

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-4
October 11, 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 Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant City Attorney, Gus Ceballos

Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Public Speaker(s)

Laura Lopez

Mary Powell

Agenda Item G-4 [11:13 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission providing direction to the City Manager regarding dogs at Catalonia Park.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving on, now we're going, I guess, back to Catalonia, correct? Or you want to -
- we have another time certain item, but let's finish with Catalonia.

City Commission Meeting

October 11, 2022

Agenda Item G-4 - Resolution of the City Commission providing direction to the City Manager regarding dogs at Catalonia Park.

City Attorney Ramos: G-4 is a resolution of the City Commission providing direction to the City Manager regarding dogs at Catalonia Park.

Mayor Lago: So, what is the will of the Commission? Do we have any other public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir, we do.

Mayor Lago: Okay. How many individuals do we have?

City Clerk Urquia: Two.

Mayor Lago: Can we listen to the public comment?

Vice Mayor Mena: Alright.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry. You want to do it first?

Mayor Lago: Let's do it.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. So, first speaker is Ms. Laura Lopez.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Lopez, how are you?

Laura Lopez: Thank you. Good morning, all. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Laura Lopez, and I live at 637 Sevilla Avenue. And I'm here to strongly support the use of Catalonia Park for our dogs. I'm sure you've seen the magazine, which is beautiful -- thank you -- beautiful pictures and portraits of the owners with their dogs. There is one article though with Catalonia Park -- that refers to Catalonia Park. And if I may quote, in it

the author says -- and I quote -- “As if transmitted through an invisible network of dog owners, word went out that Catalonia Park was the place that you could let your beast run free.” Not only do they call our dogs beasts, which they’re not -- they’re loving animals for us. They’re our children basically -- the article’s characterization of some sort of hidden group that’s going around saying things like this is really misguided at best and incendiary at least. What the authors fail to understand -- or the author failed to understand and perhaps what others in the community, in this city don’t appreciate fully is that dog owners are a community. And it’s -- we’re not invisible, as evidenced by here today, all of us in front of you. We, as dog owners, have many signatures, as Chris had mentioned. We have more than 200 signatures supporting the dogs off-leash at Catalonia Park. And this margin is impressive. It’s nearly 13 to 1 in favor of Catalonia Park. We’re friends. You know, we meet each other for dinner at our house. We go out to local restaurants. We enjoy each other’s company. You don’t know how many -- well, you probably do -- how many people we’ve met just because of our dogs. I’m new to this area, a little bit over two years, and it’s been marvelous for us to get to be a community as we are today. So, not only are we friends, but we travel as friends. We support each other when there’s an emergency and that’s so important. We support each other. We feel safer knowing that our neighbors -- we feel safer knowing our neighbors and we know that public safety is improved because of that. If that’s not a community, I don’t know what is -- a happy community. George Merrick and the City Beautiful movement wanted public places that would be enjoyed by all, that would increase the quality of life for all. And to that I ask you, what better way epitomizes that goal than a community of residents gathering together to enjoy these public spaces in person and having a sense of belonging? While I respect the different points of view, there is simply an overwhelming, an overwhelming 13 to 1 number of Coral Gables residents on record who support dogs off-leash at Catalonia. The signatures that we have come from dog owners, non-dog owners, people with children, people without children, but the common denominator is that they all recognize the value of our neighbors, of the neighborhood and the community and the shared public spaces, and that these public spaces do offer more than just a view through a window, through a kitchen window as if it were your own private yard, and it isn’t. It’s a public space. I therefore respectfully request that the City Commissioners live up to your original agreement and fulfill the off-leash dog park at Catalonia

Park. Thank you. And if I may, Mayor Lago and the others, may I address a couple of the points that Commissioner Anderson mentioned?

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Ms. Lopez: Mentioned the stones, you know, those big -- we call them coffin because they're shaped like coffins, right? But they're all over. They're in every single park that we have. It is Coral Gables and we do have coral all over the place. The one negative that I heard from the stones -- or not from the stones -- or people relating to the stones was for children. One -- I think the granddaughter of somebody that is opposed to the park was concerned that the grandchild was going to fall and hit his head on one of the stones. But for dogs, I have not had any negative comments about the dogs and the stones, so that's all I wanted to say.

