

Special Meeting: Joint City Commission and Turnbull Creek Land Preservation Committee June 10, 2019, 3:00 PM

The Turnbull Taskforce (Turnbull Creek Land Preservation Committee) met in joint session with the NSB City Commission at 3 pm on June 10th.

Three members of the Taskforce were present. Taskforce Chair, Katie Tripp and member Lamont Ingalls were not able to attend. All Commission members were present.

The importance and methods for protecting purchased properties in perpetuity were discussed, as was the effectiveness of the committee and how to continue the work of the committee beyond the initial term of six months. All Commissioners spoke highly of the Task Force. The Commission agreed to discuss expansion of the scope of the Task Force. The Task Force may be allowed to make recommendations but would not make final decisions.

Turnbull Creek Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat, and Natural Areas Protection Bonds:

The initial target land parcel is Turnbull Trace (Turnbull Land LLC). The Trust for Public Land confirmed that an Agreement to purchase exists with the Turnbull Trace property owner. Two appraisals were obtained by the Trust; the values were \$8.5 M and \$9.38 M. The average is \$8.94M and that has been set as the asking price for the property. If the Commission agrees to move forward. The Trust will purchase the property. They will apply the 40% matching grant and the City will purchase the property from the trust in or before September. The City will also pay for an attorney to do the closing.

The grant comes from a \$10M Florida fund managed by The Trust for Public Land - a national nonprofit land conservation organization. The City of NSB got, by far, the largest portion of that fund. The fund is not available this year so if the City does not use the grant it will expire. The grant is worth 40% of \$8.94M (\$3.576M). The City portion will be \$5.364M for the Turnbull Trace property.

A discussion was held about how the appraisals determined the value. They used a comparison analysis with similar undeveloped properties that had been recently purchased. The appraisal assumed that the St. Johns Water management District preliminary plat approval as valid and that 293 lots could be developed. SJWMD also placed significant protections and restrictions on the waterway, wetlands and buffers. If the property is developed, we believe that SJWMD will be responsible for keeping the creek flowing and oversight of the protected areas of that portion of the watershed.

A preliminary plat was given to the City. The City made comments but did not hear back from the owner on those comments. Were the project to go forward toward development, the owner would need to respond to the City and then a new plat would have to be submitted to SJWMD.

Since all of the property is below the 100-year flood plain, a significant amount of fill would be required to elevate the site to an allowable grade. There was a discussion about protecting the many trees now on site.

The importance of the Grant was reiterated: the City will get the largest share of the available grant funds.

Part 2: City Commission meeting June 10, 2019, 5 PM

The floor was opened to public comment.

A local realtor stressed the importance of purchasing the target property immediately and said that new houses are selling at a high rate. He said that the abutting Ellison Acres property that was being considered as part of the bond initiative had already been sold or is no longer for sale.

A citizen commented that there are many drainage issues that could be improved by this watershed initiative. She said that one oak tree can consume over one hundred gallons of water and that these mature trees cannot be replaced when removing them to clear property so that it can be elevated. It is important to create corridors and large sections to protect wildlife.

The Commission then took up the Discussion. Commissioner Kolody was concerned that the two appraisals did not have accurate information but that based on what they did have, they were well created. A general discussion about the valuation of the target parcel was held related to how the final prices were developed. The Commission will need to make a final decision prior to July 10th and convey that to the Land Trust who will then begin the closing process. (It is likely that the Commission will vote on this purchase on June 25th.) Final sale to the City will take place in or before September. The City may decide to finance prior to purchasing a bond. The City will need to do an analysis to determine the best time and method of securing bonding for this parcel and for other parcels along the Turnbull Watershed.

Commissioner Sachs asked what the actual cost for the average taxpayer would be. Staff will compute this based on the average home valuation and the length of the bond.

Commissioner McGurik asked what the City would do with the property and how to protect it in an undeveloped state.

Commissioner Hartman said that this is a wonderful opportunity to purchase property that we will maintain in its natural state. It is an addition to the multiuse trail and pavilion.

Mayor Owen said that although the purchase price is high and the developer stands to make a significant profit, protecting the land in perpetuity is important. He stressed various methods for protecting the land in its natural state for generations to come. (The terms of the Trust will protect the land in its natural state for 30 years.)

- Commissioner Kolody has articulated 9 steps for moving forward. The City Clerk will publish these soon. He also suggested that the Turnbull Creek Land Preservation Committee be allowed to make recommendations and assist in the process of analyzing the rest of the basin.
- Commissioner Sachs suggested the consideration of a Conservation Committee.
- Commissioner McGurik thought a Committee could assist in the ranking of prospective properties.
- Commissioner Hartman suggested that cleaning the waterway and creating the criteria used to rank the properties was important.
- Mayor Owen wants to develop specific recommendations for the Committee and to extend their term for another six months.

Staff member Brian Fields suggested that a consultant be used to assist in the establishment of criteria for the ranking of watershed properties. The cost would be not to exceed \$15,000. (The previously complete BioBlitz listed 112 parcels under private ownership along the 19 square mile watershed.)

Other criteria that were mentioned were: water flow; most endangered parcels; most polluted parcels; and identification of parcels zoned for commercial development. Also discussed were the possibility of incentives to enhance the opportunity for the City to purchase watershed properties.

The overall meeting was very positive, and it seemed that a clear consensus was reached for this process to move forward.