

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
September 8, 2020
Virtual Meeting
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
Parks and Rec Director, Fred Couceyro
ACA/Intergovernmental Affairs, Naomi Levi Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-1 [9:55 a.m.]

A discussion regarding recommended revisions to the City’s park naming policy and procedures
(Sponsored by Commissioner Keon)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Now we go to City Commission Items, F-1, a discussion regarding recommended revisions to the City’s park naming policy and procedures. Commissioner Keon the floor is yours.

Commissioner Keon: Included in your packet was a change, a policy change that the Parks Department made available to all of us. I just – the biggest change, I think or the biggest part of it is, it calls for maybe to be done through an organization and it calls for some community input. I don’t know if, I’m hoping that you all read it and if you have any other comments or other recommendations that might go along with it, that’s all.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Good morning Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, Ed Santamaria, Assistant City Manager Operations and Infrastructure. Before you is this item that discusses some potential modifications to the park naming policy applied by the city. I can tell you that Naomi Levi Garcia from the City Attorney’s office, along with Fred Couceyro of Parks,
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Director of Parks, worked on this together and they are available for any questions that you might have.

Ms. Levi Garcia: Thank you Ed. Perhaps Fred wants to just run us through the recommendations quickly.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Absolutely. Good morning. Based on prior discussion on our park naming policy, we had direction to look at some of the things that were discussed which were establishing a little bit more detailed criteria, maybe a more detailed process from what we had before, which was more broad. So, what we looked at, we looked at kind of defining the criteria like for contributions, we also looked at what would maybe designate a significant contribution in terms of service, we defined that a little bit. And then what we did is, we kind of changed the process. As the Commissioner noted, one of the big changes was, instead of having an individual nominate someone for a park name, it would have to come through a community organization, that way there would be some community input and some community buy-in to that naming. And then, there would be a nomination form that would be provided to that group for the nomination. That nomination form would be accepted by the Community Recreation Director, that would be a nominating committee that would be the Director, the Community Recreation Assistant Director, and then either directors or designees from Planning, Landscape Surfaces, and if applicable, Historical. And then, they would look at the nomination before and if it was acceptable to move on to the next phase. The next phase would be looking at Parks and Rec Advisory Board review and also Landscape Advisory Board review, and if, applicable as well, Historic. Once it passes that second level, then it would be presented to Commission. We would need at least approval from one of those boards, ideally from both in order to present it to the Commission. And of course, also in the policy, it provides for the Commission to waive any or all parts of the policy and be able to work on park naming if we need to go aside from the policy as well.

Ms. Levi Garcia: And the only thing I would add is that, because our current park naming policy was established by resolution, a resolution would be necessary to amend the policy, institute a new policy.

Commissioner Keon: So, the only thing we are doing here is, I'd like your comments on this from my colleagues and if there are things you think need to be added to it or whatever, so we can ask staff to draft a resolution on this item.

Commissioner Fors: I have a comment Mr. Mayor, Commissioner Keon, the only thing that struck me is as a bit questionable was the limitation of nominations only being accepted from community-based organizations. Is that something that you see in other park naming policies in other municipalities. I understand its limited to or the criteria is an organization that's been around for three years. I think community-based is a little vague, what does that mean exactly? – and should we consider an option of perhaps not allowing an individual to nominate, but to give at least an individual the ability to maybe put together a petition of residents of a specific number, so that it doesn't necessarily have to come from a community-based organization. An individual could

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advocate for a nomination that gets put before us, if they obtain a certain number of resident signatures.

Commissioner Keon: I think so. I think that's a good idea. How would you...?

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Commissioner Fors, the organization, community organization it is something that I saw in other communities. I have also seen that the ability for an individual to use a petition can be used, so we can definitely put that in the policy if you like. It was something that I considered, as I did. The only question would be, what would be the number, what's an acceptable number, is it 50, is it 100, is it 25, so we can look at that. You know, with community organizations we were looking at the different ones that serve the city and usually they are very helpful with the community and if its someone that is a person that is an appropriate person to look at for a park naming, you usually can get support. So that's why we thought the community organization would be a really good match for this type of policy, in order to make it just a little bit more restrictive, but still pretty open.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I have a question. I'm sorry, Commissioner, I interrupted, go ahead.

