

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item K
February 25, 2025
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Alberto Parjus

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Deputy City Manager, Joe Gomez

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item K [1:03 p.m.]

Discussion Items

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, I think we're done. Do you have any items for the good of the order.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We've completed the agenda. I just remind people about the Farmers Market; it's still running now. Its amazing, so enjoy it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Can I wait till the end please.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: Nothing on my agenda.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fernandez.

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Commissioner Fernandez: I want to take the opportunity to congratulate our new Deputy City Manager, Joe Gomez, and our new Assistant City Manager, Carolina Vester. Both of you have shown incredible dedication to our city, one for less time, one for a long time, but its great to have you part of our administrative team, which will continue to lead our city and take us to the next level. Having both of you help City Manager Parjus, I think you all are going to be a great team. You have different ways of thinking, different ideas that you bring to the table, different experience and I think its just going to elevate our city and take us into our next centennial in a great way. So, thank you for taking these new challenges and thank you for what you do for our city.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. So, I wanted to go ahead and share with the residents that I did come up with Welcome to Coral Gables, its like a little welcome package folder with a lot of useful information in here. I've sent it to my newsletter. I'm sending it to all new residents who are coming into Coral Gables. However, if you go ahead and DM on social media, send me an email, or call my office, I would be more than happy to go ahead and send one to you as well. What's included in this package is a lot of information of how the Commission is composed, information about the millage rate, where to play pickleball, where our parks are located, information about the trash guidelines, solid waste, Chief of Police, Fire, trash pits, a whole welcome package for people that do not live in Coral Gables, but there is a lot of actual useful information that may be you don't have being a long-time resident. There is also a directory, because sometimes you're home and you are like, I'm having this issue, but I don't know where to call or who to contact. So, I included a lot of the best places to call with names and direct numbers and emails. So, if you are interested, go ahead and contact my office, email me, or you can DM me through Instagram. Oh, and I also included a little gift which is a little calendar for 2025. And that would be all. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Alright. I have one item. So, I met with a bunch of residents yesterday and the Deputy City Manager and it was a very fruitful meeting, along with Fred Couceyro, to discuss an ongoing problem that we're having here in the city. And the issue that we're having is again, thank God these are issues that we're dealing now with other serious, even more serious issues, but we're dealing with existing parks and parks that come online, and the concept of dog-friendly parks, off leash, on leash, and you kind of have two factions, and then you have certain instances, not the majority, but people who take their dogs to a park and for some reason they want to have them off leash. Then the dogs defecate, the dogs go all over the play equipment, it becomes a problem. We've seen that happen in some of the parks that I've been able to find and acquire on behalf of the city. The main point, the one that was a big one was the one on Granada, across from the Country Club, that's been a contentious one for years. But now, yesterday we met with the residents at Majorie, and they were talking about three days a week, dog park three days a week, residents one day a week, on leash. So many ideas that just won't work, especially on the

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management side. We also talked about potentially taking a portion of the park and making it a little bit of a dog park. Again, that doesn't work either. You overload that park with 15-20 dogs, before you know it, it becomes a maintenance nightmare, and like Mr. Couceyro said, it's the constant maintenance, the constant maintenance, and again, its not up to our standards. So, I came up with an idea that I wanted to bring before the Commission and I asked for Fred, through the Manager's office, to flush this out. I think what we've seen and another piece of legislation that I wrote that's been very fruitful is the illegal dumping legislation where we installed cameras in the North Gables, before we had major issues, and once we've installed these cameras, we see a 98 percent drop. There was an actual article on Community Newspaper that actually talked about it. We see immediate, immediate turnaround and positivity in regard to people stopping the illegal dumping. We've actually caught people illegal dumping. So, I think what we should do is, we should apply a similar technology to each one of our parks and it's a twofold benefit. Number one, we'll put signage, and we'll put a camera. One of these new technology cameras that has a 360 view of the entire park. I think it sends a strong message that we want people to maintain order, to be held accountable. The residents love the idea, correct Mr. Deputy City Manager, they thought it was a great idea, on both sides of the isle, it will result in accountability. And the other issue that I brought up that just came out of the conversation that was a nice long conversation was the fact that, this will also result in the neighboring properties also having coverage in regard to anybody who comes into the neighborhood to commit a crime. There is simple crime like breaking into a car, which is not simple, but again, it's a crime where they come in and they steal your change, because over 60 percent from what I remember of these cars that are left unlocked. So please lock your cars, its important, to more violent crimes that thank God we don't have here in the city, but again, its just another layer. Maybe somebody late night is walking the dog, or is walking their child, or is out for a run. This is just another layer of protection that the city has access and tells people, listen, this area is under supervision, its under constant supervision. So, I asked the Manager, through his office, to be able to start working on with the existing parks that we have, to see how we install through the budget process one camera, one camera that's not pointed in one direction, but one camera that is all-encompassing. They have this new technology that we use in a lot of my projects to basically be able to see the entire job site and its just one camera that has multiple different lenses and features to it. The technology already exists. I think its very beneficial and I think it's a multi-layer process. It will keep people who are not following the rules in line, along with the signage, but then it will also be another safety measure. So, if you'd like to get involved in this, I'm working on this with the Manager and the Deputy City Manager, to hopefully be able to put this in this year's budget. I think it makes sense, and I think its an easy fix and all the residents on both sides were very happy about it. Mr. Deputy Manager, would you like to add anything on that, please.

