

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-2 and F-1 are related
December 10, 2024
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Community Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Lily Azel(s)

Maite Halley
Tom Wells
Lily Azel

Agenda Item 2-2 and F-1 [3:05 p.m.]

Time Certain 3:00 p.m.

2-2: A Resolution of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board requesting that the City Commission fund a planning study maximizing pickleball courts at the Biltmore Tennis Center without the loss of tennis courts, and ensuring the study also includes review by the Historic Preservation Board.

F-1: A Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager to expedite installation of temporary pickleball courts and the development of potential designs for the addition of dedicated pickleball courts at the William H. Kerdyk Biltmore Tennis Center. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson) (Co-Sponsored by Mayor Lago) (Co-Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

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Agenda Items 2-2 and F-1 – Resolution of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and a Resolution of the City Commission to expedite installation of temporary pickleball courts

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Mayor Lago: Alright. We have a time certain item for 3 p.m., agenda items 2-2 and F-1.

City Attorney Suarez: So, Mayor, I can read F-1 since it's a resolution of the City Commission or proposed resolution of the City Commission. F- 1 is a Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager to expedite installation of temporary pickleball courts and the development of potential designs for the addition of dedicated pickleball courts at the William H. Kerdyk Biltmore Tennis Center. And the related item is 2-2, which is a resolution that came from the Parks Advisory Board.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Mr. Director how are you.

Parks and Recreation Director: Good afternoon. So, we in the city in the Community Recreation Department, we were presented a proposal to look at the installation of dedicated permanent pickleball courts at Biltmore Tennis Center. So, it was a two-pronged request. It was looking at the feasibility of putting it there and at the same time also having temporary installation of six pickleball courts using the two northwest courts on Biltmore Tennis Center. So, this proposal was discussed at length with our Parks and Recreation Advisory, which is why they are related items, and the discussion was that that site is a very good site, because there is a lot of infrastructure that you already have. You have the ability for, obviously, restroom, its accessible, there is staff, infrastructure, you might need more staff with the increased activity and maintenance that would be needed with those courts, but at least you have the infrastructure there. The one concern that was discussed is, the feasibility of whether those courts can fit in there. There would need to be a designer and a study and planning to see how those courts would fit in there, because there is an access road that's there, parking, if you are adding eight courts, could be up to 32 people playing at once, and if they are leaving and they're coming in, parking is something that has to be looked at. There was discussion at the Parks and Rec Advisory Board level of how does the historic portion fall into it, because even though the courts aren't historic, it's the whole property historic. Just things that the board felt should be discussed and to have a planning study done prior to converting those two courts to the six permanent, I mean to the six temporary pickleball courts. That was the discussion. The board's motion that was passed was to, yes, move forward with the planning study, see if its even feasible to do it, and if it is, once it becomes established that it can be done, and you start the process, then you can look at that temporary fix. So that's where we are.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Like the rest of colleagues, we've all been visited by individuals who are wanting to see some immediate solution and then a well thought out and planned design for dedicated pickleball courts. So, today, I'm not saying where the dedicated pickleball courts need to be. I do think there is ample space. One of the areas that I looked at with Maite Halley was areas where we had invasive pine trees that could be removed and need to be removed. There are other options out there. So, I think that's an issue that needs to be dealt with by somebody studying it and designing it and then bringing it back to the Parks and Recreation Board and going through the normal process, but in the meantime, we can repurpose, make it dual use on the tennis courts. Two of the courts, just adding some paint, like we did at the basketball courts, and allow to have that flexible use there. All the tennis courts aren't filled up all the time, so at least then, if you have

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two of them available for flexible use, we can start to satisfy the needs for play time, because there are a lot of people playing at the Youth Center. We opened up the Sunday hours. There are times when there are hardly any basketball players there; there are times when there are more basketball players there. So, we are looking for something more consistent and then we can go through the process of planning. So the resolution that I've proposed and its been co-sponsored by two of my colleagues here, is a two-part process; one is having the temporary use section and then do the study and come back to us with a comprehensive plan to have dedicated pickleball courts at that facility, and we'll talk about the parking and how do you get there at that time. We need a comprehensive discussion about parking issues at the Biltmore, but I don't think we are prepared to do that today.

