

Technicality' Stymies Plans For City Parks

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Four of the seven cities participating in the park improvement plan made possible by the \$33 million bond issue by DeKalb County are worried about a stipulation that they must deed over their city-owned parks to the county in order to receive any funds. The cities are Chamblee, Clarkston, **Pine Lake** and Stone Mountain. Last October, with the backing of its cities, DeKalb County was get approved a \$33 million parks bond issue. Now, the plum the cities were promised for their support is hanging by a technicality.

Until a couple of weeks ago, most cities were unaware that would have to deed their city-owned parks to county before they could become eligible for the improvements the bond issue has earmarked for them.

The county is asking the seven participating DeKalb cities to deed their parks to the county for a 30-year period. The county would in turn lease the land back to the cities a dollar-a-year, leaseback plan.

And some city officials aren't sure they can legally turn over their parks to another owner, even if it is to the county.

Stone Mountain Mayor Jane Rhodes attempted last week to have some of her and other DeKalb city mayors' frustrations - and anger - vented at a special meeting. She invited DeKalb Chief Executive Officer Manuel Maloof and County Attorney Albert S. Johnson.

In attendance, were representatives from four of the seven cities participating in the park improvement bonds. The group included mayors from Clarkston, Stone Mountain, and **Pine Lake**; Chamblee City Councilor Liz Kleinsteuber; several city councilors; city park directors and District 4 Commissioner Bob Morris.

There were no representatives from the cities of Doraville, Lithonia or Decatur present. The city of Doraville has already entered into contract with the county accepting this provision. Avondale Estates is not participating in the park improvement bonds.

City representatives lost no time in expressing their displeasure with the sudden turn of events.

"We were out and out lied to," said Barbara Holiday, recreation director for the city of Stone Mountain, directing herself to Mr. Maloof. "We specifically asked the question, we were specifically told the only control the county would have was over the money. No mention of land, no mention of lease; none of that was mentioned," she said.

Clarkston Mayor Ernest Whaley, whose city was due to receive \$100,000 for park improvements, pointed out that most city parks were donated with the stipulation that the land remain property of Clarkston.

"I'm not sure we [Clarkston City Council] can legally transfer our park lands to the county even if we wanted to," said Mayor Whaley.

Mayor Rhodes, who said she has stopped work with the county on that city's park renovation master plan, shared that concern.

"Almost all our parks [deeds] say we can't deed the land over to anyone else," she said.

Saying he accepted the blame for any misunderstanding, Mr. Maloof repeatedly assured city representatives that the county did not want their parks.

"There is no intent on the part of the county to own or operate [city] parks. The only desire is to take that bond money and upgrade the parks for whatever needs the cities see fit," said Mr. Maloof.

"But," he continued, "the expenditure of [park bond] funds necessitates this method to satisfy whatever the bond holders demand when you issue the bonds - the bond holders have to have a security. We [the county] are caught in a technicality," he said.

Alternative proposals to the 30-year leaseback plan surfaced, however. Several city representatives who, though unhappy with the apparently inevitable contract provision, expressed their eagerness to get on with the park renovations.

Pine Lake Mayor Myra Singer suggested that each city make the county co-owners of city parks by deeding over only a portion of the land; in this way, the cities would maintain a hold on their property.

Another proposal, made by Mayor Whaley, was that of reducing the period the county would hold the park deeds. The park bond resolution requires that 85 percent of bond monies be spent within the first three years and the other 15 percent be under contract.

Mr. Maloof said that he would also look into the legalities of possibly putting up county park land as collateral for the bonds instead of city park land.

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