

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comments
March 29, 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 Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

David Henderson

Sheryl DoCarlo

Joseph Fadet

Grace Carricarte

Rip Holmes

Ben Bryant

Sheryl Gold

Maria Cruz

Enrique Bernal

Agenda Item C [Start: 9:26 a.m.]

Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Public Comments.

City Clerk Urquia: The first speaker today is Mr. David Henderson.

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Mayor Lago: Mr. Henderson, good morning. Thank you for being here. The floor is yours.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you very much. I'm David Henderson, I'm the President of the Board with Bike Walk Coral Gables. On March 20th, the Bike Walk Coral Gables in partnership with the City Community Recreation Department and Police Department held our 7th Bike and Bar-B-Que Ride. Over 130 people, including Commissioner Anderson rode from the Youth Center down to Matheson Hammock; enjoyed food, drink, live music, games, and a beautiful day in the park. I want in particular to acknowledge the support from city staff, including Norma Gavarrete, Carolina Vester, and Mitch Zuriarrain from Parks Department, in addition to the other staff and the police officers that helped us make it a very, very successful event. As a volunteer-lead organization, Bike Walk Coral Gables relies on partnerships with organizations and agencies like the city, the Coral Gables Museum, Dade Heritage Trust, to put on our monthly program of bike tours that highlight the incredible resources and beauty of the City of Coral Gables. So, thank you again for your support and we look forward to continuing that relationship in the future.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Sheryl DoCarlo.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Thank you for being here. The floor is yours.

Ms. DoCarlo: Thank you for being here. Thank you for listening to us. As the city is getting more crowded, I noticed our parks are getting more utilized, and sometimes that is in conflict, particularly with our K-9 friends, which desperately need their own space. So, I'm asking will you support Commissioner Anderson's agenda item, G-12, for the Salvadore Dog Park.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. I appreciate it.

City Clerk Urquia: Joseph Fadet.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir. Welcome back.

Mr. Fadet: Thank you. I'm a long-time dog owner and lover, and I'm here to express my support for Commissioner Anderson's proposal to use the existing property at Salvadore Park tennis court area, for a dog park. I think it's pretty well established many of the benefits of having dog parks and if one of them certainly provide an opportunity for more socialization and interaction for the dogs and for us as well. They also lead to; I think better mental and physical health for both the dogs and the owners. And just as importantly, I think that they help encourage more connectiveness in the community. I see it around the corner from my house, there is a new park now called Majorca Park, and it's a dog park, right next to a playground area with kids. It seems to work really well. A lot of people are bringing their dogs having fun. So, I think one of the biggest advantages of this idea is probably one of the most expensive components of a dog park is the land, and in this proposal the city already owns the property. I think the city also historically has been hesitant and very slow acting with regards to establishing more dog parks. And I think that it's really important

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that if this is going to be a leash-free park that the rules and the regulations be clear as to who can go in there, what kind of dog. You don't want aggressive dogs. The funding is for what? – the water stations, the litter bags, the benches, the landscaping, but the land is there. So, I think this is a great opportunity. I hope you guys move on it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. I appreciate your input.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Grace Carricarte.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Thank you for being here.

