

THE ACQUISITION OF STEPHENS LAKE PARK: A CASE STUDY

Michael Snyder

Dr. David Vaught, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

It was a daunting task that faced the CARE Committee, City officials, the grass-roots Coalition to Save Stephens Lake, and Stephens College. They had to unite the citizens of Columbia to raise \$10 million to purchase a property that was not on any park master plan or green space preservation plan with little time to do it, and no existing funding source.

A plan to save Stephens College was devised by the College and it involved selling a property that was beloved to many of the citizens of Columbia. To many, the parcel represented the last large property close to downtown that could serve as a central park for the City. There was a contingent of opposition groups and a well organized Coalition to Save Stephens Lake who all worked to lobby City Council members to do what they perceived to be the right thing for Columbia. The Trust for Public Land was brought in and they performed an appraisal of the property and a survey of the citizens, to determine what kind of funding source would be acceptable.

There was much criticism about how rushed the process was and how the deals appeared to be made without public involvement, but after the appraisal came in and a \$7 million price tag was set, it was agreed that the citizens of Columbia would have the opportunity to determine if they wanted to buy the Stephens Lake property. Experienced leadership guided the process past every road block, and in the end the citizens of Columbia voted to purchase the property that is now Stephens Lake Park.