

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item I-3
December 13, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Asset Manager, Zeida Sardinas

Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Maite Halley

Lilly Azel

Agenda Item I-3 [11:09 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing the City Manager to evaluate options and begin negotiations for the sale and/or development of the city-owned surface parking lot at 234 Navarre Avenue, FL 33134 (Folio #03-4108-006-1100) with Location Acquisitions, LLC and provide recommendations to the City Commission.

Mayor Lago: Moving onto I-3.

City Attorney Ramos: I-3 is a Resolution of the City Commission authorizing the City Manager to evaluate options and begin negotiations for the sale and/or development of the city-owned surface parking lot at 234 Navarre Avenue, FL 33134 (Folio #03-4108-006-1100) with Location Acquisitions, LLC and provide recommendations to the City Commission.

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Mayor Lago: Again, before we commence, just like I had to do when these individuals came before the Commission a few months ago, I have to recuse myself, because the developer is one of my landlords in a property I own here in the city. Just to be as clear and transparent as possible, I'm following the guidance of our City Attorney. Thank you.

Ms. Sardinas: Good morning, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Zeida Sardinas, Asset Manager. On January 28, 2022, Location Ventures provided a letter of intent to the city regard their desire to enter into a long-term lease for the city-owned surface parking lot at 234 Navarre Avenue. Location Acquisitions own several properties adjacent to this property and has developed the site plan for the overall – a site plan for the overall development of the property that would require the city property for the execution of the project and its parking requirements. City staff evaluated the long-term lease proposal for the property and after careful review of the LOIN, the site plan materials provided, the City Manager determined that the long-term lease proposal was not in the city's best interest. However, since the city's Minorca garage is under construction and public parking needs for the Miracle-Navarre area will be met once the garage becomes operational, the City Manager also decided to evaluate the properties as is best use market value using an appraisal in order to decide whether the city will surplus the property using the public advertising process pursuant to Section 2-1091 of Division 12 of the city's Procurement Code. Location Acquisitions has also expressed an interest in purchasing the property; and the City Manager is therefore requesting authorization to evaluate site development options and to begin negotiations with Location Acquisitions LLC, in order to provide recommendations to the City Commission regarding the property's overall potential for sale and/or development.

Vice Mayor Mena: Any comments? Really quick – and I think its really important to make things clear. This is again, to authorize the Manager, to use the exact word, to evaluate options and begin negotiations. Much ado was made previously about other discussions relating to other properties that occurred between the Manager and people. As I discussed earlier, it was all much ado about nothing, but in an abundance of caution before he starts having any conversations, making any decisions, talking about any aspects of this, he came to the Commission this time with a resolution and then, depending on what he sees and determines and what's on the table or not on the table, or what the options are, he'll come back to us and tell us his opinion and we'll go from there, because this is just step one in the process, and I just want to make that clear that no final decisions are being made with respect to the final outcome here.

Ms. Sardinas: Yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct Vice Mayor. This is just for total transparency to make sure that we can evaluate the best use for that particular property. As you know, we have a parking garage which is a block away, 120 cars, to be completed second quarter of next year, so we just want to evaluate the options, but also wanted to make the Commission perfectly clear. So, what we're doing, there is no decision has been made. This is an evaluation, what our options are and what the best use for that property is, and that's really the concern is to make sure that we are completely transparent in anything we do.

Vice Mayor Mena: Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: Before we go further, I think we have a member of the public that's on this item, so you want to take public comment first, before we proceed.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure, no problem.

City Clerk Urquia: Its Maite Halley.

