

OUTRAGE!

Angry citizens urge City Commission to restore their beautiful median



THEN
AUG 2003

Secret deal turns publicly-owned green space into 'private' parking lot

No notification to neighbors!

By CAL DEAL

The First Christian Church — armed with a “secret” city permit issued without public input — has marred an attractive city-owned median by putting 14 asphalt parking spaces on it.

Drivers entering the Poinciana Park neighborhood now find themselves staring at a row of car butts instead of a beautiful green vista.

Citizens are fighting to undo this terrible precedent, which has city-wide implications. They want the asphalt removed and their beautiful green space restored. This growing anti-asphalt effort is supported by The Council of Fort Lauderdale Civic Associations; Jeryl Madfis, president of the South Andrews Business Association, the Poin-

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NOW
OCT 2004

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH got a city permit to put 'private' asphalt parking spaces on this public land. Local property owners were never notified.

THE 10TH COMMANDMENT

"Thou shalt not covet ... any thing that is thy neighbor's."

— Exodus 20:17

SCHOOL DROPOFF BLOCKS TWO ROADS



TRAFFIC CHAOS occurs in the mornings when the Charter School of Excellence uses the middle of SE 13th Street as a student dropoff. This view is looking west across SE 3rd Avenue on Sept. 21, 2004. Cars stop in the road; through traffic veers onto the median at left as it tries to squeeze by,

and cars back out from the new median parking spaces and into the through lane (white van). Vehicles routinely block southbound 3rd Avenue as they wait in line. Church elder Hamilton Forman says the new median parking spaces are needed “for the safety of the children.”

City maintains median that church uses for free

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ciana Park Civic Association, and others.

The City Commission will examine the issue on Oct. 19 at 1:30.

The city can restore the median and eliminate grounds for a lawsuit by paying church elder and director Hamilton Forman the \$8,500 construction cost listed on the permit, according to City Commissioner Cindi Hutchinson. Forman says he paid for the parking project.

The 8,800-square-foot, 220-foot-long median is on SE 13th Street, one block south of Davie Boulevard and on the west side of SE 3rd Avenue. In that area, lots of similar size are worth at least \$300,000, according to a local realtor. The church is getting use of the median for free — and city taxpayers will continue to pick up the maintenance tab.

BARRICADES DESTROYED

The median has been under assault in recent years by people routinely parking their cars on the grass. The damage they caused can be seen in an aerial photo on the city’s web site — dirt is clearly visible where green grass should be. (*See that*



A CITY EMPLOYEE maintains the city-owned median at city taxpayers’ expense (get the point?) but has to work around parking spaces being built by the church on Aug. 26, 2004.

photo at www.graphicwitness.com/median.)

The city tried to preserve, protect and defend the beautiful grass by erecting barricades (“bollards”) on the north and south sides of the median. The wooden, bumper-high barricades were each 200 feet long.

On Jan. 15, 2004, Forman wrote an angry letter to Commissioner Hutchinson

in which he threatened to sue the city if the barricades weren’t removed.

Hutchinson says the parking lot talks were set in motion after the city’s barricades were destroyed — *twice!*

Who destroyed them?

Hamilton Forman, according to Hamilton Forman. He says he tore down the barricades “on the church side.”

“The first time they put some in front of the church, I went out and got a sledgehammer and knocked them out, and threw ‘em to one side,” Forman told a city advisory committee Sept. 20. “When I walked out and saw they were there, I knocked them down that same day so that we could continue to park in that area.” (*See recording online.*)

Forman’s admission has fueled the sense of outrage at the city’s land “give-away.” When residents of a nearby neighborhood heard that Forman had admitted destroying city property, they were shocked.

“Was he arrested?” they said. “Was he fined?”

The answer is “no.”

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Master Plan calls medians an asset to neighborhood

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After the barricades were knocked down, Hutchinson met with Forman and asked city staff to solve the problem, she says. The commissioner claims she wasn't involved from that point on, and didn't know about the parking lot plan.

