

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting  
Agenda Items F-1 & F-11  
January 13, 2026  
City Commission Chambers  
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago  
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson  
Commissioner Melissa Castro  
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez  
Commissioner Richard D. Lara**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez  
City Manager, Peter Iglesias  
City Clerk, Billy Urquia  
Assistant Public Works Director, Deena Bell-Llewellyn**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz  
David Guzman  
Christopher King  
Sarah Cortez  
Miguel Cortez  
Jeffrey Wright  
Lynn Guarch Pardo  
Jose Aval Cohen  
Maria Rojas  
David Hayes  
Mary Powell  
Hilary Rodriguez  
Raul Mas**

---

*City Commission Meeting*

Agenda Items F-1 and F-11 [Start: 6:00 p.m.]

F-1: A Resolution of the City Commission rescinding Resolution No. 2025-452, which authorized City staff to move forward with the development of a dog park on the City-owned parcel located at 520 University Drive; directing the City Manager to direct City staff to gather community input on the proposed dog park; and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

F-11: Update on Youth Center Dog Park and Conceptual Presentation. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Welcome back. I want to thank everyone for being here. It's great to see such a big crowd, especially since we're talking about dogs and dog parks. It's amazing. I'm happy to see all of you here. Thank you. We're going to be talking about issue F-1 and F-11, which are time certain for six o'clock. Mr. Clerk.

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: Do you want me to read F-1, Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: Okay. So F-1 is a Resolution of the City Commission rescinding Resolution number 2025-452, which authorized city staff to move forward with the development of a dog park on the city-owned parcel located at 520 University Drive, directing City Manager to direct city staff to gather community input on the proposed dog park and providing for an effective date. And then F-11 is a discussion item, Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. It's a presentation by our esteemed staff, which I think would be helpful for the community to see.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, I'd like to bring up staff and have them give the presentation. Thank you.

Assistant Public Works Director: Good evening, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, members of the Commission. I'm Deena Bell-Llewellyn, Assistant Public Works Director for Green Space Management in the City. I'm also a licensed landscape architect and we have put together this presentation. The concept of what the University Drive dog park could look like. So, these are conceptual renderings that will show you our concept. Okay, next slide. I think I can do it with this. Okay. So, the location for the University Drive dog park is right across from the Coral Gables Library. It's along University Drive. To the east side is Riviera Drive and to the west side, I guess, is Cadima. On the right side, you'll see photographs of the existing conditions. On University Drive are large existing banyan trees that are all going to be maintained and on the side streets, Riviera, you've got some live Oaks and on Cadima, you have some Black Olive trees. These will all be maintained. Here is the site plan rendering and just to orient you, this is the library on the top left of the rendering. You will see that it's a large site. It's all going to be split into two sections. One section is going to be for the large dogs, which is the light color green and at the bottom of the

*City Commission Meeting*

screen is the small dog area, which will be artificial turf. The trees that I mentioned are existing are all going to be maintained around the perimeters to really screen off the area. On the right side of the drawing, fronting the residential homes, you're going to have a 25-foot native tree and landscape buffer, very thick, so you will not see from the residential homes into the dog park. Just to give you an idea, 25 feet is the width of a three-lane road. It's a very wide and generous buffer. Around the perimeter of the dog park is a five-foot wide landscape perimeter with thick native hedges of coca plums and stoppers. To really nestle this in and just our concept of the trees, we're going to have pink shower trees for color. You're going to have some benches scattered around in the shady areas for people to sit. You're going to have some Gumbo Limbo trees. You're going to have some Tamarind trees and other native plants. Here's a rendering that gives you an idea of what it could look like from the Riviera Drive corner as you enter the site. The fencing will be our black metal fencing, just like it is at the dog park in the Underline. That will be five feet tall, so I'm 5'2", not very tall, but the fencing will not be taller than me. It'll be completely nestled in shrubbery that will let grow up and pretty much screen the fencing anyway. The rest of the renderings are the development of a landscape plan with the same plant materials I've already mentioned. It's just simplified so you can see the size of the area. I believe the large dog area is about 250 feet long by 90 feet wide, and the small dog area is 70 feet by 90 feet, just to give you an idea of size. Technical drawings and pictures of most of the proposed trees and plants, Lysolomas, Gumbo Limbos, Cassias, Coco Plum hedges, Coonti, Wild Coffee, Liriope, and our Beach Sunflower. We didn't have the opportunity to have a pollinator patch around the swale in the sunny areas. So that's the concept, and I'll offer, you know, to accept any questions you have.

Mayor Lago: Before we get into that, I'd like to get some public comment. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. First speaker, Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, by the way. Thank you, Deena that was great.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Obviously, I don't live in that neighborhood, but I've made it very clear many times in all the years that I've been coming here that anything that affects anything in Coral Gables is my problem, because if something happens there, it could happen in our area too. And I'm here to support the group, the neighbors that live there, and I think it's time to listen to the residents. I took the time to speak to a friend who happens to be a vet, and I asked him, he has three dogs, and I asked him, "Would you take your dogs to a dog park? And he said no, because unless you can assure me that all the dogs that go there do not have any contagious disease, I wouldn't expose my dogs to that. So that's my answer. If I had a dog, I have a cat. If I had a dog, I would not take him to a dog park.

City Clerk Urquia: David Guzman. Christopher King.

Mayor Lago: Can you do it, Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: If individuals are not here, maybe they left a note, you can just read what they said.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Just one second. I just wanted to...

City Clerk Urquia: So, David Guzman, he said he's a proponent, and I am in support, thanks. Okay, that's all he said.

Mayor Lago: Good evening, sir.

Mr. King: Good evening to everybody. My name is Chris King. I live at 3617 Harlano Street. Sorry. I am a lawyer for the law firm of Homer Bonner. I see one familiar face was my co-counsel. And I represent the University Green group that you see my clients behind me. And we are uniformly opposed to this. And just so you know who we are, we are from Harlano Street, Cadima, Wood, Riviera. On what you just were presented, those are the streets where this would be located. And look, we think that we've been excluded from this process in the previous vote. And you should know that the overwhelming number of people who live in this area are against it. And if nobody is for this project, that should tell you that it doesn't belong here. Now, let me talk about two things. Shouldn't go here, and it cannot go here. And since I'm the lawyer, I'll tell you why I think it can't go here. Number one, it's not zoned for this. It's zoned for overflow parking. Since 1972, there's an ordinance, ordinance number 1952, that restricts this to overflow parking. When the need is gone for overflow parking, then it reverts to single-family housing. And so, it would violate that. And you talk about need, you can drive by there right now, and the library is swarming with cars. There's no way that we can have a dog park here. Second, even if you took away that restriction, there's no provision for a standalone off-leash dog park in Miami-Dade County under their ordinance or the Coral Gables ordinances. Dogs aren't allowed in parks. And that's the way the ordinances are written. There's an exception for an area in a park, but you can't make the whole area the park. The bark park. Then we have, so it violates that as well. There's no zoning for this. Third, a bark park is going to violate noise ordinance. You just saw the map. This thing goes up against three residences. One of them has been there since 1925. It's going to violate that ordinance. So, look, and then there's the master plan. We're guaranteed the right to be able to walk, to open space within five minutes, within a quarter mile. That is impossible with this dog park. This structure doesn't belong here. And look, there's a whole bunch of reasons that you'll hear from my clients about why it should not go here. This is a very, very special area of town. It has historical importance. And we believe it's been taken away from us. Thank you.

*City Commission Meeting*

*January 13, 2026*

*Agenda Items F-1 and F-11 – Resolution rescinding Resolution No. 2025-452 to authorize city staff  
To move forward with a dog at 520 University Drive*

[Date]

4

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Sarah Cortez.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Ms. Cortez: I believe it's supposed to be with F1, correct?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, ma'am. It's all being heard as one item.

