

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
August 25, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli

Vice Mayor Vince Lago

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Michael Mena

Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Diego Rodriguez

Agenda Item F-3 [10:42 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida, authorizing the City Manager to negotiate an Interlocal Agreement between the City of Coral Gables and Miami-Dade County relating to the installation of a pedestrian gate in Snapper Creek Lake Parkway.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Item F-3.

City Attorney Ramos: F-3 is a resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida, authorizing the City Manager to negotiate an Interlocal Agreement between the City of Coral Gables and Miami-Dade County relating to the installation of a pedestrian gate at Snapper Creek Parkway. Mr. ACM and Ms. Levi-Garcia can explain some more.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, members of the -- Ed Santamaria, Assistant City Manager, Operations and Infrastructure. Before you is F-3. As the City Attorney just mentioned, it's regarding the -- an interlocal agreement between Miami-Dade County and the City for the installation of a gate along the Snapper Creek Lakes Parkway, which is located adjacent to the Snapper Creek Lakes neighborhood and the Snapper Creek Canal. This item has been in discussion for some time, probably about a year and a half, almost two years. And essentially, it revolves around the security concerns of the Snapper Creek Lakes neighborhood with regards to access to their neighborhood that is afforded through the Snapper Creek Lake Parkway at all hours of the day and night. The residents have expressed a desire to be able to curb the presence of criminal activity or suspicious individuals during overnight hours, and there were several meetings that were held in connection to this request. The last meeting that was held on July -- sometime in July of this year, involved Miami-Dade County Parks & Recreation, Commissioner Suarez from Miami-Dade County was there, Vice Mayor Lago was present and a number of residents from the neighborhood. And this meeting led to the -- a memo being released by the County on July 9. I prepared a memoranda that discusses this memo. I will provide a copy to the Clerk so that it can be entered into the record. You all received copies last week. Essentially, this memo outlines that the -- there should be an interlocal agreement that would allow for the installation of this gate, and it provides for certain conditions that need to be met. We believe that this is something we should move forward with because it addresses the immediate concern of the neighbors in connection to securing (INAUDIBLE). The conditions that are outlined in this memo are that the installation of the gates be by the City. In this case, the installation will be done by Snapper Creek Lakes. That the fence/gate shall remain open from sunrise to sunset; that there be ADA accessibility provided for public access; that there will be no self-closing mechanism at the gate; that the gateway and the gate shall be clearly marked for public access. In fact, it's very well

marked right now because it's part of the Old Cutler Trail, and so that signage should remain. We recommend that the County modify it to indicate that it will be closed from sunrise to sunset; that the City provide fence/gate plans from County review. That has already been done by Snapper Creek Lakes. They have reviewed it; further formal review may be required. That the pedestrian bridge above Snapper Creek Canal be open at all times without gates. This was in accordance to our own City Resolution 2016-131. The gate will not be at the pedestrian bridge. And that there shall be no restrictions to public access or travel on public right-of-way. Also, that the party responsible for locking and locking the gate must be specified. In this case, the party responsible would be the Snapper Creek Lakes Neighborhood Association or the special taxing district. They do have guards that are available to provide the service, and they would be solely responsible for locking and unlocking the gates during -- in accordance to park operating hours. In this email, the County also mentions the potential transfer of the Snapper Creek Lakes Parkway to the City as a potential consideration. We believe right now that that would muddy -- potentially muddy the waters, and it is our recommendation that we, at this time, move forward with the initiative regarding the gate and leave the transfer of the parkway to further deliberations. There are some considerations as well that I'd like to bring to your attention that I outlined in the memo; that the trail and the parkway provide connectivity between Old Cutler Road and Red Road, so there may be some public opposition to their closing in accordance to standard operating hours. But then again, the County has authorized this closure. We note that this consideration could be resolved by something that we will discuss on F-5, Item F-5, which is that the County should complete the missing trail segment of the Old Cutler trail that is just south of Snapper Creek Road and that would connect the end of the trail there to Red Road, which would provide continuity for this trail along the entire length of the trail and avoid having to divert it through the residential streets of the Snapper Creek neighborhood. So, that, in a nutshell, is what we're looking at. We already have an interlocal agreement draft, and we would be ready to present it to the County Attorney's Office for their review, should we be directed to do so. Any questions?

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. ACM. I appreciate it.

Commissioner Keon: I have one question about the...

Vice Mayor Lago: Could I --? Before we move in -- as the sponsor of this item or resolution, I'd like to give a little bit of more background.