Commissioner Anderson: As you may or may not know, I have two greyhounds.

Ms. Lopez: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: And I know other people that have greyhounds.

Ms. Lopez: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: And those other people that have greyhounds, their dogs got hurt on the stones.

Ms. Lopez: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: The dog -- the park is not well designed.

Ms. Lopez: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: And my point to you all about the lot near the library is -- I'm sitting here measuring it using a map. It's about the same distance away.

Ms. Lopez: Yeah.

Commissioner Anderson: I mean, why is that not an option?

Vice Mayor Mena: Oh, we don't know if it is.

Commissioner Anderson: I do.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, we don't.

Commissioner Anderson: I got a map in front of me.

Vice Mayor Mena: Well, there's been zero...

Ms. Lopez: We didn't know...

Vice Mayor Mena: There's been zero community meetings...

Ms. Lopez: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Mena: About that.

Ms. Lopez: I did not know.

Vice Mayor Mena: Zero discussion. That just came up like this week. I appreciate it, and I'm all for pursuing it, but that may be shut down. It may never come to fruition.

Commissioner Anderson: And there was zero...

Vice Mayor Mena: And they're looking for a place to take their dogs now, not in the future. So, I get it. I'm all for pursuing it, but that -- we're acting like if that's on the menu right now and it's not.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, here's what was not on the menu and what was forced. It was not on the menu to go public outreach to those people that live across the street and get their opinion on whether or not that should be an off-leash park. A sign was put on their door it's going to happen, period. So, I don't see as a -- there's no difference between what I'm suggesting here now as a temporary solution with a temporary fence and putting a temporary fence down across from the library, much further away from a resident.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm with you, but it's -- right now, that other option is guesswork. We don't know...

Commissioner Anderson: Well...

Vice Mayor Mena: If it's going to happen. We are sitting here right now dealing with a neighborhood where some people want it, and some people don't.

Commissioner Anderson: Right.

Vice Mayor Mena: And that neighborhood, I presume, will have the same dynamic. They'll be people that are for it and people that are against it. And whether or not they're ultimately in favor

of it and this Commission supports it, I don't know sitting here today. I'm all for pursuing it and looking into it; you know that. I agree with you on that.

Mayor Lago: Why don't we do this? Why don't...

Vice Mayor Mena: But I don't think they can realistically say, "Oh, well, we're just do that other option." We have no idea sitting here today if that's an option.

Mayor Lago: Why don't we do this? Why don't we finish hearing the public comment...?

Commissioner Anderson: Because we only -- yeah, we have two months away from having the one on Ponce open. Two months.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to give you -- I'm going to reserve my comments until the end, and there's a process.

Vice Mayor Mena: He's right.

Mayor Lago: There's a process here.

Vice Mayor Mena: I apologize.

Mayor Lago: And I follow the process. And I'll give you an example. There's a beautiful 20,000 square foot lot adjacent to Coral Gables Senior High, beautiful lot. Mr. Manager, beautiful lot a block off Bird Road next to Coral Gables Senior High, and it's an empty corner. The lot was \$800,000 probably two years ago. I brought that lot to the City Manager, and we had a con -- I think it was two or three years ago, and we had a conversation about the lot, and we did what we normally do. We went to the community to ask them if they wanted a park in their backyard. They overwhelmingly said no. I was taken aback. I said, "How could you not want this beautiful piece

of property to be a park, 20,000 square feet?" You never get to see one of these lots in the neighborhood. How could you not want this piece of property? They overwhelmingly said they didn't want it because they felt that the students would hang out there after school. I tried my hardest, my hardest to convince them that that wouldn't be the case. We did what the residents wanted. We didn't buy that piece of land. That's a \$2 million piece of property now easily. So, when Catalonia Park was considered and -- like I don't remember when that land was bought or -- we need to go back and see what we talked to the residents about. What did we explain to them? What did we promise them? What did we say was going to be the scope and breadth of that project? Because when pieces of land are bought using the legislation that I wrote, we're very thoughtful and very careful to respect the neighborhood. And if we're not going to buy monumental pieces of land like that piece of property of 20,000 square feet adjacent to Coral Gables Senior High, and we're going to miss out on that, then I'm a little bit confused about, you know, changing -- after the park is done -- what is allowed and what is not allowed on parks. So, Mr. Clerk, can we hear the next person, if possible, please?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. The next speaker is Ms. Mary...

