



Meeting Minutes - Draft  
City Council

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Monday, July 28, 2014

4:00 PM

Council Chambers

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**Special Called - Informational Meeting GCNP**

**Call to Order**

President Wayne Trawick called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m. All Council members were present with the exception of Councilmember Vera Quaites who had a work conflict. Others present: Mayor John Koniar, Mike Thompson, Vickey Southern, Don Staley, Leslie Gahagan, David Wilson, David White, Marcie Moscatelli, Jacqueline Trimble and Press Representative Cathy Higgins (Foley Onlooker).

Tricia Pierce, Fran Shults, Neal Shults, Marita Johnson, Patricia L. Pelkey, William E. Pelkey, Mary Hager, Jerry Davis, Tommy Patterson, Bill and Susan Daniel, Laura & Pierre Geneux, Richard Dayton, Jody Dayton, Hover Singleton, Julian McDonald, Prescilla Chamblin, Beatrice Henning, Emera Lang, Robert Manning, Mary Jo Bennett, Marilyn Mosely, Gail Gee, Gary & Wand Bankson, Jerry & Marlene DuBose, Charles Fraher, Richard Prisby, Heather Elliott, Joe & Suzie Mouchett, Bobby & Annette Davis, Alice Nelson, Jean & Ray Lorentz, Thomas Klumpp, Francine Carstensen, Justin Shanks, Massey & Helen Lombard, Wayne Dickey, Derek Hobbs, Cheryl Hanson, Diane Major, Diane Bunch, John Griggs, Clyde Abrams, Paul Cormier, Joe Norman, Sue Onstott, Zana Price, Try Simpkins, Mike & Jeannie Harpe, Sandi Caudill, Patricia C. Libby, Katelyn Hines, Phyllis Trawick, Milton Trawick, Lillie Patterson, Jeanita Hicks, Robert Turner, Donad Borck, Jim Lorenz, Steve McMillan, Edward Haeflinger, Trinity Morgan, Sony A. Bankson, Jim & Cindy Wilson, Etta Emerson, Barbara & Dennis Gaffney, Doug & Jan Harrell, Kathy & Morris Menk, Cathy Gerachi's, Phillip Hinesley, K. Marie Helton, Melvin Albritten, Debbie Albritten, Kenny & Beverly Hicks, Mary Ann & Ernie Fuglestad, Gary Pitts, Ray & Lisa Bakey, Nancy Baker, Stephen & Gillian Newman, Nancy Peters, Richard & Terri Zimmarma, James E. Elkins, E.A. Jakins, L.A. Lyons, Fred Blake, Agnes Cormier, Chandra Wright, Marie Ward, Faye Jakins, Pat & Chris Hayne, Pete Libby, Patsy Hollingsworth, James H. Maddox, Sarah Turner, Mike & Ann Bacher, Harold & Chloe Misch, Walter tatum, Bob & Amanda Grant, Dick & Gay Green, Kim Hillman, Jody Morgan, Wanda Bell, Edith Bolster, Matt Fetner, Verna Coggins, Phillip Coggins, Vierginia Williams, Darryl Bunch, Doug Williams, John Helms, Fred Brereton, Julian Dillon, Elaine G. Dillon, Pat Dupre, Don Sewell, Erika Bankston, Leola Cook, Leon Cook, Sam & Evelyn Loptin, Frieda Harrison, Marcia Van Cleve, LaDonna Norman, Llew Rollins, Shirley Brasher, Geraldine Zintel, John Blanchard, Sherry Garner, Joey Roberts, Luanne McCarley, Ralph Eastburn, Jean Anne Lyons, Beau Roode, Loralia, Blake, Mark Welytok, Charles & Peggy Harris, Angela Johnston, Churck Corley, Syla Womak, and Darrell Melton.

**Present:** 4 - President Wayne Trawick, Council Member Ralph Hellmich, Council Member Rick Blackwell and Council Member Charles Ebert III

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Vera Quaites

### **Introduction by President Wayne Trawick**

Council President Wayne Trawick welcomed everyone for attending. This is an informational meeting for Graham Creek Nature Preserve. Leslie Gahagan and Don Staley will present a PowerPoint presentation regarding the park. After we are finished with the presentation we'll answer any questions.

