

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-5
August 26, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez (Absent)
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

John Swain
Nestor Menendez

Agenda Item F-5 [5:06 p.m.]

Discussion regarding study opportunities within the city for kayak, canoe and paddle board launch sites including, but not limited to Ruth Bryan Owen Park and Cocoplum Circle.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: So, this is an item that I've sponsored, a discussion regarding study opportunities within the city for kayak, canoe, and paddle boarding launch sites, including but not limited to Ruth Bryan Own Park and Cocoa Plum Circle. I'd like to bring up some friends of ours who are here. Nestor Menendez and Mr. Swain, who's here with us. These two gentlemen, I've had the pleasure of spending some time with them over the few years, talking about a whole host of issues in regard to the environment, water accessibility, clean water, and the other day, we took a tour of the Cocoplum Circle. And we were looking at some interesting opportunities. And I think that until you get on the ground, and you really recognize the opportunities that are before us, you're

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going to have a different perspective because we drive in our cars, or we ride on our bikes, and we really don't get, like really get down to the water level. And I was talking with the Manager, and the Manager always thinks in numbers. And I have a lot of respect for that. Because, you know, he talks to me about the pitch, and he brings me back to my school days and talks to me about, Vince, you know how hard it's going to be to put a structure down there. You know, it's a great idea, but we got to figure this out. This is an idea that I want to see if we can include in the budget. And what I want to do, what I want to do is, I want to see if we can, and I want the Manager to help us out with this. See if my colleagues are interested in doing this, okay? I would be interested in finding Cocoplum Circle for the other park, we have already something going on. For Cocoplum Circle, I'd like to figure out a way that we could do something where I know it's going to be very hard to get in and out because of ADA accessibility, and that's something that the Vice Mayor can run a course on. But I think that is an unpolished gem, that Cocoplum Circle. And I would love to be able to do some sort of study that could show us what type of structure we would need for ingress and egress, and how is that accessible? And I'd like to hear a little bit of your input and guidance in regards to it because I think that maybe we can find a few dollars in the budget to do a design using one of our in-house consultants, maybe Mr. Manager, to do something just very preliminary to see if it's even worth chasing because if it doesn't make sense and people can't get in and out, then we may have to find a different option.

Mr. Swain: So let me go back to the history of how this kind of got...

Mayor Lago: Can you give us your full name? Your full name and everything?

Mr. Swain: Oh yeah, John Swain, 4015 University Drive. Good afternoon, everybody.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Good afternoon. Pleasure to have you. It's almost good evening.

Mayor Lago: Nestor, go ahead.

Mr. Menendez: Good evening, Nestor Menendez, 6611 Revere Drive. And I'm going to, we're going to, I'm going to defer to Mr. Swain first to talk about RBO Park, and then I'll loop in Cocoplum.

Mr. Swain: I was going to do Ruth Bryant, he was going to do Coco, but you started on Cocoplum.

Mayor Lago: Whatever you like.

Mr. Swain: So, I'll get started on that. So back maybe 10 years ago, we had a meeting with Bike Walk Coral Gables, Bike 305, I think someone from the city was there, I can't remember for sure, and the Department of Transportation to try to come up with a way to make it safe to cross LeJeune Road, Cocoplum Circle, because it's really dangerous. And at the time, the best thing we could come up with was a pedestrian crosswalk north of Ingram Highway, which is there now, but it

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doesn't really work. You can ask Nestor, he lives there. It doesn't really work. Anyway, that kind of like just went to the background. And then when I was on the Waterway Advisory Board, our Chairman Manny brought up at one meeting, he said, he goes, the area under Cocoplum Circle is so ugly. Isn't there something we can do about it? So, I was thinking about the boardwalk that the City of Miami put in at Peacock Park, the boardwalk they put in at Kennedy Park. And I was thinking, you know, it'd be really nice to have a real pretty, like a boardwalk, people could look at the water. It's a really, really pretty place. It's a mess right now, but it's a pretty, pretty spot. So, I went down there and I'm wandering around looking at the site. And I realized that while I'm walking around, I just went under LeJeune Road, and I didn't even know it. I crossed LeJeune Road. So, I said, it just hit me. That's it, an underpass. We need to have an underpass here. So, the Cocoplum site is really kind of a two-part site. One is the beautification of the site, put a beautiful boardwalk in there. And then the other one is, it would provide a pedestrian, jogger, cycling path. You could go from Ingram Terrace Park over the pedestrian bridge down underneath LeJeune Road and then on your way to Sunset and Old Cutler, wherever you wanted to go. So that's the basic idea of the project. So, you want to?

