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July 25, 1999

Memorandum

To: Bruce Delaney
City Commission

From: Sam Gowan 

Re: Duckpond Restoration

Dear Bruce,

The problems associated with the Duckpond Restoration effort stem from poor goal setting and a process that does not effectively incorporate neighborhood and professional design considerations. This probably occurred because the contract, placed with the Center for Wetlands Study by the city's Department of Public Works with Dr. Crisman as the lead investigator, was not reviewed by appropriate city departments or potentially interested private or public sector groups.

The contract concentrates on enhancing the water quality of Sweet Water Branch. The contract does not indicate that the Duckpond and branch are integral landscape features in a National Register Historic District and, therefore, the planner has to consider historic preservation guidelines. Consequently, when Dr. Crisman and his graduate students revealed their initial design, which called for street closings and major changes in the branch and the Boulevard landscape, the preservationists in the neighborhood, as well as the city's Department of Community Development, understood the plan as inherently threatening the historic district's design heritage. The Crisman plan addressed a problem specifically without reference to the neighborhood context. The Department of Public Works, however, seems stuck on bringing the Crisman plan to neighborhood meetings, even though the versions don't include preservation considerations. It is as if the department is asking the very limited number of people attending these public meetings, none of whom claim any particular expertise, to provide acceptable alternatives to the Crisman plan.

Through a series of meetings and conversations last December we forged an agreement to establish a neighborhood review group that would help design a second contract. This contract, placed by the Department of Public Works when Crisman completed his contract, called for a qualified historic preservation landscape designer/architect to review the plan and integrate historic preservation guidelines. I was asked to be a member of this group. The new broader goal blended improvement of the branch's water quality with retention the historic landscape design features. Lynn Buffington indicated that his interest in the second contract, but the design group was never called again.

Bruce Delaney
July 25, 1999

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Between December and now Dr. Crisman, I believe, completed his design and contract. The design group has not seen the results. Lynn Buffington, so far as I know, is not yet under contract. The Department of Community Development and the Heritage Conservation Board have not reviewed the Crisman plan.

Under some pressure to implement the EPA funded project, the Department of Public Works seems to have forgotten the process and jumped to hold another public meeting on August 4 to rush forward an already delayed project, even though the historic preservation planner has not yet been employed. This meeting, because of several complaints, is now put off.

Before another public meeting is called, the Crisman plan ought to be reviewed and, if necessary, revised by a contracted historic preservation landscape architect consultant. Following the consultant's work, the plan should be reviewed by at least the Heritage Conservation Board, the Office of Historic Preservation in the Secretary of States Office, and the St. John's River Water Management District. When these boards review the plans and develop alternatives that fall within the acceptable guidelines, then it is appropriate for the Department of Public Works to bring the plans to the neighborhood to decide which of the acceptable alternatives ought to be implemented.

Integrating historic preservation guidelines and improving water quality for Sweet Water Branch and the Duckpond is a complex and sophisticated undertaking. It needs expert assistance, as well as neighborhood consideration. The current approach lacks a rational process and, therefore, dooms the project to confusion and ineffective results.

Sincerely,

Sam Gowan

PS: I've asked Jane Myers to come to the Monday meeting to discuss the project, since I will be out of town.

cc: Jane Myers

cc: Commission
City Manager