**14-0618**

Presentation by Leslie Gahagan and Don Staley on the Graham Creek Nature Preserve

**Attachments:**     [Overview of GCNP 2014 \(1\).pdf](#)  
[1052-08 ORD.pdf](#)  
[GCNP MEETING SUPPORT LETTERS.pdf](#)

#### **History to Date**

Mrs. Gahagan began with the history of the site. The 484 acres site was purchased by the City of Foley and Riviera Utilities in 2004 from Bobby Faust for \$5.66 million. Riviera Utilities was interested in using the underground aquifers for a water supply for the community. The City maintained the property by mowing the fields, farm roads and keeping those areas open.

In 2008 the City agreed with Riviera Utilities to turn the property into a park. They opened it up for public meetings and developed a master plan. At that time the Master Plan was called Graham Bayou Park. The Master Plan notes all the habitats. The City hired botanists and local environmentalists to document all of the plants, which they came up with over 700 species. The Foley City Council then named the property Graham Creek Nature Preserve.

In 2009 the City received an Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) to build a canoe launch and a parking area to provide coastal public access to this property, the waters and the habitats. The City also built Stan Mahoney Lane to access the property.

In 2010 the City received another ADCNR grant to build a 2400 sq. ft. pavilion. They began the construction of Philomene Holmes Blvd., which runs off Roscoe Road off of the Foley Beach Express. The boulevard turns onto the Holmes property and into the Park from the western side. The gravel road was built as Phase I. At the same time she spoke with the local botanist because it was overgrown and it needed fire to bring about pitcher plant and other rare plants located on the property. They began an invasive exotic plant removal as well as prescribed burning. Also trails were a perfect fit for the property and they used the old farm roads that cut all the land up as trails and morphed into such. There was a two mile walking trail, a 5K running trail and a 7.5 mile off road bicycle trail.

In 2011 and 2012 the City added a butterfly garden with funding from the Wolf Bay Watershed Watch, expanded the invasion plant removal program, added restroom facilities and had another prescribed burn.

In 2013 the City added swings for children, a nine hole disc golf course, continued the habitat management programs, started a memorial tree grove at the corner of Wolf Bay Drive in the 90 degree curve, and put in a geocaching course using the boy scouts.

In 2014 the City received an ADCNR grant to build a Nature Explorer Classroom with six learning stations as the educational foundation for the Preserve. Fencing along Stan Mahoney Lane was added to prevent traffic from driving over the area. The Disc Golf Course was expanded to 18 holes. Trail and

traffic counters and monitors were installed to monitor traffic in the park and upgraded signage for the trails (2 Mile, 5K and 5 Mile). The markers now have a system whereby you can call into emergency services to give your location off of those markers and they can find you.

Other projects scheduled for the remainder of 2014 include the following:

1. Mountain biking trails under development using local resources to install north of Russian Road and accessed off of Philomene Holmes Blvd. on the western corner of the property.
2. An Archery Park will be north of the Nature Explorer Outdoor Classroom. These will be stationary target that will be facing toward the field area.
3. Paving Philomene Holmes Blvd. from Roscoe Road to the Park entrance.
4. Updating the Master Plan
5. Repairing the Gates to get them functional

#### Future Plans

The future plans for 2015 are projects on the books waiting Council approval.

1. An Interpretive Center
2. Philomene Holmes Blvd. Phase II graveled from the existing paved road from Phase I to Wolf Bay Drive
3. Certifying the 5K and 10K courses for races to include cross country
4. Expansion of trail signage
5. Additional foot bridges in some of the wet areas
6. Continuing the prescribed burn for invasive plant removal
7. Adding a bigger and more dynamic website

Mrs. Gahagan showed a preliminary design of the Interpretive Center that is still in the design phase. The design shows the classroom area behind the interpretive area. Covered porches will be located on three sides of the building. It also includes offices and laboratory for research areas in the back.