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much, ma'am. I appreciate it.

Ms. Lopez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Mary Powell.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Powell, how are you? Thank you for being here. Can we close the public comment section, please?

City Clerk Urquia: We have one more.

Mary Powell: Hi.

Mayor Lago: Hi. Good morning.

Ms. Powell: Good morning. Is it still morning?

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Powell: Okay, good. And the remarks I wrote are timely.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Ms. Powell: Okay, so good morning, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. My name is Mary Powell, and I live at 3267 Riviera Drive, or 913 feet from Catalonia Park. I am here to dispel some myths and misstatements as they relate to a broad -- our broad support for off-leash dogs at Catalonia Park. First, the Commission itself affirmed at the September 13th meeting, Catalonia Park is public, and by definition, neither restricted nor encumbered solely for the use of those living within a thousand feet. Second, it was stated by a Commissioner at the May 10th meeting that dog owners they encountered said the off-leash dog park at Catalonia was too small. We encountered no one who felt that way, such that they would not support dogs off leash at Catalonia. Third, I've heard in these meetings that having dogs at Catalonia is supposedly contentious. I can't speak for all, but what I can tell you is this, of the 201 people we spoke with while walking around the neighborhood, only one declined to sign, and that was because he didn't like the park being fenced at all. His objection had nothing to do with dogs. Our experiences in walking around were different than what's being portrayed in these meetings. I encourage you to look at the data and signatures we've provided as the basis for making a decision today, certainly not just the loosely sourced, unnamed opposed and unattributed anecdotes previously put forward. Finally, it bears saying again that our support is broad and diverse. We have lost a few people today, but we are

here as a large number, from families with children to people without dogs, and neighbors who simply like seeing other neighbors enjoying public spaces. We are the residents, and we are the neighbors of Catalonia Park, and we support this compromise solution -- your compromise solution.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Powell: I therefore just -- one...

Mayor Lago: I thought you were finished. I apologize.

Ms. Powell: No, I just want to thank you all. This is the first thank you. I therefore encourage this Commission to reject today's proposed resolution and reinstate the compromise solution for the dog park at Catalonia. I thank you all for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, last speaker is Ms. Mayte Haley.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Haley, how are you?

Mayte Haley: Hi. You know, I'm not here today to talk about this issue specifically, but I can give you some light on the background of how this park came together. I lived for 30 years on Malaga Avenue, around the corner from the Catalonia Park. And it's been really interesting listening to this because I sat at a meeting upstairs at the Youth Center seven, eight years ago with the former City Manager and others from the Recreation Department, and we discussed whether they -- what they were going to do with this property. They bought the property from the people who brought it -- bought it from Audrey Finkelstein. Audrey and her husband, very long-term Coral Gables residents. There are buildings at the University of Miami named after her. You

know the name, and you know their generosity. And they always let all the kids play on that park. There was a turtle on that park, if any of you now remember. You remember, Commissioner Menendez. There was a turtle. It was called Turtle Park. You would send letters from around -- there were letters -- and I remember this calm and clearly the day we planned the park -- that you would send letters to the Turtle Lady in Coral Gables, and they would get to her. So, it was well known as a children's park. I'm not on either side of this issue. I don't have a dog. I don't have a dog in this fight. But I just wanted to give you -- sorry for the bad joke. I wanted to give you a history of it. We planned -- at that point, no one came forward for dogs. It was a children's park. When the landscaper came and we talked about landscaping, there was a meeting right on the property a couple of years later. Again, no one came forward about dogs at that time, so it was always a children's park. So, I don't know -- and I just wanted to give you that history and that background, and I know we talked about it too. I'd love for a place to have my grandpuppy run. I don't have one. I don't have a dog now, but I have a grandpup. I'd love to have a place for them to run, and I'm sure you'll come up with a good solution. But I wanted to give you that history and that background, and maybe some of the newer residents didn't know that about this park.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Commissioner Anderson: Now, G-4 itself is not park specific. It doesn't say Catalonia on it anywhere. So, to the extent that you all are opposed to it...

