

SUMMARY MINUTES

ISLAMORADA, VILLAGE OF ISLANDS SPECIAL CALL PARKS & RECREATION CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

June 13, 2023

Meeting started at 5:00 p.m. at the Founders Park Community Center

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Alina Davis, Carolyn Wightman, Lee Gannaway, Sharon Wampler, Lesley Rhyne, John Weare, Maria Bagiotti (IVOI), Anne Onsgard (IVOI), Alicia Mote (IVOI), Ted Yates (Village Manager IVOI)

ABSENT:

J.C. Mikula, Richard Russell, Claire Johnson, James Brown, justified.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman asked Maria Bagiotti to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The approval of minutes from April 18th, 2023 will be addressed at the next regular Parks and Recreation Committee meeting.

EMERGENCY AGENDA ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS: None.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION:

ADDITIONAL PICKLEBALL COURTS AT FOUNDERS PARK:

Village Manager Ted Yates explained that the conversation regarding the need for additional pickleball courts at Founders Park began before his hiring. He mentioned that the three current permanent pickleball are utilized consistently but are not facing the correct direction. He and Maria Bagiotti have looked at different areas of the park to place the additional courts. He is aware that it would be a large expense and could take away from the natural space within the park. Ted brought the idea of adding pickleball lines to one of the tennis courts to Maria, as they are in the process of being resurfaced. This idea was then presented at the last Parks and Recreation Committee meeting, and a meeting was held with Tennis Pros Susie Jannach and Greg Pearson. The discussion evolved into possibly converting one of the five current tennis courts into permanent pickleball courts. Carolyn Wightman confirmed with Ted that the current proposal is to convert Tennis Court #5 into four permanent pickleball courts, including the extension of the current fencing and adding a shade structure.

Tennis Pro Greg Pearson mentioned that in the meeting that was had with staff, an option not to make any changes to the tennis courts was also presented, and this is the option that he prefers. He stated that the Tiki Tennis program has grown tremendously, with summer tennis camps having the largest attendance they've ever had this year. During summer, the coaches usually need to use four courts for camps, leaving one open for the public during camp times. He believes that taking away a tennis court by converting it into permanent pickleball courts would affect summer camps and court usage immensely. John Weare asked if the Coral Shores High School tennis team utilizes any of the courts at Founders Park. Greg clarified that they do not, as they have five of their own courts at the high school's location. Coral Shores' courts are only open to the public during non-school hours; however, they do not have lights for use after dark.

Tennis and Pickleball Pro Susie Jannach stated that her first choice is to not affect the tennis courts as they are currently, because the courts at Founders Park are the only public tennis facility in Islamorada. However, her second choice would be to turn tennis court #5 into permanent pickleball courts. She believes that simply putting lines on a court and making it a shared space could be confusing to both tennis and pickleball players. This would also involve scheduled usage limitations, and equipment changes that may cause issues. Carolyn asked Susie about the amount of usage on the current multi-use pickleball courts that have been lined onto the basketball court. Susie mentioned that pickleball has been given certain hours during the day to use those courts, from sunrise until 12:00pm daily. After 12:00pm, basketball has priority over pickleball.

Lesley Rhyne asked if there is any other area that may be considered for additional pickleball courts. She mentioned that eventually there will be more pickleball courts than tennis courts at Founders Park, and as Susie said there is no other public tennis facility in Islamorada. She stated that she would hate to take away a tennis court but would defer to the opinions of the tennis pros, as they are the ones using the courts the majority of the time. Sharon Wampler mentioned that she is glad that the basketball court is not being removed, because her grandchildren who live very close to the park utilize the court and facilities regularly. She is also concerned about the park losing more green space by continuing to add facilities, to the point where it no longer looks like a park. John Weare mentioned that he believed a proposal was brought to the Committee back in 2022 regarding the expansion of the current pickleball area out past the nearby parking lot and softball field. Community member David Epstein confirmed that he brought this idea to Maria back in March of 2022. The concern that was discussed was the loss of parking in the area, and so the proposal was left on the table for the time being.

