

From: John Holic

Sent: Thursday, December 29, 2016 7:18 AM

To: Charles D. Hines <chines@scgov.net>

Cc: Carolyn Brown <cnbrown@scgov.net>; Mark Cunningham <mcunning@scgov.net>; charlesdhines <charlesdhines@gmail.com>; Edward Lavalley <ELavalley@Venicegov.com>; Heather Taylor <HTaylor@Venicegov.com>

Subject: Re: Future of Wellfield park

Dear Commissioner Hines,

Thank you for the detail on Wellfield and I appreciate the attempt to consolidate your thoughts into written form. It is difficult and, if you're like me, no sooner than you hit send, another thought comes to mind that should have been included.

I am including the draft of the county priorities you had sent in our next agenda and will ask council to pick the top 20 priorities from our strategic plan to list as priorities for the city. Once this is done, I will forward it to you as I think to work together effectively, we must know what we are working on alone. I would also like to include a copy of your below email and my reply in our agenda so that the entire council is on board, but will do so only after your OK to do so.

I could not agree more with you on several of the topics we talked about, especially that of having studies done and then placing them on a shelf and not following through. A case in point, but a topic for another day, is the CRA study that was done for Venice and never even presented to the county for consideration. That was back in 2002 I believe and it is something that will be brought up again, but not at this time.

Back to Wellfield, and these also are my thoughts only, not those of the entire council, this park has to be the top priority of the Parks Master Plan (PMP) even though it is not adequately singled out as such. Wellfield, as you know, includes the entire section of land along the eastern side of Pinebrook Rd. from Ridgewood Ave. on the south to the beginning of Waterford on the north. On the eastern side, the closest homes are in the Bridle Oaks subdivision. The entire size of Wellfield is listed by the City as 160 acres of which about 60 % is currently developed parks and 40% is left in natural condition and contains a walking / fitness trail on about half of the undeveloped land. The undeveloped portion of Wellfield is commonly referred to as Pinebrook Park, although that name has not formally been placed on the list of city parks. The developed side is where we have what we both refer to as our regional park land and it is where the current Police Station and sports complex are located. The sports complex is probably best described as 10 pounds of sports fields in a 5 pound container. The walking / fitness trail portion of the undeveloped side has been agreed upon to be left natural and the lime pits in that area will soon be eliminated from that park. That portion of the park is about half of the undeveloped land as it is split by Curry Creek with no current access from the south to the north part of the undeveloped area.

The Wellfield side of the park has received most of the attention to the area as it has been neglected for years. Drainage is / was poor and some of the fields were not lit. The City has improved the drainage as much as possible without tearing up fields and inconveniencing some of the sports. There may be a little more we can do, but the real challenge is to totally remodel the park layout. As you know, the parking lots are largely gravel (complete with pot holes) and are inadequate for the number of sports fields present. To make Wellfield into a true sports complex with all the sports that currently use the park, we would have to extend the boundaries and encroach on the undeveloped side. Even with the police giving up the Waymire training facility / gun range and the fire department giving up their training area, the park is too small for the current activities. The addition of the police and fire areas would give us 10 pounds of sports in a 6 pound bag, an improvement but not a solution.

If we are to transform the area into a regional sports complex and central park, then we will have to move some of the sports out of the area. I am in total agreement that we need to better utilize our school resources to accomplish that goal. The sharing with the schools has been pretty much a one way street up until now. In Venice, at least since I have been in office, the City has contributed approximately \$8 million to the Performing Arts Center and for three years, while the new high school was being constructed, reserved the tennis courts at Hecksher Park for the ladies tennis team as their courts at the high school were not usable during construction. The City accomplished these two items in the way governmental sharing should occur, no charge to the receiving unit by the giving unit, rather it was a sharing of taxpayer resources. Cross utilization of taxpayer resources will be a topic of discussion at a Council of Governments meeting in the near future. We have tried to discuss this topic several times in the past, however, with the exception of Venice, the leadership of the other governmental units changes each year so we tend to lack the continuity needed during our discussions. Perhaps this will be the year we get a bit more traction on the topic and begin to see some progress. I grew up in a city that had one Little League field, one Pony League field, an open unmarked field, and a couple of tennis courts. Football, soccer and basketball were all done on school grounds or the unmarked park field with open utilization by the public except during school hours on the school property. We survived and had very few complaints - we all shared.

The city does not have the revenue or the expertise to run a regional sports park. I think we have the desire to help get Wellfield into much better shape than it is now, but we can't do it alone. It would be helpful if the city was given a time line as to when additional fields (either rectangle or diamond) could be ready to take those sports out of Wellfield. Once that was accomplished, I think we could redesign the park and make it a showcase for the city and county. Removing either rectangles or diamonds would get the field much closer to 5 pounds of sports on a 5 pound field. In addition, it would allow us to focus on the upgraded amenities needed at the fields. The PMP really didn't give us too much guidance on this topic so I think it will have to be a cooperative city / county effort between our two parks departments.

The topic of additional parks is for another day. I had hoped to convince council to enlist the services of a city planner to aid us in design of the remaining part of the city, however, it may

be too late for that. I think any future parks that Venice may dedicate will be passive in nature and require a minimum of maintenance. They will have to be sharing arrangements rather than single use parks if there are any amenities provided. We lost the ability to master plan the area in northeast Venice once it was annexed in with the zoning given it without concessions for park land. The current mind set is for gated communities with private facilities controlled by a homeowners organization. This leaves little for the city to develop or control other than purchasing additional land and developing it. I think we would be better off combining our resources in developing some of the adjacent county land as it is already owned land and eliminates the acquisition cost, but again, a topic for another day.

