

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comment
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**

Public Speaker(s)

**Jackson Rip Holmes
Maria Cruz
Humberto Silvestre
Lucita Moran
Cindy Abreu
Andrea Wahler
Carlos Halley**

Agenda Item C [10:15 a.m.]
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk moving onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. First speaker this morning is Mr. Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good morning.

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Mr. Holmes: Wow, this is a big meeting here. We've got the new Parking Director. I know her from the Taxi Advisory Board. Most importantly, I think she knows parking garages. She knows parking garages. The reason I'm taking up your time today is that we're in danger on Miracle Mile, even the city's tax base is the most upsetting thing you'll probably know about Sears. We may lose our anchor department store at Sears in four years. If you can help me with the slides. Thanks. I finally got my hands involved in this and I know the subject now well enough to make this presentation. So, there's bad news and there's good news. The bad news is that the present owner, which is RK Centers of that site, and I've talked with them, and I had a good conversation. They're already applying for a high-rise residential permit. So that's the bad news. We're under the gun, but I'm coordinating with people who are having meetings with Raquel Regalado, with the State Representative, trying to oppose it. Not that you care, but the homeowner's association and Coral Gate. Okay. Now we get to the good news. The owner – do you all know this famous man, he's the co-owner of the Miami Heat Basketball Team, Ronin Katz, and here comes the good news, if you go to the next slide. This is his company, and they are into retail. They've got retail centers all over everywhere. So, this is a guy I think we can reach, because of his home, if his bread and butter, as you slide down to the next slide. He's a billionaire because he owns all these retail centers, right. So, I'm rehearsing my speech, so to speak, when I talk to him on the phone, or whatever you know, so we can reach him and inform you, the citizens of Coral Gables, that this is going on. I think a poll would show that like 98 percent of the people of Coral Gables don't want us to lose the retail anchor there, among other things, it gives the city money to its tax base, so we have four years. Sears is bankrupt, they are going under, but I'm working, I've got a list of all the department stores and who you call to get them to come to Sears, right. I got the inside info and I'm calling them. Thanks for listening.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, Ms. Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning. I'm still Mrs. Cruz. I guess I'll be Mrs. Cruz till the day I die. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, and I'm here today to change what I was going to talk about, because I want to thank you for what you did for the teachers today. As a retired educator, let's face it, I spent 40-some years in classroom. Sometimes I wonder if the general community understands the impact that teachers have on their kids. It's not what they teach the subject matter, it's how they treat them, the example that they give, the mentoring that goes on in the classroom, and I would be remiss if I did not do this today. One of the teachers that you recognized today, I'm going to tell you a little story. Many years ago, when my oldest granddaughter went to David Fairchild Elementary, a public school, for the first time, she was very young. I don't remember whether it was first or second grade. I went to pick her up and she was crying, she was very upset. She had taken one of those small dolls and she had lost one of the shoes, a tiny, tiny, tiny shoe. So, she comes to the car, and she says, Abuela, I lost a shoe. I said, okay. I'll wait. Go inside and see, go by the room and you may find it. I waited and waited. All of a sudden, I saw Ms. Valdez, who you recognized today. Not only did she see this little girl by herself looking. She did not stop, and this was after school. She should have been home by that time. She did not stop till she helped

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Samantha find the little shoe, and then, I see her walking Samantha to the car. She could have stopped at the gate and just say, go to your Abuela. No, no, she walked her all the way to where I was. This is what teachers do. This is why I told her today, you're my favorite teacher. Of all the people that I've met in education, the impact you made on that little girl – talk about 10 – 11 years ago, we still talk about her in my house. That's what teachers do. You may not see it all the time, but they do impact people's lives. This is, to me, it was fantastic that she was one of the people here. I reminded the Principle, I said, remember she says, oh, I remember the little shoe. I said, well, we will never forget Ms. Valdez and the little shoe. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Humberto Silvestre.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir. Thank you for being here with us.