Ms. Carricarte: Good morning, Mayor Lago, our esteemed Commissioners and my fellow neighbors. I'm Grace Carricarte, I'm a native here and I live at 1036 Palermo Avenue and I'm here to share my very enthusiastic support for the Salvadore dog park. I've been very used to the whole wait and see and wait and see, and wait and see a little bit longer, and yet I met all my neighbors through their dogs. I knew their dogs' names before I knew my neighbors' names. It's such an important part of the community and here I am telling my friends where I'll be this morning and they were like, you've got to be kidding me. Of course, we have a dog park, it's a city, every city has a dog park. And I was like, yeah, no sadly, when I moved here eight years ago, I realized we did not. And so, I said, alas, this is true, and I told her also, sadly I'm seeing a lot more concrete than I'm seeing green, and that concerns me for a whole other variety of reasons as well. And I think to myself, you know with the concrete, my friend said, well where are all those dogs going to go when you've got all these condos and all these apartments coming in? – where are people going to go with their dogs? And she said, I know what's going to happen, we are going to see more...next door...homes because they are too energetic, their behavior becomes disruptive, where are they going to go? And so, obviously we know how we felt during the pandemic, that sense of isolation and imagine, for some dogs that's their day-to-day it's like indoors. And so, we really do thrive off the very things that our K-9 companions need. We need to be able to get outdoors, we need to be able to interact. We are all social animals, dogs and people alike. So, I really think that it's a mutual health benefit, right, so we get our fresh air, we get our exercise, we have that social connectivity, which with my background in mental health and suicide prevention, I have to say that when it comes to protective factors for communities as well as for individuals, what we see overlapping, especially in longitudinal cities is that having a pet companion, most specifically a K-9 in one's life is a protective factor across all demographics, whether its socioeconomic status or race, or whatnot. So, I think that's really important to support that and to support all of our friends who have fabulous animals. I know many of you have your own. So, while I have 13 notes that my neighbors compiled, because they couldn't be here today, which I've already e-mailed you all.

Mayor Lago: You sent that by e-mail. It was a very well drafted e-mail, by the way.

Ms. Carricarte: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: I know that all of us got it. We responded to you.

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Ms. Carricarte: Well, here's the best part. For those who could not speak today, I present to you our neighborhood pack. We can start with Benny, beloved Benny; here's Sydney with her dog Tinker. That's another thing, just so you know, I'm watching the dogs play, you know just having the companionship. Even though I may not have lived in Coral Gables, they told me not to reveal their ages or how long they've lived here for. That's David walking Sally, he says its doctor's orders to walk. Here's Mary Arnold with her dog Russell, a senior she rescued. Then we've got Louie, you can keep going and going. We've got Ben; we've got Rizzo; we've got Fern. So, we've got all these doggies here that, you know can't speak up, but I'm sure that they would love to be a part of this wonderful proposal. I think it's really exciting and what I really hope is I'll be able to see you all with your dogs there some time soon. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Ma'am, can I ask you a question? Are you any relation to the Carricartes who serve this great country?

Ms. Carricarte: Which one of them?

Mayor Lago: I had the pleasure of sitting at a table at an event with a gentleman, I forgot his name, a pretty distinguished individual, who is retired.

Ms. Carricarte: Yes, that would be my father, Michael, and then I also have a brother, Mikey and me, he's going to be so embarrassed this is a public record.

Mayor Lago: I sat at the table with Mike.

Ms. Carricarte: So, you can tell little Gracie – yes, we have a large family. Somebody tends to know one part of our generation or another.

Mayor Lago: I just wanted to make sure I put on the record that your family has done great things for this country.

Ms. Carricarte: I appreciate that.

Mayor Lago: And like I told your father, we are blessed to have individuals like your family, both your brother and your father in this community. So, thank you for that.

Ms. Carricarte: Thank you Mayor Lago, I appreciate that very much.

Mayor Lago: That's the first time I've met them. I had never had a moment to exchange, but when I heard your brother's story, and he was very humble. He didn't really share it. I had the individual to my right who shared his story. I was very impressed by his valor.

Ms. Carricarte: Yes. I've always looked up to my big brother. He's wonderful and they are both Army Rangers and Green Berets. I grew up with all of that, and then we actually have a family member, my first cousin, Jason Recio, hi Chief Hudak, who is in your K-9 unit, and obviously I give him a hard time when I run into him, but I'm always looking out for the SUV to say hi to him.

