

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Virtual Meeting
Agenda Items G-6 and G-7
July 14, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
ACM Ed Santamaria
ACA/International Affairs, Naomi Levi Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-6 and G-7

G-6: A discussion regarding the potential acquisition of Banyan Drive Park
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

G-7: A discussion to provide direction to staff regarding the acquisition of Banyan
Drive Park from Miami-Dade County (Sponsored by Commissioner Keon)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Item G-6 and G-7, discussion regarding the potential acquisition of Banyan Drive Park and direction to staff for the acquisition – G-6 and G-7.

Commissioner Keon: You know that's another one, for me that I gave it to Naomi, I met with...on other issues, he had asked me about it. I said, Jim, you know, let me ask them to put it on and they can direct staff. So, it's the same thing. I don't really care whose name it shows up under, it doesn't make any difference to me, same thing.

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Vice Mayor Lago: If I may, I'd like to give a little background in regard to this project. I think it was about a month or two months ago, I brought forward Solano Prado, which is another project, another property that this city took from the county and now the support of the residents, now its going to be a community park for them to enjoy. I had been discussing with Leonardi from the county for a few months in reference to Banyan Drive Park, as she brought it to my attention about hopefully potentially bringing that also in line. On January 15th, I sent my colleagues on the Commission a nice memo detailing this project and the potential interest of bringing that under the auspice of the City of Coral Gables. It's a great piece of property and a great location. I also met with Mr. Augden, just to have a conversation with him and he made it very clear, there is one big difference between Solano Prado and Banyan Drive Park. There is not an association, just like there is one in Solano Prado. I then proceeded to meet with the neighboring residents, Rob Barlik, who is one of the most active members, I spoke to him over the phone, he was out of town. He was one of the most active members who really drove the issue in regard to the guard gate. And all the residents I spoke were in favor. But the issue was, how do we maintain this property if we do bring it under the auspice of the city. It's a great piece of property. Its almost an acre in size. Its in a quiet neighborhood, and the issue was that the city would, obviously have to maintain it. And I think that's an expense that we should take, because it would increase our park portfolio and it would allow us to control the park and take it away from the county, which again, you never know what happens in the future, and we've had those instances before. So, I think it's a great opportunity and I think we should bring it and I'd love to hear what my colleagues have to say about it. I think it's a great opportunity.

Commissioner Keon: Same issue. I think its fine.

Vice Mayor Lago: No, no. It's a little bit different. It's a little bit different of an issue, because if you are going to say it's the same issue, its not, and the City Attorney and also the Clerk can advise you of that. I put this on the agenda before you put it on the agenda. So, it's a simple thing and I welcome...

Commissioner Keon: I spoke to Naomi, I gave it to Naomi. She talked to me and I said, and I asked her to put it on the agenda. That was it. When she put it on the agenda, she said that, Oh, you put it on. I said you know what, its outside of the Sunshine, I'm not talking to you. I haven't spoken to you about it, I haven't discussed it with you. Just go ahead, it's the same thing, then let it go. So that's all there is to it. Let it go.

Vice Mayor Lago: Commissioner, its simple. I take a lot of pride. I wrote the memo on June 15th to all my colleagues, educating you...

Commissioner Keon: [Inaudible]...and even if you did, it's not important, it's not important.

Vice Mayor Lago: Of course, it's important, because I value your input, I value your input.

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Commissioner Keon: [Inaudible]

Vice Mayor Lago: But you don't let me finish.

Commissioner Keon: Its irrelevant at this point, because...

Vice Mayor Lago: No, I don't think its not. I think its government...I think we have to at the end of the day, it's a great opportunity and we shouldn't get lost in the back and forth. I think it's a great opportunity for the residents, I think it's a great opportunity for the city. I welcome this discussion.

Commissioner Fors: And I don't think anybody can dispute it that we should definitely.

Vice Mayor Lago: A hundred percent.