Ms. Cortez: Thank you so much. Just wanted to make sure. I'm going to have to lower this down again. Hello, Commission. Thank you so much for having us and for hearing from us on this issue. I hope I can show my graphic.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Cortez: Thank you so much. When we heard about this without our knowledge, we did as a community start to ask our neighbors. So, thank you for this opportunity to get to know my neighbors. It's really been something amazing and wonderful over this holiday. And as you can see, we've gotten some great neighborhood feedback. I'm Sarah Cortez. I am at 511 Cadima Avenue for the last 10 years. That is a historic home. It is the 1925. And this would very much impact me personally, but I'm here more to talk about what the impact on my neighborhood would be. I am a pediatric emergency medicine physician. So, health is really important to me. Mental health, childhood mental health is absolutely of the utmost value. And what I've seen over my years in practice so far is that our mental health has deteriorated. And these open spaces absolutely are crucial. They were crucial when George Merrick decided to plan them out. They've been crucial since and since COVID, they've been even more crucial. That being said, that's not only for kids, that's for adults, that's for seniors, that's for people with neurodivergent disorders as well as our differently abled community. All of us can use that open space right now. We know studies have shown that just looking at an open space, not with fences, not with beautiful landscaping, but just natural open spaces can absolutely and within five minutes calm someone. Now, if we can do that without actually using any medication, with getting people out and being able to use this space, what a brilliant use of space that we don't have to spend a dime on. Now, on the other side, dog parks can only be used by a subset of our community. I'm a dog owner, and I know that I would be doing something against my neighbors because I'd be taking away a space that they use, and I don't think that's fair. Also, the dog parks, parks with dogs, have different diseases, and as we have feral cats, we also have diseases that come with them in the dog parks. So, we would be bringing on more problems rather than actually improving lives of our citizens. Thank you again so much for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

*City Commission Meeting*

City Clerk Urquia: Miguel Cortez.

Mayor Lago: Who's next after Miguel?

City Clerk Urquia: Jeffrey Wright would be next.

Mr. Cortez: Good evening. I am Miguel Cortez, a resident of Coral Gables for over 10 years, and also a husband, a father, and a dog owner who loves living in Coral Gables because of its open green spaces, native plants, trees, and natural habitats they support. The field at 520 University Drive is Coral Gables at its core. 520 University Drive is currently enjoyed by all kinds of residents, including adults, children, and their dogs. This field was also a safe outdoor place for residents during COVID. Limiting its use and taking away its untouched natural beauty goes against the core of our city. I'd like to read the first sentence from Coral Gables, A Guide to the City Beautiful. It says, Coral Gables founder George Merrick imagined both a city beautiful and a garden city with lush green avenues with winding through a residential city punctuated by civic landmarks and embellished with detailed and playful architectural features. I'm here today to ask you, please help us preserve our city. Please help us preserve what makes our city beautiful. Please help us preserve the city we love. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Jeffrey Wright. And Lynn Warshparda will be next.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Wright: Good evening. I'm Jeff Wright. I live at 3501 Riviera Drive. I've been a resident here for 26 years. I appreciate you all listening to us tonight. First, let me say I'm a dog owner and a responsible dog owner. I question the reasoning behind us restricting the uses of this widely used park now. Why are we restricting it so it can only be used by dog owners? Why can it not be used by children and families as it's being used now? If I want to go over there and have a picnic right now, I can lay a blanket down. I've got an open space. It's well maintained and we can have a picnic. If we're going to restrict it to dogs only and dog owners only, you're taking only part of my freedom. I've been here 26 years. I'm not understanding the reasoning here. Why is this being done? I question the sanitary and health of this dog park. I question how it's going to be maintained. Again, there are at least three single family homes that are very adjacent to this park. I want to know how it's going to be maintained to ensure those families are not impacted directly. As a dog owner, I want to make sure my animals are not impacted. I'm also curious. I hear about transparency in the City Council. I can't understand why none of the residents here were informed before this thing came for a petition and vote to the City Commission. Were any of us asked if we wanted a dog park in our neighborhood? I understand y'all have the right to do so, maybe legally,

*City Commission Meeting*

*January 13, 2026*

*Agenda Items F-1 and F-11 – Resolution rescinding Resolution No. 2025-452 to authorize city staff  
To move forward with a dog at 520 University Drive*

[Date]

6

but I do not understand why it was put to vote before questioning anyone who lives within even 500 meters of this park. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Lynn Guarch Pardo. Jose Aval will be next.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Pardo, good evening. Good evening, Ms. Pardo. How are you?

Ms. Pardo: I'm fine. How are you?

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here with us.

Ms. Pardo: My name is Lynn Guarch Pardo. I live at 421 Cadima Avenue. I've lived there for almost 36 years. I'd like to raise a few concerns regarding the November 18th petition, which was submitted to the Coral Gables City Commission in support of off-leash dog parks. The November 18th petition was submitted titled Petition to the City of Coral Gable City Commission in support of an off-leash dog park. It should best be viewed as an expression of community enthusiasm for another off-leash dog park in Coral Gables, as no location was specified on the petition pages. If it was intended to be site-specific to 520 University Drive, why weren't the neighbors immediately abutting the proposed bark park, which are 511 Cadima, 3510 Riviera, or 3500 Riviera, or the homeowners directly across on Cadima, 520 Cadima, 510 Cadima, and 570 University, given the petition to sign, or residents on Harlano, which are 500 feet off of the proposed location? If the proposed bark park was going to be for patrons within walking distance, why did people sign that lived two or three miles south on Santana, on San Vicente, or in Coco Plum, or north by Southwest 8th Street, or west on Country Club Prado, or North Ponce? Where would they park? If it was a formal petition rather than expression of support, why did six entries include first names only? Why were 23 addresses redacted? And why was one family member allowed to sign on behalf of three others? If it was more than an enthusiastic expression of community interest, why did people sign who don't have dogs? If it was site-specific location in Coral Gables for Coral Gables, why were signatures included with addresses outside of our city limits, like Brickell Bay Road, Southwest 27th Street, Southwest 79th Avenue, and Southwest 7th Street? When the Commission received the November petition, we know that you were impressed by the number of signatures in support of another off-leash dog park, unaware that it was not site-specific. It included signatures outside of Coral Gables, and many entries were incomplete. As you review our neighborhood petition opposing a fenced dog park at 520 University, please know that our petition includes almost 100 residents abutting across or proximate to the proposed dog park. We are united in our opposition, and our petition outlines why. We recognize that there is enthusiasm for another off-leash dog park, but please don't force it on a small, single-family neighborhood that clearly doesn't

want it. As city leaders, we implore you to find a better community solution that works for everyone. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Jose Aval Cohen. Maria Rojas will be next.

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

Mr. Aval: Hi, good evening. My name is Jose Aval. I live at 520 Cadima Avenue. Right across the green space where the dog park was proposed. Let me start with something very important. No one asked the neighbors who were directly impacted. There was no notice, no flyer, no neighborhood meeting. We found out after the approval. So that, for me, is weird, suspicious. Because I receive mail from the city every week. You know, they're going to do this, they're going to do that. And we didn't receive anything for this dog park that is going to be right in front of my house. Nobody knocked on my door, nothing. So, I work in real estate and development for 20 years. I specialize in commercial and residential real estate. And I've been doing it, and I know how the process is to build. To build is not easy. You have to go through a process. You go through a board of architecture. And as you know, building in Coral Gables is one of the hardest cities. Why? Because there's a lot of rules. And I love that. I love that because it keeps the city green with open spaces. Not any developer can come in and just build whatever they want. So, when they approved this without the notice, and without the input of the people that live right across from it, for me, it was a no-go. I started knocking on doors. I moved from downtown Miami to Coral Gables because I don't like the traffic anymore, the congestion, the overdevelopment that is going on there. And that's why I moved to Coral Gables. This space, this open green space, I use it with my kids. I have two daughters and a son that is going to be born in a couple months. So, I use it for picnics. I use it to play ball. I use it. It's right in front of my house. And not only me, my neighbors here. If you can see us, we are all in the green shirt because we're trying to defend this. We're opposed to this dog park. We love dogs. Don't get me wrong. We have dogs. And what happened is that one day, my neighbor came to me and asked, "Do you know about this dog park?" I said, no. And the next day, I started knocking on doors. And everybody was in the same situation as me. So, we oppose the dog park. I am amazed at why they're doing this. But what I saw is that there's a lot of buildings coming up that is strange in Coral Gables. You know, it's weird why all these big developments are coming up. So, I guess we need more amenities. And that's the reason I'm here, to oppose this amenity. Look for another location, please. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Rojas. David Hayes will be next.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

