

## **Proposed Property Exchange**

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Forestry (DOF) has requested that the City of Gainesville consider exchanging the 11-acre DOF District Office and Smokey Bear Park located at 1600 NE 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, for equivalent land value at the Wacahoota site that is managed by the City of Gainesville Recreation and Parks Department (GRPD).

### **History**

- In July of 2002, DOF contacted GRPD about a possible land exchange.
- The proposal was to exchange the 11-acre DOF District Headquarters and Park land for the equivalent land value at the City's Wacahoota site.
- The City and DOF split the cost of an appraisal on the DOF site and on the Wacahoota property.
- In October of 2002, 60.11 acres of the Wacahoota property was agreed upon as a dollar for dollar exchange for the 11-acre DOF facility and park in the City.
- At that time, the DOF property had some outstanding issues to correct (hazardous materials clean-up near gas tank areas, structural repairs and flooding issues in the parking compound).
- DOF was interested in developing approximately 5-10 acres of the Wacahoota property for their office site, maintenance shop, and equipment storage. The remaining property would be left as undeveloped land with nature and hiking trails, as well as outdoor recreation and exhibits.
- Early in 2003, the Director of Recreation and Parks submitted a recommendation to the Assistant City Manager and the Legal Department for approval to pursue the exchange.
- In June 2003, a contract was drafted and submitted to the City for review and approval.
- Due to lack of funding by the DOF, this agreement was never signed and approved.

### **Current Status of Forestry Site**

- All environmental issues at the DOF site have been or are being addressed.
- Repairs to the building are complete and include a new roof and air conditioning.
- Previous flooding concerns in the main compound area have been addressed.
- DOF is willing to remove three (3) existing houses along 15<sup>th</sup> Street for a future parking lot adjacent to Smokey Bear Park.

### **Current Status of Wacahoota Site**

- GRPD manages the approximately 200-acre Wacahoota site.
- Fifty (50) acres are currently leased to Gator Bowmen for the archery club.
- The agreement with Gator Bowman is for a 20-year lease that began in 2004.
- There is a natural gas line utility easement dissecting the property.
- GRPD has held two meetings to mediate neighborhood concerns with the archery range.
- A resident from the area has asked the County to evaluate the property as part of the Alachua County Forever project.

### **Benefits to the City of Gainesville**

- The DOF Administrative Building, located adjacent to Smokey Bear Park, would provide a larger administration office for the Recreation and Parks Department, while still keeping these services on the east side of town.
- The DOF facility on NW 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue would provide an opportunity to centralized Nature Division's operations for maintenance, natural resource management, and administration.

- The opportunity to relocate the Nature Division's maintenance operations, equipment, and supplies from Morningside Nature Center (currently in an environmentally sensitive area) to a more appropriate location would be provided.
- The new location allows for possible consolidation considerations in certain facets of the Parks Division and Nature Division in regards to equipment and staffing.
- City ownership of the DOF property would prevent any future sale and closing of the Smokey Bear Park.
- Today's land value at Wacahoota is possibly higher than the Smokey Bear site, which would result in less acreage needed for the exchange.
- The Wacahoota land requested by the DOF is disturbed land due to previous land use, lack of fire, and other impacts. The Flatwoods community located in the proposed development site is no longer intact.
- Several neighbors at the western edge have indicated their approval of the DOF moving to the Wacahoota site.
- The DOF is willing to develop nature and hiking trails as well as outdoor recreation and exhibits at the Wacahoota site, which would be available for the public.
- The Northeast Complex office (current location for GRPD) would become available for other City uses.
- A GRPD operation at Smokey Bear Park is a compatible use.
- The DOF has indicated they would add a security and stewardship presence to the site and would assist the GRPD with land management on other areas of the Wacahoota property if required.
- The DOF facility will provide a trailhead and parking for public access to the nature and hiking trails at Wacahoota.

**Potential Costs to City for Relocation of GRPD**

- Connection to the GRU Fiber Optics Network would be necessary. However, the DOF Building is currently wired for computers. (\$6,000 for equipment, \$6,000 reoccurring yearly cost)
- A telephone system network and hookup would be needed. (\$4,500 reoccurring yearly cost)
- Some office equipment and furniture may be necessary. (\$10,000)
- The development of a parking lot for Smokey Bear Park users is not critical at this time. (\$10,000)
- A property appraisal for the Wacahoota site would be needed. (\$3,000)
- Minor fencing and compound improvements such as painting and landscaping would be necessary. (\$2,500)
- City signage would need to be added. (\$1,000)

Estimated One Time Cost Total = \$ 32,500  
 Estimated Re-occurring Cost Total = \$ 10,500