpture and then meander across the green and end up in a concert at the Odeon. So, this is a view from the street of the pavilion and arcades and the alley bordering Ponce. Next. As we turn the corner around Ponce, this would be a view of the alley on the left and the pavilion and arcade on the right. As we approach the Sculpture Garden, this is what we would see as we focus in on Frank Stella's star. This is a view from one pavilion. So, these pavilions are at the crosswalk. So, we're coming in through this pavilion, and this pavilion and its arch faces the pavilion on the other side. And so, you step into this pavilion, and you get a frame of the pavilion across from you. And these pavilions act almost as thresholds into the park. Next. Okay. Close-up of the star. And so, this would be the Sculpture Garden. And now we'll start to meander into, well, here we are already in the green, looking back at the sculpture being framed with a pavilion on each side. This is a view from the inside. So, these arcades are a little bit more solid towards the street and more open towards the green. And we've come up with this detail in the show rafters so we can actually have vines growing on the inside, thus making it even more green. Next. Okay. This is as we're starting to look and meander through the green. Next. And this is standing at one of the pavilions and looking down the alley, which is basically trees sort of marching down, creating shade, where many of the,

I guess, office workers that work in that vicinity could go down and have lunch. We're envisioning sort of green tables and chairs, like what you might find at the Tuileries in Paris. And these are loose furniture that might move locations as the users decide. Next. And so, we arrived at the concert. So, this would be a small concert with people meandering through the green and sitting on some stone benches in the proximity of the concert. And so there you see the Odeon. Odeon is Greek for a small space for music. We thought it was a very appropriate name for the structure. And so that's the Odeon. And now we're back at the star. So, I would like to end the presentation with a parting thought. Night settles over Crafts Plaza, where sage-colored chairs lean close in gossip around the green. And bronze musicians hushed and waiting, tune their silent instruments. Then a star falls, drifting slowly downward to kiss its simmering reflection in the fountain. That concludes my presentation.

Javier Fernandez: Thank you, Maria. And Mr. Mayor, just to quickly wrap up in terms of the next steps. So, as I mentioned at the outset, our intention is to have our first public meeting in this room on June 1st to engage residents around this concept and get their feedback. Thereafter, it's our intent to return here on June 9th. As you'll recall, when we approved the development management agreement, it had a budget of \$8.9 million. In working with your staff and pricing out this concept, this concept before you, we estimate will cost about \$11.2 million. We've been working with staff on putting together a financial package, which we'll present to you on the 9th with the details as to how we will fill that gap. And then assuming the feedback is positive, which we hope it will be, our goal would then be to commence design, development, and construction documents and the permitting associated with improvements so we could advance the project. And with that, happy to take your comments. We also are joined by Andres Arcila, the landscape architect, on this project, should you have any questions for him or Maria. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Just to be very brief, first and foremost, congratulations. It's an amazing project. I know it's just the first iteration of it. We've been working through a few different design options. I like the way things are, they look a lot cleaner now where you don't have the wall on both sides. And I remember working over the last four years with our team, with our arts team in the back, historic preservation, in regard to the Stella sculpture. And it looks like nothing else could ever belong there. It looks perfect in my opinion. And it's an exceptional design and perfectly fitting for the City Beautiful. And I couldn't have asked for a better architect, a better team. I thank the developer for all the hard work. I've sat down with the Manager, and we went over a little bit of the funding opportunities to make that gap. I think we'll be able to make that gap. I also understand there's a contingency in regard to the construction. I know that once the CDs are finalized, hopefully we'll be able to grind the numbers down even further and make that gap easily. So, I think it's a great opportunity to get to the residents, get their feedback, get their input, but I think that they're going to like it a lot. They're going to like it a lot. I like the fact that we incorporate some of my ideas about potentially having additional sculpture opportunities. I think it could be

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something where it could be permanent or it could be maybe a loan, which is something that I'm working on with a big collector right now to potentially lend us some major international sculptures for four- or five-year period. And those can be housed in this park, and it could be something just amazing. The only problem with that will be when we have to give those sculptures back.

Javier Fernandez: Yes. So not a happy day.

