

City of Coral Gables

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



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 5, 2023

4:00 PM

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86149844627>

Adult Activity Center

Senior Citizens Advisory Board

Chairperson James "Jim" Berlin

Vice Chairperson Celia Suarez

Board Member Jean H. Connelly

Board Member Kelley Schild

Board Member Julian Sevillano

Board Member Richard Thurer

Board Member Hendrik Woods

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting began at 4:03pm

ROLL CALL

Present: 6 - Chairperson Berlin, Vice Chairperson Suarez, Board Member Connelly, Board Member Schild, Board Member Sevillano and Board Member Woods

Excused: 1 - Board Member Thurer

a. Roll Call and Excusal of Absences

A MOTION TO APPROVE THE ABSENCE OF RICHARD THURER WAS MADE BY JULIAN SEVILLANO AND WAS SECONDED BY HENDRIK WOODS. ALL IN FAVOR; PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

a. Approval of December's Meeting Minutes

Discussion was had where Board Chairperson James "Jim" Berlin mentioned an accidental mention of Board Vice Chairperson Celia Suarez being referred to as "Vice Mayor Celia" which Administrative Assistant Sarah Espino said she'd be sure to fix that mistake for the final draft.

A MOTION TO APPROVE LAST MEETINGS MINUTES WAS MADE BY JULIAN SEVILLANO AND WAS SECONDED BY CELIA SUAREZ. ALL IN FAVOR; PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

a. General Updates

AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson began the supervisor's report by discussing the Aqua Zumba class that began on January 4th, 2023, stating that the class has reached its enrollment limit of 20 people in its debut month. Katherine Anderson then goes on to mention that beginning in January the AAC will be extending their hours into Saturday's, with Strength & Toning beginning at 9am followed by Zumba at 10:15am, mentioning that although there is currently low enrollment this is the first month of Saturday classes and we do expect the numbers to continue to move upwards. Katherine Anderson then mentioned that there will also be pickleball offered on Saturday's in two separate time blocks, the first from 11:30am with the second following immediately after from 1:30pm, noting that the 11:30am time has already filled up entirely while the 1:30pm time still had some spots available.

Board Chairperson James "Jim" Berlin then inquired as to the progress on the pickleball lessons that have been discussed in previous meetings, to which Community Recreation Director Fred Couceyro provided clarification stating that there are some procurement issues that need to be resolved before the AAC can move forward with scheduling those lessons.

AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson then went on to discuss the Mind & Melody program, stating that there was a list created to track interested members and now that the list has officially reached 16 people they will be attempting to have another session of the program in the Spring. Katherine Anderson did specify that there must be a minimum of 10 registered participants for the course to move forward, and that they will push the course start date if necessary to ensure that this minimum requirement is met. Community Recreation Director Fred Couceyro then stated that the advertisement will move forward as discussed in the previous meeting, however there must be demand for this program to continue. Board Chairperson James "Jim" Berlin then inquired as to whether there was any additional information regarding a benefactor mentioned in the previous meeting who had shown interest in sponsoring the program, Director Couceyro replied that he had not received any additional information and that the department would happily accept a donation to help sponsor the program. Katherine Anderson then mentioned that she had reached out to a potential sponsor regarding the program but has yet to hear anything back.

b. Special Events

AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson began by discussing the recent Holiday Luncheon, stating that all initial 100 tickets were sold with such a demand remaining the limit had to be increased to 120 tickets. Katherine Anderson then noted that the maximum number of participants that can be seated is 135 which will now be where the ticket limit will be set for future events. Board Chairperson James "Jim" Berlin and Board Member Julian Sevillano then gave recognition to the dancers for their wonderful performance.

AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson then went on to discuss the variety show stating that it has been tentatively scheduled for Friday, April 7th at 1pm. Board Chairperson

James "Jim" Berlin then mentioned that the variety show would then fall on good Friday, in response Katherine Anderson stated that the date would then need to be revisited and that she would have an update when the board meets again in February.

AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson then stated that the Volunteer Appreciation luncheon has been scheduled for Friday, May 5th and would be a Cinco de Mayo Fiesta this year, providing Mexican food and a DJ with all AAC volunteers being able to attend for free as a thank you for all of the time they dedicate to the center and the City of Coral Gables.

c. Administrative Updates

Community Recreation Director Fred Couceyro began by discussing the smoke free legislation stating that it has officially gone through Commission for a second reading and that they expect to begin updating the necessary signage very soon.

Director Couceyro then began going over all of the efforts being made for dog parks throughout the community, noting that there is the temporary one on Catalonia, another temporary one at 1505 Ponce being provided by commercial developers. Director Couceyro then discussed the Underline dog park being worked out in conjunction with the county, noting that they have had 3 meetings to discuss the park in December, where the plan is for the county to build the dog park to then hand over to Coral Gables to run the park.

