

**AGENDA MINUTES
CITY COMMISSION MEETING
VENETIAN CENTER, 1 DOZIER COURT
MONDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2021 5:10 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Carver Heights / Montclair Area Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Leesburg, Florida held a regular meeting on Monday, October 11, 2021, at the Venetian Center. Chairperson Christian called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. with the following members present:

Commissioner Jimmy Burry
Commissioner Jay Connell
Commissioner Mike Pederson
Commissioner Erika Jasper
Commissioner Kevin Conner
Chairperson John Christian

Commissioner Dan Robuck arrived at 5:23 p.m. Also present were City Manager (CM) Al Minner, City Clerk (CC) J. Andi Purvis, City Attorney (CA) Fred Morrison, the news media, and others.

INVOCATION

Commissioner Erika Jasper led the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

2. APPROVE MINUTES:

A. Regular meeting held September 16, 2021

Commissioner Pederson made a motion to approve the Carver Heights/Montclair Area CRA Meeting minutes from September 16, 2021 and Commissioner Burry seconded the motion.

Chairperson Christian requested comments from the Commission and the audience. There were none.

The roll call vote was:

Commissioner Pederson	Yes
Commissioner Burry	Yes
Commissioner Jasper	Yes
Commissioner Connell	Yes

Commissioner Conner	Yes
Chairperson Christian	Yes

Six yeas, no nays, the Commission approved the Carver Heights/Montclair Area CRA Meeting minutes from September 16, 2021.

3. RESOLUTIONS:

- A. **Resolution of the Carver Heights / Montclair Area Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Leesburg, Florida, authorizing the City Manager to execute a land purchase contract between the City of Leesburg and Mrs. Gwendolyn C. Allen Carston for property located at 1115 County Road 468; and providing an effective date.**

DENIED RESOLUTION 97

Commissioner Jasper introduced the resolution to be read by title only. CC Purvis read the resolution by title only.

Commissioner Burry made a motion to adopt the resolution and Commissioner Conner seconded the motion.

Chairperson Christian requested comments from the Commission and the audience.

Commissioner Connell questioned if there were any plans for what would be done with this property.

Chairperson Christian added that the purchase of this contract was previously approved.

Commissioner Connell stated that he believes the request is now asking for a plaque. He wondered if we had any plans at this point for the use of the property. **CM Minner** answered we do not. This parcel is just too strategic for the city and it is essentially the eye of the bigger parcel. It is the hole in the donut, if you will. We had an appraisal done, which we discussed at the last meeting, and this board authorized a purchase price up to one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. A few weeks later, Ms. Allen-Carston came back through her counsel, Chuck Johnson, and notified us that they would accept our offer of one hundred and seventy-five thousand. Now, the reason this is back before you is for an additional consideration of signage. At the present time, we do not have any specific plans, but it is a strategic parcel, so it will be good for us to have this property in our inventory.

Commissioner Jasper asked if the reason for their attention to this tonight is for memorial signage? **CM Minner** replied yes. **Commissioner Jasper** wanted to know what the rationale was for that. **CM Minner** answered that this was at the sellers request. **Commissioner Pederson** inquired if the seller would be paying for the plaque or if this would be at the city's expense? **CM Minner** replied that it would be the city's expense. **Chairperson Christian** remarked that he disagrees with this plaque because we are already paying five thousand dollars above appraised value. Nobody is giving the city anything and we are purchasing this property. If she was donating the property, then that would be great, but to just systematically give someone a plaque because they asked for it after we are already purchasing the property at an above appraised value, that he does not agree with. He had already explained to the City Manager that he had no problem buying it at one hundred and seventy-five thousand, but he was a no vote for the plaque. We are giving them one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars and if they

want a plaque, then they can go purchase a plaque, buy a piece of land and put it up wherever they want.

This is not an historical house and we will probably end up tearing that house down anyway. He does not understand why we would obligate ourselves to put up a plaque when we do not know what it would even say or where it would be located. It would be setting a bad precedence without them giving or accommodating the city, plus we are already giving them more than the appraised value. He totally disagrees with this. **Commissioner Pederson** agrees with Chairperson Christian completely.

