

August 7, 2003

The Pinellas Assembly Recreation, Structures and Financing Task Force met in the Pinellas County Park Department Conference Room, 631 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida, at 3:00 P.M. on this date with the following members present: Jerry Provenzano, Chairman; Carlen Petersen, Co-Chairman; Jim Appelt; Elizabeth Darnell; John Day; Chris Eaton; Steve Heller; Lynn Rives; and Elizabeth Warren.

Absent: Ralph Marlow.

Also in attendance: Pick Talley and Chris Staubus, Pinellas County Utilities; Warren Smith, Pinellas County Solid Waste; Thomas Iovino, Pinellas County Public Affairs; Jeff Hollis, Mangrove Bay Golf Course; Clay Thomas, Westchase Golf Course; Larry Thomas, Airco Golf Course; D. Lee Metzger and Susan P. Ajoc, City of St. Petersburg; Kevin Bronson, City of Largo; and Arlene Smitke, Board Reporter.

AGENDA

- I. Overview/General Discussion
 - a. Where are we?
 - b. Where are we going?
 - c. How do we get there?
 - d. Who else do we need to talk to?
- II. Guest Speakers
 - a. Pick Talley, Pinellas County Utilities; Warren Smith, Pinellas County Solid Waste
 - b. Jeff Hollis, Mangrove Bay Golf Course; Clay Thomas, Westchase Golf Course
 - c. Larry Thomas, Airco Golf Course
- III. Pinellas Assembly Update – County Administrator (Videotape)
- IV. Public Input
- V. Task Force Member Input
- VI. Adjournment

Chairman Provenzano called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M.; and noted that the Pinellas Assembly Task Forces' meeting with the Board of County Commissioners has been postponed until Thursday, September 3, at Harborview; and that he will be out of town on that date due to the Labor Day holiday.

OVERVIEW/GENERAL DISCUSSION

Chairman Provenzano reviewed the meeting agenda and introduced the guest speakers.

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PICK TALLEY, DIRECTOR, PINELLAS COUNTY UTILITIES, AND WARREN SMITH, DIRECTOR, PINELLAS COUNTY SOLID WASTE, RE TOYTOWN PROPERTY

Referring to an aerial photograph, Mr. Talley pointed out the Toytown property and presented the following information regarding the site:

- ✓ Redevelopment of the Toytown landfill for recreational use was first discussed in 1951; Pinellas County took over ownership of the site from St. Petersburg in 1983.
- ✓ The County is maintaining the site according to Department of Environmental Protection landfill closeout regulations.
- ✓ The site consists of approximately 200 acres, previously covered with Brazilian Peppers, which were cleared last year.
- ✓ Proposals have been received from several private-sector developers.
- ✓ The site is not ready for development; only a thin layer of material exists to cap the landfill.

Mr. Talley indicated that the Martin borrow pit, which was abandoned by its owners after court-ordered excavation of toxic materials, was subsequently purchased by Pinellas County; that the pit contains clean fill material; and that plans are to move the fill to the Toytown site, recover the land as a lake, and deed the property to adjoining property owners.

During discussion and responding to queries by the members, Messrs. Talley and Smith indicated that it will take approximately nine months to move the required one million cubic yards of fill; and that grading and redevelopment for recreational use will take an additional one to two years, depending on the selected use; whereupon, Mr. Talley discussed alternatives for consideration by the Task Force, as follows:

- ✓ The 60-acre Struthers property, a closed-out construction debris dumpsite, is for sale; however, it must be reclaimed and the purchaser would assume liability for any contamination.
- ✓ The County sod farm (Bridgeway Acres), a future landfill site, could be designated for recreational use for the next 15 to 20 years. Various activities can be relocated at a minimal expense as required.

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- ✓ Toytown is the only site left in Pinellas County large enough for a golf course.
- ✓ Golf courses tend to pay for themselves; other recreational facilities are tax supported.
- ✓ The County Planning Department is doing a study of recreational property needs and activities and trying to match needs to available land.

Responding to query by Chairman Provenzano regarding the potential for industrial development of the Toytown site, Messrs. Talley and Smith indicated that buildings have been constructed on landfills; that it is not a recommended practice due to problems with settlement of the land and the necessity of testing for gas accumulation; and that the highest and best use of a closed landfill is a golf course or other passive development.

JEFF HOLLIS, MANGROVE BAY GOLF COURSE, ST. PETERSBURG, RE GOLF INDUSTRY TRENDS

Mr. Hollis distributed an information package consisting of national golf trend statistics, news articles, and a Round and Revenue Comparison among local golf courses, a copy of which has been filed and made a part of the record. His presentation included the following points:

- ✓ The golf industry experienced unprecedented growth from the mid-1980s through the mid- to late 1990s, peaking in 1990.
- ✓ Supply is outpacing demand; facilities have continued to open, while the number of golfers has remained flat.
- ✓ Three million golfers take up the game each year; about the same number quit.
- ✓ Rounds played this year are down nationally and locally.
- ✓ National golf associations have started new programs to promote the sport.
- ✓ Competition for disposable income is ever-increasing.
- ✓ Baby Boomers are participating in a variety of activities, rather than focusing on just one sport.