Director Couceyro then discussed the other project that is happening in conjunction with the county which is the informal canoe launch on Riviera which they plan to turn into an official canoe launch.

MAYOR APPEARANCE

a. Q & A with Mayor Lago

City of Coral Gables Mayor Vince Lago began by thanking the board for their time and for inviting him to their meeting stating that he is here to listen. Board Member Julian Sevillano began by bringing up the large number of visitors the City of Coral Gables is seeing and the security concerns that come with all these visitors. He then inquired whether the City has been considering a security camera system similar to the one in London to help protect the community. Mayor Lago responded by stating that the City of Coral Gables already has a very similar security camera system and offered the Board an opportunity to tour the Public Safety Building to demonstrate this system to the board.

Mayor Lago then went on to note the efforts being made to expand the police force by adding 5 additional units specifically to patrol the downtown area where there is the most visitor traffic seen. Board Member Julian Sevillano then inquired specifically about the residential areas asking what efforts are being made to keep those areas safe. Mayor Lago responded stating that the neighborhood safety aides are one of the innovative ways that they can keep the residential neighborhoods safe, noting that while they are not police officers, they work in conjunction with the police department to help keep the community safe.

Board Chairperson James "Jim" Berlin then mentioned the assisted living facilities in the area noting that Mayor Lago had raised concerns regarding the extra strain these facilities have on emergency medical response units, asking if this is still a concern and if so, what steps are being taken to get ahead of those issues. Mayor Lago responded by stating that those concerns still exist, however the City is taking the steps to offset this strain by moving forward with building a new fire station for about 8 million dollars and creating more firefighter positions in the City. Mayor Lago then noted that he had just recently returned from a visit to Tallahassee Florida in order to be able to secure the funds necessary for the new fire station. Mayor Lago stated that he believes these tactics should help to relieve the strain that assisted living facilities create and mentioned that there have been discussions with the City Attorney regarding possibly adding an extra sur-charge to these facilities in response to the extra strain they create in these areas.

Board Member Kelley Schild shared that having run a nursing home in the past, it is her belief that these assisted living facilities do not provide an extra strain on emergency medical response teams but rather, are reducing the number of calls being made by reducing the number of at home accidents. Mayor Vince Lago responded by noting that when he looks at the data it is showing that these facilities do require the use of emergency medical services more than other areas. Mayor Lago also stated that when he can sit in a meeting across the street from the Palace and see a constant flow of ambulances coming through it is a clear indicator that they are these pulling ambulances from other areas in the community where there may be a need for them. Board Member Kelley Schild then inquired whether the sur-charge would be like a false alarm fine, Mayor Lago stated that it will be similar in the purpose being to ensure these resources are available for other parts of the community that may require them.

Vice Chairperson Celia Suarez then mentioned that Board Chairperson James “Jim” Berlin and herself went to visit one of these assisted living facilities and took note of the high costs. Celia Suarez then inquired as to what is being done to maintain affordable housing throughout the City of Coral Gables. Mayor Lago discussed what he views as possible risks of subsidized housing being the land acquisition followed by the selection process for who would qualify for this reduced-price housing. Mayor Lago discussed the raise in the cost of living, stating that the Commission had raised the maximum unit creation per acre from 50 to 100 units recently and that even with this increase the cost of living is at an all-time high. He then stated that the only way to clamp down on this would be to have a cap on rental prices noting that this has not worked well in New York or California. Mayor Lago then stated that the goal needs to be to make it affordable in the city and get rid of the red tape to make it an easier process for developers to build up the number of units they are legally allowed to build according to the code within the City of Coral Gables and expanding affordable public transportation.

Board Chairperson James “Jim” Berlin then inquired as to what methods are being used to control traffic noting that he has heard complaints regarding residents sitting waiting at traffic signals for too long. Mayor Lago informed the board that the traffic lights are controlled by Miami-Dade County, stating that he has been working with the county to fix this issue along with removing the boxes on the street corners that control the lights. Mayor Lago then discussed other methods that he is employing in this area including having passed a piece of legislation recently that lowered the speed limit in the residential areas to 25mph and receiving approval to install speed bumps and speed humps throughout the City to help make the streets safer. However, Mayor Lago did acknowledge that this alone will not fix the traffic problem in the residential areas noting that the county will not close off anymore streets because they do not have public transportation that extends far enough south leading to a reliance on side streets helping to reduce traffic on main roads.