Commissioner Fors: I was just going to say that I want to be clear, I'm not insisting on this, I want it up for discussion and if an individual is going to be the one doing the nominating, I would set the number of petitions pretty high, so that you can't just go get 25 folks to do it. I was thinking something in the range of 100 and to be clear, I wouldn't hold community-based organizations to the petition requirement, they would be able to petition just on behalf of the organization.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Can I ask a question? I am concerned whenever something involving the public comes along in terms of petitions, etc., what are we trying to cure? Had we had problems, are there parks, Commissioner Keon that you think are named after inappropriate persons? I think this came up when you brought this up when we had Commissioner Barker, who was a very distinguished resident of Coral Gables, the Orange Bowl Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, Commissioner for many years and his family asked for a naming opportunity. But did this come up because you think that there are inappropriately named parks or are there things in the pipeline that you wish to cure before they come up with us. I'm concerned as to why of this because I don't think it has been abused ever in the past, when you had the Fred Hartnett Park, you had Phillip Park, two Mayors named Phillip, you had Betsy Adams Park, I don't know, Merrick Park.

Commissioner Keon: Betsy Adams Park came through a community-based organization as the Garden Club. Most of the parks that had been named, even going back in history, they've been named by a community of people that have come together to want to see a park named for them. I think it is to – I don't want to see one individual – this is nothing against Commissioner Barker, not at all, but I think to have – yes, he served the city and he served in a government relation role for the company he worked for, for a very long time, so by that he was involved in the Chamber, and was involved in the City. But I think parks in neighborhoods have, and as we have a very renewed effort to purchase land in neighborhoods and to establish parks and we have established over the last eight years, we have established more neighborhood parks than I think any

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Commissioner's group has established prior to this, and I think we have set a path going forward with setting aside money for public parks or whatever, and we have a plan to have a neighborhood park within a 15-minute walking distance of almost every neighborhood in the city. So, we are going to continue to have parks, and so naming of those parks is going to become, will come up more and more often where it didn't before. So, I think with the changes in the number of parks we have and a desire to establish parks and whatever else, I think we are going to see this. And I think before, most of the parks that we've established is neighborhood parks have really been, one we worked with the community to name those parks, and they usually have been ended up being reflective of some element in the park or the address or the neighborhood that they are serving. I thought that was a wonderful thing that we worked with the neighborhoods to identify how they would name their park and all of those things. We have many very good people and long time residents of this city who have served this city well and I think we honor them in a variety of ways, but I think parks belong to neighborhoods and I really would like to see neighborhoods more involved in the naming of parks or the renaming of parks, particularly, because it's usually they're named by the community that establishes them and I wouldn't like to see them renamed at one individual's request with all due respect to Commissioner Barker, the support letters came from one very good Commissioner, very well intentioned Commissioner that served the city exceedingly well, the President of the Chamber of Commerce and a prior Congresswoman, that doesn't reflect the community. It's a suggestion, but it doesn't reflect the input of a community, and I'd like to see the community involved as we continue to establish parks and have an opportunity to name those parks or to rename those parks.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I don't think, to my knowledge, we have renamed parks that have been existing, and I have here a list, which is in our map of our parks.

Commissioner Keon: I have the same list.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: ...Francis Gordon Park, Fred Hartnett Park, Ingraham Park, Carlos Kokoris, MacFarlane Linear Park, Merrick Park, Nelly B. Moore Park, Perrin Plaza, Ruth Waterway Park, Phillips Park, Mayor two times, Pears Park, Pittman Park, Ponce de Leon, Alex Rodriguez Park, which is the University of Miami, because he donated many funds for the baseball stadium, Loretta Cehee, Lola B. Walker, William Cooper, anyway I don't object...I'm not convinced as to the reason why you are saying this, but that's my problem, I guess.

Commissioner Keon: But William B. Cooper Park was at the request of the neighborhood to name that park, William B. Cooper Park. I think that there needs to be a community element in the naming of the park.

