**AD HOC COMMITTEE ON HEMMING PLAZA MEETING MINUTES**

**March 9, 2012**

**Location:** Don Davis Room, Ground Floor City Hall

**Date:** 10 a.m. March 7, 2012

**In Attendance:** Chris Quinn, Greater Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce; Susan Cochran, River Region Human Services; Carolyn, Hillhouse-Jones, Sarah Ausherman, Office of Special Events; Jamie Hill, Office of Special Events; Janice Billy, Office of Council Auditor; Brian Snow, Sulzbacher Center; Megan Newton, Mental Health Resource Center; Karen Nasrallah, JEDC; Asst. Chief Michelle Cook, JSO; Dick Jackson, Amy Harrell, DVI; Terry Lorince, DVI; Ava Barrett, Jacksonville Public Library; Roy Thomas, Jacobs Jewelers; Vikki Wilkins, UPS Store; Fay Carter; Evie Welch, ShAdCo Zone 1-A, Jason Teal, Office of General Counsel; Council Member E. Denise Lee, Council Member Bill Gulliford, Council Member Don Redman, Scott Wilson, ECA District 4; Dan Macdonald, ECA District 8, and Daryl Joseph, Parks and Recreation.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. March 7.

CM E Denise Lee began the meeting by voicing her disappointment that less than an hour before the scheduled meeting Kelley Boree, Parks and Recreation director and Chair of the Hemming Plaza Sub-Ccommittee, was going to be unable to attend the meeting and her future involvement was uncertain. CM Lee was also disturbed that there was no representative from the Parks and Recreation department at the meeting. Scott Wilson was dispatched to find a representative from that department to attend the meeting.

While waiting for a Parks and Recreation representative to arrive, CM Lee began the agenda by asking Terry Lorince of DVI to go over the two surveys that the sub-committee had developed. Ms. Lorince read each question and possible answers to the committee and audience. The first survey was an in-person survey that would be conducted by an independent survey group (Jacksonville University, University of North Florida or a private survey firm) of people using the park. The second was an online survey that will encourage people who work and live downtown as well as any interested parties to partake of the survey by clicking a link provided by merchants, offices, and the media.

Discussion left the survey when CM Lee asked if Hemming Plaza is mentioned in any tourism brochures that can be found in downtown hotels. There is no Hemming Plaza specific publication but it is mentioned in literature about downtown attractions. CM Gulliford suggested, considering Hemming Plaza’s historical significance, that information plaques be set up to help tell the story of Hemming Plaza.

Emily Lisska, of the Jacksonville Historical Society, gave a brief history of the park and explained that she often uses it as a starting point for her historic tours. But because of the current atmosphere in the park, teachers have asked her not to bring school children into the park. CS Lee was rather disturbed upon hearing this information.

At around 11 a.m., Daryl Joseph of Parks and Recreation joined the meeting.

By a 3-0 vote it was decided to proceed with the surveys and the Committee charged DVI with finding out how much it would cost an independent group to conduct the in-person surveys.

Continuing with the Agenda, Karen Nasrallah said she had compiled a list of garden clubs that could be contacted about getting involved in landscaping portions of the park.

The status of removing benches, tables and chairs was brought up. CM Lee read the written “Hemming Plaza Sub-Committee Recommendations” (included in Minutes package). The sub-committee suggested the following:

* Keep 15 to 20 benches but distribute them throughout the park.
* Recommended that DVI oversee the utilization and storage of tables and chairs.
* The moveable tables and chairs would be in the park from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
* Recommended purchasing 30 tables and 100 chairs made of power-coated steel with UV protection.
* Recommended light-weight furniture for ease of moving and storage.
* Establish a furniture schedule.

Discussion ensued about the pros and cons of the permanent tables. Pros thought that removing them was an unnecessary expense and that it was a rather drastic move. Those opposing the tables said the tables attract nuisance users, gambling and encourage people to “squat” in one place for long periods of time.

Assistant Chief Michelle Cook suggested that the park needed a “drastic repackaging” that included programming to redefine how the park is used. She noted that the recent increased police presence in the park has had a positive impact in reducing the congregating at the corner of Laura and Duval Streets as well as quieting loud discussions and arguments. However, such an extensive use of manpower cannot be a permanent solution as she is receiving complaints about too many offers covering a relatively small part of the downtown core.

Discussion continued about removing the permanent tables and chairs. It was suggested that no changes in the park would be permanent. If they didn’t work, other solutions would be sought.

The Committee voted 3-0 to approve all of the sub-committee recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at 12:02 without addressing the agenda items concerning:

* Park security
* Programming
* Closing the park during renovations

Prepared by Dan Macdonald, ECA District 8, (904) 630-2737.

Package includes:

* Attendance Sheet
* Meeting Agenda
* Meeting Minutes
* Audio CD
* Hemming Plaza Sub-Committee Recommendations