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The last time I saw him, he was up a tree in the Venetian Pool; he's 100 percent disabled veteran and I'm like, how do they end up throwing you up in the tree. And it was just amazing to see the K-9 force coming together and finding him. It really gave him something just so wonderful to have in his life, to find a way to come back and still be of service and to continue that way forward. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good morning. The floor is yours. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Holmes: Thanks very much Mayor Lago and all of you. Certainly, great to hear about a dog park. Congratulations. I'm here to speak in the Public Comment section, maybe it's a little more in depth on the item coming up today about the ground floor of the Mobility Hub and whether that is used for retail or for bikes and scooters type of thing. And I want to make a quick three points about why I believe we should retain retail. So here they are. Number one, finances, money. Retail pays the city rent at a time right now when we are in the corona virus recession. Does anybody have a guess when this is going to end? I don't have a guess. The city taxpayers are already, in my opinion, overburdened. Let's not increase the load on the city's taxpayers. Number two, I'm a diehard. I've been pushing for a department store to anchor low-rise Miracle Mile retail for the past, almost 25 years, and I haven't given up. We can still do that at 345, but it requires adjoining retail, which would be at 245 Andalusia, the Mobility Hub. We can get a department store. As you know, H&M, last I talked with them, wants to come to 345 Andalusia. We say yes to H&M Department stores, we got them. They are the biggest in the entire world. They are based in Sweden. They are all over Miami-Dade County. So, let's not give that up for, what I think actually is a misguided promotion from a safety standpoint of bikes and scooters. Why do I say such a thing? Many of you know that I have spent 30 fulltime years as a passenger driver, as a taxi driver for 23 years, Uber for 6 or 7, and I've done other transportation jobs that are very interesting. So, I'm on the road all the time. And think about this. What if you were a driver, what would be your worst nightmare, hitting a pedestrian, hitting a bicyclist, hitting someone on a scooter. Could you ever live that down? I don't think so. And yet, when we let these bicycles out there – look at what's happened on the Rickenbacker Causeway. How many bicyclists have died or been permanently injured? The idea that we live in a city, Mr. Lago, I guess I'm running out of time, you get my point. I think that better leadership with the retail than with promoting a dangerous activity. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Ben Bryant.

Mayor Lago: Sir, good morning. Welcome to the city.

Mr. Bryant: Thank you. Thank you. Such a pleasure to be here. I moved here in October.

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Mayor Lago: Welcome.

Mr. Bryant: It's a wonderful city. I live on Segovia Street. Just two things to start with. One is, thank you guys and women for all you do. Without city councils and mayors, cities don't work. You need to make tough decisions sometimes, a dog park probably isn't one of your biggest, hardest decisions to make, but thank you for what you do. Since moving here, with my dog taking walks daily, it is such a pleasure to meet my neighbors. We all have something in common. We immediately have something to talk about. Being able to do that in a dog park just enhances that experience. So, approving this dog park at Salvadore Park would benefit the community, most of the people who would use it would walk there, you don't drive to a small dog park, you walk to a small dog park. Its just a great opportunity, people already said here. I don't know what I can add to what you said, just unbelievable. I just want to be here in support of that. Thank you, Commissioner Anderson. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you and welcome to the city.

Vice Mayor Mena: As an FYI for you folks, just because we are going to talk about this more later, but I know you guys are here now for public comment. But just briefly, separate and apart from this issue which is terrific and a great suggestion. We are always looking for more places to put dog parks. We do have a fully planned and approved dog park that's supposed to be coming near Merrick Park, we approved that three years ago maybe, which I know is frustrating to hear, because its not actually here to utilize yet. It's a little bit complicated because it was part of a development project that was being built and the underlying which goes near the Metrorail, so there is a lot of moving parts and coordination to get that done. So, we are always looking for places. That one is coming, hopefully we'll be moving forward with this one as well, we'll continue to look for more places where we can do that. While I appreciate that there might be concerns about some other locations, the idea is to get as many of them done as possible, so we have as many options for people that live throughout the city as possible. So just FYI, so you know.

City Manager Iglesias: And Vice Mayor that has been incorporated into the Underline project.