Vice Mayor Lago: Mayor, if I just may ask a question of Fred. My question is, I had in preparation for this meeting, I reached out to Miami-Dade County Parks and also to the City of Miami to really understand what their process is. And again, they notified me, and I think I mentioned it before at previous Commission meetings that they are currently reviewing their processes and at the end of the day the BCC has the ultimate approval in regard to the name. I think that the process has worked pretty well. I haven't seen anything out of the normal in regard to naming for parks. If we

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are going to go down this route, I just want to make sure there is a mechanism in place, you can put a friendly amendment, obviously, we are in discussion today, so no need for an amendment. I'd like to make sure that the Commission itself can somehow somehow recommend a park naming. To me, I think its another layer in the process. We can offer the ability for interested residents to use a mechanism of a 501(c)3, if the Commission deems it appropriate, but I would like to see that the Commission not only have the final say as its had when we vote for a park naming, but also be able to have a mechanism to submit potential candidates for park names. I think that's important and I'd like to see if my colleagues agree with my request or if they see something different that we could potentially use.

Parks Director Couceyro: Vice Mayor in the policy, we do describe that the City Commission, you can approve, you can waive any or all of the conditions of the policy, and in fact, the Commission has done so in the past and they can continue to do it. It's a resolution, its not an ordinance, so the Commission has that. If you want, we can make a little bit more descriptive language in the policy to state that we can say, direct and detail the Commission can nominate a park naming outside of the policy, we can even write it into there. But the language right now, it's the City Commission may approve the waiving of any or all conditions or procedures in the naming policy. So, the Commission has the ability to do so.

Ms. Levi Garcia: Vice Mayor Lago, if the Commission wanted to direct a nomination to go through the process, you could do that. You would just in effect waiving the requirement that it come from a community group.

Vice Mayor Lago: Right now from different parks in my neighborhood that have been named recently, the process has been that group or that individual, that homeowner or that business owner, whoever it may be, reaches out to a Commissioner and basically pleads their case on why that park, new acquisition or old should be named on behalf of somebody in the community. Again, I just don't want to add more and more layers, but I don't have any issues with it. I agree with what the Mayor is saying. At the end of the day, it falls on the Commission and we are the ones that have the right to move forward in a direction of naming that park. I'm up for whatever my colleagues, I want to hear what the rest of my colleagues have to say on this. I just don't want to have so many layers, layer upon layer upon layer, and at the end of the day its our decision moving forward in regard to the park name.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Any other Commissioners wish to speak?

Commissioner Mena: I'm sort of on the fence on this a little bit. I sort of understand on some level the need for some criteria. I'm not a big fan of overly stringent or ridged criteria just because I think you got a lot of unique circumstances and I don't like to disqualify things. For example, you have over 25 years of service, you know. I can foresee somebody having, let's say 20 years of distinguished service and they satisfy all the other criteria. I don't love the idea of at least 70 years of age, that seems like an arbitrary sort of thing. I don't care what age somebody is. I care about what their contributions were. So, I think in most instances you are probably will be somebody that checks that box, because of all the things that you have to see, but I don't necessarily think

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there needs to be a hard and fast rule either. So, the other thing I had thought, and I'm just sort of brainstorming it. This is helpful as a criteria for people and groups looking to nominate somebody and maybe we can still tweak the particulars, but another way I thought to skin it, and again, just brainstorming is, maybe you make it something that for a park to be named or renamed it requires some sort of like super majority vote of the Commission, instead of just your standard 3-2 vote, maybe you need a four-fifths or something. I can understand if you have a hypothetical situation where you have two out of five Commissioners who are not in favor of naming it something, maybe its not a great idea to name it that. The part I agree with most that I just want to state, the part that I agree with most with Commissioner Keon on is, I do think neighborhood input is important, and however that happens and however we make that a part of the process, I don't ever want to come in and impose a name on a neighborhood for their park, because I do think neighborhoods have a sense of ownership over a park. Yes, it's a city park, but for whatever reason the neighbors don't want it, I think that its important for us to know that, hear that, and respect it. Listen, we live in an age where there is a lot of political sort of anxed and strife among people and everything is hypo-politicized, maybe people don't want a park named after...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Al Capone.

Commissioner Mena: So, if that's what the neighborhood wants or doesn't want, I would respect that. I'd like to see – this is what will be helpful to me going forward and I should have done this myself, but frankly I didn't. Fred, I'd love to see some sort of like survey of what neighboring municipalities do, just to get a sense of it, not that we are going to do what other people do, but just to get a feel for what kind of criteria they have. I'm sure this already reflects that on some level.