Deputy City Manager Gomez: Thank you, Mayor Lago and Commissioners and Vice Mayor Anderson. As the Mayor said, I think yesterday's meeting was a very productive meeting. We had folks who were passionate on both sides of the issue.

Mayor Lago: We had a lot of people there.

Deputy City Manager Gomez: Absolutely. But they came together, and I think the solution that was proffered which is the security camera with a 360 view of the park area will certainly help in the issues. Its not just whether the dogs are running unleashed or not, but also from a security purpose for our residents. So, I think it's a great idea and I spoke to the City Manager last night after our meeting and we're definitely excited to move forward with this.

Mayor Lago: And we're also very candid with the residents. We told them, listen, this is going to take a year, because you've got to budget for it, unless we can find money in last year's budget that wasn't properly allocated, not that it wasn't properly, excuse me, that was allocated, maybe it was a surplus, or maybe extra money came in, or maybe we didn't do a project for one reason or another and we can use that money, but I think that these types of public safety projects, for example, this project in itself, something that I want to see in the budget. I want to see as a budget line item. I think this is, again, getting rid of the dog poop and getting rid of unleashed dogs, which are a hazard, especially for young kids, is important, but I think the idea of having this public safety option at every park is really going to deliver and its going to be another layer in our public security arsenal. Just wanted to put that out there. Yes, Madam Vice Mayor, give your input and have you work with the Manager, if you have any ideas that you want to layer onto that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I also had a meeting on Friday during office hours with a group of individuals around the Salvadore dog park. They are going to be bringing forward the specific sand that is going to be appropriate because it was rather apparent from the sample that's in my office now that what was put in there was the leftovers from the Christmas Park, and its not going to work, even with the beautiful topper on it which immediately once the dogs are running through it is mixed in with the muddy dirt and not good. But your message about separating off leash dogs from children is paramount and I don't think you should be having off leash dogs with children for a multitude of reasons. The children can get hurt. You have the remnants of things that weren't picked up and then you also have some folks who don't pick up. So, they also talked about having a camera at that park to encourage compliance. So, I'm all for it and Manager, I'll give you the specific grade of sand as soon as it's identified for me from the architect that was present.

Mayor Lago: So, on that point, I think that this should be at every park. At every park we should have a camera that will give us, again, would be in touch and people will see it, it's a deterrent. When people see that camera, they know that someone's watching and again, I think it's a deterrent and it delivers. For example, like we said before, with the illegal dumping. The second thing that I'm presenting, that I already presented to the Manager on an email, which I've done probably ten

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times already since I've been elected and I'm doing it again is, a piece of property that was brought to my attention that could be potentially an asset to the city as a park. We have the funds already in the park funds, acquisition fund, which I wrote that legislation, and I think it's a great piece of property, a great piece of property, that will compliment already an existing park that is in dire need. I sent the email to the Manager last week; the realtors have been working with him for about a month to try to avoid the property going to market. It has not gone to market yet, so the Manager has that information. I hope the Manager will have a conversation with the Commission because I think it's a great opportunity. Obviously, its in the fledgling state. You have to have appraisals, you have to do a lot of leg work in preparation, but I think it's a very interesting piece of property that would compliment our efforts in the park. If the Commission would like to have the piece of property, I'm all for it. If they don't, again, the owner will sell it for a lot of money.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm absolutely for it.

Mayor Lago: We have the money and it's a park that if you analyze it, this piece of property could potentially provide even more relief to an overflowing park already. So, please speak with the Manager. I sent him that email already and I look forward to your input and hopefully we can start negotiating with a realtor in regard to this property. If there is nothing else further to discuss, I hope everybody has a nice week. God bless. Thank you. Thank you to staff, thank you to everybody who participated. Take care.