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Tybee park changes ignite public discord

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A one-hour public hearing on the Memorial Park plan did little to improve any sense of unity on Tybee Island.

Public comments were supposed to be limited to providing feedback about the suggested improvements for the park along Butler Avenue. But as some speakers crept off topic, the divisions were on full display.

Twice during the meeting, council members Eddie Crone and Wanda Doyle walked out on speakers. Crone left first as Sandi Postle began reading into the record results of a Tybee Neighbors Association survey of what responding residents thought of the park changes.

Saying he would not listen to anyone who had once called him "scum," Crone walked out, followed by Doyle.

Later, when Postle's husband, Dave, voiced an allegation that a council member had been heard promising some neighbors not to worry about where the city's dog park would be relocated, Crone walked out again, followed by Doyle.

Tybee Mayor Jason Buelterman tried to call them back to the meeting and then addressed the council and the audience of about 40. The mayor said that compared to the problems the city of Galveston was encountering after Hurricane Ike, he could not understand why Tybee residents were allowing such division.

Subsequent speakers offered their thoughts on the conflicts. Larry Nesbitt, former president of the Tybee Island Residents and Property Owners Association, blamed discord on supporters of the skateboard park, who remain unhappy that they lost a spot in the park.

The three new council members who took office in January got there because they understood that most

residents did not want a skate park, preferring instead to preserve green space over pouring more concrete, Nesbitt said.

"I've never seen an issue drive an election like this did," he said. "People on this island did not want a skateboard park."

In closing, Nesbitt said the island is not divided.

"We just need to work together a little more and do what the majority want," he said.

Speaker Gloria Leonard said the community indeed is split, and she tried to place blame on the Property Owners Association in part for not supporting the skaters.

The veterans memorial, which will go where the dog park was, drew support from both groups, but there was still disagreement about whether an anonymous donor had demanded that the memorial be moved to Butler Avenue.

Doyle tried to clarify what happened, saying that in making the motion in July to move the memorial, she talked about an anonymous donor who had come forward. Doyle also called for the memorial to be placed on Butler, but she never indicated the two were directly related, she said Thursday.

Ronnie Tatum, chairman of the veterans memorial committee, said no donor had sway.

"At no time were we coerced," he said.

The council listened to the comments without voting on the plan.

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