

STATE OF ALABAMA)(
 :
COUNTY OF BALDWIN)(

The City Council met in a Work Session at 5:00 p.m.,
Fairhope Municipal Complex Council Chamber,
161 North Section Street, Fairhope, Alabama 36532,
on Tuesday, 11 February 2014.

Present were Council President Jack Burrell, Councilmembers: Rich Mueller, Diana Brewer, Councilmember Ford, and Kevin Boone, Mayor Timothy M. Kant, City Attorney Marion E. Wynne, and City Clerk Lisa A. Hanks.

There being a quorum present, Council President Burrell called the meeting to order. The invocation was given by Councilmember Boone and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Council President Burrell explained that tonight we are here to look at the future of Knoll Park. He mentioned a quote from November 2004 from Mayor Kant regarding Knoll Park: Mayor Kant stated we would be back in 10 years if you don't take action tonight.

Councilmember Mueller said he has not decided yet; and there are several options and would like to hear them.

Councilmember Brewer said she reiterated what Councilmember Mueller said and mentioned there are experts on both sides. She told everyone that there was no need to hear the same points over and over again.

Councilmember Boone stated the park needs to go back to the original park like the pristine condition in the 1966 picture.

Council President Burrell said there is a long history for this park and there are lots of questions to be asked. He said feel free to ask questions and to speakers try to get information.

Mayor Kant commented in 1983 we had issues and nothing has really changed. When the City cut the azaleas, we had issues. Every 10 to 15 years the Knoll Park issue comes up. He said half of you want natural and the other half want a pristine park. Whatever we do, this is a public park. This park touches all facets of our community.

Peggy Dyson, 10 Greenbrier Lane, who is the Chairman of the Knoll Park Committee addressed the City Council and said this park is unique in Fairhope and is within walking distance to enjoy nature. The nature of the cycle of the longleaf pine is partly due to the wildflowers. Progressions of the seasons and the cycle enhance the opportunity to keep park natural.

Fred Nation, a non-Fairhopian who lives in Daphne, addressed the City Council and mentioned the tree trails and that he wrote a "Guide for Nature Trees." He mentioned that Fairhope has more Alabama State Champion Trees than other cities or towns. The longleaf habitat is diverse ecosystem shows elegance and glory of our native things. Burning was questioned by Councilmembers Brewer and Ford. Mr. Nation replied to remain a natural habitat; you must have at least two burns in 10 years. He also explained the makings of a longleaf pine habitat with a canopy, mid-story, and ground layer.

Bobby Green, 415 Maple, addressed the City Council and stated the restoration is never completely finished. A great number of steps have already been implemented. We have had three burns in six and a half years. He mentioned flowers that have been reintroduced to the park; working with Bill Finch to implement cell phone tours; and the possibility for Knoll Park to be the seed source for the newly acquired Dyas property. This project is for our children and our children's children. Mr. Green also answered a question from Council President Burrell regarding burning and scarring the trees. He said that the first burn is what scarred the trees and the last two burns you could literally walk through the fire.

Jennifer Fidler, Public Works Director, addressed the City Council regarding the plan from the Knoll Park Committee that was prepared by David Dyson. Recommendations were made to remove oak trees, leave wooden stags for bird habitat, put more items in to enhance bird habitat, and plant a buffer around the park which will be native plants in a scattered design. You could actually see through the buffer the natural park.

Art Dyas, 22430 Main Street, addressed the City Council and explained the longleaf pine ecosystem. He stated that originally there were 93 million stands of longleaf pines before cutting and now there are only 4 million stands; and Knoll Park has original longleaf pines that are over 150 years old. Endangered species are due to lack of burns. Mr. Dyas explained why the burns are good for the longleaf pines and that the seeds of plants need to be scarified which is what the fire does; it germinates the seeds. Mr. Dyas also stated that the Dyas property is a second growth forest with longleaf pines that are approximately 85 years old; Knoll Park has the original longleaf pines.

The following individuals spoke during Public Participation:

- Wendell Barnhill, 111 North Ingleside Street, addressed the City Council and commented on how passionate he is for the look of the park and the longleaf pines. He said his family has nurtured pines for over 100 years. There is a place for all of us. We need to come together and put a border around park; and keep park natural.
- Dr. Lynn Yonge, 111 Keifer Avenue, addressed the City Council and said he was a longleaf pine and "Treasure Tree" owner. He also stated we should work together. He asked us to think about what nature wants; leave it alone and love it.

