



Keep Public Lands Public

By the Friends of Tallahassee's Parks and Recreation

An executive summary about the importance of keeping Myers Park intact and the City's Parks and Recreation tract in character with its surroundings PCM201706.

Prepared for Planning Commission Meeting February 7, 2017

For more information, contact FriendsOfMyersPark@gmail.com or visit Friends of Tallahassee Parks and Rec Office on Facebook.

The full report is available online at:
http://myersparkna.org/assets/fotparo_report_2017_02_07.pdf

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Friends of Tallahassee's Parks and Recreation recommend that the proposed amendment PCM201706 to change the land use and zoning designation for the Parks and Recreation site should be rejected.

The Friends reject the proposal calling for development of this parkland and believe that the land use for the 9.7 acre plat would be more beneficial remaining as parkland, and future uses could include cost-effective improvements connecting the FAMU Way linear park, the Monroe Street pedestrian bridge, Cascades Park and Myers Park as a greenway consisting of a grassed play area. Other land uses suggestions include removing the today football betting tips warehouses to convert to open spaces, and perhaps building an arts and craft or senior center.

We find the staff report in support of the proposal omits significant information that should be considered by the Local Planning Agency and the City Commission in their review of this proposed amendment. The staff analysis fails to

- Adequately analyze the policy issue of urban infill vis-à-vis neighborhood preservation as addressed in the Vision Statement of the Comprehensive Plan;
- Fully analyze alternatives to the recommended action; and
- Address the long-term implications of changing the future land use designation of public parkland for private development.

This executive summary presents the Friends of Tallahassee's Parks and Recreation's objections to the proposal and raises issues we believe that the city and county need to address:

1. The current proposal that recommends changes in land use and zoning designation for the Parks and Recreation site is flawed and incomplete. A major part of the problem arises because of the lack of appropriate regulations specifying procedures for selling city parklands, and also because of inconsistencies in the categories of land use and zoning.
 - a. Residential development in parklands raises issues vastly disproportionate and unrelated to the sound issue that the staff proposal focuses on. It appears to be a solution in search of a problem, one with a questionable fit to the sound issues.
 - b. Selling and developing parkland is an irreversible decision with important implications for Tallahassee's future, particularly as the few existing green areas on private lands are developed. The procedure for selling well-utilized parkland for development purposes needs to be carefully considered.
 - c. The current rules for selling city property appear to apply only to land determined to be surplus, which is not relevant for the proposed site. Perhaps this explains why the current proposal only focuses on the legal consistency of an apparently unsolicited development proposal with current regulations, and

does so in a very narrow way that can be misleading. The proposal does not analyze alternative future public uses and adverse consequences on other city-sponsored development projects and on surrounding neighborhoods. Perhaps these issues will be considered in a subsequent RFP process, but changing land use and zoning before seeing these analyses seems to put the cart before the horse, particularly when considering a longstanding, well-used parkland with considerable future value under the current designations.

- d. The concern with the consistency of land use and zoning designations for park-related structures needs to be addressed for all parks, not as a piecemeal decision for one park. The city needs to clarify that the necessary administrative and maintenance facilities and community centers currently included in many Tallahassee parks are approved uses in the appropriate land use and zoning categories for open space nonresidential park areas.
 - e. If existing zoning categories need to be used at this time, the current zoning of RP2 is more consistent with the best future use of the site than the proposed CU12. Instead of changing zoning to create consistency with inappropriate current use of parklands, grant variances or soccer dropping odds create deadlines for conforming that reflect relocation costs.
2. The importance of the Parks and Recreation site as parkland has been reaffirmed by the city and state throughout the past century. It currently provides administrative and maintenance services supporting the broad range of recreational services used by countywide residents.
 - a. If even this most iconic headquarters complex and historic parkland can be sold and developed, what credibility remains for the city's land use and zoning regulations? How can current and prospective homeowners be sure that parklands they choose to live near will not be sold due to future unsolicited proposals?
 - b. The administrative complex includes necessary storage and maintenance for the multiple recreational facilities in Cascades and Myers Park, facilities that are used less by neighborhood residents than by city and county residents from other areas. It is part of an important *regional* park, and is clearly not surplus land with services unrelated to parklands.
 - c. Issues of land use and zoning nonconformity due park-related service buildings need to be addressed simultaneously for all parklands that have similar buildings, not on an ad-hoc basis applying only to the Parks and Recreation site.
 3. The Parks and Recreation site is most valuable to the city as an integral component of the Cascades/Myers Park greenway.
 4. A fully-integrated, multifunctional Cascades/Myers Park greenway can play a role for Tallahassee similar to the role of Central Park for New York City, drawing residents from the county and beyond to help create a vibrant downtown.



