

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting  
Agenda Item G-10  
September 14, 2021  
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**

**Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria**

**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Parks and Rec Director, Fred Couceyro**

**Public Speaker(s)**

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Agenda Item G-10 [Start: 2:30 p.m.]

Preliminary presentation regarding regional dog park proposal with use limited to subscribing residents with access cards in zones within walking distance. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Let's move onto G-10, it's a preliminary presentation regarding regional dog park proposal with use of limited to subscribing residents with access cards in zones within walking distance, sponsored by Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: Got an e-mail from Ms. Herrera showing the areas of our city that have high interest in having a dog park within walking distance. I'm hoping that this can be a project that our entire Commission can work on, seeing its such a high priority just like other parks. Thank you for being here Director. So, I asked staff to begin a feasibility study. I had a punch list of ideas that really, the result of talking to residents as to what they were looking for and didn't like about

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the possibility of having a dog park in their neighborhood. Some of those items were that they didn't want people coming in from outside of the City of Coral Gables, so an access card idea grew out of that with a fee attached requirements that the dogs be vaccinated, putting up residential parking permit signs funded by the fees for the park system itself in a couple of parking spaces for individuals with disabilities. We've just begun this discussion. I'm mentioning this to you all so that as you have ideas you can provide them to our director here to try to build the best dog park system, we can within walking distance of homes, so we don't have people parking all over everybody else's lawn. That's it. Just wanted to present this.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: I'm just here to answer questions if you have any. I was just in a meeting Commissioner, the first thing we are doing from our staff is, we wanted to look at some benchmarks and some standards for dog parks, because there is an ever-changing ideal of what a dog park would be. I remember when I first started as a director, everyone would tell me you needed two acres, you needed two acres, and that's what I told the public, because that was the standard. Things have changed. There are dog relief areas, there are dog players, there are all kinds of different things that fall under a dog recreational amenity. So, we are looking at the standards trust public land put out a standard that has some things that we are looking at that we found, and we are starting to look at that feasibility and we are working with our staff to see what we can do there.

Commissioner Anderson: A couple of things I observed, dogs were happy playing in 100 by 50-foot piece. There are some areas in our existing parks where there is a lesser used end where we can take a few feet and run a linear fence and it can just be for the dogs to go run and play and throw frisbee, whatever. So those were some of the ideas. I'm sure you all have some, so I figured we could work together as a team on that.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to comment that during this past six months, a lot of folks in the community approached me about wanting the dog park and seeing the evolution of dog parks, and I commend both of you and staff on trying to see what the community really wants, obviously concerns too, because it's a balancing act. As the former chairperson of the Parks and Rec Advisory Board, and having worked with Fred and his team, even playgrounds for children becomes a controversial issue. You can this most amazing land, piece of green space and half the neighbors don't want play equipment, the other half do, so it's a constant balancing act. So, I can only imagine it extends even into dog park situations. So, I commend you for the work. I know there is a lot more work to be done, but the fact that we take into consideration the desires, the needs, but yet the concerns, at the end of the day I think we'll find the right solution.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think its important to note for dog park enthusiasts out there that we do have one funded and planned. Obviously, the timetable has been longer than we wanted, but it will be behind the Gables Station project and integrated with the Underline. If you haven't seen the renderings for that, its quite nice. We had a community meeting on that, it was very well received. Its for large dogs and small dogs, kind of separated if I recall correctly. So that will be coming online over the course of the next few years, and has funding, which obviously is a big hurdle, and so that's important. That will be coming online. Beyond that its what you just said, the reason

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why that position is where it is, is because it was sort of a non-controversial location, because its not immediately adjacent to residential or single family residential anyways. Its got parking. The tricky part whenever we've looked at properties that are in residential neighborhoods is you get a lot of pushback, and so, we are going to have to – the location is half the battle sometimes. The other point about the smaller spaces, because I remember from our conversations when we were working on the other dog park. Some of those smaller spaces, the issue is less about the sort of happiness of the dog running around, if you will, and more about the maintenance, because when you have a smaller space and more dogs running around within that space, it requires a lot more maintenance of the space, and so, that's another thing that...for alternative materials.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: The smaller spaces you see them with gravel, you see them with different things, because grass, depending on the amount of dogs you have there, I've seen some small spaces that aren't very heavily used that the grass can be sustained. But there is canine grass, which is the artificial turf, there is gravel, there are a lot of different surfaces that are being used now for smaller spaces, that's why those standards are starting to get a little bit, its up in the air. Depending on your source, some people say it should be bigger, but there are some new standards and different people coming out saying, this is the way to maneuver around smaller sizes.

