

Attn: David Adams, PMP; Craig Carrington, Chief, Project Planning Branch
Re: Proposal to lease Cook's Landing and Recreation Area
March 22, 2021 at 5:50PM

Dear Chief Carrington, Mr. Adams and Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal for Cook's Landing.

As a young child who grew up in Metro Nashville, my family and I camped many nights at the Cook's Landing campground that has now been closed for many years. It was the place that I learned about nature, not nature as seen at the Science Museum or in the school playground, but wild animals, trees and plants not seen in downtown Nashville. It was the place I got to experience first hand the work Tennessee has done in providing public spaces for that purpose. I now live in the community near Cook's Landing. Over the years I have lived here, I have seen individuals from many diverse walks of life enjoy the day-use area, the trails, the beach, the boat ramp and the land surrounding it. On a daily basis, I observe people walking to or riding their bikes to the lake, resting on blankets by the water, reading in hammocks, playing with their dogs and cooking out with friends. I observe people fishing and teaching their children to fish in the pond. I observe people kayaking, paddle-boarding, windsurfing, sailing, jet-skiing, boating. While there is much enjoyment in the lake itself, maybe surprisingly, it is often the people who do not have access to boats that seem to get the most out of Cook's Landing. I observe people alone and in groups taking in the sunset from the shore. Mostly, I observe people from all backgrounds taking long, deep breaths, resting minds and hearts that are not able to rest in other parts of ever-growing Nashville.

Several years ago during one of the Tennessee senatorial debates, the candidates were asked how to balance the Tennessee budget. One of the candidate's responses was "to get rid of ancillaries such as parks ..." I find the word "ancillary" to be an interesting choice for these types of scenarios in Tennessee. The assumption that Tennessee parks are "extra perks" that can be leased is troubling for me. Taking the 2020 Shelter in Place measures as an example, Cook's Landing was a vital place where people could socially distance and take that deep breath during a time when it was desperately needed. As the cost of living and crime rise in Hermitage and throughout Nashville, that desperate need continues to grow. I wonder why the benefit that public space provides for mental, emotional, social and psychological well-being is viewed as leasable and "not essential" for public good.

Regarding the attached letter, I find it to not be specific and forth coming regarding the details under which the land could be leased. For example, there is no mention of the construction of a marina, which has been mentioned to me by other sources. Phrases such as “may include” leave it open for the land to be leased for other purposes without proper and complete impact analysis and without consent of the community. The letter mentions species of trees as if that is the only concern if this land is to be developed. There is neither the mention of wildlife nor of the benefits that such public spaces provide to the health of our community.

Finally, people from all over Nashville, Tennessee and our nation come to enjoy Cook’s Landing. I know because I often provide directions, drive so people can follow me out of the series of dead-end streets that lead to Cook’s Landing or help with flat tires. While the benefit of Cooks Landing is for anyone who chooses to go there, we do not need to look beyond I-40 exit 221A and B in Hermitage to see its benefit for the community. The growth in Hermitage, as throughout Nashville, and the addition of housing without green space has increased drastically over the last 5 years. Without proper public space like Cook’s Landing which is effectively and cost-efficiently managed, the entire community of Hermitage will be greatly impacted.

The options presented in the communication were the following:

1. Advertise for lease
This is an unacceptable option.
2. Advertise for lease with restrictions.
This is an unacceptable option. Who will decide the restrictions? Will they take into account things like public mental health that are difficult to quantify and are, therefore, often pushed aside? What protections will there be for wildlife, flora and fauna that is native to Tennessee ? What will be the impact to the lake and the surrounding communities given the other marinas within a short distance?
3. Forego advertising for lease and continue management with Operations and Maintenance funds.
I would add here to forego not just the advertising for lease, but the possibility of lease.

Another option not mentioned, and I believe the right route to take, would be to find a creative way to continue to make this space available for our community. I ask that you

consider this option. As a Project Manager with 20 years of experience managing complex projects with diverse stakeholders, I would be happy to spearhead a volunteer committee to find ways to make that possible.

Thank you for your time and efforts in this matter. Please contact me to confirm receipt and so that I can understand the next steps in this process.

Best regards,

Tia Clark