*City Commission Meeting*

Ms. Rojas: Hello. I live at 410 Cadima Avenue. Dear honorable members of the City Commission, I am speaking to share my passion for a hidden gem in Coral Gables. A natural thicket with native plants that is home to many birds and animals. This passive green space brings serenity and is a healing spot for me. I am sure many other residents as well. And I love to see it preserved. Compared to downtown Brickell, where green spaces are scarce and fenced dog parks are needed, Coral Gables has always been a place where open green spaces with native plants and animals make it attractive to move here. Residents near this area enjoy the gift of sighting North American Kestrels, Peregrine Falcons, Macaws, Red-billed Parrots, Eastern Screech Owls, and our UM mascot, the Glossy Ibis. The endangered Scrub Jay, Raccoons, Possums, Red-tailed Foxes, and even more. Let's preserve these wild native mini-habitat areas for our native species so future generations can also have the gift of this experience. I urge you to consider preserving this natural area, keeping George Merrick's dream of harmony between architecture and nature intact. Bulldozing and fencing would disrupt this natural flow in our landscape. Let's keep this hidden gem alive, allow the little Red Foxes to have a place to hide. Thank you for your attention to this heartfelt request and just think of our children and our grandchildren. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: David Hayes, Mary Powell will be next.

Mr. Hayes: Hello and good evening, everyone. David Hayes, I live at 300 Fluvia Avenue, which is close to this location. I've lived here for over 20 years now and have often driven through this area and marveled at this little gem of an area, especially all the vegetation and growth thicket, the area that is behind the one house, which I guess is the old Spanish. It's been there since 1925. I can't imagine taking that away. It's very beautiful the way it is. The thing that really struck me on this is I happen to know people that live in the area and I heard about this, that they said this dog park was planned and that they didn't know anything about it. I happen to have been involved. They put in a park on Salzedo and Sarto and I remember everyone in the area was noticed on that and they had a meeting. I went to the meeting and all the surrounding residents, and the immediate residents were there, had a lot of input into the amenities and the design and so forth. I think they even gave more votes to the people that lived closer to it. Anyway, it was a process in which the neighbors were very involved in the development or what was done with that area as a park. So, I really think you need to include the residents a lot more there and I appreciate your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Mary Powell, Hillary Rodriguez will be next.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Ms. Powell: I did also, I provided this to the City Clerk, but I'm just going to give you guys a map so you can see. This is a map of our signatures. Thank you. I do have one question. I know I have three minutes to give my statement. There was one thing said by someone else and I wanted to be able to address it, but it was just a quick thing. There seems to be a misunderstanding about whether people were told when signing the petition. Since I'm the one that got all the signatures, a map was shown to each individual signature person. So, I can commit to that, and I can do an affidavit, if need be, but that 100 percent was the case everywhere.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for clarifying.

Ms. Powell: But that's not part of my statement. I just want to address that. So good evening, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager, City Attorney. My name is Mary Powell, and I live at 3267 Riviera Drive. I'm here tonight for one simple reason, to reaffirm that the resolution this Commission passed in November should stand and move forward. Support for dog parks in Coral Gables is broad, documented and citywide. More than 485 residents from every part of the city have formally expressed support for the off-leash dog parks. It's on the map in front of you all. This support includes residents living near the proposed site as well as residents from neighborhoods throughout Coral Gables. This effort followed the process, residents engaged, petitions were submitted, public comment was given, the item was properly noticed, debated and ultimately approved by this Commission. That vote was not rushed, informal or incomplete. It was the result of sustained public input and deliberation. It's important to acknowledge that in any city project, there will always be some residents who disagree. That is normal and their voices deserve respect. But disagreement after the fact does not negate the process, nor does it outweigh the demonstrated documented support that led to this Commission's decision. What does matter is consistency, predictability and trust. Residents engaged in good faith relied on this Commission's vote and now reasonably expect the city to follow through. Reopening a duly approved resolution based on a handful of late objections sends the wrong message to residents who participate constructively and transparently in civic life. This dog park is a quality-of-life investment. It activates underutilized public land, and it reflects the will of a broad cross-section of Coral Gables residents. I respectfully ask this Commission to honor its November vote, keep the resolution in place and allow this project to proceed. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Hilary Rodriguez. Raul Mas will be next.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Ms. Rodriguez: Good evening. My name is Hilary Rodriguez. I live at 510 Cadima Avenue, and I've lived there for over 23 years and I'm directly across from the proposed site of the dog park and

everybody's stated a lot of their views, opinions and, you know, feelings about the situation. But my main concern that I want to express is that I live, as Jose said, directly across the street. I never got any notice. No one asked anything about our opinion, about having a dog park right in front of my house and I just think that that's contrary to all of the mail, notices and outreach that we've received as citizens with regard to other important issues in the city and I think we really need to go back, look at the process and do this the right way, engaging in the neighborhood just like everyone in the, I live across the Youth Center. I feel like we're engaged in community and youth and war memorial and remembering all the important things about our city and I think we need to include all that in the process before we take away this open, passive green space right in front of our homes. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Raul Mas.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Mr. Mas: Good evening. My name is Raul Mas. I live at 610 Viabella Avenue. I have grown up in the City of Coral Gables practically my entire life except for a 10-year period going off to college and getting my career started, et cetera, et cetera. I am extremely familiar with the Coral Gables Library, with the Youth Center, and with University Drive. I actually lived on University Drive for a while. I drive on University Drive. I drive up Segovia. I drive to what was then called the big church there. I mean, I've been to Riviera back and forth. I know that area intimately. I want to echo the comments of a previous speaker here. I love the green spaces of Coral Gables. Where I live, I don't have any sidewalks. For me to walk my dog in my neighborhood can be sometimes dangerous because of a lot of traffic and there are no safe spaces around where I can walk them. I ordinarily need to put my dog in my car and take him someplace that I can walk him freely or let him run freely. And there has been an incredible absence of dog parks in this city, quite frankly, until Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson came around and made it an issue. And I'm delighted for it. My only problem with dog parks now is that when I take my dog there, he doesn't want to leave. He's thrilled. I mean, literally, I remember being there at the dog park at eight o'clock in the evening and there was no way I could get my 100-pound dog out of the park. Dogs, and I became a dog owner late in life. Dog owners aren't just dogs, they're family members. Just like we have parks for children and the youth center, which is phenomenal. And I'm a little bit confused because I've driven by this property numerous times and you would think from listening to the people here that there are constant picnics going on there and people playing softball and running around with balls and the dogs are free roaming around the park. I don't see that. I've seen, yes, a nice open space, okay? A green space. But there is this mentality, it's a phrase called NIMBY, not in my backyard. It's very understandable. You want city services, you want all these things, but once it interferes with your life, then suddenly it's a big issue. I can't address the issue of whether you were notified

*City Commission Meeting*

or not. I know that recently there's a park opening up, the University Drive park there where the canal is, right in my neighborhood. It's going to be a small park for children, et cetera, et cetera. I got tons of notice that the city was going to build something there. My message to my neighbors is, listen, I don't see what the objection is. You have an enormous Youth Center. You have incredible lights all over there, especially during the soccer season to all hours of the night. You've got traffic, you've got the library there. There's plenty of parking. You know, dog parks normally close at six o'clock. This is, I think, a reasonable compromise for dog owners.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

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

Mayor Lago: All right, thank you very much. Colleagues, Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Yeah, so thank you very much. I'm the sponsor of item F-1, and I sponsored F-1. This originally wasn't my item, so I apologize, Vice Mayor, to be presenting this, but it is my responsibility also when I have this amount of residents approaching me with the dissatisfaction of a dog park to do something about it. I can't just turn my face even though it is not my item. So, no disrespect to your item at all. I just, I had to act upon it. I invited Chris King as my special guest, and I know that he was time limited, so I do want to give you the opportunity to go ahead and finish what you could not finish. And the other thing after he's done is that I want to go ahead and I want to present. I want to go ahead and put again on the screen the map that was attached to the item after he's done talking. And I'll continue what I have to say.