Mayor Lago: And while the Vice Mayor won't mention it, I'll mention it for him. He's been working on this for the last four years himself. He brought it before the Commission. He made sure it was addressed in the Underline, in the project that was built and it was as a result of his hard work that made sure that we are not going to have just one dog park, we are going to have multiple that will be able to serve multiple areas of the city, so you won't have everybody just going to one park, which would be, in my opinion, not the best situation for a neighborhood, if you have that many people in just one area. We need to have multiple opportunities for people to enjoy themselves with their dogs, especially in the city of 51,000 residents.

Commissioner Anderson: Do we have confirmation on our future dog park overall meeting yet? If not, I'll just let everybody know that we are talking about an overall plan as well, so that there can be more dog parks throughout the city, including I think the Mayor is working on a larger park for those times your dog really needs to get out and burn off a lot of energy.

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Mayor Lago: We are in the process of working on that, and I think we'll have some good news. The Manager has been working diligently over the last year on negotiating for a big piece of property that I think people are going to be very surprised once we bring that into the fold, and it's something that's taken a long time, a lot of negotiations and hopefully we'll be able to include a portion of that piece of property as a dog park also. There's a lot of things in the works, but I think that we are bringing in several of these possibilities in for a landing soon, as a result of the efforts of my colleagues on the Commission and the Manager and his team. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Ms. Sheryl Gold.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold, good morning. The floor is yours. Its always a pleasure to have you.

Ms. Gold: Thank you. Good morning, Sheryl Gold, 721 Biltmore Way. First of all, I wanted to thank you all for declaring Earth Month in Coral Gables for the month of April. I really appreciate that, as a dedicated environmentalist. And I would encourage you, if you haven't already done so to visit the flood zone exhibit at the History Miami Museum. It would be a great Earth Month activity for everyone. Its more than a year since you approved the zoning code update that resulted in the newly created MF4 District and the upzoning of the Biltmore Section. I'm here to support the text amendment to roll back the changes for properties south of Biltmore Way. However, it is time for the city also, to acknowledge the major zoning code changes to the properties north of Biltmore Way and to remedy equitably their harmful consequences. I would like to read portions of a March 24 letter to Mayor Lago from Marissa Chisena and me, that illustrate those changes. We have been repeatedly told that nothing has changed on the north side of Biltmore Way with the new zoning code. In the very first point of the letters that Mr. Iglesias sent to us, it specifies that the future land use classification is multi-family high density. This same concept of high density is repeated in Section 2, 105, paragraph A, quote, the purpose of multi-family district is to provide a high-density residential district that accommodates various forms of multi-family housing of high height and density. The original purpose of this district was, quote, to ensure that there is a transition to single-family and duplex neighborhoods which protects the integrity of those neighborhoods, end quote. Nowhere was high density mentioned. The purpose was indeed changed from a transitional district to a high density urban residential district. If the purpose is supposed to paint a picture of what the neighborhood should look like, this new picture is definitely different from the previous one. On the other hand, if the purpose has no weight, then why change it? According to Webster, the meaning of purpose is something set up as an object or end to be attained, intention. We have asked staff to reconcile the conflicting three communications that they provided to us in reference to what can be built on 719 Biltmore Way. If these communications can be misconstrued, as described by Mr. Trias, why were they sent to us? Why haven't they been explained and reconciled as we have repeatedly requested. We have also sought to understand the difference of what could have been built under the old zoning code and what can be built now on the north side of Biltmore Way. Of great importance and serious concern, changing the minimum lot area from 20,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet, to take advantage of maximum height will change the neighborhood. An increase in height from 70 feet, 97 with Med Bonus, to 150 feet, 190.5 with Med Bonus, for lots having only 10,000 square feet as a minimum qualification is unacceptable. Specifically, this drastically increases the height allowed on 719 Biltmore Way, which has a lot size of less than 12,000 square feet, and 730 Coral Way, with a lot size of less than

