

LEGISLATIVE #

110258C

Nature Centers Commission

Pearse Hayes, Chair

PO Box 490, Station 24
Gainesville, FL 32627

August 30, 2011

Dear Mayor Lowe:

As Chair of the Nature Center's Commission (NCC), a City Commission appointed citizen advisory board, I am writing this letter in regards to the recent inquiry about the process for private purchase of public land. This topic was discussed at our regularly scheduled Board meeting on August 18, 2011. The Board was provided a copy of the latest proposal emailed by Mr. Nathan Collier to Mr. Steve Phillips, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs (PRCA) Department Director, as well as a copy of the Department's denial letter to Mr. Collier and the referral from the City Commission to the Recreation, Cultural Affairs and Public Works (RCAPW) Committee. At this meeting the Board voted unanimously to approve this letter to be sent to the City Commission opposing the proposal from Mr. Collier and to provide said letter to the RCAPW Committee meeting on October 10, 2011.

Speaking on behalf of the entire Board, I would like to say we were quite surprised that such a proposal would even necessitate further discussion. In regard to the proposal to surplus land in the Hogtown Creek Greenway, Loblolly Woods Nature Park is one of the true gems of the City of Gainesville and is a key component in the overall Hogtown Creek Greenway structure. The land was purchased for the conservation and preservation of natural resources for the enjoyment of the public, not for an extended fence line for an adjacent neighbor. The conservation easement language provided for consideration by Mr. Collier is incomplete at best and does nothing to further the continued existence of the land for the enjoyment of the public.

In regards to a process for selling public conservation land to private landowners in general, the Board feels this idea is completely against the intent of the City's land acquisition program. As you are aware the NCC, as part of its by-laws and work plan, is to advise the City Commission on environmentally sensitive land acquisition as well as to receive and review land management plans from staff in the natural resource management of those properties. For many years the City has maintained an active land acquisition program utilizing funds designated for the acquisition of greenway and/or conservation land. Lands purchased with those funds should be carefully considered prior to acquisition so only those lands deemed conservation worthy are purchased. The Board feels the PRCA Department provides great thought into lands prior to acquisition and any lands purchased with the greenway or conservation funding are truly conservation lands and should remain as such in perpetuity.

In addition, the City actively utilizes various grant and partnership funds to leverage for the acquisition of greater amounts of conservation land. The selling of conservation land to private landowners may have serious negative affects towards obtaining future

grants or partnerships not only for land acquisition but also for other conservation land management funding the PRCA Department applies for every year. If this line of action is being further discussed due to budget decreases, then this Board strongly urges the City Commission to look elsewhere for revenue generation.

The Nature Center's Commission strongly opposes selling public conservation land to private landowners and recommends to the City Commission that public conservation land should remain just that, in the hands of the public for the conservation and preservation of natural resources for the enjoyment of the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Hayes', written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Pearse Hayes, Chair
Nature Center's Commission

Cc: RCAPW Committee Members
Nature Centers Commission Members
Russ Blackburn, City Manager
Paul Folkers, Assistant City Manager
Steven R. Phillips, Director PRCA
Linda Demetropoulos, Nature and Cultural Manager
Stefanie Nagid, Program Coordinator