

CUYLER PARK REFERENDUM COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Cuyler Park Referendum Committee, appointed by the North Brevard Commission on Parks and Recreation, an advisory board, held Monday, July 16, 2001, at 6 p.m., at the Cuyler Park Annex.

Members Present

Dwight Seigler, Chairman

Juanita Barton, Vice Chairman

Shawn Harris

Deborah Rodwell

Corine Saunders

North Brevard Commission on Parks & Recreation Liaison

Dr. Ron Bobay

County Staff Present

Charles S. Nelson, Parks & Recreation Director

Terry Lane, North Area Recreation Superintendent

Judy Inman, Administrative Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Dwight Seigler called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Juanita Barton, seconded by Corine Saunders, to approve the minutes of June 18, 2001, as printed.

AYE: Barton, Harris, Rodwell, Saunders, Seigler

NAY: None

Carried 5-0

III. DISCUSSION OF PROJECT

Charles Nelson reported demolition is underway. Parks Maintenance will clean up the site, remove Brazilian Pepper, and make it more park like. The committee's work is to determine what is to be done from here. At last meeting, a vision for the park site was discussed.

Chairman Seigler reported that when that property was first looked into about a year and a half ago, the concern was for a community swimming pool. A large pavilion was also considered.

Mr. Nelson reported pool prices can vary quite dramatically. The County is involved in one in the South Area Referendum where a 25 meter, 8-lane pool will cost well over \$1,000,000 and the School Board is assisting. Olympic size is 50 meters. A community pool, without some of the competitive capabilities by making it smaller, would reduce the cost. The other question is the availability of land. With the area required for the pool, parking, showers and restrooms, it would be tight on 1.5 acres. If it is the desire of the committee, staff can get more details.

Fred Harvey inquired how many pools Parks and Recreation is currently managing and how many has the department built in the past ten years. Mr. Nelson explained the department partners with the School Board for seven pools, plus two in the Central Area are owned and operated by the County. The County has not built any pools in the last ten years.

Juanita Barton requested public comments and questions be held for the period of public comment on the agenda.

Ms. Barton suggested looking at what services this particular project will bring to the community as a whole. There are senior citizens, children, middle aged people. Ms. Barton suggested, that at this point, not to lock into one item because other possibilities and other services have not been explored. One thing that is part of the community planning is to have some sort of medical services in the community. A number of senior citizens may need just a shot or minor things, and those things might be brought to the community. The Community Learning Center, which is greatly in need of help, needs to be renovated and redeveloped to meet the needs of the students in the community today. Ms. Barton stated there are several areas which might be open if it isn't limited to a pool.

Chairman Seigler stated the Referendum is for the 1.5 acres. The Learning Center and other things would not come under this.

Ms. Barton suggested looking at the whole and bringing other people to the table so that it can all be done at one time. The 1.5 acres could be developed and be the end of it. But the community has an opportunity here to redevelop the entire center to better serve the community. If the committee just says they want a pool, then there is no need to meet.

Chairman Seigler disagreed because the community, as noted in the minutes, didn't preplan. He then asked who planned the \$70,000 and suggested another zero could have been added to the amount. The community has to help pay for \$15,000,000, and is getting only \$70,000, of which \$41,000 has already been spent, and when the property is cleaned up, there will be only \$10,000 to \$15,000. The architect costs will eat up that. Therefore nothing can be done and the Referendum is dead to the community. If nothing can be done with the Referendum money, then there may be a challenge to the Referendum saying it is completely unfair.

Ms. Barton stated that is not what she is saying, but rather there are other funding sources out there and this will be an opportunity to not only develop the 1.5 acres, but to go out and get the School Board and others to help.

Chairman Seigler questioned why the community always has to go for other sources of funding. He noted Chain of Lakes is not in a community and asked who did the planning and determined the amount of money. Ms. Barton suggested that Chain of Lakes is a consortium project which means several people are involved in it.

Mr. Nelson stated the Referendum is a complex process. As to selection of the projects, there was a summer-long process of public meetings, even to the extent they were on TV, to try to determine what those projects should be. He suggested looking at the community of North Brevard as a whole versus just this immediate neighborhood. One of the projects is the Mims-Scottsmoor Community Center which is in the vicinity and has \$790,000 for the beginning of additional improvements. Children from East Mims will play on the Chain of Lakes fields. As to equity and how the Referendum was structured, there probably isn't an absolutely fair way. One has to look at the big picture to see if it is reasonably spread out in terms of serving community needs and then vote accordingly. The other thing this community has been very fortunate in is that it has been able to get the dollars associated with the existing facility which

aren't available elsewhere. The question could be asked why things like this are built in Mims and not in other parts of the community. There isn't an answer that makes everyone happy. It's an imperfect process at best. The advisory board struggled with a variety of projects, many of which didn't get funded by the Referendum, through a selection process where projects were actually ranked. In retrospect, Could it have been done differently? Maybe.

Chairman Seigler noted that all the things in Mims are from HUD dollars which means the community qualifies as a lower income, target area and asked, Where are the local tax dollars? He stated the community always gets the short end of the stick and a smoke screen that it could have been done another way.

