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Tybee council to consider Memorial Park plan

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Tybee Island's Memorial Park proposal, more than a year in the making, will be laid before the public for open input this evening.

The battle lines, however, are already drawn, and casualties have come.

In the time since a City Council advisory committee presented its report in March, council members have voted to make changes to the plan.

Tybee's dog park: gone.

A proposed skate park: gone.

A veterans memorial - once planned for a quiet, reflective spot on Jones Avenue near the cemetery - has been moved front and center to Butler Avenue, the island's main artery.

And supporters for both spots say the change was made with the full backing of local veterans.

Fueling the speculation over the shifting memorial are reports that an anonymous donor offered to pay for the \$150,000 memorial only if it would be moved to Butler.

Not true, said Ronnie Tatum, chairman of the veterans memorial committee.

"We haven't had anyone approach us with that little deal," he said.

Tatum plans to attend tonight's meeting to deliver this message: "I'm going to tell them this monument's not for sale."

The memorial's new location - in the middle of what was once the dog park - came about only after the council voted to remove the dog and skate parks, Tatum said.

He approached the council about moving the monument once he realized those two parks were gone.

"There's nothing mischievous or underhanded," he said. "When I realized the space might be there, I asked. There weren't any politics involved."

A non-voting member of the advisory committee disagrees. Libby Bacon is disappointed in several of the changes in the park plan, including moving the memorial.

The committee's liaison to the veterans memorial told the committee the veterans voted unanimously to have it in a quieter, more reflective area of the park.

Since the vote to move it, she said, some of the veterans she has talked to said they were pressured to put it where the donor wanted it.

The council in July voted to approve moving the memorial to the Butler location. In making the motion, Mayor Pro Tem Wanda Doyle noted that an anonymous donor wanted it moved.

That the vote came in the middle of the council's 90-day public input period has been upsetting to other Tybee residents, especially the park committee's chairwoman, Janice Bentley.

"I'm just totally disgusted that with the amount of time and effort we put in that they couldn't leave the plan the way it was for public input," she said. "It's like a slap in the face to any Tybee resident who has volunteered.

"I'm going to think long and hard before I volunteer for anything for the city again."

Doyle also has voted with the majority to get rid of the dog and skate parks.

She made that a focal point of her campaign for re-election, she said, so she doesn't think too many residents will be surprised by the changes to the plans made by the new council, which acquired three new members in January.

The dog park and the skate park, she said, made the overall park too crowded. She also didn't like that they would be so prominently displayed in the city's core area. The park is on Butler, between Fourth and Fifth streets.

Doyle expects vocal opposition tonight, and she said she plans to listen to foes of the plan and respect their opinions.

But she does not believe they speak for the majority.

"I think it's a small group on the island," she said. "I think that was shown in the election results."

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