I'll stop here and wait for your approval to bring both emails up to council for discussion. I also do not wish to let this topic gather dust on a shelf.

Best Regards and thanks again for your time. Sincere hopes for a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

John

John Holic
Mayor, City of Venice

From: Charles D. Hines <chines@scgov.net>
Sent: Wednesday, December 28, 2016 5:42 PM
To: John Holic
Cc: Carolyn Brown; Mark Cunningham; charlesdhines
Subject: Future of Wellfield park

Dear Mayor Holic:

I wanted to follow up on one of the items we discussed yesterday, as I've given it some thought and do not want it to linger. Sorry it is long but this is a big subject with lots of moving parts.

As you have now received our draft list of priorities for the next year, you will notice that Wellfield is not on there. However; having completed our Parks and Rec master plan our Park staff has been directed to bring us their ideas as to how we can begin to implement the recommendations in the Plan. Obviously this involves the main recommendation of the County moving toward being the provider/maintainer of regional parks and having the cities take over the smaller pocket or so-called neighborhood parks. So obviously the conversation of Wellfield will need to come up at some point this next year. As both you and I recognize, the future plan

for Wellfield is a massive undertaking due to the size of the park, the significant infrastructure upgrades that are needed, the many nonprofits that run their sports activities there, (which will be interrupted and with some in all likelihood having to move permanently), and of course, the large amount of funding that will be needed and the issue of where will it come from. Therefore I wanted to get my thoughts down in writing for reference. As with any long journey, it starts with the first step, and I believe with the Parks master plan the first couple of steps have already been taken. What we need to do now is not allow the Plan to become another government study that gets placed on a shelf. We need to pick it up and keep moving it forward. When we return from the Christmas break, I will get with our Parks director and find out where things stand in regards to this matter and maybe you and I can talk again and can try can get this issue before our boards. Obviously anything in here are only my thoughts, and not a policy decision made by our Commission, (other than agreeing with the idea of moving toward the regional parks idea for the County).

Furthermore, the School Board will need to be involved in this discussion, as in my opinion and that of many others, the School Board has many underutilized amenities that need to be part of the conversation. This issue of joint /general public use is on the agenda for our joint meeting coming up with the School Board. For example, should the Pop Warner program be displaced or ultimately moved, if the Venice high school field is to be considered, that will take the school board's involvement. As with any other teams that are temporarily displaced (softball, baseball, soccer), their activities in all likelihood may have to take place at various school sites.

With that said, I just bounced the idea of coach John Peacock at the high school about the Vikings potentially coming over there temporarily or maybe permanently for their games. (fyi; prior to Letson stadium that is where they played). Considering the new upgrades that have been done at the high school and that most other Pop Warner programs in Southwest Florida, except in Sarasota County, play their games at the local high school, this makes sense; least to me. Although he does not control the football stadium or its facilities, Coach Peacock was open to this discussion. He believed that practice times and weekend football games would not interrupt his program and even discussed the possibility of converting the grass playing surface to a turf surface so that the additional play would not be an issue of damaging the field. I have not had a recent conversation with the Pop Warner program but I did several months ago that included a lot of "what if" questions, but we all agreed that the football facility, bathrooms, parking, etc., at Wellfield are inadequate and outdated.

Furthermore, I am aware that there's continued discussion with the School Board, Venice staff, and its athletic programs in regards to more improvements to the high school football/track/soccer facility that were initially approved by the School Board but were administratively removed from the high school's recent rebuild, but which are still very much needed, (expanded track, bathroom improvements, etc.). Therefore there may be some synergies available in the near future to have the community and the nonprofits contribute to some improvements at the high school for the Pop Warner program, such as a storage facility or potentially a small locker room/ changing room, etc. These are all just ideas that can be properly vetted and discussed, but I do not think we should be closed minded to anything.

The above comments are starting to get very specific, but the overall idea I am promoting here is, it does not make logistical or financial sense for the County, the City, the School Board and our area nonprofits to all continue to try to build separate facilities. As we have seen, when we have so many small, sometimes single use, non-master planned parks and/or locked-off taxpayer funded facilities (school properties), all of them have significant downtime (but still have maintenance costs) and in all likelihood are inadequate for our local needs and for larger-users or regional tournaments that produce revenue for our community. What we have now cannot compare to the quality of what we can do if all of us combine our energies, thoughts and resources for the benefit of our local athletic teams and our active citizens.

In our business, we know that there's always loud skeptics and naysayers that always say that can't be done, etc. However, if local leaders were to always listen to those loud few verses doing what's best for our community, then we would not currently have the Legacy Trail/Venetian Waterway Park, the Performing Arts Center at the high school, a video screen at the VHS sports field, the world renowned Nathan Benderson rowing facility, major league spring training baseball in Sarasota County and the list goes on. Let's keep working on this and let's see what we can accomplish and create a true central park for Mid-South County that all of our residents can use and enjoy.

Again all of this is to hopefully begin some serious discussions within our community. At some point we will have to get all the various groups together, along with some experts as to what can fit on the property and what types of fields should be at Wellfield. Then figure out where the displaced programs can go in our community and then if needed, due to what has to be taken away or added to Wellfield, such as additional parking, upgraded restrooms, concession facilities, storm-water retention, new ball fields, fitness trails, etc., where our current and future programs can go and what needs to be built.

Thanks and I look forward to us working on this together.