Some things that could happen that they have looked at through the Master Plan are as follows:

1. Adding more split rail fence along Wolf Bay Drive
2. Adding ADA walking trail and boardwalk from the Interpretive Center to the Northern Pitcher Plant Bog
3. Potential zip lines but more along the lines of the ropes courses, which are done in a lot of the state parks in the back areas where there are larger trees.

#### Maintenance

Maintenance that is currently taking place includes the following:

1. Public Works inspects the gravel roadways throughout the park
2. Public Works maintains the trails to include trimming and mowing
3. Sanitation comes out to clean restrooms and restock them, take care of the trash and recycling pickup
4. Contracted out prescribed burn operations for invasive plant removal and habitat assessments

#### Education

In 2010 educational programs started out with field trips offered on a random basis as requested. In 2011 it expanded when Wolf Bay Watershed Watch funded some field trips and supplies. In 2012 they started smaller schools to handle with the limited number of people helping out as it was Mrs. Gahagan and Wolf Bay Watershed Watch volunteers. In 2013 they gave more tours to

senior groups, churches, and home school groups. They had over 2,000 children come through the Preserve. They added a Pioneer Day Camp, which is going on. A grant was received to build an educational program to follow a course of study from pre-school through high school, which will be implemented this year. They also do an Explore and Observe at Graham Creek Preserve, which is pre-school program free of charge to the public and a Discovery and Elements Program for the older children. She showed some photos of the programs underway.

#### University Research

There have been several universities (Mississippi State, University of Alabama, Iowa State University and Auburn University) using the Preserve for their data collection and research projects. Auburn University is the largest one since they have a wildlife/forestry program and they come out often to do water quality that has been monitored since 2010 and still have ongoing research projects.

#### Events

In 2010 the City met with the Foley High School Cross Country Team to begin races at the Park. It is the ideal cross country location. There are races for every Labor Day weekend with 250-500 students from all over the Baldwin and Mobile County areas. They run approximately four races and they do it in waves.

In 2011 the City added an Earth Day Festival as well as the Jog the Bog 5K race, which was very small. In 2012 they added a Creek Crawl to the events held in the previous years. It was an obstacle race that was very successful with approximately 250 racers and 200 spectators. The Preserve was also chosen for the Cross Country Sectionals where runners in Baldwin and Mobile Counties came out to qualify for State.

In 2013 scouting agencies came out for a Day Camp, hosted events whereby they would do projects. The first camp out with a meteor shower was held and the YMCA held a "Y Get Dirty Race" using existing trails. There was also a forensics seminar held as well as a few other activities.

2014 included the "Y Get Dirty Race", the Boy Scout District Camp out, Earth Day Festival hosted by the Wildlife Rescue Center, Forestry Commission Training by a State Forester with foresters from all over the State of Alabama, began disc golf tournaments, which is very popular with 50 participants, and a Corpse Crawl to support the Foley High School Cross Country team in August. Coming up is another disc golf tournament on August 23rd, several weddings booked this fall, Creek Crawl in October 4th, which is the Preserve's big fundraiser, and a PowerMan competition November 30th.

#### Staff

People that work out at the Park include Leslie Gahagan, Jackie Trimble, Environmental Assistant, and she coordinates all the educational programs and events. They have a temporary part time parks ranger who mows areas of the park. He also is the security, visitor support and assists with programs and events. The college intern has gone back to Kansas and sometimes they have an Easter Seals Employee, which is temporary help, that assists the park ranger. The City crews do the large mowing.

