

**MINUTES OF JOINT MEETING  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, THE CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE  
AND THE ST. AUGUSTINE AIRPORT AUTHORITY  
ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA  
FEBRUARY 5, 2003  
(9:00 A.M.)**

Proceedings of a joint meeting of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners, the City of St. Augustine and the St. Augustine Airport Authority, held at the Airport Authority, located at 4796 U.S. 1 North, St. Augustine, Florida.

County Commissioners Present: James Bryant, Marc Jacalone, Nick Meiszer, and Bruce Maguire

City Commissioners Present: George Gardner and Don Crichlow

Airport Authority Members Present: Suzanne Green, Jack Gorman, Joe Ciriello, Wayne George

Also Present: Cheryl Strickland, St. Johns County Clerk of Courts, Ben Adams, Jr., County Administrator; Allen MacDonald, County Finance Director; William Harris, City of St. Augustine; Wiley Deck, Representative for Congressman Mica; Robin Platt, Deputy Clerk; and Cecelia Aldrich, Clerk

**CALL TO ORDER**

Suzanne Green, Chairperson of the Airport Authority, called the meeting to order.

(2/5/2003 - 1 - 1.0001)

**DISCUSSION OF THE POSSIBLE ACQUISITION OF THE PONCE DE LEON GOLF COURSE**

Bryant opened the discussion by outlining the concerns of the Board of County Commissioners and Jacalone stated that he helped guide the former owners in the selling process and that it was never their intent to do away with the golf course. (1.0030) Meiszer stated that once it became public knowledge that the property had been sold and the new owner intended to do away with the golf course, he began to receive calls about saving the golf course. He said he then got permission from the Board to look into the issue and has been gathering information. Meiszer said he was then told that the Airport Authority wanted to meet and discuss the possibilities. He stated that it might be possible to obtain funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) through a noise abatement program. He was told that the asking price was around \$5.2 million. He proposed a combination of revenue bonds, grants and aid from various sources to come up with a financing package to purchase the golf course, without using taxpayer money. He stated that interest began to mushroom when various aspects of the property surfaced. Some of the issues related to the golf course property are: it is a bird sanctuary and a migratory landing place, there are archeological sites on the property, as well as, environmentally sensitive areas along the Intracoastal marsh area, and there are remnants of ancient Indian settlements. As a result, various related groups have become interested. He identified a couple of possible sources for information and/or help such as the State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Florida Forever Funds. Meiszer said he contacted the PGA Tour, the Golf Hall of Fame and the World Golf Village and initially got a positive reaction. He also heard from the Donald Ross Society. He said that Donald Ross was the architect who designed the course, and that this is the oldest Donald Ross

designed course in Florida. He stated that he would like to put together a financing plan to buy the course, and noted there is a time constraint due to the developer's timetable. He suggested putting together a financing plan to raise the money to buy the course and the development around it would be a separate matter. Meiszer noted the County does have Staff with the necessary expertise to operate the course, as the County already operates 27 holes of golf. Meiszer said he saw a great benefit, more than just an economic advantage in obtaining the property, there is the historical aspect, the environmental issues, tradition of having the oldest golf course in the oldest city and the PGA having such a key presence here now.

(1.0292) Maguire reiterated the need to move quickly and noted Penny Rolleston from the State of Florida DEP was present to talk about environmental concerns.

(1.0318) George Gardner, Mayor of the City of St. Augustine, stated that this property was annexed into the City about two years previous. He noted the tax revenue benefit and commented that there is an ongoing crusade to preserve the elements of history found here and to slow development. Mayor Gardner gave some historical information about the golf course and quoted Henry Flagler. He continued to address the historical value of the site, as well as, the entire area, and the importance of retaining it.

(1.0438) City Commissioner Don Crichlow, commented that he was also interested in exploring the possibilities. He talked about how closely tied the golf course is to the history of St. Augustine. Crichlow said the City would do whatever it can to save the golf course and he offered his support.

(1.0480) County Administrator, Ben Adams, said he appreciated the opportunity to get all the players together. He said he had the opportunity to talk with Chester Stokes, one of the developers, and said there were a couple of options.

(1.0511) Penny Rolleston, DEP, reported that a couple of years previous, the County submitted an application to the Florida Forever Program related to some parcels on the Intracoastal that had environmental concerns. She said the golf course is not one of them, but that part of Mr. Stokes' property next to the golf course is. Rolleston said that is the parcel they could go after. She noted that the State process is a long process. She said there is a strict criteria which includes, surveys, water work, reviews, two appraisals, and probably a six-month process to the point of negotiation. She said they do not buy improvements, or golf courses, and she said there would have to be a contamination assessment. She said the City, or the County, could write a grant to the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) to try for funding for the golf course. Rolleston commented that the FCT is very competitive, and the process would require a very good grant writer. She stated they would want the golf course to be Audubon certified. She said maybe the State could offer some additional funds for the adjacent property. Rolleston added that the FCT would look more favorably upon the application if the County, or the City, could go ahead and purchase part of the property before submitting the grant.

(1.0663) Chester Stokes, reviewed the circumstances leading to the purchase of the property. He explained that they looked at the PUD zoning of the property and clarified what could be done. He reviewed their Plan A, which changes the golf course back to more of its original state. He said they don't want to be involved in the management of the golf course and have tried to find a hotel/golf course operator. Stokes stated it is costing about \$150,000 per month to carry the property and they've spent about an additional million dollars since October. He said they are willing to work with the County and the City, but because the cost is so high, they are not able to

wait long. He said they rejected an offer by Wal-Mart to buy about 30 acres of the property.

