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It's Almost Over For Overton Park Proposed Expressway Will Become 'Biological Barrier'

By Jack Powell

An important figure in the fight to stop an expressway from bulldozing through Overton Park is Dr. Arlo Smith, professor of biology at Southwestern at Memphis. Dr. Smith is president of Citizens to Preserve Overton Park (CPOP), which is leading the fight against city hall.

After receiving a masters degree from Northwestern University, Dr. Smith received a Ph.D. from the University of Washington at Seattle. He has been president of the Tennessee Academy of Sciences, is a fellow in American Association for the Advancement of Science and other scientific organizations.

Dr. Smith has been at South-

western for 24 years and has held the rotating chairmanship of the Biology Department there.

The Tiger Rag: You're on record as opposing the present plans to build an expressway through

Smith: It'll be approximately 300 feet wide (the expressway) and 30 feet will be destroyed for construction easement and then returned to the city. There will be a pedestrian overpass 18 feet high

April 22 has been designated as the National Environmental Teach-In, a day of nationwide action on campuses and in local communities to examine the facts about the pending environmental crises. Coordination of efforts has been taken over by a student-run national office in Washington, D. C.

Overton Park, right?

Smith: Yes.

The Tiger Rag: Why?

with a long approach ramp. The expressway will be five feet above ground instead of being sunken.

There will be a wall in the neighborhood of 12 feet high to keep the automobile exhaust pollutants from entering the zoo, but the traffic will keep the air stirred up and the wall probably won't do much good.

The director of the zoo and the zoo veterinarian have both been opposed to this project because of the known damage to zoo animals that a nearby expressway will cause.

The playground and the wading pool will be partially replaced by parking lots. Pro-expressway people say that none of the facilities will be affected, but the playground and the wading pool will definitely be affected.

A biologist, in a fight to prevent the expressway through Overton Park, says traffic near the zoo will be dangerous to animals living there. "Running an expressway through the park will worsen the pollution in the park." - Turn to pages 4 and 5.

Also, the expressway will be a biological barrier to the wildlife of the park. Many animals will be killed trying to cross the expressway. Boy Scouts from seven states have officially recognized trails which will be obliterated by the expressway. Also, ROTC used the park to lay out compass trails, something which will be a lot harder when the expressway comes through.

The use of the park by high school and college ecology classes will be curtailed. Some huge trees over 350 years old will be destroyed. The wildlife protection area will be diminished. Proper zoo expansion will be severely hindered. The expressway will definitely contribute to both air and noise pollution in the park itself.

The Tiger Rag: What are you doing about the expressway?

Smith: We have a motion to stop expressway proceedings through the park until a better plan is presented that will do much less damage to the park.

The Tiger Rag: What kind of opposition are you facing?

Smith: The opposition of those who place great emphasis on the dollar much more than the livability of future Memphians. The opposition includes particularly the real estate interests and downtown businessmen who fear the deterioration of business and businesses if more people are not funneled downtown.

The Tiger Rag: Do you think downtown could be saved without running the expressway through the park?

Expressway construction will replace Boy Scout trails.

Smith: There were over 20 alternate plans for the route, some of which would certainly have been found to be feasible and prudent and which would have saved the park. With all the real estate transactions already having been made, it is very doubtful that an alternate route could now be found.

The Tiger Rag: How about a tunnel or a monorail?

Smith: Tunnels are being used more and more throughout the country. One in Pennsylvania has been stated to cost \$60 million for its one mile (tunnel). Accordingly, a tunnel under most of Overton Park should cost four-fifths of this. Yet there are those who are guessing \$107 million without having adequate statistics to prove it.

The defense says the tunnel would have to be 20 feet deep because of tree roots, but trees don't have tap roots that deep. If a complete bored tunnel is impossible, certainly a cut-and-cover design would cost less than \$50 million. The tunnel shouldn't have to have a 40-foot median either. Incidentally, the tunnel will not cost the Memphis taxpayer one cent directly.