Mr. Nelson stated the nature of taxing itself is difficult. If you want to look at where the property values are that are really paying the tax, they are going to be in communities which have higher property values. The taxes for the programs that allowed the community to have money for this center come from the other end of the scale where the property values are greater. The other thing that happens is that businesses pay, which means the business communities of Titusville are paying some substantial dollars into this program. Mr. Nelson related a similar discussion with a beach-side community in the South Area where the Harris Corporation pays a tremendous amount of property taxes. If each community were taxed only on the perceived boundaries of the community, most communities would not be able to afford the improvements. People who live here work in other places in the County. One of the biggest difficulties in North Brevard is that the Space Center doesn't pay taxes. There is a large number of people who work at the Space Center so that taxable value, which other communities have to help offset this, is lost in North Brevard. The Referendum was a very public process which was followed through the summer. Mr. Nelson stated he makes no apologies for how the list came out because in the end, the voters said it was relatively balanced. There may be other communities which think they did not get their fair share either, but that equates to a no vote.

In response to Shawn Harris's question about the cost of demolition, Mr. Nelson apologized that he doesn't have the exact number, but it was less than \$10,000.

Mr. Harris indicated he understood tonight's discussion was to give some ideas of what can be done to develop the property. A few ideas have been given. Mr. Harris suggested sending out information to the churches and request ideas from the community who will be paying for the Referendum. Then the committee can look at all the ideas and see what is feasible and discuss pros and cons, rather than debating ideas about things which might not even be able to be done.

Mr. Nelson stated he agreed with Mr. Harris and that he has had this discussion previously with Chairman Seigler and stated the difficulty is that he can't change the budgets for the other projects. A community process that identifies projects and possibilities, puts it in a position that if the County is effective in spending the dollars and saves money, then it can be moved into additional projects. This is really the goal. The County is applying for grants where possible to maximize dollars. He stated he believes the committee is to do a visioning process and ask the community what they desire which will take it beyond the Referendum. Then, when other sources become available, there will be a plan in place to try to get those dollars as well.

Ms. Barton suggested public comment be received at this time.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Seigler denied Ms. Barton's request to chair this portion of the meeting.

Mr. Harris requested explaining to the public how much money was received and what has been done so far.

Ms. Barton suggested in the visioning process, not to limit the dollar amount.

Mr. Nelson explained the Referendum process, which began in February 2000 when the Board of County Commissioners asked the Parks and Recreation Department to put together some possible projects for a Referendum throughout Brevard County although it would be geared to individual pieces of the County. King's Highway, just south of Titusville, north to the County line is the boundary for the North Brevard Referendum. Referendums also passed in Merritt Island in the Central Area and in South Brevard which is south of Rockledge down to the Indian River County line. The Referendum failed in the Cocoa-Rockledge area. The \$15,000,000 in total projects for North Brevard was arrived at by the North Brevard Commission on Parks and Recreation (NBCPR) meeting during the summer to take public comment and get listings of projects from a variety of sources. NBCPR then voted to rank the projects which totaled about \$30,000,000 and were pared down to \$15,000,000. The Cuyler project is the acquisition of 1.5 acres of land, site improvements and picnic facilities. That entails removing the old house and barn, turning it into a park setting and then making recreation improvements. As far as what this committee is working towards, it is not only that piece which was in the Referendum, but also revisiting the vision of the entire complex. At the last meeting it was noted if money is saved in the entire process by bringing projects in at budget or below budget, then moving on to other recreational needs that got cut from the list is possible.

Mr. Nelson reviewed that the acquisition of the 1.5 acres was \$38,000, which, with associated closing costs came to about \$41,000. Removal of the buildings including some minor asbestos was a little less than \$10,000, therefore there is about \$20,000 remaining for the project.

Dwight Seigler stated \$20,000 is not a lot to work with and restated his concern that the community is paying for the Referendum for 20 years. Mr. Nelson discussed property values and encouraged looking at the bigger picture including other facilities which will be used by the community.

Chairman Seigler stated too long the community has been paying for something for someone else. The streets were paved through HUD and now the community will be paying for 20 years for the \$20,000 left with which little can be done, and yet the community is supposed to be calm and think it is fair. Mr. Nelson suggested in that case he could have voted no. It is a democracy. It was a close vote and it was based on people's views as to whether or not there was something in it for them to vote yes or no. Mr. Nelson stated he can't go back and change that.

Ms. Barton suggested calling in the people who are directly responsible for the allocation, because Mr. Nelson is just carrying out the wishes of the Referendum. He is at the end of the stick. What is needed is someone who is at the beginning of the stick and is making the decisions.

Mr. Harvey asked what input Terry Lane and the County Commissioner for the North Area had in making the suggestion that the Harry T. Moore project receive \$110,000 of the \$15,000,000 Referendum. Mr. Nelson responded the Harry T. Moore improvements were designed around the completion of the part that is currently unfunded. The museum construction is being funded through state sources.

Mr. Harvey asked if there is budgeting for these proposals or is it just going on an annual year basis for funding of the different project areas. Mr. Nelson explained the construction portion is being done by issue of bonds which have been sold to generate \$15,000,000. The maintenance will be from a different funding source.

