*City of Greenbelt, Maryland*

***GREENBELT CITYLINK***

 ***WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Monday, February 6, 2006****, for the purpose of meeting with the Forest Preserve Task Force to review the draft Forest Preserve Maintenance and Management Guidelines and other recommendations of the task force.*

*Mayor Davis called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m. It was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.*

*PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.*

*STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Celia W. Craze, Director, Planning and Community Development; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.*

*ALSO PRESENT WERE: Keith Chernikoff, chair, and Forest Preserve Task Force members Ginny Mudrock, Bob Trumbule, and Susan Gregersen; Kelly Ivy, Park & Recreation Advisory Board; Sheldon Goldberg, Greenbelt East Advisory Committee; and residents Robert Fireovid and Joan Falcão.*

*Mr. Chernikoff spoke of the high level of consensus that the task force had been able to reach on the guidelines document, despite the broad range of interests represented in the group. He stressed that it was a unanimous presentation and was signed by all the members. He said that they envisioned it as a “living, evolving document” but hoped that its framework would carry over to developing situations. The Mayor replied that the workings of the group were very impressive and a credit to everyone. She said she thought the draft document was comprehensive and well thought-out.*

*The Mayor asked about review of the document by other groups. Mr. Chernikoff said they received comments from the Advisory Committee on Trees (ACT), the Park & Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), and the Recycling & Environment Advisory Committee (REAC), as well as having benefited from feedback all along from those groups that had active representation on the task force. They did not have any comments from the Advisory Planning Board or the Youth Advisory Committee, nor was there any participation from either of those groups after the first few task force meetings.*

*The Mayor asked about the division in the guidelines of the preserve into five areas. Mr. Chernikoff said that their charge had been to create a management plan for the land Council had already placed into the preserve, as well as establishing criteria that would apply to future parcels. He said the task force went out and looked at the areas section by section and that they fell naturally into the five areas that were designated in terms of their condition and accessibility. He said they wanted to recognize that these areas were not all the same and wanted to present a framework for dealing with the differences. Ms. Gregersen said some of the areas were in rather appalling condition, where people had been living and had left trash and tents. She said there was also evidence of fires having been pitched; she added that this was close enough to GHI houses that she would be alarmed as a resident of the area. Mr. McLaughlin later clarified that this area had been cleaned up by the City after the task force discovered it.*

*Mayor Davis asked Ms. Craze to characterize the five areas as they were designated in the guidelines. Ms. Craze said the sub-areas defined themselves: “A” is the North Preserve in its entirety and is the most pristine. “B” is relatively flat, with some well-defined trails. “C” is accessible from “B” and is very dense. It includes the area behind the GHI community gardens, the diving board bridge, and the artifacts of previous landfill activities. “D” is the area below the community gardens where there have been problems, including camping and paths. It is very flat and can be reached from Hamilton Place or Gardenway. She said if it were to be decided that a public education area should be identified, it should be here, since this area has already received maximum disturbance. Area “E” is very dense with brambles and undergrowth and is nearly impossible to walk through.*

*Ms. Craze noted that the document addresses contingencies for uses already in existence that the task force recommends approving but limiting as to any future expansion. These include, for example, the community gardens, the fields at Northway, and Hamilton Cemetery. Two others, which the task force has not yet made a recommendation on, are the observatory and the yard waste compost areas. She said the task force would consider these, as well as some draft language circulated by task force member Ruth Kastner, at its next meeting.*

*Regarding contributions of others, it was noted that ACT had contributed a great deal to the invasive species subgroup, based on work it had undertaken in a broader context than that of the Forest Preserve. John Beauchamp of ACT had contributed in the areas of forest health and resource protection. Lola Skolnik of PRAB had also worked closely with the group on the “trails” section of the document. Mr. Chernikoff noted that “trails” were an example of a use that cannot be evaluated across the board but must be looked at contextually.*

*There was discussion of the prior dump site in area “C.” The task force was in agreement with Mr. Trumbule’s view that it should be left alone. He said there is vegetation over it. On the other hand, he said there was a continual source of new trash emanating from the Baltimore-Washington Parkway that might need to be dealt with.*

*Mr. Putens asked if there were resident encroachments, e.g., tree houses. Mr. Chernikoff said this was not too much of an issue. There is a blind originally thought to be for hunting that had been determined to be for photography. Mr. Trumbule said there were some old sites that appeared to have been children’s play sites.*

