City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
November 18, 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
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff
City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Director of Greenspace Management, Deena Bell-Llewellen

Public Speaker(s)
Mary Powell

Agenda Item F-4 [Start: 6:00 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing City Staff to move forward with the development of a dog park on the city-owned parcel located at 520 University Drive, at the corner of Segovia Street and University Drive; providing for design parameters including landscape buffers, screening, and materials; and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: So, we're going to be talking about item F-4. We are going to open it up to public hearing, but first, I want to have our Vice Mayor speak a little bit about the item that she sponsored. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, as you can see from the audience in the room there's a lot of support for dog parks in our community and I was looking for additional space so that we have dog parks sprinkled throughout our city and people can be able to walk to them. So, I spoke to some of you, others of you heard through the grapevine about this project across from the library or proposed

project across from the library, and I handed it off to staff and individuals who have worked their tails off making sure that we had support for the item before we moved forward. So, staff have a general overview of the area. It was actually something that I drew as a conceptual idea of where we're going to do it. I had asked for it to be brought up on screen. And then staff will develop a professional drawing. This is my handiwork, I apologize, but it gives the idea that there is a patch of land that has a heavily shaded area on one end for small dogs and we can put some K-9 grass in there, in that area, and then have two large dog areas where you have real grass and it can alternate back and forth. You close one to let the grass recover from the activities of the large dogs and then open the other one and rotate them back and forth. I saw this when I was travelling in California and it seems to work extremely well. There is a buffer area between residential homes and stuff that is going to be like a little mini forest by Deena, that's going to screen if from the residential area. There would be a hedge around the exterior of the fencing, so people driving by don't see necessarily that this is a dog park. This is for the neighbors. This is for the neighborhood to be able to walk there and enjoy it. So, Ms. Bell-Llewellyn would you like to make some additional comments on this.

Greenspace Management Director: Good evening. I am Greenspace, Director of Public Works for Greenspace Management. I'm a landscape architect and as the Vice Mayor said, this was her concept that is very basic at this point. The small dog area is going to be separated on the southwest side of the property. I guess it's located at Cadima and University, it's the corner that it is located. And then to the northeast side will be the two separate large dog areas. This green space measures approximately 400 feet by 150 feet. So, it's really sizable enough to have these different elements and components. The fencing is going to be the black Coral Gables standard dog park fencing that you would see at the Underline. It's a wire fence that's tight enough to keep the small dogs from going through the fence and we might recommend that it be buried so that the dogs can't dig below the fence. Landscaping-wise – I see this buffer zone. It's going to be 25 feet wide of buffer zone between the fencing and the residential homes to the south, a combination of native plants that form a multi-layered buffer. Like we might have Gumbo-Limbo, Buttonwood, Stoppers, Wild Coffee, something like that that brings the Florida native plant scheme into here and creates just a really thick buffer. The large dog area will be natural grass, that I'm sure will have to be switched out according to where. And the small dog area will be the artificial turf made especially for dog parks. And then of course we're talking about adding irrigation into this to make sure all the planting is maintained and really healthy for a long time.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to add one other aspect about this and that is, it is going to be funded by private donations and there's been a lot of discussion between me and individuals that are willing to contribute towards this, and we are working on a budget. So right now, this resolution is to give staff the green light to be able to move forward on the plans going forward. So, Mayor, I know that we have public comment on this, based upon the number of folks in the room.

Mayor Lago: So, before we have public comment and I ask everybody to be as concise as possible. I think we have a lot of people that are going to be speaking today. I want to give credit to the Vice Mayor. For years before she was elected, we had had conversations and also Meg Daley, who's

here from the Underline. If you are not aware of what's happening here in our city and what she has been at the helm of, it's going to be transformational and I'm telling you get ready for what's coming. The Underline is a three-mile linear park here in the city that is going to have a dog park that is completed, that is about to open. That's something that I've worked on for ten years and the Vice Mayor and Commissioner Lara have been instrumental in making sure that it gets delivered to the community but getting back to what I was talking about. We talked a lot about dog parks; the community came out. We tried to fit dog parks in existing parks, fencing areas off, retrofitting existing parks. It just didn't work. So, my understanding is that right now we have how many, including the Underline on the way?

Vice Mayor Anderson: The Underline is on the way, we have one at Salvadore Park, there's that one off of Ponce that is there. We don't know what's happening with the property yet, but that one will be a future dog park. There are tiny ones inside of some developments. That's where we're at right now.

