

# **City of Coral Gables**

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



## **Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, October 8, 2020**

**8:15 AM**

**Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

### **Parks and Recreation Advisory Board**

**CALL TO ORDER**

**@8:38am**

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:**

**Carlos Hernandez**

**Kirk Menendez**

**Nancy Leslie**

**Charlie Rua**

**Felix Pardo**

**Wifredo Fernandez**

**Monica C. Segura**

**Absent:**

**Desmond Gonzalez**

**A motion to excuse Desmond absences was made by Monica Segura, second by Carlos Hernandez. Motion passed unanimously.**

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

**A motion to approve the minutes for September was made by Wilfredo, motion was second by Monica Segura. Carlos Hernandez withheld his vote. The remainder of the board approved.**

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Community Director Fred Couceyro gave a brief overview of the potential partnership with Venezia FC Youth soccer club and the Coral Gables Youth Center utilizing the Coral Gables' standing with the FYSA. The board had asked Carlos Hernandez to be the board's representative helping Fred with addressing the appropriate questions and concerns when meeting with the soccer club's director Gene Roca.

Fred explained that because soccer means a lot to the Youth Center and the Park's board has been very involved in the City's programming, Gene Roca was asked to speak to the board at today's board meeting about the collaboration between the two parties.

Gene Roca began with giving the board a brief introduction of himself and his decision to move to the City of Coral Gables. This decision was heavily influenced by the history and the Italian architecture throughout the city. Gene is raising four children here in the City and one of them has participated in the Toro Soccer programming. And while living here, Gene was presented with an opportunity to be involved with an Italian soccer academy, Venezia FC which is also in conjunction with the sistering of the City of Coral Gables and Venice, Italy. An official approval of the sistering should be executed by the end of the year.

Along with speaking with the Mayor, Gene reached out to Fred to see how to bring a soccer collaboration with the Venice sister city and the Youth Center to fruition. Components of the partnership include offering a trip to participating soccer families to train in Italy during the summer where they can talk to professional soccer players, coaches and staff. Additionally, he would be able to offer soccer clinics here in Coral Gables with Italian trainers and specialists of the sport. Another item discussed with the City Mayor was a weeklong cultural event around the sport which could stimulate business and investment opportunities within the City. But the main idea would be to offer a recreational league with lower level competitive opportunities while still embracing the Italian culture and values.

Gene Roca continued to explain that he is very flexible to whatever perimeters are needed to be set in order to create this union with the City of Coral Gables.

Carlos Hernandez asked who is involved in the soccer program at this moment and who does Gene Roca represent when he says 'we' when

referencing to the partnership. Gene Roca represents the Venezia FC Soccer team here in the United States which is a corporation based in Italy that the club branched from. There are no other partners within Venezia FC in Miami.

Carlos also asked who manages the cultural partnerships that Gene was speaking of if the program were to take advantage of clinics and travel. Gene responded that after speaking with both Mayors, staff would be used in order to seek out experts to coordinate.

Kirk Menendez would like to know who would be with the children every day during the program. Gene told the board that there is already a structured program in place with the five teams who are managed by the club's soccer director Michael Martin alongside another coach who has experience playing professionally in Italy. All staff that has been selected were chosen based on qualifications and their training on the classic Italian soccer methodology and have been with Venezia since inception. This is a turnkey solution however the club is very open to modifying the program to represent Coral Gables. Gene had a lengthy discussion with Fred prior to this meeting and was informed of many of the frustrations the City has had with previous partnerships with clubs. Gene does not want to recreate any of that frustration.

Kirk asked where are the teams that are already apart of Venezia currently playing and where are they from. Gene explained to the board that the currently play at Tropical Park and because of FYSA they must play under the flag of another team. They compete in local tournaments and State competitions. Most of the children are from the Westchester, South Miami, Coral Gables areas.

Charlie Rua had questions about how they plan on opening the program to Coral Gables Residents and why they want to leave Tropical Park. Gene explained when he first began Venezia he did not explore other options and the team they play under already were already setup out of Tropical Park. Once the sistership with Coral Gables came up, they started looking to move to the program to Coral Gables and believe with what is going on with the pandemic, it will be a fresh start.