**Events Perceived for the Park**

**Ecotourism – The Preserve is on the official Alabama Coastal Birding Trail just off the scenic by way. We are using the Park as a beautiful natural area to be enjoyed by all.**

**Community Events – Weddings, family and church gatherings. As the Interpretive Center is built they will be looking at picnic areas, meeting areas, workshops, seminars and potentially some sports competition that fit in the woodland venue.**

**At this time Mrs. Gahagan introduced Don Staley, Executive Director Sports. Mr. Staley was hired by the City in March. He came from the City of Tuscaloosa after 22 years. He coached at the University of Alabama and worked at the sports commission. There were 50 or so events annually and he utilized all the assets they had in Tuscaloosa. The University of Alabama athletic teams are going 365 days a year. They utilized Shelton State and Stillman College. The parks and recreation department did not have stick and ball fields so they had to be very creative. This opportunity to work for the City of Foley appreciates how welcoming the community has been to him and his wife and plans to retire here. Appreciates the friendships he has made with Mayor, Council and staff.**

**He chose to come to Foley because of the assets that are available to this community. Blue Collar is going to be one outstanding place for stick and ball events, tailored events, etc. However, there are some events in sports that is not one size fits all so as we started to get up and running he took an inventory of what was available to the City. Essentially, potentially Power Man, which is a run-bike-run event, archery, but the one that got everyone's attention was Tough Mudder. We pulled it off the table. When we pulled it off the table to give us a little more time to study up on the event it was announced that it will be in Destin, Florida this year. I think I may be remiss in saying that there may have been approximately 13,000 people coming in but none the less we will move forward. The event we have coming is Power Man. Possible events coming will be National Junior College Cross Country, NAIA Cross Country, NCAA, and National Mountain Bike Championships. When I spoke with Leslie about potential events there were some she said absolutely no. She did her homework on Tough Mudder, as well as the City Council and the Police Chief. We went to other cities and it wasn't just massive economic impact for those businesses but it did cross so many demographics. There were people of all ages, rich and poor. He stated he felt like the Preserve has an incredible guardian in Leslie.**

**He looks forward to being a good steward to the assets that we have in this community and look forward to continuing to bring events in, not just to the Preserve but to the area. Between the Mayor, Council and Leslie they will all be careful about the events brought to the area.**

## Question/Answer/Comment Period

### Question & Answer Period

Marita Johnson – 8421 Palmetto Way, Foley Graham Creek Estates Subdivision – She is a member of “Citizens Protecting Graham Creek Nature Preserve.” They have members from the five surrounding neighborhoods, Graham Creek Estates, Wolf Bay Pines, Bay Forest Estates, Leisure Lakes and Glen Lakes. On behalf of their group she thanked President Trawick and Leslie Gahagan for meeting with their group on two occasions recently to give them background on all of the issues that have come up after the article that came out about Tough Mudder. She thanked President Trawick for taking the group’s request for a Citizens Advisory Group to the Council meeting last week. She made reference to an article in Sunday’s newspaper and mention of this advisory group was made by Councilman Blackwell. Their group has also established a group called the “Friends of the Graham Creek Nature Preserve”. It has been registered with the State of Alabama and they are doing the final steps for the incorporation as a non-profit. The primary purpose of this group is for fundraising for the Preserve as they understand there are not enough funds for the maintenance of it. Councilman Ebert made mention of this advisory council “Citizens Protecting Graham Creek Nature Preserve” in Sunday’s article as well. Essentially the purpose of the group is to maintain the Preserve as stated in the ordinance (Ordinance 1052-08) passed by the City Council on July 7, 2008. She read it aloud and quoted “...the property shall be preserved in a nature state for use as a park of passive recreation, environmental education and habitat, wildlife and plant preservation for enjoyment by all citizens and visitors.. .” With the presentation that Leslie provided to us that all of the past events and current events from this year have maintained the integrity of what the GCNP was. They want to make sure that it is maintained in the spirit in which it was created back in 2008 and that it be maintained for our future generations.

President Trawick reported that you can see a lot of positive things going on in the Preserve and we do have an overseer of the Park so that it doesn’t get out of hand.

Jim Lorenz, CR12 – CR12 is a dead end road and asked if there were any plans to bring a road in from the Foley Beach Express to the Park. President Trawick reported the name of the road off the Foley Beach Express is the Philomene Holmes Road and it goes directly into the Park on the west side. Mr. Lorenz asked when it would be completed. President Trawick reported the road across the Holmes property will be paved this year as part of the agreement for them donating the property and once it enters the park it will be graveled. There is a deadline on this and it is close. Russian Road is also shown on the Master Plan and it is shown as a service road. It has two bridges that will have to be built.

