

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-3
September 10, 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
Assistant City Attorney, Clifford Friedman
Community Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item E-3 [10:00 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending the Code of the City of Coral Gables, Florida, Chapter 2, Entitled “Administration,” Article III “Boards, Commissions, Committees,” Division 1 “Generally” by amending Section 2-52 “Qualification and Appointment of Members” in order to expand the benefits offered to members of City boards; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item E-3.

City Attorney Suarez: E-3 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending the Code of the City of Coral Gables, Florida, Chapter 2, Entitled “Administration,” Article III “Boards, Commissions, Committees,” Division 1 “Generally” by amending Section 2-52 “Qualification and Appointment

City Commission Meeting

of Members” in order to expand the benefits offered to members of City boards; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date.

Assistant City Attorney Friedman: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners, again, Cliff Freedman, Assistant City Attorney. The item before you today is an ordinance sponsored by Mayor Lago to expand the city’s past policy to extend certain city recreation facility benefits free of charge to the spouse, domestic partner, and immediate family members living with the board member or committee member who are under the age of 17, and that would enable them to access the tennis facilities and the pool facilities, but leaves aside the golf facilities.

Mayor Lago: So, just to touch base on what we’re discussing on E-2. For example, E-2 when you talk about a facility like the gym, the daily use facility. People play golf, unless you’re retired, unless you are fortunate enough to not have to go to work, they play golf maybe once a week, on weekends, if possible, when most people are weekend warriors. You go to Venetian Pool once a week. When I talk to residents and people who live in our community they say, I go once a week, or I go once a month, and that’s the reason why I brought this forward, because it doesn’t really impact the facility. When you talk about a gym, the gym gets used 3, 4, 5, 6 times a week. When you go from one member to having maybe 4 or 5 members in a family using it for health and wellness, there is a significant impact upon everyone else that’s using the gym around you. So those are things to consider when expanding it. When applying this legislation to, for example, the gym. Also, for example, like golf, there is a golf benefit for certain members, for all the members, excuse me. I don’t play golf. I’ve never played golf, but if we allowed everybody to use the golf facility, I think it would become pretty strenuous in regard to Granada and the Biltmore, it would be pretty difficult to get a T-time. So, those are just things that I put out there for consideration. This is a simple one. I had two members who serve at the will of the Commission in the city, they were not in town, their significant other went to the Venetian Pool with their kids to use it and they told them that the actual member had to be there. So, it’s a pretty simple opportunity just to help and say thank you, because by the way, the family is allowed when the member is there, so there’s really no difference. Its actually less of an impact. The family is already allowed to visit the Venetian Pool together. Its an opportunity to consider and to give back a little bit to the employees who may not be able to be there for one reason or another, not employee, excuse me, to the members who serve on different boards.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, I think it makes perfect sense, you know. You can get around rules sometimes by bringing your family in and leaving early, but why go through red tape and this is a great way to show the appreciation for the work that people do.

Commissioner Castro: Question. Is there any limitation to the size of the family, it’s your legislation.

Assistant City Attorney Friedman: The limitation would be on the immediate family members living with the board member.

Commissioner Castro: What if it’s a family of 12, that’s fine.

City Commission Meeting

Assistant City Attorney Friedman: As currently written, yes. As long as those folks are registered with the community recreation system, yes.

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: I agree. I think that it is a benefit and as I mentioned last time, I think our board members are giving up of their time with their families a lot of times to serve on boards. If they are already getting the benefit, if the family member or the board member is there, I see this as a smooth transition. I think I liken it to the parking option. There is a cost to this. It isn't like it doesn't have a cost. What is the admission currently at Venetian Pool?

Assistant City Attorney Friedman: The admission at Venetian Pool.

Commissioner Castro: There is a different price for residents.

City Attorney Suarez: Perhaps staff can give that information.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't think they are here. Fred, what's the price of admission at Venetian Pool?

Commissioner Castro: Residents - \$5.00.

Community Recreation Director: Well, non-residents are much more.

Commissioner Fernandez: Residents.

Community Recreation Director: At the top of my head, I think it's between – here it is – \$6.75 for adults and \$5.75 for children.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right. And we do have days when Venetian Pool is pretty much sold out too.

Community Recreation Director: We do, especially in the summer and on the weekends when its quite busy and hot, hotter months.

Commissioner Fernandez: I have no problem with it. I just want to make sure on the record we do state there could be an impact on the service that is currently being provided.

Mayor Lago: Fred, quick question. If I'm a member serving on the Planning and Zoning Board and I go to the Venetian Pool and I take my family, does my family get in for free?

Community Recreation Director: Currently, no. Currently, it's the board member that we allow in. We had not had family privileges for board members at any of those facilities, whether it was the pool, golf, tennis.

Mayor Lago: How often would you say that somebody uses the Venetian Pool?

Community Recreation Director: A board member?

Mayor Lago: What would you say just on average, what would you say?

Community Recreation Director: I don't think it's a very large amount.