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CLAY THOMAS, WESTCHASE GOLF COURSE, TAMPA, RE PRIVATE-SECTOR
AND PROFESSIONAL GOLF ASSOCIATION (PGA) PERSPECTIVES

Mr. Thomas stated that he is the general manager of Westchase, a privately-owned course which is open to the public; that he is the outgoing president of the local PGA chapter; and that he sits on the board of the North Florida Section of the PGA, which represents seven counties and is the fourth largest of 41 sections nationwide. He referenced articles in the April, 2003, *PGA Magazine*; and shared the following information:

- ✓ Westchase draws equally from Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties.
- ✓ Golfers are typically willing to drive 30 to 45 minutes to a course.
- ✓ A Golf Datatech study shows Tampa Bay area rounds down 8.1 percent from 2001 to 2002, highest of the 13 cities included in the study.
- ✓ The goal of initiatives such as Link Up to Golf and Growth of the Game is to increase the number of players and their frequency of play.
- ✓ Golfers typically fall into three segments:
 - Occasional (4 rounds per year) - number has risen over last ten years
 - Core (14 rounds per year) - number has dropped 30 percent from 1997 to 2001
 - Avid (62 rounds per year) - number has remained fairly steady
- ✓ Reduced play has increased competition among local courses out of season; private courses offer reduced fees.
- ✓ Private, membership-based courses are also struggling.

LARRY THOMAS RE AIRCO GOLF COURSE

Mr. Thomas indicated that Pinellas County took over ownership of Airco in 2001; that it had been privately run under a 40-year lease and was not well maintained near the end of the lease; and that rounds initially increased approximately 26 percent under County ownership. He cited the following challenges to profitable operations at Airco:

- ✓ Outdated putting surface
- ✓ Located in a commercial/industrial area
- ✓ Talk of upcoming closure drives business away

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- ✓ Economic factors
- ✓ Weather factors

Mr. Thomas indicated that approximately 40,000 rounds are played at Airco annually; and that he believes another golf course in Pinellas County is warranted in light of the probable closure of Airco.

PINELLAS ASSEMBLY UPDATE TO BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Ms. Warren played a videotape of County Administrator Stephen M. Spratt's presentation regarding the activities of the various Task Forces before the Board of County Commissioners at its meeting of July 29, 2003.

PUBLIC INPUT

Representing the City of St. Petersburg, Mr. Metzger suggested that the Task Force solicit input from municipal parks and recreation directors as to the optimal use of the Toytown property for recreational purposes.

TASK FORCE MEMBER INPUT

Mr. Rives distributed information regarding municipal recreation programs and per capita expenditures, a copy of which has been filed and made a part of the record. He stated that he had given a briefing to the Mayors' Council on the activities and discussions of the Task Force to date; that the Council has requested that each Task Force submit a few high-priority issues for their review; that the therapeutic recreation concept was well received; and that the municipal "neighboring" concept for recreational facilities could work effectively in some instances; whereupon, Ms. Warren distributed copies of a draft interlocal agreement, a copy of which has been filed and made a part of the record, urging cooperation among the County, the School Board, and the municipalities in that regard.

Discussion ensued; and in response to concerns raised by Mr. Appelt, Parks and Recreation Operations Manager Leah Hoffman provided clarification regarding potential County partnerships with the Cities of Clearwater and Safety Harbor for the Chi Chi Rodriguez Driving Range project, and with Clearwater, Safety Harbor, and the School Board relating to the Seltzer property on McMullin Booth Road. Ms. Warren indicated that the County is currently exploring several partnership opportunities with varying levels of success.

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During general discussion, Task Force members offered the following input:

- ✓ Is the Toytown golf course a “done deal” and should the Task Force invest more time discussing it?
- ✓ In light of the golf statistics presented, does Pinellas County need a new golf course?
- ✓ Could the County purchase an existing golf course?
- ✓ In considering a golf course, strategic planning is required as to the needs and desires of the target market: length of course, level of skill required, and fee schedule.
- ✓ A golf course at Toytown would involve a substantial growth curve before it would become self-supporting, during which time it would compete with mature courses.
- ✓ It is important to define the County’s desired level of involvement in implementation of recreational partnership ventures.
- ✓ The County and municipalities must maintain open communication regarding partnership opportunities to avoid situations where the taxpayers bid against themselves.

Chairman Provenzano stated that the August 21 Task Force meeting will focus on preparation for the September 3 presentation to the Board of County Commissioners; and requested that each member bring a list of their five top issues or recommendations; whereupon, Ms. Warren indicated that the agenda also includes a speaker regarding therapeutic recreation and a representative from the Convention and Visitors Bureau regarding sports marketing.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 P.M.