

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
March 11, 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
Assistant City Manager, Carolina Vester

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item F-3

A Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager to identify funding to develop a concept design and to obtain community input regarding such concept design for improvement of the park located at 301 Majorca Avenue as a dedicated off-leash dog park. (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto F-3.

Commissioner Castro: A Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager to identify funding to develop a concept design and to obtain community input regarding such concept design for improvement of the park located at 301 Majorca Avenue as a dedicated off-leash dog park. Billy, I have given you a video. Oh, there we go. This is a dog park; residents right now use it to walk their dogs and do their necessities. It's actually one block off right there where we are located, and I think it's important that this is a dense area. This is an area that is already being used as a dog park and for us to go ahead and convert it into the first, I would say, the first off-leash park

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for our furry pets. I really want to preserve this as a green space, especially in this area, and I think this is the perfect way to keep this area green and at the same time provide a benefit for the residents that are around.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. Couple things. And I've been out walking and knocking as well, as far as the need for dog parks. There is a dog park exactly three blocks away that isn't off-lease dog park, and it will be temporary. It's been there ever since the 1505 Ponce Building was approved, and so, this is my respectful suggestion, as far as location for dog parks. One of the areas that I hear some of the biggest demand and I started talking to residents about having a location up near Barker Park, off Venetia. They have a children's park that's very, very frequently being used as an off-leash park, so it's kind of making something that should be a children's park into an off-leash dog park which it's not supposed to be. I think our Parks and Recreation Board needs to establish a master plan and recommended minimum distances between the parks, because from the prospect of having the need to walk three blocks as opposed to ten blocks to get to the next dog park, that's something that I think we need to do on a regional basis. It's not quite the same as having pocket parks. The dog parks I don't think need to be that close together, because people are willing to walk their dogs to the parks to allow them to go run. I absolutely want to maintain as much green space as possible, but I would appreciate the input from our Parks and Recreation Board, as far as a master plan for the entire city. There are folks that want a dog park down close to Sunset. There are other areas that want them closer to Bird Road, and the Salvadore Park is nice, but it's too far a distance for them to walk the dogs that far to be able to get to the park, and the idea is not to have to load your dogs up in a car to drive them there, to have something within a reasonable walking distance. Three blocks are not that far. So, I think it's something that a complete study needs to be done for the city to make some recommendations to this Commission.

Commissioner Castro: At 1505 Ponce, I believe that's the Kapor property, and this is a temporary park. I believe the ribbon-cutting was before I got elected. I'm not sure what's really happening with that property. It's, as you said, a temporary park and I think this park is really in the perfect location for North Gables as far as a dog park. Who knows – I mean...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let me fill you in. The 1505 property, that was designated as a requirement of that development. It's fenced now, its operational now, its usable now, its watered, it has a dog waste station, correct me Assistant City Manager if I'm incorrect on any of this, its operational and its three blocks away. The greatest needs I've seen are the greater distance away – Venetia, North Gables, they need a dog park within a walkable distance. Somewhere up in that neighborhood, we need to explore, there are some vacant lots around. The thing I ask folks when I was knocking doors, I said, listen, talk to your neighbors, there is no objection to that location there for a dog park, we can explore it further and I can bring it to the Commission. There are other

areas that are closer to Bird Road that it becomes just a little too far to be able to go to Salvadore dog park to be able to take the dog there, and then there is the areas south between Bird Road and US-1, and then you have the sector that's below US-1 in there that we don't have any at all. So, we need to kind of sprinkle them around, so more people have access to off-leash dog parks in our city.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you for your comments, Vice Mayor, I agree with you. I think we need to keep on exploring after we do this one to see where else we can go ahead and put dog parks. This area in particular is city property, so that's something we have to purchase, so it's a great opportunity, besides that my plans for this dog park are a little different from the temporary dog park that we have. We are really going to go all out. It's going to be a real off-leash dog park, maybe Carolina, you want to give a little explanation of what that really means.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to stop you for a moment and remind you because you weren't here. Salvadore dog park went through the Parks and Recreation Board, it absolutely did. To skip that process, I think it is depriving the opportunity of members of our community to be able to provide comments on where the best locations would be for us to have an established dog park, as opposed to another type of necessity for that area. So, that's we have the boards. We just had a lengthy meeting today about the Waterway Advisory Board being circumvented on a bridge and I'll suggest that you do that here today, involve the board early on. I knock the doors before I even allow Salvadore dog park to be proposed, because I wanted to make sure that the neighbors were not going to have a problem with it before putting it through the system.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely – and if you read the resolution, part of the resolution says that we are going to go ahead and – after we come up with a design, we are going to go ahead and have community input, that's what the resolution states. We are going to do a dog park that's community based, that's what the community wants.

