



**WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council held Wednesday, January 17, 2001, for the purpose of discussing the possibilities for acquiring the Jaeger Tract on behalf of Greenbelt Park.**

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:07 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, Alan Turnbull, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Frederick Cunningham, National Capital Parks-East; Susan Hawley, National Park Trust; Robert Crecco, Jack Carrick, Kent Kwiatkowski, Phyllis Berg, Pat O'Leary, Charles Breiterman, Westchester Park Civic Association; Audrey Scott, Prince George's County Council; Tawanna Gaines, Mayor, Berwyn Heights; Theresa Laughlin, Berwyn Heights Town Council; Eric Olson, Stephen Brayman, College Park City Council; Andy Quinn, Congressman Steny Hoyer's office; Pat Unger, State Senator Leo Green's office; Regina Robinson, City Clerk, New Carrollton; Jean Snyder, Friends of Greenbelt Park; Jon Robinson, Sierra Club; Susan Barnett, Paul Downs, Doug Love, Valerie O'Brien, Committee to Save the Green Belt; Kate Spencer, Lowell Owens, Citizens to Conserve and Restore Indian Creek (CCRIC); Amethyst Dwyer, Matt Hare, Kerry Shaw, Greenbelt residents; Amy Boyes, the Gazette; Diane Oberg, Greenbelt News Review, and others.

Following introductions, Susan Hawley, Vice President for Programs, National Park Trust, described the mission and methods of the Trust, which is privately funded and works with other organizations to leverage funds to acquire land, which they then donate to national parks. In response to a question from Mayor Davis, she cited Oxley Island and the C&O Canal as two places in Maryland where the Trust had purchased land.

Mayor Davis noted a memo from Terri Hruby, Community Planner, to the City Manager, indicating that a preliminary plan for subdivision for the property had been submitted. Ms. Hawley said the first important question was whether there is a willing seller. Bob Crecco, president of the Westchester Park Civic Association, said the developer would be willing to sell "for enough money" and that he would want an appraisal. Mr. Crecco heard anecdotally that the owner would be seeking \$1.7-\$2 million but that potential obstacles to development on the site might provide leeway. Having visited the site, Ms. Hawley said she thought there might be considerable problems with developing it. Mr. Crecco said he had heard there were environmental problems and that they were doing borings last week. He noted the owner has had various plans for the property and that the current one suggests that not all the land is useable.

Ms. Hawley said the first thing the Trust needs is a letter from the National Park Service saying acquisition of this property is a priority for them and that they need the Trust's help. They also want to see demonstrated support from the City Council and from other groups.

Mr. Roberts asked if it was workable when the Trust is the buyer for an owner to sell part of the land and donate the rest for a tax deduction, and Ms. Hawley said yes.

Mr. Turnbull noted the unusual situation here where the land in question is not part of the City. He asked why the City would want to pay to give it to the federal government? Ms. Hawley asked how else it could be done: to whom would the City rather give it? Would the City really want to own and maintain it?

Mr. Putens asked if the Trust could place permanent restrictions on the use of the land in the transfer of the deed. Ms. Hawley said they could not but that they had taken legal action in the past to stop use that was inconsistent with their intentions in purchasing it. Mr. Roberts asked if the Trust used easements. Ms. Hawley said they could, but that the federal government is not bound by easements. Mr. Cunningham, Special Assistant to the Superintendent, National Capital Parks-East, said the Park Service is mandated to preserve and protect the property in its care and stressed that Superintendent Hale is very enthusiastic about acquiring this land for Greenbelt Park. Mr. Turnbull added that if the Department of the Interior ever tried to sell, it would be a highly visible process and the local municipalities could step in. He also said that there are really no options other than for interested parties to work together as a group and give the property to the Park Service.

Mr. Crecco asked about the large amount of state funding that has been reported in the press as having become available for open space. He said Sarah Taylor, Secretary for Natural Resources, had previously stated she thought this project was more appropriate for the federal government to undertake than the state. Mayor Davis said the competition for those funds would be very high and that the Bay would probably be at the top of the list. She suggested that Ms. Unger might bring the question to Senator Green's attention.