Parks and Recreation Director: So, just for clarification, because the proposal that they looked at was to have those six courts taking those two tennis courts and creating them as pickleball courts, not as blended, not having combination of tennis and pickleball, because if you make them blended where they do both, I have to look at how that works with the fixed nets. The nets are fixed in posts. We would have to look at how we do portable type nets for tennis as well, but whatever direction we're given, we're definitely moving to expedite.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may, Madam Vice Mayor. This is what I think in my opinion, after sitting with Maite and sitting with yourself, by the way, thank you for your hard work on this, along with Maite. Maite has been a huge advocate on behalf of the pickleball community. She deserves all the credit that she gets, because she is always out there fighting for this community. If anybody deserves the credit is Maite for hopefully what we are accomplishing today. I apologize, what I said was, if anybody deserves the credit its Maite, for all the work that she has done on behalf of the city.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: There isn't a Friday afternoon in my office hours that Maite doesn't show up and she's a sweetheart.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Always with a smile though too.

Mayor Lago: Always with a smile and I will tell you, yourself, Mr. Director, we had a long conversation with Maite in my office, and we really sat down and kind of ironed out the plan that the Vice Mayor is talking about. So, I want to congratulate the Vice Mayor also for her hard work on the issue. And I walked the site with Maite and to me, I think this is part of the site that makes the most sense due to the simple fact that the other site that I talked about just requires a lot of work, the county approval, and that kind of thing. It would be a perfect site, but you know, at the end of the day, let's get something done. I think this two-step approach, as the Vice Mayor was saying, today we approve the pickleball courts; the pickleball courts should be pickleball courts. Leave them as the way they are.

[Applause]

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Mayor Lago: And if I may, while I appreciate the round of applause, we could be here for days, and we've had a long meeting, but thank you for that. Let's save it for Maite at the end. So, what I was saying was, let's make sure we have dedicated pickleball courts. We have \$500,000. What I want to see is the \$500,000 be used for the following: let's retrofit the existing courts, it shouldn't cost that much, should cost significantly cheaper than what we talked about; and then, let's engage, through the Manager's office and Procurement and your office, hiring an architect, hiring a team that is required, any consultants, engineers, pavement reviewer, whatever we need to do to get the ball rolling. We have a year, less than a year, you have nine months to the next budget season, let's say. We could have the plans, we could have the pickleball courts installed, people using them in the community, we could have the plans, the architect hired, possibly in the next two months, takes about two months to go through Procurement, advertise, select. Make a selection like we did today in regard to City Hall and then potentially three months, I don't think it should be more than three months to have the plans done. I think it's a pretty simple project. Its not anything massive, unless they may require some drainage, I'm not sure if drainage is required, that may be an outlier that may cause the cost to go up, and then have something that we can bid and be ready for budget season. So that we can come to budget season and say, we need a million dollars, we need \$750,000, whatever the number is going to be, to build something that addressed the need in the community, that we can really take a step forward. The budget season, we address it at that moment, and we can just roll into selecting to go into the procurement process with our great Procurement Director and our team, to find a contractor or multiple contractors, depending on the disciplines that are required. We may break it up, we may do civil, we may do just the courts, whatever may be required, and possibly be in construction before the end of 2025, that's the goal. We have the money in place right now to pay for the architect, to pay for the retrofitting of the existing courts to address what the Vice Mayor said, which is the Australian Pines that need to be removed. Those are all things that I think could be budgeted within that \$500,000 and be ready to start the procurement process in hiring an architect immediately. Okay. That's my opinion, that's where I stand. Pretty simple. It's been a long time coming. I don't know if you want to add anything else to that, Vice Mayor, that maybe I forgot.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think its well stated. Commissioner Fernandez, unless you have something to add.