Assistant City Manager Vester: So, if I may, just two points. You brought up the master plan. So, there is a Parks Master Plan that was adopted by the Commission, not ever member that sits here today, but that was adopted, and as part of the master plan there are components that include the dog park need, whether its off-leash or pet-friendly parks, and that was factored in that master plan. So, without a doubt that master plan and the adoption of the master plan, they also included what's called an analysis, which is basically a citywide survey that for the most part when you look at municipalities the master plan does have to get updated, almost on a five-year basis. So we are at that time now and we can definitely explore, if you're looking at a master plan, I wouldn't say a separate master plan, but within the existing parks master plan, an update to the level of services that the city provides right now to have that included, instead of a separate master plan. Also, as it relates to the dog park, so I want to say, we measure the level of services through walkability for normal parks, but this is a special use concept, right, so that's also different and we

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also look at major arteries for streets that are dissecting that makes access to parks difficult. So, we have Ponce between the two locations and this property that's being discussed was an amazing property in exchange, I think actually, Mayor, you worked with us on getting this property. At the time of the acquisition and trade for this property, we had discussed already with the board when we looked at acquiring it, different types of uses, and without a doubt, I think the way the resolution was written, it would go through that same process. I don't think this resolution was written to supersede the process that we normally follow, this would have to involve community input, concept design, as well as be vetted by all of our parks boards. So, we are not going to supersede that process, that's without a doubt the most important part of the parks acquisition and development processes to get community input.

Mayor Lago: Could I ask you a question. Thank you for acknowledging that I helped get that property, that's one of the many in the city.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Again, I love dog parks. I don't have a dog, but I love dog parks. I've got to make sure, because if I don't say that then it will be used, like I don't like dogs and I'm trying to stop dog parks. Not trying to stop dog parks. I love them, they're great. I love parks period. Parks are amazing, trees, canopies, they're amazing. More parks, more dogs, more canopies. I just don't get two dog parks in three blocks. That to me doesn't add up. I'd have to flush that out a little more and figure it out, and I also need to understand from you, in regard to the Commissioner's comments about the dog park that's already existing off Ponce. I want to say on the record, I didn't vote on that project four times when it came up. It has, one of the votes was for the dog park. Quick question. On that property, is that dog park part of the city or is that still in line with the property?

Assistant City Manager Vester: For that question, I would defer to legal, because they were overseeing the legal proceedings for that.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So that piece of property...

City Attorney Suarez: The city does not own that property.

Mayor Lago: When it was entitled, when it was entitled, part of the entitlement was that it would have a green space and that green space was a park, and that was the first thing that opened up.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, I would have to doublecheck. My recollection is not that it would be turned over to the city, but I can doublecheck and confirm.

Mayor Lago: I get it. But that's one of the things that I want to look at to make sure, because if we don't own that piece of property, I want to understand where we stand on it. Is it going to be whoever buys that property in the future is going to have to maintain that entitlement of having a

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dog park there, then that's a great thing, and we should also hopefully in the future when that property does trade hands or whatever happens to that property, that we put a caveat in the contract that we've done with all the other ones in downtown that the city owns the piece of land, the city owns the piece of land in the entitlement. So, I don't know if we did that on that property. I'll have to take a look at it, but I know that we've done it recently with all the ones in downtown, Publix, Codina, the one in front of Nordstroms, all those properties were deeded over to the city. So, I just don't know if putting two dog parks within three blocks – I think make one a dog park, make the other one a green space. I don't think we need two dog parks.

Commissioner Castro: I don't think the other dog park is three blocks away.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Also, just want to set the record because it was asked in the beginning that we do already have one dedicated off-leash park, which is adjacent to Salvadore park and then there will be a second one, which is going to be the one under the Underline, which will also be large and small dogs dedicated off-leash park. So basically, city owned property we already have two in the works, this would be a third. I think again, it would be on the community to say that if this is the right use for it or not.