*In Section 4, the Mayor pointed out that the guidelines recommended against any maintenance other than the annual inspection, except for the “front door” areas at the edges. In Section 5, the approach to invasive species is intentionally pragmatic.*

*Regarding Section 9, the Mayor asked Ms. Craze to explain the penalties of civil infractions vs. misdemeanors. Ms. Craze responded that misdemeanors are criminal and distinguished mostly by magnitude. She said most items were infractions, and most were related to use and activities. She said the goal of the enforcement was to try to get compliance. It was agreed that language referencing use of Park Rangers could be changed to staff as directed by the City Manager.*

*There was mention of a need for a permitting process for activities. The Mayor also suggested that there might be a need for further definition on what comprises a group of people and what comprises an event. Mr. Chernikoff ventured that one factor might be whether the event was publicized.*

*Mr. Chernikoff pointed out that the document recommends that a baseline assessment be done by a forester. He said this is the one area where the City needs to budget money—if not in the upcoming fiscal year, then in the next one.*

*In response to a question from Mr. Fireovid, it was agreed that the last sentence in Section 10 should more clearly state that the benefit referred to must accrue to the community, not the group conducting the activity. The Mayor also clarified that prior to any approval of guidelines or adoption of legislation related to the Forest Preserve, there would be a public hearing and discussion at a Council meeting.*

*Regarding the draft resolution to establish a permanent committee, Mr. Chernikoff said the group had come to the conclusion that there was enough left to be done that was outside the scope of existing advisory groups, as well as enough to be done on an ongoing basis, to justify establishing a permanent committee. There was discussion of whether there was a rationale for permitting members of this committee to hold appointments to other groups without relaxing that policy for all groups. Mr. Putens asked why nine members had been suggested. Ms. Craze said that was the number that usually showed up for task force meetings. She suggested there could be consideration of continuing the task force to complete some additional work.*

*There followed a great deal of discussion about the need for an ongoing group. Kelly Ivy said he thought if the task force had completed its task, the ongoing work should go back to the existing advisory groups. He also questioned the much stricter requirement for removing land from the preserve than for putting it into the preserve. Mr. Roberts said it should be much easier to preserve than to remove. Mr. Ivy said there were people who were concerned about both issues. He speculated on whether there should be a referendum to take either of these actions. Mr. Chernikoff suggested perhaps a middle ground would be to allow a referendum petition to force an addition to the preserve to be brought to a vote, rather than having it be automatic. There was further discussion of whether a Citywide vote was the best way to take into account neighborhood concerns regarding particular parcels.*

*It was agreed that the task force would give further consideration to what work the task force could finish, how the work of a permanent committee would be defined, and whether there should be consideration of a referendum alternative for putting land into the preserve.*

*Regarding the ordinances for additions to the preserve, the recommendations to take action on Parcel 12 (adjacent to the North Core) and the Boxwood parcel (#56, formerly known as #8) were reviewed. Council asked to see a map for the Boxwood parcel that would include the areas on the northeast corner that are in use for recreation. Mayor Davis asked why the Sunrise property was not being brought forward. Mr. Chernikoff replied that the task force had simply wanted to be sure that all ballfield needs had been addressed first. Mr. Goldberg said he had no problem with the idea of evaluating ballfield needs first.*

*Ms. Falcão said that, as a Boxwood resident, she supported putting that parcel into the preserve.*

*This topic was concluded at about 11:20 p.m.****Other Business***

*Ms. Craze gave an update on the Park and Planning meeting, where the Greenbelt Station conceptual site plan and proposed plan of subdivision were approved 4-0. She said although 61 conditions were placed on Metroland, three of the City’s conditions were not included, and she was requesting a letter of commitment on those. She said the Metro Access roundabout had been moved to the South Core phase.*

*Mr. McLaughlin brought up items related to distribution of the MML annual directory, a request from College Park for support for a change in the area of student housing not subject to the school impact fee; and Charlie Watkins’ retirement.*

*Mr. Herling thanked Ms. Craze and her staff for working on the local transportation issues regarding Greenbelt Station.*

*Mayor Davis said there are lights out on the east side of the pedestrian overpass at the parkway. She said she had suggested that Mr. McLaughlin write a letter in response to Don Comis’ letter to the News Review regarding the possible loss of retail postal service in Center City.*

*The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 p.m.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

 *Kathleen Gallagher
City Clerk*