Commissioner Fernandez: I do, actually. I agree with the Mayor. I think these have to be dedicated pickleball courts. I don't think it should be a blended court.

[Applause]

Commissioner Fernandez: We continue to have that problem and pickleball continues to be in high demand. My son, the one thing I hear from him all the time is, why don't you take me to play pickleball, and its just because you know, we don't have the ability to do so, we don't have a place to go. So, this is a temporary solution. I would not be happy with waiting a year to get this project done.

[Applause]

Commissioner Fernandez: Do we have any current contracts with architects that already working with your department on other projects, on a pre-approved list that we can tap into to get to work on a potential design.

Parks and Recreation Director: Celeste is coming up. She can answer.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

Chief Procurement Officer: Celeste Walker-Harmon, Chief Procurement Officer. Yes, we have a current contractor pool with architects who are already certified and, in our pool, ready for work and they can be used for the initial design or whatever needs that you have without us having to go out for competition, because the pool already exists.

Commissioner Fernandez: What's the turnaround time on that?

Chief Procurement Officer: Meaning?

Commissioner Fernandez: If we were to tell you, let's start working on this, how quickly can we get them.

Chief Procurement Officer: They're already in the pool.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Alright.

Chief Procurement Officer: They're ready.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, we can get to work right away on that.

Chief Procurement Officer: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because I walked the site a couple of times with Maite and with an architect and realistically, we do believe that you can place eight pickleball courts there, and the only thing that would have to be moved, Fred is the access road to the other side of that little hill that we have there, for a short period of time. I know that the pines are an issue, however, that is the only protection that we currently have for the golf balls. So those pines, although invasive, they're protective, because they do protect however is going to be playing pickleball, whoever is playing tennis from the balls. And while we were there, there was one that hit one of those pines while we were standing there measuring the sites. So, I think based on the measurements we took that day, it is possible to do it without even touching the pines. Maybe there is one pine that would have to come down, but I think its totally feasible to have eight pickleball courts, a real pickleball facility there. The one concern that was brought up by the tennis operator was finding a way to buffer the noise between the pickleball side and the tennis side. I guess the architect can figure out

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a solution there, but I'm sure that if we put some foliage there, there should be ways to buffer that a bit.

Parks and Recreation Director: Yes. I think there was some discussion there, maybe look at the design of concentrating whatever is newly constructed to be all pickleball and then revert the converter ones back to tennis, so then there'll be a divide.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Parks and Recreation Director: A split and maybe you can buffer it with vegetation or whatever you can for noise buffering as best as you can.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There is some vegetation that I've already had some discussions about that might be able to come in and address the immediate issue of the removal of pines and you can have a two-layered approach, something that grows tall and something that stays bushy and a native plant too that will address that need. So, it will provide you the necessary square footage to have that north-south court. The only reason why I said a blended court was to address the tug-of-war that always exists between tennis and pickleball. We are not going to take away the courts, they'll be given back once the permanent courts are installed, and we have plenty of space there, we do.

Mayor Lago: If I may. I just wanted to add something. I want to manage expectations, and I think its important to tell the residents the truth. I had multiple contracts, like what they stated. I have two contracts with the School Board, CM at Risk and a job order contract where I'm pre-qualified. Also, I have them with different entities throughout the State of Florida that I build for them. So, just because you have that contract and you go out to design and you design it, you still have to get funding, and you can't procure funding until the next budget cycle. So, construction will not start unless you can reallocate funds from another project or from another pool of money and then refill that. So, yes, you can start the planning, you can start the design, maybe two months early, but you are still going to have to wait for funding, unless the project, which I think is going to be probably about a million dollars, you can find a million dollars in the budget. So, just want to manage expectations that worst case scenario, you have to wait till next budget cycle, you present the pricing, because you go out to market once you've got those plans, you can get several pricing from different contractors or different specialty contractors throughout Miami-Dade County and then you can get that into the next budget cycle, which should happen rather quickly, you see there is a lot of support on the Commission. Just managing expectations. I want to make sure that you're aware.