Ms. Halley: I'm back. Hi guys. Hello Commissioner Anderson, Commissioners. So, this is one of those properties that looks like a good place for dedicated pickleball courts and that's what I'm here to speak about. We talked about, last time we were here, and there are some solutions in the works with Parks and Rec, I'm working with them, for using courts that would be blended, right, with the basketball court, the Youth Center, and some other options, maybe something at Phillips Park. However, this is an opportunity to do something dedicated, very specifically to just pickleball so it doesn't take away from anywhere else. So, this is one of those pieces of land that we thought available to it. Frankly, its 20,000 square feet, but I think we can easily get like 4 to 6 pickleball courts on there. I went out and walked it. I'm not a designer, but just drafted it on a piece of paper. Someone else is coming, I don't know if she'll make it before the discussion is over, but she is going to talk about, again, a little bit more about the demand. We had at the Underline meeting; I don't know if you are aware that has been going on. Pickleball was absolutely the highest requested amenity for fitness amenities for the Underline, and I think we are going to get some things from the county there, but there should be something for the city. Our firemen are driving to Broward County after their duties to go play pickleball, okay. Yesterday we were going to go to play at Tropical Park, 20 people waiting, you'll never get a game in. The demand is there, and it will get used and we'll figure out how to get our people to park. I've already told people, say, parking – said listen, you park way down the street, and you take the trolley and there are options. You walk, its good for you, all those things. I'd like you all to consider the use of this for a park. I mean even if you do four pickleball courts, there is maybe room for a basketball court or some other kind of activity like that, that would be good for our community. So, thank you for listening.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think we have some other park options in the area, not necessarily pickleball courts, but just parks we are looking to onboard in different areas, we talk about dog parks and other things. You know, I'll be honest with you, I'm fully supportive of more pickleball courts. I will say, I don't know that having an actual pickleball in this location is ideal for the following reasons: one, it's a very expensive piece of property, and if there is an opportunity to generate funds from the piece of property and then build a dedicated pickleball court somewhere where it makes more sense from an economic perspective to do that, I think that makes some sense too. If there is a complaint about pickleball, it is noise, right, I'm just saying. I'm for pickleball courts.

Ms. Halley: There are ways emulate that, yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure – but in an area like that where you are surrounded by buildings, I could see the noise issue there being more of an issue than it would be in an open park like Phillips Park

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or other places where you don't have buildings pretty much on top of the property really, in this circumstance. So again, what I do think there's an opportunity here to do though is to as part of these discussions that we are embarking on, to have a situation where maybe there could be arrangements made for a dedicated pickleball courts in another location as part of this transaction, as part of the public benefit that it could provide, and so, I would ask the Manager to explore that as part of his discussions, what can we do to use this to try to generate funds or to try to have a pickleball court built, but maybe not on this actual location as a dedicated facility. That's all I'm saying.

Ms. Halley: I understand that, and I had the same discussion with my husband, he's a banker across the street, so he knows, and he says this is what you're going to get, but it opens discussions, right, and that's the point. I really like us to get moving on this, we are so behind the 8 ball in Dade County in Coral Gables to get this done. We really need to identify a spot for dedicated courts. I know in this particular property on just the east side there's a big wall separating the building; the back is either an open parking lot or the entrance to the parking garage, and then on the west side there's a small apartment building that's locally owned, and then across the street, I think there's some condos. So that's how that property works and I'm not sure what they are doing in that private lot that's part of this discussion. I think that this property, one of the proposals. I just urge you to do this really, really soon, not three years from now. This is like mid-2023, you can put a court together like that.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think our park staff, I know Fred is here, I think has the message loud and clear that as soon as possible try to a) have whatever shared spaces we could have, as an immediate measure, immediate, to try to do something more dedicated as soon as possible.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: So, we are working on getting some of the retrofit fixes. When we spoke and we brought to Commission, the direction was as we go into the next year's capital funding, that's where we're looking at for the standalone.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Looking at perhaps doing it – we floated out Kerdyk Park, but the first things first, is to come back with a capital funding request, which we will during the budgeting process. We do have the Youth Center_____ and I know that you are going to speak with our staff, I hope so.

Speaker: I have an appointment later this week.

Parks and Rec Director Couceyro: Okay, perfect – and we're probably going to add another court there. The court is starting to get used at the Youth Center, and so we are going to look at expanding times, doing some program elements that she is going to help us with to get more people involved. So, we've got the ball rolling.