Mr. Silvestre: Good evening, Commissioners. I was raised to always speak to someone with eye contact, so actually I hope it will be reciprocated. I am here on behalf of myself and a large group of parents for the Coral Gables Youth Center. We have learned about the huge need for pickleball facilities in Coral Gables and we full-heartedly support that initiative. It's a huge initiative and it's a very large call for that and by all means residents should get that. I want to take you back to understanding my connection to Coral Gables. My family has been in the city for over 60 years. My grandmother, when coming from Cuba bought her house on the corner of Coconut Grove Drive and Malanga. My father walked to Coral Gables High School 69-70, and he was in the Class of 73. I had the great experience of being Class of 2005. I went to Ponce de Leon Middle, Class of 99. I shared a cool experience of our P.E. teacher, the same person Joe Hudak, which might be some family ties there. So, I have a pretty big connection with the Youth Center. I was in the after-school program at the Biltmore from 94 to 96, while the Youth Center was being built. I was the first member when it reopened on April 19, 1997. So, I grew up playing baseball at the Youth Center. I've learned discipline. I've learned how to be part of a team and I've learned a lot of life skills that have carried me throughout my life. I'm currently a father of four kids who attend the Youth Center – 19, 17, 6 and 3. They've done the programs. I've been a coach there, my father has been a coach, and the reason I'm here today is because we would like to speak up against building on top of the Coral Gables Youth Center field. It is a place that was opened on December 7, 1944, and is going to stand for almost 80 years this year. It has been a tribute and a huge point of emphasis for our community, as being a world-class Youth Center and the Commissioners have always done a great job in preserving that. The goal is not to create division but to help unite us and how we can get the pickleball facility here as soon as possible. I commend you, Mayor, for being creative in your ways of thinking of using the parking lots and turning Anastasia into a one-way, even with the consideration of reevaluating Riviera, because there are ways that we can do different things besides using the field space. You mentioned yourself that you played baseball, so did I. The diamond that was suggested the lower triangle is for our teenagers. Our teenagers are a huge part of our future, especially baseball, because growing up if you played baseball, we said 80 percent mental, 20 percent physical. So, we need to be very cautious as to what type of message we're sending to the residents of Coral Gables, if we're considering taking away the only teenage baseball diamond at the Coral Gables Youth Center. The field space has been precious to us. Kirk,

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you pointed out on that part of the field they have shade, it's really one of the most valuable parts, right, it's a place where you get a really nice breeze. There are also considerations that those trees create a lot of waste at the bottom, and if you put pickleball courts at that side of the field, you may have an ongoing issue of cleaning and taking care of those courts. We've gathered about over 500 signatures for a petition to not build on the Coral Gables field, in less than about 48 hours, since we've learned about this. And so, the idea here is to just spread awareness to the community. I'm working with the Clerk's office to gather an email list of all the Coral Gables residents so they can be made wide aware of this. They can provide their input and whatever decision that they think is fair to them, in their opinion, we're all entitled. But I'm very cautious about a sport that is addictive to our youth, because we don't know how this could go in five or ten years. And by all means, I support a huge world-class facility, but not at the expense of sacrificing our kids' sports. We shouldn't have to choose. We have more than enough vacant lots that we can utilize. There's a lot of county parts and resources that we can evaluate before going after the low-hanging fruit of our kids' parks. I spoke to Fred and Alexandra, they walked out. I went to school with her, right. Fred was there when I was a kid in 97. I'm just speaking on behalf of the parents. We'd like to work in tandem with the city. We'd like to work in tandem with the pickleball community to make it happen, but we should treat this park as sacred ground. It's been there for over 80 years. It came together between efforts of 48 lots purchased of residents, the city purchasing 12 lots and putting them together. There's an idea for a youth recreation center, youth, not to sacrifice the youth. I don't know the numbers, but it seems like predominantly when I'm there Tuesdays and Thursdays, some of the older residents play. I support that. I'll be at the Youth Center today, Tuesday, when my son has soccer practice. It's a situation that impacts all of us parents. We pay thousands of dollars every month, hundreds of us. So, you're currently generating revenue off the field right now. So, it may be something to consider of how the parents and the residents may be impacted and something that generating you revenue and its actually investing in the future of the children. So, I just want to share that with you. After exchanging emails with some of the Commissioners, this was supposed to be deferred, but we are where we are now, and I will be back here for our next meeting and just hope that we can all work together to make the quickest world-class pickleball facility as possible.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here. I appreciate that. And the goal at the end of the day is to find common ground and I think the opportunity before us, which is not an idea that was brought by this Commission, it's an idea that should be taken advantage by this Commission, and that is between the Library and the Youth Center you have a great opportunity. And I've already spoken with two separate County Commissioners about possibly exploring that strip which could provide two important factors. Number one – three things; number one, not touching the fields; number two, much needed parking for pickleball so you don't have a cannibalization of the parking; and number three, providing pickleball fields. But it takes a long-term process and a long-term commitment to do things the right way. So, I appreciate you being here. I appreciate you exchanging emails with everyone on the Commission and again, the key is to work together and to find a solution that doesn't hurt the baseball players, the soccer players. My daughters, I don't have any sons, they'd rather be playing baseball. I'll try my best to push them into baseball.

Mr. Silvestre: Sure.