(1.0891) Gardner asked Stokes if there was a possibility of retaining all the property and through a public/private agreement, get a government subsidy to maintain the course. (1.0911) Stokes responded in the affirmative. He said they just could not put their money at risk trying to make a golf course work. Stokes said the golf course is roughly a third of the land. He said he has heard the cost would be between one and half million to three million dollars to rejuvenate the course. Stokes explained why they weren't really interested in developing the golf course. (1.0989) Gardner asked if it would work for Stokes to do all the development except the golf course, and have another entity take it over. (1.1017) Stokes said that absolutely would work. He commented that the World Golf Village could have an interest and suggested that the Water Management District could possibly help in the purchase. (1.1062) Gardner talked about approach and getting to an agreeable number. (1.1100) Stokes said nine to ten million dollars would put the course in first class condition. He said the clubhouse is not included in that price. (1.1139) Gardner reviewed the possibility of utilizing Plan A.

(1.1182) Jacalone asked what amenities there would be to lot buyers without the golf course. (1.1188) Stokes referred to the plan they intend to submit and described an upscale development with two major amenities, a driving range/practice facility, and a main clubhouse to include a health facility and a swimming pool. Stokes noted that the plan allows for about one and a half units per acre.

(1.1307) Wayne George, on behalf of the Airport Authority, spoke regarding the noise factor. He pointed out that noise levels go up just before planes come in to land. He noted that the 9/11 attacks has caused changes in airports around the world and has resulted in an increase in private plane travel.

(1.1378) John "Jack" Gorman, Airport Authority, stated that the property is adjacent to the major instrument (ILS) approach that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has funded. He commented that the golfers are aggravated for a minute by the noise, but the residents would be aggravated for the life.

(1.1400) Joe Ciriello, Airport Authority, spoke to the developers in regard to complaints from proposed residents. He talked about complaints they currently receive and expressed concern about complaints that the airport will likely receive from future residents.

(1.1500) There was discussion about noise complaints, and ownership of property that lies between the airport and the Ponce de Leon property. It was noted that the airport owns most of the adjacent property.

(1.1560) Meiszer suggested that the City, County, Airport Authority, and various State agencies need to first decide if the golf course is worth saving. If it is, he suggested the next step should be an acquisition plan and/or a business plan to operate it. Meiszer said that initially, an operating subsidy will be needed, but eventually it would need to fund itself.

(1.1644) Discussion followed about possible sources of revenue and how some of the State agencies might fit in. It was noted that everything has to be in place for the grants to be in process, including appraisals, and then the end result could be predicted.

(1.1820) George suggested that a project leader be designated to assign tasks to the various entities involved. He said the Airport Authority could get in touch with the FAA and then report back in a one to two paragraph synopsis of available funding. George said they would probably need to raise twice the amount of the acquisition cost.

(1.1865) Gardener suggested the County act as Project Leader. Discussion followed about which entity should take the lead.

(1.1930) Bryant commented that the County is stretched trying to fund transportation and recreation, county-wide. He noted that the county-wide needs far outweigh diverting funds for this golf course. He added that the cost is around \$20 million to get the recreation infrastructure currently needed in the County.

(1.1974) Green suggested they regroup and report back.

(1.1997) Jacalone noted that the County has people on board who could do an analysis, tell how it can be funded and then can contact other agencies. He stated that the Board of County Commissioners must make a determination before moving forward. There was discussion involving timeframes.

(1.2052) Meiszer commented that he also was not in favor of diverting County resources to this and suggested a ground rule be that no funds eligible for any other purpose should be diverted to this.

(1.2088) Bryant asked Adams to agenda this item for the next Board of County Commissioners' Meeting.

(1.2096) Stokes said, if the County purchased the property, he would like to see the number it would take to lease the golf course from the County. He reiterated that they were going to submit their final development plans to the City the following day. Stokes said they planned to break ground in June.

(1.2153) Jacalone determined the configuration of the golf course with Stokes and confirmed that the nine to ten million dollar figure would cover acquisition and improvements of the golf course.

(1.2202) Rolleston stated that the Division of Recreation and Parks is looking for a facility for a tourist center and they might possibly be interested in this property.

(1.2254) Maguire noted that Wiley Deck, was present on behalf of Congressman John Mica. (1.2268) Deck said Congressman Mica is supportive of the noise abatement problems and funding.

(1.2282) George asked what the price is for the entire property. Stokes said it is appraised at \$35 million.

(1.2332) Meiszer mentioned that if the site is acquired by a non-profit land trust, instead of a government agency, any amount paid or any amount that the owner sells it for, below the appraised value, becomes a Federal Income Tax deduction.

(1.2376) Stokes stated there is another piece of land they are trying to acquire for \$25 million dollars. He suggested that the County purchase that piece, and then they could swap for the Ponce de Leon property.

(1.2426) Gardner explained that when he suggested the County as leader, he meant as the central figure for agencies to contact.

(1.2460) Green said she understood that it would be on the Airport Authority's agenda for Monday to see what FAA funding is available. (1.2472) Adams volunteered his services. (1.2492) Jacalone said the Board would discuss the issue on Tuesday (February 11, 2003). (1.2565) Maguire asked about the County and City doing a joint venture.

(1.2619) Rolleston said she would report from her end on the Water Management District and the TPL.

(1.2625) Jacalone suggested that the lead contacts would be: the Airport Director, the City Manager and the County Administrator.

(1.2649) Deck said there are many programs to research for possible funding.

(1.2676) Crichlow suggested getting the PGA Tour involved. (1.2685) Meiszer stated that he is scheduled to meet with them within the next week or two. Meiszer commented that if money is to be spent on the golf course it should be to restore it, rather than modernize it.

(1.2746) Green thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 10:26 a.m.

Approved March 4, 2003

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: James E. Bryant  
James E. Bryant, Chair

ATTEST: CHERYL STRICKLAND, CLERK

By: Yvonne King  
Deputy Clerk