Mayor Lago: Sir, how are you?

Mr. King: Good, thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: How many minutes do you need to speak?

Mr. King: If you just give me five minutes, I think I can wrap it up. I know you guys have heard a lot of arguments. I can be quick.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk, will you give him five minutes on the clock, please? Thank you.

Mr. King: Yes, sir.

Mr. King: Okay. And I just want to hit a couple of things about the law, and then I want to hit something about the history of this, which is we have these ordinances, and this is the law. We have noise ordinances that are going to be violated every single day that this park is used and every single day that it's going to be in existence. We have historic homes that are right up against where

*City Commission Meeting*

there's going to be a bark park, and that's what they call it, a bark park, because that's what dogs do. They get together. They get excited. They bark. We know that. And that is going to violate the noise ordinance that we have against repeated, repetitive, and continual barking from dogs, and the folks who are on ground zero of this, you've heard from them. They're uniformly opposed. Now, let me talk about the history of this, because one of the speakers you heard lives in a house built in 1925, and it was designed by one of the preeminent architects in the world at that time, which was John and his brother Colton Skinner, and across the street, we have a house that was designed by George Fink. These are historic homes. This is a very special house. I know when I bought my house in 2004, I was sold on the idea that this is a special street. It is a historic street, and the open spaces go along with that. If you start intruding on that, if you take that away, the city is going down a path where there's going to be liability here. The city is going to be exposed. People are going to want compensation for taking that away. And look, I quote the master plan. Merrick's vision of a place where people could live in a great garden set with houses and a park where all people can live to their best capacities ensured that parks and open spaces would be essential to the framing of the future of the city. This isn't some trivial concern that we're losing an empty space. These are important areas that are critical to the history of this. And lots of folks have been excluded from this process. You heard from the residents. This was really the first time that people learned of this had the opportunity to show up. You have not heard necessarily from the patrons of the library, people who use the library all the time, every single day, who need that quietude, commuters. We know that this is a high-density traffic area throughout the year. It is probably right now when it's raining. It's overflowing with cars. Voters, the library is key for voting and elections. Throughout the year, every year, we have off-year elections. We have presidential elections. That thing was swarming last year. And that's an early voting area. All that's going to be taken away for a bark park. And then we have the naturalists. And you heard one of the speakers talk about the importance of having this habitat. We think that there may be endangered species who may use that area as well. There is vegetation. There are trees that have been there for 100 years that under the ordinance that we think that is still in effect since 1972. Those can't be removed. And it would be a shame to remove them. And look, I understand the need. I understand the passion that a lot of people have for this, which is they want to have a dog park. And there's a solution for this. And it's in the private sector. This should be commercial property. It should be privately owned. It shouldn't be run by the government. And maybe these are my Republican colors showing. But this is better run by the private sector that can better absorb the risks and are much better to offset the risk with insurance. The government is not the solution here. And this should not be taking place in this particular area. It makes no logical sense. So that's why we're opposed to it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Castro: So now, I believe I still have the floor. So now, Billy, I'm going to go ahead and ask you to go ahead and put the map on the screen.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, ma'am. Just give me one second, please.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Cable TV could share my screen, please. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: I want to go ahead, and I want to explain this map right here. There were two petitions that were out there. And I believe this is one of them that they brought up here. But it's missing, actually, the little red dots. The red circle right there is a 500-meter radius from where the park is. Right there, the people who signed the petition, there are 14 people that are for the park surrounding a 500-meter radius. And there are 41 against the park. Now, I think what I want to do is come into a fair conclusion. Rescinding the previous vote but take it as far as having the city do an outreach of the area, maybe 1,000 meters. I don't know what the custom is, right? What is it? A 1,500, 1,000 meters? What is it?

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: For parks, I defer to the Manager on what we typically would do.

City Manager Iglesias: It's generally one quarter mile within walking distance.

Commissioner Castro: One quarter mile?

City Manager Iglesias: It's what we use for walking distance.

Commissioner Castro: So, what I would suggest, if we rescind the vote to go ahead and do the outreach and ask especially the immediate neighbors that are really going to affect their quality of life if they want a dog park or not. I think we are leading a resident-first government. Everybody here says residents first. I think that's a healthy medium. I'm not saying not a dog park, but I'm saying let's do some outreach. If people want it, they want it. We'll give it to them. Whatever the majority wants. And if they don't, then we won't get it. I will move to go ahead. And I will move my resolution to that.

Mayor Lago: We're in the middle of discussion. So first and foremost, having been here the longest, I remember that Commissioner Slesnick was the Commissioner who passed the legislation in regard to expanding the outreach effort to homes. I think it was about 1,500 meters. We should have staff confirm that.

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: Mayor, do you want me to address that?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

*City Commission Meeting*

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: So, I think we're talking about two different things. There's the outreach that we do per our zoning code, which is the mail notice requirements. And we have 1,000 feet for certain things and 1,500 feet. We do have, like you said, 1,500 feet for other things. But then when it comes to outreach for park designs and so forth, I don't know what our standard is. On that, I would, Mayor, defer to the Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor, 1,500 feet is about a quarter mile.

Mayor Lago: So, my point is that let's not pin homeowners against homeowners. That's what I believe. Let's not politicize this and make this about politics. That's not what we should do. Well, you have 40 people that are in favor of it, but then 500, and then you have 14 that are against. That's not going to work. Because guess what? Someone's going to be unhappy at the end of the day. So, let's move on from that. We're not here to -- we're here to find a solution, okay? So quick question, if I may, before I pass it on to the Vice Mayor, because I'm just reserving my comments for after. Mr. Clerk, have we also heard individuals who maybe are in favor of the park? I know we had one individual that spoke, or two, two or three.

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: We've listened to everyone.

Mayor Lago: I want to make sure we covered everything. I'm going to close the public comment now, okay?

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: Sorry, Mayor, I apologize for interrupting. But I believe this was all public comments, all speaker cards that had asked for, to speak on items F-1 and F-11.

Mayor Lago: Yes, I just want to make sure we covered everything, because I don't want to hear later that we didn't give anybody the opportunity to speak. Okay, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, before we begin, I know that the more recent petition that Mary Powell submitted, it was submitted to the Clerk. And Mr. Clerk, can you please state for the record how many signatures were collected?

City Clerk Urquia: I will. Give me one second, Vice Mayor, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: And just to make sure the questions should go through the Mayor as Chair.

City Clerk Urquia: So, Vice Mayor, just on average, I have a 13-page document with four signatures per page on average. So about 50 signatures on this document, maybe five signatures. Yeah, so let's do about 50 signatures on this document.

*City Commission Meeting*

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, which document are you referring to?

City Clerk Urquia: The one that I just received now that says petitioned to the City of Coral Gables City Commission in support of an off-leash dog park.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, the actual number is about 470-some-odd. Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: May Ms. Powell clarify how many signatures she collected?

Ms. Powell: Okay, sorry. So, on three separate occasions, there were tranches of signatures that have been provided to our City Clerk. So, there was a time when we had Catalina Dog Park, we had for that 200 signatures at the time in supporters in that neighborhood, my neighborhood, my street. And then the second tranche was the 225 that we presented that got tagged to that item when you all voted in November. And then additionally, 50 were submitted tonight. So, they are all in your records. They are not all in one document in your records. I am happy to combine them into one document and resubmit them to him. I don't have the ability to do that from this room right in this moment, but I would be happy to compile that all together for you. But it's that map that I gave out represents every signature that we've gotten in support of an off-leash dog park. Because Melissa Castro and these other lovely neighbors did not send me, I mean, nobody gave me their addresses. So, I don't have a way to put them on my map. But no, I'm just saying like there was a, she said specific, it's not intended to be contentious guys. I'm just saying she said that my map does not reflect your addresses. It doesn't because I didn't know you. I didn't know any of this. And so therefore, it's kind of a little bit of a misnomer.

Mayor Lago: But let's do this. Let's do this. Okay, let me make a request, okay?

Ms. Powell: Of course.

Mayor Lago: Because we want to move on and allow the vice...

Ms. Powell: But if I may. I'm not in charge of this.