Carlos Hernandez believes that not until after the ratification of the sistership partnership is legal, could the partnership with the soccer club and the Youth Center begin. Gene believes that sometime in December everything should be in place.

Felix Pardo asked Fred Couceyro how much time will be allocated to the competitive teams versus the recreational side of the program. Fred gave a brief summary of the envisioned layout where there should be a fair 50/50 split between both sides of the program, keeping in mind that they do not care to make the program with thirty plus teams like there were in the past.

Nancy Leslie commented that she thinks the partnership with the sister-city program is a wonderful experience and believes the soccer program will impact the partnership in a positive way.

Kirk Menendez added the comment that he would like to see something home grown with concentrations on the younger age groups so when they are ready to compete at twelve, they will already have a good foundation. Kirk also asked Fred if there have been any discussions with other soccer clubs for younger age soccer programs. Fred shared that has been conversations with one other person, but it was to bring in this individual as a potential employee, not a merge of programs.

Carolina Vester suggested that whichever coaching program that is brought in, perhaps a training certification program for coaches be required or be offered to help ensure a solid foundation of coaching for our younger children and the future of the program used.

Conversation continued between Kirk and staff about how important it is to have solid coaching and to build our soccer program around the younger ages to ensure proper education and growth in the sport.

Kirk would like a more detailed explanation of what the program is going to offer for the younger age groups. Details should be provided before the Parks and Recreation Board decides to support any movement forward on a soccer program partnership. After hearing Kirk's request, Carlos Hernandez asked that Gene Roca provide a detailed framework of what the soccer partnership will work out to be. Carlos provided sample details that should be included in the proposal such as age groups, trainers' verses director of coaching, payment plans, will trainers be employees of the city, what would change after the merge from how its being operated at Tropical Park.

Felix Pardo asked that a motion be passed for a detailed written framework of the proposed partnership between Venezia FC and the City of Coral Gables. Charlie Rua second the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Being short on time, Fred Couceyro gave a brief update on Emergency Orders within the City for COVID. All parks are now open along with playgrounds. Playgrounds need to be disinfected once a day according to CDC guidelines. Disinfecting is being handled by our Park's maintenance crew along with the South Florida Maintenance Crew that are contracted by the City. Venetian Pool is now open with capacity at 100. The Fitness Center is open and is by reservation only. There is now minimal staffing being used to monitor parks. Basketball courts and the Adult Activity Center have not yet been approved for opening.

Our Special Populations coordinator is working with an Australian app company that is creating a digital application like the Pokémon Go game that can be used in our parks. Interactive games that can be played while running around the park or Youth Center field. We will be the first in the United States to use this application. The name of the application is Magical Park.

Monica Segura asked about the opening of the new community parks. Fred told the board that all new parks have been included in the reopening of our parks. We will share with the board when we will be doing the ribbon cuttings.

The water mister in Betsy Adams park has now been installed.

The Little Libraries have been added to some of small parks that will allow children to pick out a book to read and leave for others. Rotary Park, Catalonia Park, and Majorca Park all have Little Libraries.

Public Community Input meetings have taken place for Salvador park and Lamar Louise Park. We really like the forum and can manage the communication much better than in the past and allows for more people to attend. The upcoming meetings for the renovations of Granada Pro Shop and Pierce Park will be shared with the board when dates have been selected.

Assistant Director Carolina Vester gave the board an update on the mask order and when to wear or not a mask. Intermural and skills & drills athletics has begun at the Youth Center.

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Felix Pardo asked about the attendance rules for the next scheduled board meetings. At this time the Emergency Orders have been extended by the Governor, but we will wait to see if we will be required to meet quorum in person for the next meeting. Felix Pardo and Monica Segura expressed the want to remain virtual. A discussion was had about alternative ways to meet and if the City Commission or City Attorney can intervene with the Governor's orders.

Kirk Menendez requested that an alternate soccer professional address the board next meeting in order to hear another perspective of what can be brought to the Youth Center.

## **ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY**

The next meeting will be November 12th, 2020 at 8:30am.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Adjourned at 9:59am.

## **NOTE**