Vice Mayor Mena: Before it did. It doesn't? It says it on the agenda.

Commissioner Menendez: It does.

Commissioner Anderson: On the agenda it did, but the resolution itself is generic to whatever direction the Commission provides.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think you're thinking of the other item. You're thinking of the item that allows more broadly for off leash...

City Attorney Ramos: There's also an ordinance, yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: An ordinance. This is the resolution. It is specific...

Commissioner Anderson: Well, the one...

Vice Mayor Mena: To Catalonia.

Commissioner Anderson: The one that I clicked on...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: I can read the resolution if you'd like.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: So, it's a resolution of the City Commission of the City of Coral Gables, Florida providing direction the City Manager regarding dogs at Catalonia Park.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, you're...

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: Thinking of the ordinance, which is broader.

Commissioner Anderson: Broad -- yeah, okay. That was the item I clicked on.

Mayor Lago: So, Commissioner, this is the point that I wanted to make.

Commissioner Anderson: Go ahead.

Mayor Lago: I want to -- I need -- we need to obviously move the agenda along because we have a long agenda today. When we define the scope of a project and we consider it coming before the residents who live in that neighborhood for consideration, like I mentioned the park adjacent to Coral Gables Senior High that we foolishly, foolishly did not purchase, we're very thoughtful to understand what those residents want who live around the property. Can anybody here today tell me what was the outcome when we did our outreach efforts if residents wanted dogs -- for this to be a dog park? Was there any consideration for that? What was the overwhelming sentiment? What was not the overwhelming sentiment? Okay, Fred.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: When we originally purchased the property, Ms. Haley's recollection is correct. She was actually at the meeting, so was I. In fact, one of them we did under a rainstorm under a couple of tents, so that's why I recall it vividly. It was always looking at -- that's why the turtles are in there. It was to revisit the Turtle Park aspect and have a kid's park. That's what was done when we did -- we had our meeting to purchase the property. We had the follow-up meeting on purchasing. We had the design, then we had the follow up to show the design and looked at all the elements, including the rocks. The rocks -- I heard we talked about the benches. It was an alternative to have a natural element of seating instead of the plastic or metal, and that's why -- and we showed all kinds of different options to the community, and they pick certain things. And that's why -- that's what we came up with, what's there. That's what we do with all of our community meetings. Now, there is -- there has been history that certain parks where we've done for community, we've come back to and changed because the community has changed. Kerdyk Park, they didn't want a playground, then they wanted a playground, so then we changed it. So -- but the initial was to have a children's park. If the neighborhood changes, we've

always been the ones to listen to the community and that's what we've always done. We don't build stuff that the community doesn't want.

Mayor Lago: What is the will --? Thank you, Fred. I appreciate that history lesson. Yes, go ahead.

Commissioner Menendez: But Catalonia was -- had signs that said, pet-friendly.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yes, but we have...

Commissioner Menendez: That basically opened the door for people to bring their dogs.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Well, we do have pet-friendly designations at a lot of parks. And what it meant is that you can have your dog on a leash. Now...

Mayor Lago: Can I...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: There was a...

Mayor Lago: Can I interrupt you for a second...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Sure.

Mayor Lago: There since you brought that up? I wasn't going to bring this up, but I'm going to bring it up anyways. So, I don't have a dog. I think dogs are great. My daughters are fighting every single day for a dog. It's coming.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: It is.

Mayor Lago: It's coming.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: I got one.

Commissioner Anderson: You're going to lose that one.

Mayor Lago: And it's not about me. They're just -- they want the dog, and it's going to happen.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: I lost the battle too...

Mayor Lago: You know, I'm looking for fish.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: So I know.