Commissioner Keon: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Lago: We've been working on this for about a year and a half with the residents. And one of the items that I think is important that we have to mention is I know that all of you have received probably close to over 60 emails from the last time -- I stopped checking last night. About 60 emails from residents in support of this resolution that I'm sponsoring today. Just to touch on some points that were brought up by the ACM in reference to F-5 is another resolution that I'm supporting in regards to the finishing the Old Cutler Trail bicycle path. You're talking about a three-fourths to a mile bike path that, as the ACM will tell you, has been in discussions for over two -- you know, probably almost 16 years, since 2004. I've already reached out to the TPO, as your -- as the representative for the City of Coral Gables. And I will be making that a priority. We need to reach out and see if we can get some SUN Trail funding, see if we can get some TPO funding, and make sure that it's included in the next five-year plan and comes to fruition. Sixteen years is long enough. And this would cure the issue of anyone having to cut through Snapper Creek altogether. And Mr. ACM can verify that. In reference to F-4, we will be deferring that potentially for the next Commission meeting, if not further. It all depends on how F-3 ends today. So, in reference to F-3, after many meetings and a pretty significant meeting that the ACM attended, along with Commissioner Suarez, who I want to compliment him and his staff for doing such a wonderful job. Our Chief Hudak was there, members of the Parks Department, members of the County. It was a very down-to-business meeting where, after such a long time, we were able to really, you know, listen to the residents and understand their concerns. The residents are requesting the closure of the gate area for the safety of their community. According to many residents, as you can tell by the 60 emails that you received yesterday, there have been multiple car break-ins, home burglaries, stolen vehicles, animal sacrifices and other suspected criminal

activity, including finding a set of home invasion criminal tools. Numerous home security cameras have captured roaming thieves on many occasions at all hours of the night searching for unlocked vehicles and other criminal opportunities. There is a great concern in the community, and it is only a matter of time before criminals come into contact with a resident or one of their children and potentially it turns violent. Criminals have been potentially -- have potentially undetected access into the community through the park access. Snapper Creek has incurred the expenses of Coral Gables off-duty police patrolling for up to 12 hours a night, and added a 24-hour roving guard. But with the gate open, the incidents have continued. The association -- and this is one of the items that we negotiated -- is proposing to fund oversight and be responsible for the construction of the gate and its security. Extending the Old Cutler bike trail will prevent people who ride bike to these safer trail options and would provide safe passage. I give you my promise that in the TPO, that is something I'm going to continue to work on and ensure we can deliver. And I want to just bring one last thing to your attention. We already -- we've already done this in another area of the City, and that's Monegro. That's a project that I helped sponsor with the residents in that neighborhood, and it took four years to bring to fruition. I reached out to one of the individuals who lives in that neighborhood, who's been kind of the individual who's -- who brought everyone together and helped us, you know, really deliver on Monegro. And I asked him how were things going. And he wrote me an email. He said, "Good evening. The structures have been fantastic. They really beautify the neighborhood. We went from dirt and rocks to a really pretty gate. This helped immensely with the trash. I haven't seen any trash near the outlets since the gates were installed. The gates also help with suspicious activity. I see much fewer people that I don't know in our neighborhood. There are actually many, many families that are out now, and I think everyone feels safer in the neighborhood. I also have not heard of any burglaries or car break-ins since the gates were put in." And by the way, bicyclists have full access to ride through that neighborhood. They have not been impeded. "The gates have improved the neighborhood tremendously, and we're very grateful for them." So, this is just a simple presentation, and I ask you to support this resolution. We have over 60 residents in that neighborhood that, after over a year and a half of meetings on-site, meeting with them personally,

we're finally bringing something that has County support and that will appease both the residents, the community, and will really deliver on public safety. So, I ask you for your support.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Do you want to make a motion?

Vice Mayor Lago: I'd make the motion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Is there...

Commissioner Keon: Second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: A second?

Commissioner Keon: I'll second it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. I think this -- there's no controversy. I think it's a very good idea and the neighborhood is for it. So, will you call the roll, Billy?

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, before I call the roll. We do have a member of the public who would like to speak on the item.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, this is not a public hearing, but yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Diego Rodriguez.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What?

City Clerk Urquia: His name is Diego Rodriguez.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Rodriguez, you have two minutes.