Carolyn asked if there are certain times of the day that pickleball is more popular. Ted mentioned that early morning from 6am to 11am is usually a prime time to play because the weather isn't as hot, as well as in the evenings. Carolyn also asked if anyone has an idea of how many residents versus non-residents are using the courts. Ted and David both agreed that it seems to be a mix of both, depending on the time of year. John asked what

came of the proposal that was brought to the Council regarding the expansion of the current pickleball area. David was told they liked the idea but asked him and Maria to go back and create a plan.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Islamorada resident Sandi Bisceglia made a general comment about reaching compromise due to capacity. She stated that this park began as a passive green space meant to accommodate some human desire for organized sports as part of a general vision. She is a supporter of the idea that the park is not designated to accommodate everything, and there are limits to the number of events that can be held at the park, as well as the sizes of audiences it is allowed to accommodate. Because of the growth of usage and the community, there sometimes needs to be compromise due to capacity at the park. Sandi mentioned that during busy times at the pool, she may have to share a lap lane or come back another time to swim. She believes that a comprehensive plan for the future is needed as opposed to calling different things “emergency items” in order to give time for assessments, organizing and planning before making decisions.

Islamorada Resident Christy Hughes believes that the decision that eventually is made does not have to include removing space from either sport, tennis or pickleball. She believes that expanding the current pickleball area makes a lot of sense and would not take away from tennis. She believes the park has enough room to accommodate everyone and not end up with a “neighbor versus neighbor” competition for space.

Islamorada Resident Justin Peda feels that Founders Park has gravitated its space towards families. Justin has five children that utilize the park regularly. Although he is unsure what the solution would be, he believes there needs to be a solution to accommodate the growth of pickleball and those who enjoy the socialization of the sport.

Islamorada Resident Whitney MacEachern stated she has two children on the high school tennis team, and she and her children play tennis with instruction from Greg Pearson and Susie Jannach. She would not like to see a reduction in the available tennis courts at the park, as she feels like it would mean that other children may not have access to learning tennis and pursuing it over the years.

Islamorada Resident Bob Boss believes that an expansion does need to be made to accommodate the rapid growth of pickleball and alleviate the crowdedness of other areas like the courts in Key Largo. Carolyn asked Bob how he would feel about the creation of an additional facility down in Lower Matecumbe. Bob mentioned that the majority of the population that plays lives in the Islamorada area. He usually has to drive 14 miles up to Key Largo because of the lack of court availability in Islamorada. Ted and Bob both agreed that the least costly solution would be to convert tennis court #5 into permanent pickleball courts, but that may not be the best solution for all user groups.

Islamorada Resident and Coral Shores Highschool Senior Olivia Hughes mentioned that although she agrees pickleball is a very social sport, she believes that tennis has the same level of socialization and fun associated with it. She has been playing tennis since the fourth

grade and has seen many people enjoy the sport of tennis just as much as pickleball. She does not think that taking away a tennis court is the answer, especially for kids who are in school and only have a limited amount of time in the evenings to play and train for the sport they love.

John Weare moved that the Committee submit a request to the Village Council to engage services of architects and engineering as needed to develop a professional plan for the expansion in the vicinity of the existing pickleball courts as was proposed back in 2022. Lesley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (6-0). Alina asked when this motion would be brought before the Council. Ted mentioned that he would like to have a site plan created first to be able to show the Council, and then get engineering estimates as to how much the project would cost. Maria stated that this is a project that staff would be interested in and able to pursue.

FUTURE ITEMS: TBA

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman set the next meeting date as TBD. Carolyn Wightman made a motion to adjourn, Lesley Rhyne seconded. The meeting ended at 6:27 P.M.

Recording Secretary,

Alicia Mote

Minutes Approved by Committee on

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman _____.