Mayor Lago: If I may, if I may. Thank you. Thank you very much. All right, if I may, if I may. Thank you. Okay, so we want to move forward with the process and limit the outbursts and get to some consensus here. That's the goal here. Mr. Clerk, if you would please help me with both sides and the petitions here. You have certain pages that have 50 signatures and certain pages that have one signature. For example, I'll show you two signatures. Do you understand? So, if we could potentially put together these documents so that for the record appropriately so there's no duplication and you're not saying that one has 200 and 250 and then 50 and all these guys. I just want to make it very clear. It doesn't have to be done today, okay? All right. And by the way, a

*City Commission Meeting*

decision has to be made here. Somebody's going to be happy. Somebody's not going to be happy, but we can build consensus, all right? So, let's go through the process where everybody spoke. We closed the public comment. We clarified the issue of the signatures. Madam Vice Mayor.

[Speaker off-mic - inaudible]

Mayor Lago: Excuse me, thank you. Sorry. But we can't, but we can't, but we can't. Yeah, but we can't draw. Sorry, but we can't do this. We can't do this. And I, oh, if I may, if I may. If I may, just for the record. I met with you. I sat down with you. We had a long conversation. We're here to listen, but we have to follow a process. We can't be bursting from the grandstands. It just, no other city allows that. I know that was the comment here before, but it's not. We can't do that. There has to be rules. There has to be rules. For example, your lawyer had three minutes. He wanted additional time. I asked him, "How much do you want? He said five. I gave him a full five, all right? All the rules. Okay, I just want two, that's it. Just so we can be transparent, and we can do things the right way. That's it, okay? Thank you very much. Now, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to walk you all through the process, because not every one of you I've spoken to. I did a dog park item over near Salvadore Park. It was led by me. This one was not led by me. I went door to door, and people who are across the street from that park now are thrilled with it. There was a drawing that was submitted. There were some people that didn't want it. It was built. They provided input on what was going to go into the park. And as I've gone over there more recently, the individuals that are directly across from the park are absolutely thrilled, because they had input into design. Now, I see you're shaking your head and stuff, but I've also told every single one of you, I hold office hours on Fridays. None of you came to provide input. If you want to provide input, you need to come and provide input. And none of you came. So, 475 of your neighbors around the area, and there's three green spaces along University Drive there that belong to the City of Coral Gables and have dogs running off-leash at this time. A very dangerous situation that can happen in any neighborhood. It's not a safe place for them to run off-leash because there's no fence. We've made some statements that neither here nor there, but native plants are not there. You have invasive snake plants. 100-year-old trees, the banyans are not going to be touched. You have poinsettia trees, some which need trim back. There is broad support for this. People that walk by, through, and around our neighborhoods that have to walk their dogs lengthy periods, because, number one, they can't get sufficient exercise. And it is important, not only for the mental health of the people, but the mental health of the animals, to have this time together. One of the things that I, comments I got in from residents that do go to these dog parks, is it's good for community, it's good for mental health, and it builds community. A 25-foot buffer is wider than a street. A 25-foot buffer loaded with plants and greenery that is native does provide a sound buffer. When I had the opportunity to go down to an area that was filled with rock pineland, and you couldn't even hear the traffic from the Turnpike because there was so much underbrush.

*City Commission Meeting*

*January 13, 2026*

*Agenda Items F-1 and F-11 – Resolution rescinding Resolution No. 2025-452 to authorize city staff  
To move forward with a dog at 520 University Drive*

[Date]

17

And that's what plant material does. Microforests do that. They reduce the amount of pollution. They reduce the amount of noise. And 25 feet of width of planted material does do quite a bit. No matter what decision we make here today, there are going to be people walking out unhappy. It happens with every single decision that is made. We have a large community that has been wanting a dog park in this walkable area between Bird Road and Coral Way, LeJeune Road and Granada, so they could be able to walk to take their dogs as opposed to having to put them in a car. Now, public comment can be made as to what to put into the park. There's a five-foot buffer all the way around the edge with a hedge. And the comment that I had provided, the staff has let it grow up to the height of the fence so that it's not visible for people driving through that don't live here. Because it's supposed to be something you walk to, not something you drive to. I've made the same comments for the folks over at Salvadore Park when we cut the ribbon there. I asked people to be respectful of the neighbors. And I told the neighbors that, you know, we can provide them residential parking permits if parking becomes an issue. It never became an issue, so therefore they didn't need to take that exercise. But we need to work together as a community. Putting wars against each other is not a great way to do, make community and build community. The residents gathered the signatures to support the placing of an off-leash dog park in this area. And this was one of the best locations because the other location is used for the parking. The other green space, which is available for picnicking if you want, is smaller. And it would be too concentrated an area. And this one is the largest and offers the greatest opportunity to create the 25-foot barrier between the residences and the park itself. So that you have essentially a city street width between your homes and that. I can't ignore what the majority of folks have wanted. Those are my comments.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Commissioner Fernandez.

Commissioner Fernandez: Much like you, I wasn't informed about this either. In fact, I showed up at a Commission meeting and found out that day that there was a 6 p.m. time certain to address a resolution to create a dog park at that location without any prior notification. Yet the room was full of people, so I'm sure a lot of people were informed that there was a 6 p.m. time certain to address that issue that day. Yet a member of this Commission was not informed about that item being discussed. As I've spoken to many of you over the last few weeks, I am concerned about the fact that only those who supported this park were informed. Those who were against it somehow just didn't find out. And from what you have shared with me; it wasn't that members of this Commission did not know you were opposed to a dog park because this is not the first time this issue comes up. And I covered it in Gables Insider back in the day about the discussions that there were at the time about creating a dog park at that location. In the community, the neighborhood was totally against creating a dog park at that location. There's a lot of talk, and if you watch today's meeting, you'll hear about, you know, things done in the cover of night. This was done in the cover of night. You were excluded from the process. The neighbors in this neighborhood. And of course, we hear now, well, you know, we don't want to pin people against each other. It's very easy to say

*City Commission Meeting*

it now. And what you're being told here today is you'll have the opportunity to select the trees you're going to get or the flowers that you get. But you're going to have to deal with a dog park in front of your house or adjacent to your house, the dogs barking at all times, all the time. I'm going to second Commissioner Castro's motion to rescind this. I think that a process needs to be laid out and followed where a solution is found. I'm not saying a dog park is not something that we can do, but there has to be a process where both sides are able to come to the table and find a solution that works for everybody. And I know if there's any place where we can do that, it's here in Coral Gables. So, I will second Commissioner Castro's motion, and I'm ready to vote.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: I'm really happy that everybody came this afternoon at six o'clock to express their views. We're always open. All of us are available at all times to hear everyone's concerns, on matters especially that involve them personally. And I have met with some of you. You have come to my office hours, and you've expressed your concerns. The concerns you've expressed, though, were after the vote was taken, naturally. And you've said to me, and I have no reason to doubt, that you were unaware that this process was ongoing. But perhaps more to that point, and maybe to put a finer point on it, some of you expressed to me that you were under the belief that it wasn't proceeding. Not that you were unaware that a dog park was being contemplated, but that you were under the belief that it wasn't going to be going forward. So, I have no idea what the disconnect was, if there was a disconnect, or how it came about. But that's what was expressed to me by some of the residents, is that they understood one thing, and then when they spoke with other residents, they said, no, don't worry, this is not going forward. I was made to understand it's not going forward. Well, with respect to the vote that was taken in November, so my colleague here to my right said that he was unaware of a time certain six o'clock. Well, I don't know how that's the case, because we all received the agenda, we all were given an opportunity to attend an agenda review, and it is not uncommon, in fact, it's after seven o'clock, and we've been here at Commission meetings until nine o'clock at night, a full 12 hours in a row. So, I have no idea, nor have I asked why Commissioner Castro and Commissioner Fernandez were absent at the six o'clock agenda meeting, time certain, that was heard in November. But in any event, this room was packed. This room was packed with individuals, more so than we had during the entire day of regularly scheduled Commission meeting. All that I know is that a great deal of people showed up, enthusiastic for this project, and I am unaware, and if the City Manager, Parks and Rec, or the City Attorney could clarify for me if there was anything that was required to be done in providing notice to the affected residents and the residents at large, because this is not a project that is just for the people that live in the immediate area, but this is a citywide, or at least walkable distance. Is there any, I'm going to ask that question now, is there any failure to provide what's required in terms of notice leading up to the vote that was taken in November through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: Mayor, so there's no requirement in our code or in our zoning code, no legal requirement for such mail notice. Obviously, the posting of the agenda is notice in and of itself of an item that's going to be considered by the Commission. It is my understanding that staff have its typical practice when it comes to reviewing park sites and designing park sites, but I'll defer to the Manager on that, but my understanding is that there is usually an input process for the design of a park. So, once we know we want, staff have identified a particular site, there is input that's ascertained from the community for the design of that particular park.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor, to the office of the City Manager, if I may, or to Parks, what is the sequence that the city follows typically, if not policy practice, in terms of how these things go about in terms of the resident input at the earliest and through the end state?

