

# City eyeing increase in park duties

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

As anticipated, the Sarasota County Commission has officially notified the city of Venice it will not extend the current interlocal agreement to operate and maintain city parks.

Negotiations are underway to come up with a new one — this time with the city paying a greater share of the repair and maintenance costs.

How much greater is unclear.

“It is unfortunate that due to a dramatic shift in the economy ... the terms of the current agreement are no longer economically sustainable,” wrote County Commissioner Nora Patterson in a Jan. 25 letter to the city terminating the agreement.

“The way I read it, they want to give them back to us,” said Venice Mayor John Holic. “Let’s see you balance a budget with that.”

Holic agreed, however, that negotiations have only just begun.

City Engineer Kathleen Weeden said the city is already close to reaching a new agreement. She urged city council to reject the commission’s proposed draft amendment to the interlocal parks agreement that eliminates a requirement for a public hearing on the matter in favor of pressing forward with an extended 120-day window in which to resolve their differences. Council adopted the latter position unanimously.

Two new parks will be added to any new agreement — Maxine Barritt Park, which is technically part of Brohard Park, and the Venice Myakka River Park. Other parks covered under the agreement include Chauncey Howard, Chuck Reiter, Hecksher, Higel Park and boat ramp, Legacy Park, Marina Park, Venice Community Center, Venice Municipal Beach and Wellfield.

“We felt because we are so close, it’s in our interest to just resolve the agreement rather than adopt this” county amendment, Weeden said.

The most significant financial impact to the city, she said, will be assuming a maximum repair charge of \$5,000 per park per year.

“We’re still getting to that cost,” she said.

The county also wants the city to take additional responsibility to pay for vandalism in parks.

“We’re working to find out what that means,” Weeden said.

A final request by the county would clarify that Venice will pay for any capital improvements that exceed \$5,000. That’s current practice, but county officials want it in writing.

Weeden declined to place a dollar amount on the changes because negotiations are still under way.

“It could have a significant financial impact on our budget,” said Council Member Bob Daniels.

Holic noted there were no funds designated in the city budget last year to offset the new agreement, even though city officials have known for at least two years such a change was imminent.

E-mail: [ggiles@venicegondolier.com](mailto:ggiles@venicegondolier.com)