

# City of Coral Gables

405 Biltmore Way  
Coral Gables, FL 33134  
[www.coralgables.com](http://www.coralgables.com)



## Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 8, 2026

8:15 AM

<https://coralgables.zoom.us/j/89943974263>

Youth Center - Conference Room

**Parks and Recreation Advisory Board**

## **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 8:20 a.m.

## **ROLL CALL**

### **Present:**

Jennifer Marques  
Erik Rodriguez  
Michelle White  
Maite Halley  
Richard Smit  
Kirk Menendez

### **Absent:**

Vanessa Gutierrez - excused

## **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

A MOTION TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER MEETING MINUTES WAS MADE BY VICE CHAIRPERSON MAITE HALLEY AND SECONDED BY BOARD MEMBER RICHARD SMIT. ALL IN FAVOR; PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

## **DIRECTORS REPORT**

**a. General Updates**

Director Couceyro reported that December was an extremely active month for the department and that January is anticipated to remain busy as operations transition from the holiday season into spring and summer programming.

Director Couceyro addressed the board's prior discussion regarding the proposed dog park. He explained that, following direction from the board, he consulted with both the City Attorney's Office and the City Clerk's Office to clarify the process for holding a special public meeting. He stated that the board may pursue a special public meeting; however, a formal process must be followed.

Director Couceyro explained that one option would require the board to pass a formal motion requesting approval from the City Commission. That request would then be placed on a future Commission agenda as a specific line item, and a designated board representative would present the request to the Commission. A second option would allow the board to make a recommendation to the City Manager.

Director Couceyro emphasized that any special meeting conducted by the board would be strictly advisory in nature. He clarified that the board does not have policy-making authority and that such a meeting would serve solely as an information-gathering opportunity to inform future recommendations to the City Commission.

Director Couceyro further reported that the upcoming City Commission agenda was expected to include one or more items related to the proposed park, including a time-certain item at approximately 6:00 p.m., which would allow for public input. He advised that this Commission meeting may accomplish the board's original intent of ensuring the community has an opportunity to be heard.

**A MOTION RECOMMENDING THAT, IF THE CITY COMMISSION HAS NOT YET PROVIDED THE PUBLIC WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD REGARDING THE PROPOSED DOG PARK, THE PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDS THAT A SPECIAL MEETING, TOWN HALL, OR PUBLIC MEETING BE HELD IN THE IMMEDIATE ARE TO ALLOW RESIDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE INPUT WAS MADE BY BOARD MEMBER KIRK MENENDEZ AND SECONDED BY VICE CHAIRPERSON MAITE HALLEY.**

**ALL IN FAVOR; CHAIR PERSON JENNIFER MARQUES, BOARD MEMBER ERIK RODRIGUEZ, BOARD MEMBER MICHELLE WHITE; OPPOSED BOARD MEMBER RICHARD SMIT.**

**b. Special Events**

**Farmers Market – Saturday, January 17th, from 8 a.m. – 2 p.m. (ongoing through March 28th)**

Movies Under the Gables Moonlight at Kerdyk – Friday, January 16th, at 5:30 p.m. (E.T.)

Kids Club Parents Night Out - Thursday, January 30th, from 6 - 9 p.m.

Daddy Daughter Dance - Friday, February 20th, from 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.

c. C.I.P Updates

Director Couceyro provided a comprehensive update on current and upcoming capital improvement projects throughout the city.

He reported that the department is currently in the process of transitioning out of the existing Holiday Park setup following the conclusion of the holiday season. He explained that the removal of seasonal infrastructure and décor is underway and that staff are coordinating with contractors to clear the site.

Director Couceyro stated that the department is in discussions with multiple design professionals to explore future Holiday Park layout options. He reported that two conceptual design proposals are expected, which will be reviewed internally prior to being shared with the board and City Commission. He emphasized that the goal is to develop a layout that improves overall visitor experience.

Director Couceyro stated that the department is also assessing the condition and inventory of existing Holiday Park assets. He reported that select legacy items, such as the polar bear, Santa figure, mailbox, gingerbread man, and other reusable decor elements, will be retained for future use, while older or deteriorated large-scale pieces will be sold.

He reported that Venetian Pool has reopened to the public following an extended renovation period. He emphasized that while the pool is operational, the project is not yet fully complete. He explained that two mechanical pumps required for the waterfall features were delayed due to supply chain issues and are pending installation. Once the pumps are installed, the waterfall features are expected to become fully operational. Director Couceyro noted that staff have experienced several start-up challenges related to new drain, fill, and well systems, which are brand new and required operational adjustments. He stated that staff continue to work closely with contractors to stabilize water pressure and system performance.

Director Couceyro reported that Blue Road Park (David Lawrence Park) is nearing completion. He stated that new signage has been installed and that the park is expected to open on a soft-opening basis in the coming days to allow residents to begin using the space. He explained that a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony is being planned for early to mid-February to accommodate the family for whom the park is named, who will be traveling from out of state. He added that safety lighting remains pending and will be installed as part of the final phase of the project.

Director Couceyro provided an update on Phillips Park, noting that construction is actively underway. He stated that the project is currently focused on grading and

underground utility work. He explained that staff are reviewing potential design adjustments and funding allocations to maximize improvements within the available budget. He added that Phillips Park will also receive a blue-light emergency pole with an integrated AED and camera during construction as part of the City's expanded park safety initiative.

