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CITY OF GAINESVILLE

Public Works Department

Concluded by

DATE: March 12, 2002

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Public Works Staff

SUBJECT: East Gainesville SPROUT Project Task Force
Discussion of Conceptual Depot Park Design, February 19, 2002

On January 26, 2002 the City held a park design workshop to obtain public comment on three conceptual park designs. On January 29th, the East Gainesville SPROUT Project Task Force requested that the City develop one park concept based on the public comments received during the workshop. On February 19th, staff and Genesis Group presented to the Task Force a proposed park design. Len Buffington of Genesis Group explained the various design elements and the rationale for their inclusion in the concept plan. Staff obtained feedback from the Task Force on this design and authorized Mr. Buffington to proceed with revising the concept, which is attached to this memorandum. The comments of the Task Force are summarized in the following paragraphs:

Viability of Amphitheater

Task Force comment: The Task Force questioned whether income-producing forms of entertainment would be allowed on land purchased with Florida Communities Trust (FCT) funding. This type of entertainment would likely be concerts or theatrical performances.

Members noted that Gainesville does not have a concert venue suitable for large-scale outdoor events. The bandshell on the UF campus is appropriate for large outdoor concerts where attendance reaches into the many-thousands, but there is no similar facility near the urban center of the city. Task Force members questioned if the park is suitable for large gatherings in light of potential parking and noise impacts to nearby residential areas. The Task Force is very concerned about noise affecting the neighborhoods and asked staff to reduce potential impacts by planning the park and programming types of entertainment to minimize creating objectionable amounts of noise. The Task Force speculated that possible uses for the amphitheater could include weddings, plays, concerts, and other outdoor events. Chair Hutchinson stated that a decision is needed by the Task Force concerning the purpose of the amphitheater and whether it is intended for large gatherings and amplified music or a smaller venue and un-amplified events.

Staff response: FCT has stated in the past that some income generating uses are acceptable on property purchased with FCT funding as long as they are consistent with the use of the park and the income is returned to the upkeep of park facilities. However, the land on which the amphitheater is currently proposed may be ineligible for FCT funding if Rinker Materials does not vacate the premises by June 1, 2002. If no FCT funding is used to purchase the land, then no FCT income restrictions will be in effect.

As currently envisioned, the amphitheater area is a grassy slope with a performance stage and seating for approximately 1,500 people. It is a flexible space that can serve other uses as well. Staff recommends further discussion with the Task Force to determine types of uses for this space and appropriate design and programming measures to reduce offsite noise.

Main Street Slip Lane

Task Force comment: The slip lane is proposed by the Florida Department of Transportation as a bypass around the proposed Depot Avenue/South Main Street traffic circle. The proposed location of the slip lane is near the Main Street park entrance – a major gateway to the park. The Task Force expressed general concerns about pedestrian access and safety in the location of a major park entrance. Pedestrian access from the west side of Main Street would cross three lanes of traffic with the slip lane in place instead of two lanes of traffic without the slip lane. Members stated that the slip lane might increase traffic speed near the South Main Street park entrance.

Staff response: Park users may find it difficult to access the park from South Main Street due to the additional traffic lanes. In addition, the lane may increase traffic speeds and volumes along the stretch of Depot Avenue east of Main Street where pedestrians will also enter the park. Brick pavers can be installed on the approach to the traffic circle to reduce traffic speeds; however, this feature alone might not adequately calm traffic and improve safety. Staff recommends further discussion with the Florida Department of Transportation to express these safety concerns and to explore an alternative that increases pedestrian safety at the intersection.

Homeless Issues and Security Costs

Task Force comment: The Task Force expressed concerns that vagrancy, littering, and other undesirable behavior occasionally observed in places such as Lynch Park will become a problem in Depot Park. Mr. Buffington explained the park's security system, which includes fencing and a pathway for GPD patrol cars. Staff mentioned that discussions have taken place with GPD to use mounted patrols when the park is operational. Members suggested GPD review the concept for consistency with crime prevention design standards and that staff provide a cost estimate for implementing a security plan.

Staff response: GPD has been involved in park design meetings and has offered suggestions on the design. Mr. Buffington and GPD have discussed incorporating a police substation at the south end of the park for mounted patrols. The substation would create a full-time security presence at the park. Project staff plans to continue seeking the

advice of GPD in the park planning stages as well as the implementation of a security plan. A cost estimate for security will be prepared and will be discussed with the Task Force upon its completion.

Location of Transit Stop/Parking

Task Force comment: The Task Force expressed concerns that a transit stop on Depot Avenue near the Depot building would cause pedestrian conflicts with buses and excessive bus exhaust at the building entrance.

