Tennis players of the world—unite!

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It’s just a little ball
That one hits across the net
Is the hope that the opponent
doesn’t quite know enough to get
In position to address it
With a racket that will let
The best player who acquires
Enough games to win the set.

At 2 p.m., Thursday, March 26, the Longboat Key Town Commission will meet at the Town Hall on Bay Isles Road to consider construction of a new building for the town tennis center.

The meeting is open to the public, and members of the public are entitled to speak and make their wishes known. Commissioners welcome such input, because by charter one of their functions is to serve their constituents by making Longboat a better place in which to live.

Everyone agrees that the beat-up old operations shack at the tennis center is totally inadequate and definitely not up to the standards of the community.

Vice Mayor Bob Sieckmann has publicly called it “an outrage.”

Funds are available to build a suitable replacement.

The one-cent sales tax imposed by Sarasota includes more than $700,000 to be allocated to Longboat Key, restricted to projects consisting of “recreational facilities only.”

The issue has been kicked around by the commissioners since last fall. Architectural renderings have been drawn, and the matter was put out to bid in early February.

Several commissioners have voiced negative opinions about the plan, with concerns raised about substituting a “pavilion house” for an “outdoor gym.”

The mayor is strongly against the proposal, objecting that the tennis center is “not self-sustaining,” and the economy is in such dire straits that expenditures for tennis are not warranted.

This writer has the greatest respect and affection for Mayor Lenobol, who, among other things, is a fellow columnist who writes a regular column for this newspaper.

His interest, however, is golfing, which is a very different game from tennis.

As played on Longboat Key, neither sport is “self-sustaining.” The largest golf operator on the island, the Longboat Key Club has recently approached the town with vast plans for reconstruction, with the argument its present operation is a money-losing proposition.

And where is it written that municipal operations have to pay for themselves? We don’t require it of our library, nor our police, fire and public works departments. These services are paid for out of the public treasury because they are good and useful endeavors, and no law says otherwise.

One of the most attractive features on Longboat Key is the Joan M. Durante Community Park, which is maintained by the Public Works Department at considerable taxpayer expense. Comparatively few residents take advantage of its beauties, but no town official ever complained that the park is not “self-sustaining.”

At a recent meeting of the Federation of Condominium Associations, officials disclosed that the town sends many more millions of dollars to the counties than it receives back in services, and that we pay the Sarasota County School Board more than $1 million for each student that we send to school there.

Certainly, the school system cannot be characterized as self-sustaining, but the education of youngsters is important to the wellbeing and health of the country’s future, so the expense is tolerated, albeit not without some grumbling.

As for the argument that these are difficult economic times and therefore money should not be expended on an up-to-date tennis building, actually the reverse is true. Because the economy is bad, any funds devoted to make jobs and stimulate business by injecting funds into the construction market place.

And the building itself, as planned, is no Taj Mahal. It is essentially a plain box, with sufficient square footage to take care of the needs of tennis aficionados for the foreseeable future.

In municipal affairs nothing happens just because it ought to happen. It takes citizen involvement, often at a high decibel level, to let the politicians know that a need exists.

If you favor the tennis center plans, gird up your loins, leave the pitchforks, torches and bullhorns at home, and come down to the Town Commission meeting Thursday at 2 p.m. on Bay Isles Road.

Even if you don’t speak, numbers count, and the show itself is worth more than the zero price of admission.

Richard L. Hershatter is a retired Connecticut lawyer and novelist, who writes an occasional column of interest to Floridians. He plays neither tennis nor golf, and can be reached at hershatter@lbknews.com.

Hypocrisy and dilemmas

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Hypocrisy, according to www.dictionary.com, “a pre-tense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess.”

There is no shortage of hypocrisies in Washington, although it is often reduced by one when I leave town.

Regardless of that, Democrat Chris Dodd of Connecticut is clearly the biggest, the loudest and the most noticeable of the group. He is the Babe Ruth, the most notorious of the group.

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