

Task Force Out to Discover Unmet Needs of the Aging Population

By Chuck Bell
Staff Writer

The newest county task force formed to tackle a problem is the Task Force on the Elderly.

"Our older people have a lot of problems," said Chief Executive Officer Manuel J. Maloof, who ordered creation of the task force and attended its first meeting. "Now that I'm getting older myself I have come to realize just how serious those problems can be."

Sue Krueger, Deputy Director for Intergovernmental Relations of the DeKalb County Planning Department, and the Rev. Chet Grey, rector of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, were named co-chairmen of the task force.

The task force will split into four committees. One committee will investigate health problems facing the elderly while the other three will study transportation, housing, and crimes against the elderly. The

committee reports will be combined into a final report which will include legislative recommendations that will be passed along to the county's General Assembly delegation.

The task force is expected to take a year to complete its report.

"We're hoping that the quality of life for many of the elderly in DeKalb County can be improved," the Rev. Grey said. "The poor elderly and the low-income elderly are sort

of left in the lurch. Even where there are services available to them, they are not always aware of what is available. And transportation is such a problem as well. We hope we can at least begin the process of addressing some of these issues."

Senior citizens are the fastest growing segment of the county's population. According to census data, between 1970 and 1980, the county's overall population grew by 16 percent. During that same period, the over-60 population in DeKalb increased 48 percent. The growth was even more dramatic in the higher age groups. For example, the number of people 75 or older in DeKalb County increased 64 percent between 1970 and 1980.

Judith Hagebak, director of the DeKalb Community Council on Aging, said the trend is continuing and that funding of programs to deal with problems of the elderly is not keeping pace. "We've been able to

maintain services but we haven't been able to have any growth," she said.

Declarth City Commissioner Elizabeth Wilson, also a member of the task force, was similarly excited about the possibilities. "I think it's great," Ms. Wilson said. "The closer I get to it, the more I feel that we need to do something for our older citizens. I was just delighted when Manuel asked me to serve on the task force."

Ms. Wilson said that through her work as director of the Oakhurst Community Health Center she has become keenly aware of the problems faced by the elderly. "Housing is a problem," she said. "Transportation is a problem. Loneliness is a problem. These problems aren't something that's happening somewhere else that you can just read about. It's here, it's real, it's in our community and we have to deal with it."

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School/Park Debate Receives Board Airing

By STEVE TEASLEY

DeKalb's board of commissioners was scheduled this week to hear citizen positions on the proposed Vanderlyn School/Park master plan.

District 1 Commissioner Jean Williams asked for the debate March 14 when the commission met to vote on the plan.

With support of other commissioners, the board at that time deferred a decision until March 28 and scheduled a work session for March 21.

Mrs. Williams, acknowledging a flood of mail in recent weeks from both supporters and opponents of the project, said she believes that "since there definitely are two sides, each side deserves time to present its (arguments)."

When the item first came up March 14, it was on the commission business — not public hearing — agenda, with no opportunity for public input. A dozen or more residents were present, but could not speak.

Before the board is a plan that calls for putting \$140,653 in park improvements on school grounds.

If approved by the commission, the master plan would provide for

a tot play area, fitness area, eight basketball posts/backboards, additional basketball court space, fences, planting, grading, water fountains and a grassed seating area.

The project will be financed from a recent countywide parks and recreation bond issue.

The master plan was put together with the help of a citizens advisory committee.

However, there are other citizens opposed to the school/park concept. In recent weeks, many have been expressing fear that the changes will encourage increased crime and vandalism around the Dunwoody school.

Dunwoody neighbors at odds

By S.D. Rosenberg
Neighbor Staff Writer



Manuel Maloof

Tensions were high as opposing Dunwoody neighbors pleaded their cases to the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners about the future of a proposed public park on the grounds of the Vanderlyn

Elementary School as outlined in the county's master plan for parks.

Residents, both in favor of the park and against it, crowded the commission's work session room March 21 to tell commissioners what they think about the proposed \$140,000 in improvements to the school yard to create a public park in their neighborhood.

A 1987 county bond referendum approved funding to transform several elementary school playgrounds to take advantage of existing recreational facilities.

Speaking in favor of the park was

neighborhood resident Ro Augustine, who said the improvements proposed to the school could only help the community.

"It's despicable really, nothing we have out there is much," Augustine said. "We don't see there's a problem with the plan and it will benefit the community."

Residents opposed to the park cite possible increased drug activity added traffic and noise as reason for the commission to reject the county's proposal.

Bob Pratt, who lives across the street from the school, said the

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over proposed Vanderlyn Park

commission should take into consideration a neighborhood vote taken on the issue that marginally rejected the plan.

"Parks require the supervision of the neighborhood and 19 out of 21 neighbors who border the school have opposed this plan," Pratt said.

Eight other DeKalb County schools are slated to be converted for general public use by 1991. The elementary schools Atherton, Fernbank, Henderson Mill, Heritage, Pleasantdale, Rehoboth and Smokerise are included in the bond funding.

Only the Vanderlyn neighborhood has opposed the proposed plan to turn school playgrounds into mini-parks called community-school parks.

As a pilot community-school park, Sky Haven Elementary in southwest DeKalb been successful since it was converted in 1985. DeKalb County Chief Executive Officer Manuel Maloof said the area has not created more drug activity.

"We have built these neighborhood parks and they have worked, they have not caused crime to increase at all," Maloof said. "In

fact they have been a factor in causing crime to decrease."

Neighbors against the park recommended the county scrap the Vanderlyn project and move the park to a neighborhood that is not so divided about the issue, but Maloof said the improvements would benefit the entire area.

"Maybe it does inflict a burden on the adjacent property owners and that may not be fair, but nothing is ever 100 percent fair," Maloof said. "I feel very strong about doing positive things for children."