

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
June 13, 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)

Daryl Payne
Tom Parker

Agenda Item G-2 [11:27 a.m.]

Presentation by Friends of Gables High
(Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez)

Mayor Lago: Moving back unto time certain, 11:00 a.m., G-2.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you Mayor. Before I bring up, two gentlemen who are very involved in our community, Coral Gables residents, going back to recurring issue that we've dealt with, I think in an amazing way, lead by you Mayor, on many levels is, in our city we are sometimes short of park space, available land and the city has made it a mission of its to find opportunities to increase the number of parks our city has, because we are a growing community and we have a lot of, especially young families coming in, and its what adds to our quality of life, and I think also, in this environment that we live in today, national, state and local, opportunities to cooperate with other local government agencies and community groups is scarce, and I was approached by the Friends of Gables with an idea that they had, and the beautiful part is that there seems to be support, not only the Friends of Gables, the community, but also the School Board,

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and its about the opportunity to take an amazing piece of land that we've sometimes taken for granted and perhaps converting it into one of those crown jewel parks for our community. So, with that, I'd like to bring up to the podium both Daryl Payne and Tom Parker, to address the Commission and the administration and the public about this, I think wonderful opportunity.

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

Mr. Parker: Good morning and thank you for having us. I'm Tom Parker, I live at 419 Camilo Avenue, and I am the Chair of the Friends of Gables High, although, as we are a non-for-profit, we are not here in that capacity, I'm here as a citizen of Coral Gables. And as Mr. Menendez said, we think that Gables High is an amazing location and a potential as a park for the City of Coral Gables. We have been talking to Commissioner Rojas at the School Board, and as you know, the School Board has committed to invest \$46 million dollars into the renovation of the facility. However, that \$46 million is for the facility and not for the perimeter and not for the campus outside, not for landscaping, fencing, etc. And so, our hope is that cooperation between the City of Coral Gables and the School Board can come up with an interlocal agreement that will properly fund renovation of the athletic field, of the fencing, of the landscaping and create the park that Commissioner Menendez just mentioned. So that's why we're here today in support of that, and specifically to begin the process of getting the stakeholders of our community on board, and specifically would propose to you all that you consider hiring Dover Kohl, architectural firm that you all are familiar with, to start the process of getting the vision that each of you have. The Mayor has a vision, Mr. Menendez has a vision, all of us have our ideas to get into, so that we can start to talk to the community about where this park space can go.

Mr. Payne: My name is Daryl Payne, also a former Chair of the Friends of Gables High. I'm a long time Gables resident. I just realized, I think it has been six decades, I go back to 1960s, but I just want to talk a little bit about Gables High and our role in supporting the school and helping the school become really deepen its ties to the community. So, Friends of Gables High was started a few years back, when we realized that city, community leaders, alumni even and parents didn't realize an undiscovered gem we have here. And I picked up the most recent issue of Coral Gables Magazine and you'll see the amazing schools that students are going to from Gables High every year, always three or four of the Ivies: Chicago, Michigan, Virginia, great schools. You can't get a better education anywhere in the state, and people don't realize that. So, we were formed to connect alumni's, students, community leaders, like yourselves, with the school as-a-large. The School Board, as Tom mentioned, has stepped up to the plate, \$46 million-dollar renovation and if you've been on campus, you know it's not even halfway done, but you see what a difference its made. But there are things the School Board is not going to do about the perimeter and bringing the school up to the standards of Coral Gables, the landscaping, the architectural fencing. They are going to commit to a totally renovated gym and you know, driving along LeJeune, that façade needs to be better, and it will be better. We envision that the field space can become, as

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Commissioner Menendez mentioned, a true partnership integrated with the community, Merrick Park, all the new apartments going up there, with the school, obviously continuing to use it, and that space can be used in a way that benefits the school, the students that are there and absolutely the City of Coral Gables. How proud would we all be to be able to drive by that new campus when its done and let Gables residents know, if you want to go to another school, you can, but you have a public school option right here that is unparalleled and one step on the campus our businesses, our new residents coming in will know this is a place I want to go and I want to be. So, we're here to answer any questions. We want to support, we encourage you to put some funds to helping us to develop a site plan with input from everyone, students, schools, cohorts, everyone. We know its worked: Key Biscayne, they've got a compact and you see what they've done with MAST and their field space, and St. Agnus, I'm sorry, not St. Agnus, but the K through 8, Miami Beach has done it. Coral Gables have done some partnerships, but we want to deepen that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I just want to thank you, Mr. Parker, we've met. I think its an excellent vision, but you were instrumental also in helping address some of the residents' concerns and getting that netting moving to prevent the balls from flying across Riviera and into other people's roofs. So, I want to thank you for that. I look forward to looking at this in further detail in the future.

Commissioner Fernandez: This actually came up several times in the School Community Relations Committee over the last few years. The District was the one that was really against use of the fields as a park, so its welcoming to hear that the School Board is now changing the idea. Its an area that doesn't really have a park, so this would be a welcome addition to the neighborhood and it's a very large area, so there's plenty of usability. I'd say its probably the same size as Phillips Park.

Commissioner Menendez: I would say significantly so.

Mr. Parker: And I would like you to know that from a perspective, there is a little bit of competition for this area, so it would be helpful to get moving. I had a long conversation with lead council for the School Board and he mentioned the soccer club on Key Biscayne has to their eyes on this location too, so that was something that the attorney brought up and I just want to mention that we as a community need to move forward and begin these conversations with the School Board and see if there truly can be a great partnership for this location.

Commissioner Menendez: So, my suggestion is, with the help of the administration, the City Attorney's office is, two-pronged; one is, if the Commission is supportive, to have them come back our next Commission meeting with details as to what they mentioned, the gentleman mentioned about Dover Kohl, creating a vision, and what funding source, how much would it be.

Mr. Parker: We do have an initial proposal from Dover Kohl, its \$50,000 for Phase 1, which would include there gathering the vision from the various stakeholders and putting it on paper. I'd be happy to circulate that.

Commissioner Menendez: If my colleagues are comfortable with bringing it back next month with perhaps suggestions from the administration what funding source we can use, unless you have some ideas now, and have it come back, so we can move forward on the vision part, and then at the same time, I think if we can have the administration and the law department also start at least engaging Mari Tere Rojas and the School Board, if this is something that the city wants to embrace, we can move in a coordinated fashion. I leave it up to you all.

Mayor Lago: You are the sponsor of the item, so I mean, why don't we have these two gentlemen, through the Manager, let's put together something so we can have it on the next Commission.

Commissioner Menendez: So, I'll make a motion to have them bring it back next Commission meeting, a plan with regards to Dover Kohl funding source and something that the Commission can approve and bring us also an update with regards to interlocal agreement, perhaps you can sit down with our City Attorney and her staff on the mechanism of an interlocal agreement. That way we keep things moving in an efficient way. We got a first and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: All in favor.

All: Aye.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you gentlemen. See you next month.