Vice Mayor Mena: You don't have to do this, if you want to or not, but I was going to say to you, you know, as the new Commission comes in, in April, and there is going to be at least two individuals appointing new members to all the boards and things like that. I hope you consider getting involved in the Parks and Rec Board, because it would be an opportunity.

Ms. Halley: I'm happy to do it. I'm happy to be on a board. I actually put in an application for one of the boards and never heard anything from anybody.

Vice Mayor Mena: Well sometimes they are already – so the timing is...

Ms. Halley: And there is a vacancy still.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, the timing for that will be good in April again after there is going to be two new Commissioners and they'll have all their board seats to fill. I think it would be great to have a voice on the Parks Board always looking out for opportunities like pickleball.

Ms. Halley: Absolutely. Lilly Azel just came in. Lilly is our pickleball ambassador for Dade County, the U.S. Pickleball Association, and she has made it over here, so I'm going to let her say her thing, they want to help us, but it looks like this property is a little difficult, but they are going to find one to replace it with, right.

Ms. Azel: Well, I really appreciate your time. My name is Lilly Azel, I'm a U.S.A. Pickleball Ambassador, its our national governing organization in the United States. And I became Ambassador five years ago; I learned this sport in Big Sky, Montana, where I live part of the year. Came back to Miami, there was nothing. Miami-Dade County as-a-whole, this whole region has been last, last to be on board with pickleball. I was working with Carl Schmidt, who's our Facility Development Manager, he's available to everybody here nationally; and basically, he told me we were working on numbers, and he basically told me, 15,000 people would be playing this game in Miami-Dade County if there were facilities. Last August, we had zero; today, within six months we will have 70 dedicated pickleball courts and 33 blended lines. Coral Gables – I came to Coral Gables four years ago in your community development center, I think it was the Active Adult Center, I believe, because I was trying to find a place to play. The court is the wrong size and its wonderful that that was available, and that is available to the community, which is excellent, but Coral Gables has really been one of the last cities to adopt this, and we know that the challenge is space, that's what we hear across the board, and we know its space. And I've got to tell you, it's also creating problems with our tennis community, because what's happening is because there is no space, then you want to do blended lines on tennis courts, which that's the way it's been up to now, because we had not been able to quantify the demand. The demand has been quantified, its here. We don't have enough courts. We have the youngest generation now is getting involved in pickleball, which means those 38 and under and our kids is the largest growing court for those children too. So, what I'm saying is, I'm happy to hear you guys are on board. We need a solution that's dedicated and that doesn't impede on our tennis community because we don't want to have those problems and its not good for our community and the Underline – I mean the largest population that turned out to try to get courts in the entire Underline this past week was pickleball.

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So, I'm just letting you know, and your residents are actually going to Miami Beach, they are going to Tropical Park, they are going to all other facilities because there is nothing available here to speak of.

Vice Mayor Mena: I would encourage you and I'm sure Maite can provide to you, last meeting or two meetings ago, I don't remember which one, we had probably a healthy hour-long conversation probably with a lot of residents here and I think unanimously everybody was in support of doing this. Again, kind of step one immediately, as soon as possible, try to have co-located courts just where we already have things set up; and then step two, which our Parks Director was just describing is to make sure that in the next budget, we budget dollars to build out more dedicated facilities. I'll just reiterate because I said this during that meeting – looking to opportunities with schools and try to like partner with them where, and again, I'm just pulling this out of thin air, but like Ponce Middle that has a huge grass field there, it's a central location in Coral Gables, maybe if we paid to buildout the court, they'd let us have it there, as kids could use it during the day. You know there are opportunities there to try to make things happen in a more expedited fashion while we budget for a bigger solution.

Ms. Azel: And that's a really good suggestion. There are two areas, Water Oaks out west has eight courts that Miami-Dade County built, it sits up right behind Cooper Elementary. They had a pickleball unit in their education, I talked to the P.E. teacher; in Miami Beach we had two courts at Polo, those kids have completely overrun those courts. So that's a great suggestion, that may be a way to address that, but we know that there is very little land here and we just hope that you all as stewards of the community that you all really address the issue that we have in our public parks.

