

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

The parking committee

Our city manager, Mr. Martin, has assembled a committee to find out if there is a parking problem downtown. In his remarks to the *News-Leader*, Mr. Martin stated, "I want to take a hands off approach so it doesn't look like it's a political process." Really? A review of several aspects of this process, and I wonder how it can be anything but a political process.

To start, Mr. Martin has publicly stated that there is no parking problem. Doesn't that set a conclusion for the committee to reach? At least one of the chosen members has stated in discussion about the increase in downtown density that there is no parking problem. Mr. Martin is the city manager, and all of those he appointed are city employees! Could this influence how open their study will be? To truly avoid the appearance of a political process, Mr. Martin should have said we need to study downtown parking so I will be setting up a committee and anyone interested in serving on this committee please send a letter of interest. There are many things impacting downtown parking. What is decided about it will have far-reaching effects for years to come. Anyone affected by parking has a right to give their input and have that input heard.

I find it amusing that the city manager states there is no downtown-parking problem. Could that be because, if

you go to City Hall, there are 11 parking spaces reserved for city employees and only eight for the public? True, the public "may have to walk a block or two but that doesn't make it a problem." If there isn't a problem, and won't be in the future, I hope that Mr. Martin will remove those signs which reserve City Hall spaces for staff. Will he open them up for the overflow cars from the townhomes being built in the old lumberyard?

I find it very interesting that not one of his handpicked members has a vested interest in downtown parking. Where are the merchants whose livelihoods are affected by parking? Yes, Mr. Martin stated that the committee could add members if they saw fit. If there is no political process going on, why were these key stakeholders excluded from the start?

Let us all remember the (Planning Advisory Board) and what was done to that board when it failed to follow the wishes of our City Commission. All of the members were removed and replaced by handpicked members from each commissioner. Let's also remember that a commissioner has the power to remove a member if they don't like their vote. No political process there? If this is to be an open and fair study of parking, the committee should be made up of city staff, merchants and residents.

Philip A Chapman III
Fernandina Beach