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Mayor Lago: My daughters play soccer. So, the last thing is, just like I'm hearing from people in baseball, my friends where their kids play soccer, nobody on this Commission, nobody on this Commission wants to be with the amount of work that we have already here wants to be swamped with rumors, that we're taking away people's baseball fields. It's a conversation.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Let me address one last point. I think it's critically important that we all come to the same consensus. We've searched everywhere in the city and what we're trying to do is limit the exposure to the residents.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: In the sense of noise, traffic, there's a lot of different things. So, when you talk about parks and you talk about available land, there really isn't that much, and due to the significant cost of properties in the downtown, it's tough to put a pickleball facility when you buy something that just doesn't make real financial sense.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: So, we have to take advantage of what we have, the properties that we have, and I think that this is my opinion, and I don't want to speak for the whole Commission, but I think everybody has analyzed everything possible. We've all driven through the city. We've all looked. We've spent hours and hours and hours looking for an area where we can put a handful of courts. No matter how difficult the situation is, I'm of the belief that in between the Library and the Youth Center, we finally can take the step to work with the county and to deliver on something that works there. It's less impactful on the residential neighborhoods. You can get some shade; you can get the parking that you may need there, and you can also address the fact that you leave the fields, you encroach on the fields, so you don't touch the fields. So, I think that the opportunity is now to work together. I just want Youth Center aficionados, pickleball people, and whatever other groups are missing just to give us a little bit of patience so we can work through the process, budget everything and then move forward on the item. I think it's pretty simple request.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: That's what I told you, by the way.

Commissioner Fernandez: I agree wholeheartedly with the Mayor. I think each one of us has been out there exploring all the different options that we may have. We're a city that is nearly 100 years old. Our green space is very limited, and I've heard the concerns. The reason we deferred this item was because of the concerns that we heard from the community. I'll be meeting with Coach Alex this afternoon to discuss the concerns that are being brought up, but if you can, on your way out, if you can stop at Gabby's office, she's our Assistant, right on the other side of the staircase.

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Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Commissioner Fernandez: And leave me your phone number and I'll call you so we can schedule a time to sit down and talk. I think, like the Mayor said, right now we need to find a solution that works for everybody, but we are also limited in what options we do have out there. The information that was presented to us at the last Commission meeting was that this field is not being utilized. Obviously, that's not the case. That's why we got to this point, but I think you have a commitment from five people up here. We want to work with the community to find a solution that works across the board.

Mayor Lago: Let me add something just to that point. If you look at the three items that I brought up there were three opportunities, only one was possibly on that field and now that we have different information, we'll discard that possibility.

Mr. Silvestre: Discard the possibility of using the field.

Mayor Lago: Of using the field. But my two other options should still be considered.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Which is again, it's the Commission's will to move forward and deliver on pickleball courts, but I think what ends up happening a lot of times and say this with all due respect, okay, is when there's a rumor the rumor runs, the rumor runs, and we need to come together on this front because, to be honest with you, I think that this is not that difficult.

Mr. Silvestre: It shouldn't be.

Mayor Lago: Let's be honest with ourselves, we can deliver on pickleball needs and we can also deliver on ensuring that the Youth Center is the gem that it is, but we also have to be honest with ourselves. We have a budget season that's forthcoming, so identifying the location, getting our team activated to start working with the county. I held a Town Hall meeting this past week, Commissioner Cabrera was there. I had a conversation with the Commissioner in regard to this, and I said listen, this is not my idea, this is an idea that's happened before, that's been discussed in the past about that street being potentially closed out and connecting the Library, which by the way, the Library is owned by the city, the property is, and the Youth Center. It's not that complex. We just have to think big and then I think we can deliver on something exceptional. So, I just ask for a little bit of patience and we're being transparent. We talked about it at the Town Hall, we're talking about here in Commission meetings, we have open office hours, nothing is happening in the cover of darkness. I just don't want to see unnecessary pressure and I'll tell you why. All the people that work in the city are swamped with issues, and you're hearing from the Commission saying our plan is to deliver on something that is not impactful to the residents and the users. Trust me, I got calls from my daughter's soccer coach. I got calls from neighbors in regard to that. So, there's a way to make everybody happy moving forward and I think that we can find common ground. Madam Vice Mayor.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to follow up on some of the things that weren't covered yet, and one other thing is there's a process for every single one of our parks coming online or off-line with different things and ideas. And there will be notice, we do postings, we get the community involved and you get public input. The fact that it's being discussed here is not the final decision. We have to reach out to the community, especially those impacted the most, which are the folks that live close by. I put a discussion item on regarding opening the courts up for play on Sundays, the existing courts on Sundays. So far, I knocked on the expensive townhomes across the street, the majority of folks are in favor of it. No one said no. It's just that some of the folks weren't home. So that is something that we can explore to take away some of the pressure. And the other is, if we need to raise the money to be able to improve courts, expand courts, whether it's there at the Youth Center or elsewhere and to take some of the pressure off, so our residents can get an opportunity to play, because I know the people who are within walking distance have not been able to play since it's been so well advertised that come out here and play. My neighbor next-door, my neighbor two doors down and even I, cannot get on these courts anymore, because everybody around the county has now found out about our free courts. Membership is something that we have to talk about.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And it will help us maintain the courts. It will help us maintain the safety of the Youth Center. It will help us control the parking. How many people can – how often can you be out there on the courts because we are out of parking too. That's a major impact for that community.