Mayor Lago: I'm a fish tank guy, but...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: I lost that battle a long time ago. The dog is coming.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: It could be multiple dogs for all I know. Last week, it was a hamster, and the hamster got loose at Petco, and it was a nightmare. So, you know, I think that we talk -- we've been having this discussion back and forth. And the Vice Mayor -- now, with Commissioner Anderson -- have really led the charge on finding not one, but multiple different options for dog lovers, and it's coming. As a matter of fact, I'm working on another option. It's going to be a massive park, multi-acre park, and I don't want to divulge exactly what's going on, but it's going to be a massive park that we had another negotiation last week with the owners. And it's going to be a park that's

going to be an opportunity for multiple scopes, dogs, playground, play fields, who knows, maybe a putting green. Who knows? It'll be something interesting. When we talk about the park on Granada in front of the country club, we've said, "You cannot have your dogs without a leash."

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right.

Mayor Lago: Every day when I drive by there on the way to work, there are dogs without leashes. And I get constant phone calls from residents telling me, "My kids are in the park and there are large dogs without leashes here. When are you going to do something about it?" And then I get a phone call from other residents, and emails, and text messages, "Vince, the park grass looks terrible." I sent it to you, Fred, and your answer is, "Well, there's dogs sometimes there. We're trying to control people. We're trying to curb the behavior."

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right.

Mayor Lago: You know, you can't have that much just constant interaction with that park when it wasn't designed for that.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Correct.

Mayor Lago: So, my point is, we're trying to figure out a way to address this issue. We can't get these parks fast enough online. If we design something and it's not meant for our four-legged friends and they're using it, and they're running up and down, you're going to wear down the park.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right.

Mayor Lago: You're going to wear down, you know, the grass, the landscaping, some of the infrastructure that's there.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right.

Mayor Lago: So, we got to make a decision today. Either we shut this down, or we allow for dogs in Catalonia. You're going to make somebody happy; you're going to make some people unhappy. But the decision has to be made.

Vice Mayor Mena: Agreed.

Mayor Lago: I am of the belief that we design this park and we notified -- this is why I asked the background -- that this was going to be a human park with dogs allowed, but on leash, on a leash, for our disabled members of our community, for people who need a dog or want to enjoy the park and the dog can be on a leash next to them. I'm all in favor of that, but we need to make a decision today. We have dog parks that are forthcoming. We've made a lot of strides, and it's been the main focal point of this Commission. I've met with the dog advocates on multiple occasions for hours, but we need to make a decision today because this is taking up a lot of the time, and I feel that we are not coming to a final consensus.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: I think what's an important thing to note is what was discussed and what was suggested by the Commission is this is a temporary solution as you build Salvadore and as we brought up the space across the library.

Mayor Lago: But they don't want it temporary. They want it permanent.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Well, but I'm saying if you got a few permanent solutions that are on the way that are within a mile of Catalonia Park, you might have the solutions that you need. If we get all of the parks that we're looking to get online between the Underline, between Salvadore, between -- if we look at that library space...

Vice Mayor Mena: (INAUDIBLE).

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: I look at it, I like it. We just have to look and see what the neighborhood thinks. Then you have three more, and then we have another one that we're looking at on Ponce that we're looking at, you know, closer to 8th Street. You could have four set parks within, you know, a year or two, so maybe this is a good temporary solution.

Vice Mayor Mena: Well...

Commissioner Anderson: Well, Fred, I've got one question for you because...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: I'm reading the transcripts, okay, and one of the comments on the transcripts was an anecdote about a dog almost going over the fence, that the person was scared because the fence at Catalonia is not tall enough...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: It was a resident that said that.

Commissioner Anderson: For all these dogs. I think they described a couple Dobermans or rottweilers...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Commissioner Anderson: Rushing. And they -- what they really wanted, what the request was -- and memories fade, so that's why I looked at the transcript again...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, yeah.

Commissioner Anderson: Was a taller fence because it's inadequate at...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right.

Commissioner Anderson: Catalonia. So, I just want to remind you all -- I did look at the transcripts -- but that was the issue, when they were asking for a fence, they wanted something taller to avoid that situation where these dogs were just rushing over, and they had their children and with the little stroller and stuff. It was a very scary situation.