Commissioner Jasper seconded that as well.

Chairperson Christian asked the City Manager what he would like to do moving forward. **CM Minner** answered that it sounded like they needed to vote no on the motion. **Commissioner Conner** stated he also agrees with the Chairperson because we do not want to set a precedence for doing things like this.

The roll call vote was:

Commissioner Burry	No
Commissioner Jasper	No
Commissioner Connell	No
Commissioner Conner	No
Commissioner Pederson	No
Chairperson Christian	No

No yeas, six nays, the Commission denied the resolution.

CM Minner stated that with this failing, the existing direction of the CRA Board was to purchase this property at one hundred and seventy five thousand dollars. If that is still the flavor of the board, he will go back and inform Ms. Allen Carston of the outcome and the City Attorney will inform her counsel, Mr. Johnson. **Chairperson Christian** stated that there would be no reason to bring this issue back with any other offers. If they do not want the one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, we can take that money and do something else with it. **CM Minner** replied that he has it and if there is any other request from the seller they will be very clear that this is the board's intent.

Chairperson Christian and **Commissioner Jasper** thanked him for his comments.

4. ROLL CALL:

Commissioner Pederson had nothing further.

Commissioner Burry had nothing further.

Commissioner Jasper commented on Berry Park, stating she had been taking time out to walk around the community knocking on her neighbors' doors and she wanted to make her presence known because many people had been complaining about Berry Park. There have been some residents congregating there on a daily basis and she has witnessed this for herself. She was very concerned and wanted to know what the city could do about it. She knows we have talked about putting up a fence going around this area in the past, but these individuals start out early, around ten in the morning, and are out there until nine or ten at night. There is drug paraphernalia out there which has been previously discussed, but it seems as though that crowd is getting larger and larger. Being a female, she does not feel safe going to that park and that is not right because it is a public park and it is not fair to any of the other residents.

She wanted to know what we could do, because we have made efforts to stop people from parking by the pavilion area, but something else needs to be done and she wanted to know if we had any other ideas or

recommendations about this in lieu of closing it down temporarily. Maybe we could install some cameras out there or have some extra police presence. Other residents have been coming up to her complaining about the issues going on at Berry Park. **CM Minner** responded that we do have security cameras out at Berry Park, so when we hear about incidents out there, staff does go back and review that.

We are still of the opinion that the fence is a critical step in securing that area, especially in the evening and early morning hours. The Public Works Director is almost ninety percent done with the estimate, which will essentially copy the framework of the brick columns and wrought iron fence. That amount is about three hundred thousand dollars to get that project completed, which is pretty much where we figured it to be. The fence will run all the way around Berry Park, it will close off the parking lot and it will continue from Beecher Street to Johns Avenue at the end. It will then go around that corner and seal off the entire park. We do not have a gate bid yet, but we do intend on putting a gate similar to what we have out at Ski Beach, which would open and close, so they would have daytime usage and then that would be followed up by police patrol. As soon as he has that number, he will bring this back with a concept and plan, so they can approve that expense. **Commissioner Jasper** said she knew there was a camera close to the bathroom area, but she wanted to know if we had any other surveillance cameras in that area. **CM Minner** replied that we have four cameras total in the park. **Commissioner Jasper** asked if we were monitoring those cameras. **CM Minner** answered yes; those cameras are monitored.

Commissioner Jasper added if the police could monitor that park a little bit more closely, that would be greatly appreciated. With the park hours being from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., she knows those are the standard hours, but wonders if we could consider changing those hours to when the sun goes down, the park would close. **CM Minner** stated that would require action by the Commission along with a directive for those hours and the standards. If they want to change the hours for Berry Park, that would need to be a directive by the Commission. **Commissioner Jasper** said she does have an issue with the hours along with everyone congregating out there because it is not safe, so maybe we could come back in a few weeks. Also, with the homeless population in the Carver Heights area and living in that community, there have been a couple of incidents where there have been fires set in the woods, which is very dangerous. How can we go about cleaning that area up? She remembers comments being made by the Chairperson with respect to cleaning some of those areas out on Chester Street and then back on Johns Street and Georgia Street. The homeless people are back there in the wooded areas setting fires to keep warm and cook their food. Maybe we could have those areas cleaned out because it is not safe for the homeowners who are vested in their homes in those areas. **CM Minner** replied that he would bring that to the Chiefs' attention.