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, this was already a park site. This is across from the Youth Center. This is used for parking. This is zoned S. So, this is already a park site. It's not a site that we are acquiring for something. And so, what we would normally do is meet with the residents to show the proposed park. So, we are going to be meeting with the residents to show what the proposed layout is, as you saw. Those are the kind of drawings that we showed here earlier are the kind of drawings that we show to the residents at large. However, this site was not acquired for a park. This site is across from the Youth Center, across from the library, which is, by the way, our library. We own that site also. So, the fact that this site was already used for park space, generated -- took care of that initial site acquisition. The next step would be to meet with the residents to show them the proposed project, which would be similar to what was shown here by our city landscape architect.

Commissioner Lara: So, it sounds to me that since the site was already a park, then determining what shape or use that park would take typically is at the design stage. The design stage when you see the input from the residents who are most impacted by that design. Is that correct?

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct, Commissioner.

Commissioner Lara: I think the Vice Mayor is correct that there's no way that you can have a decision rendered today that will make everybody that was here in November and everybody that's sitting here today in January feel good or satisfied. It's impossible because there's obviously a discrepancy or a split of opinion on how the park space should be used or what its

*City Commission Meeting*

design would be. It is quite another thing though to say that, as one of my colleagues just said, that it was an exclusion of you all. There is no basis in fact to say that there was a decision made, a conscious decision to exclude your views or your input. And frankly, I take offense at that because that would be something that we'd be trying to take so far what is a civil conversation and possibly try and inflame it. We've seen enough of that today. The fact remains, I am sitting here unaware of any failure to provide any notice not only required because apparently there is none at that point required, but that we're actually following the way the practice has been in the city with respect to space that's already been designated as a park, park space. So, what we're looking at, it seems to me, is the design use of that particular park space there's an input state for that, an input stage. And we're still in it now, and I think the Vice Mayor made that point perfectly clear that we want that input from you all. We want to know how it will best be utilized in your collective views. And for that, it's a process that we're going to need to follow. But be assured, I wouldn't stand for anybody trying to pull the wool over your eyes exclude you as residents from the input or from what you are required and lawfully entitled as a say at the table. For the love of me, I have no idea how so many people appeared in November to a packed room and none of you were aware of it, but such is the case. Such was the case. And where we are right now is that we're all ears. And we're going to take to heart whatever your views and your thoughts are with respect to the design of this space which has already been designated a park.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I've requested that the Clerk look up the agenda for that day and he has some other information. Just wait a second. I want to be very clear. So, I've asked the Clerk to look up the agenda from that Commission meeting and to give us background to how we got to where we are today.

City Clerk Urquia: So, Mr. Mayor, if I may. When we published the agenda for the November 18th meeting on Thursday, November 13th this item was on the agenda with a 12-noon time certain. The day before the meeting on November 17th the Commission decided to attend the funeral of Officer Jaramillo the following day. Therefore, we changed the time certain of this item to 6 p.m. the day before the meeting. But the item had been on the agenda since the agenda had been published the week before with a time certain on it.

Mayor Lago: You have a copy of that, please.

City Clerk Urquia: If cable TV can share my screen. As you can see, F-3. It's agenda item F-4, I apologize.

Mayor Lago: F-4, I'm sorry. My eyesight's a little bad. F-4 clearly delineates a time certain at 6 p.m. But that's not the only issue we're at hand, okay. It is a responsibility and its incumbent of

*City Commission Meeting*

the elected official who's elected by you to be at every meeting. The vote was 3-0. Commissioner Fernandez and Commissioner Castro did not come back after the funeral. Again, at the end of the day, that's their decision. No excuse was given in regard to why they couldn't be here. But at the end of the day, they were not here. So, my point is this. I was not aware that you were upset or potentially, I was not aware that you were not in favor of this. A process was followed, and we did not circumvent a process to make sure that your voice was not heard. Many of you came to see me at open office hours that I've been doing every Friday for 13 years. And we came and we had a conversation. And I said, I need to find out more information about what happened. So, there was no process where you were excluded from, okay. Now, a few issues that I think we need to put on the record that your esteemed attorney mentioned, the noise ordinance issue. We have rules here in the city. If a noise ordinance is violated for one reason or another, we will force individuals to comply. That's number one. Number two, if it becomes a habit, I give you my word that the park, the dog park or bark park, whatever you want to call it, is going to have a problem. Because you're not going to have somebody living next to that park and a violation of the noise ordinance. I'd like to find out from the Manager, if possible, please. Have we had any issues? Because we already have one. We have dog parks in the city adjacent to residential homes. Have we had any complaints in regard to those dog parks?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we've had no complaints concerning noise on those dog parks.

Mayor Lago: So, we don't have any Code Enforcement, proof of Code Enforcement violations or anything like that where the neighbor has said, I can't sleep at night. There's a dog. Obviously, you can't use the parks from dusk to dawn, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: That's correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, there's limitations in regard to the uses of those parks. So, I think we need to be very careful about that, okay? Also, there was a mention about historic homes. We value our historic homes, critically important to who we are as a community. I don't know how that would affect a dog, would affect a historic home, but I'm more than willing to learn on that front. And by the way, I don't own a dog. So, I'm going to put that on the record. My daughters are killing me for a dog, but I don't own a dog. I don't own a dog. And at this present moment, I got my hands full, as you can tell by this Commission meeting. So, to me, you had a meeting. We followed the rules, okay? I don't want to be put in a position, which is what I am right now, which is what I said in the beginning. And I know that having the privilege to be an elected official, sometimes you got to make decisions that doesn't make people happy. But if you told me there was a glitch in the matrix in regard to the process, we didn't follow the rules and someone disenfranchised, I would say to myself, okay, we got to fix this. We got to back this out. But if I make you happy, I make them unhappy. What I think is better to do, in my opinion, is I think that we need to have both sponsors select one or two individuals each and start to build consensus. To have a conversation

*City Commission Meeting*

with the Manager, the City Attorney, and the City Clerk, sit down in a room, call a Sunshine meeting, and have the four people, the two elected officials, and say, okay, what can we do to build consensus? Because at the end of the day, you're going to run into your neighbor at Publix, you're going to run into your neighbor at a UM basketball game, you're going to run into your neighbor at the library, you're going to run into, and that's not who we are, not who we are. So, we got to find a way to bridge the gap. Does that mean that you cut a certain area of the park? Does that mean so it's not next to the nice lady, the physician? By the way, I know what a physician has to do every day. My father's a physician who works nonstop every single day. So, I know, especially being in the emergency room, what she has to do and how she needs to sleep. So, we got to take a step back here, okay? We've had two meetings pro, against. Let's take a step back. Let's schedule some time with the Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk. Both of my colleagues select two individuals from each group, from each side, and we build some consensus here. We find a way to bridge the gap, okay? I've already told you there's no noise ordinance issues. I don't know personally, and I want to be educated, okay? I want to be educated in regard to how this may affect the historic home. I'm not saying it may not, maybe you teach me. You know, property values go down. I need to find out what are issues that would affect us. But right now, as we are right now, I feel I will be doing a disservice to myself as an elected official if I voted in favor for them and then I voted against. So, I think that we need to be very, very careful about how we move forward. Not only on delivering the park, but also on how we vote today. I don't think we should vote, except for designating two individuals on each side to start having real conversations about these issues. So, I know that we have the Blue Road open space. That was done, that was an existing park that after 20 plus years was finally delivered. It's going to be about to open, and we had the Salvadore Park, which was existing, and we put in a dog park there. Those are examples I think we need to look at in regard to notice and what we did in those parks and what we did there. Those are examples of existing pieces of land that we owned and then they later transitioned after, you know, decades into a different use. Even though Blue Road is not a different use, it's always been an open space, but now it's a park, now it looks beautiful. So, I think that's something that I'd like to see the Manager and the City Attorney, and the City Clerk work on with my colleagues to say, okay, what are the notice requirements? How do we handle it at that point? What do we do in Salvadore Park when we put a dog park in? Okay, so I think we've had some pretty robust discussion. What I would like to see, and I hope my colleagues would support me. You have something you'd like to say?

