

Mirror Lake renovation gets a boost

By JON WILSON

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Poked, prodded and discussed during a weekend planning session, downtown's Mirror Lake area won a City Council member's suggestion that money will be available to renovate historic buildings there.

"I think there's money for capital projects that make sense. And a lot of times historic preservation makes sense because you're getting two for one. You're getting a grant and all you have to do is come up with matching money," said council member Bill Foster.

Penny for Pinellas would provide the match, not property taxes or the city's operating capital, Foster said.

The session on Friday evening and Saturday morning drew about 60 people interested in the future of such sites as the shuffleboard, lawn bowling and chess clubs.

The bigger picture involves creating a leisure district that complements other downtown neighborhoods and ties in with such sites as the Coliseum, the Carnegie Library and the Sunshine Center.

The meetings produced no decisions. The council will make those later - perhaps much later.

Bob Jeffrey, the city planner who has been guiding the Mirror Lake discussions, said Tuesday he thinks "more input" is needed, either from another session such as last weekend's, or that produced by a task force.

Meanwhile, most of those in attendance showed the city's oldest non-park recreation area some love.

"It was clear to me that there was a strong 'no demolition' theme running through the reports offered at the end of Saturday," said Chris Kelly, a neighborhood activist whose particular favorite is the weekly "shuffle" at the old club.

In fact, the mood seemed to be one of keeping what's there and enhancing the sites to produce money, Foster said.

"Let's save the buildings and get somebody to build a cafe, or something overlooking (Mirror Lake)," Foster said. He also mentioned the area as a possible venue for the Saturday Morning Market.

A caveat, said Foster, is that the city couldn't operate enterprises there.

"We can build anything we want. We just can't afford to run it," he said.

But Kelly pointed out that virtually all the activities that take place now at the clubs are volunteer-operated, outside the city budget.

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