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### **City to seek Laishley Park proposals**

PUNTA GORDA -- The city wants to see if private investment can help to add amenities to Laishley Park.

City Manager Howard Kunik got the go-ahead from the Community Redevelopment Agency Board -- which includes the Punta Gorda City Council, Jane Sturges and [Frank Weikel](#) -- to move forward with "phase two" improvements to the park.

How far the second phase will develop will depend on the city receiving proposals from the private sector. City Finance Director David Drury made it clear the CRA faces a tight budget for the next two years and will until the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods see more redevelopment.

Earlier this year, attorney Michael Haymans' clients, Smugglers and Captain's Table restaurant owners Ron and Chris Evans, told the CRA board they were willing to pay for the planned outdoor market pavilion, parking, an interactive fountain and possibly other amenities in exchange for a lease to open an upscale "crab house" restaurant.

The restaurateurs would build a second two-story building at the marina. The first floor could be devoted for retail space, while the restaurant would occupy the second floor. The improvements could serve as rent for the property's use. They also expected to be given a long-term lease.

At the time, city officials didn't want to take up the offer because of potential complications to the city's effort to get a new submerged land lease from the state.

The time, however, might be right now.

In a memorandum to CRA members, City Attorney David Levin concluded, "I believe (state officials) was favorably disposed to grant the approval (of the submerged land lease) with the understanding that the principal use was for a public purpose, rather than a commercial endeavor where the public was only incidentally benefited.

Ancillary uses, such as restaurants and retail shops would be permissible as long as the primary use of the property remains public. Levin viewed those uses as consistent with the state lease.

Kunik said he would now like to put out a request for proposals (RSP) and see what is received.

"We would like to start now," Kunik said. Drafting and approving the proposal, issuing it and receiving responses, will take some time, possibly into January or February 2007, and Kunik suggested the first phase of the park should be completed when the CRA is ready to finalize plans for a second phase.

Councilwoman Marilyn Smith-Mooney suggested the city could have an agreement similar to the city's agreement at Fishermen's Village. She listed what she would want to see and not see at the park.

Among the amenities, Smith-Mooney said she'd like to see a "fast-food" or more economical restaurant, not just an upscale restaurant at the park, as well as a ship's store. She also mentioned a developer paying for the planned outdoor market pavilion, an interactive fountain and an

enclosure for the proposed park carousel.

"But I want to make sure we don't end up with T-shirt or tourist shops," Smith-Mooney said.

Councilman David Phelen said he thought now wasn't the time to get as detailed as Smith-Mooney proposed. However, Phelen also supported the idea of issuing an RSP.

"We do need to move forward," Phelen said.

Councilman Tom Poole didn't oppose the idea, but he did questioned the timing. Poole said he'd rather see the park up and running and then determine what should be added or needed.

"(Lashley Park) may energize itself," he said.

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