

26. Consideration of a Request for the Donation or Lease of the Gadsden Street Parking Lot to the Riley House/Museum for the Creation of Legacy Park

County Administrator Alam explained that the item requests consideration of the donation of the Gadsden Street parking lot to the Riley House/Museum for the creation of Legacy Park. He shared that the parking lot was purchased in 2003 for \$1.5 million, to help meet the County's short and long-term parking and office space needs. He noted the Gadsden Street lot provides parking for constitutional officer, judicial, and traffic court staff and that it would cost at least \$100,000 annually to transition staff to alternate parking. Mr. Alam also mentioned that the County had entered into a parking meter agreement with the City of Tallahassee, which includes the addition of 20 metered spaces on the Gadsden Street lot. Mr. Alam distributed a copy of Florida Statutes 125.38 Sale of county property to United States, or State; which states that the Board must determine that the property was not needed for any County purpose; otherwise the Statute prohibits the donation of real property. He recommended that the Board adopt staff recommendation for Options 1 and 2.

Chairman Rackleff clarified with the County Administrator that the Riley House request includes the entire lot and that the County's proposal would not in any way destroy the Riley House. Mr. Alam affirmed that the County would continue to work with the Riley House in their parking needs when special events and functions were held.

Speakers:

- Althemese Barnes, 1919 Summerwood Ave., Riley House Executive Director, notified the Board that Ms. Edwina Stephens was scheduled to speak; however due to illness was unable to appear. She informed the Board that Ms. Stephens requested that her support for the request be made known to the Board.

Ms. Barnes thanked that Board for its support of and conveyed that it has been the desire of the Riley House for 14 years to expand its interpretative space. She shared that the proposal would attract more out of town visitors, tourist and history buffs and would provide a reason for residents and flow-through traffic to visit the downtown area. She articulated the historical significance of the Riley House and other structures and monuments to Tallahassee's past. Ms. Barnes added that the proposal has the potential to refine the image of the community and expand grant opportunities.

- Patty Wilson Byars, 4425 Meandering Way, remarked that the Riley House was a great learning environment for Leon County students and citizens. She spoke on the implementation and success of the Blended Lives Program, developed in cooperation between the Riley House and Goodwood Manor to teach Leon County school students the importance of working together in a blended environment.
- Quenita White, 2915 Sharer Road, read a statement issued by Dr. David Jackson, Professor of History at FAMU and Chairman of the John G. Riley Board. He asked that the Board consider allowing the Riley House to utilize the

parking lot next to its current structure for expansion purposes. He stated that the Riley House serves as a resource for FSU, FAMU and TCC students. (A copy of Dr. Jackson's comments was presented for inclusion into the record.)

- Annie Harris, 436 W. Georgia St., stated that donation of the property would assist the County in meeting its economic development and tourism goals and requested the Board vote in favor of, and be supportive of, all educational programs that the Legacy Park can provide.
- Spencer Ingram, 118 Salem Court, asked that the Board view the project as "more of a vision than a parking lot". He noted the important historical significance of the Riley House. He expressed support for the Riley Legacy Park and questioned whether the use of the property as a parking lot is its most efficient use.
- Cicero Hartsfield, 3971 Emerald Chase, grew up in the "Smokey Holler" neighborhood and expressed that this, along with the Riley House, was an important part of the community's rich black history. He professed support for Ms. Barnes' vision to grow the Riley House and make this a better community.
- Julianne Hare, 3048 Bell Grove Drive, discussed the possibility of instituting "park and ride" programs at under-utilized parking lots such as Tallahassee Mall and K-Mart and commented on the opportunity to not only expand the community's heritage knowledge but to create another green community space.
- Steve Whitaker, 1630 Branch St., stated that the Riley House has produced many defining moments to students, historians, etc. and expressed his support for the expansion of the Riley House facilities.
- Mary May, 2862 N. Nettler's Blvd., provided an illustration of Tallahassee in 1946-47 and stated that the Riley House is an important repository of African American history in Tallahassee/Leon County. She expressed concern that a lack of space will result in fewer opportunities to expand exhibits or to improve educational programs.

Arthur Muisse, 531 Norman Dr., shared his work with Ms. Barnes on expansion of cultural exchange and economic development and suggested that the parking lot property provides the best opportunity for expansion.

Elinor Elfner, 1107 Seminole Ave., remarked that she has been a member of Riley House for over 10 years and that it represents an important part of Leon County and the Big Bend and should be recognized. She noted that the Riley House is a very historically preserved place that is listed on the Historic Register. She asked assistance in protecting history and requested the Board approve at a minimum the transfer of the eastern portion of the parking lot to the Riley House.

Commissioner Desloge expressed his appreciation to Ms. Barnes for her energy and efforts on behalf of the Riley House. He noted that the County has been a large supporter of the organization; however he could not in good conscious support the donation of the property. He asserted that the County would continue to support the Riley House in any way possible.