Vice Mayor Mena: I guess the question is, if what we are talking about is a desire to have more dog parks in the appropriate locations, I would say, yes, I'm for that. The question is going to be, what are those locations?

Commissioner Anderson: I've had some residents say, hey, we already have a space that's being used right now, we just need a fence. It is being used, but its not really safe enough and the feasibility study also analyze the cost. Ideally the fees that are collected should pay for the fencing and the other amenities that are necessary to make it work for that neighborhood, and try to restrict the area, so people are mainly walking there unless they are disabled.

Vice Mayor Mena: When you say the fees, you mean the users will have to pay.

Commissioner Anderson: An access card, otherwise we'll have folks coming in from out of town, is the main pushback I had that I heard from, from people not wanting a dog park in the area – oh, everybody is coming here from Hialeah, everybody is coming here from everywhere else and park all over my lawn, so that's why you have the fee issue and people have not – I asked them just a couple of questions, I said, are you willing to pay \$25? – yes; are you willing to pay like \$50? – the answer still was yes. So, I think we need to – that's why I called it a feasibility study to see how much we can do within that range, and most of the statistics that we are already...show basically the north and east and the northwest sections up here are the highest percentage of folks that want the dog parks and thereby would want to pay for access to a dog park.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: That's the most high multi-density homes and housing is in the north area.

Mayor Lago: With that being said, what is the next step?

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Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Well, the next step is we are doing some benchmarking, we are looking at potential sites. We actually had some discussions on a couple that are non-traditional that the city owns to see what we can do. We are also looking at lots that might be open to see what the potential is for purchase. We are trying to concentrate a little bit further in the northern area, because like you said, we have that park that's going to be along the middle of the city, the Underline, and we also have, it's not run by the city, but the county has the Chapman Field Park in the south end. So really the north end is where you have to concentrate to get some spaces, and then later on we can work into the neighborhood spaces, depending on that's always depending on the neighborhood and depending on if they want to.

Vice Mayor Mena: What's that small area we talked about in north Gables there, close to Douglas Entrance.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Rotary Park?

Vice Mayor Mena: Like a small sort of park that people use a lot for dogs.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Yes, it's the median.

Vice Mayor Mena: Just the median, right.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Yes, yes, yes, it's a median.

Vice Mayor Mena: But its large.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Its big; it's a big median, its right there, its near Rotary Park, its right along there.

Vice Mayor Mena: I remember we talked about it back when we were trying to identify locations and you thought it was maybe a little small, but...

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: That's where people walk their dogs and that's where we are looking at is what we can do there. Its basically coming up with a plan. What Commissioner has, in terms of the usage, that's part of the needs assessment which we've done as part of the Master Plan should be coming to you, I think in the next Commission meeting right now, so its all part of that, and it does say that dog parks are something the community wants, especially in those two areas up north.

Vice Mayor Mena: Absolutely.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: And its common sense, because there is not a lot of green space up there, its mostly multi-housing and people want places to walk their dogs.

Mayor Lago: So, the next step is you'll present us, not only with the findings, but you'll present us with options for locations.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: We're going to look at all that, yes. And we'll present you options for locations if we could find them and what we have and if we see if there's a need that we have to go out and purchase, we'll also let you know that in the report as well.

Mayor Lago: I don't want there to be a restraint. I want you to be able to come and say listen, the optimum property is this one, we may have to purchase it and we'll figure out a way.

Vice Mayor Mena: Depending on what you find though is going to color my position on the notion of access cards and fees.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Sure.