Diego Rodriguez: Hi, good morning. First of all, I want to thank you, Mayor, and the rest of the Commission for taking this item into consideration. I especially want to thank Vice Mayor Lago for submitting this item. I am president of the homeowners' association at Snapper Creek, so I am speaking on behalf of the board and residents. And we are completely in favor of this. We've had -- you know, one of the reasons we joined -- we voted to join Coral Gables as a community about 15 to 20 years ago, was we wanted the security that Coral Gables has to offer. And I couldn't have said it any better than Vice Mayor Lago did in explaining our concerns with the crime that has been occurring in our community and the importance of being able to close this entrance that is used far too often for criminals to get into our community undetected. So, all I wanted to say is that we are very much in favor, and I wanted to thank the full Commission and Vice Mayor Lago for bringing this to...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Mr...

Mr. Rodriguez: Vote. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Urquia, you want to continue with -- or you want to start the -- calling the roll?

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. And thank you, Mr. Rodriguez...

Commissioner Mena: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: For your participation.

Commissioner Mena: Mayor, very quickly. I just want to commend -- I don't know if it was Mr. Rodriguez or, obviously, Vice Mayor Lago has been instrumental, but whoever really organized the neighbors here, you know, it's very helpful to us to get so much feedback. It's hard when you get 20, 30 emails in a row, but you still like to see it because it makes us have really good input without having to spend, you know, an hour and a half of people's time on speaking here on the meeting. So, thank you to Mr. Rodriguez and whoever else in the neighborhood who was responsible for getting everybody together because that was very helpful for -- at least for me.

Vice Mayor Lago: You know, Commissioner, it's interesting you mentioned that. And the HOA president, which you just met -- which I think you've met before; all of you have met him -- we had this conversation. And I said, "Listen, don't leave anything up to chance and make sure that everyone just takes a quick moment and just sends everyone in the Commission a quick note stating the importance of this very simple project." Like you saw in Monegro -- and I'll forward -- by the way, I'm going to have Chelsea forward that email from Sebastian Ohanian, who's a fellow attorney, and you know him very well also. He's the one that sent -- just saying how simple -- just how simple these gates and how they've delivered to the residents in the Monegro area. So...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And Mr. Rodriguez, the thing to follow up here is the opening and closing and making sure that it does take place. As you being the president of the neighborhood association, please look after that.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah. We were very clear -- and I don't want to speak for the HOA president. He can just, you know, tell me if I'm incorrect or if I step out of line. But we were very clear to the HOA. And we told them, listen, we're going to grant you this ability, but we ask you, please do not leave it open for interpretation. Do not allow anyone to say, listen, that gate is being closed 24 hours a day. Because that's going to put this Commission that has granted you this ability in a very tough position, and that we're not going to be lenient. And I was very clear on that issue, and the HOA president can reiterate right now on this.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, I was pointing it out to Mr. Rodriguez (INAUDIBLE). Item F-5, Vice Mayor...

Commissioner Keon: Mayor...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Your item too.

Commissioner Keon: Can I ask one question about it before we go? When -- I know the fence that runs along the west border of Snapper Creek, I know where that is. Does the --? I know once you go over the pedestrian bridge that's at -- on Red Road, do you also have access to Banyan Drive from there?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: You could go directly along there, and you could go to Banyan Drive from there also. So, there -- isn't there some provision -- I mean, knowing that this is very beneficial to the Snapper Creek community, do we -- is there (INAUDIBLE) can provide that same protection or safety to -- I know Banyan is putting in their guardhouse. We've already approved that and they're moving forward with the guardhouse. Is there a way to --? Can you get in touch with them and maybe look to provide the same level of security to Hammock Lakes so that -- as they have

roving guards and they have, you know, a taxing district and everything else, to make that also available to that community?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Commissioner, if that community organizes and requests such protection and comes up with a plan, we will definitely look at it and help them to the extent that we can.

Commissioner Keon: Okay. So, it's only about Banyan Drive. And they've seen -- you know, there are a number of different homeowners' associations in there. So, would I have the person from Banyan Drive or all of the homeowner association presidents in that area get in touch with you to begin that discussion?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: I would -- I mean, whoever initiates the conversation, we will go ahead and have a discussion with them and kind of give them guidance. The template for the process has already been established...

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Historically by what Snapper Creek Lakes has done.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: It may be a point where, if there's going to be a construction of a fence or any kind of improvement to assist in the controlling of access, that some folks will have the pony up funds to make it happen. And at that point in time, that would be probably when different folks come together.

Commissioner Keon: Okay. I'll have them get in touch with you. And I think -- you know, I think what we've done today is a good thing, and I think you can extend it to provide that same protection

so easily, you know, to the adjoining community. So, I'll have them get in touch with you about that process.