Vice Mayor Mena: That was one issue, but I think it was a fairly -- I don't know if it was the issue. You know, I think, Fred, the -- my -- look, I hear your point. I hear you loud and clear. The thing is, we made this decision, you know, and now we're kind of revisiting it. And I agree with Mr. -- and I apologize if I butcher his last name -- Codkey (phonetic) and Mrs. Powell. You know, we made the decision, and we put the door hangers out there. We had the purchase order ready for the fence. And so, I -- and I think the logic that went into that -- and it was a compromise. Compromises always -- you know, you feel good about some of it; you don't feel good about the other part of it. That's the nature of compromise. Because I hear the Mayor's point. I do think that it seems to me, and from speaking to the residents and the signatures and everything, like whether or not it was discussed at the outset -- because that was definitely one of my concerns -- is it seems to me like the -- you know, the neighborhood's desires have evolved, and I think that...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yep.

Vice Mayor Mena: Whether that's new people that live there, whether it's -- you know, I do think on some level, you know, COVID, people working from home was kind of a seat change in terms of how much people are home, how much they're walking their dogs rather than being at the office or, you know, things of that nature. So, there's a lot that has gone on. It seems clear to me that this neighborhood is more in support of than against. But I hear your point, the dog -- the park wasn't designed for this purpose, so that does create some challenges. That's why I think I go back to what we already decided, which was a temporary solution, so that the other option that

Commissioner Anderson's talking about -- among others -- we'll know by then whether it is really an option or whether it is -- it didn't come to fruition for whatever reason.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right, right.

Vice Mayor Mena: And then now you can look these residents in the face and say, "We told you it was temporary. Now these other options are online." And they may -- I have no doubt they're going to want to keep this as it is.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Sure.

Vice Mayor Mena: And I told them that, and I appreciate that, and I respect that. That's kind of the nature of the beast, if you will. Sorry, didn't -- not to use the word beast. But, you know, we'll deal with that when we get there and when we have other options. Again, if -- when Salvadore gets done, and if this other option gets done, if the option the Mayor's talking about gets done...

Commissioner Anderson: We have Ponce.

Vice Mayor Mena: Now, we're in a different...

Commissioner Anderson: (INAUDIBLE) on Ponce.

Vice Mayor Mena: Now, we're sitting in a different world than we're sitting in today. And so that's why, to me, a temporary solution works. And not only does it work, but it's what we already decided, and I think we should stick to that at this point.

Commissioner Anderson: You know, I wouldn't have brought this up, but...

(APPLAUSE)

City Commission Meeting

October 11, 2022

Agenda Item G-4 - Resolution of the City Commission providing direction to the City Manager regarding dogs at Catalonia Park.

Commissioner Anderson: I wouldn't have brought this up but for the fact we have one open for small dogs on Valencia, and we will -- in December -- have another one open on Ponce. So, how long is it going to take to put up a fence?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Anderson: It's a timing issue.

Unidentified Speaker: Catalonia we're talking about, right?

Vice Mayor Mena: Putting up a fence, yeah.

Commissioner Anderson: How long is it going to take to put up the fence there?

Public Works Director Diaz: Well, we had a PO about a month, but we told the contractor to hold off. If the staff is available, you know, a month or two maybe. I don't know. It's difficult if the material's there or not.

Commissioner Anderson: So, if the...

Public Works Director Diaz: So...

Commissioner Anderson: 1505 Ponce is -- park is open -- the temporary one -- as predicted. These will overlap. That's my point.

Commissioner Menendez: I got two points to make. One is, in the resolution, G-4, it talks about putting signage at Catalonia that these other options are available. I'm supportive of that. That makes all the sense in the world, sort of a transition period. Second is, the only reason why I

suggested this compromise back in the day wasn't that I chose children over dogs or dogs over children. The number one reason was I want kids to be safe, and it's for the safety of kids. And every single day that goes by, the chances exist that something unforeseen happens for a child that gets injured. We all received the video back in the day that was circulating, like four or five large dogs running unleashed at Catalonia Park, and there were toddlers in that same vicinity. And I'm not saying those dogs are -- would harm anybody, or I'm not saying they wouldn't, but when you have four or five unleashed dogs running around, larger than the children themselves, it's not a good formula for safety, you know. And that's the reason why I presented it. It's not an issue of policy. It's an issue of safety, and that's why I proposed it, and that's why I think we all agreed at that time to vote in favor of it.

