

Basic Facts on Parkland expansion/ land acquisition

Process

- Application to County made by petitioner. Anyone can put any piece of land into the process. Owner involvement is not required nor is any 'vetting' or analysis of the land in question required.
- Application is reviewed by City PREP board
- Recommendation to the City Commission
- (This item is unclear to me) If the City Commission supports the application, it is forwarded to County PREP board for allocation of priority
- There is a bit of conflicting info on this point: The City Commission's support is much of the basis for allocation of priority at the County. The County staff sees it merely as 'community input' that is of limited authority. I suspect that the City Commission's stance has a lot of clout either way.
- Once at the high priority level, \$ released for Concept Plan (This is the point where community input is integrated and where neighborhood concerns are voiced and integrated)
- The preliminary concept plan is voted on by the Parks Board and then the County Commissioners .
- County Commission approves funds for investigation (appraisals, etc.)
- Concept Plan approved and County staff released to obtain appraisals, etc.
- Negotiations with landowner: County is only allowed to offer 80% of appraised value; higher amounts must be approved by County Commission. Final purchase price is approved and purchase authorized by the County Commission.
- Once a property hits the top of the 'A' list, process for purchase typically **takes 2-2.5 years**; at any time during this process the land could be sold on the open market. There is no stomach for the City or the County 'taking' parkland through eminent domain.

Improvements:

- There is currently **no money for improvements**, only for land acquisition. Improvement money is allocated on a per-case basis by the Commissions. Every staff person made it clear that already-acquired parkland can sit unimproved for years. If other sources of money are available, they are not turned away but any amounts or sources are unclear.
- It is likely the park design would be 'passive'... pavilions, benches, but no basketball courts, tennis courts or more 'active' programming.
- A quick analysis by Todd Kucharski puts improvements at a bare minimum of \$250k to \$1.5 million. This does not include dealing with structures already onsite.
- When money is available it takes a minimum of 1 year (usually several) for public process, design, permits, and construction.
- Road improvements, if required, are included in the general improvement budget.

- ***Parking is integrated into the design but is sharply limited by statute.*** Commercial standards certainly do not apply.

Parameters:

- Parkland is purchased by the County. I don't have any sense the City has the money or willingness to buy parkland.
- The landowners have not been contacted. There is no indication that they are willing sellers.
- ***The County has a total of \$4 million for parkland acquisition for the entire county.*** Typically \$1mil is added to the kitty per year though there's concern that funds will be reduced or cut in the years to come.
- There are other funding grant sources but neither City nor County staff are aware of exactly what entities can be tapped or how much there is available. Any mention of these mysterious sources will require a lot of specifics and letters of support to be credible.
- There are a number of factors in allocation of these funds:
 - Environmentally sensitive land, particularly waterfront (neither parcel meets this according to County staff owing to the previous development on the site)
 - Waterfront access
 - Other standards
 - Even distribution of parkland county-wide. This has become a political hot button within the County...Staff indicated that the East County areas are very poorly served. Since they use a radius approach to parkland (within a reasonable distance) the IBSSA has a number of parks to go to. Not particularly convenient but easily accessible. They don't consider IBSSA to be underserved within the context of the County as a whole.
- Parkland improvements are subject to City, SWFMD standards, or any other applicable governing agency. Each entity adds time to the process.
- The house(s) on the lots are considered amenities and are not typically demolished if salvageable. Stabilizing and maintaining the structures becomes another parameter for costs.
- The application is currently 'tabled' by the City Commission pending answers to questions posed in our letter to them.
- Speaking with the Chairman of the PREP board: these same questions were posed to the petitioner in November. In the February meeting, the questions were unanswered but assurances were made by the petitioner that the neighborhood was behind the project, hence that body's approval. The IBSSA Board voted to remain neutral until answers are in hand. ***Clarification has since been introduced into the record at the City Commission meeting.***
- ***Unimproved land is not always 'open to the public' after acquisition; until such time as it is developed to County standards, it is usually not open to the public.***

Future:

There is a joint City/ County park board meeting in July. The person I spoke with did not have an agenda (won't be one for some while) and there is no sense whether this will be discussed at the meeting. The public can speak (typical 3 minute limit) on anything on the agenda. We will monitor the process.

Any 'urgency' in this process is an illusion. The process is long and riddled with bureaucracy and the reality of market forces cannot be discounted if anyone is to be in any way credible.

If the City Commission wrote an endorsement in gold ink on the back of the Declaration of Independence there is still over a year before any real steps are taken. That presumes all the other entities involved also have gold ink and their own Declarations of Independence. Claiming that we are delaying things is nonsense: reality is. The use of such divisive language from either 'side' of this issue serves no purpose and has no place in this process other than to artificially divide the neighborhood.