Mayor Lago: If I could add something else to the Vice Mayor's point. The common misconception I heard from multiple people said, you have a court in Salvadore Park and why don't you just expand there, they just mentioned that. I said listen, number one, that's not really a possibility, because we took county funds there. So, when you take county funds you have to open it to everybody in the county. So, this should be a facility, I'm talking about pickleball, to minimize the impact, should be first come first serve for residents and it should be something that again, its solely dedicated. Again, I'm going to speak without having every fact, but I've heard from individuals and residents told me look, I tried to go there, but a lot of people from all over the county are coming to play here. So, our facility should serve residents first. They should not be serving Homestead, Doral, Key Biscayne, even if you're visiting a friend that's fine. We've got to figure things out. There's a lot of opportunities here. Let us just give us time to work through the issues. I promise that we're not removing anything.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: I look forward to finding common ground.

Mr. Silvestre: Can I respond.

Mayor Lago: Of course.
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Mr. Silvestre: So, absolutely. We recently had a meeting in regard to the soccer program and the future of it and the Youth Center reassured us that we serve our residents first, similar to what you just said, right. I really hope that that's at the forefront of building a world-class pickleball facility. It should be done for us Coral Gables residents primarily. I know that these other areas and other towns are building their own like Pinecrest and some of the other ones that were referenced in the prior meetings, but we shouldn't let others dictate the way that we move, right. We are our own city, and we should think of our residents first and I applaud you guys for doing that. My concern is that I went back, and I saw all of the previous meetings on this. In February, you mentioned that you had particular ideas about using a park that was underutilized. There wasn't any reference in March. In April, you said, let me switch gears in the meeting and let me show you where I walked to this weekend. And you laid out your plans of how you thought and inspired different ideas at the Youth Center field grounds. Later in that meeting, you passed the initiative to Mr. Fernandez, I want this to be your project. I want you to push this. I want you to move forward with it. I'm not really sure where the focus for using the Youth Center field is coming from, but at the very least it's an idea of using the park resources that are underutilized, right, but we're just going to be very close working hand-in-hand as parents, working with coaches to help the pickleball facilities go up. We're just going to work hand-in-hand in any way we can. We just want to support you guys, but as residents we want our voice to be heard that this is our field. We'd like it not to be used. We don't want it to be the first or second choice. If it has to go up, we'll cross that bridge when we get there, right, but we want to create unity and work together and just try to find common ground so that everybody's needs can be taken care of.

Mayor Lago: So, I'd like to respond to you because you brought up everything. First off, I haven't been fortunate enough to hit the nail on the head and hit it out of the park, a grand slam in the ninth inning, maybe you have, but...

Mr. Silvestre: I did.

Mayor Lago: There're multiple iterations before you find a solution or before you chart a course to success. So, I've looked at almost every single park in the city, every single opportunity and to me, I think the Youth Center makes the most sense and that's why I came back to you. You know why I chose the Youth Center, something that you left out in your comments right now, which I think are important and I'll get you a copy of the meeting so you can refresh, is the infrastructure.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Is key. So, one of the big things why I changed gears from the downtown is because multiple things would have to be built. Number one, you'll be impacting the business community which, I don't think, is the right thing to do. Number two, just like I don't think you should pack a residential neighborhood, because we talked about potentially using the empty lots across the street from the Youth Center and then the residents said listen, it's going to be a lot of parking, a lot of noise, maybe that's not the appropriate place. So, we shifted away from that opportunity. So, why did I think the Youth Center was the best place? – because I thought two out of three options would not impact the fields. Number one, is the issue of ADA compliance; number two, was the

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bathrooms; number three, was the parking and that there's shade. We have a lot of infrastructure there and when you're talking about trying to save as much money to make a real solid investment in an actual amenity, I don't want to have to pay for things that I wouldn't have to pay for when I'm trying to put a square into a round peg. So, at the end of the day, it's not about finding the first location that you come up with and forcing that peg through. It's about thinking a little bit more outside the box and finding the best location and I will tell you now on the record, I think the best location which has the least impact is between the Youth Center and the Library. We just have to be creative, and we have to do the proper planning and the proper budgeting to move forward on that. And I welcome you being observant and keeping tabs. You know, I have open door Fridays, you should come every Friday at 2 o'clock. We can sit down; we can see the progress of the meeting. You can put it in an email, copy the Manager. You can get a public records statement every single week in regard to where we are and what we're doing.

