

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, July 9, 2014, for the purpose of reviewing a Petition Received from Jonathan Murray regarding use of the Greenbelt Forest Preserve.

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 8:06 p.m. It was held in Room 201 of the Greenbelt Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan. Councilmember Silke I. Pope was out of town.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; John Shay, City Solicitor; Celia Craze, Director of Planning and Community Development; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

OTHERS PRESENT WERE: Jonathan Murray, Ancestral Knowledge; Bob Snyder, Susan Gregersen, Yoni Siegel, Joe Murray and Donna Almquist, Greenbelt Forest Preserve Advisory Board; Lee Shields, Bonnie Shields, Kelly Boardsen, Scott Boardsen, Matt Elliott, Jean Snyder, Mark Miller, Jean Newcomb, Bill Rich, Carl Gregersen, Sue Stern, Martha Tomecek, Michel Cavigelli, Rick Rutherford, Richard Cookson, Donya Osler, Susan Smithers, Brian Almquist and Bill Orleans.

Mayor Jordan explained the purpose of tonight's meeting was to discuss a petition received from Jonathan Murray requesting that Council consider allowing use of the Forest Preserve by Ancestral Knowledge.

Jonathan Murray provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Ancestral Knowledge organization, its programs, and its request to be allowed use of the Forest Preserve to conduct its educational fee-based programs.

Ms. Davis asked if Ancestral Knowledge was a City organization since its mailing address is in Brentwood. Mr. Murray said Ancestral Knowledge is a City organization since he is the resident agent and resides in Greenbelt. He explained that the post office box is used for the convenience of the Ancestral Knowledge board member who handles the mail. Ms. Davis questioned the purchase of land outside Greenbelt by Ancestral Knowledge. Mr. Murray explained that Ancestral Knowledge pooled funds with other environmental groups to expand a protected wooded area which allows them four weeks of usage of the land annually.

Celia Craze explained the issue of Ancestral Knowledge holding fee bases classes in the Forest Preserve was brought to her attention in October 2012. After staff discussion with the City Solicitor, it was determined that the usage was commercial (fee-based classes) which violates the City Code and the Forest Preserve Management and Maintenance Guidelines and the classes could not be held. However, at the request of Mr. Murray, Mr. McLaughlin agreed to allow fall classes already underway and an abbreviated winter class (with completed registration) for home schooled students to continue with the understanding that no additional classes could be held.

Bob Snyder, Chair of the Forest Preserve Advisory Board (FPAB), said the FPAB discussed a request by Ancestral Knowledge for modification to the Forest Preserve Management and Maintenance Guidelines to allow them use of the Forest Preserve. He advised that by a vote of 5-3,

the FPAB issued Report #2013-2 to Council noting its recommendation that no changes be made to the Forest Preserve Management and Maintenance Guidelines or the City Code to allow for usage of the Forest Preserve by Ancestral Knowledge or any other activities of a commercial nature.

Mr. Putens questioned whether organizations that accept donations would be excluded from use of the forest preserve. Mr. Shay said no, and explained that organizations which accept donations are different (non-commercial) from those requiring a fee for service (commercial).

Mr. Roberts proposed that Ancestral Knowledge continue holding its fee-based classes at Mowatt Methodist Church and on Greenbelt Homes, Inc. (GHI) property and use those locations for instruction on activities that are not allowed in the Forest Preserve, such as building fires, fire circles, etc., and then have the paid instructors switch to volunteer roles and offer free hikes in the Forest Preserve. Mr. Roberts said this would be a perfect compromise, using paid instructors for the fee-based classes off City property and using volunteers for free hikes through the Forest Preserve.

Mr. Putens said he supported Mr. Robert's proposal. A number of options were discussed, including offering partial day fee-based classes followed by free classes in the Forest Preserve and offering fee-based classes for several weeks, followed by free classes for a week. Ms. Davis said the free classes/events should be advertised inviting the public to participate. Ms. Mach suggested Mr. Murray consider an off-shoot program of Ancestral Knowledge with just the use of volunteers, in order to make a clear distinction.

Mr. Herling said he supported the proposal put forth by Mr. Roberts, Ms. Davis and Mr. Putens.

Ms. Davis questioned why Ancestral Knowledge wants to conduct classes in the Forest Preserve since they were now holding classes at the Mowatt Methodist Church and in GHI. Mr. Murray said the size and high environmental quality of Forest Preserve provides for a better teaching environment.

Ms. Davis, Mr. Putens and Mr. Roberts noted the efforts put forth to secure and protect the Forest Preserve as a separate entity when it was established by Council.

Mayor Jordan said a distinct timeframe would need to be specified during the permitting process. Ms. Mach said the key is getting a permit for the activities offered in the Forest Preserve and be sure the programs are not competing with City programs in operation.

Ms. Davis said Council will be discussing fees for permits for events on City property, including the consideration of deposits, at an upcoming work session. Ms. Craze advised the general use of the Forest Preserve is for general use by the public and not for use by organized groups. She noted the need to determine the issue of impact from usage to the Preserve.

Mr. McLaughlin mentioned consideration could be given to treating Ancestral Knowledge programs similar to other programs that use City facilities, such as Jazzercise, where the City receives a portion of the revenue. However, an acceptable level of impact to the Preserve would need to be determined.

Ms. Mach suggested the possibility of the City contracting with Ancestral Knowledge to run classes in the Preserve. Mr. Murray said he would be interested in this idea but, since Ancestral Knowledge has a very slim operating budget, fees for the classes would likely increase.

Susan Gregersen noted the Forest Preserve is supported by tax dollars from City residents and should not be used by a commercial enterprise.

Mayor Jordan summarized what he saw as the next steps: 1) Ancestral Knowledge could apply for a permit, 2) a member of Council can make a proposal modifying the process for permitting, and 3) Mr. Murray can submit a proposal based on the suggestion by Mr. Roberts, Ms. Davis and Mr. Putens.

In response to a question from Mr. Putens, Ms. Craze said many permitted volunteer events had been held this year in the Forest Preserve in celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Preserve.

Joe Murray, FPAB Member and employee of Ancestral Knowledge, commented on the positive teaching of Ancestral Knowledge which is all about helping children.

Brian Almquist, FPAB member, urged Council to stay the course and preserve the Forest Preserve.

Susan Smithers, 10-J Laurel Hill Road, said the important thing is the integrity of the Forest Preserve. She added that it doesn't sit well for any organization to make money off the Preserve.

Richard Cookson, 9-P Research Road, spoke in support of Ancestral Knowledge and its program. He said his son had participated in their programs and had grown from the experience and was a Counselor in Training for Ancestral Knowledge this year.

Sue Stern, 5-K Gardenway, said she has volunteered with Ancestral Knowledge which is an initiative from the heart of its founders and does not operate for money. She said it would be sad if children couldn't continue to be educated in the Forest Preserve.

Ms. Mach noted the proposed option of a volunteer program. She suggested an off-shoot program of Ancestral Knowledge with just the use of volunteers, in order to make a clear distinction.

After further discussion, Council suggested Mr. Murray submit a proposal for use of the Forest Preserve by a volunteer run, non-fee based program to Council at a regular meeting. Council said they would then decide whether to refer to staff and/or City advisory groups for review.

Jean Snyder, 15 Parkway Road, spoke in support of the Forest Preserve. She said no one should have to pay to enjoy the Preserve.

The meeting ended at 10:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Murray

City Clerk