Ms. Scott asked whether the Trust holds money. Ms. Hawley replied that they have a revolving fund of \$1 million. Ms. Scott said her office had made efforts about this with Steny Hoyer's office but had been told it was not a high priority because of the parcel's size. She questioned why size should be a priority. Mr. Cunningham said National Capital Parks-East cannot compete with large western parks like Yosemite when they put in requests. They have been told to "partner."

Mr. Crecco asked if there was any way the county could help. There was some discussion of the process by which state open space money gets to the county. Ms. Scott said the county budget for FY2002 is fairly complete at this point although it is not finalized until April 1.

Ms. Snyder noted that in addition to the passive recreation aspects of the property, there are environmental angles, including impact on Indian Creek and the 300 acres of wilderness on the east side of the Baltimore Washington Parkway. In response to a subsequent query, she said she saw no problem with recycling the name "Friends of Greenbelt Park."

Mr. Cunningham then talked about the Friends Agreements that the Park Service uses. It was clarified that these are sometimes for fundraising purposes, sometimes for other support or programmatic purposes. Mr. Crecco asked for clarification on what the group would do - would it lobby? Ms. Hawley said the group would come together to assist in raising money; she added that the Trust thinks in terms of "advocacy" efforts rather than lobbying. Mr. McLaughlin also added that Superintendent Hale had stressed the importance of presenting tangible evidence of interest in the fate of the property and that a Friends Agreement could serve that purpose.

Ms. Laughlin asked what the time factor is with the developer. Ms. Scott responded that after the application is filed, it would typically take 9-12 months for review, sometimes 18. Because there are environmental factors here, she thought 18 months would be more realistic.

Mr. Turnbull asked how communication with the owner is initiated - does the Trust lead the way on negotiation? Mr. Hawley said it can, but generally either the Park Service or the Friends group would take the initiative on getting an appraisal, which requires initiating contact with the owner.

Mr. Quinn said the county Department of Environmental Resources had looked at the property for Congressman Hoyers' office and estimated the value at \$1.7 million in August 2000. He said this estimate was not fine-tuned, however, and that he did not know if environmental issues had been factored in—for example, if there were wetlands concerns. Mr. Crello said a 1988 report from the Corps of Engineers said there was an acre of wetlands.

Mr. Quinn said he believed this project had been limited by a lack of local partnership. He said it really strengthens the applicant's hand to have half the money committed. He said, "We're dead in the water at the federal level without state, county, municipal support."

Mayor Davis clarified that there was not an expectation that everyone involved in the Friends group would donate and that the vision was broader support. She then sought a definition of next steps to be taken. It was agreed there should be a letter as soon as possible from the Park Service to the Trust signed by Superintendent Hale and that the Park Service would initiate the appraisal. The subject will be discussed at tomorrow night's 4 Cities meeting in Greenbelt. Mr. McLaughlin said the city managers of the four cities could meet with Glenn Houston, the agreement coordinator for the Park Service, and work out a draft Friends Agreement at the staff level.

Ms. Snyder said Mayor Ferguson of Riverdale is also interested and should be kept in the loop.

### Other Business

Mr. McLaughlin said Senator Green had relayed information this morning that the Governor's office was willing to meet in Greenbelt. He also distributed copies of the bill to be introduced by Delegate Hubbard requesting full planning and zoning authority or, as the fallback position, site plan authority only, for Greenbelt and other municipalities in Prince George's County.

Mayor Davis brought up the following:

1) On January 23, she will be having a 4 Mayors lunch with the mayors of Laurel, College Park, and Bowie. If anyone has any issues to raise, please let her know.

2) The Chautauqua for current and former Council members will be February 24, and she and Mr. White will both be away.

3) She received a call from the Governor today. He said the word is out that Greenbelt is against the state's purchase of the land on the Smith property. He thinks the quicker they get the funding approved, the better. Steve Cassard is the person in his office handling the project.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher  
City Clerk