Mayor Lago: Would you say maybe once a month.

Community Recreation Director: A little bit more than that, maybe a couple, a couple of uses. In the hot months, it's a little bit more.

Mayor Lago: Out of 300 board members, we have 30 boards, 30-plus boards, how many board members you think use it?

Community Recreation Director: I wouldn't be able to tell you, maybe on the high end maybe 30 or 40, I would think, if that. We don't get that much.

Commissioner Fernandez: I guess the question I have is, we were told that this was a benefit that was offered to family members if the board member was there, so that's not the case.

Community Recreation Director: It was always for the board member. For family members that wasn't part of the old ordinance. It was only for the board member.

Mayor Lago: The two individuals that I spoke to that called me about this issue, they told me that when they are present and they are not working on the weekends, that their families are allowed in for free.

Community Recreation Director: That could be something with our staff trying to be nice to the resident and the board member.

Mayor Lago: That's what I've been told, that's why I brought up something that doesn't make much sense. You are allowing somebody, if you think about it, you are allowing somebody's children and their significant other in for free when that person is there, but when that person is there, if they bring their card, they said the member has to be present for the family to come in.

Community Recreation Director: That's probably a staff error, to be honest with you.

Commissioner Castro: Mayor, would you be open to putting a cap of four, mom, dad and two children.

Mayor Lago: You know what I would be willing to do so that later when we have the parking conversation, there is no conflict of error, I'm willing to scratch it completely, because if I was mislead and I was told that residents were able to come free, even though its only – you're saying 30 residents a month that use it, you know let's say that you bring your residents in and let's say it's a family of five, I don't have a family of five, but let's say you do, the average is what, 3 ½, 4 people in a family, I don't have the census data. You're talking about instead of maybe an additional 120 people a year, excuse me, a month, how many times they come a month. When you talk about parking for example, you're talking about a person, when you park in the downtown its seven days a week, its parking, it's a significant number. When you're talking about a \$5 entrance, imagine hour parking in the downtown is, you spend two hours in the downtown you already spend money than you do in the entrance to Venetian Pool, depending on where you park and the time that you park. I want to be correct on that front. So, I don't have an issue removing my legislation, if its an issue that my colleagues are not happy with.

Commissioner Menendez: I'd like to comment, Mayor, if I may. I have no issue with expanding the Venetian Pool benefit to family members. I think if we can identify what immediate family entails and provide some finer detail, I think everybody will be more comfortable. This is first reading. I was ready to vote yes, and we can come back between first and second reading with more details. Think about it. If a board member has free access to Venetian Pool and he has three kids, that doesn't mean he's not going to go to the Venetian Pool because the three kids don't get in free. They are just going to pay and you're still going to have the family in there. So, I don't think the impact is necessarily going to be as great. They may go to Venetian Pool more often, but I'm all for about expanding benefits to immediate family. Mayor, I'm comfortable with doing the first reading and letting staff come back with details to see how that would work. It's your call.

Community Recreation Director: We do have some wording already that would kind of mirror what we do with employees, which is it has an age qualification, and they have to be living in the same household, and so, there is no problem extending that. That would actually kind of give it uniformity, because we already do with employees, so we can do that.

Mayor Lago: You offer that service to employees and their family members.

Community Recreation Director: Yes, and its up to two adult age and they have to be in the household.

Mayor Lago: So, what I would like for you to do for me, if you can, and I'm going to defer this, its important. I'd like for you to come back and tell me thinking about – I'd like for you if you can, through the Manager, research how many individuals, we should have their names, right, when they swipe, how many individuals that are on boards go to Venetian Pool.

Community Recreation Director: Okay.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: And we'll take their number. We'll say, okay, if they are coming twice a week and you told me there is an individual who I don't think is on a board, but they swim in the morning at Venetian Pool, if they swim three or four times a week.

Community Recreation Director: Yes, they do.

Mayor Lago: So, they swim, but I don't think that's a majority. I think that's a very finite minority, maybe less than five.

Community Recreation Director: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Because I've been there, I've walked through that area all the time. So, what I think is an opportunity is take a look at it and you tell me how many board members are using that service. We have the actual information there and then we can calculate, okay, if they are coming twice a week and they have three members, what would be the loss of revenue. If its three family members, you are talking about under \$20, are we willing to make that sacrifice, instead of making that revenue, and if we're not, then I don't have a problem moving on from it. It's no big deal.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, I agree with Commissioner Menendez. I was prepared to move and vote on this today. This is the least respect we should be able to give to our board members. Not everybody plays golf. I'm not a golfer either and for as often as you get to go in there with your children and most people don't have large families today anyway.

Mayor Lago: To me, I think personally its an issue that we should have all the information, as the sponsor of the item and I think its such a miniscule item, there is just way too much discussion on it, in my opinion. If there is this much discussion on it, you shouldn't have a vote on it today. So, Mr. Clerk, I'm deferring the item to come back when staff, through the Manager, providing information.

Community Recreation Director: Okay.