Mr. Silvestre: Amazing.

Mayor Lago: I look forward to it.

Mr. Silvestre: Thank you, guys. And just so you know, I'm going to go back to the residents of that open lot by the Coral Gables Youth Center and I'm just going to have a discussion with them to see if they would be possibly open to maybe having a pickleball court there. Kirk mentioned that some of the issues are the lighting when it's right next to residential homes, that's a huge issue. But maybe if there was some sort of tax incentive from the city to help – we've got to get creative, right.

Mayor Lago: I've talked to those residents and the lighting, the noise, the parking, and you're talking about a facility that will be open till very late. I've had conversations with all those residents already. I went to visit them because I didn't want to float that without them and none of them were very – but maybe you can persuade them.

Mr. Silvestre: I live there.

Mayor Lago: Maybe you can persuade them with a tax incentive. I don't know what else, but I look forward to you engaging. Maybe you have the power of persuasion.

Mr. Silvestre: We can't boil the ocean guys, but I really appreciate you taking the time each and every one of you. Kirk, I look forward to you helping to build the soccer program to what it can be.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I hold office hours on Fridays too. So come down and see me and I'll fill you in on some missing gaps here.

Mr. Silvestre: This has been fun. Being a resident, going through the experiences, being able to show up and I just appreciate that you guys have this open podium and we're able to feel like the voice is heard, right. A lot of the parents are watching this on Zoom. This feels like we've been heard and let's just work together to build a world-class pickleball facility.

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Mayor Lago: That's why I put together years ago this one hour of open discussion, that's the intent of it. So, you can come in here and have a conversation with the elected officials and have your voice heard. I'll see you on Friday, 2 o'clock.

Mr. Silvestre: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Commissioners.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Lucita Moran.

Commissioner Menendez: By the way, the young people listening, the word of the day pickleball.

[Laughter]

Commissioner Menendez: Take that with you.

Ms. Moran: Good morning, Mayor and Commission. This is divine intervention. My reason for being here is not about teachers, but I'm a retired teacher and counselor for many decades in Dade County School System and I appreciate your respect and concern for teachers. Back in the day, we weren't really mentioned that much or thought of that much, so it's a pleasure to see the recognition that is long overdue and well deserved. I was a counselor for Shenandoah Middle School. Hey middle-schoolers, I appreciate how patient and quiet you are. Your energy on steroids from what I remember. So, it's so cool to see you all attentive and well behaved. Congrats. That being said, my real motivation for being here is, I'm a concerned citizen of Coral Gables and I would like to see the Mayor's Council left in place. I would appreciate that. That is what motivated me to come here today. This is my first time coming here to speak, but I so feel driven to do so. On a personal note, every time I ask Mayor Suarez for anything regardless of what it was, he responds immediately. I think "Johnny on the spot" would be a good nickname for him. As a senior in Coral Gables, he's very supportive of our Adult Activity Center and has been there on various occasions and for other things as well. So that being said, I would very much like to see his council in place. I bid you all a good day and enjoy the week. Bye bye.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here.

City Clerk Urquia: Cindy Abreu.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Abreu, good morning. Please join us.

Commissioner Castro: Cindy, I read your email. I haven't had a chance to write back to you, but very informative and good email.

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Ms. Abreu: Thank you so much. I appreciate that ma'am. Good morning, everyone. Happy to be here. My name is Cindy Abreu and I'm a resident of Coral Gables. I know that the motion or the proposal for the Youth Center expansion has been moved to May 21st. I will not be here. I just want to make sure that at least an active voice is obviously heard before then. I'm here with another fellow concerned citizen as well. We're both part of the Blue Devil's Baseball Team. My son Max is right there.

Commissioner Fernandez: Have him come up.

Ms. Abreu: You want to come up Max? As a previous resident so eloquently put, I concur with everything that he absolutely was saying. We have a lot of history with the Youth Center. We also have an older son, who's in college right now. We love this Youth Center. Obviously, the programs that it offers, everything that it offers; and we understand that obviously we have to find some common ground with these other individuals. Absolutely, 100 percent, we have to share our beautiful city here. However, many of us are concerned because, again of the recent proposal to house those courts at the Youth Center, and even probably more so with how quickly – well, I shouldn't say how quickly, but we just found out about this last week. It was so quick to turn from its original intended location atop the parking garage, which we thought was a great idea, to all of a sudden now to the Youth Center. Many of the residents that we know that live there that have their kids there in the programs were not aware of this whatsoever. I'll let my friend here talk really quick and then we'll wrap it up and then we'll get going.