Board Members Kelley Schild then mentioned fines that are issued throughout the City for needed home improvements, noting someone who attended the Community Meeting about the Granada Diner, asking whether there is any sort of resources for elderly residents because many are not sure where to begin. Mayor Lago began by reviewing the mobile permitting service that is now being used in the City of Coral Gables, stating that to qualify you must be a veteran, disabled, single parent, or over the age of 65. They will come to your house and if it is an addition or less, they will help you with your permitting for different projects such as painting, trimming trees, etc. Board Member Kelley Schild then inquired as to how one would come across this information to which Mayor Lago replied that it is posted all around the City and AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson stated that there are informational flyers in the at the reception desk when you enter the AAC. Mayor Lago then discussed another program where the City is partnering with contractors who will complete projects for those who qualify at cost and in return are receiving a tax benefit. AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson offered to send Board Member Kelley Schild a flyer for the permitting information.

Board Chairperson James “Jim” Berlin then inquired as to the status of the parks master plan now since the referendum vote has failed to pass. Mayor Lago began by mentioning a law that he wrote that requires any land developer developing on City land must pay 0.5% into an account for land acquisition for parks, stating that this account has been used to acquire approximately 10 different parks throughout the City of Coral Gables. Mayor Lago then mentioned an effort that he has led to convince land developers to expand upwards slightly taller than wider to preserve land. Mayor Lago then stated that despite his love for the Community Recreation Department and want for expanding the City’s parks, he did vote no on the referendum because of inflation and the increased cost of living that was already occurring, stating that there are individuals who could not afford the proposed tax hike. Mayor Lago then said that while he is a huge supporter of accomplishing the Park’s master plan, and that he believes these projects could be pushed to later down the line.

Mayor Lago then discussed the differences between the City of Coral Gables and other cities around the country, pointing out the high education level of our population and the “extraordinary people” who retire to the Gables. Board Member Julian Sevillano then brings up how the retired population likes to feel useful within their community and Mayor Lago mentioned how volunteering within the community is a great opportunity to stay active and mentioned some volunteer opportunities.

Vice Chairperson Celia Suarez then mentioned the Country Club stating that she would like to see the Country Club get going more stating that she joined early on but that many of the amenities are still not up to par with what she was expecting. Community Recreation Director Fred Couceyro then said that he is open to any suggestions she may have, however there are some ongoing changes with the Country Club that he hopes will begin to move things in the right direction, beginning with Mitchell Zuriarrain now taking over as Director of the Country Club. Director Couceyro then mentioned that the café has begun to extend its hours and has seen a very sharp increase in the number of customers they are receiving and has become a center point for Country Club also having received their liquor license. However, Director Couceyro did acknowledge that getting the pool up and running has been taking longer than anticipated,. Everything else including the fitness club, classes, and rentals has been moving in the right direction. Mayor Lago then brought up how mismanaged the Country Club was under the previous management leading to the Community Recreation taking over operations of the Country Club along with leading the repairs of the Country Club. Vice Chairperson Celia Suarez then said that she joined six months ago and feels as though she has not received her money’s worth out of the membership and would like to extend it into the next calendar year to which Director Couceyro responded that he would not mind having a discussion with her about her different ideas and what she feels she should be receiving from her membership. Director Couceyro did however point out that in comparison to what the Country Club previously offered they are now offering more classes, have better equipment, and have elevated the quality of what the Country Club is offering.

Board Member Hendrik Woods then stated that one of his goals for the City of Coral Gables is to make it affordable enough where employees of the city can afford to live

here, and inquired as to whether or not the City could require developers to donate a certain percentage of units as affordable housing. Mayor Lago then mentioned how he believed it would be that we would need to have this kind of housing built on City property and then it would be a difficult decision to decide who would qualify for this reduced rate housing. Board Member Kelley Schild then stated that Baptist Health has taken steps to provide housing for the hospital staff in certain areas, to which Mayor Lago asked if she had any further information she can share with him regarding that process. Mayor Lago compared this idea to similar one's discussed by the school board in the past to provide housing on school property for teachers and staff, stating that it would be very difficult with the increasing construction and land costs. Mayor Lago then stated that to make it a viable option employees must be willing to give up having a car which would mean a big leap in public transportation as well.

NEW BUSINESS

OLD BUSINESS

a. Update on Farmer's Market Booth

AAC Supervisor Katherine Anderson then mentioned that she was able to reach out to the Special Events Team regarding the board participating in the Coral Gables Farmers Market and got the okay for any week of their choice, noting that the Farmers Market will be taking place every Saturday from January 14th-March 25th from 8am-2pm. The board said that they were interested and with Board Members Jean Connelly, Julian Sevillano, Kelley Schild, and Board Vice Chairperson Celia Suarez volunteering to attend hopefully one day in February and March.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Board Member Kelley Schild then mentioned how in a previous board meeting she had discussed the idea of using the AAC as a location where people can register to vote, and that after looking further into it she found some information that the center can have an outreach program come and assist with sharing information and assisting members citizens with registering to vote.

ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY

Next Meeting is set for February 2nd at 4:00pm

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 5:28pm

NOTE