Commissioner Connell had nothing further.

Commissioner Conner wanted to know about Berry Park being a public park. When these people are congregating out there, we still need to know what is going on, so is it possible to know when the police are visiting that area and what is going on out there? **CM Minner** replied that would be a question for the Police Chief, but he would make sure they are paying extra attention to that park. **Commissioner Conner** stated he believes it is the same group of people out there every day. They are there from nine in the morning until six or seven in the evening. They are still driving their vehicles right up to the pavilion. If the Police Chief could go out there and put a little enforcement into that and see what they are doing, that would be good. **Chairperson Christian** wondered if we could put some four by fours with some chains up because that would tell people not to park on the grass because we are making it too easy. We have the same problem out on Mike and Pine Streets where people just hang out all day long. It is the same group of people and it is not like they come for a few minutes and leave so someone else can come along. They come and sit there all day long. On his way here tonight there were probably fourteen cars sitting there. As Commissioner Jasper said, we all have a family and they do not want to go to Berry Park. Now what are we saying as a city, that it is okay for some people to take over certain city parks so that the rest of the people are not able to utilize them? Maybe the police department can have some of

their officers circulate and/or do some of their paperwork out at Berry Park. We could also purchase and install a "do not park on the grass" sign which costs around fifty dollars, because we want to have beautiful parks. We do not want citizens driving their vehicles on the grass killing it because this is a problem and it is happening. We need to reverse the mindset of these people now because they think they can go to the park and park their cars right next to the pavilion. Meanwhile, we are here trying to beautify these city parks for our citizens to use. We need to do this immediately because if we wait on the fence it will be even harder for us to change peoples' mindset. **Commissioner Pederson** wanted to know if the fence would really help, because when he heard that it would cost three hundred thousand dollars, he had to ask. **Chairperson Christian** said some four by fours and a chain would block that area out, but the fence would be beautiful. There will also be more police presence because the homeless population is located just on the other side of the trail. They are living in the woods and they will still come in. It will take the police presence and the community to say that it is okay to be here, but you cannot stay all day. They cannot continue to make it hard for other community members to come and enjoy the park. **Commissioner Pederson** remarked that he did not want to spend three hundred thousand dollars on a fence if it would not help keep people out. He has been to Berry Park, but he is not that familiar with it. **Chairperson Christian** invited the Commission to take a drive out there anytime of the day to take a look because it is all day, every day. He does not want to go and have a picnic there. The other day, he and his wife walked the trail, but it had become so problematic of an area for them that he did not know if the fence would solve it, but it would make it look prettier. **Commissioner Jasper** said she had heard stories from other individuals who have had events out there where homeless people came out of the wooded areas and they ended up having to feed the homeless people during their event just to keep peace. Something needs to be done. She does not know if the fence will fix the problem, but it will definitely beautify the area. **Commissioner Pederson** stated that he previously supported the fence. However, he had to raise the question when he heard how much the fence was going to cost.

Commissioner Conner added there are two problems: the homeless and the people gathering. He was definitely with the fence because it would definitely beautify the area. As long as those two other pieces become involved with it, maybe it could solve that problem. Once the fence is installed, the homeless would have to walk all the way around to get into the park. Hopefully, they will not want to walk all the way around and that could solve half of the problem. **Commissioner Pederson** remarked that the three hundred thousand dollar number hit him pretty hard and wondered if there were better ways to spend that money to make the park safer.

Commissioner Robuck had nothing further.

Chairperson Christian had nothing further.

5. **ADJOURN:**

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES NEEDING ASSISTANCE TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THESE PROCEEDINGS SHOULD CONTACT THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT, ADA COORDINATOR, AT 728-9740, 48 HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING.

F.S.S. 286.0105 "If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Commission with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, they will need a record of the proceedings, and that for such purpose they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based." The City of Leesburg does not provide this verbatim record.

The meeting adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