Good morning or good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Wahler: Good morning, my name is Andrea Wahler. I am a long-term resident of Coral Gables and Coconut Grove, and you know, we all do love the Coral Gables Youth Center and I could understand why pickleball would want to be there. I will also say that I am a pickleball player and I do love the sport. In retrospect now, I feel it's not necessary to put it there. It is extremely loud. It also does form a lot of safety issues with the children. So, there are after school care programs with their counselors that are watching these kids, and they are not, if you're thinking about it, it is a youth center. So, you're introducing a multiple amount of adults there. Also, on top of that, I will say that it can bring money, right, it can bring money to the Youth Center and the Youth Center does need money to do different things. If you look over the entire United States there's multi-million-dollar lawsuits that are against the city, against the park. It doesn't necessarily have to be just a money-maker. It can actually cause a lot of lawsuits and a lot of issues, so we have to look at that as well. The infrastructure, and I know you have spoken about this, Mr. Mayor, but it's already difficult, it will bring a lot of attention, but what about when we have to have a fire rescue truck come in. What happens when there is so much traffic? We already have trouble with that now and there are multiple times. The baseball field is not just a baseball field. It's a baseball field, a soccer field, a flag football field. I loved the proposal back, I think it was in March, March 16th where they were putting eight and it's still in progress, eight pickleball courts on the top of the parking garage, you know, right next to LeJeune Publix. There has to be more discovery. There hasn't been enough attention to what could happen or, of course, everybody loves it and it's great,

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myself included, but there are things that can possibly bring that area danger, really, to be honest. So, I did want to say that, and we really do have to focus on the kids. Right now, in order to be an adult in that area, if you're not a parent, you have to have a background check. So can you imagine bringing in pickleball brings in how many people and what are we proposing, like eight courts in that area. How many people would actually be there. How many adults are going to be around those kids. It's not just the little league. It's also – there's Lego bricks for kids, there's after school programs, there's gymnastics, there's the infrastructure inside the Coral Gables Youth Center, the bathrooms, there are safety issues. There are concerns for that. Also, you know how Coral Gables is, obviously. The minute that they find, the minute that they start hearing that, there's going to be lawsuits, there's going to be pushback. Yes, it can make money, but I think that it would actually drain more money than make money, but I do believe that there should be pickleball courts, just not in a youth center. I like the idea of what we had decided before on top of these parking garages that are underutilized, there's so many of them around the area and it's very close. How close is LeJeune that Publix, that parking garage, what three minutes, four minutes.

Mayor Lago: Driving is probably five minutes.

Ms. Wahler: Yes.

Mayor Lago: The issue is...may I.

Ms. Wahler: Yes, of course.

Mayor Lago: Again, what I said before and I don't want to reiterate it because we have a very long meeting, but this is a very simple discussion. There's an opportunity to do something. We're going to explore it. The Commission has been very clear with you in regard to the fields. Trust me, I received the phone call from Dr. Amar, I sponsor the Blue Devils personally and it's going to be perfectly fine. We're going to find a way to deliver on both ends on all the needs, and nothing is set in stone and we're moving forward to find a location which is suitable and does not impact your son's baseball or anyone else playing soccer.

Ms. Wahler: Right – exactly.

Mayor Lago: But I just want to be very careful reiterating over and over and over and over the narrative that we're going to hurt the baseball program, because that's the way things catch. You know you repeat it enough and it becomes the truth.

Ms. Wahler: It's not just baseball.

Mayor Lago: I understand. My daughters play soccer. My daughters play soccer. I know there's going to be a La Crosse program forthcoming. There's a lot of great things that are coming - flag football. Again, I think that there's an opportunity to finally do something, which again, in an area that potentially can house the impact, and I think the Library also works well when you talk about that area, because you have existing parking that could be potentially used, if there's a way to come to an agreement after hours when the Library closes. Moving forward there's going to be a

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lot of discussion, but the Commission has been very clear already in regard to the fields. We don't need to have that conversation. It's difficult enough to budget and get this project off the ground. The last thing I want is anyone who opposes the project. So, we'll find a way to make everybody happy.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I'll be meeting with Coach Alex later today about this. What position do you play?

Ms. Wahler's son: Outfield and pitcher.

Commissioner Fernandez: Outfield and pitcher. Who's your favorite player?

Ms. Wahler's son: [Inaudible – off mic]

Commissioner Fernandez: Oh, Tawny, that's a good choice and he does play two positions, so that's good. Be proud of your mom for what she's doing. She's here to stand up for you. Do the same in the future and play baseball, play your heart out and know that baseball is not going to go away in Coral Gables. You'll have a place to play.