Commissioner Desloge moved, duly seconded by Commissioner Sauls, to approve Options 1 & 2: 1) Do not donate or lease the Gadsden Street parking lot to the Riley House/Museum and 2) Continue to coordinate with the Riley House/Museum for its annual fund raiser/new exhibit display, Rock-a-thon, and Blended Lives program.

Commissioner Akinyemi acknowledged the fiscal facts provided by staff, the \$100,000 required to relocate staff parking and indicated that he was familiar with the Statute distributed by the County Administrator; however, he too questioned whether a parking lot on prime property in downtown Tallahassee was the "highest and best use of the property". He submitted that the Riley House was an African American History Museum jewel and the request provided an opportunity for the Board to do something unique, historic and significant. He referred to attachments of the Board's agenda packet (architects' conceptual designs for the Gadsden Street Lot) and suggested that possibilities and/or cooperative efforts be explored.

Commissioner Akinyemi offered a substitute motion to direct representatives from Leon County, Riley House and Blueprint 2000 work closely and seriously to develop the following: 1) a sector plan for the area; 2) decision on highest and best use of the property; 3) recommend the form of ownership and conveyance for the property, and 4) coordinate the timing of this effort with the opening of Cascade Park. The substitute motion was seconded by Commissioner Thaeil.

Chairman Rackleff clarified with Commissioner Akinyemi that his motion referred to the property owned by Leon County.

Commissioner Proctor offered his support for the donation of the property to the Riley House and spoke at length on the total dismantlement of assets pertinent to the cultural experience of African American people. He remarked that staff's recommendation was based on dollars and did not allow for the cultural richness and significance of the Riley House. He conveyed that an interpretation of Florida Statute 125.38 empowers the County to lease or sale for nominal price (set by the Board), regardless of its value, real property for non-profit promoting the community's interest and welfare and asserted that the Riley House met that criteria.

County Administrator Alam responded that the request represents a \$1.5 million donation and that the property should not be viewed as a parking lot, but as an asset of the taxpayers of Leon County. He deemed that the property was acquired for future use by the County, however, should the Board determine there was no future need for the property, it could be donated. Mr. Alam also pointed out that the property could be sold. He asked that County Attorney Thiele clarify the Statute.

County Attorney Thiele advised that the Statute allows the County to make a conveyance for less than fair market value only if a factual determination is made by the Board that the property does not serve a current and future County purpose.

Commissioner Dailey voiced support for the substitute motion and suggested that the County approach Blueprint 2000 regarding the addition of the Riley House plan to their list of projects. Thus, the property would be purchased by Blueprint from the County and officially become part of Cascades Park. He addressed the immediate parking needs and submitted that a lease could be entered into, by which the Riley House would assume more of the space as the parking situation is alleviated.

Commissioner Thaeil indicated that he would support the substitute motion and appreciated Commissioner Dailey's suggestion to add the Riley House plan to Blueprint projects (when one-cent reauthorized). He stated that concerns regarding the need for

additional parking could be addressed by the encouragement of car pooling and use of transit service. He endorsed the establishment of the Visioning Committee to determine the best and highest use of the land.

Commissioner Desloge emphasized that this was a significant transaction and encouraged fellow Commissioners to consider the value of the property (\$1.5 million) and the incurrence of \$100,000 in on-going expenses. He stated that a great relationship has been established with the Riley House and indicated that the Blueprint idea had merit down the road; however those funds would not be renewed until 2017-2019.

Commissioner Akinyemi clarified that his substitute motion did not involve a sale and that the proposed study group would determine the best and highest use. He envisioned that the group's outcome would confirm that this would be the County's best investment.

Commissioner Akinyemi amended his motion to include a timeline of three months for the group to bring back recommendations. Also, the group should include one Commissioner, one county administration senior staff member, a Riley House representative, and a representative from Blueprint. He also noted that citizen involvement was very important to this process.

Chairman Rackleff volunteered to be the Board's representative.

Commissioner Sauls reaffirmed that the substitute motion does not convey the property. She commented that the Board has always been very supportive of the Riley House; however she expressed concern with how to determine that the property was not needed for County usage and where the recurring money for parking would come. Commissioner Sauls pointed out that the agenda item states that the property is needed and confirmed with County Attorney Thiele that the Board could move forward without making that factual determination at this time.

Chairman Rackleff offered that he would support the motion. He stated that he was very cognizant that this was a very valuable, useful piece of property; however, was not indispensable. He acknowledged the extreme high cost of parking and stressed the need for future policies to include transportation and parking reduction strategies that reduces the number of parking spaces in the downtown area. These strategies could include a parking "buy out" program.

Commissioner Akinyemi called the question. The motion to call the question carried 6-1 (Commissioner Proctor in opposition).

The substitute motion as amended carried 6-1 (Commissioner Desloge in opposition).