During the talks that followed, a city employee created the initial design for the church parking lot.

On April 26, 2004, "A-1 Network, 1303 SE 3rd Ave.," filed the application for the permit, listing itself as the "owner" of the city right-of-way. **No nearby property owners were notified of the proposal.** The final plan was initiated by four city employees.

The permit was issued on July 14. Local property owners became aware of the "secret" project when construction began in mid-August.

RULES DON'T APPLY

The church was not required to put in pavers, sidewalks and other things that might be required of private developers. That's because the rules don't apply to publicly-owned property, according to Acting City Engineer Peter Partington.

The result: Plain asphalt parking spaces on property the city controls!

It appears that sprinklers also weren't required. Recently a Parks & Rec employee noticed the new sod turning brown. He stopped to check the sprinklers. There were none.

"The sod will die," he said.

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSET

In Fort Lauderdale, property owners love their landscaped medians. Poinciana Park is no exception. Grassy medians with large oaks on broad streets are the aesthetic highlight of the neighborhood, which is situated around the north side of Broward General Medical Center. The area is a mix of single family homes, rental units, houses converted to offices,



DAMAGE TO THE MEDIAN is evident in this aerial photo on the city's GIS web site. Cars and dirt are visible where grass should be (arrows). The city's Parks and Recreation Department erected barricades to stop this destruction.

and office buildings.

On SE 13th Street, there was nearly 1,300 feet of continuous green "linear park" stretching from Andrews Avenue to SE 4th Avenue — "eye candy" for locals and passersby alike.

Churchgoers have been parking on the median for years, and that has been tolerated by the neighborhood. Parking on Sundays is not enough to permanently destroy the grass.

But in recent years, the Charter School of Excellence has been added to the church grounds. Forman says it started with 100 students, and has expanded to 300. That adds to the parking and traffic pressures.

Visitors to a nearby offices also contributed to the median parking problem, according to long-time residents.

WORTH PRESERVING

When the First Christian Church made an attempt to construct parking spaces on the same median in 1995, City Manager George Hanbury called the medians "an aesthetic asset to this area."

Tom Tapp, then Parks and Recreation Director, flatly opposed the parking lot proposal "because of the attractiveness of the medians," Hanbury wrote.

The current South Andrews Avenue Master Plan calls the medians a neighborhood "asset" and pushes for even more green space. The City Commission adopted that Master Plan in May 2004 —

two months before city staff issued the "secret" permit.

Although the paved parking spaces are technically "public," they only have practical value to the church, school and the offices across the street. There are no retail businesses in the immediate area.

Police have failed to enforce "Keep Off Median" signs near the church, according to residents.

COMMITTEE CUTS SPACES

On Sept 20, the city's Property and Right-of-Way Committee voted 4-3 to recommend continuation of the project, which had started weeks earlier. In a "compromise" not supported by residents, the committee called for two fewer parking spaces.

The church went ahead and completed the project by paving all 14 spaces allowed by the original permit.

Representatives of District IV civic associations expressed outrage at the secret deal during Commissioner Hutchinson's Sept. 20 meeting.

One Poinciana Park homeowner said he was amazed and disappointed that he had not been given the chance to comment on a project that is one block from his home.

Prepared by Cal Deal

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WEB SITE: Photos and more! <http://www.graphicwitness.com/median>



THE MEDIAN ONCE SERVED AS A LINEAR PARK where residents could walk with their pets (left, May 22, 2004). The construction of the parking lot changed all that (right, same dog, Aug. 14, 2004).

Please Help Our Neighborhood!

PLEASE tell your Commissioner that you support the restoration and preservation of the SE 13th Street median.

Ask for action to prevent this outrage from happening again!

If you can, show your support at the City Commission meeting, 1:30 p.m. Oct. 19.

VISIT THE WEB SITE: <http://www.graphicwitness.com/median>