

City of Coral Gables

*405 Biltmore Way
Coral Gables, FL 33134
www.coralgables.com*



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 4, 2025

8:00 AM

<https://coralgables.zoom.us/j/86149844627>

Youth Center - Conference Room

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 8:20 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Present:

Kirk Menendez
Richard Smit
Maite Halley
Jennifer Marques

Absent:

Erik Rodriguez
Michelle White- excused
Vanessa Gutierrez- excused

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The quorum was not met. Approval of the August Parks Advisory Board minutes will be deferred to the next meeting.

DIRECTORS REPORT

a. General Updates

Director Couceyro reported that fall programming is underway and that the department is preparing for a busy season of events and holiday activities. He further announced staff changes, including the promotions of Mrs. Rodriguez and Mr. Pichardo, the appointment of Mr. Walters as Youth Center Manager, and the appointment of Mr. Rojas as Supervisor. He noted that interviews are currently in progress for the Country Club Director position.

Director Couceyro emphasized the importance of hiring a director with event venue and sales experience, noting that the top two candidates under consideration possess extensive knowledge in this area.

Board Member Marques suggested restructuring the position so that one individual oversees venue operations and another focuses on sales. Director Couceyro responded that these roles already exist at the Country Club and are currently filled by staff who are performing successfully.

Board Member Smit proposed involving City Management to explore the introduction of commission-based compensation as an incentive to increase venue sales revenue. Director Couceyro noted that he and the City Management team are actively discussing this option for implementation at the Country Club.

Director Couceyro further explained that a major challenge the Country Club faces is its lack of in-house catering services, unlike most hotels and event venues. Board Member Smit suggested exploring the option of in-house caterers. Director Couceyro stated that the City has previously explored partnerships with caterers. He explained that under the current catering contracts, the City receives 10% of revenue from venue use, in addition to charging a cleaning fee. He further noted that the contracts include provisions allowing preferred vendors to receive a 5% discount when their clients book events at the Country Club. In return, preferred vendors are required to provide services for the Country Club's member mixers.

The department is also reviewing the option of transitioning to an exclusive catering agreement through a formal RFP process.

Director Couceyro continued his report by noting that the golf course experienced growth on the greens due to recent rainfall. He stated that the parks crew is aware of the issue and is actively addressing it. He further reported that the golf course has seen increased usage, with approximately 60,000 rounds played this year.

Director Couceyro informed the Board that he will be presenting to the Commission a proposal to increase fees by an additional 5% for the next fiscal year.

Board Member Marques inquired whether the increased fees would be consistent with those charged by other municipalities, expressing concern that the increase might discourage golfers. Director Couceyro explained that the adjustments are part

of a five-year plan with scheduled increases every two years. He noted that the proposal represents an additional 5% beyond the increase already planned for the next fiscal year and assured the Board that the adjustment would make the fees more comparable to surrounding municipalities while remaining fair and competitive.

He also reported that he is in final discussions with the Commissioners and City Management regarding the implementation of a security deposit, bond, or irrevocable line of credit requirement for special events. This change is being considered in response to large-scale events failing to comply with existing rules and regulations, and it is intended to ensure the City is better protected.

Director Couceyro explained that the safeguard would include tiers for minimum and maximum fee limits, along with language granting the City the authority to increase those limits for major events that may pose a greater risk of significant property damage.

Board Member Marques inquired whether the proposed deposit would be comparable to those required by other cities. Director Couceyro responded that the department had benchmarked practices from other municipalities. He noted that the City hosts larger and more complex events than most, making its operations more comparable to those in Miami Beach and Fort Lauderdale. Director Couceyro further stated that the ordinance has been approved and that the language will be incorporated into the fee amendment.

b. Special Events

Director Couceyro updated the board on upcoming events, including the Pumpkin Float now taking place at the Country Club on Sunday, October 26th, AAC - Book Reading and Discussion on Monday, September 15th, The Western Roundup on Friday, September 19th, Coral Gables Pollinator Palooza at the Youth Center on Saturday, September 27th, A Saturday at the Cinema showing "A Hard Day's Night" on Saturday, September 27th, The Pumpkin Patch on Saturday, October 18th, The AAC Halloween Spooktacular on Friday, October 24th, A Saturday at the Cinema showing "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" on Saturday, October 25th, The Gentle Trick or Treat on Saturday, October 25th, and the Nightmare at 405 Haunted House on Friday, October 31st.

