

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL
Held Monday, August 23, 2021

DISCUSSION: FPAB Report
(Interim Pilot of Trial Management Activities in the Greenbelt City Forest Preserve)

Mayor Byrd started the meeting at 8:00 p.m. Held virtually via Zoom.

In attendance were: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Emmett V. Jordan, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, and Mayor Colin A. Byrd.

Staff present were: Nicole Ard, City Manager; Timothy George, Assistant City Manager; Todd Pounds, City Solicitor; Brian Townsend, Assistant Public Works Director; Jason Martin, Environmental Coordinator/FPAB Staff Liaison; Scott Crawford, Producer; and Bonita Anderson, City Clerk

Also present were: Damien Ossi, Mary Canter, Donna Hoffmeister, Edward James, Vanessa Zanin, Bill Orleans, Forest Preserve Board Members and others.

Informational Discussions

Ms. Davis has expressed concerns regarding unanswered requests. She identified two specific issues she asked to be added to the agenda but never received a response. She shared her regrets not receiving an update on the Community Gardens, which had been removed from the agenda. Additionally, Ms. Davis shared, she had requested a celebration for Centenarians earlier in the year.

Ms. Pope expressed her support for Ms. Davis's concerns about unanswered requests. She noted that the Senior Citizen Committee believes the City should honor these individuals in addition to the county's usual commemorations. Ms. Pope has indicated that she had informed the administration about these milestones but had not received a response. While she congratulated one of the women, Ms. Snyder, she was unable to reach the other due to a lack of contact information.

Public Comments regarding recent flooding at Park Crescent Apartments

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson lobbied about severe flooding that occurred on August 9, 2021 which caused significant damage to their apartment. Mr. Johnson described arriving home to find water rapidly flooding his unit and rising to chest-deep levels. Despite their efforts to open the drains and divert the water, the situation worsened, requiring the fire department to assist in evacuating Mrs. Johnson through a window. This was not the first time the Johnson's experienced flooding; a similar incident had occurred six months at move in. Mr. Johnson voiced frustration with the unresolved drainage issues and the overall poor condition of the apartment.

Ms. Stephens, a neighbor, shared a similar experience. She recounted how water rushed into her apartment, forcing her to seek safety on her bed. She was trapped in her apartment and was eventually rescued by firefighters. This was the second time Ms. Stephens had experienced such flooding, and her apartment remained uninhabitable for days due to standing water. Both residents raised concerns about the long-term damage and the unlivable conditions caused by mold and other issues. Ms. Stephens said the landlord claimed the City was responsible for fixing the drainage problem, but no one was taking ownership of the situation.

Councilmembers expressed their apologies and concerns. Mayor Byrd asked the residents what they wanted the city to do and promised to hold those responsible accountable. Ms. Davis apologized, stating that the apartments should never have been rented given their history of flooding. She called it a crime that tenants were allowed to live there without resolving these long-standing issues. Councilmember Pope also urged the families to seek legal advice and suggested that council meet with the property manager to prevent future rentals until the drainage problems are fixed.

Councilmembers Roberts and Jordan suggested involving the county and investigating the drainage system. They emphasized the need to resolve the issue before re-renting. Mr. Sterling emphasized the importance of addressing the mold, as it poses a serious health risk. The Council collectively agreed that action must be taken, expressing their intent to work with the county to address the drainage and flooding problems affecting these apartments.

Forest Reserve: Proposal for Piloting Trail Management Options (PTMO)

The "Forest Reserve: Proposal for Piloting Trail Management Options" presentation highlighted key issues with trail maintenance, such as muddy trails, erosion, fallen trees, and blocked pathways. During the discussion, Ms. Mach supported the proposal, noting that making the forest more accessible would encourage preservation. Mr. Roberts raised concerns about the involvement of volunteers and emphasized the need to avoid creating artificial trails. Other council members, including Councilmembers Davis and Jordan, agreed that safety and minimal intervention should be prioritized, with more detailed plans needed before proceeding.

Regarding the Community Gardens, Ms. Clee expressed no issues with tree trimming, but Ms. Hardcheck mentioned that shade has been a longstanding problem, affecting the growth of fruits and vegetables. Ms. Davis requested an update from Public Works on the status of tree removal and work done in the area, while Ms. Helen noted that limb removal had been incomplete in some hazardous areas. Mr. Roberts opposed cutting trees near the forest and suggested alternative garden locations. Mr. Jordan and other councilmembers supported revisiting the plan to find a balance between the gardeners' needs and forest preservation.

Several stakeholders, including Councilmembers Pope and Jordon, emphasized the importance of both the garden and the forest. They urged a cooperative approach to managing both spaces. Ms. Canter stressed the need for practical solutions to address sunlight issues in the gardens and ensure long-term management. She noted that the plots provide essential food for many residents.

The general consensus was that both the gardens and the forest could coexist with proper planning and adjustments, balancing the needs of gardeners and environmental preservation.

During the meeting, several action and informational items were discussed:

- Ms. Ard proposed following up with code enforcement, health departments, and resources for tenant relocation.
- Mr. Putens requested the council obtain copies of the insurance policy and lease for legal review, and urged the council to hold the county accountable, even suggesting legal action.
- Mr. Gordon recommended sending letters to the property manager and the county on behalf of the entire council.
- Mayor Byrd concurred with Mr. Gordon, proposing letters to additional agencies like the health department, and urged staff to act swiftly.
- Mr. Jordan suggested an inspection of the apartment the following day and pushing the management company for resolution.

Information items:

- Ms. Davis received a letter from BWRR, and the City Manager is drafting a response.
- Mr. Jordan mentioned communication with the County's Municipal Liaison, and they will discuss further actions with the Council.
- Ms. Ard discussed the upcoming resident survey on election day, handled by Mr. George.

The meeting ended at 11:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita Anderson

Bonita Anderson
City Clerk