Mayor Lago: Again, how far is it? – They said three blocks, am I incorrect: five blocks, six blocks?

Commissioner Castro: This is on the other side of Ponce. This is right here. It's a block away.

Mayor Lago: Madam ACM.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Again, from a park's perspective, we don't necessarily look for blocks in this case. You're going to be crossing Ponce de Leon.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Assistant City Manager Vester: So, I think that there's something to consider that is the access to the location for the use of the type of park.

Commissioner Menendez: Those serve as neighborhood opportunities for people with dogs – neighborhoods not citywide necessarily. So, the parks you mentioned are all public, in terms of owned by the city. Do we know who currently owns 1505? Obviously, Richie Kapor doesn't. He's with the FBI now, but who owns that. Is that something that – if they sell it or somebody buys it, we may be without a park, a dog park. Just asking. Does anybody know who the owner is?

Commissioner Castro: Does anybody have an update, does anybody know what's going to happen to that property? What's going on? – Who owns it? – Are they going to see it? – What? – Do you know Mayor?

Mayor Lago: I don't. I wish I did, but it would be great, maybe we'll be able to buy it. Maybe we should buy that property too.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's a nice piece of property. Its where the old Oldsmobile used to be, so I'm very familiar with the area, because its off Minores and Madeira area. It's a short distance between this and the other green space that you're mentioning. Having lived when I first met my husband, for a short while on Minores, it's a walkable distance from the one side of Ponce to the other side of Ponce. It's not the same as crossing US-1 or Bird Road and then you have some crosswalk areas available. I've also had my in-laws had a piece of property on the other side of Ponce, 230 Salamanca, so I know the walkability of the area, so it's not that far apart. I just think that we're forgetting other areas of our city that are in greater need of having an off-leash dog park, and Mayor, I know you weren't there for the vote, but yes, it's a requirement for that project. Let's see if somebody buys it to develop that same project and build it like somebody designed Villa Valencia, but somebody else bought it and did the actual development, that those conditions of approval that are the same as far as the developer having to maintain that as an off-leash dog park, as part of the project approval process and as part of the permitting process that they would have to do. I don't see this Commission ever releasing somebody from that, maybe the property then would be deeded to the city, as opposed to being a maintenance requirement and a tax payment requirement for that property owner to pay taxes to the city on that dog park, but it was part of the conditions of approval and fortunately its been available ever since the project was approved and the fencing was put up, and it was opened up. There is irrigation there and I don't know who has been mowing the grass, but it has been maintained ever since then.

Mayor Lago: So, what's the will of the sponsor.

Commissioner Castro: My will is to go ahead and move this. We don't know what's going to happen in the future, we don't have a crystal ball, we don't know what's going to happen with Richie Kapor's property. I mean, we don't even know when it gets sold if they are going to go ahead and do the plans that Richie had proposed. It could be a complete change. As it is, it's a temporary park. The other park that's being proposed is across Ponce de Leon. Its not easy to go ahead and cross with your dog. It's in a very dense area. So, I will move this. I think it's a very, very good option and if anybody would second that.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Before you vote, okay, let's correct the record. The 1505 Ponce Project was not a temporary dog park. It was a requirement of the project to be a permanent dog park. As long as it goes through the boards and committees and they approve it to have these two close together and not address the needs in other areas of the city first, I have no objection.

Commissioner Castro: I'm so sorry. Correct me if I'm wrong. When I drove by that dog park, does the sign not say temporary, or am I wrong. The sign says temporary dog park.

City Attorney Suarez: Go ahead.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Temporary as designed right now, for the use it has right now. What's going to happen in the future and what was agreed in the terms, I would defer to legal.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'll go back over the terms with you again. It was put in as a temporary park, pending the construction of the more permanent park with the standard fencing, this was temporary fencing that was put up at lesser cost, while they were still going through the design plans and the engineering plans for the building and pulling their final permit.

Commissioner Castro: I'll go ahead and reiterate myself again. We don't know what's going to happen with that property. We don't know who it's going to be sold to. We don't know if they are going to go ahead and use the same permits for the same deal that they got. So, it's not a guaranteed park. I think right now we can have the chance to go ahead and develop another park in a very desired dense area, and I think it's a very, very good option. I'll go ahead with my motion.