Ms. Wahler: One more thing. Even though – yes, you're right, it shouldn't go away, but that is the primary reason, there's not really any other baseball parks in Coral Gables. I did share with all of you the petition that we created just two days ago. It's interesting, if you look at the comments and it's interesting to see if people are informed and you can look how many people are looking at it versus how many people are signing it. So, it's interesting to see that. So, take a look at it. I did share it with all of you and check out the comments. See what other people are saying and remember that if you look at what's going on right now in the United States, we don't want to put all this money into something that everybody is just going to get sued for. There's going to be lawsuits.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, Mayor, just a couple of things. I was also a softball player, and I played every position. My last position was pitcher. It's near and dear to my heart. But we do have basketball courts there, which also make noise. So, come by on Friday, we can debate some of the issues, that's why I went door-to-door to talk to the folks in the townhomes and see what their thoughts were and so far, not a single person has opposed it, because they have impact windows. The basketballs make a lot of noise too. The critical thing here is we need to have balance. We can't have one sport pushing out another sport, and so, the item that I put on the agenda literally was purposely phrased as opening the courts. I didn't say what for. That is still got to be – we have to have meetings, we have to determine how much time do we need for basketball, how much time do we need for pickleball, do we split the courts. There's a lot to talk about here. So, loved to hear from you.

Ms. Wahler: Okay. Great. Thank you so much.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to, if I may. Your son, do you see this picture? – see that guy with a bat, that's my son, he played for the Blue Devils. He's in college now. He was about your
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age – grand slam home run in a playoff game. Proud Dad. But just on a side note – you want to do it, come on, a close up. My son would kill me for that. That’s him, grand slam. That’s Coach Alex over here with his mouth open, there he is. Proud Dad. I would make a copy of this, because one day he’s going to be in college and he’s going to look back and he’ll be very proud.

Ms. Wahler: Thank you. We just want to reiterate again. We understand of course that this is going to go into discussions, further discussions, and again, we want to make sure that everybody is happy. Again, I don’t know if you guys were active at the Youth Center. We definitely are. So, you are aware of all of the new issues, especially since it’s such a wonderful place to be, but ever since past post Covid, post pandemic, the Youth Center has exploded with memberships, okay. These guys are maxed out and understaffed unfortunately. We love those guys. Those folks are our friends, the staff are our friends. Those guys are maxed out which is obviously contributing to the traffic congestion, the human congestion, and so, again even thinking about adding something additional there. We’re already parking in the overflow, parking at Christ Journey, which is my church, we’re parking at, obviously the Coral Gables Library, the extra green space that I believe is dedicated for the church, but obviously also for the Youth Center. Again, there’s just that that’s been causing a lot of issues and so, that’s obviously another main concern for us, but just like Andrea said the other thing too would be intermingling and I understand the Mayor’s point here, because I saw his video, that’s how I found out that it was actually really happening, into the point of, again it already has existing bathrooms, a 100 percent, obviously it’s much easier than spending more money recreating that elsewhere, but again, our main concern is that there’s going to be adults intermingling with children and if they are going to be using the same bathroom facilities that’s unacceptable for me and I know a lot of other parents as well, if anything that’s going to be the main concern. I’m sure that there’s going to be something drafted in place to prevent that, but again, I think a lot of us who are obviously advocating for this, we are just trying to preserve the integrity of the fact that it is a Youth Center. It’s near and dear to my heart as well, because it’s a War Memorial and so, my husband and I are retired Air Force and so, we love the fact that we have a place here that actually honors those who made the ultimate sacrifice. So again, we don’t want to obviously keep you guys here all day and we know it’s going to be obviously decided later on down the road, all things are going to be considered. We just want to make sure that we highlighted these points to you folks and hope you guys take it to heart.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Two of us live close by. We live very close by. You’ll see me walk with my two Greyhounds around there several times a week.

Commissioner Menendez: I grew up at the Youth Center since the 1960s. I coached there for 30 years and the baseball program they had was dying, there was nobody participating. I brought Alex to meet with Fred and Carlos Pichardo one afternoon. I go this is the program that can save baseball. And baseball is one of the original sports of the Youth Center going back 70 and 80 years. Back in the day it was tackle football, basketball, and there was baseball and perhaps soccer, but I’m sure soccer came later. So, it’s a traditional sport. The deed to that property says it’s to be primarily for our youth, not completely, but primarily.

Ms. Wahler: Right.

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Commissioner Menendez: So, I would be hesitant and the folks with pickleball from day one said, we don't want to help pickleball grow at the detriment of other sports. So, they are totally on board of not hurting, especially programs for youth. So, we are here, I think the Mayor said it very well and my colleagues as well, a balance, but the programs after Covid they are growing. I talked to Fred, the numbers are picking up again pre-pandemic numbers and the Youth Center is primarily for our youth. I grew up there and we will protect and preserve our youth and their programming. We need to find solutions because the world changes, but I think as everyone has agreed, this was a discussion, not something that was going to be voted on and agreed to. A lot of moving parts, but I think if everybody comes together, we have a consensus at some point with a solution, perhaps this was a good exercise for bringing everybody together.