- a. Three complementary areas in the Cascades/Myers Park greenway provide unique functions not available in the other areas, so the value of the whole exceeds the value of each separate part.
 - i. Cascades Park provides open space walkways with water interests, playgrounds for children, and a restaurant complex.
 - ii. Myers Park provides walkways in mature woodlands not found in Cascades Park plus organized recreational facilities including baseball, tennis, basketball, and swimming.
 - iii. The Parks and Recreation site in Myers Park already provides necessary administrative and maintenance facilities, a heavily-used community meeting space, and a rich canopy of mature oaks and pines that enhance the other park areas. Future developments here could offer unique pathways with sunset overviews of Cascades Park that can link and extend existing pedestrian and bicycle paths, level grasslands for unstructured recreation not available anywhere else, and other amenities to attract a broad cross-section of recreational users.

5. New residential development in the Myers Park Historic District may provide housing for young professionals and increase the tax base, but may actually reduce the attractiveness of near-downtown to these professionals. There are plenty of nearby sites more suitable near Cascades Park that are already targeted for development to serve this goal without the adverse consequences of selling parkland.
 - a. A web survey of 203 resident ranging from Myers Park through Indian Acres/Lehigh and beyond shows that an overwhelming 90% of respondents oppose rezoning and believe that preserving the open space and mature trees

at the Parks and Recreation site is very important. Many of these residents represent the kinds of professionals Tallahassee wants to attract, suggesting that converting parkland to residential development to attract young professionals is self-defeating: the loss of the iconic Parks and complex and canopy of mature pines and oaks, along with the traffic, noise and related problems associated with dense development will reduce the attractiveness of these neighborhoods for professionals.

- b. The Vision Statement of the Comprehensive Plan calls for channeling infill into appropriate locations *while protecting the integrity of existing neighborhoods*. The Firestone/Bloxham Annex and Monroe-Adams Corridor have already been designated for infill adjacent to Cascades Park, and undeveloped private land is available adjoining Myers Park. Why sacrifice public parkland for residential development that would compete for residents and reduce the attractiveness of projects already supported by public investments? Lessons from these high priority developments should be learned before even considering development on well-utilized parkland such as the Parks and Recreation site.
6. The sound issue caused by the Cascades Park Amphitheater needs to be addressed separately from the decision to sell and develop parkland in order to consider the relative merits of all alternatives. Potential Traffic Issues also need to be addressed before proceeding.
 - a. Residential development in parklands raises issues vastly disproportionate and unrelated to the sound issue. It appears to be a solution in search of a problem, one with a questionable fit to the sound issues.
 - b. No evidence is provided that residential structures capable of mitigating the sound problem would be aesthetically, economically, and legally acceptable.
 - c. Past consultation between neighborhoods and the city about the sound issue have produced several options completely unrelated to the current proposal. The consultation process broke down after the city apparently received an unsolicited proposal to develop residential housing as a sound barrier to replace a sound wall that the city had previously approved, but the two issues need separate consideration.
 7. Many other groups and individuals have written letters to the city leaders and editorials opposing PCM201706. Board, club and association letters against the rezoning and development of parkland include:
 - Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
 - The Big Bend Sierra Club
 - The Myers Park Neighborhood Association
 - The Woodland Drives Neighborhood Association
 - The Indianhead Lehigh Neighborhood Association
 - Los Robles Neighborhood Association