



Hallman favors corporate retreat over dog park

By Prentiss Findlay
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MOUNT PLEASANT — Mayor Harry Hallman says that he favors a corporate meeting place on five acres tentatively designated for a dog park at the new Memorial Waterfront Park but a decision on what to do with the land is at least two years away.

"It's probably one of the most valuable pieces of property on the East Coast," Hallman said. Nearby hotels, Patriots Point, seafood restaurants and golf courses provide the necessary ingredients for a corporate retreat to be a success, he said.

Hallman said a dog park could be located elsewhere in the \$14 million, 22-acre park. Recently, he mentioned the possibility of a performing arts center instead of a dog park, and dog lovers contacted Town Hall to express their displeasure. "People think I hate dogs. I've got two. One of them sleeps with me every night," he said.

Hallman said the notion of a performing arts center was just a possibility, not something etched in stone. A dog park is among the features designated on a consultant's conceptual design for the \$14 million project. It was included in the park plan based on public input.

The town and the state Department of Transportation are negotiating final details of transfer of the park land to the town. The park will be next to the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge, and it will have the longest pier in the area at 1,200 feet. A war memorial, visitors center, sweetgrass pavilion and playground will be part of the park, which is scheduled to open next year on Memorial Day weekend.

At a recent Council meeting, there was brief discussion after an executive session about the future of the five-acre tract designated for a dog park.

"No one has said, 'Let's sell the dog park and see about putting a building on it,' " Councilman Joe Bustos said.

Councilman Gary Santos has expressed concern that during executive session negotiations, the council has been moving away from its original intent of having a selling that part of the project for development.

"Everybody is pushing for the dog park. We haven't gotten this many e-mails in a while," Santos said.

Santos said a dog park is a good use for the land because it is inexpensive and popular. Residents in the southern part of town said it would give them a new, closer option for a place to take their four-legged friends. Palmetto Islands County Park in the northern part of town has a dog park.

Recently, Council voted 8-1 to proceed as discussed in executive session regards its negotiations with the S.C. DOT for the Waterfront Park land. Santos cast the dissenting vote. At first, he wouldn't say why but later revealed that he was concerned about the future of the dog park and whether the land was being sold to a developer.

Mayor Pro Tem Kruger Smith has suggested that a performing arts center for the planned Memorial Waterfront Park is a better idea than a dog park. Smith said the town could retain ownership of the land but offer it to a company that might want to construct and operate a performance venue. He suggested a building to seat 1,000 people, which is about half the size of the North Charleston Performing Arts Center. Nearby hotels, medical facilities and parking make the location a good one, he said.

In an e-mail to a dog park supporter, Hallman said the 22-acre waterfront park is better suited to something like an arts center. "The options for a town that will one day approach 100,000 people are too varied to make that commitment (dog park) with such a valuable resource," Hallman said.

Bustos said town staff asked Council for permission to look at the possibility of purchasing the five acres slated for the dog park from the DOT because the staff said it might be beneficial to the town to own the property rather than being granted a permanent easement on it. Owning the chunk of land designated for a dog park at the back of the Waterfront Park could in effect protect the rest of the park land as far as how it could be used, he said.

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