Ms. Wahler: I think it's great. Also, thank you for that. The other question I was wondering which I don't know, because it is a War Memorial does that take a lot more to actually build something at this caliber for approval?

Commissioner Menendez: The War Memorial, I'm sorry, the War Memorial was dedicated to those who served in World War II from Coral Gables. Originally the Youth Center was where the Publix is on LeJeune and it was on the cover of Life Magazine, but a non-profit bought the property and helped build the Youth Center in 1956 and they deeded the property over to the city. The only part of the deed that is the part that they have to maintain is a) the name, control, and it has to be primarily for the youth. Those are the three prongs that the deed holds true that the city must comply. So, we don't want to perhaps test the boundaries and it's already been tested by the way, and I hate to repeat, but perhaps you're new to the area, so I'll repeat the story. Late 60s, the City Commission voted 4 to 1 to tear down Coral Gables Elementary and build an office building there and they were going to build a new Youth Center, I mean a new Coral Gables Elementary between the Youth Center and the Library, a smaller version, but because they didn't have land, the City Commission was looking at moving University Drive, picking it up and moving it towards LeJeune to create more land. Late 60s. But because of the deed and the Youth Center, it was challenged in court. Actually, the city challenged it and the Third DCA said, those three prongs are upheld. You have to abide by primarily youth, you can't change the name, can't change control. So, the DCA has already supported the fact that it is what it is, and you can't change it. We can adjust and do certain things that enhance the experience for the community, but it should be and will always be a youth center.

Mayor Lago: We have a long day.

Ms. Wahler: Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: I appreciate both of you being here and we look forward to continuing the conversation. Thank you very much. Good luck.

City Clerk Urquia: Carlos Halley.

Mayor Lago: How are you ma'am?

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City Clerk Urquia: Carlos Halley.

Mayor Lago: Carlos. Sir, good morning. How are you?

Mr. Halley: Good morning. Carlos Halley, I've been a resident of Coral Gables for about 50 years. I'm 66 years old. The only reason I'm mentioning my age besides the gray hair, you probably noticed that already is because probably the oldest guy that's been a member of the Youth Center, I think Commissioner Kirk came in like right after me or we came in right around a long time. The Youth Center holds a special place in my heart without a doubt, particularly the field that we're going to be using now for pickleball. That's the field where I coach my son.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes, I know the feeling.

Mr. Halley: I coach my son for championships. Now, the reason I'm up here, basically is obviously my wife is the head of the pickleball community in Coral Gables, so I better before. What I'd like to do is basically clear some misconceptions and I think it's incumbent upon the Commission to clear the misconceptions that's been going on. One that pickleball has taken over the Youth Center and there's going to be no baseball. If that were the case, I'd be the first one and we'd have a thousand people out there complaining. That's not the case. That's the first misconception I want to clear up. The second misconception I want to clear up is the fact that pickleball is for adults. Pickleball is for everybody. There's been proposals for having programs for kids. Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the United States right now. Of course, it doesn't grow if you don't have youth and if you don't have kids coming into these things. The proposal, Mr. Mayor and Ariel that you guys came up with, oh, I'm sorry, Kirk and everybody else, I'm sorry if I missed somebody, came up with doing it at the Youth Center, I thought was brilliant. There's a lot of things to be worked out, but it's also for kids. Let's not forget that, okay. That's being lost in the whole thing that we're talking about now. There's going to be programs for kids to go along. And in terms of interaction, since I've been going to the Youth Center, there's been programs for adults. We used to call as kids, look at those old fogies. Well, that happens to be us now. Since I can remember, there was ____ playing softball way back then, so there's always going to be that interaction between the adults and the kids, and frankly, I find that to be beautiful. I find that to be very constructive to have a community place in the City of Coral Gables where you do have that interaction. Are there risks? – absolutely there are risks, but there's going to be risks everywhere. I think in many cases those risks can be mitigated through people in public office who know what they are doing. Again, I came to say that, please clear up the misconception that this is an adult only and that no kids are going to be involved and that we're going to get rid of baseball. That is not the case. Alright. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I'm going to go to Zoom next, speaker is Catherine [Inaudible]. And I'm asking here to unmute, and they are not unmuting, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: We'll come back.

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City Clerk Urquia: And that's it.

Mayor Lago: Okay. You tried to unmute. Okay. Nothing else Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: No sir.

Mayor Lago: Alright. Perfect.