

★ Roll Call Number

Agenda Item Number

63B

Date June 13, 2011

Communication from the Chair of the Park and Recreation Board regarding the proposed declaration of approximately 1.8 acres of Glendale Cemetery land as excess property.

MOVED by _____ to receive and file.

Approved as to Form:

Ann DiDonato

Ann DiDonato
Assistant City Attorney

COUNCIL ACTION	YEAS	NAYS	PASS	ABSENT
COWNIE				
COLEMAN				
GRIESS				
HENSLEY				
MAHAFFEY				
MEYER				
MOORE				
TOTAL				
MOTION CARRIED			APPROVED	

CERTIFICATE

I, DIANE RAUH, City Clerk of said City hereby certify that at a meeting of the City Council of said City of Des Moines, held on the above date, among other proceedings the above was adopted.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal the day and year first above written.

Mayor

City Clerk

63B



Friday, June 10, 2011

Honorable Mayor
And
Members of City Council

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

On May 24, 2011, the Des Moines Park and Recreation Board met to review a request to determine if 2.0 acres of cemetery land at Glendale cemetery could be determined excess for the purposes of private development. The Park and Recreation Board received public comments and considered the recommendation from Park and Recreation staff to declare this area excess property. A motion was made to accept the staff recommendation to declare the cemetery property as excess property; with a friendly amendment recommending that the revenue proceeds go back to cemetery infrastructure improvements. The motion failed 5-8.

Board members who were in the prevailing majority expressed the following concerns:

- Several members stated that even if the land is not needed for cemetery use, and even if money will not be spent to develop it into an official park, the land can and should still be left in its current status as green open space which will benefit the neighborhood. There would be no increase in maintenance expenses, beyond what is already being spent.
- In fact, people do use this area for park-like purposes ... playing kickball, using the adjacent trail, and working at the community gardens. One board member observed a kickball game in progress when visiting the site two days before the meeting.
- Board members objected to selling off green space rather than acquiring more. The Board is charged with being stewards of the land.
- There are other areas nearby that have blighted, abandoned buildings, and this blighted zone should be used for development instead of the green space. While the developer would not be happy about paying demolition costs, it is not the responsibility of the parks department to help him meet his budget. It is likely that the City at some point will invest economic development funds into the blighted zone, so why doesn't the City do that now, and help pay for the demolition costs, so that the developer can use the blighted zone and the neighborhood can keep the green space -- a win, win solution for everyone.

- One park board member visited a comparable senior apartment complex this developer built on the south side of town, took pictures, and observed that the building appeared to be huge and that no green space would be left on the two-acre parcel. The only green space near the new Franklin building would be City property. The board member observed a large number of cars in the parking lot of the south-side complex and concluded that this meant that few parking places would be left for the community gardeners, if this footprint was replicated at the Franklin site.
- The three-story building would tower over the community gardens and would make the gardens a less attractive place to use.
- Several board members also believed that the proposed three-story design was incompatible with the surrounding neighborhood, which is mainly one-story.
- One board member observed that the Board has a land use committee (which did not consider this proposal) which is tasked with establishing criteria for determining excess property available for sale. This member felt that land should not be sold on an ad hoc basis, until these procedures are in place.
- At some future time the parcel could be developed into a neighborhood park, or more community gardens.
- If the land is designated as excess property then it should be auctioned and sold to the highest bidder, in fairness to other potential developers and also to maximize revenue.
- Citizens in this area have said they do not have a fair share of parks and losing this green space would make things even worse.
- Board members were concerned that this process was being rushed, and that the Board did not consider this in two readings as it usually does.

Several board members commented about the difficulty in separating the "excess" determination from the evaluation of the developer's plans. If the land is determined to be excess, and is then sold to another buyer with different development ideas, then the neighborhood association endorsements would be invalid, since they were based on this particular developer's plans.

Although it is rare that the Department staff and the Board differ on a matter for which the City Council has asked for their recommendation, the Park and Recreation Board members felt the need to communicate with the Mayor and City Council members to officially be on record that our recommendation was not in support of the staff recommendation to determine the parcel in question as excess. The Park and Recreation Board and the Park and Recreation Department each have a responsibility to the City Council to provide their best recommendation as to matters relating to the park and recreation system.

Wherefore, the Park and Recreation Board recommends that this parcel not be declared excess property.

MINORITY REPORT

Since the park board action was not unanimous, below are some comments made by board members whose votes were in the minority. These do not represent the official position on the Board but are included for information only, in order to give a full picture of the discussion.

- By developing this land, you are generating revenue and tax base in the northwest part of town. The property taxes paid by this development over the years will exceed what the land could be sold for as cemetery plots. Having the new residents at the Franklin site could spur interest in new businesses moving into the blighted zone.
- A large part of the two acres currently is concrete in poor condition, not green space.
- There is a need for senior housing within the City limits. Currently, when City residents reach an age where they want to move into a townhouse or senior apartment, they move to the suburbs because of a lack of such facilities in Des Moines. That means they will be spending their money in the suburbs instead of in the City neighborhoods.
- Citizens are already well served by park and open space in the northwest part of town; which will be further enhanced by development of the 70-acre Tai Dam Memorial Peace Park.

The above proceedings of the Park and Recreation Board and its recommendation that the land not be declared excess are respectfully submitted,



Joseph M. Galloway, President
Park and Recreation Board

Cc Richard A. Clark, City Manager
Donald Tripp, Director, Park and Recreation Department