Mayor Lago: So, the goal of the Commission is to try to open up a few more dog parks here in the city and there's going to be an announcement pretty soon on something that I've been working on for the last decade on a big piece of property that's going to come into the city's hands from the private sector. We should be announcing that next month, Mr. Manager, God willing, and its going to be a transformational piece of property. It's going to be the largest piece of property in private hands that is left and it will be the largest green space probably that the city has ever accepted, almost six acres. And that is something that I've been working on for a long time and we're very, very close to finalizing. I think the negotiations of the terms are finalized. Now, we're just in the process of papering it up between lawyers. So, it's not going to cost the city a dollar, just development rights. So, why am I telling you this? I'm telling you this because you have elected officials that are listening. We've been working on green spaces. When I got elected 13 years ago, we had one green space in downtown, which was Ponce Circle Park. Now we have seven green spaces, many of them that are coming, that are under construction or that are already programmed and as properties are being finished, the parks will be developed. As you've seen, we've opened a litany of different parks in the residential neighborhoods. The latest one that we opened was on Blue Road, which is exceptional. We also opened one which is the Dorothy Thomson Park on Bird Road, and we continue to look for sites, and we also bought a large piece adjacent to Salvadore, which if you haven't seen that big piece of green space, we were able to acquire that piece of land. So, I tell you this and I bring this up, because we need eyes and ears on the ground. So, if you see properties that are, for example, adjacent to an existing park that come up for sale, call the city. If you know a friend that is going to sell a piece of land, contact the city, contact my office, the Vice Mayor, Commissioner Lara, contact the Manager's office. Let us know before somebody else scoops it up, because we are looking for parks, but there are guidelines and our Parks Director can explain that to you later. It's got to be within a certain distance where we don't have parks. So, we are looking for green space. We want to continue to buy green space. It's a big priority. So, with that being said, Mr. Clerk, how many public comments do we have?

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, so far, I've only received one.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Perfect. No problem. That is amazing. Can we have that person who is going to come and speak.

City Clerk Urquia: Mary Powell.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: They are very well organized.

Mayor Lago: Yes. This is what I like. I love this. I love this.

Ms. Powell: Good evening, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners.

Mayor Lago: With that being said.

Ms. Powell: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: I can imagine that you are representing everyone, correct.

Ms. Powell: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So that the three minutes won't apply to you, so take your time.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You can breathe.

Ms. Powell: But I've been practicing and timing myself.

Mayor Lago: The Commission is really grateful for the fact that you guys are so organized. Thank you.

Ms. Powell: Thank you. And City Attorney, I don't know if I missed you. So, my name is Mary Powell, and I live at 3267 Riviera Drive. I'd like to begin with a simple look at where we are today as a community. Coral Gables is home to 70 city-owned parks, 26 of which allow dogs, and only one offering an off-leash area. Now, I do know that you mentioned some other parks, but I'm talking about just the ones that we physically own and are opened by the residents here. I understand what you were saying earlier. So, it says for a city of more than 50,000 residents, many of whom are dog owners, that number is striking. It clearly shows that we have an opportunity to better meet the needs of our residents. What's even more striking is how strongly the community feels about this need. In just the past five days, more than 225 residents have signed a petition, and I've given it to the City Clerk via email, as well as Rhonda, so that you guys have it on record. Some of those supporters are here tonight. If you're here in support, would you please kindly stand. Thank you all.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you all.

Mayor Lago: The only people who are not standing are staff. It's a day of firsts. It's a day of firsts non-stop. Okay.

Ms. Powell: I want to connect this moment to something Mayor Lago has emphasized in the city's 100th anniversary reflections. Coral Gables has always been shaped by bold, community-driven ideas, ideas that honor our past, while investing thoughtfully in our future. You spoke of generations of leaders who never compromised on values and who understood the importance of investing in the quality of life that makes Coral Gables extraordinary. Creating a permanent dog park reflects that same vision, a small project with a meaningful, lasting impact. Vice Mayor Anderson also said something very important. Dogs need exercise too and walking around the block isn't going to do it. She's right. A purpose-built, off-leash space isn't just convenient, it's necessary for safety, health, and community connection. This isn't a divided issue. It's one where residents are showing extraordinary unity. They've asked for this. They've signed for this, and they've shown up for this. City Manager Iglesias has said proudly that Coral Gables is a small city that works like a big city. To that end, a well-designed, centrally located dog park is precisely the kind of quality-of-life investment that great cities make. This is the right project in the right place, at the right time, and so tonight on behalf of the more than 225 residents who signed this petition, the many supporters in this room and the countless neighbors who will benefit from this amenity, I respectfully ask you to vote in favor of creating a permanent, thoughtfully designed, off-leash dog park at this site. Thank you.