Vice Mayor Mena: Because its always a tricky thing when you are talking about using public dollars and then restricting access, right, and so. To me, if you have to buy a property, now your overhead just went, obviously a lot higher. I don't know that you are going to make that up with whatever fees that will be part of your analysis, that's why I'm saying depending on what you tell us.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: That's true. It would just be the cost of doing business to have that amenity, like we do with any park.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right, but those parks are publicly accessible.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Right, but you could also do like we have – there are other explorations. You can look at a resident versus non-resident fee system, which we do for the Youth Center. The only problem with...we are trying to limit. We are trying to limit, if we are doing smaller spaces that are close to residential spaces, having the cars be the influx into that neighborhood and parking on people's swales, that's what we want to try to eliminate. I think that's the whole point of the residential access is to look at that and it depends on the piece of land. We do have some open spaces that we're looking at that are in residential areas, can we do something there? – we probably could if we could use a small space, the problem is that we have to gauge what the neighborhood wants.

Vice Mayor Mena: And I think the area where we are lacking, as you mentioned, is north where there may be better parking solutions than another part.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: There might be, because you might have curb space, you might have metered space close by depending on if you are next to one of the busier roadways up north or you are near Ponce or LeJeune or whether you are near Douglas or Salzedo, whatever it is.

Vice Mayor Mena: And listen, if the idea is, I don't know if I understood or misunderstood, but if the idea is to have residents have access for free and non-residents have to pay a fee to access, that's a different conversation to me. My issue is Gables residents, Gables taxpayers, and whether or not to limit their access or charge them a fee, which is a question again, to me it would depend on the location, the finances, the whole sort of picture on a given park.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: I think the first step is look at the feasibility of doing it and look at if there are possible sites and then we may get into the neighborhood and see what the appetite is for each neighborhood to do it. I think we first have to look at what Commissioner said is feasibility.

Commissioner Anderson: And the reason the idea of the access card evolved was based upon the input I got from residents in a particular area. They originally wanted it and then they had concerns about the parking issue with people driving to the site, and then they said, why don't you put it on the other side over there.

Vice Mayor Mena: That's what people always saying.

Commissioner Anderson: You go from "nimby" to "yimby" and that's the idea, so that's why I came up with the zone idea, is that we have particular zones where its within walking distance, so we don't have people driving there, type of situation, but there are exceptions to that. Like we may have a strip along an existing park; Jaycee Park is not a great example for parkability for bringing cars there, but there is a section on the far side that is very, very rarely used. So, its conceivable you can put a fence and have a dog run there, yes, but there are maybe other locations. I'm going to leave it to staff to try to vet this out.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to mention my only concern, which is an old concern, since we are talking about it is, when we try to combine dog parks and parks for kids, I think obviously fencing is key, but I know there's been some confusion over the meaning of dog-friendly parks to the point where parks that are intended for kids gets used, I don't want to use the word overrun, but a lot of folks with dogs show up. At the beginning you see all these little 2 and 3 year old kids, all of a sudden you don't see any kids and you just see dogs, which emphasize the fact we need dog parks, but when you have a 2 year old and you have a Great Dane, as a parent or as a grandparent you are a little concerned because not everybody, let's say has the dog on a leash or whatever, so when we start mixing parks for kids and dogs, I just want to make sure if that's ever going forward, very careful on how we manage it, how we separate the two, and how we notify folks, because its difficult enough having kids find a place they can run, but you're concerned that it can be chaotic.

Commissioner Anderson: I'm not suggesting.

Commissioner Menendez: I know you don't.

Mayor Lago: Let's do this, as we've talked this pretty well through. When do you think you'll have the information and an actual plan of action to move forward in regard to locations?

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: I would like to, I think the next Commission meeting we are presenting the Master Plan, we could come back the Commission meeting after that, if that's okay. Give us a few weeks to...

Mayor Lago: Let's do that, if that appeases Commissioner Anderson.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor we are presenting the Master Plan on the 28<sup>th</sup>, so maybe the second Commission meeting in October would be a good time to come back with Fred, so we can have internal discussions on it and present it to the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.