

**CITY OF DARLINGTON  
PUBLIC HEARING  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2016 AT 6:00 PM**

The City of Darlington held a Public Hearing to hear public comments on the proposed recreation complex to be located on Lawson Road. Those in attendance included: Mayor Gloria C. Hines, Council Members: Mayor Pro-Tem Coleman Cannon, Carolyn Bruce, John Segars, Elaine Reed and Bryant Gardner. Others in attendance included: City Manager, Howard Garland, Police Chief Danny Watson, Fire Chief Pat Cavanaugh, Fireman, Mr. James Jett, Mr. Lee Andrews, Mrs. Lisa Rock, Mr. Jim Stone, Mr. Linwood Epps, Mrs. Joyce Thomas, Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell Goodson and standing room only visitors.

Mayor Hines called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and Mayor Pro-Tem Coleman Cannon gave the invocation followed by the Pledge.

Mayor Hines said there will be no voting tonight, but the public hearing is to hear concerns from the public and for Council's comments.

**Mr. Lee Andrews** said when he first came to the City of Darlington, which has been approximately 3 ½ years now, he was asked to find property to build a recreational complex. He said his ideal spot was where the Wal-Mart is currently located. Mr. Andrews said they have looked at property in that area, but the people either wanted too much for it or they did not want to sell. He said they thought they had found the perfect piece of property, but found out it was sold. He said Mrs. Lisa Rock found this property off of Lawson Road for \$195,900 for 100 acres. Mr. Andrews said they have had an environmental study done on this piece of property, then he turned around and said we haven't had it done yet. He said when people ask what are the plans, he said the plans right now is to get the property. He said people may wonder if the park is going to pay for itself with concessions and gate, but it will not. What will pay for the park is that we will be bringing people into Darlington that will spend money here. Mr. Andrews said there are two sites that he has his eyes on. Mr. Andrews did a power point presentation of how the proposed complex could look with these possible sports: ballfields, green spaces, a picnic area, a disc golf area, ample parking, a walking trail, a dog park, a splash pad, playground, horseshoe pit, and bocce ball. Mr. Andrews said the property on Old Florence Highway is \$750,000. He said Lawson Road property is only \$195,900 and would bring people through Darlington to the site. He said we are going to have to invest some money so we can do something for the kids. Mr. Andrews said they want to hear feedback from the public and from Council and if this is not what they want, he said they will go back to the drawing board and find something that will work.

**Ms. Anna Dewitt** said she is for a new and improved sports complex, but she has some concerns. She said it's not the building or the complex that worries her is the maintenance of the facility. She said the City will not pay to have the lights fixed at the tennis courts which has been a problem for years. Ms. Dewitt said it's been said the

fields on Blue Street are in poor condition, so why haven't they been maintained and upgraded. She said has concerns about our sidewalks needing repair and have not been fixed. She said the green spaces at the City's which were once so beautiful and is now an eyesore. She said we are asking for brand new toys when we can't take care of the ones we have. not in favor of it being located on Lawson Road. Ms. Dewitt said to lessen the cost of the proposed land, fix the lights at the tennis courts and expand the current building to include locker rooms and a concession stand. She said maybe the City can purchase the lot beside the Piggly Wiggly and move the playground area there. She said with the rest of the money scrap the fields on Blue Street and make them a football & baseball area with a central building. Ms. Dewitt said buy one more piece of land and create a softball complex inside the City Limits because 1.2 miles is long way to walk to Lawson Road. She said before the City purchase a 100-acre swamp, why not look at what the City already owns.

**Ms. Julia Patrick** said she is for the complex. Ms. Patrick has been living at the corner of Blue & Spring Streets for twenty-five years and the noise and the lights have never bothered her. She said the traffic doesn't bother her.

**Mr. Charlie Gaskins**

Mr. Gaskins said his biggest concern is the location of the property. He asked if the City buys the land for \$195,900, are they going to have the money to develop the land? He said why not put the complex in a high profile area. He said if it takes another year to find a suitable piece of land, this may be a wiser course. He thinks the By-Pass would be a more appropriate location for the complex. He said if we're going to make Darlington attractive, we have to put things where people can drive by and see them. Mr. Gaskins said there is no easy way to get to Lawson Road, whereas on the By-Pass, people will be able to find it quickly. He said other than that, he is for a sports complex, just not on Lawson Road.

**Mr. J.J. June** said he is all for a new complex. He said he doesn't know if this is or is not the right place. He said the price of the land sounds good, but as far as he's concerned, he thinks this is a good spot.

