

Gina Peebles

From: Joni Ellis <joni@opticsforhetropics.org>
Sent: Friday, November 8, 2019 4:58 PM
To: BOCC (Only Commissioners)
Cc: Michele Lieberman; Gina Peebles
Subject: McConnell Park

Good evening Commissioners,

I have toured the facilities at Camp McConnell and have the following suggestions for consideration. It was very inspiring and thought provoking.

1. Decide to keep the property. Call it McConnell Park, stop calling it a camp. It should be a park now. A public park with unique opportunity.
2. Have some planning staff evaluate the facility and make suggestions regarding possible uses, renovations vs tear down, cost of operation. Hold a community charet' where the citizens can review ideas and brainstorm, possibly make a commitment to a project. Do some fundraising? Have work days?
3. Move the Alachua County Parks Department out there, there is a great office waiting to be used, in addition to an equipment pole barn, a 2 to 3 car covered shop area, a 3 bedroom, 2 bath large house for a director of the park to live full time as a perk, and part of their compensation package. They cover utilities. The money saved from renting space for them downtown should be evaluated and considered.
4. Florida Wildlife Care is interested in the front acre(?) and structure there, former grounds keeper house perhaps? with an entrance from 441. I say fence it off and let them have a 25 year lease. Could that be a value of \$12,000 a year? More? Also make the upkeep and maintenance their responsibility. A set of guidelines would be developed to make this work smoothly.
5. The barn is far away from all the other structures and in sellable condition. It is located near other farmette residents. Could the barn be cut off with a like sized acreage to the neighbors? Three to five acres perhaps? Sell it in the range of \$50k to \$70k. People are paying \$10k an acre around me. Use these funds for one of the renovation projects.
6. Renovation Projects
The amphitheater by the lake has great potential as an event venue. It could bring in money to support other renovations, maintenance, overhead.
Take down the cross, put an A frame roof over it, appropriate for a musical venue, acoustics in mind. Close in the walls between the very stout and structurally sound pillars, have the front wall on the lake side as much glass as possible with wood framing, and a back wall with doors. By closing it in, it will be usable in any weather condition. Weddings, concerts, performances. It has the best potential for rental space in my opinion.

The tiered foundation that is there is very sound, it could be carpeted and theater seating put in. Something cushy for sitting on for 2 hours. Electric for lights and outlets need to be run.

I would renovate this first as it has money making ability. People could rent nice tents for a wedding reception. They would be temporary so no maintenance. Music event might want to bring in a few vendors and set up smaller tents for music stages. I predict it could be rented out most every weekend nine months of the year.

Newer cabins to the east of the dining hall area also have some potential for rentals. I would prefer a smaller dining hall closer to these cabins, they could become a unit of use, a rental unit, with cabins, infirmary, dining hall for a set price per weekend or per week. Wedding parties might also want to rent the cabin area for the weekend in addition to the event theater.

The dining hall could be a great space if it were renovated. Single day/evening use or perhaps weekends for smaller conventions, dances, folk events. Needs some work and updating. There are original cabins near the dining hall. A call on whether they should be renovated or razed needs to be evaluated. This area strikes me more of a day use area, with some rental potential down the road. It is lower on the renovation list because it has the least appeal right now and will take some funding.

There is potential to have a friends McConnel Park raise funds, write grants and organize work days. Florida Park Service depends on their friends groups to keep the parks up and running. Almost 50% of the labor force in the FPS are volunteers. FYI

I am willing to be involved in a committee to help make this work if you should choose to form one. I think we should run some numbers, survey the community, evaluate the situation and see where it leads before putting it up for sale. The property alone is worth double what you paid for it, let's not give that away.

I appreciate your time and consideration. Let me know if I can be of assistance in this endeavor.

Joni Ellis, Director
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