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Lara: When you're done,

Mayor Lago: I'm done.

*City Commission Meeting*

Commissioner Lara: Well, I just want to borrow and jump off that last point you were making. It's at the risk of being repetitive, it's already designated for park use. Do not underestimate, assuming the vote is that we're going to be ultimately going forward with this particular use of the park. Do not underestimate the power and the influence and the reach you have as residents to work with the city to reach the consensus that the Mayor is talking about. I have seen miraculous, well, near miraculous changes in all kinds of developments. What one that recently comes to mind is a development at 760 Ponce. It went years. And the developer and the residents were like this far apart for a very, very long time. But they were passionate and they were clear and direct about what they wanted to see since they are the ones most affected by that development. So don't underestimate yourselves in getting what you want as part of an overall consensus. Because I've seen mountains get moved when people care enough. So, you may be very, very surprised, I would not, that you end up with something you really will treasure if we all work together and try and find that consensus.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, the layout that you see there may not be the layout. Again, this is very preliminary. Very preliminary. It may not be the whole size. It may be half the size. It may be, I don't know at the end of the day. So, I think that I'd like to have the sponsors of both of these pieces of legislation tell me if they agree with what I'm trying to do here. Yes, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, for the people that did come to see me, or I did get the opportunity to meet with, I was able to show them the various iterations of what happened at the Salvadore Dog Park. And they saw that it started with one idea from staff. Then it transformed into another idea. And then it went into a third idea where the sidewalk was moved. The neighborhood is thrilled with the park. Even those who thought they wouldn't like it. They like it now. They use it now. And they use it daily themselves, even though they live right across the street. We do need to build consensus. But we cannot build consensus if you're unwilling to meet. If you're unwilling to talk. If you're not willing to look at the drawings and make comments on them. I did it with some of your neighbors. Then the rest of you refused to meet. So, you cannot build consensus that way. Yes, I do think the idea that you have for having the meetings is exactly where we're heading anyway. With the dog park design, this is why I had staff's first iteration presented. So, we can start that discussion and move forward.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Yes, okay. So, they don't want, number one, I think having a Sunshine meeting is a great idea. But I'm pretty sure, and they've reiterated to me a thousand times, they don't want to talk about the design of the park. What they want to talk about is that they don't want a dog park. That's the conversation they want to have. And I also understand that there's

*City Commission Meeting*

other residents that do want a dog park. So yes, I think a Sunshine meeting would be beneficial. Maybe with both of us in there with all parties available, as well as many residents as we can get there in the area affected. But I also think that moving forward, we need a process of how we determine and maybe through the Mayor and City Attorney, if you can go ahead and work on legislation to go ahead and build a process, especially the neighbors that are being affected immediately or a 1,000 foot radius when we're going to propose a park. We need something like legitimate that we can follow through. And I was also unaware that it was at 6 p.m. I was told probably three hours before that it's at 6 p.m., the dog park. That's why I wasn't here. I do feel that for some reason you guys were excluded. I don't know. I know that the City Attorney here says that because it's on the agenda, you guys were notified. But the reality of life is that people that are not following politics every day are not reading an agenda every single day and I understand that. So, I think that there has to be another method of communication, especially when there's a dog park being proposed in your backyard or in your front yard. So, I want to go ahead, and I also want to go ahead and put on the record some of the text messages I've been getting. One of them said they want to change the green area to real grass for fake grass with a fence. Is that accurate? Is that the proposal? Do we know?

Mayor Lago: First and foremost, through the Mayor. We got to have an order. I'm sorry, I apologize. It's got to work. It's the way democracy works. Again, if you'd like to speak with staff, ask me and I'll bring staff up.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. Through the Mayor, that's a question I will continue to ask different questions that I have here on my phone.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: The large area would be grass. The small area for the small dogs would be artificial turf. That's what was proposed on the plan.

Commissioner Castro: Okay, thank you, Deena. I'm sorry, I think the question was answered.

Assistant Public Works Director: That's okay, I'll stick around.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. So, then the second one is that Vice Mayor Anderson speaks with the neighbors next to the park, but she hasn't given us a chance for a neighborhood meeting. All she wants to do is do one-on-one meetings. I think moving forward, and I'm not going to answer for her, but I think she's open to having a Sunshine meeting with all residents if we can come into some type of agreement that will make everybody happy at the same time.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

*City Commission Meeting*

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The emails I received requested a meeting within hours, you know, within the next day, on a Saturday at the Coral Gables Library. I said, "It's too short a notice. We don't own the library. I mean, we own the library. We can't dictate the uses there. Okay, I offered to meet with people one-on-one. I also offered my office hours to meet. Same process happened with the Salvadore Dog Park. Okay. People came in. They came in as a group. They requested certain things. They brought in samples of what they wanted. I handed it off to staff, and staff obliged. And staff have done an amazingly good job of maintaining that park. And they clean it as well. So, thank you.

Commissioner Castro: If I can continue? Through the Mayor. Yes, another resident has some concerns that the petition has signatures that are not even residents of Coral Gables. I think it would be, and I love petitions, but at the same time, when it comes to a park like this, I think the city should take a little more hold and ask ourselves, and me going door-to-door, or ballot questions when it comes to this, or verify these petitions. Parks and Recreation Review for Park Change. What is the process behind that? That's one of the questions from one of the residents.

City Manager Iglesias: The process, through the Mayor.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you, Mayor. The park process would be now, the process for a new piece of property is the Commission decides to purchase a piece of property for parkland. And then we look at different alternatives for what that park is going to be. In this case, it would be a dog park. And in this case, we would present to the residents what the proposal is and get feedback from those residents. Just like we presented here today through our city landscape architect.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. This is a question for the City Attorney. There's an ordinance, and please correct me if I'm wrong, about walking dogs off-leash. One of the residents is asking, why are we not enforcing that?

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

City Attorney Suarez: So, my understanding is that we enforce our ordinances, but if this is a dog park, then that is allowed in the dog park.

*City Commission Meeting*

Commissioner Castro: Okay. And one of the other questions here also is, point of clarification, nearby residents were never asked to sign a petition in favor of the dog park. So why are we in fact excluded? Maybe not intentionally. I'm not sure why none of the residents that were really close to the dog park were not asked. I think we should probably follow up a fair process. I know that there's like 400 and something people that signed the petition, but if maybe the city can go ahead and take a hold of that, I mean, I think it would be the most fair thing to do. Maybe at the end of the day, we will get a dog park, but in a fair manner, I would say. And that is it.