Commissioner Menendez: If I may, Mayor. First off, without the involvement of all of you, we wouldn't be here, so great job on your community effort. Your voices are being heard. I think it's a great enhancement for that entire area. We were talking about the Biltmore Hotel earlier, I think its also a draw for people to frequent the Biltmore Hotel, to have variety. I think more people play pickleball in terms of, without having years of experience in tennis. So, I think its something that reaches all brackets, all socio-economic groups. I think it's a great enhancement and I think at the

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very least what you're hearing is, there is going to be an effort by the city to fast-track it as much as possible. I don't think we are going to take the foot off the accelerator. There might be hiccups along the way, but I think moving it forward, I'm going to ask the administration, I think we have to admit budget cycles sometime the Finance Department budget comes back to us with some excess dollars here and there that weren't anticipated. If we have some excess dollars that come in, even if its \$50,000, \$100,000, its something that maybe the Commission can then look at and move towards this effort, but I mean, I think you hear pretty much here, we're on board and thanks to the efforts that were collected between you and the city. I think you're going to get what you always wanted.

Parks and Recreation Director: As we are moving towards the conversion of those two courts to six courts, we want to expedite it. I would make a request to maybe consider a motion to do a bid waiver for that portion, because sometimes you have to work on, not only the price, but the scheduling, and if I call three companies and the one that can get to me quicker – so if we want to expedite this, I think a bid waiver would be very helpful. I think Celeste would be okay with that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, done.

Parks and Recreation Director: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: All in favor.

All: Aye.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

City Attorney Suarez: Is that the motion on the resolution?

Mayor Lago: The bid waiver.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I moved the resolution earlier. Okay. We need a second folks.

City Attorney Suarez: But can we get a little bit of clarification, because the resolution as drafted says, that the City Manager shall expedite the temporary repurposing of up to two existing tennis courts for shared use for tennis and pickleball with the funds in the current Capital Improvement Project Budget. So, is it going to be shared or dedicated for the repurposing?

Commissioner Fernandez: Dedicated.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, we do dedicated. I was just trying to balance things, so we didn't get tarred and feathered guys.

City Manager Rojas: Excuse me, Madam Vice Mayor. I think what the director was saying is that it really should be dedicated, because if it was dual use, it would be difficult to change the netting and it will require more staff, so it would have to be dedicated.

Parks and Recreation Director: Its tough for both. Tennis would have a tough time with the blended as well.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Friendly amendment accepted. We're ready. We have a first and several seconds.

Mayor Lago: You are about to get what you want. Does everybody need to speak or no? Maite, would you like to come up. Come on up.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: May I make a request because we have a pretty long item after this. Do you mind if Maite speaks on behalf of everyone. We are about to vote in favor of.

Ms. Halley: I think probably Lilly wants to get up here and talk and that would be it, but what I wanted to say guys, we had been fighting and my mantra for the last six months had been eight dedicated, lit, centralized pickleball courts now, and we're about to get six, which is great and a study to see how we fit the eight, and this is really important to me, make the tennis community whole. So, they have ten courts right now, we are going to take over two for a few months, hopefully its only a few months, but like the Mayor said, we have to manage expectations, because of budgeting issues, project delays, etc., but its happening, okay. This is it. This is happening. We're all on board. We have budget money right now to get those lines painted, so I'm hoping that January 28th is my birthday, that would be a great day.

[Laughter]

Commissioner Fernandez: Can we start scheduling the ribbon-cutting?

Ms. Halley: I'm sorry.

Commissioner Fernandez: Can we start scheduling the ribbon cutting.

Ms. Halley: A lot of pressure on Fred right there, but I wanted to say a couple of things really quickly. One is, Fred, you said the northwest corner, I thought we had talked about the northeast.

Parks and Recreation Director: You know what, I don't know my directions. You're right.

