

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
May 7, 2024
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, Amos Rojas, Jr.

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Maite Halley

Agenda Item F-3 [4:03 p.m.]

Discussion regarding Sunday hours for open courts at the Youth Center
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Item F-3.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I did knock on doors of the town homes across the street from the Youth Center of the people that were home, because not everybody was home. I had 100 percent positive response from four of the eight town homes there, the rest were not home at the time. So, I think it's time for us to take the next step, send out notice. Let's get their engagement and also staff needs to evaluate what the needs are on the courts. We need to discuss whether or not we're going to be having a Youth Center membership issue. That was one thing that was consistently brought up, in order to use those courts so that we can prioritize residents using the courts, but I think we need to go through the normal notification process. I was just doing a reach-out, to feel if there

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was any appetite for it. No one had an opposition to the pickleball, or basketball being played there. But there is going to be folks that want to play basketball as well as play pickleball.

Commissioner Fernandez: And one of the things that I brought up to Fred along the same lines was, the possibility of having – originally the courts were kind of between basketball courts, the pickleball courts were lined. Now that they are unlined in each one, you have two on each. I talked to him about the possibility during slow season on basketball, maybe having one of those, two of those pickleball courts open at all times for pickleball, at the same time basketball is open on the other court. So, he was going to look into that as well and hopefully we'll have some news back from him.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I've seen both playing at the same time.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Commissioner Menendez: Just to mention. Fred has mentioned in the past, hey Fred, we're mentioning you a lot. How you doing? That some years ago, you know you mentioned when the current Youth Center was completed and part of the discussions with the community, the neighbors in that area was about Sunday use versus not Sunday use. To put things into perspective, back in the day there were rumors flying around, flyers, not door hangers, but flyers going around that this new Youth Center is going to bring in all kinds of crime, drug use, that you're going to be smelling hotdogs throughout the neighborhood, that the field lights are going to go into the neighborhood for blocks and blocks, and as soon as they turned them on, they point straight down. People go, oh, it's pretty good. So, a lot that was discussed back then was a result of misinformation, and I think since then, 30 years later, or whatever it is, that I think folks have understood that the Youth Center is actually a welcomed plus to the neighborhood.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Yes. I think as the Vice Mayor said, I think we should do a formal notification process. Ironically you were talking about door hangers before, we've used them for community meetings for parks and they are very effective. The reason why we started using them is because the mail wasn't as effective. Mail-outs get lost, people don't get them, there's always a complaint. We can do it either way. We can either do it as a mail notification or door hanger to get feedback and there's an endless array of possibilities for opening that court on Sundays. You can either do all basketball, you could do half pickle, you can do full pickle. The only thing I say if you are using pickleball on Sundays, it does require staff effort because we've got to build the nets, we've got to bring them out and we've got to break them down. And I've got to look at getting another staff member out there. That's the only difficulty that we have on that. If it's basketball I would say it's not, because basketball, the baskets are connected. I don't have to set them up.

City Manager Rojas: But I think we talked about doing like a pilot project on a Sunday, just to see what the interest is and the amount of people that are going to be using the courts.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: So, what we're going to do, we'll do a pilot. Once we do the notification. I think it's important to get the notification out and then make sure there isn't a big opposition and then with a pilot – a pilot in terms of my staff. I have staff that's already come to me and said look, I can do it for Comp time. So, we can figure it out to see if it's viable or not.

Commissioner Menendez: You used to have a field monitor on and off. Historically at some point you had somebody on the ground.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: We have someone there now, but it's a security guard. It isn't necessarily an operational person who could build the nets and put them out. That's the only thing. That's the only issue.

Commissioner Menendez: We've had people.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: We always have someone watching.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I do think you need to come back to us about a membership option, maybe pickleball only...that way we can control the flow, because it used to be my neighbors two or three blocks away could walk down and catch a game. It's impossible now. In their reporting and I've seen, and I've talked to folks there, they are not from Coral Gables. So, what's happening is the residents are last instead of the residents being first. And the residents get pushed out as opposed to being able to use the courts at all.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Yes. That's the challenge that you have with the free. And I've said before, that's one of those challenges where you offer free pickleball, the word gets out. Everybody is coming from everywhere, because it's free, and our courts, although they are not dedicated courts and they are hybrid courts, they are pretty nice, because they are new. We just did them. Our contractor did a good job. The nets are high quality, so people have a good time there. So, word gets out, people come because it's free.

Commissioner Menendez: You can do residents Sunday. If you're doing pickleball, that's the day for residents.

Vice Mayor Anderson: How do you control who comes in?

Commissioner Menendez: He has to staff it.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: You have to staff it and you have to have a person being the gate master there saying, I need your ID to check. We're getting ready to do that. I think in the next couple of weeks there's going to be a notice on the pickleball courts that we are going to start

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having staff out there on those busy Tuesday and Thursday nights. Not to limit, but to start annotating and seeing. How many residents do we really have versus nonresidents, and we're going to put on the notice, if you don't bring your ID, you can't come in and play. Please bring your ID, because we want to see who's playing here.

Mayor Lago: Since you're here, before we adjourn on this item. Can you do me a favor. I was playing basketball the other day in a park next to Battersea, near Edgewater. You know what I'm talking about. I forgot the name.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Sunrise. Sunrise Harbor.

Mayor Lago: The basketball hoop is kind of shaky.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: We'll take a look at it.

Mayor Lago: And it needs a new net.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Okay. We'll take a look at it.

Mayor Lago: And just the rims just need a little bit of TLC.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: You could have said it when Kenny was here. (Laughter)

Mayor Lago: I've been meaning...

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Gabby was going to write you an email. I just forgot to.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Okay. I'll give him a call. No problem.

Commissioner Menendez: That's what happens when you dunk on the basket.

Mayor Lago: Anything else Vice Mayor for the good of the order.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'd like to get some numbers, after all membership will help us pay for that staff member.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor before you move on, I did have a speaker card here from Maite Halley and she's on Zoom, so if you don't mind, I'll recognize her.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir. Maite, you're on Zoom.

Ms. Halley: Hi everybody, can you hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes. Yes.

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Ms. Halley: So, Fred and I have talked about this. I'm in full support because I think it should be residents first. You know, whatever we can do to help him implement that we will do that. I don't necessarily want to exclude others, but to have it work the same way that we've worked in other facilities where we always have residents first and once it's full with residents, we cut it off. And that's what we've done in Adult Activity Center, in the Youth Center, that all works fine. We are about to cut our pickleball hours substantially in about six weeks when the summer camp comes up, so we will not have pickleball hours at all during the day and all we will have will be Tuesdays and Thursday nights. So, Fred and I have also talked about maybe adding one night a week if it's possible, I don't know, or maybe that night is a half and half, with basketball. I hate to keep taking space from others, but the Sunday half and half and residents only is great and if you want to do residents free, if there's room for non-residents, whatever you guys want to do, but the pickleball community is with you guys. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. That's it, Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.