Mayor Lago: I have a few questions I want to answer, but Commissioner Lara, you'd like to-

Commissioner Lara: I just want to say that, you know, thank you, Mayor, for being indulgent with the questions, because that's just another form of public commentary and colloquy which was already covered at the beginning, but you've been indulgent in having the questions asked or answered in real time. I'm not sure when the appropriate moment would be, but it is my belief that since what's being asked, and I just don't even recall that there was a motion made and seconded on Commissioner Castro's F-1, but if that's the case, I would strongly urge us to call the vote on that, because what we've already voted on is to allow city staff to move forward with the design and development and the implementation through public input of a dog park. I think that we are going to be losing the thread of moving towards a consensus if we don't answer first the question of whether or not there was something untoward, illegal, inappropriate in the vote that was taken back in November. I'd like that motion voted on.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yeah, I do, actually. I think if both sides are willing to have a conversation, I think that goes to what I was saying earlier, if we can find a solution, Coral Gables would be able to find a solution. I think, trying to understand what Commissioner Lara was just saying, I think it would go a lot further for those who are concerned to maybe, instead of voting on the question at hand, voting on an item that would just put a hold on moving forward with the plans until this meeting has taken place and until there is a meeting of the minds and that comes back to Commission. At that point, we can reconsider whether it moves forward or there's a change in the plan.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor, on that question. That is exactly and precisely what I'm trying to get clarity on. Not on anything that would derail consensus on what a dog park may ultimately look like, but rather to call the question and vote on whether or not we need to rescind what was a lawful vote taken back in November because that can be distracting at best as people try to discuss the future if they're still perhaps holding out hope that there will be no dog park. There may be, there may not be, but we need to have a vote on the motion, if it hasn't been seconded, concerning F-1 today.

*City Commission Meeting*

Mayor Lago: If I may, just one second. We're going to do the vote right when I'm done. A few points of clarification. Commissioner Castro mentioned 1,000 feet notification. Let's correct the record. It's 1,500, correct, Mr. Manager? You said that on the record?

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so we got to be careful what we say because then we got to be, got to say the correct thing. So, 1,500 feet for future notifications on these issues, okay? Let's also, I also heard that we weren't notified of the meeting as elected officials. I'm sorry. Even when I didn't have a Manager that I trusted and believed in, I still knew how to find the agenda online. Even when the Manager wouldn't meet with me for eight months, which he didn't, I still knew how to find the agenda. And Mr. Clerk, just for the record, because I think we have to be incredibly cognizant and careful when we make statements because then it makes it seem as if elected officials are being misled. That happens in Third World countries in South and Central America. It doesn't happen here, okay? At the end of the day, Mr. Clerk, that was, when we changed from 12 to six o'clock, the decision was made because the Commission requested to attend this incredibly important funeral for an ex-police officer that worked for the City of Coral Gables.

City Clerk Urquia: That is correct, sir.

Mayor Lago: Okay, and the Commissioners were made aware that we were obviously going to push the items from the agenda and come back and address issues, correct?

City Clerk Urquia: We did not call each Commissioner individually and told them of the times. We provided them, we posted a new agenda, and we provided a new agenda.

Mayor Lago: But at the end of the day, you have items on the agenda. As a responsible person, you know you've got to address those items on the agenda. We're not leaving here until the agenda gets finished. I've been doing this for 13 years, and we just, I've never not showed up for a meeting and said, oh, I guess it'll be addressed later. That's not the way it works. It's just common sense and a sense of responsibility for the job at hand. So, Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second. I'd like to have a roll call vote on that.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, we have a motion on a second on agenda item F-1, rescinding the previously adopted resolution. Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: For the reasons stated, and in the interest of moving forward and seeking consensus, no.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And before I vote, I'll just go over and note for the record that Commissioner Castro did ask for a dog park without notice in the North Gables. We have a location three blocks away from another park that we already have in the North Gables. So, if we want to

*City Commission Meeting*

go over process, that's something that we have to be consistent about. And there was no petition by any resident for a dog park in that area. The dog park plan is to have dog parks within walking distance of residents throughout our city. They don't need to be three blocks away from each other. But the design stage is only fruitful if you're able to engage with staff and be able to sit down with staff and look at the design and give feedback. So, for that reason, we do need to move forward with design and get input from residents. And you can't provide input unless you have a design to even look at. So, my vote on the resolution is no.

Commissioner Castro: Once again, I'm going to go ahead and clarify my motion, just in case there's any mistake in what my motion was. And it was to go ahead and rescind the previous vote. Not only to rescind the previous vote, as the City Clerk just said, but it's also to go ahead and reconsider and ask the neighbors, especially the ones not 1,000 feet, but 1,500 feet, if this is what they want. Maybe they want a passive park. Maybe we'll have a park. Maybe we'll have a playground, but we need to ask the people. We cannot just sit here and decide from a petition that we do not know if everybody even lives in the city. I understand very well that my colleagues don't agree with me. But I think the grand majority of the residents that live around this park do. And that's what's important. I am sorry that this motion is going to have to go ahead and fail, but with a lot of more resident input, maybe who knows, maybe there will be a miracle in this dais. My vote is yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Clerk, thank you for clarifying the point on the November meeting and the fact that we were not notified of a 6 p.m. time certain until the day of the Commission meeting. And Mr. Mayor, I don't have the luxury of leaving my son at school unattended. I unfortunately cannot do that for a 6 p.m. time certain or a meeting that will go past 5:30. I have to make arrangements prior to the meeting. Unfortunately, at that moment, just a few hours before, I was not able to find anybody to take care of my son, pick him up at school and bring him home. So, it is unfortunate that you were excluded. You were excluded. I think it has been made very abundantly clear here today that this Commission has no interest in revisiting it. It's just about having a meeting so that you can figure out what the best design is going to be. My vote is a yes because I stand with you, the residents.

Mayor Lago. So, let's give you an explanation. We'll give an explanation on the vote. Number two. Number one. You know what? We're paid to do a job. No excuses. I was in the hospital this weekend. I'm here. I don't feel well. I'm here. You know, so at the end of the day, we have a job to do. In almost 14 years, I've never missed a meeting. I have a responsibility to this Commission and to this city. I respect that people have children, elderly, they're sick. I understand. But I have a responsibility to be here. We were noticed. It's personal responsibility. This is a Commission meeting. Accept their personal responsibility. Stop blaming other people for not addressing issues here. It is a story that never ends. Blaming others, blaming others, blaming others. For a lack of success. So, at the end of the day, what we've done here today is exactly what I hate doing. And

what I've tried to not do in 14 years of public service is pin residents against each other for politics. That is the problem. And that's what I hope the residents see here. Because we voted in favor of a dog park that had 400-something signatures. And now you vote against a dog park, rescinding a dog park that has 390 signatures or 500 signatures. You know, it just doesn't make sense. Accusing people that they don't live in the city and that the petition wasn't done correctly. It's just not the right way of doing things. I'm a believer of getting people in a room, build consensus, figure out a way to get this to the finish line. Like I said before, you don't know what could happen. But don't blame other people and take the blame off you. Because at the end of the day, I take a file home that I put together right before a Commission meeting here. And it has everything. It has my notes. I review it days in advance. And I add notes on every single issue. I take this job seriously. Whether you agree or disagree with me, I think it's a disservice to this community if you don't work as hard as the employee's work. So, it's very clear. If you look at the agenda, I take great pride in doing this. Even in disagreement. So, I'm going to be voting no. Okay. But what I'm asking is that we schedule a meeting immediately next week. We put this together. Leave the politics at the door. Find an answer. Whether it's a dog park, whether it's half a dog park, whether it's a quarter, whether it's a repositioning of the asset, whether it's more trees that make the residents happy, whatever that is, I leave it up to you. Both of you. All of you. Because it shouldn't just be one side that has a say in this. It should be both sides. So, I am sorry that it even came down to a vote. I tried to avoid a vote at all costs because I was hoping that we could be Coral Gables. And we could say, hey, we're going to try to figure this out. But it took a vote at the end of the day, which I don't think it's the right thing to do. It shouldn't have even been on the agenda today. It shouldn't have been. Because it pins the residents against each other. And in my opinion, that's distasteful. It's not the right way of doing things. Because you're going to run into the neighbors and you're going to be that person who makes a comment, you know, on a political blog opposing somebody else or disrespecting somebody else. And that, to me, is just not who we are. Because guess what? I bare the brunt of that constantly, constantly from people in this community. Thank God I have thick skin. But some of you shouldn't have to deal with that because you shouldn't pin neighborhoods against each other. So that's just my opinion. Maybe I'm wrong, but I've also been in this city for decades and decades and decades. So, moving on, thank you for being here very much. Your voice has been heard. We will, Mr. Manager, please put together with my colleagues, the people that are going to be designated to meet in the Sunshine meeting. And let's move forward. I look forward to coming back to the Commission.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor, we will have a meeting, a parks meeting that will be Sunshined on this particular proposal.