Ms. Halley: Northeast – Okay. I wanted to clear that up. It is a temporary use because we hope to be able to give those very courts back, but it is not flexible. So, at the time that pickleball lines are painted on it, on these two tennis courts, they will be solely for the use of pickleball and that's

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what the resolution in front of us says; and yes, as soon as Mr. Prescott moves his building materials in the parking garage, we'll have plenty of parking. I had hoped to have today, the students from Gables High. They are starting a pickleball club, they are out here practicing with us, and they had hoped to come, but one of the mom's doesn't allow them to ride the trolley. I don't understand, but anyway. You know, we've got the kids interested and Fred know, and we've talked about programming for them, because this is really exciting that our youth, our teenagers, as well as our young kids are involved. So, thank you so much for this.

[Applause]

Budget Director Rodriguez: Just for a point of clarification, the bid waiver is for the resurfacing and restriping portion of this project.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Suarez: And we will incorporate that into the resolution.

Lily Azel: Hello everyone. So happy to be here. It's been a couple of years in the making here and thank you all for this court and really bringing this forward dedicated pickleball court is needed here in Coral Gables. Just to give you, I know that you've heard a lot about the need of the community, but one of the things just to keep in mind and this could happen pretty quickly. Major League Pickleball was in Miami in fairgrounds this past, it was in November. I introduced – I went up to Peachtree and I introduced the fairgrounds to Major League Pickleball. The footprint for that is six courts to bring Major League Pickleball pros here. It was hugely successful; nine events during the year. You had some of your staff here playing in the Minor League portion, the amateur part of that tournament, but what I'm trying to say is that there is with six courts in that footprint there is so much opportunity to make this a worldclass facility also for pickleball. You have the number one player staying at the Biltmore. It would have been wonderful to have some pickleball there so they could train. You had the High-Five staying there. You've got all the right ingredients and making these dedicated pickleball courts will be wonderful community, but also Coral Gables can immediately get into the national scene with pickleball. So, thank you for that. And also, I am so ecstatic because I asked two years ago, I asked Maite Halley two years ago if she would consider being a USA Pickleball Ambassador. She said no two years ago and two years later through her work, she has accepted, and I will be sponsoring her to be the USA Pickleball Ambassador for Coral Gables.

[Applause]

Lily Azel: So, you'll have an ambassador and she's an ambassador no matter what. She's just going to be representing the governing organization for our sport. So again, thank you. I appreciate your support, and we look forward to playing some pickleball there.

Commissioner Menendez: By the way, I have a suggestion. We have the Junior Orange Bowl Golf Tournament, Junior Orange Bowl Tennis, might as well have Junior Orange Bowl Pickleball at the Biltmore.

Lily Azel: We're there.

Mr. Wells: Thank you for letting me speak. Tom Wells, ____ Coral Way, Coral Gables. I will be very brief on this lovefest on pickleball. I just wanted to note a couple of things. In the oral history, the hundredth anniversary Coral Gables website, fantastic website. I note that Commissioner Menendez stated how important parks and sports are in Coral Gables, because it brings kids to play with other kids, and their parents together. He stated the sole of our community is the opportunities we provide to our residents to come together. That's what pickleball is. It's a community sport. The second thing is, I want to bring out about this whole drama between tennis players and pickleball players. There is no fight. One of the players who regularly plays with us is Eleana. Eleana won the Salvadore's tennis team, got second in the nation two weeks ago, in Amateur Club National Tennis Championship. She plays tennis, she also plays pickleball. I grew up playing tennis and won one of the Calvin Tennis Tournaments. Like most tennis players, we play both sports right now. Now, in tennis you need to bring a player to the court, and you need to reserve a court. In pickleball you just show up, put a paddle in, like you know, in the rack and you play with anybody who plays. It's a much ____ court. There is a lot more banter. I've played with Billy before; he might say there's too much banter for me. Putting that aside, this is great for Coral Gables. It allows grandparents to play with grandchildren, and that can't happen in tennis. It allows parents to play with children and I thank you for supporting this. Thank you.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: We do, sir. Just to make sure we're incorporating the change of the bid waiver into.

City Attorney Suarez: Correct – and its going to be a dedicated pickleball courts instead of the blended.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

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[Applause]