

ST. JOHNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION ROUNDTABLE
5650 A1A South #103, St. Augustine, FL 32084 (904) 471-0312

Board of County Commissioners
St. Johns County
Post Office Drawer 349
St. Augustine, FL 32085

January 1, 2001

Dear Commissioners:

The purpose of this letter is to communicate to the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners the concern of the St. Johns County Civic Association Roundtable regarding the lack of any policy, written or unwritten, addressing the private sale of county property, that is without competitive bidding and without public input.

This issue came to the attention of the Roundtable as a result of the recent sale of county property on State Road 206 to the Crescent Beach Baptist Church. The property was sold at appraised value without competitive bidding. In addition the property was sold to the Crescent Beach Baptist Church without affording other nonprofit organizations, and indeed, other religious groups, the opportunity to buy the property.

The Roundtable recognizes that Florida Statutes permit the unadvertised private sale of public lands, without competitive bidding, if a public purpose is to be served by the projected use of the property, and that, in this case, the sale by County was well within its authority. However, this sale raises several troubling questions. Was the property in question truly surplus? Could the taxpayers of the county have been better served by sale of the property at fair market value as opposed to appraised value? Would a lease arrangement allowing the county to reclaim the property in the future have been a more farsighted approach? For what purpose will the funds generated by the sale be used? Would the use of the property by some other nonprofit organization serve a higher public purpose than that proposed by the Crescent Beach Baptist Church?

Although the County followed the letter of the law, there is no question that more open and equitable procedures could have been adopted and followed. This approach would have eliminated the perception of some that in this case the interests of the St. Johns County taxpayer were not adequately protected.

As a consequence the Roundtable would urge the Board of County Commissioners to adopt a clear policy with regard to the private sale of public lands, a policy which such sales would be open to public scrutiny and comment and would more effectively address the concern mentioned above.

The St. Johns County Civic Association Roundtable is an organization of organizations, if you will, that has been in being for over 10 years. It is currently composed of some 39 organizations with a combined membership of over 25,000. The purpose of the Roundtable is to maintain and, wherever possible, to improve the quality of life of the citizens of St. Johns County. Its meetings are open to the public.

Sincerely

George Gregory Jacunski
Chairman
St. Johns County Civic Association Roundtable

Cc. The St. Augustine Record