About the monorail. Some sort of mass transit is going to be necessary in the next 30 years. Expressways become inadequate the moment they are finished. Mass transit should be financed by some of the 4 cents a gallon gasoline tax that now goes into the Federal Highway Trust Fund, all of which must be used for highway building. It will take a Congressional act to do this.

Mass transit vehicles like the monorail can practically eliminate noise and chemical pollution. Running an expressway through the park will worsen the pollution in the park, whereas a tunnel could be constructed so as to remove most pollution and a monorail

would cause very little pollution and noise.

Monorails could move many more people in a shorter length of time. People will soon have to give up being able to drive their car any place they want to go. In places like New York City, many people simply take the subway or a taxi. Memphis must look forward to a situation like this and to high-density population living (no single family dwellings anymore). This is where Memphis will need a lot more park land instead of getting rid of what we have now.

They took 50 acres off Riverside Park, 25 acres off Overton Park, they're planning to take some of the north side off Audubon and they're

planning an access road through Davy Crockett Park. Where will it stop?

The Tiger Rag: What are people who feel as you do up against?

Smith: The public is not being informed of the facts involved in putting an expressway through the park, not through radio, TV or the papers. Most of the information they get is incomplete, bearing toward omission rather than commission. The public is being left out, not just our side, for we represent the people of Memphis.

For example, the plans for this expressway have never been presented to the public where they would be aware of the immensity of the damage that would be done to the park. The Park Commission has repeatedly opposed the expressway through the park and has gone on record of such by resolutions. Yet they are quoted as approving the expressway and feeling that it would enhance the value of the park.

The City Council voted unanimously that the expressway should not go through the park and that another satisfactory route be found outside the park. If no such feasible and prudent alternate were found, the expressway was not to go through the park, but to be on the northern edge of the park and North Parkway.

The Tiger Rag: Why did the Council change its mind later?

Smith: Under duress and pressure by the Federal Highway Administration and State Highway Engineers, the City Council reluctantly voted by a majority of one that "there appears to be no

feasible and prudent alternate" route and they guessed the expressway would have to go through the park.

Nothing else was ever said about

taking it off the northern edge of the park. The alternate routes, which were apparently official, went through the Southwestern campus, the National Cotton Council, Parkway House and Snowden School; and the one south of the park went through the First Baptist Church, an exclusive neighborhood, hundreds of apartments and the Parkview Home for the Aged.

These two routes were apparently presented only to show how much cheaper it was to go through the park, rather than seriously being considered as alternates. The alternates did not appear in the official plans and only appeared when opposition to the park route seemed imminent.

The Tiger Rag: You spoke of pressure being applied to the City Council. What were the details?

Smith: In two "hearings" involving opposition of the expressway through the park, required transcripts were alleged to be defective because of malfunction of the equipment; and much of the testimony needed by the Secretary of Transportation for his decision about the park route was deleted. The deletions were of the testimony of the opposition. Sounds a little suspicious, doesn't it?

The Tiger Rag: Are other politicians receiving the same pressure the City Council received?

Smith: Both Representative Jack Smith and Congressman Dan Kuykendall met with a certain amount of threatened political persecution if they opposed the expressway going through the park.

The Tiger Rag: What do you mean by "persecution?"

Smith: They were told that if they relished a political future in the city of Memphis, that they'd better abstain from interfering with highway development.

We're said to be impeding progress in Memphis. If the destruction of such badly needed parkland is impeding progress, we'll find in the future that we're much more short of the 45 per cent of the recommended amount of parkland we have now.

We know we are working against politicians who knuckle under to

the real estate and other business interests and the lobbyists for auto manufacturers, real estate promoters, concrete, asphalt, petroleum interests and steel, and this is an almost impossible combination to fight.

This is what is found all over the United States, not just in Memphis. Until the public is completely informed through all news media and takes an interest in what is happening to them, our future is in great danger.