

From: Jay Melder
Date: April 25, 2024 at 1:55:23 PM EDT
To: Carol Williamson
Subject: Windsor Forest Community Center

Carol -

Thank you for reaching out. Allow me to respond. Yes, unfortunately some community members have spread misinformation about this project. As requested, here are the facts:

Alderman Purtee, Mayor Johnson, and the City Council have budgeted and approved \$8.9 million for the development of a new Windsor Forest Regional Community Center. This action represents the most significant community investment on the Southside in the city's history and a major win for Windsor Forest residents. I for one, am very excited to be a part of this project.

Over the last two years, The Alderman and City Staff have hosted community meetings with neighborhood leaders and residents to receive input on the types of programming and amenities residents want to see in the new facility. City Staff have also been working to evaluate several possible sites for the future facility. That analysis is ongoing but should be wrapping up soon. One of the sites we are evaluating closely is city owned land at Tribble Park, a 55-acre parcel, which includes an 11-acre lake.

While no final decision has been made on the location of the facility, and while other sites are still being evaluated, we believe that the new Windsor Forest Regional Community Center building could enhance the amenities of Tribble Park and provide synergies with the offerings of the park and the community programming for the building. This facility could provide restrooms for those visiting the park and would also increase safety and security due to having a staffed community center onsite. The architectural design of the community center building would integrate with the natural environment, rather than take away from it. The approximately 17,000 square foot center building would take up less than 1% of the 55-acre park.

City staff is also evaluating the so-called "LaVida" site at Largo and Windsor, which is also owned by the city. This site is being ruled out because it simply is not large enough space for the facility we are planning to construct. Another site we are evaluating is a parcel known as "the Old Woody's Skate Park" at 214/218 Windsor Rd.

We also met with a local landowner about purchasing 9 acres of land on 1137 Mohawk Street for a potential municipal use. (I personally met with the landowner as well). We had a 3rd party appraisal done on the property, and we offered to purchase the property at the appraised value. Unfortunately, we could not come to an agreement with the property owner, as he wanted \$2 million over the appraised value. I do not fault that landowner for wanting more for his property, but I simply cannot justify to City Council or to taxpayers, paying 50% over the appraised value for any property. That would be a gross misuse of taxpayer funds, in my professional opinion.

Another important point is that the Windsor Forest Regional Community Center will replace the existing Windsor Forest Regional Community Center located on Board of Education property at the Windsor Forest Elementary School. We are leasing this property from the School Board and when the lease expires, we will no longer have access to this space, which includes a gymnasium.

We look forward to working with the community to finalize plans for this exciting project and to get started on design and construction. Any site that is chosen will have its challenges, and certainly not everyone will agree on the best location. This is why city staff also provide a technical review of parcels to better understand the viability of future uses for those sites. I hope that we can agree that this project is a significant step forward for providing residents with new, beautiful community amenities that will improve the health, vitality, and quality of life for residents.

Best,
Jay Melder
City Manager