Chris Hayne – Bay Forest Estate – Mr. Hayne expressed his concerns with traffic problems and wants to keep the Preserve as it was set up in the beginning. He stated Foley doesn’t need any money. “If we don’t have any money somebody is not handling the books quite right.”

President Trawick reported the comment on the City not handling their funding properly was incorrect. We just came back from New York and the City received a AA rating from Standard and Poor. There are approximately ten

cities in Alabama that have a S&P rating and Foley is in the top ten for handling public funds in a very responsible manner.

The City operates similar to a business in regards to it either going forwards or backwards in that if it doesn't grow it dies and then you have bigger problems. The City has no control over the traffic on State Highways or the number of visitors that come to visit the beaches in Gulf Shores and Orange Beach. The City does manage its growth responsibly in that it looks after its businesses and employment rates.

Harold Misch 8531 Heron Drive – Graham Creek Estates – He expressed his concern about large activities in the park, felt passive recreation was abandoned, and the Preserve should be saved for its original intent and not something the City can bring in extra dollars.

Jim Garner – Glenlakes Subdivision – Mr. Garner wants to maintain the quality of life that they have.

Ray Lorentz, 9447 Clubhouse Drive – Glenlakes Subdivision – Mr. Lorentz expressed his feelings that the City should do one project at a time to see how it would impact traffic and was not in favor of a zip line.

John Blanchard, 8620 Bay View Drive – Mr. Blanchard was in favor of a zip line; stated the City has done a good job of maintaining the property since he uses the Preserve for bike riding and occasional camping; and Tough Mudder was an event planned too soon since traffic could not be disbursed off the west road.

Steve Newman, 8460 Forest Lane, Foley - new to Foley, Fairhope resident – He has a master's degree in Geology and has taught at the University of South Alabama and still teaching basic geology at Faulkner State. His concern was about an activity bringing in thousands of people and it would damage/destroy the eco-system. He felt it needed to be "nipped in the bud".

Katie Hines, 26535 Frank Road, Elberta – She has been coming to the Graham Creek Nature Preserve for a long time and is the captain of the FHS Cross Country Team and Graham Creek is their home meet. A lot of you have made the complaint about passive recreation. She read the definition as follows: "Passive recreation may be defined as any non-motorized activity." So technically in the Tough Mudder race there is no motorized activity going on. She asked how many of the people speaking was actually from Foley and not many people in the audience raised their hands compared to those that were clapping. She further stated that most of the people have retired down here and yet want it to be exclusive so that other people can't come and visit.

Zana Price, 920 N Holly Blvd. – A very passionate fourth generation Foley-ite whose family goes back to 1813 in Baldwin County and used to live in the area of Graham Creek and Bay Forest. Her husband used to go fishing in that same area and now they can't because of the private launches. She expressed her concern that the majority of citizens in attendance were not willing to welcome visitors and were not happy with the City's progress when they were good neighbors; and concerned they made complaints about the demise of the environment when their homes contributed to today's environment in that community.



Marsha Van Cleve, CR12 – Mrs. VanCleve expressed her concerns about the location of the Interpretive Center and felt it should be located off the Beach Express at the western entrance to the Preserve.

South Baldwin County Resident for the past 27 years. This young lady has a Biology degree and loves the Preserve. She wished she had the educational programs offered to her at a younger age that are now being offered at the Preserve. She thought the Council and staff have the best interest of Foley and citizens at heart. As far as the location of the building there are no endangered species and it is a very high area of land and there are no wetlands. The endangered plants that everyone is concerned about they actually do thrive off of habitat disruption and that is why the City does prescribed burnings. "I think it is a major mistake trying to block out people from that preserve, especially if you want to encourage good environmental stewardship." People need to know that the park is there, to be outdoors in it, and need to be learning about it. Otherwise future generations would not care about something they have no knowledge about at all.

