

Edward Lavallee

To: Judy Gamel
Cc: John Veneziano; Lori Stelzer
Subject: Public Bench Donation program

Memorial Bench Cover memo –for a future Council agenda, pending discussions with VABI

Mayor & Council

The City maintains a considerable number of “ park benches” many of which are located in City parks, but are also found along public streets and on other public properties. Some of the benches bear plaques memorializing a person in whose name the bench may have been purchased. The total amount of benches maintained by the City numbers in the hundreds. An attached memo from the Public Works Director details some of the locations of public benches and other memorialized tributes, such as pavers and other plaques.

Maintaining and, as necessary, replacing the benches is a significant task. Most benches are constructed of concrete bases with wood slats. The wood slats require considerable maintenance due to the extreme heat and humidity in our environment. Newer benches can be purchased with composite slats that have an extended life, requiring less maintenance. The current published replacement cost of \$150 is approximately half of the actual cost of purchasing a new composite bench. Recognizing the cost of labor and materials to preserve, repair and replace the benches, attached is a proposed ordinance to update the replacement cost and implement a plan to systematically replace the wood slat benches with longer lasting composite benches. The proposed cost to donors would equal the actual cost of purchasing and maintaining a bench (*currently about \$300*). This would allow for a continuation of the practice of accepting donations and installing benches without adding to the already substantial maintenance and replacement burden on the City budget.

As members of the public offer to donate funds to name a bench or otherwise memorialize a relative, friend, or loved one, the attached proposed policy suggests creation of a special fund to collect donations and catalog requests for the purchase of benches and other memorials. The proposal includes the assignment of the process to a volunteer group that would accept the responsibility to manage the funds. Working with the Public Works Department the volunteer entity would follow the material specifications for benches, plaques, and other memorials established by the City, to ensure the cost effective and product appropriate purchases and installations.



Memorandum

To: Edward Lavalley, City Manager

From: John Veneziano, Public Works Director

Date: July 1, 2014

Subject: Memorial Benches and Other City Park Memorials

Proposed Action

Recommend that City Council approve a resolution formalizing programs regarding memorials within city parks and open spaces.

Background

The City has a number of ways by which citizens may memorialize or pay tribute to a family member or other person. These methods include memorial benches, memorial trees and inscriptions on bricks or concrete pavers.

The Public Works Department established a memorial bench program more than 10 years ago. The most popular spots for memorial benches are the South Jetty and the West Venice/Centennial Park area. The donation is \$150 per bench, an amount based on the cost to procure and install a bench when the program began. The current cost to install a bench is about twice that amount. The person making the donation procures a plaque. A city worker installs the plaque on the bench.

At least seven locations have bricks or pavers with inscriptions. Private not-for-profit groups manage these programs as fundraisers. Locations with these programs include Centennial Park interactive fountain, West Blalock Park arboretum, Venice Community Center front walkway, Venetian Waterway Park trailhead, Venetian Waterway Park behind Publix, Venice Theater sidewalk along Tampa Avenue and Patriots Park. Patriots Park is a county park. City workers install the inscribed pavers within city parks.

Trees are donated mostly at West Blalock Park and Centennial Park. A sign is placed at the base of the tree. VABI manages this program.

At no time have these programs included a stipulation that there is any time limit on the donation, i.e. there is an expectation that the memorial will be permanent and maintained perpetually by the city.

In most cases there does not appear to be any record that the City Council took action to approve or authorize these programs.

Issues

In the development of a formal program, five issues need to be considered: the scope of the program, administration of the program, program specifications, the amount charged for the memorial and the term of the memorial.

Options

- (1) The scope of a program may include, in addition to benches, trees and inscriptions, other items such as picnic tables, playground equipment, walkways, fountains, restrooms, any type of park amenity.
- (2) Administration of a program can be by the city, by a private group, by a group formed by the city or any combination thereof.
- (3) It is always preferable that items provided conform to some minimum specification to facilitate maintenance and replacement, as well as to minimize potential for vandalism and liability.
- (4) The cost of an item can be either set by City Council and periodically reviewed or established as the actual cost to procure and install the item, with or without an administrative charge.
- (5) The term may be for the expected life of an item, for the actual life of the item or for some fixed period. Options to purchase additional terms may also be provided. A perpetual maintenance fund, most often used for cemeteries, might be another option considered.

Recommendations

1. Scope

- a. It is recommended that the program be open to any City park and any type of park amenity as long as the item is an existing or planned park amenity, and with the concurrence of Sarasota County in the case of county-maintained facilities.
- b. For someone wishing to donate an item not in the plan they must first seek a recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and then receive approval by City Council.
- c. All memorials should be limited to recognizing individuals not groups, pets or inanimate objects.

2. Administration

It is recommended that the city establish a private organization or foundation or use an existing group to administer these programs.

3. Specifications

It is recommended that the PWD establish standards for all memorial items including size and materials for plaques and signs used to recognize persons.

4. Charge

It is recommended that the amount charged be the actual material and labor cost plus reasonable administrative fees. In addition, the private group administering the program, with city council approval may create a specific program around a specific amenity to raise funds for a project or maintenance efforts in city parks.

5. Term

It is recommended that a term be established for each item in the donation program in line with the expected useable life of that item, for example wood bench 5 years, composite bench 10 years, trees life depending on species, inscriptions 20 years. Additionally, there should be an option for purchase of additional terms and there should be clear direction on responsibility for damage due to severe weather or vandalism.