

Beacon, July 2, 2010

# Council approves purchase of property on 49th Street

By MELISSA LATTMAN

**PINELLAS PARK** – The City Council approved the purchase of the former Tire Kingdom property at its June 24 meeting.

The parcel at 7900 49th St. adjoins city property on the front, back and side. It is right by the Performing Art Center's new parking area.

The council discussed the merits of the \$300,000 purchase with the money coming from Community Redevelopment Area funds.

"I think the property should stay on the tax roles," said Councilwoman Sandra Bradbury. "I don't think it's the time to do it."

Councilman Rick Butler thought the city should act on the opportunity.

"There's a few times when property adjoins city property and

it makes sense to purchase it," Butler said. "The parcel just happens to join existing city land. If we have the opportunity to get something at this time, let's do it."

Councilman Jerry Mullins said it was a key piece of property that ties in with existing city properties.

"If we don't jump on it now," he said, "we may be wishing we had. It makes sense to buy it right now."

The parcel price was about \$450,000 last year and a current appraisal of the property was \$330,000, said Michael Gustafson, city manager.

Ed Kosinski, a local resident, asked if that figure was an independent appraised value.

Butler said it was an independent appraisal completed by someone the city selected.

Jay Wallace, another resident, asked if the parcel was being purchased for a particular use.

Butler said the city had been looking at the parcel for a while because of its proximity to other city land. For the short term the building would be used for warehousing city property such as city records.

Butler said the council would need to discuss plans for the property. He said there were many possibilities and the parcel could be used as a charging station for electric cars.

The city came to the agreement with the property owner on June 24. The parcel was slated for auction on June 25, Mayor Bill Mischler said.

Butler said at an auction there was no guarantee the city would have been able to get the parcel and they would have had to pay additional fees.

The council approved the city's purchase of the former Tire Kingdom property with a 3-2 vote. Bradbury and Councilman Ed Taylor voted against it.

# Legislators say state deficit will be biggest challenge

By BOB McCLURE

**TREASURE ISLAND** – A panel of four state legislators all agreed June 24 that the next session of the Florida Legislature will likely be the most challenging in the state's recent history.

Speaking during a Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce Learn at Lunch session at the Treasure Island Yacht and Tennis Club, State Sen. Dennis Jones, R-Treasure Island; State Rep. Jim Frishe, R-St. Petersburg; State Rep. Bill Heller, D-St. Petersburg; State Sen. Charlie Justice, D-St. Petersburg; and State Rep. Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg all predicted the state's anticipated \$5 billion deficit for fiscal year 2011-12 would be monumental to work around.

"This past session was interesting from a budget perspective," said Frishe, "and it will be doubly interesting next year when the (federal) stimulus money goes away."

Kriseman noted that it's really going "to be imperative on leadership to make the decision to make the cuts necessary or find other means of revenue."

Some of the deficit will be made up through a gaming compact with the Seminole Indian Tribe, which passed this past session.

The agreement calls for the state to receive \$1.4 billion over the next five years in exchange for giving the Tribe exclusive operation of blackjack at three casinos in Broward County and casinos in Immokalee and Tampa. All seven tribe casinos in Florida would continue to operate Las Vegas-style slot machines.

The compact will be reviewed every five years for possible revision and extended up to 20 years.

"Right now, they (the Tribe) don't have to pay the state of Florida a dime of tax unless we give them something in return," said Jones. "This gives them the right to operate slot machines with a guaranteed minimum of \$150 million a year (to the state)."

In addition to the budget, Frishe predicted healthcare – more specifically, Medicaid reform – would be a huge topic next spring. He also hopes to see legislation concerning computer system security.

"The (National Security Agency) is hosting a seminar soon in Orlando and I hope we can participate in that," said Frishe.

Kriseman said he would continue sounding the trumpet for his primary issues – restraints on oil drilling and the promotion of renewable energy.

Heller, a professor at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg campus, said education would also be a big topic in 2011.

"Education reform will be back," Heller said. "Senate Bill 6 (which was vetoed by Gov. Charlie Crist) had a lot of things in it that weren't acceptable. If you're going to have reform, you've got to have a buy-in by everyone involved."

Heller said he would also push for additional funds for higher education, senior-related legislation and help for persons with developmental disabilities.

Justice talked about legislation passed this year to protect homeowners near a chemical spill such as the Raytheon spill in St. Petersburg.

"What we passed this year makes sure the public is informed when there is a problem like this in their neighborhood," Justice said. "There's more work ahead on this."

Justice also pointed to a bill that passed this year allocating \$300,000 to Florida National Guardsmen and their families when National Guardsmen are forced to serve overseas.

On another topic, the legislators were asked what efforts are being made to close loopholes in the state's sales tax.

"We need to be consolidating the exemptions we've got and make sure they serve the public purpose," said Frishe.

# Freedom Fest slated for today

**PINELLAS PARK** – Freedom Fest 2010 that opens today at noon offers a wide range of entertainment ranging from live music to fireworks.

The event will be at the Town Square Plaza Park 5121 80th Ave. Entertainment begins at 2 p.m.

This year's Freedom Fest will offer a little bit of everything from festival events and activities, a concert for the adults.



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