

Mayor's Column
February 9, 2015

This column is a departure from the normal format of my weekly messages as it is neither an update on ongoing projects and issues nor a look forward. Rather it is a request for your input about a Village program. Now that it is budget season, the Trustees and I are grappling with what has become a perennial issue – What to do with the paddle tennis courts and program. While this issue is rather small in the overall scheme of things, in a tax environment where every dollar matters and we are subject to tax caps by our State government, we are truly at a crossroads with respect to this program-do we keep funding a money-losing proposition that is used by fewer and fewer residents?

As background: We have a facility that cost, with improvements, approximately \$360,000. The cost basis is \$193,431 (including depreciation), carrying a debt service of \$150,280.

In addition, the heating, lighting and general maintenance costs such as shoveling, are not insignificant. Capturing all of our costs in the permit fee would price the program out of competition given our numbers. Bottom line, Villagers are not signing up to play. Only 23 residents or .33% of our population are permit holders. This represents a 70% decrease in participation in just eight years. As a result, 77% of the current paddle permit holders are non-residents. As it stands, this year's program is projected to lose \$15,000.

Historically, the Village Board was at this same crossroads in 2008 and chose to fix the courts that were in great disrepair, rather than shuttering the program.

At the time, the Village committed \$253,900 in capital expenditure and paddle players – resident and non-residents alike – generously contributed \$70,000 via a fundraiser.

Given the Villages yearly subsidy to the heat and light costs as well as carrying the debt service over the past seven years, the Village has repaid in kind the gracious donations.

Bringing it back to the current discussion, I share a glimpse of the process as the Trustees debate the pros and cons of keeping this program going at taxpayer cost. Given that four out of the five of us are lawyers, conversation takes on a Socratic style as ideas are out forth.

The following is a flavor of our discussions and we ask residents and paddle players to ass their voices to the conversation:

- Why are residents not joining? Is it because popularity has waned? Is it because the recent upgrades at nearby private clubs result in fewer Villagers playing at the Village? What are the other reasons?
- How do we encourage resident participation? The two tier permit fee system is very favorable to residents as it stands currently? So what are other incentives?
- Would beginning a children's program jumpstart the program? Can we partner with local schools, (as we do with our tennis courts), for instructional classes and/or team parties?
- Who would teach/staff these physical education classes, this freeing up field space?
- Should we seek an outside vendor to operate similar to the Lake Isle model and take a percentage of the revenue?
- Should we dismantle the courts, sell them and convert the real estate to a different use?
- Would an enforcement system be profitable so that all players and team participants have valid permits?
- Deficit or not, are the paddle courts needed because our Village has so few public recreational opportunities, save the Village

tennis courts. We have no pool or even a Senior/Community Center.

- Do those who use the courts contribute to the energy/economy of the Village?
- Does having the paddle courts enhance the uniqueness or ambiance of the Village that is an intangible value added to our real estate?
- Once the paddle courts are gone, they will NOT be coming back.

These discussion points are just the tip of the iceberg and I know we are missing salient points. Please form the discussion by emailing or calling Village Hall at mary.marvin@gmail.com or 337-6500. All suggestions attached to a name will be considered.