

VENICE SHUFFLEBOARD CLUB

Hecksher Park

Established in 1938

August 12, 2017

Mayor John Holic
City of Venice
401 West Venice Avenue
Venice, FL 34285

Dear Mayor Holic:

After reading the article "Pickleball may have found a home" written by Bob Mudge and published in the July 19 issue of the Venice Gondolier Sun, we are writing to you on behalf of the Venice Shuffleboard Club (VSC) in regard to the August Council meeting, where you will be presented with a recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to turn the eastern most 8 shuffleboard courts at Hecksher Park into pickleball courts.

The Venice Shuffleboard Club is an organized club with bylaws established in 1938. In 2006, the VSC president, Dan McAuliffe, submitted a request and received approval for the VSC to be recognized as a Historical Landmark by the Sarasota Historical Committee. This includes the VSC Club, the VSC "John Gill Hall" building and all 18 shuffleboard courts. We currently have 98 active (paid) members. We have organized game days on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; and, every other Tuesday, we host league competition with neighboring parks—Spanish Lakes, Venice Isle, Ridgewood, Japanese Gardens, and Lake Village. Generally, we utilize the ten courts in the fenced area; but, as we have 98 members, we frequently find it necessary to use the other eight courts in question. These 8 courts are also used quite often during the season by non VSC members. On game days, our club encourages non-members to play shuffleboard on these courts by making available shuffleboard sticks, discs, and beads for the courts. For this service there is a fee of \$1. During the 2016-2017 season, more than \$300 in fees was collected. Many shuffleboard players, who are non-club members, own their own equipment and use these courts for practice. If these shuffleboard courts are no longer available to the public, where will the people play as these are the only public courts in Venice?

Because taking these 8 shuffleboard courts for pickleball directly affects our Club and the general public, we do have major concerns and feasibility questions.

Parking: Perhaps the most acute concern is the lack of adequate parking that exists quite often even for the current activities. Since the Public Works Director

has indicated that 75 to 100 people regularly use the indoor pickleball courts at the civic center, these added courts will create an untenable parking deficiency, particularly during peak use months of November through April. In addition, the limited parking along Venice Avenue and Harbor Drive, and even the 25-car parking lot next to the shuffleboard courts, are often taken by tourists shopping downtown and also by members of the Epiphany Cathedral during special events. This makes it very difficult on a regular basis for sports participants in the park to find parking spaces. Adding 3 new pickleball courts without addressing the parking problem first will depreciate the existing activities while offering less than optimal use of the new courts.

Feasibility: It does not appear to us that 3 courts meeting the recommended 34 X 64 foot size, along with other space needs (walkways, benches and so on), will fit into the current fenced space. This will result in more impervious areas which could trigger numerous plan reviews. While it may offer some outdoor play, it will not allow for the forming of a pickleball club or hosting pickleball tournaments. What will likely occur is a large gathering of players waiting to play, similar to the current tennis activity. Where will they park? Where will they gather? Isn't it more feasible to work with the county in developing a space where 5 or 6 pickleball courts can be installed with adequate parking which will allow the full potential of this sport?

Compatibility with existing uses: Pickleball is an active and noisy sport: hard plastic balls being struck by wooden paddles and lots of yelling back and forth. Multiply this times 3 courts and it becomes a din. Shuffleboard play requires lots of uninterrupted concentration, similar to what you find in playing golf. It is simply incompatible for pickleball courts to be located directly adjacent to shuffleboard courts.

Waste: The County Parks Department has spent a good deal of money within the last three years upgrading the 8 shuffleboard courts to useable standards: resurfacing the courts, adding 16 new benches and 4 new scoreboards, and fencing the entire area. These 8 courts are the only public shuffleboard courts in this area available 24-hours a day to Venice and Sarasota County residents, while the county has 32 outdoor pickleball courts and 20 indoor pickleball courts. Also, six new pickleball courts were recently completed at By-Pass Park (Foxworthy Campus) just 1.9 miles from Hecksher Park. Tearing the shuffleboard courts out so soon is a waste of taxpayer dollars.

Compliance with future Parks Master Plan: According to the National Recreation and Parks Association PRORAGIS Facilities Level of Service (LOS) Benchmarking found in the draft of the parks master plan, the median LOS for pickleball courts is 1 court per 24,804 people, while the existing courts at the community center provide

for a LOS of 1 court per 5,581 people, or over 4 times the median LOS. Moving forward on this project, while the parks system master plan has not been finalized and approved and the major parking issues have not been addressed, may be putting the cart before the horse. Increasing the LOS to 7 times the national median may not be a sound decision currently given the incomplete status of the parks master plan. As pickleball is a fast growing recreation activity, Sarasota County should be encouraged to add facilities based on their LOS needs. In addition, the level of activities shown in the parks master plan for Hecksher Park is currently at 5 which is the highest rating on the scale. Additional activities in Hecksher Park will further strain the existing activities.

I feel that our concerns are very genuine and, after taking them into consideration, ask that you vote against converting the 8 shuffleboard courts into pickleball courts. If you have questions or concerns, I may be reached by phone at 734-626-4685 or e-mail: rosemarydinn@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for your favorable attention to this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

VENICE SHUFFLEBOARD CLUB

Rosemary Dinn
Rosemary Dinn, President

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