Commissioner Keon: Its not a big deal. Just move forward.

Commissioner Fors: We should definitely look into, you know the devil is in the details. Obviously, it looks like a no-brainer. I look forward to hearing more about it.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. I think Ed Santamaria had some concerns, but that's why we asked him to work with the county to go ahead and do it. It doesn't really make you know – I promise you that I won't ask for the park to be named...[Inaudible]...let's move forward.

ACM Santamaria: Mr. Mayor, Ed Santamaria, Assistant City Manager for Operations and Infrastructure. We have been discussing this particular parcel of land with the county for some time. It is a one-acre piece that runs along...waterway. If Billy can pull up a map so everyone can see what we are looking at. And as it runs abutting the waterway, one of our concerns would be a potential risk in liability, because there is no barrier between the park and the waterway. And in other places where we have this situation, they've asked that there be a barrier, that makes sense. If you have children playing in this area, it's a good idea to have some sort of protection potentially. But we are willing to abide by the will of the Commission, if the Commission deems it's a parcel of land that is worthwhile for us to acquire. We have no problems in making this happen. The cost of maintenance would be minimal, because it would stay the way it is, basically just a green open space. I'm certain that any kind of transfer of this land that is conducted would involve certain conditions imposed by the county, in the manner of an interlocal agreement. That interlocal agreement would likely say something along the lines that it is to remain an open park space and we have no problem with that whatsoever. In the future if this were to be improved, the manner of the improvements is something to be considered and there probably would be some community input into it. A question that would be, would be along the lines to make it more active or not. In

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my opinion, this is a great parcel of land as it is, as an open green space, which it currently is right now. So, we can provide further direction on this and can provide further information on this, pending your direction. And then we can work towards, as Commissioner Fors pointed out, the devil is in the details.

Vice Mayor Lago: I think we have a very similar situation when you talk about the waterway of a parcel adjacent to my residence, which is the Blue Road open space, which again, it is closed off to public use, but we all know as you drive by that there is always people either adjacent to the bridge or on the property. So, I agree with you, it's a great piece of property and I think it would be very beneficial for our park portfolio.

ACM Santamaria: Fred Couceyro, our Parks Director and Naomi Garcia Levi who has also been working on this initiative brought this process, it has gone on for some time, and so, they are available for questions that you might have.

Commissioner Keon: I would like to see us have this parcel within our domain, but I would really like to see a fence erected along the waterway side, because the problem with canals is, if a child or anybody falls into a canal there is no way to get out. There are steep embankments and it crumbles as you try to get out of it. I think that it would make it a much more safe place in our community if somebody wants to go and sit and have a picnic, if they are going to go on a bike ride, they can...But I would really like to see it ours, so that we would erect a fence and really safe up that access to the waterway there. Thank you.

ACM Santamaria: Any erection of a fence along that line of property abutting the canal would involve South Florida Water Management District, so we'd have a discussion with them.

Commissioner Keon: Okay. You would work out those details, you know what it is. So, thank you. I don't care if you merge the items. I don't care what you do.

City Attorney Ramos: I do think staff is looking for a vote directing them to engage the county and South Florida Water Management, whatever it is that we need to do in order to move this forward.

Commissioner Keon: Okay. I just moved it.

Ms. Levi Garcia: In terms of the process to move forward, we would need a resolution from the Commission requesting the transfer of Banyan Park Drive from the county, it's the same process that we engage for the transfer of Solano Prado Park.

Commissioner Keon: Okay. So, then you'll...and bring it back.

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Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. Anything else?

Commissioner Keon: No.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Let's go onto the next one.

Commissioner Keon: Do you need a vote?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, we don't, it's a discussion.

City Attorney Ramos: Yes. Yes. You need a resolution.

Vice Mayor Lago: So moved.

Commissioner Keon: I moved it.

Vice Mayor Lago: Second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll please. Billy call the roll.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes

Commissioner Mena: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)