Director Couceyro reported that Rotary Park is approaching approximately 90 percent design completion. He stated that once final plans are complete, the project will move forward to the contracting phase. He noted that Rotary Park is also planned to receive a blue-light emergency pole once construction begins.

Director Couceyro discussed the City's ongoing rollout of blue-light emergency poles equipped with AEDs and security cameras. He explained that the pilot installation at Salvador Park has been successful and that similar installations are planned for Phillips Park, Merrick Park, Rotary Park, and additional locations. He explained that the system allows direct communication with emergency dispatch and provides real-time instructions for AED use until first responders arrive.

Director Couceyro reported that Merrick Park will be receiving both a blue-light emergency pole and a large commemorative sculpture. He explained that the sculpture, created by an African American artist, honors the Bahamian community and will occupy a prominent location within the park. He noted that the addition of the sculpture will impact future design considerations for Holiday Park programming, and staff are evaluating how seasonal installations will be configured around the artwork.

Assistant Director Espino provided an update on Dorothy Thomson Park, stating that bronze statues for the park are currently in production. She explained that the fabrication process is time-intensive due to the use of prefabricated molds and bronze casting. She reported that Toto has been completed and portions of the Tin Man statue are underway. She stated that installation is anticipated around June and that the statues will be placed in accessible locations that encourage interaction and photo opportunities for children.

Director Couceyro reported on Granada Golf Course capital projects, including the renovation of the maintenance barn and golf shelters. He stated that final approvals were received from Historic Preservation and other review boards and that the approved design maintains the original architectural style while improving durability and functionality. He explained that the shelters will be slightly larger and constructed with sturdier materials while preserving the historic character of the course.

Director Couceyro reported that planning is underway for the Country Club Pool Deck renovation, which is not expected to begin until November of this year. He stated that staff are using the lead time to plan construction sequencing to minimize impacts to members and programming.

Finally, Director Couceyro provided an update on the Youth Center athletic field

renovations, stating that staff are preparing a Request for Proposals to re-sod and re-grade the athletic field. He explained that the work is anticipated to occur during the summer months, as that period has the least impact on athletic programming. He acknowledged that some summer camps may be affected but stated that staff will explore operational adjustments to minimize disruptions.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **I. Board review and approvals for accreditation:**

- a. Leadership Succession Plan**
- b. General Security Plan**
- c. Risk Management Plan and Procedures**

**A MOTION TO APPROVE AND ACCEPT THE LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION PLAN, GENERAL SECURITY PLAN AND THE RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN AND PROCEDURES NEEDED IN SUPPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT'S ACCREDITATION WAS MADE BY BOARD MEMBER KIRK MENENDEZ AND SECONDED BY BOARD MEMBER RICHARD SMIT. ALL IN FAVOR; PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## **OLD BUSINESS**

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

a. Baseball program at the Youth Center

Board Member Michelle White raised concerns regarding the current baseball program, citing issues related to contractor conduct, program oversight, communication with parents, and contract compliance.

Director Couceyro acknowledged the concerns and stated that the department takes all allegations involving youth programming seriously, particularly when they involve the treatment of children and adherence to City policies. Director Couceyro explained that a central issue discussed this season was a reported request to parents by the contracted baseball provider for additional fees to be paid directly to the contractor, outside of the City's registration and fee structure. He noted the contracted baseball provider has already been addressed by the Youth Center Acting Manager and informed them this is not allowed within their current contract with the city.

Director Couceyro further explained that concerns regarding the contractor's behavior toward participants and parents had previously been brought to the department's attention. He stated that the department met with the contractor following prior incidents and communicated expectations regarding professionalism, appropriate conduct, and compliance with City policies. He noted that while he received Mrs. White's complaint, the department's ability to take formal corrective action is significantly strengthened when more than one parent raises concerns in writing. He further explained many parents wrote in favor of the contractor with one parent even recanting their previous statement as it was not meant in a negative way towards the contractor.

Board Member Michelle White responded by stating that the absence of multiple written complaints should not be interpreted as the absence of a problem. She emphasized that parents may be reluctant to submit formal complaints due to fear of retaliation or negative treatment toward their children. Board Member White also raised concerns regarding the City's oversight of contractor operations, noting instances in which program activities occurred outside of City facilities without staff awareness. Board Member White further stated that recanted complaints should not invalidate the seriousness of the original concerns. She emphasized that the behavior described remains the same this season.

Director Couceyro explained that procurement and contract renewal decisions are governed by City policy and subject to direction from the City Manager's Office. He stated that while the department has no issue in pursuing a competitive solicitation process for the baseball program, any decision to terminate, rebid, or restructure the program must follow established procurement procedures and administrative guidance.

Director Couceyro noted that baseball programming presents unique operational challenges, including shared field usage, limited dedicated baseball facilities, and coordination with other Youth Center programs. He explained that historically, these

challenges have limited the number of potential vendors interested in operating the program. However, he stated that this does not preclude future solicitation and that staff remain open to evaluating alternative models, including re-bidding or restructuring the program, if directed.

Board members emphasized that the central concern is the well-being of participating children and maintaining a positive, respectful environment consistent with the City's values. The board reached consensus recommending heightened supervision of the baseball program for the remainder of the season and requested that staff provide a follow-up update at a future meeting.

#### **ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY**

Next meeting date Thursday, February 12th at 8:15 AM

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

#### **NOTE**