Parks Director Couceyro: Yes sir, but I will tell you, as the Vice Mayor noted, a lot of communities its just basically at the elected level and it's a recommendation and they go ahead and do it. It's interesting because, as the prior discussion, to look at our policy and make it more detailed and have more criteria, I reached out to all of my colleagues in the county and a lot of them had the elected and quite a few of them, not quite a few, but a handful of them actually had used our previous policy as their starting point and added a few things. It's not any – the more restrictive ones are from bigger communities, which I guess would have more recommendations or more suggestions, more requests.

Commissioner Mena: Right. And I'd love to see some sort of notice and I apologize if its in there, but if there is some sort of notice provision on neighbors within X amount of feet of the park that issue will get notice of any public meeting that we have and we should have a public meeting, on the issue. Again, and I know that, I'm willing to guess that everybody on this dais is always in favor of getting public input and listening to the residents, so I know that's not an issue. Its just a matter of building into our process something that, not only gives people notice, and I would be, you know, let's do more than the bare minimum. If our current code requires 100 feet or something, I don't know what it currently does, do a little more than that and make sure that we are really capturing the neighborhoods input. And we talked about this before Fred, in terms of park infrastructure, not park naming, but to me it's the same issue. I also don't want a scenario where

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you notice a public meeting, you get three people that show up from the neighborhood and then we accept that as the neighborhood's input on the park, when its really just the three people that took the time to show up. We've got to go a little further in terms of getting neighborhood input on this, whether it's – I don't know the best way to do it, but that's my concern and I think that's a noble effort to try to get actual tangible input from the residents who don't always have time to attend a public meeting.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Commissioner. Thank you very much.

Ms. Levi Garcia: Mayor, if I could just respond quickly to Commissioner Mena's suggestions. So we currently do not notice the neighbors regarding a park naming and I think part of the reason for that was, we want to be, or in the past the city has wanted to be cautious about creating an environment where the neighbors can come and potentially bash the person that is being nominated for the naming in a public forum. So, perhaps if you give staff the opportunity, we can try to brainstorm a way to encourage and allow for neighborhood input and potentially avoid that scenario.

Commissioner Mena: I understand that concern and we all cringe when somebody is being bashed in terms of their reputation, but it begs the question if neighbors are bashing the person whose name, we seek to put on the park in their neighborhood is that the right name. And so...

Vice Mayor Lago: Especially Commissioner Mena, if they are willing to, like you said, bash on the record, I think if you are going to give some input in regards to whether a park should be named for such individual, I think those comments have to be made public, so people are very careful what they put on the record. That's just my opinion. I thought for some reason, I thought we had already some sort of public input in regard to park naming. If we don't, I think that's the most important thing that may come out of F-1.

Commissioner Keon: Right. We don't currently have anything for public input. I really think that's – especially as we've developed these small neighborhood parks. I think its important that the people that work with us and support those parks and have an opportunity to be involved in the naming of their park.

Parks Director Couceyro: We do.

Commissioner Keon: Commissioner Mena, I really don't think it needs to be their sustained continued public service either. I think you may have somebody that lives in a park that maybe isn't in public service but happens to be a very worthy person of being remembered in a particular neighborhood. So, I don't know – I don't think you need to do that. And I also don't think that age should be an issue either, because you may have a reason to name a park after a child at some point or you may have it named after some occasion or whatever else. I don't think age is – age is not an issue and I don't think – I think it is the character of the person and that's a difficult thing to actually put in writing, but I think that's kind of what you want to get. But I really do think the biggest part is that the public should be involved in naming these neighborhood parks. We are not

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establishing because we don't have this phase to establish big regional type or extremely large parks or whatever. So, what we are establishing are neighborhood parks and I think the neighborhood should be a very integral part of deciding what they want at that park and the name of that park. Those are the two things that I'd like to see come out of this.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: This is your issue. We've been discussing it for a while. What is your wish? What is your desire to see in this?

Commissioner Keon: That we'll bring back a proposal considered of the comments that you have made.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Is there any other discussion in this matter? It will come up again in a future meeting.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. Thank you.