Mayor Lago: So, what is --? Knowing the lead time, so it'll take -- what, a month?

Public Works Director Diaz: If the fence is available, they could get started fairly quickly. So, I will say no more than two.

Commissioner Anderson: A month and...

Commissioner Fors: And it's possible that if we get lucky and they do have a slot open for us, that it could be much quicker.

Public Works Director Diaz: It could be done quicker.

City Manager Iglesias: The work is very...

Unidentified Speaker: You can't promise that.

City Manager Iglesias: It's a very small amount of work.

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: It's a matter of just getting materials. It's a two-day, three-day job.

Commissioner Fors: We just don't know if they're going to be able to jump in and do it.

Commissioner Menendez: Do you have a temporary alternative until it's done? You know, the final park, that we come up with a temporary solution?

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's just get the fence in, guy.

Commissioner Menendez: I mean, no. You've got a fast track, but I'm saying, between now and then, is there something else we could do.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, we're using a black chain link fence, which is very easy to put up.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: And it's a very small amount of work. It's a matter of just the availability of materials right now.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, let's make a decision. I'm a no on the resolution that's on the agenda today. I'm in favor of what we already passed.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so where are we? Commissioner, you're -- this is your item.

Commissioner Anderson: Is everybody a no on this? Or we just drop it?

Mayor Lago: No, listen...

Commissioner Menendez: I'm good with the signage announcing the other alternatives, that part of it.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, we don't need a reso for that. We can just...

Mayor Lago: I'm going to mention to you something, and I want to put this on the record, okay. The moment that we have the other two parks available for dogs, I would like for this fence to be removed, okay.

Commissioner Anderson: The fence to be...

Vice Mayor Mena: Which are the other two?

Commissioner Anderson: Oh, the temporary fence.

Mayor Lago: The dog -- when the dog parks are available...

Vice Mayor Mena: Which ones?

Mayor Lago: Well, we have -- I mean...

Vice Mayor Mena: No, I'm just saying so we're...

Mayor Lago: Which ones are the ones...

Vice Mayor Mena: Clear on which ones.

Mayor Lago: That are coming now?

Commissioner Anderson: Well, the first one that's going to be available...

Mayor Lago: In December.

Commissioner Anderson: Is 1505 Ponce.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Ponce, yeah.

Commissioner Anderson: In December.

Mayor Lago: And which is the next one?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Salvadore.

Commissioner Anderson: Salvadore would be the...

Mayor Lago: Wait, let me -- let me just -- give me one second, please.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: Give me one second. One second, one second.

Commissioner Anderson: Salvadore Park is not a...

Mayor Lago: I asked you a question.

City Commission Meeting

October 11, 2022

Agenda Item G-4 - Resolution of the City Commission providing direction to the City Manager regarding dogs at Catalonia Park.

Commissioner Anderson: Non-residential area.

Public Works Director Diaz: Salvadore will be the next one.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Unidentified Speaker: And she's saying that's not a residential area.

Mayor Lago: Can we...?

Commissioner Anderson: I happened to live on Menores at one time. That's a residential area.

Mayor Lago: Can you do me a favor? Can you do me a favor? Just to keep some order -- because we have a Clerk, and we'd like to have an opportunity to make a decision here -- let's not speak from the grandstands. That's important so that we can hear each other, and we can properly record everyone's statement. Mr. Director, you said December for Ponce?

Public Works Director Diaz: I did not say December.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Who said December?

Commissioner Anderson: I did.

Vice Mayor Mena: Commissioner Anderson.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Anderson, December. And which is the other item? Which is the other site that will be ready?

Unidentified Speaker: Salvadore.

Commissioner Anderson: Salvadore Park.

Mayor Lago: When will that be ready?

Public Works Director Diaz: So, Salvadore, we should probably have a PO, a notice to proceed to the contractor by December. The timeline will be depending on the availability of materials so...

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: Next summer probably.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager...

Public Works Director Diaz: Early 2023.

Mayor Lago: In regards to our negotiations, you think there could be a possibility to put up a nice fence, temporary fence in the area that we're working on?

