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FLA. TODAY - EDITORIAL

Our Views

City in the works

Booming Palm Bay should start now to develop a great parks system

As anyone who has lived in a close-knit town or neighborhood can testify, there's more to a community than streets, houses and strip malls.

It takes mutual interests, shared experience and some memorable good times to develop the network of acquaintance that, multiplied a thousand times, can build a successful city.

But rambling Palm Bay, with its phenomenal growth and lack of a town center, has struggled to create that strong foundation.

That's why we're impressed by its commitment to solutions and the willingness of many of the city's 90,000 residents to take on the challenge.

Palm Bay's Bayfront Community Redevelopment Area is still in the planning, but its goal of a town center highlighting Palm Bay's Indian River Lagoon shoreline is making progress.

Now, the city has made another smart move, commissioning a study of the needs of residents for recreational areas that can help weave the very fabric of community.

And a majority of residents wisely say they'd pay a little more for a bond issue or user fees to finance the projects.

They know such elements aren't frills. They're the foundation of community life, and according to the study by consultant David Barth of West Palm Beach, Palm Bay needs plenty of them between now and 2020.

Specifically, 823 acres devoted to new parks, a cultural and performance center, a youth and teen center, an amphitheater and aquatic centers. Plus dozens more projects from tennis courts and boat launching ramps to softball fields and nature trails.

If it sounds like a lot, consider:



Palm Bay Mayor John Mazziotti must work with other city officials to ensure the rapidly growing municipality has an adequate park system.

Within 15 years, Palm Bay's population is expected to top 140,000 people. That's an increase of more than 50 percent in that short period.

A city of that size, or even of its current size, must foster a unifying civic spirit by providing recreational and cultural venues. It also must consider the recreational needs of thousands of young people who otherwise might find less-wholesome entertainment.

And families of all ages need ways to bond as they join other families in recreation that will help the city meet one its greatest challenges:

To build the tax base by attracting large employers, who typically reject a city if it fails to provide a high quality of life.

Fortunately, Palm Bay has perhaps the state's best "systems of publicly owned undeveloped preserves, natural open spaces and canal-greenway and utility corridors," Barth noted.

It also has the study to lay out the needs and important public support.

Next, officials must develop a long-range master plan to fund the work and bring it to fruition, a job the city promises will begin in January.

Whatever the roadblocks, success is essential. Otherwise, Palm Bay will miss what is probably its last chance to develop a great system of urban parks worthy of a burgeoning metropolis.

That must not be allowed to happen, and citizens must closely watch their city officials to be sure it doesn't.



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Your Views

Criticism of lobbyists only skimmed the surface

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks government issues, more than 150 former lawmakers turned their public service connections to dollars as lobbyists in 2000, the most recent year surveyed.

FLORIDA TODAY's editorial Monday on lobbying by former members of Congress made some very very important points. The criticism was valid and well-expressed.

In addition to what the newspaper and the CRP have said, I would like to know who these former lawmakers are, and what party they represented.

This information is as important as the numbers and the paper should look into this question.

I would also like to know whether this same trend is readily apparent in our state Legislature.

The editorial represented some great reporting. But it didn't go far enough and a follow-up article looking more deeply at this issue would be a good idea.

Diane Y. Ward
Melbourne

Ellis is doing job well despite recent criticism

I have known Brevard County Clerk of the Courts Scott Ellis for many years.

Although he has been criticized by FLORIDA TODAY editorials and letter writers, I believe he is doing the best that can be done with what he has to do it with.

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