Commissioner Fernandez: So just chiming in. Setting the record straight, like the Vice Mayor was trying to do. Villa Valencia was not done by another developer. It was done by Kapor, and he wasn't able to finish it, and it ended up falling on the city to complete a lot of the proffers that had been made for that project. Thankfully the city had money set aside in a bond by the developer and we were able to cover some of those costs. I think some of that work is still being done today by the city. So no, we don't know if that dog park is going to stay there. We don't know what the developer who purchases the property, whoever purchases the property is going to do about it. All I know is that Salvadore park was a lengthy process to get to the process of construction and then what it is today. So, there is a possibility that over the next months, possibly a year, year-and-a-half, that dog park will go away, and this one will become the dog park that the city has. And I think, yes, we should explore other places where dog parks are necessary. I think what the Assistant City Manager was saying is something we should contemplate whether we should amend our Parks Master Plan and figure out what the needs are today and what neighborhoods needs are today, because its great that we purchase properties, but maybe sometimes purchasing a property across the street from a current park isn't the best use of money either.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So let me enlighten you about what the process was for Villa Valencia. It was not originally a Richie Kapor project. It was designed and approved as a project from another developer. It was purchased by the company that is commonly being referred to as a Richie Kapor property. The original project was lot-line-to-lot-line. I live within two, three blocks of that area. I was one of the two members of the neighborhood association that fought the original project, that

demanded that there be a green space there. I went and saw the original Commission members. Before the Planning and Zoning Board, the original project was killed, because we didn't want an entire block of cement. We didn't want a project that was that dense. So no, it was not Mr. Kapor's project to begin with. It was somebody else's. They sold it to him, and it was developed by him, and it had to comply with all the terms and conditions of approval at that point. With regard to who is finishing out the project. The money that's being held on bond right now and I am in communication with the folks that are in that building as well. They had prepaid the FPL work; FPL is now doing the undergrounding work. There is still some other things that need to be completed and I have both the City Manager in communication, so that we can make sure that we have them complete everything else that they need to complete so that they can get their certificate of occupancy and be able to sell their final units that are not completely sold or built-out in that unit, because the CO is necessary for them to finish selling the units. So at least you have that record clear. Alright.

Mayor Lago: So, we've got a motion and a second on the floor. What's the will of the...

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have a member of the public requesting to speak, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I have a suggestion. From now on, at least in the near future when anything is proposed, let's keep anonymous the proposer, so there is no arguments, because this is becoming really, really unbelievable. I signed up to speak for this because I have friends that live around there and yes, Ponce is not US-1, but Ponce is a big street to cross and there is no lights to cross that corner. So, this is a great idea to see if we can make it happen. Let me explain, I do not walk dogs. I do not have a dog. I have an attack cat in my house. If I don't feed it, if I don't feed him and somebody tries to break into my house, so people know if you try to break into my house and I haven't fed the cat, he will kill your legs, because he wants his food. So, if anybody is trying to scare me, don't come when I'm not there. Alright. So, going back to this dog park. I have several friends that have close relatives or pediatricians and they maintain that dog parks should not be near children's parks, because there are illnesses that, you know, dogs do their necessities on the grass and whatever is there, you know, the grass doesn't keep it in place, it moves around and there are things that kids can pick up. So, this is only for dogs. The city owns the place, so that is out of the way already and this comment about city owns property and we don't sell it. Well, what's the name of the property that we sold across from Havana Harry's that's still unused, the parking lot that we were going to have all the electrical, all the outlets for the electric vehicles, that was one of the caveats and nothing happened with it. Its sitting there. The city sold it because this city is known for breaking covenants, changing things. When the city says there's a covenant, the covenant is as good as the people that signed it. Next Commission can say, oh, we don't want to follow that, because some developer wants to buy it in

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this case, and we will do that. So not selling city property is a very touchy subject in this city. So, this, according to the people that I know around there will be a real asset and the fact that its only for dogs and that its off-leash and that they can walk to it, and not have to cross Ponce is wonderful and I'm sure that some of you walking and knocking on doors, maybe you can ask people because what I heard was that they wanted it.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

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

Mayor Lago: We have a motion and a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)