Mr. Menendez: Yeah, sure. So just to piggyback off of that, this is what we've been discussing now is a derivation of a project that I had first proposed back when I was originally put on the TAB by the Vice Mayor. And I live a block away from LeJeune Road and right off Revere and the Cocoplum Bridge. And I have young children and it's difficult for me to enjoy or cross LeJeune Road safely to get to Ingram Park, which is a beautiful park. It's a great addition to the city. I just don't get to enjoy it as much as I'd like to, because as you all know, LeJeune Road is the gateway to the South Gables. It's heavily trafficated and there is no safe way to cross the street. There's a constant green light coming, going south off of LeJeune. And if that light's red, there's a green light coming off of Ingram Highway or Main Highway. And it's just a constant flow of traffic. And you kind of have to play frogger to get across the road. So, while I was on the TAB, I discussed it with my fellow TAB members. I said, there's got to be hopefully a safe way to get a crosswalk across LeJeune, maybe under. And so, I started talking to Debbie Swain and we got involved and they came up and they said, well, we've been actually talking about this, and we know that they're going to close down the Cocoplum Bridge to redo the whole Cocoplum Bridge and the circle. And I said, why don't we take advantage of this and see if we can get an ADA pedestrian friendly crosswalk to go under the bridge and give people access, the residents access to Ingram Park that live across the way. And so, in that, we got together. The Mayor kindly cut out some time for us in the morning, met up with John and Debbie and myself. And we walked the area and what we found was, it was pretty shocking. It was a beautiful area that was just unkept. There's a lot of people that actually enjoy that area. They sit there, they fish. I know fishing is not really allowed there, but they're not disturbing anybody. I live literally a block away from there and I have no issues with it. There's a lot of kids down there. We just need to beautify it. You know, make it accessible. And so, what we came up with, which is kind of a compromise in my sense, because I

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wanted a pedestrian bridge under on the north side of the bridge, but just as well, we can get to the south side. There's access, there's public access there. There's parking and there's a sufficient grade, I was told today, to make an ADA compliant ramp with maybe one switchback. Was it?

Mr. Swain: Well, I'm not an engineer. Well, the top of Cocoplum is 18 feet high down to sea level, but the walkway or whatever we wind up building wouldn't be at sea level. It would probably be about four feet, something like that. So that would be a 14-foot slope and it's about 200 feet. So that's about 7%.

Mr. Menendez: Which is ADA compliant.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Before you assume that something's ADA compliant, I'll speak in a minute.

Mr. Swain: I'm just saying.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You said something, and you're a lawyer, so you're going to be stuck with it.

Mr. Swain: We believe it's ADA compliant.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You think, you may, you hope.

Mr. Menendez: We believe it's ADA compliant.

Mr. Swain: But maybe we need to put a switchback. Maybe we need to put a couple switchbacks.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You have 216 inches of rise. Okay.

Mr. Swain: Divided by 200.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The rise for any ramp run must be maximum 30 inches. I'm going to leave this in very capable hands.

Mr. Swain: Yeah, I would do that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Our calculator on the end of the dais here. But then you also have to have the 60-inch area for the wheelchair to be able to turn around. But before we even get to that question, you need to ask yourself, are there going to be any amenities and services down there that are going to be available to the abled body that are not available to the disabled? You must provide ADA accessibility if you have something different to offer.

Mr. Swain: At the moment, we haven't proposed anything, but it's in its infantile stages. Like the Mayor said, we should do a feasibility study and figure out where we're going with this.

Mr. Menendez: Very conceptual, but it's...

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I think just taking a measuring tape and then putting those measurements in the very capable hands of our City Manager will be able to get the answer. Now, I have traversed that area. I've carried my bike down. I've gone underneath. I think it's a very cool area. I'm one of those kids that would go out and exploring all kinds of areas. And I haven't changed. As many people know, I haven't changed. So, and I'm not about to change it. I hope I never do change because I love exploring areas and hiking and so forth. And the day that I'm stuck to where I can't get around very much, I'm not going to be a happy camper. So, I have explored it. I think it's a fantastic area. Let's assume for a moment that it's not feasible to do a ramp there. And the feasibility is going to be determined by this gentleman down at the end with a simple set of measurements. You can also have, you know, have you thought about doing like you were going to do at Blue Road, a place where, you know, the kayaks can pause, disembark, and get back on? Yeah, that's feasible.

Mr. Swain: Yeah, the canoe launch was always part of my conceptual plan.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's not a launch. It's not a launch.

Mr. Menendez: A landing area.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Not a launch. It's where the disabled can also row on up, disembark, you know. I don't know if fishing is allowed there or not. It's a pretty wide section, so it's not that much. Picnic if they want.

Mr. Swain: Yeah, well, you were down there, so you know. That's really, you don't realize it when you're driving by, but it's a big piece of property.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's cool.

Mr. Swain: It really is. It's a long, long piece of property. And there would be room to do some kind of ADA compliant canoe access. I mean, probably the same thing you're doing at Blue Road open space. You know, whatever you would come up with, Blue Road, which has much more limited space than Cocoplum does. So, whatever we could do there, we could also do at Cocoplum.

Mayor Lago: So, let's do this. So, let's, Mr. Manager, will you do us a favor? Will you have a meeting next week with these two gentlemen? And I can either attend or the Vice Mayor can attend. The reason why I say the Vice Mayor, not over anybody else, is because she's familiar with the area and the ADA requirements. I'd rather have her attend, as a matter of fact.