Vice Mayor Mena: We are committed to making it happen, I assure you. Again, everybody has been very strongly in support of this. We hear you guys loud and clear. We know there is a real palpable demand for it, so we hear you and we'll get there.

Ms. Azel: I appreciate – I do invite you; I'm doing a clinic for Commissioners for Miami-Dade County on Sunday at Calusa Park. I'm doing one for Miami Beach Commissioners and Mayor in January, and I would love to do one for the Coral Gables crew, so we can get this done.

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's do it.

Commissioner Anderson: I'm ready. I have my paddle and ball. Let's go.

Ms. Azel: Let's do it. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, Commissioners, we understand the pickleball issue, that it's so popular and we are looking at all aspects to see how we can improve that right away.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, this is a very valuable piece of property, but I also see this as an opportunity to fast-forward the need for additional parks space now that we know. My request would be in your evaluation, I want to emphasize that this is an evaluated process, this is not a

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green light, it's going to not come back to this Commission for final approval, that you locate some additional park space. We're short of field space for soccer, we're short on field space for many other things and we're also clearly short on pickleball space and other space for recreation. So, let's grab the opportunity. You have an asset that's got a tremendous value and I think we can utilize those dollars maybe use a little more efficiently if we do it simultaneously and not have to wait for the next five-year budget capital improvement plan to do it in.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, we are looking at all options right now and this is one of them. We realize how pickleball is really kind of taken over.

Commissioner Anderson: You want to play? I'll play you a game.

Commissioner Menendez: She's trying to recruit me all the time.

City Manager Iglesias: And so, we are looking aggressively to increase our local courts and looking at different options, and also, this would be another option that we can look at. As the Vice Mayor said, this maybe not be the ideal property, because of the noise and the potential value of the property, but it doesn't mean that we can't look at this as a steppingstone to something else.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to add, if at some point down the road, because we've had preliminary discussions and the timing wasn't right, but at some point, down the road, as is needed, we are able to come up with a renovated new Coral Gables Youth Center, that's an amazing time to really have significant areas dedicated to pickleball. That's something I think most everybody understands there's a need, we want to do, but that's an incredible property and that be a clean slate where we can start from scratch, and the only reason I don't play with Commissioner Anderson is, I refuse to play unless we're playing against fire rescue, because just in case, I want them around, that's another story.

[Laughter]

Ms. Azel: If I could just add one thing. I've always looked at Coral Gables as a very progressive, very much involved and engaged community for its residents. I've had the opportunity to work with different municipalities around Miami-Dade County. Miami Beach – I had Bit Coin out, I had Bit Coin attendees who reached out to me, they're coming in April, Miami Beach was kind enough to lend me the two tennis courts that we had adjacent to the Miami Beach Golf Club, so that we could at least line those courts and put temporary nets for that community that was coming in. There were 35,000 of them coming in. We had over 200 RSVPs. Now let me just add, at the same time we had efforts from the community actually talking to their Commissioners, within four months they built the most beautiful, dedicated courts in that community, and that is being overrun right now by everybody, Coral Gables residents are heading that way. So, what I'm letting you know is, when there's a will there's a way and we know you guys' care about your residents and

your community and there is so little space left. Let's just kind of think about what that is going to do for your residents and for your kids.

Vice Mayor Mena: Thank you very much.

Ms. Azel: I appreciate it. Thank you very much for your time.

Vice Mayor Mena: Alright.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's get back to the item on the table, which is authorizing the City Manager to again, start discussions, evaluate and report back on what possibilities there may or may not be as it relates to this property so that we can then have for discussion and get community input on the matter and go from there. Is there any additional public comment? Anybody want to make a motion?

Commissioner Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

(Vote: 3-0)

(Mayor Lago: Recused himself)

Ms. Sardinas: Thank you.