

Park Route Hearing Growls On In Nine Hours Of Argument

By MICHAEL LOLLAR
 If numbers mean anything, those in support of the Overton Park expressway barely bested their environmentalist rivals in City Hall yesterday.

The first day of public hearings in the case ended after almost nine hours of nonstop arguments by 42 park route supporters and 34 anti-interstate conservationists. At its peak, the audience included about 320 persons.

In all, 180 persons signed a roster indicating their wish to speak, and many others are expected to ask for a forum when the hearings resume at 9 this morning. A typewritten transcript of the arguments will be forwarded to Secretary of Transportation John Volpe, who will then make a new decision on the routing and design of Interstate 40 between Bon Air and Claybrook streets.

The only alternatives under consideration during the hearings are the presently proposed park route, the so-called L&N route arching north of Overton Park and the option to

abandon the highway altogether.

Most of the verbal barbs registered yesterday were repetitious arguments, stated many times in the past. A few speakers, however, offered novel suggestions and warnings.

The Rev. James Barr, pastor of the Church of the River (Unitarian), issued what may be the sternest warning ever made in 17 years of the battle: "We become agents of the Prince of the Underworld to desecrate this park land," he said.

"If we lose the center of our city, we lose the soul of our city," Mr. Barr added.

The only friction during the hearing occurred during a speech by Lt. Gov. John Wilder of Somerville. A man who identified himself as E. C. Freeman was reprimanded after he interrupted Mr. Wilder at least three times.

C. S. Moser, owner of the American Lumber Co. at 1684 Overton Park, stood, turned to Mr. Freeman and shouted, "You'll have your turn. Shut

up!" Mr. Freeman removed his glasses and started to rise, but both men were restrained by those in neighboring seats.

Mr. Wilder argued in favor of the park route. "Overton Park is an area that has some trees in it. It's not the only area that has trees between the East and West coasts."

Douglas Taylor, an assistant English professor at Shelby State Community College, asked that the right-of-way for the park route be abandoned and used to expand the present park.

He said he knows of at least one family of raccoons, including a mother and three babies, which makes its home directly in the path of the planned park route.

"I often go down at night and feed them ginger snaps," Mr. Taylor said.

Mrs. Sarah N. Hines, a member of the mass rapid transit committee of the Environmental Action Council, asked that a complete new study of the city's traffic situation be made in light of newly developed rapid transit systems.

Former Mayor Henry Loeb said that if the highway isn't completed Memphis citizens may face a suit by Arkansas taxpayers, who have helped pay for the new I-40 bridge under construction. Only 10 per cent of the bridge's cost is paid from local funds, with Arkansas citizens paying 40 per cent of that and Tennesseans 60 per cent.

L. V. Rando, an official of

the National Cotton Council at 1918 North Parkway, said that if the L&N route were approved the cotton council would have to relocate, "probably outside this city."

Thomas E. Maxson, former city engineer, said, "I know of many elderly people who would have died heartbroken because their homes were taken in the original right-of-way acquisitions. I therefore, can't in good conscience, now think of dispossessing a like number of people by acquiring right-of-way for another route."

Public officials who spoke in favor of the currently planned park route included Mayor Wyeth Chandler, City Councilman Thomas Todd, Gallaway, Tenn., Mayor Layton Watson, City Engineer Frank Palumbo, Fayette County Agent Troy Tomlin, Community Relations Commission Chairman Mrs. Frank 'Happy' Jones, Memphis Police Lt. Ed Sills, and former Fire and Police Director Frank Holloman now executive director of Future Memphis, Inc.

Also favoring the park route were representatives of Meth-

odist and Baptist hospitals, the Mid-South Medical Center Council, Memphis Board of Realtors, Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce and Future Memphis, Inc.

Opposing the park route, Mrs. Sunshine K. Snyder said, "This route has been approved and is being pushed by a small

group of self-serving men."

Also opposing the park route were Mrs. Frances Coe, chairman of the Memphis Board of Education, Shelby County historian Mrs. Ellen Davies Rogers, New York city planner Robert Hart, Overton Park Zoo veterinarian Dr. Daniel Laughlin, Southwestern biology professor Dr. Arlo I. Smith

and Mrs. William W. Deupree, a member of the board of advisers of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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