Mayor Lago: Maybe for a tax break, they won't take them back. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, sorry I interrupted. I had a question. Looking at the park from the north and the south, I see that there's a beautiful viewing area where you can see the Stella sculpture. But my question, because we have a slip line there, how do we address the pedestrian safety issue where someone might, you know, we have children, et cetera, step into that slip line. Is there anything to prevent the pedestrian from taking that course?

Javier Fernandez: Yeah, so the southern edge from, Maria, you can address this better than I can, I'm sure.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The north side is on the Stella sculpture. I haven't taken a real close look at the north end because we have the Odeon there. But particularly when you're looking at the Stella sculpture from the north end, I didn't see anything in a way of prevention of someone stepping into that slip line. Is there a sidewalk there?

Javier Fernandez: Yeah, but we have a, I believe there's a low-rise wall, correct, that rings the southern part of the property. And so, access is from-

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's the northern side.

Javier Fernandez: Yeah, on the north end. So, the access is from the laterals on Ponce.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Correct. But there's also a viewing area from the north.

Javier Fernandez: Correct, that is a-

Vice Mayor Anderson: From the slip line.

Javier Fernandez: Yeah, but that is not open at the pedestrian level. So, there is a wall.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There's a wall. Okay.

Javier Fernandez: It usually rings the southern part of the property to, again, create an edge. But it is, it just provides sight lines to folks to see through it. The idea being that we wanted to make sure that we highlighted the statue.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: Perfect, perfect. I just don't want people thinking they can cross there.

Ms. de la Guardia: Yes, and the main reason for those site accesses, both north and south, is for service. And they were given to us as phase one. Part of the project had already been approved. So, we sort of inherited that, those two accesses.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, then let's go back and talk about discouraging people from trying to cross through the slip line.

Public Works Director Diaz: Hi, good afternoon. So, the first phase of this project before the developer became involved was going to be the roadway on the park. And we went through several iterations of that. That has actually already been designed and approved by the county. And it actually includes raised intersections at all the crossing points to facilitate crossing into the park. And then there's also several features, including the use of pavers as kind of like a different texture to slow down cars. But that's already built into the roadway, the perimeter of the park, which is something that's already been designed and done. But there are some features to facilitate crossing in a more safe manner.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, I understand that those are on the east and west side. I think we need to look at the slip line and deterring people from stepping off and into the slip line. Okay.

Mayor Lago: May I? So, the Vice Mayor is asking just to take a look at it. Can we look at it?

Javier Fernandez: Yeah, we can.

Mayor Lago: We have a long agenda today. This is like preliminary.

Javier Fernandez: It is.

Mayor Lago: I want to get input from the residents and then I want to make her happy with the slip lane. She's pretty adamant about it and I agree with her.

Ms. de la Guardia: We could have a low wall with some kind of a fence or something that discourages people from going in that direction because they really can't go anywhere.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We can look at it. We know how little ones are and we had one here.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we will take a look at that issue for the Vice Mayor. Happy to do Vice Mayor.

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Mayor Lago: May I have a motion?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. First speaker, Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, 305-323-2154. I only have one concern. I hear this being called Crafts Plaza. This park was named after Fred Harnett. Are we changing the name? That's the question. I mean, Fred Harnett, the Harnett family were very, very involved in this city. I hope we're not trying to rewrite history or changing the name of somebody who deserves to be remembered.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you, Mayor and Commission. I'm against this thing. Too many buildings. Why would we turn a beautiful, sacred green space into something that has yet more buildings? I can imagine that from a safety concern, you know, when you have children playing in this park, that a security wall, that's hard to argue with because the nightmare of some drunk driver plowing into a bunch of people in Ponce Park is one that we don't want to leave ourselves. That justifies a wall. But doing buildings, I mean, we've already got, look, when we look at the plaza, that's actually, it's a weird trade off, right? Because it's a beautiful building. It's got great businesses. I didn't oppose it when it was being put forward because I like having a greater retail downtown, but it is still a monstrosity, right. And now we want to ruin it with more buildings right in front and the only green space. I'm against it, but the wall, okay. That's it for me, for me.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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

Mayor Lago: All right, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir, we do.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Vice mayor Anderson: Yes

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Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Thank you very much. Looking forward to seeing you again.

Ms. de la Guardia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, have a wonderful day.