Mr. Harvey asked about Parks and Recreation funding sources. Mr. Nelson explained the Parks and Recreation funding source in North Brevard is the District I MSTU and the County's General Fund. Mr. Harvey asked again what input Terry Lane had in the proposal. Chairman Seigler asked to bring the discussion back to the Cuyler Park project.

Mr. Harvey stated he was trying to understand future funding for Parks and Recreation and again asked Terry Lane if he had any particular input. Mr. Nelson indicated that wouldn't be Mr. Lane's role at this time and talked about the Harry T. Moore project. There is a committee which had a plan for the site. The portion that was not funded under the state grant was then put into consideration for the Referendum. A portion of the difference was funded in the Referendum.

Ms. Barton offered to explain how the project has \$70,000. When Parks and Recreation had the meetings, each of the communities were represented at the meetings. Ms. Barton stated she had a previous engagement and announced it at a Civic League meeting that the meetings were going on and there needed to be a representative from the community at the meetings. No one was able to attend those meetings. Ms. Barton reported she then called Mr. Nelson to let him know East Mims was not on the list at all and asked him to at least get the property on the list.

Chairman Seigler noted that whoever came up with the figure of \$70,000 could have just as easily said \$700,000. Nothing can be done with this, but the community still has to pay for it for 20 years.

Ms. Barton stated the Referendum is kind of like a law and must be followed. If the desire is to change the Referendum, then a process needs to be followed, if it can be done at all. To debate the Referendum at this point is moot.

Mr. Harris pointed out there was only about 15 minutes left for the meeting and he wanted to be sure the people of the community had the opportunity to give suggestions for the property on the corner. He also stated he thinks information should be provided to the community to get comments.

Chairman Seigler made a statement regarding the possibility of challenging the whole Referendum because it is unfair to pay for that large an amount and not get anything out of it.

Frances James suggested the committee survey the community for their input.

Chairman Seigler agreed to polling the community.

Mr. Harvey asked Mr. Nelson if the Referendum money is the only money Parks and Recreation has available during the life of the Referendum for this area. Mr. Nelson stated that once the \$15,000,000 is expended, that is all the money there is in the Referendum. Operating expenses are budgeted on an annual basis. Capital items are also on an annual basis and considered in the budget process for funding. If the committee comes up with a list of improvements, it can go into the funding consideration and will be judged against balancing all the recreation needs in North Brevard which would obviously include this area. The window for the upcoming fiscal year starting October 1, 2001, is basically already passed. Now is the time to begin the process for the next fiscal year which begins October of 2002.

Ms. Barton stated that unless the committee comes up with some plans to put into the budget, staff still won't know. As to surveys, they are notorious for not being completed. It was suggested to put a realistic and reasonable time frame on it. Mr. Nelson reported that one of the best ways Parks and Recreation has been involved in surveys is for community activists, like those present, talking to neighbors and then coming back to a community meeting. The danger of a written survey is what might not be put on or the number of responses coming from one interest group. Community leaders need to overlay what is needed in the community. Mr. Nelson stated that sometimes good people have to make good decisions and stand with it.

Shawn Harris suggested sending out an announcement to the community organizations and churches to let them know the next meeting will be the last time the committee will accept public comment. This would avoid what happened with the Referendum where the community didn't know what was going on. Now is the time to ask the community what they would like to see on the 1.5 acres. With \$20,000, the committee could come close to a design plan of what is desired and find out what it costs. Then, when the amount is known, funds can be sought.

Donna Cooper asked the time frame to get the projects in order to answer questions from the community so they will give the information. Mr. Harris stated it would be up to the community and depend on funding. He related it took three years to come up with the total amount needed for the Cuyler Annex. Mr. Nelson stated the difficulty is that it is not known when funding will be available. However, if there is a plan in place, windows of opportunity come along periodically where money becomes available. He gave the Harry T. Moore project as an example.

Mr. Nelson stated, ultimately, the Referendum projects list was a citizen-based decision. It was not Parks and Recreation staff. The NBCPR is a nine-member board who went through tough decision making to come up with the list.

In response to an inquiry from the audience regarding securing the 1.5 acres to keep out cars and dumping, Mr. Nelson agreed to move the fence between the properties to north of the 1.5 acres and committed to doing it outside of the \$20,000 Referendum dollars.

V. NEXT MEETING DATE

Chairman Seigler stated August 20 at 6 p.m. as the next meeting. Shawn Harris made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Barton suggested a motion for consistency in the date of the meeting. It was noted the East Mims Progressive Civic League meets the Monday after the third Sunday.

Ms. Barton inquired as to action items. Chairman Seigler stated he will get the information to the local community and organizations. Mr. Nelson stated staff will do a press release. Judy Inman reported she added four churches to the Referendum mailing list and asked for names and mailing addresses for any other churches.

Someone asked if the basketball court could be used for parking. Mr. Nelson stated he will take a look at it but sees a problem with oil from the cars and breaking up the edges of the court. He stated he is hesitant but will get back to the committee on that.

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dwight Seigler, Chairman

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