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- Anne Nix, 415 Myrtle Avenue, addressed the City Council and mentioned she had lived here over 61 years. She has seen no beautification at the park; and has heard more comments on why it is not like it used to be. The City of Fairhope has been four times in Nations in Bloom. Mrs. Nix wants to keep it nice for Fairhope.
- Patrick Waldrop, 20900 Lowery Drive, addressed the City Council and told them he was the one who actually did the last burns in Knoll Park. He made sure the smoke was put in Mobile Bay and not in the streets of Fairhope. He also said they took precautions not to scar or hurt the plants and trees. Mr. Waldrop told the Council that if the park remained natural he would help with the burns.
- Harvey Joanning, 11 Echo Lane, addressed the City Council and said he lives in gully and a mature longleaf pine forest where everything is natural. He invited the City Council to his home and to walk the neighborhood with him.
- Harriet Gutknecht, 109 Echo Lane, addressed the City Council and commented she was on the Tree Committee and the Garden Committee. She said this park is a unique space and habitat. She said what is beautiful for one person may not be beautiful to another. We need to do what is best for our citizens. This park shows diversification and a variety.
- Carl Couret, 208 Fig Avenue, addressed the City Council and stated there is a lot we don't know about a natural ecosystem. Mr. Couret said he has an attraction to Knoll Park; and he was married there because there was no other place that had its character. There is only a modest amount of human intervention in this park.
- Connie Flowers, 109 Fig Avenue, addressed the City Council and stated it does not look like a park. We need beautification of the perimeter and keep natural on the inside.
- Paul Ripp, 22985 High Ridge Road, addressed the City Council and stated to leave it with the Committee.
- Chris Knight, 50 North Bayview, addressed the City Council and mentioned cars pulling into the park and erosion is bad. The edge needs to be maintained on the perimeter. He requested that an actual landscape drawing be presented to the community before work begins in the park. He questioned what the sidewalk would look like and will it cause erosion too.

Council President Burrell stated he was proud to be part of the City and glad we have taken action. He told the City Council we need to give clear concise direction regarding Knoll Park.

Councilmember Ford said he was on the committee and there are two different factions: one wanting to keep the park natural and one wanting a pristine park. He said he thought we could merge both factions together. This is City property and we have a committee telling us what to do. He said he was glad we were here tonight; we should take both sides and make a decision. We need to define, bring people together, and come to a common ground.

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Mayor Kant said this came about because a committee was making decisions, not meeting in public, and meeting on private property. We need to work towards a compromise.

Councilmember Boone commented he felt rubbed the wrong way when signs were put up without permission. The City should appoint the committee who would be advisory only. He recommended a border all the way around the park more than 10 feet; stumps and root systems cleaned up; and walks ways better throughout the park. He said a compromise with a buffer for the park is his suggestion.

Councilmember Mueller said that twelve months ago a 20 foot buffer and manicured area with plants and bushes was recommended. That still left over 3 acres of natural park. That was the spirit of compromise. Council President Burrell replied Mayor Kant said a 10 to 12 foot buffer around the outside.

Councilmember Brewer said she has heard a lot. People don't understand what they are trying to do. She said now I have a better understanding of what they are trying to do. Councilmember Brewer stated she was not sure we have to have a 20 foot buffer and we should be able to see restoration from the road.

Council President Burrell said he was not here because of whom controls the park. The committee wants direction; and he is thankful for all of the comments. Tonight the majority was for the park to remain natural; be unique, be different, and take in natural space. The compromise is to keep manicured perimeter of 10 to 20 feet and keep the rest natural with removal of oak trees and leave dead trees for birds. The City Council will give direction.

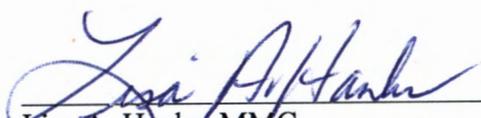
Councilmember Brewer stated we need a design and manage plan. Mayor Kant said people want a visual to see sidewalk and plants.

Councilmember Brewer moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Councilmember Boone, motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

There being no further business to come before the City Council, the meeting was duly adjourned at 7:05 p.m.



Jack Burrell, Council President



Lisa A. Hanks, MMC
City Clerk