Jean Lyons, 24511 Wolf Bay Drive, Bay Forest Estates – Ms. Lyons thought the activities currently in the Park were good, especially the eco-tourism activities but did not like the location of the Interpretive Center. She expressed her concerns about the traffic, future high population activities that bring with it vehicular traffic, and the impact on the Park.

Sarah Turner, 24052 Bay View Drive West – Ms. Turner agreed with Ms. Lyons regarding the current educational facilities and activities. She asked what research had been done to promote the site for event like Tough Mudder; if there were any alternate sites; had a suitability analysis been done; had an environment impact study been done to see what happened to the Gopher Tortoise population that is in the Park or other plants or things that are there, and has a traffic impact study been done.

President Trawick responded the studies are ongoing.

Tommy Patterson, 24241 Bay View Drive West (Wolf Bay Pines) – Thanked the City Council for the work they have done and has been friends with Leslie, and has worked with Chief Wilson on the first prescribed burn. Mr. Patterson wants the integrity of the Preserve to be kept and not utilized for sporting events. He stated that the events that have occurred in the Preserve to this point have been great but would not want to go beyond those types of activities.

Unidentified man – He expressed his concerns about the PowerMan event and the impact that it would have on the gravel road. He also expressed concerns about the archery activities stating that the arrows for compound bows were expensive and if the archer missed the target that they would go in search of the bows thus trampling the bushes.

Jody Morgan – Fitness Director and race director and the Y Get Dirty Race. Mrs. Morgan loves the Preserve and stated that it takes a lot of work to put on a race to be sure that the structures are placed out of the way of the prescribed burns and that no plants are disturbed. She stated she felt that an internationally accredited event like ToughMudder did not care about the Preserve or the Foley community and that a planning committee for traffic. She

also had concerns about the traffic and parking. "I want to reiterate that the City and Leslie in particular she loves that park and I don't think that she would bring anything in that would hurt it or the surrounding communities either."

Sharon Lorentz – Ms. Lorentz expressed her concerns about the lack of a road other than Wolf Bay Drive and the traffic.

Ralph Eastburn, 24269 Bay View Drive – Bay Pines Subdivision – Mr. Eastburn expressed concerns about taking out pine trees.

J. E. Elkins, 8640 Bay Pines Lane – Mr. Elkins expressed his concerns about have a huge event with only one road and how emergency services would get in since there is only Wolf Bay Drive in and out of the subdivisions. He doesn't have any problems with the Preserve being an educational venue for the Boy Scouts, YMCA or any other local groups but felt it is the wrong place for a national sports complex.

Marita Johnson – Last week in Blumberg's News there was an article about ToughMudder. Interestingly enough not only the participates have to sign a waivers that they will not bring any liability claims but spectators have to sign waivers when they attend the events. There was a major sports attorney quoted as saying that any city considering this should look at the fact that they are requesting spectators to sign waivers as a red flag. Also there has been a lot of research done and there have been a lot of issues with cities with Tough Mudder.

### **Follow Up Comments by President Trawick**

President Trawick reported again this is just an informational meeting and the Council is looking at events for the Park, the history of the park and where we want to go with the Park. The additional road from the west of the Foley Beach Express will be built this year. The Tough Mudder event was a short time frame. It was a concern that the residents in the various subdivisions had and we wanted to give you the opportunity to express your concerns.

The other thing is that if we don't have solid business with good employment then crime goes up and then the City will have a problem. His perception is to keep employment up. Chief Wilson reports were great on the Tough Mudder event in other areas. We have had other events that did not happen because it wasn't a good fit for Foley, i.e. music groups that the Council did not approve because of various problems.

President Trawick reported he would be around for further questions after the meeting.

### **Mayor's Comments**

Mayor Koniar reported that he understood their concerns about the traffic situation and larger events like Tough Mudder and felt it was pre-mature. They will continue to find a site that would be a better fit for Tough Mudder. He further reported that City staff does a great job at looking after the best interest in the City's parks and the whole community.

## Adjourn

Hearing no further comments the meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.