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15,000 square feet. As owners who live north of Biltmore Way, we believe it is only reasonable to expect for the City Commission to reconsider the upzoning of the MF4 District, Lots 1 and 2, and reinstate the 20,000 square foot minimum property size to qualify for the maximum height, as existed prior to the 2021 zoning code update, and to reinstate the original transitional purpose of our zoning district. Thank you for your consideration.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Sheryl so much. I appreciate you always shedding a little light on the issue. Mr. Clerk, just to add something, thank you for the information. By the way, in reference to the individuals who are asking about the public meeting that we'll be having, it will be held April 5th at 4:00 p.m. and that's a dog park Sunshine meeting, April 5th at 4:00 p.m. We'll spread the word on social media, we'll send out notices, as required, make sure you please spread the word that April 5th at 4 p.m. we'll be having a dedicated Sunshine meeting just in regard to dog parks throughout the community. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Ms. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: How many more speakers do we have? Okay. Ms. Cruz, good morning, the floor is yours.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning, Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Two things for public comments today. One, a good one. I was very impressed of the Sunshine meeting last week. I thought it was the way that we expected it, the way Coral Gables does things, only the people that were really affected spoke. They spoke very clearly. They were given respect and they respected. It was really amazing. I suggest that should be the criteria for future Sunshine meetings, and I thank you for that. The second one, you know that I am known for looking after the whole city, not just the little corner where I live. So, I happen to be around the Biltmore Hotel this weekend, and lo and behold, even though we've talked about the west parking lot ad nauseum, because I think we really discussed it very well. There are still signs about paying. Now, I do not know why the signs are there. I thought that we understood that they would not be charging, that the Commission hasn't approved the charging for that lot. Let me tell you, last weekend, I guess it was Friday when I went by, there were cars all over the place – across the street, on the street, everywhere, everywhere. There were so many cars the Biltmore must have had a killing last weekend, that Friday. There must have been an event that brought in everybody and his brother, but the signs are still up, at least one. At least one was still up saying that they had to park and giving the link to park to pay. So, I do not know who is kidding whom, but obviously somebody hasn't gotten the message yet. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Ms. Cruz.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Enrique Bernal.

Mayor Lago: Before we move onto Mr. Bernal. Madam City Attorney, we've gotten two e-mails over the last two days, along with Ms. Cruz' comments about the sign still being up. I went to the Biltmore for an event, I think it was on Friday and I saw one of the signs down. Obviously, I don't think the Biltmore is doing this intentionally. I think the signs come down, there is a lot of wind.

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There's been some weather this weekend over the last few days. Are we sending somebody to monitor to make sure that those signs are up?

City Attorney Ramos: So, we received an e-mail from Mr. Prescott just a couple of days after the last Commission meeting saying that he deactivated the app. So even if the sign comes down, if you go into try to pay, you can't pay.

Mayor Lago: I wanted you to put that on the record. That's it.

City Attorney Ramos: Okay. Aside from that Ms. Sardinas has been notifying at least once a week, if we get complaints that are causing confusion, but the reality is, as far as what we've been told, I haven't tested it myself, but you cannot pay.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Bernal.

Mayor Lago: Dr. Bernal, good morning.

Dr. Bernal: Good morning, Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. I'm here really in support of the text amendment for the change of Blocks 8 and 10 back to the original zoning conditions. And I also would like to acknowledge and thank Ms. Gold, the Coral Gables Neighborhood Association, and many of the neighbors in the Biltmore Section for their active participation in the debate with the city about the impact of the changes that were made and the reasons why we requested that they be reversed. To me, this is the perfect example of a vibrant democracy where the people that are in charge of the city made decisions where they are willing to listen to the residents and to engage in the debate and try to find a compromise solution that makes us feel like we are part of the community. I think this is a great step forward what the Commission has demonstrated is openness and its willingness to engage in a lengthy dialogue and it's a good sign for the future of the city. I congratulate you and thank you for your openness.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Dr. Bernal. Have a wonderful morning. Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: Alright. We'll close the public comment, unless anyone else would like to make a comment. Anyone else, staff, anyone? Alright, we move on.