A concern was also raised regarding the location of a small parking area near the east end of the Depot building. Member Brad Guy, UF Center for Construction and Environment, stated a preference for locating the parking on the west side of the building to preserve the view looking south into the park from SE 3rd Street.

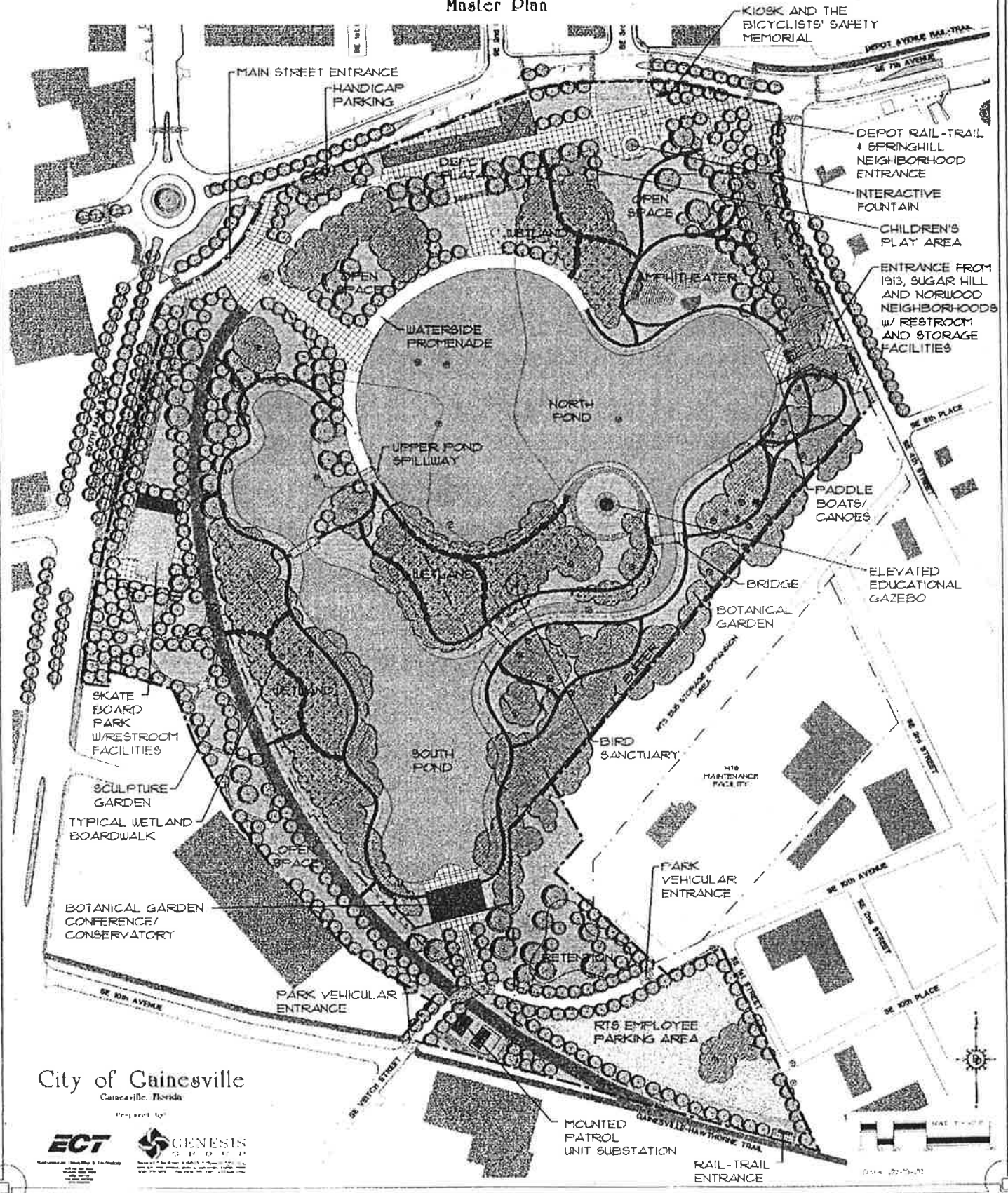
Staff response: Mr. Buffington will seek the advice of RTS Director Jeff Logan to select a location for the transit stop.

Mr. Buffington has relocated the Depot parking area to the west side of the building. It is understood that this location may change as the design for the depot rehabilitation progresses. Mr. Buffington will work closely with the architect responsible for the depot building rehabilitation in order to ensure the optimum location for the parking area.

The modified version of the concept reflecting the location of the parking area and transit stop will be reviewed with the Task Force upon its completion.

Depot Park

Master Plan



City of Gainesville
Gainesville, Florida



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