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COMMUNITY NEWS

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## Opposition to offer alternatives on bus shelter ads

JTA considers advertising, other revenue sources over next 90 days

by Susanna P. Barton

Opponents of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority's plans to fund bus shelter construction and maintenance with advertising have 90 days to come up with a better game plan. During a late-October board meeting, JTA Chairwoman Ava Parker said JTA would discuss ideas for alternative sources of revenue to build and sustain new bus shelters before the agency issues requests for proposals.

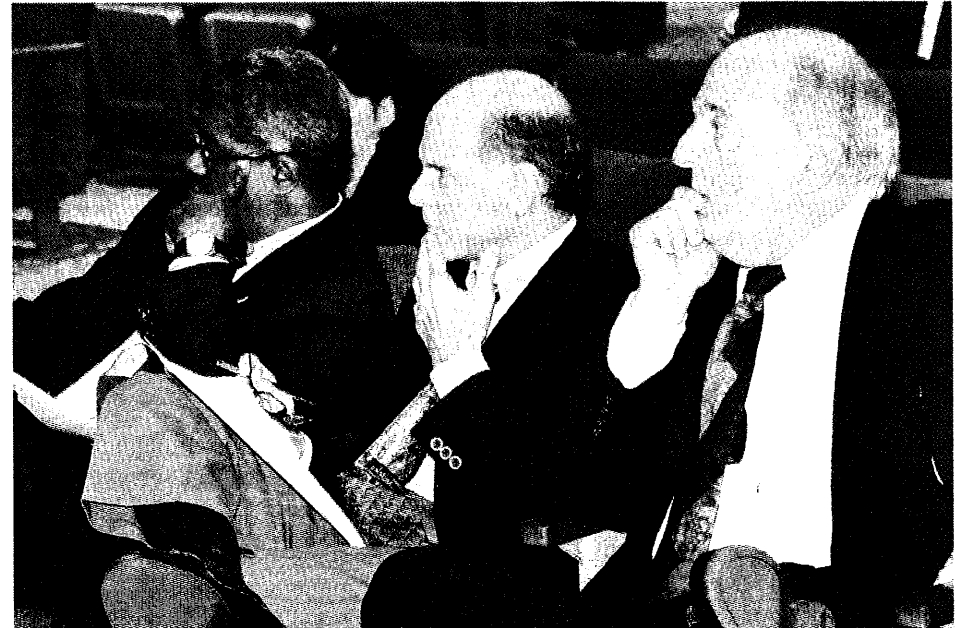
The JTA will continue to prepare an RFP during those 90 days as planned, said JTA spokesman Mike Miller.

"We're in the business of trying to attract new riders to the system and make current riders as comfortable as possible," Miller said. "We want to put up new shelters, but we need to find a revenue source to maintain them — the only way we've been able to find a sustainable source is with advertising. If they can find something else, then certainly we would welcome seeing that."

At issue is the city council's mid-October 10-7 decision to pass an amendment to the city's sign ordinance legislation — a judgement that opens the door for a new breed of outdoor advertising in Jacksonville: bus shelters. Mayor John Peyton approved the legislation in late October. With the change confirmed, JTA was allowed to begin its quest for a bus shelter contractor who could cover the development and maintenance cost of these shelters with advertising sales.

Dissenting city council members most vocally opposed to the legislative change — a group that includes Clay Yarbrough, William Bishop and at-large member John Crescimbeni — will now be working with JTA liaison Cleve Warren to help JTA come up with some alternative funding plans for the shelters.

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JTA Executive Director Michael J. Blaylock, JTA Attorney David Cohen and JTA External Affairs Director Mike Miller

## Bus shelters

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"If, by the end of 90 days they have not found a source of revenue, then we are still planning to put the RFP out on the street," Miller said. He estimated it would cost between \$4,000 and \$15,000 to construct each of the 50 new bus shelters JTA would like to see built each year.

JTA's plans have been a divisive initiative for residents on both sides of the river. Opponents say the need for bus shelters is just part of the equation. Also of concern is the visual pollution expected from additional outdoor advertisements — as well as whether the decision will allow sign companies to legally challenge the city's sign ordinance. Safety issues are another concern.

"Of course we need bus shelters," said Lane Welch, a San Marco resident and opponent of the JTA's plans. "But the JTA has other avenues to fund them, they need to be the focus of this — I don't believe JTA has the right or should be given the right to sell the beauty of our city for its own convenience."

Welch, along with many others on both sides of the issue, attended and spoke at the city council's mid-October meeting. During the meeting, the city council voted

to offer exemptions to the historic overlay areas of Riverside/Avondale, Springfield and a 10-block radius from San Marco Square. City Councilman Michael Corrigan said residential areas of Ortega will also likely be exempt from bus shelter advertising because of its status as a National Historic District.

"There will be advertising allowed on Roosevelt Boulevard, but I am fairly confident it will only be there," Corrigan said.

The legislation also prohibits advertising-backed bus shelter construction in residential neighborhoods. Also, Miller said if bus shelters are deemed necessary in exempt areas, the JTA would build the shelters without advertising.

"Any revenues we'd generate out of net proceeds of advertising would help go toward capital maintenance costs and the cost of additional shelters," Miller said, adding that JTA may be putting up more than 20 shelters a year in addition to the ones being built by contractor agencies. "We agreed that there would be no advertising shelters in single-family neighborhoods. Our goal is to get shelters placed on our major corridors — we are very sensitive to that, we know people don't want a

lighted shelter in their neighborhood."

The historic areas of Riverside, Avondale, Springfield and San Marco are exempt from hosting shelters with advertisements, according to the legislation. City Councilman Art Shad, who voted against the measure during the city council meeting, had the nucleus around San Marco Square included as an advertising exempt area.

"There is definitely a need for bus shelters, but as with everything in the historic districts there needs to be some oversight," said Riverside Avondale Preservation director, Carmen Godwin.

Shad underscored that the planning department has to give approval of the new shelters.

"I imagine you will have some shelters going up on San Jose with advertising or toward Hendricks on the other side of Cedar Street and the Southbank," said Shad, who estimated it would be at least a year before shelters start going up. "But ridership has to justify the shelter, there has been a lot of discussion to make sure shelters don't go up where it's primarily convenient for advertising."

Some residents are not convinced all exempt areas will remain completely immune.

"Here we have San Marco Boulevard, Hendricks Avenue and San Jose Boulevard and most of it is all residential," Welch said. "You can bet your boots that these companies are going to immediately apply for waivers — that bus stop at the Duck Pond is considered a major route and don't you imagine that a lot of advertisers would like to have that nice upscale neighborhood to market their product?"

Barbara Ketchum, an Ortega Terrace resident who also attended the city council meeting in mid-October, is bracing for the new bus shelter advertising that will be built in her neighborhood. She is also concerned that the city, which has built a reputation over the years as a national model for tough sign and tree ordinance legislation, is now on a backward path.

"I am opposed to this because of the visual blight of each bus stop with ads — they're ugly and they're not safe," Ketchum said. "There is a concern that this will open up our very wonderful billboard legislation we've had for 22 years. This is not about bus shelters — this is about advertising."

She advocates the idea of getting local businesses to sponsor the construction of bus shelters.