**Mr. Linwood Epps** said he has changed his mind on where the sports complex should be built. He said he doesn't think Lawson Road is a good place to build because it's out of the way. He said if we need to spend extra money, then spend the extra money and put it somewhere that's high profile. He said he doesn't like the Old Florence Road site either. Mr. Epps said spend the money and build something nice because our kids and grandkids deserve it.

**Mr. Brantley Jett** Mr. Jett said he moved back here in 2005 and for years and years we have been putting the youth last. He said we wonder why our youth are getting in trouble and it's because they have nothing to do. He said we are worrying about how the kids will get to the complex, but it's the parents responsibility to get the kids there. We said we need to find unity and get together and get this done now for the kids.

**Ms. Elizabeth Weatherford** said we cannot wait another year to build a complex. She said if the City builds a facility, people will come. She said it only takes a moment to find any place on your GPS. Ms. Weatherford said they need to make a decision.

**Mr. Joshua Williamson** said in his opinion the proposed site is the best place to put the sports complex. He said he doesn't think a complex need to be on the By-Pass because of the traffic. He said as a taxpayer, he doesn't think we need to wait any longer on this.

**Ms. Katrina Stone** said she is for the ballfield and Lawson Road is a great location. She said you can easily find Lawson Road on your GPS. She said she is for this and she hopes they will move forward on this.

**Mr. Brenton Dana** said we are not Hartsville or Florence, but Darlington is unique. He said the Blue Street ballfields there are in great condition, but the facilities are lacking. He said Darlington has a great opportunity to take action and do something positive for the community and make an impact. Mr. Dana said it obvious that this has been researched really well. He challenged Council to move forward.

**Ms. Susie Berry** said she doesn't believe we have looked at all possible locations. She said she gave Councilman Milling a number to call about land. She said Mr. Milling assured her that he would pass the information on to Mr. Garland. Mr. Garland said he and Mr. Milling talked about this, but that's as far as it went. Ms. Berry said the land is at the corner of Oleander Drive and Mineral Springs Road. She said it's farm land right now, and the lady is anxious to sell. Ms. Berry said she went down Timmonsville Highway and saw the Billie Hardee property they had for sale. She said she doesn't believe we've looked everywhere to put the complex. She said the property on the corner of Oleander Drive and Mineral Springs would be less to get the property ready and it would be less populated. Mayor Hines asked Ms. Berry how large was the property and she said it's a large piece of property. Mayor Hines asked her if it was over 40 acres and Ms. Berry said she is sure it is. Ms. Berry said she is very disappointed this has not been checked into. Mayor Hines told Mr. Garland to make sure he has the information so this can be checked into. Ms. Berry said we need to look into the Billy Hardee property they may want to sell.

Mayor Hines said we've heard a lot of pros and cons and everyone is in favor of the complex, but it's just the location. She said as a Council, they want to make the right decision for the City. She said they've heard a lot of good comments tonight and Council wants to take their time and do the right thing.

**Councilwoman Reed** thanked everyone for letting Council know their concerns. She said she is not against the present proposal for the complex. Councilwoman Reed briefly addressed some of the comments that were made by the citizens.

**Councilwoman Bruce** said she is for the recreation complex as well, but as a Council they want to make the right decision and not rush to make a decision based on the dollar

amount. She said she heard a lot of good things and hope they can get back together and talk about this and make the best decision for the City as a whole. She thanked Mr. Andrews for the research and information he provided. She also thanked Ms. Berry for the additional information she presented. Councilwoman Bruce said another concern she has about Lawson Road is that there was a lot of flooding was in this area during the rains and wondered if we would be able to take care of this. She said there are a lot of unanswered questions and there's a lot of information that they need to sit down and talk about and make the best decision for the City. Councilwoman Bruce said if we spend \$195,000 to buy this land, how much will it cost in the long run if it's not the right purchase and we made it based on a financial decision.

**Councilman Cannon** thanked all of the citizens for their concern. He said he is for the recreation complex as well, but agrees that they need to make sure that they make the right decision. He said he hopes they can find a good place to out the recreation complex. He said if they can't find a place, they will have to work with what they have.

**Councilman Segars** thanked everyone for coming and said he appreciates the input they have given them. He said they have to make the right decision for the right reasons. He said they can look at the property that Ms. Berry brought up, and then get their plan together and try to make the best decision for the City.