Mr. Swain: Can I make a suggestion? When I have told this project to countless numbers of people, something really excited about it, and usually when I give it to them, they're like, yeah, that sounds

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pretty good. And then I get them to go down there. And it's a completely different thing. They're like, well, this is great.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It is.

Mayor Lago: I hadn't really realized how interesting it was because I had gone down there, but I hadn't gone underneath the bridge and gone the other side.

Mr. Menendez: Right.

Mayor Lago: It's accessible from both sides. It's very interesting. So, I just want to understand, number one, is it reasonable? And number two, what is the cost? I would like to do that over the next week, 10 days, two weeks, because we're in budget season. I'd like to know if it's going to be, you know, \$25,000 feasibility study, \$15,000, \$20,000, \$40,000, whatever the cost is going to be. I want to bring it before the Commission, before our next Commission meeting, and say, look, this is what we're looking at. Okay? Because this is something we've got a budget for, and we can start planning for. Once I get it into a design, then we're really in good shape. But it's going to take- We got to get there first. We got to walk. So, can we schedule a meeting?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor. The next Commission meeting is 9/10. It's a little tight. Can we do it in the October meeting?

Mayor Lago: That's fine.

Mayor Lago: But I'd like to have at least a meeting the next week, the next 10 days. And then we can decide, you know, moving forward a plan of action so we can get in the Commission for October.

City Manager Iglesias: Okay? As you know, Mayor, the problem there is the elevation.

Mayor Lago: I got it. But we'll have an idea of what the costs are going to be. And maybe the DCM and ACM can kind of already start projecting a little bit of the cost of what it would be to do a feasibility study, maybe a preliminary design before we even engage in spending real money.

City Manager Iglesias: It's a beautiful area.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, it is. It's fun. We can just go there with a measuring tape, too. You could probably get that zip before we spend money.

Mr. Swain: The reason I brought that up about show and tell is I was Mr. City Manager. I was going to invite you to personally go, the three of us or the four of us, to actually meet at Cocoplum

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and visit the site and go through it. And we can tell you all our ideas and you can tell us if we're crazy or not or whatever.

Vice Mayor Anderson: With a measuring tape.

Mr. Swain: Whenever your schedule is.

Mayor Lago: Let's schedule a meeting for next week.

Mr. Swain: Okay.

Mayor Lago: In the Manager's office. We'll do it early in the morning, at 8 o'clock, 15–20-minute meeting so we can put a plan of action together. Okay.

Mr. Swain: Excellent.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, gentlemen. I appreciate it.

Mr. Swain: Thank you. Can I speak a minute on Ruth, Bryan, Owen Park also?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mr. Swain: So, when I was on the Waterway Board, my focus on the Waterway Board was public access. And there were four spots that I saw. Ruth Bryan Owen, Blue Road Open Space, the Underline, Riviera and US-1 and Cocoplum. And I'm going to jump to Riviera really quick. When the Underline did their preliminary design for their pedestrian bridge, their infamous pedestrian bridge, they had it right over where the existing makeshift canoe launches. So, I met with Underline, and I got them to move it to its present location, which is closer to US-1. And then, thanks to Vice Mayor Anderson, she got the county to agree that they would put in a proper canoe launch. Who knows when they're going to get the money to actually do it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, yeah. Now you know why I take a particular position on certain impact fees because we never see the money again.

Mr. Swain: Yeah. So hopefully we will get that. So, we've got, we're working on three or four. In 2021, when I brought up the Ruth Bryan Owen improvements, I just brought up that one because it's really the easiest of the four to get done. There's not a lot to do there. But one thing, that's my personal, my neighborhood park. I'm a fifth of a mile from it. I can see it from my backyard. So, I have a vested interest in that park. And Ruth Bryan Owen Park was originally part of a hardwood hammock that spanned all the way down past Blue Road. I don't know how far down, but past Blue Road and east all the way towards Coconut Grove. This massive hammock. And it was called the Devil's Den back then. Nobody really wanted to go in it. And when Merrick bought the property, I only brought two copies of it. This is what it looked like. This is a photo of Bird Road

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and Granada. So, my hope is that the city, that there's not hardly any place if anywhere else in the city, that is what it looked like when Merrick bought it. Everything's been developed.

Mayor Lago: Not everything.

Mr. Swain: In this, except for there's this one spot.

Mayor Lago: And there's one spot next to my house in San Amaro. That is...

Mr. Swain: Okay, so there's two.

Mayor Lago: That's an entire block.

Mr. Swain: But that block, okay. I know you're talking about Pinewood, yeah. Which I grew up in that. I grew up 40 years ago running around in there.

Mr. Swain: So, I would love the city to agree, rather than to develop it, to keep it basically a natural hardwood hammock. And then all you really need to do is, like I said back in 2021, put in the canoe launch.

Mayor Lago: But let's do this. Let's have the meeting with the Manager. Let's put together a plan of action for both of these projects.

Mr. Swain: Perfect.

Mayor Lago: And we'll take a look at it. All right.

Mr. Swain: Yes.

Mayor Lago: All right.

Mr. Swain: Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: No, thank you for being so patient.