

opinion

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Editorial board: Those at left, Bobby Martin, editorial
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Tala Reynolds, J.R. Ross and Ron Salem.

A VERSE FOR TODAY

For the Lord hears and poor,
And does not despise His prisoners.
Psalm 69:33

Hemming Park needs collaboration

Hemming Park is a much better place than it was just two years ago.

There is more positive energy in the downtown park on a daily basis. Just observe Hemming during a week-day lunch hour: It's awash with musicians and people who have streamed out of their offices to buy trendy fare from food trucks and enjoy a little early afternoon sun.

And there are more people who are drawn to Hemming Park each day for constructive and enriching reasons, attending everything from programs for kids and police fairs to community gatherings and food festivals.

Does much more work need to be done before Hemming Park can fully live up to its lofty status as "the city's front porch"?

Yes.
Have there been stumbles by the Friends of Hemming Park, the startup organization that assumed day-to-day operations of Hemming in 2014?

Sure.
But progress has clearly been made in improving Hemming Park.

For instance:
■ Between September 2014 and this spring, an estimated 675,000 people visited Hemming Park for events.

■ During the last two years, more than 80 events at Hemming Park have drawn 500 or more in attendance.

It would be foolhardy to squander that forward momentum because everything hasn't been done perfectly.

It's encouraging that the City Council has come around to that reality by agreeing to provide \$58,000 to Friends of Hemming Park to continue managing the site.

This is no time to hobble the effort to make Hemming an inviting and accommodating park for everyone in our community.

Council decided to provide the \$58,000, far less than the \$150,000 that Friends of Hemming Park had sought, after weeks of council members questioning how the nonprofit had managed the park and spent previous funds since 2014.

TIME-CONSUMING DEBATE

Here is just some of the second-guessing that went on during the council's time-consuming inquisition of Friends of Hemming Park:

■ Some council members railed that too many vagrants and others continue to hang around Hemming Park.

But they weren't as vocal when it came to recognizing the reality that you can't throw people out of a public park — and blatantly violate their rights — simply because you wish they weren't sitting (and sitting and sitting) in it.

■ Other council members questioned the Friends of Hemming Park's heavy focus on planning and scheduling events to hold in the park.

But they weren't as quick to offer better, specific ideas on how to inject life into Hemming.

Nor were the micromanaging council members quick to grasp that one way to minimize the presence of vagrants is to have huge volumes of other people in Hemming Park — which is exactly what scheduling attractive events helps to do.

Nor were they quick to concede that when the city previously attempted to operate Hemming Park, the end result was a disaster — and that the city's parks and recreation department wants no part of overseeing Hemming on a daily basis.

■ Yet more council members were eager to rake through the expenses of Friends of Hemming Park, demanding answers on why money was spent to buy cups of coffee here, office furniture there.

But eventually these council members had to acknowledge — if less than eagerly — that they could and should have been closely monitoring Friends of Hemming Park's spending all along but had taken their "foot off the pedal" — as Councilman Danny Becton so accurately phrased it.

In short, too many council members sought excuses for the city to stop supporting Friends of Hemming Park — rather than solutions to put the city's support for the group on firmer ground.



Bruce.Lipsky@jacksonville.com

Past and present. With the statue of Congressman Charles Bennett in the foreground, musicians perform in the background recently at Hemming Park.

A BETTER PARTNERSHIP, A BETTER PARK

By providing the \$58,000, City Council has thankfully realized that right now, this is the best way to improve Hemming Park:

Keep working with the group that's already making a genuine effort to do just that.

The Friends of Hemming Park has begun to address many of the issues raised by council members.

It has reformed how it keeps track of funds.

It has named the highly respected Bill Prescott to serve as interim director.

And it has scaled down its monthly expenses.

These moves and others are good-faith steps by the nonprofit to build a better partnership with the city that will lead to a better Hemming Park.

It's in the city's best interest to do the same.

There is every indication that a public-private partnership is the best solution for Hemming Park.

But both sides need to do their part with better communication and collaboration.

The park is too important to downtown and the city.

The Cummer

Complacency is the enemy of progress

The chief curator and associate director of a museum resigns after 15 years of devotion to the institution.

Under her leadership, the museum immersed itself in its community and made international waves with its groundbreaking programming.

But her resignation came after an exhibition representing minority communities garners too much controversy.

Afterward, the museum is never able to re-establish its credibility within the museum world. It eventually goes bankrupt and its collection sold away.

This is the story of The Corcoran Museum in Washington and the resignation of its associate director and chief curator Jane Livingston in 1989.

IMPORTANT LESSON

But you would think it sounds like the first act of a play regarding The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens.

Its director, Hope McMath, after more than 20 years of devotion to the museum, has resigned.

She stepped down in the midst of overseeing powerful exhibitions inclusive of Jacksonville's minority communities, such as the current exhibition LIFT, which garnered much praise from this very newspaper.

The resignation of McMath is a scandal.

