

Preserving land for Future Generations

Women Lead Efforts to Turn Space Into Dorothea Dix Park

By Danielle Jackson

Fall 2007 - When the state decided to build a new mental hospital and move patients from Dorothea Dix Hospital in downtown Raleigh in 2002, it was left to the legislature to decide what to do with the land.



A proposed plan for Dorothea Dix Park has been developed by H3 Studio.

Since that time, a surging grassroots effort has emerged to preserve the greenspace surrounding the current hospital and turn the land into a world-class destination park. Several area women are at the forefront of the effort, which has received support from the likes of Mayor Charles Meeker and Councilwoman Jessie Taliaferro, among others.

Friends of Dorothea Dix Park, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission of saving all 306 acres of the campus for a destination park, also hopes to preserve greenspace and historically significant buildings on the site.

Women join the cause



Carol Apperson, administrative manager of the plant biology department at N.C. State University, serves on the board of Friends of Dorothea Dix Park. She became involved after reading various newspaper articles on the topic.

“We read about the selling of the land and that some people wanted it be a park,” she says. “We agreed with that concept.”

Since joining the board, Apperson also has become involved with Dix 306, another grassroots effort to spread awareness of the project through signs posted on neighborhood lawns. “The important thing is that it’s the right thing to do for our children, as well as for the economic growth and preservation of life for generations to come,” Apperson says.



For Jeanne Moyer, a realtor with Cary-based Triangle State Realty, the decision to join the cause was a no-brainer.

“Every great city has a park,” she says. “What attracts people here is the open space we have. When you see the outcrying of people saying they want a park and realize what it can bring, you wonder why legislators and anyone with a role in making this a reality are not responding.”



Kim Peacock, a substitute teacher, became involved for a more personal reason: Her nine-year-old son.

“The decisions made for this land will affect him, his children and his grandchildren,” she says. “Do we need another strip mall, or do we need greenspace for future generations? With the stroke of a pen, the General Assembly could make this happen for our state.”

Building support

Through the efforts of many, support has been felt across the board, which is why many are hopeful that legislators ultimately will agree with the Dix park concept.

According to Public Policy Polling — which recently surveyed 559 likely municipal voters July 25 in Raleigh — 58 percent of respondents would support an \$80 million bond referendum to help the city purchase the Dorothea Dix property from the state to turn it into a city park.

While Meeker recently made a \$10.5 million offer for the city to purchase the land, it remains under review by the legislature, which must determine what to do with the property before it closes in late November.

“As Raleigh grows and is developed, there soon won’t be any more greenspace left,” Apperson stresses.

“It’s important to set those acres aside,” she adds. “It will give people downtown a place to go and bring their families on weekends. We can make it a destination for them.”



Downtown Raleigh as seen from the Dorothea Dix property. July 2004 file photo.

Staff photo

Saving Dix

There are many ideas on the table for what could become of the land currently occupied by the Dorothea Dix Hospital in downtown Raleigh. Supporters of Friends of Dorothea Dix and Dix 306 foresee a world-class destination park that would be used for hosting cultural events and concerts, while an Urban Land Institute (ULI) development plan would consist of 248 acres of mixed-use development and a 215-acre park on state land. In June, more than \$20,000 was pledged during a fundraiser to save the park.



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