City Manager Iglesias: Temporary fence? I'm sorry, Mayor. I couldn't hear.

Mayor Lago: In regards to the negotiations for the site that we're working on...

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Do you think there could be an opportunity for us to put up a nice fence there?

City Manager Iglesias: I am not sure. I can look into that.

Mayor Lago: Okay, please.

City Manager Iglesias: I can look at it.

Mayor Lago: Because when you think about the parking, the open space -- the magnitude of the open space, I think it could be a good opportunity to alleviate a little bit of the pressure and the need. So, are we moving -- are we leaving it -- we're leaving things as is, or are we taking a vote?

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm a no on the resolution on the agenda. I need to know what do you guys want to do.

Commissioner Anderson: Well...

Commissioner Menendez: I'll be voting no.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Fors: I'll be voting no as well.

Commissioner Anderson: Alright, leave it as is then? And I guess we -- what -- divide the park, and then you have a smaller space for dogs? Okay.

Commissioner Menendez: Do you have the designs?

Commissioner Anderson: Enjoy.

Mayor Lago: Do we have support from the Commission to remove the fence once the other parks come online?

Vice Mayor Mena: I would -- yes, but I would make that decision at that time.

Commissioner Menendez: We'd bring it back...

Vice Mayor Mena: Because I don't...

Commissioner Menendez: At that point to address it.

Vice Mayor Mena: I would say that it comes back on the agenda when that happens, and then you can make a decision. I may not even be here when that happens.

Commissioner Menendez: Because my only issue -- Mayor, my only issue is that -- my only issue, Mayor, is if we automatically remove it and it's still a pet friendly, designated park, do we encounter the same issues we have now? So...

Mayor Lago: You shouldn't encounter them.

Commissioner Menendez: No, I agree, I agree.

Mayor Lago: Because I think people can follow the rules because we're a society where you have to follow the rules. And just like we've asked...

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: So many times to please on the Granada Park in front of the country club, please do not have your dog unleashed, every day that I drive by there, the dogs are running. There's a

German shepherd that runs constantly up and down, up and down, up and down, and I've gotten calls from residents. This is not my item. This is not my item. I didn't advocate for this. This is the Commission's item. I'm just here -- I'm just telling you -- but there are rules. There are rules that we have to abide by.

Vice Mayor Mena: Can we...?

Mayor Lago: It's like, basically, look, like saying, hey, you know, parks are meant to be local, correct, right? Some of them have fences, some don't; case in point, Lisbon Park, which we so strongly advocated to save that tree, and we bought that park. Remember when we -- they don't have a parking space if somebody wants to park. Well, what if they park their car inside the park, or they park their car on the swale? It's not supposed to be that way, but that becomes the norm, and we have to just accept it. That's not the way things work. There are rules. We have to follow the rules. If not, it just becomes a free-for-all. So, we're moving in a direction as per your request. I have no problems with that. But you know, there's certain needs -- and we sold this park in a certain way, and I know that needs evolve, but if there are two or three different options over the next year, I think people...

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, we...

Mayor Lago: Should be responsible...

Vice Mayor Mena: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Enough to, you know, be team players.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, I agree with you. All I'm saying is tee it up when that's -- when those things are here and...

Commissioner Menendez: Can we put as soon as that second...

Vice Mayor Mena: Viable, let's do it.

Commissioner Menendez: As soon as Salvadore is up and running, the park -- the dog -- designated dog area, let's put it the next Commission meeting, Catalonia. And that way we address it...

Mayor Lago: We'll have the discussion then.

Commissioner Menendez: Immediately.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure.

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah, no, we can do it. And by the way, just for you all here, I got calls from more people than you brought here complaining about the behavior in the park. That's why I put it on.

Unidentified Speaker: May we respond?

Mayor Lago: But can we...?

Commissioner Anderson: No. We'll talk...

Mayor Lago: Can we...?

Commissioner Anderson: You can come see me on Friday.

Mayor Lago: Can we have this discussion -- can we have the discussion after? Let's move on. Thank you very much to everybody. Let's move on to time certain Item J-1, which is already late. Thank you.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Vice Mayor Mena: That temporary fence is going in the prior resolution.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)