

OPE 30-12

Powerful Citizens Are Dealt One-Two Punch By Council

wow!
CA, Nov. 9, 1977

By TERRY KEETER

It was not a good day for a group known fairly or unfairly as "special interests" — the developers.

City Council members flexed their muscles a bit yesterday and delivered a one-two punch to some of the most powerful Memphis citizens as they killed the

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Wolf River Parkway — or at least moved it farther down the road — and stripped the restrictions from the industrial development corporation.

The parkway had the staunch support of Boyle Investment Co., which obviously had big plans for development of the sizable chunks of land owned by the firm and Boyle family members along the proposed road. The restrictions in the city-county industrial development corporation had not only the support of the Boyles but also such developers as Jack Belz and Thomas C. Farnsworth.

It was a loss for people who are not used to losing and those present for the event were not particularly gracious losers.

Boyle officials, who arrived an hour

before the meeting and left the minute the road bit the dust at 6:15 p.m., offered a terse "no comment."

Charles Cobb, attorney for Boyle, first gave a simple "no comment" also, but then turned to a reporter, slapped him on the shoulder and said, "Tell your editor congratulations. I'll never forget it." The Commercial Appeal editorially opposed the road construction and questioned whether it would solve traffic problems in East Memphis and Germantown.

During the three hours of sometimes heated debate, two recused council members — one with a financial interest and the other with a family interest in the road — killed time in a back room and listened to the activities over a speaker.

At one point, Councilman Tom Todd, whose wife is a cousin of Bayard Boyle, lounged in the audience and read a newspaper. On another occasion, Councilman Robert James, who owns an interest in a parcel in the path of the road, came into the council chamber and whispered with other councilmen, but obviously was not discussing the parkway proposal.

Several times during the discussion tempers flared and councilmen exchanged sharp barbs. And Frank Palumbo, city engineer and public works director, learned that all the pointed re-

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Compromise Left Outside Chamber

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marks wouldn't be saved for councilmen.

Councilman John Ford charged that Palumbo felt he could "come down here and continue to give us these lies and innuendoes."

"I can't say right now what I want to say to you," Ford said.

Council Chairman Oscar Edmonds then gaveled the proceedings to a halt and issued a luke-warm admonishment.

"Let's don't call anybody a liar — specifically," the chairman said.

Over in the Shelby County Administration Building, county Mayor Roy Nixon and a few top advisers listened to the proceedings on the radio and whooped it up over some of the council shenanigans.

They weren't whooping it up, however, when the final vote rolled in. If the priority of the road was a point of debate for city officials, there was no doubt of its high priority for the county.

Nixon was particularly critical of "my friend Chairman Edmonds," who he had been counting on to change his position and cast the decisive vote for the parkway. As much as any councilman, Edmonds had been the target of intense pressures from both sides since the council deadlocked on the issue two weeks ago.

Nixon was also critical of what he felt was an underhanded move on the opponents' part.

"I think the last minute call of the Corps of Engineers was an unfair thing and obviously an attempt to defeat the project . . . this was a tactic that was used that I think was a last minute effort to defeat it."

He was referring to an appearance by Col. Robert Lockridge, district engineer for the U.S. Engineers, who told the council that a wetlands permit would have to be obtained before the road could be built.

Lockridge was called to the meeting by Glenn Raines, a backer of the road project and a close personal friend and political ally of Nixon.

Nixon said he had heard the Wolf River Parkway and the industrial development corporation mentioned as a pair — with the possibility of one being voted up and the other down — but it had only been mentioned as a possible compromise by some unnamed council members.

There was also discussion in City Hall that this move — apparently aimed at keeping everybody happy and nobody ecstatic — was in the works. But it never materialized.

The council proceedings offered evidence of everything but a compromise, and the confrontations were not limited to one side against the other. On several occasions councilmen on the same side of the issue squared off and exchanged verbal blows.

Handwritten marks: a checkmark, an 'X', and the word "Said!"