

**Broncos at Palmetto Bay Park,
by Councilmember Edward Feller, MD
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Palmetto Bay is known as the "Village of Parks," not only for the quality and number of parks we offer but also for the number and quality of activities that take place in our parks. We have facilities and activities for toddlers, children, teens, adults, and seniors. We are proud to have active programs in football, softball, baseball, soccer, lacrosse, tennis, and volleyball.

During the past several months, the adult leaders of the Broncos, a group that plays football in Coral Reef Park, have claimed the Village of Palmetto Bay is trying to "kick them out." This is the farthest thing from the truth. ALL Council members, old and new, as openly expressed at public and private meetings, appreciate the value of the Broncos team and want them to stay. Some of the team's adult leaders have mounted a campaign of phone calls, emails, letters, and personal communications, in which many false and misleading facts have been put forth. Last year they asked local TV stations to attend our Council meeting to document their protests. Recently, I learned, they had asked local as well as state and national political figures to support them as well.

This article is to set the record straight without "spin." This issue has spiraled out of control. Our Village wants the Broncos to continue playing at Coral Reef Park. What we do insist on, however, is that they follow the same rules and regulations that EVERYONE else follows who uses our parks for athletic activities.

The crux of the matter is an old storage building in Coral Reef Park in which the Broncos keep their equipment, during the season as well as the rest of the year when they are not playing football. They also run a refreshment stand in this building open only during their football games. The Village wants to replace this with a new modern facility housing a full concession stand open throughout the year, additional rest room facilities for the ball fields - something that is sorely needed - and covered picnic areas. This will be constructed on the site of the existing storage building. The plans for this were proposed at our Master Parks Plan several years ago. The Village held multiple public hearing wherein the details were discussed and developed. It was clear during these hearings that the old building would be replaced. No opposition to this arose at that time.

There are two main issues: first, the Broncos want to run the concession stand solely for their benefit; and, second, they want to continue using the building to store their equipment for the entire year. This has led to conflict between the adult team leaders and the Village government.

A few years ago as we began planning the construction of our new building, a representative of the Broncos adamantly claimed the old building in Coral Reef Park belonged to them and the Village had no right to use it. When he was provided with our agreement with Miami Dade County clearly delineating that ALL of the structures in the park belonged to the Village he maintained the Broncos had documents that proved their ownership. He was asked to produce these documents but never did. I do not know if such documents existed. The present leadership of the Broncos has since given up this position agreeing the building belongs to the Village.

In recent months the approach by the Broncos leadership has changed. They re now challenging why the old building is being torn down, with such questions as: “Why is an expensive building being destroyed when it could still be used” , “why is the Village wasting taxpayer money by not keeping the building” , and “why doesn’t Palmetto Bay build its new building on another site?”

These questions promulgated extensively during the recent local election have been answered multiple times in meetings with Village staff. As Council liaison for the Village’s Parks and Recreation Department, I have personally met with members of the Broncos Board of Directors and their attorney and discussed this in detail. Our Village manager and other Council members also met numerous times with the same representatives. They still however, continue to claim that no one has spoken to them about this nor answered any of their questions.

The building is more than 30 years old and was poorly constructed in the first place. It has multiple code violations including electrical, structural, mechanical and plumbing. The refreshment stand has never had a health inspection and is lacking in many items. The building is not ADA accessible. To fix it and upgrade it to current building and health codes is prohibitively expensive if even possible. To allow children to continue to be in a building that may be unsafe is wrong and both the team and the Village would have unacceptable liability.

With regard to storage of equipment, I was advised by the Bronco’s leaders that they could only play in our park if we provided year round storage on site for them. Why can’t they rent offsite storage for their equipment when they are not playing football? Clearly, to play football, some equipment is needed on site – kids may forget their equipment or something might break. I asked Village staff when the new building was planned to provide some storage space for all sports or other groups using the park to be able to store necessary items during the season they were at the park. We wanted to try to provide a place for this but the team leaders wouldn’t even discuss it. They insisted upon all year storage or nothing - provide storage or they were leaving!

All of our Council members want the Broncos to continue playing football at Coral Reef Park. This has been stated continuously. We have tried to find a way, with on site limited storage during the season to satisfy the team’s needs but their leaders have categorically rejected this and have made it a non-discussable item. I have responded with multiple emails to Bronco parents and on several occasions have received replies that stated that the team leaders had never provided them that information. Perhaps it is time for the parents whose children play football in the park and have such a wonderful experience to ask the Bronco leaders what is really happening and ask them to find a solution. What are the real facts? Why are they so inflexible? The Village wants to resolve this for the sake of all the football players, cheerleaders, and their parents so they all can continue to benefit from this long term relationship.

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