

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
September 26, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-2 [10:23:52 a.m.]

A discussion regarding identifying and pursuing a location for an off-leash dog park in Coral Gables. (Sponsored by Commissioner Mena)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Item G-2, Commissioner Mena, dog parks.

Commissioner Mena: So, a lot of our residents have been clamoring for a better option, we have a lot of residents with dogs; they are very passionate about this. There was a change.org petition with thousands of signatures and hundreds of people from Coral Gables. I know that this is an issue that has been percolating for some time and there have been discussions about it in the past. The only option right now is Chapman Park that's obviously very far south and quite a drive for a lot of our residents to make, so I had asked Fred Couceyro to investigate and give us ideas of potential options. One option that had come up – to me there is no sort of ideal option and I think what we try to do is be sensitive to the neighborhoods and not impose on any given residential neighborhood, a dog park maybe in their neighborhood. So, I look at sort of distance from

residential single family homes and – and then obviously the logistics that Fred would have to implement in terms of fencing or whatnot. One suggestion that I had and that we had discussed was Nat Winiker Park, which is if you are not familiar with it, it's sort of under the Metrorail area close to Merrick Park, so it's a commercial area, there is plenty of parking. Fred seems to think that it's central, exactly, and maybe you can describe some of the logistics that it has or doesn't have that might be helpful to you.

Mr. Couceyro: One of the things when we are looking for dog parks and one of the challenges that we as a City has is first off, the size of the park. Obviously, an ideal size for really flourishing dog parks is usually in the two-plus acre area, that's not something we can realistically look at here. There are some dog parks that are around an acre that could work, so one of the things that we are looking at dog sites, sites for dog parks is you have to look at the parking, because of the fact that we don't have any in the City right now, based on the input that we receive from residents, I think it would be a heavily attended area, so you are going to need some parking there. Some of the other logistics you have; you are going to have to have a big enough space because you are going to have to split, you are going to have a big dog area and a small dog area. We have experience with – we do a dog event at Venetian Pool, its coming up actually and we have to separate, we do a morning session for one size dogs and afternoon session for another size dog, because you do have to separate them. One of the challenges of Nat Winiker that you'll find is it's located under a Metrorail station, so grass is always an issue with dog parks that are smaller, because the dogs constantly running on them you wear out the grass. So, when you are looking at also in this location, which is under the Metrorail, there is not a lot of sun there, so when you get a lot of wear and tear the maintenance of growing grass will be a problem.

Commissioner Mena: What about mulch?

[Laughter]

Mr. Couceyro: There are options; there is actually artificial grass that's specifically made for dogs, it's called K-9 Lawn and Doggie Grass, a few vendors that do it. So, you can look at something like that as well in that area. Obviously, you need fencing, you would need resurfacing and there are certain regulations that you would have to use in fence and you have to have double bays on both sides, and then it would be, it's the parking; I know that in that location there is a parking lot over to the east, I'm not sure who owns it, I haven't really researched it.

Commissioner Lago: The County owns it and its rented right now to the Collection.

Mr. Couceyro: OK.

Commissioner Mena: I think there is metered parking in the area as well.

Mr. Couceyro: There is metered parking there as well, but that's a big lot there. I know there is some interest with the Underline and what their designs are, I'm not sure if a dog park is in the plans of that, but that's something that you can look at. It's a little less than an acre in that area, so it could be tight, but if you use it all the way to the back fence there is a possibility.

Commissioner Lago: If I may, there are two things. I want to work with you hand-in-hand. We were supposed to have a public meeting and it was cancelled as a result of the hurricane, we rescheduled it for October 12th, everybody is here to join, Mike and I are going to be there. Two things really quickly; I spoke to you via a resident that brought the idea to me, pump skate park, is that what it called?

Mr. Couceyro: It's a pump track.

Commissioner Lago: Pump track like what they have in Key Biscayne, she said I'd love to be able to have one of those here, and I think they take their son all the way to Key Biscayne to use that. So, that's something that potentially we could do at that park.

Vice Mayor Keon: What is it?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What is it?

Commissioner Lago: It's a pump track, it's pretty cool. Not only for skateboarding, but it's also for scooters.

Mr. Couceyro: It's very popular for scooters, rollerbladers. It's a small sided track, it kind of undulates, they call it pump because you can't really, it's not big enough to peddle, it's just a quick pump and then you coast around it. They had a temporary one in Key Biscayne, they are very successful and the Director reported to me that it was very popular, especially popular with the smaller age children that like to ride on the scooters; scooters turned out to be the number one thing that it was used for.

