

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-1
October 24, 2023
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 Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Nina Burgos, Cultural Development Board Member

Agenda Item 2-1 [11:08 a.m.]

A Resolution of the Coral Gables Cultural Development Board recommending the City Commission to commit to completing Ponce Circle Park renovations in time for the city 's centennial; further recommending the renovation to include infrastructure to support installation of future artworks in the park (unanimously recommended by the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 7 to 0).

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item 2-1, which is time certain for 10:30. I apologize for being half an hour late.

Arts and Cultural Specialist Cathers: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Commissioners, Catherine Cathers, Arts and Cultural Specialist with the city. And we have this morning Board Member, Cultural Development Board Member Nina Burgos, who is going to speak on behalf of the board for this item.

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*Agenda Item 2-1 – Resolution of Cultural Development Board recommending
The Commission commit to completing Ponce Circle Park renovations*

[Date]

1

Ms. Burgos: Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Commissioners, City Attorney, thank you so much for having me here this morning. The board asked me to come speak before you, because we proposed a resolution through the Cultural Development Board to recommend the City Commission to commit to completing Ponce Circle Park renovations in time for the City Centennial. We think it would be an amazing thing to have Ponce Circle Park renovated and ready for the Centennial. We also recommended the renovation to include infrastructure to support installation of future artworks by the park. Now we understand that it may not necessarily have infrastructure for permanent artwork, but the board has discussed it to open the possibility of temporary work with the Plaza across the street from Ponce Circle Park. I think it would be amazing to have, and the board actually thinks, it would be amazing to have sculptures in that park would be a great area for the city to have people come and look at the art that we have here and further to beautify the city. So, we'd love for that to happen in time, and we welcome any future sculptural installations as I know that the city is doing as much as possible to add more art into the city. I'm here to answer any questions or anything that you want to discuss regarding this issue.

Mayor Lago: First off, thank you to the board as-a-whole for the resolution and for your engagement and for your continued commitment to the city. I think that is the intent of the Commission to ensure that the park is completed. When you talk about art, I mean its my understanding and I presented to the Commission and they approved it, a budget for a Frank Stella purchase, which is probably the most important living American artist in the world, and hopefully that sculpture will be showcased at Ponce Circle Park, which I think is a perfect place for its location, or maybe, I don't know of any other park, maybe Merrick Park, but I think that's the appropriate location, especially when you talk about all the sculptures that are already adjacent to it, as a result of Agave. So, I think that you have the support of the Commission. Obviously, I think it's a multi-phased project.

Ms. Burgos: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Based on funding, and I think we're commencing that, and the Manager can give a little further color in regard to that, but this is moving forward. This is moving forward, and I think one of the biggest issues that we're going to have is accessibility to the park. I once had an idea, a very far-fetched idea to figure out a way to connect that park. I know I gave the previous zoning director a lot of heartache, because that was George Merrick's vision, but if that park was connected to either east or the west, I know that it would get a more use, a lot more traffic that would require redirecting traffic, different options, but it's something that I wish we would have considered at one point, because I think it would have gotten a lot more traffic. Imagine that park connected to, for example,

Agave, or connected to the bank across the street. Yes, you would have had to divert traffic, but it can be done. Where there's a will there's a way. My biggest concern is the amount of money we're about to spend on this park and the fact that it doesn't get that much use.

Ms. Burgos: Right. That's part of our concern as well, sir. Our hope is that with adding art in and other things to kind of engage the community, then that park would get the use that it should get, and it needs, and especially with the Plaza across the street and everything else. It's a great area for engagement with the community.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: In addition to the art, we've also had several requests for a band shell and music performances because of the interplay between physical art and musical performances, we've seen it with the moon, we've seen it this past weekend. I hadn't seen that many people packed into that little space, and it looked like a little space, because we were shoulder to shoulder with the children in a line for the pumpkin patch, for the bounce house, for the face painting, and so forth. So, it's a really robust area. We also could use more shade trees. The Manager, I think you have the marching directions from this Commission that we want it to happen and what can we do to at least achieve some of these milestones. If we're not able to complete it, get as much done as possible.

City Manager Iglesias: Excuse me Vice Mayor. The first phase is accessibility to the park, an excessive amount of asphalt, very difficult to get there. So, phase one that we're starting early next year will be all the right of way work where we are slowing down traffic and providing much more accessibility to it; and phase two, if it does get budgeted would be the internal part of the park, which we have a mini-Central Park concept with art and uses at each corner. So, we are planning on starting that project early next year, as far as the civil work.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to just add to what the Vice Mayor said. I think the last year or so, we realized that through programming that park can really be activated. The Pumpkin Patch event, to try to find parking within a five-block radius and it was almost impossible. Moon over the Gables, it was covered by the media, so I think a lot of it comes down to programming, that's why when a conceptual design for the park, I brought to the attention to the administration, we've got to make sure that its accessible for those types of events. Because to close it off, not thinking about being able to bring in whatever equipment they need to activate it is key, but I think it's a jewel. The location is prime for what Coral Gables is all about. I think as we can all see people are really moving into that

area. So, I think just by default and just because of the migration of people to this area of Coral Gables, its something that we should definitely plan properly, accordingly, because I think it's always been a jewel, but it could be really showcase what the city can offer. So, I'm very supportive of getting this done in a timely fashion but doing it well.

Ms. Burgos: Yes, thank you. The board also, I failed to mention before, the board's vision or at least their hope is that Ponce Circle Park could be even a focal point for the Centennial for all the reasons that Commission Menendez mentioned – the location, the history, the activation. So, our hope is that, especially if we can put art in there, both public art and performing arts, it would be an incredible thing for the city. I was at both the Moon event and the Pumpkin Patch recently and it is a really lovely park, and we would be very excited to get more activation, more art in there.

Commissioner Fernandez: I've been talking to Fred and to the City Manager about Ponce Circle Park for years, even before being up here, because I always thought it was one of those places that could really be an accent of Coral Gable and I think at this point we're really also on a clock.

Ms. Burgos: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: And with 18 months, the conversations that I've had with staff, we're not even sure physically if it would be possible to complete all the work of phase one and phase two by the centennial, but I know that the Manager is working on getting phase one completed as quickly as possible and then next year's budget we'll look into funding for phase two. I was happy to see this weekend the new benches that were put in, which were much needed. The old benches were cracking and were just not in good shape, but it was definitely an updated look. If you look at that area and the growth of that area has had, it definitely will increase the use. The Pumpkin Patch was phenomenal. National Night Out was held there this year with our police and we had great turnout by our Police Department there as well. I think the city has been doing a very good job of moving some of our events to that location, because there is, even though you are five blocks away when you are parking, it's easy to get to. It's more of a central location for the rest of the city. It's not 100 percent in our downtown. It's a little offset closer to U.S.-1 has easy access points from all around. So, I think, like the Mayor said, you have the support of this Commission to get this down. That is one of our priorities.

Commissioner Menendez: By the way, sorry to interrupt. For the Manager, the administration, now that I was thinking about it. That park is the Fred B. Hartnett Ponce

Circle Park, if we are able to pull this off for the centennial, I think its important to invite the Hartnett family, there's plenty of them still in our community to be part of the ceremony and marking that special event.

Ms. Burgos: That's a good point. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: What is the will of the Commission? There's a resolution on the table.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: Second.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item G-1.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, just to clarify. The motion was to accept the resolution of the Cultural Development Board.

Mayor Lago: Yes.