

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-4
May 23, 2023
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, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Parks & Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-4 [p.m.]

Discussion regarding parking at the Adult Activity Center.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-4.

Commissioner Fernandez: G-4 was brought up at the Town Hall meeting that we did. It was regarding the parking at the Adult Activity Center, and valet parking versus parking on location.

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: I think that was brought up was in reference to something that was discussed in the past, where we looked at maybe just having valet solely versus parking in the garage. We nixed that. That was during like, as we were getting ready to open after Covid, you know the Adult Activity Center stayed closed a little longer. We, at this point right now, discussed with our board there, we need to have both options. A lot of our participants want to park in the garage and it's at a cost to the city, but I think it's important to continue to do that for our Activity participants.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think some people weren't aware that there was a valet option, because I had a couple of residents approach me after, they didn't know that there was a valet option.

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: And that's a good point. We've made it clear many times, but I think we'll do something at the front desk to let people know that's an option that's available. I do hear a lot more cons than pros on it and I think that's just our customer base at the moment. We will make sure that they know that they are aware that it's available, but we do have a lot that want to use the garage. Sometimes they don't want to wait. There's a bunch of different reasons.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Director, let me ask you a question.

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Again, trying to find money for projects and different things, like we were talking about right now about the defibrillators, how can we fund it. What is the cost for us to use the parking garage every year? Can we say safely that it's 50 feet away valet from the front door of the actual Adult Activity Center?

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: Yes, it's across the street.

Mayor Lago: Would you say it's closer to park in the parking garage or closer to park in valet to the front entrance?

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: If you're looking at just steps, probably across the street is closer.

Mayor Lago: Valet is even closer.

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: The issue is obviously, crossing the street.

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: Yes, crossing the street.

Mayor Lago: I see both sides of it.

Parks & Rec. Director Couceyro: You have to wait to drop it off, you have to wait to get it picked up. Some of our participants do not enjoy having people in their car. So, there's a lot of different reasons why they don't use it. When we have full operations, it's been in the past anywhere from \$40 to \$50,000 cost, but we didn't have as big enough of a cost, obviously during Covid as it slowed down. We've just recently started to get all of our numbers back up and we're hitting full classes. So based on this, we really haven't had payment information for quite a while since 2019.

Mayor Lago: For example, that right there is \$50,000, could potentially fund almost 25 to 30 defibrillators for our parks. So, this is a situation where you've got to balance. You have to find

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ways and say listen, we need you to help us with this, because it's a benefit for the community. I'm not afraid of rocking the boat on issues where you're providing an excellent service. You're telling me you're going to be getting a valet service for your car. If you told me that you had to park on the street and you had to park at a surface parking lot five blocks away. I'd be like, no, no, no. We'll eat the \$50,000, not a problem. But if you're telling me we're literally parking closer and it's a valet option, and at the end of the day...

Parks & Rec Director Couceyro: You make a good point. The only thing that I would say is, we do have larger classes, you know, and the valet only allows us 35 at a time, according to what it is. But we have 70 people in some of our fitness classes. You know what I'm saying. I just listen to our customers, and they really enjoy parking in the garage.

Mayor Lago: So, we've also got to make sure that \$40,000 here, \$50,000 there, \$100,000 here, it starts adding up.

Parks & Rec Director Couceyro: Yes. I understand.

Mayor Lago: And we've got to find cuts. Is there any appetite for the Commission to have that conversation or do you think the status quo is the way it should be.

Commissioner Fernandez: If we start maybe informing people about the valet, we may start transitioning them to using the valet service. I personally am not a valet user. I've had my car crashed twice on Miracle Mile by the valets, so I've decided not to use the valet, but that's a personal choice. I think with Freebee expansion and with other things that we're contemplating as well, we may see a reduction in the use of parking. I think the Commission and you have done great work with the trolley as well, getting more mobility into that area might help alleviate some of that cost as well.

Commissioner Menendez: Through the Mayor. My hesitation with valet is something that's been brought up before, that street during the day is very difficult to cross. The amount of cars that go through there heading towards Douglas Road and believe it or not, sometimes cars stop so it narrows the road even more it makes it treacherous. I'm concerned about having people crossing from the valet over to the Adult Activity Center, because believe it or not, sometimes its taking your life into your own hands.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. How much are we saving by doing valet?

Mayor Lago: \$50,000.

Commissioner Castro: So how much are we paying for valet?

Parks & Rec Director Couceyro: We do not pay for valet.

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Mayor Lago: Don't pay for valet.

Parks & Rec Director Couceyro: Its part of our deal.

Mayor Lago: Its part of the deal because we own The Palace, the city owns The Palace. It's a land lease.

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

Mayor Lago: So, we can either have them use the valet. Ask the members of the Adult Activity Center to use the valet for free, and that way we would save money and we could use that money to immediately – Mr. Manager, take that \$50,000 and buy defibrillators we need for all the parks. Done. Or we continue to spend the money on parking in the parking structure, which is again, people who don't want to get in their cars, they don't want to valet, but it's a great service when you think that the Adult Activity Center is a city-run facility and sometimes we have to have concessions. It's not like we're asking you to walk five blocks. We literally are asking you to walk across the street.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. Would you be able to talk to your clients, customers, and ask them how they feel, if they were given the option of complimentary valet, but if you didn't want to valet for the option to actually pay for parking. How they feel about that, if they are very against that.

Parks & Rec Director Couceyro: We had this discussion when we were coming out of Covid, and we were looking at doing it. It was not met with a positive reaction. We got a big opposition to it and people were upset. They wanted to continue to park in the parking garage. We did approach this discussion before.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. I'm not suggesting you do it again. Times have changed since we're coming out of Covid and putting a sign up there saying the word free first valet across the street, free valet parking, you don't have to pay at all. There's a point of negotiation too with the other side, you start using this valet we may gain a little leverage. So, if its used enough we may be able to do better.

Commissioner Fernandez: My understanding was that we've actually told folks that they were going to have free parking, and that was part of the issue. They were told they were going to have free parking or free valet.

Parks & Rec Director Couceyro: When there was discussion as to the development of the Adult Activity Center, this is going way back, before we even had the building. That was one of the things that the senior board at the time really wanted to make sure of because there was discussion that there was going to be a facility in downtown. They didn't know it was going to be The Palace.

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There were still negotiations being made a couple of City Managers ago, and the board wanted to make sure that they would have access to free parking.

Mayor Lago: Which is fine. They have access to free parking with valet and that's free parking. Again, listen, I just want to put it on the record, there is a ripe \$50,000 to pay for a project that we want to do in the parks, and we'll keep the status quo, no problem. All good. Thank you, sir. As always, I appreciate you.