Commissioner Lago: And the second point, I just brought it up, because I just wanted to get your opinion on that; and the second point was, I know the Manager has been working on scheduling a meeting with a piece of property that will hopefully try to do something. That was set back, because of the hurricane and I think that that also could be an opportunity to do something, either

be passive, either be a small section, or it could be carved out for a dog park, because it has that parking in place, and it's surrounded by commercial property. I don't want to talk too much about it, because there is nothing in detail and the Manager is handling it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Where are you talking about?

Commissioner Lago: It's a piece of property in the City that I'm trying to work on with the Manager to see if we can have the City acquire it, and she is handling the negotiations. She is going to be meeting with the owners, hopefully in the next week or two and then obviously, the same thing was postponed by Irma. I agree with you, I think we need to do something in the near future for the residents, because they are staunch advocates of finding an option. We are going to have that meeting on October 12th, they are passionate about this. I don't have a dog, I'm not crazy about dogs, even though my kids are dying for a dog, but I think there is a big community out there that would love to have an option.

Commissioner Mena: And, it's a great way both the pump track and the dog park; there are great ways to activate parks that otherwise will not ever be active. This park will never be active unless we do something like this that brings people with this type of interest to it. So, that's a big part of what I like about it; and to your point, I think we should explore any options. What I'd like to do is have Fred sort of come up with maybe a little more detail on what we could do there. Obviously continue to investigate the other issue that you are looking into and just come up with a solution that works for our residents.

Commissioner Lago: The great thing about that Nat Winiker Park is that it has natural shade, even though I know...it can't grow grass, but it's a perfect location for something, some sort of programming that's right now is just empty.

Vice Mayor Keon: There used to be housing along there.

Commissioner Lago: Yes, they knocked it down...

Commissioner Quesada: I love the location of the idea.

Mr. Couceyro: There was that housing on U.S.-1, that's what the park used to serve...

Vice Mayor Keon: That park served that community. Are you sure that that – when you look at the plan for the Underline, isn't there some planned used for that piece or no?

Mr. Couceyro: There's been several plans that I've seen and really when it comes to the areas in our jurisdiction...

Vice Mayor Keon: Is that the City of Coral Gables or is it County?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: In terms of who owns, we'll double-check. I believe the City owns that, but we'll double-check.

Vice Mayor Keon: I know we have control of it, but I'm not sure who owns it and also because of its proximity to the Metrorail there are some restrictions on any of the development along there, so I don't really know. Where are we with the County on West Matheson? That is supposed to be redeveloped as an off leash dog park and I know that there has been a lot of contention over the entrance into the area, because people use Hammock Lakes and we know that the County has said that we don't put entrances to regional parks on residential streets, which it is, so there was supposed to be developing the entrance through off of Old Cutler, through Matheson Hammock Park, but there is a whole group of people back there, the County is developing that as an off leash dog park, it was the next one up from Chapman Field, so where are we?- and maybe we need to make people aware of it and we need to work with the County, because there is plenty of parking.

Commissioner Mena: This is still very far south for people north of U.S.-1 and in the north Gables, it's quite a trek to go to take your dog out to the park.

Commissioner Lago: Like I mentioned yesterday, we are talking about the Underline because the Vice Mayor brought it up, we are going to have multiple meetings with the Underline; the Underline is coming to us asking for a funding strategy. We can always work in a dog park; we can always work in a pump track. Again, there are ways to program what this community needs into the Underline, that's the whole point. If you are coming asking us for millions of dollars and a funding strategy to figure it out, if Nat Winiker is the right place for a dog park, then let's put a dog park there; and I think they'll be lenient, they are asking for millions, they are not asking for five dollars.

Commissioner Mena: They'll figure out how to make it work.

Commissioner Lago: They'll figure it out.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There is a great introduction to this theme and we are going to look into it, the dog park.

Vice Mayor Keon: You talked with the County as to where they are with that, follow up with the County on that.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I haven't talked recently, so let us get back into where they are with that discussion.

Commissioner Lago: Can we put like a schedule, because we've had multiple discussions on this. The Manager is going to talk to a land owner now in the next week or two weeks and I'm going to be in that meeting hopefully. We have now Nat Winiker Park, we have what the Vice Mayor brought up right now; is there a way we can put like maybe a month or two months to come back and say, look, we've exhausted all these options – I want to be able to on October 12th say, we had a discussion at the Commission, but we are going to have some sort of presentation. I look to see what other cities are doing in regards to dog parks; what are other cities doing?- how are they meeting the needs of the residents?- what's the optimal size?- what's the amount of parking that we need, just educate. I really don't know.

Commissioner Mena: And this is the last thing I'll say about this. It doesn't necessarily have to be perfect; we've got to do something though. So, we may not have the perfect solution, but let's do something anyway that our residents can at least utilize and then have an option that's better than what they have now, which is next to nothing.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Commissioner.

[End: 10:35:10 a.m.]