A PERSONAL STORY

I grew up in the Cummer.

I was part of its inaugural class of junior docents, and I volunteered for Camp Cummer during the summers. I went to Douglas Anderson School of the Arts and eventually went on to graduate school for art and critical theory, becoming an arts writer and curator.

This path was forged in no small part by my experiences at The Cummer.

Hope worked tirelessly to make the Cummer as inclusive as possible.

She pioneered art programs like Women of Vision: a monthly gathering for low-vision and blind women to take art classes.

She brought in Very Special Arts for children with disabilities.

And as director, she was responsible for incredible and beneficial changes to the museum: renovating and expanding the galleries, gardens and the museum's outreach to the community as well as exhibiting diverse and inclusive artworks.

But it seems some people in Jacksonville would rather the Cummer's mission be changed back to quieter, less complicated views of culture and ignore a museum's inherent obligation to be fair and representative of its community.

Will this be the downfall of the Cummer?

To those who possess this complacency, beware: In your desire to see a less complicated view of culture, you may do serious damage to an institution we all love, just as the stakeholders of The Corcoran did to theirs.

Calder Yates, Jacksonville

Another view: Nate Beeler Columbus Dispatch

GOUGING



Letters from Readers

HILLARY CLINTON A historic change

Surprisingly enough, I have heard some rather questionable words this election cycle.

Some of these comments may pertain to Hillary Clinton.

These comments may mention her womanhood or "A woman can't be president."

It is true that Clinton will not fit our idea of a president. This is simply because all of the presidents we know happen to be men.

But what if this idea of the president were to change? In selecting Clinton as our 45th president, it most certainly will.

The real debate should discuss whether this change would constitute an improvement; I believe it will offer a sizable improvement.

Her experiences differ from those of men, and thus she will offer new insights and skills that will influence the nation in a positive way.

Our Founding Fathers advocated for the power of diversity within our belief systems.

Well, after 44 men, it is about time we put femininity in our presidency.

Carter Delegal, student, Jacksonville

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT Bring in casinos

I have been lobbying to take the old City Hall and Duval County Courthouse and lease the property to a casino.

With a casino, we would have first-class entertainment; what a perfect way to drive traffic to downtown Jax! This would be a great first step to revitalizing our downtown.

Move JEA out of the old Ivey's Department store building and make an offer to one of the major department stores. Perfect anchors to restore our downtown.

This is a win-win situation for Jacksonville. Stop the gambling buses to Tampa, the junket planes to Mississippi and the

Bahamas.

We already have one of the largest and most profitable poker rooms in Florida, dog tracks, bingo, scratch-offs, lottery and fantasy football.

Please do not say we do not want gambling in Jacksonville; it's already here!

Don't think violence can get any worse, this might actually help reduce it. Let's restore the "Bold New City of the South."

Karl Frisch, Jacksonville

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS Trump's straight talk

Many supporters of Donald Trump say one thing they really admire about him is his refusal to be politically correct.

Other things they like about him usually circle back to this: Nothing is off limits, including his views on immigration, Muslims, China, Mexico and political opponents, all delivered with the same unfiltered, unrestrained voice.

I certainly agree that political correctness at times reaches a ridiculous point. "Non-PC" was originally a humorous way of describing speech that a politician dare not use for fear of alienating a substantial portion of the electorate.

Then, as with most movements, things went too far. Before you know it, people were criticized for saying things that

might be misconstrued as offensive.

Pretty soon everyone was walking on eggshells and speaking in coded language. Innocent words were abandoned.

So, yes, I can empathize with supporters of Trump who think he is being unfairly maligned for "telling it like it is." Political correctness should have limits.

On the other hand, it is quite possible to go too far in the opposite direction. When it turns out that your extreme non-PC approach is actually turning off a lot of voters, perhaps it is time to change your tone. Even if you have been boasting about your "outsider" status.

I'm afraid that's what happens to outsiders when they decide to run for elective office: They automatically become politicians. And you have to be at least a little bit politically correct if you ultimately want to be an outsider who actually gets in.

Andrew Balee, Fernandina Beach

FREE COLLEGE TUITION Advice from a senior citizen

I hope the lovely young student who wrote a letter supporting Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton will ask where is the money coming from to have free college, free health care, free food stamps and welfare for everyone who needs it?

This young lady isn't paying into the system or worked her whole life to save for the future as we retired people did.

Margaret Thatcher said, "The problem with socialism is that you will eventually run out of other people's money."

Venezuela has been a socialist country for 17 years and look at it now. The people are fighting in the streets just for food.

I hope she will work hard for what she wants and will get them on her own and not just given to her from the government.

You can't enjoy the fruits of your labor unless you work for them yourself.

There is another quote I hope this young lady knows, "There is no free lunch."

Rita Friedman, Palm Valley

LETTER POLICY

Letters of about 200 words are preferred. Letters are edited for space, clarity and newspaper style. All letters should include a name, address, occupation and telephone number.

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