Director Couceyro commended the Adult Activity Center for its vibrant programming and the success of Senior Week. He proceeded to announce the ribbon cutting ceremony for Dorothy Thompson Park on Saturday, September 13th and noted that the Blue Road Park opening is pending.

c. C.I.P Updates

The Director reported that the Venetian Pool is scheduled to reopen on October 15, pending pump installation, and that the Centennial Concert is planned at the pool for

December 7. He noted delays with the Granada shelters and the pickleball assessment but stated that a meeting with the C.I.P. team has been scheduled to address these matters. He further reported that the groundbreaking for Phillips Park is anticipated in late October or early November.

The Director also noted that renovations to the fitness center and dance floor are progressing, with completion pending the installation of green safety padding and the painting of the walls in the basketball gym.

Assistant Director Pichardo reported that the Youth Center has relocated the volleyball program outdoors while the basketball gym renovations are being completed.

Director Couceyro reported that he has approved the Club Play Pickleball at the Biltmore Tennis Center and has directed staff to explore designating the 5:00–6:00 p.m. hour as instruction-led pickleball program for youth.

NEW BUSINESS

Board Member Marques proposed creating a monthly walking club event, which would involve the temporary closure of streets along Miracle Mile from approximately 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., with the walk concluding at the Country Club. She noted that the concept was inspired by similar initiatives observed during visits to Puerto Rico and the City of Miami.

Director Couceyro responded by outlining logistical and budgetary challenges, including potential concerns from residents and nearby businesses. He also referenced prior experiences with low community turnout for similar events.

Assistant Director Espino proposed introducing a Saturday Wellness pilot program at the newly renovated Phillips Park once it opens, highlighting the park's amenities, including exercise equipment and the turf field.

Board Member Menendez recommended incorporating a Farmers Market-style wellness festival, featuring different stations focused on fitness and wellness activities.

Director Couceyro stated that he will evaluate the addition of a wellness section to the Department's existing Farmers Market in the Spring as a potential approach, and will also assess the costs and logistics associated with a walking club, including the impact of street closures throughout the city.

Board Member Smit proposed removing the stop signs along Country Club Prado to allow cyclists to continue their route without frequent stops. He suggested installing speed bumps in place of the stop signs to slow oncoming traffic.

Director Couceyro stated that he will forward Board Member Smit's suggestion to the appropriate department, as it falls outside the jurisdiction of his department.

Board Member White suggested considering road closures along North and South Greenway during Halloween due to safety concerns.

Director Couceyro responded that departmental resources are limited during Halloween because of existing street closures at Santa Maria and the South Side of Coral Gables. He noted that, although there are no closures on Miracle Mile, there is a strong police presence at the crosswalks. He further stated that Fire and Police personnel are also present along the golf course.

Board Member Menendez noted that public awareness of closures along North and South Greenway could attract additional visitors, as parents would recognize these areas as safer for children.

Board Member White added that these areas are already congested without implementing closures.

Board Member Smit inquired whether residents are receptive to children and

parents being in the area during Halloween.

Director Couceyro agreed with Board Member Menendez, noting that some residents have expressed concerns about the large amounts of candy they must purchase to accommodate visiting children and their difficulty keeping up with the demand.

Director Couceyro added that he will follow up with the Police Department to determine why closures are not implemented in those areas and will update the Board accordingly.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Discussion on implementing signage to reduce litter at parks.

Director Couceyro provided an update on anti-littering efforts, noting that signage will be placed inside Majorca Park to assess its effectiveness in reducing litter.

b. Consideration of adopting a balloon ban for pavilion rentals.

Administrative Operations Manager Rodriguez provided an update on her research, noting that most municipalities do not have a balloon ban unless the park is located within a marina or waterways. She explained that, in most cases, municipalities enforce rules prohibiting the release of balloons or confetti.

Board Member Menendez suggested that any ban focus specifically on latex balloons.

Board Member Halley informed the board the State of Florida has banned the releasing of balloons in 2024.

Director Couceyro discussed next steps with the Board, stating that he will consult with the City Attorney's office to determine the appropriate approach for prohibiting the release of balloons and confetti, whether through a resolution, ordinance, or Parks policy.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY

Next meeting date Thursday, October 9th at 8:15 AM

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 a.m.

NOTE