**Councilman Gardner** asked for a show of hands for those for and against building the complex on the Lawson Road. Then he asked for a show of hands for those that was in favor of a recreation complex. The majority wanted a complex. Councilman Gardner gave numbers on Lawson Road property vs the Old Florence Road property. He said he is in favor of this property. He said they will definitely look at the property Ms. Berry mentioned because there could be some great opportunities. Councilman Gardner said every piece of property they have on the table right now is wetlands and holds water. He said you will have the same issue with the Old Florence Road property. Councilman Gardner addressed comments made by Ms. Dewitt. He said he was not aware of the lighting issue at the tennis courts, but he will look into it. He addressed comments made by Ms. Dewitt, Mr. Gaskins, Mr. Epps and Councilwoman Bruce.

Mayor Hines said they are not against the complex, but they have got to make sure it's in the right place.

**Mr. Bonnoitt** said the ballfields have been on Blue Street for 50 years and why have the schools asked us to leave after all this time. He told Council it would be more sensible to fix up what we have. He said he agrees with Ms. Dewitt when she said we can't maintain what we have now. Mr. Andrews said the School District has not approached us and said they are taking that land back. He said we're still under lease agreement with the School District and the City has a very good relationship with them. Mr. Andrews said there's only 18 acres at this location and they have no parking.

**Mr. Lee Andrews** answered some of the citizens' questions they had about the school property and other property in the area as possible sites.

**A man in the audience spoke** and said a sports complex is very much needed. He said he is a Forrester for the State and thinks 10 years from now they will close Brunson-Dargan school. He said the old football stadium and base fields will be moved to Blue Street. He said there is 48 acres in this location and if the school moves everything, what will happen to the 48 acres right in the middle of town. He told Council if they build a ball park at Brunson-Dargan they can tie it in to Williamson Park if they build a boardwalk through the creek. He said there's a lot that can be done inside the City. He said he is not opposed to the sports complex being built on Lawson Road because it is needed, but he doesn't think it needs to go further into the County. He said he hates seeing people move in the County and forgot about the City. He told Council they talk about Florence and they talk about Hartsville, but there are two major differences in those towns. He said Florence left downtown (their core) and Hartsville, everything is right in town. He said we need to do more stuff in the City.

**Mayor Hines** said Mr. Bobby Ross did a plan for the City about 20 years ago (Central Park South) which tied in Williamson Park to the area the gentleman was talking about. She said she has the plans at her house, and they are very thorough plans, that would put together exactly what the gentleman is describing now. Mr. Andrews said the recreation department wants to connect Williamson Park to the green space. They are looking at building 3.1 miles of trails all the way to Smith Avenue. Mr. Andrews said she works for both the County and City of Darlington and whatever Council decides they want to do, that's what they'll do.

**Mr. Charlie Gaskins** said he's more confused now than he was when he first came in. He asked if this is for the kids that live in Darlington or is this to attract all of these tournaments from out of town. Everybody said it for both. Mr. Gaskins said if this is for the children of this community they would be much better off trying to find a place in Darlington where it's accessible by all children. He said to say it's the parent's responsibility for getting their kids to Lawson Road, they need to find a location that accessible for all children. He said this is how we need to target the location for this complex. Councilman Gardner said it's a lot easier for the most disadvantaged kids of our community to drive some place in our town because our town is not that big. He said he would like to have some place in town for our disadvantaged kids. Mr. Gaskins said he is not talking about disadvantage kids, he's talking about all kids.

**Ms. Dewitt** told Council to think about our kids when they make their decision. She said she heard certain ones talking about the kids driving. She said they don't drive, the children walk and some of the kids are from single parent families that have to work and can't take their children to the ballfields.

**A lady that lives** on Oleander Drive said she moved to Darlington from Florence because it was quiet. She said there is a lot of traffic in this area already and if a ballpark comes to this area there will be even more traffic and they won't have the privacy that they once had. Councilwoman Reed said the children in her area walk to the ballfield. Mr. Andrews said this is a concern and if we build something new somewhere else the

children will have to get there. He said there is nothing bigger inside the City Limits of Darlington that's big enough to build on.

**Chief Danny Watson** said the fastest growing crime today is female juvenile crime because our girls are not presented with the leadership opportunities that they need. He said other than in church is being members of organized athletics. Chief Watson said softball has done more for American girls than any other sport. Chief Watson said when the Police Department opened the City Pool, he wrote a grant to receive an award for the City and the first summer they opened the City Pool the juvenile crime rate dropped 13%. He said if you want to make a difference, you have to move forward, you can't stand still.

**A young lady spoke** and said all of the people that are complaining about the ballfields not being clean, she said they volunteer to clean up and if the people complaining want to make sure everything is clean, then volunteer your time to help them clean.

Upon motion of Councilwoman Reed, seconded by Councilman Gardner, the meeting adjourned at 7:57 PM.

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Mayor

ATTEST:

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Clerk & Treasurer