



Editorial: West Ashley park plan a winner

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The new West Ashley park that the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission plans to purchase will be a boon to the public and to ongoing efforts in Charleston and Dorchester counties to restrain urban development.

Although the park purchase would require a change in the county's urban growth boundary, the shift will be relatively insignificant, and will have the larger benefit of designating the urban line definitively for the future.

The park would be the county's largest, at nearly 1,600 acres, and would be purchased with proceeds of the half-cent local option sales tax approved by county voters, in part, to provide greenbelts for the area. A park along the edge of the urban growth boundary will accomplish that purpose.

Moreover, it will be linked to a 232-acre city park planned adjacent to the site, and is close to other tracts for which conservation easements have been granted, in conjunction with the campaign to preserve the historic Ashley River district from large-scale development. The Poplar Grove project, sharply downsized as a result of a cooperative public-private effort, is nearby as well.

The PRC wrestled long and hard over the purchase of the park, and agreed to the deal only after its price was reduced from \$8 million to \$6.5 million, and the owner agreed to provide 200,000 cubic yards of dirt for road development within its boundary. Commissioner Robert New, initially skeptical of the idea, finally agreed to the purchase, saying "for the price, we take a lot of potential development area off the table."

Much of the developable area is along scenic Rantowles Creek, for which public access would be provided.

The park land would be purchased from the Long Savannah developers, who originally intended to seek a shift in the urban growth boundary to allow 4,800 units. As now proposed, the shift would allow for 3,600 units, and provide for a major county park along a scenic waterway. Changes to the initial plans include concessions to the adjacent Red Top

community, which has withdrawn its opposition.

Long Savannah would be annexed by the city upon completion, and the overall concept for the development and park has been endorsed by Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. The Coastal Conservation League has endorsed the idea as well.

Shifting the urban growth boundary is not a precedent that should be lightly made, but the positive benefits of the park — for the public's enjoyment and as a permanent barrier to growth — are worth the trade-off. The fact that the park purchase combines with continuing conservation efforts in the area should further encourage council's approval of the commission's plan.

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