[Applause]

Ms. Powell: I did just want to add. We did have other people that wanted to be here, but when the time changed unfortunately lost some of our older residents who wanted to support, and we lost some of our friends that have kids to soccer. Sorry, it was for a good reason, we understand.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, we would have had all the seats filled, which is what you're trying to tell me.

Ms. Powell: Yes ma'am.

Mayor Lago: Don't worry, my kids are at soccer right now. I know. So, Vice Mayor, before you take the floor again. Listen, I'm a big believer that dog parks are essential. We are changing the way that we do business in the neighborhoods, especially when it comes to parks. I want to buy as much land as possible and with that comes people want to have their dogs to be able to enjoy these parks, but it's got to be the right use. We've had this conflict, and you've dealt with it and so have you, where people want to take their dogs, certain people are following the rules, some people have not, and I'm not even talking about the people who have dogs. I'm talking about the people who don't have dogs, and we get into this conflict. I think through the leadership of the Vice Mayor, I think we have a solution and she's worked incredibly hard and I want to thank you again for your hard work on this, because sometimes its very difficult to bridge the gap when people don't want to see something happen or see us evolve, they have concerns. Just like we did with the

sidewalks at Alhambra where we were able to get the sidewalks on Alhambra, those three blocks of sidewalks done, it took time. We had to knock on the doors, explain to them, we went with staff, we sat down, and I think this is what you've done here and that's a prime example of why we have so much support. And I think the big thing for me is seeing friends like Sam, who are here with us, people who live in the neighborhood, people who are not only are potentially use the dog park, but are people who are engaged in the neighborhood, people who have an understanding of what the neighborhood really wants. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to add to your statement about land. This centrally located for folks between like Bird and Coral Way. We are looking for properties up around Venetia Terrace. We need properties in other locations, God willing, you are successful on the other piece of property. There's plenty of space there for another dog park there. The idea is to have something walkable, so you don't have to load your dog in a car and have to drive necessarily to a dog park. So, the Underline is going to be another fabulous amenity where this socialization can happen. It was very, very apparent during Covid that people were meeting and letting their dogs run loose in parks that were not supposed to be dog parks, but the social interaction was not just beneficial for the dogs, it was extremely beneficial for the people there. The social connection between neighbors was immense and I think healing for the neighborhoods. So, I'm hoping that this can help us all work together and have a better community. So, thank you for being here. I'll move it. It's up to you to second it.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, can I read it into the record.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh yes, true, minor details.

City Attorney Suarez: F-4 is a Resolution of the City Commission authorizing City Staff to move forward with the development of a dog park on the city-owned parcel located at 520 University Drive, at the corner of Segovia Street and University Drive; providing for design parameters including landscape buffers, screening, and materials; and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: Yes. I wanted to say, and it's been an extraordinary day of having the residents come together in a way that we haven't seen in a long time.

Mayor Lago: 760 Ponce.

Commissioner Lara: Exactly. Right where you have passionate residents who are very dedicated, respectful and committed to try and improve the community they love, they live, not only for themselves, but for their neighbors. And so, you mentioned sidewalks, right, so one of the things about sidewalks is its all about connectivity, so the community becomes a smaller one even as we increase the number of people that we meet and that we interact with, it becomes smaller,

ironically. And the Vice Mayor made an excellent observation as well, because it's a sense of community for the people that go to the parks with their dogs. Sure, the dogs are going to socialize, and they get to know their neighbors too, but the people who are dog owners are going to be also socializing in a way that the city always has room and needs to improve and increase. And I think that Ms. Powell's points were really well put during the public comments that sense of community goes all the way back to the days of George Merrick and that's what makes us unique, and makes us stand above the rest is that we have residents who don't just live in a great city, but because they live in the city they make the city a great city, and I know that each and every one of us is very proud to call Coral Gables home. So, I applaud my colleagues who have been here so much longer than I have and have accomplished so much for the betterment of the city. So, thank you and thank you very much for all you've done.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner. As you can tell, he's been doing a great job since he got elected and you can tell you have your elected officials here who are putting their best foot forward on all these issues. So, I want to commend both of you. Thank you again. You have a motion on the floor; would you like to make a second.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, no further public comment, no comment from staff. Can we have a vote please.

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Absent

Commissioner Fernandez: Absent

Mayor Lago: Thank you for this opportunity. A lot of great things are happening in the city, as we've told you, and I want to thank you for being engaged. This is what I hope, and I wish and I say at every single Commission meeting, I say, show up, give us your opinions, even if it's contrary to the way we're voting. At the end of the day, this is what makes Coral Gables special. So, I want to thank you all. God bless and God bless the United States of America.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

[Applause]

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.