

## ***Recollections of Jeff Milner*** **Boca Raton Mayor 1977-1981**

In the 1970s, Boca Raton was governed by five elected city council members, who then appointed one of themselves mayor. In 1977, the mayor, chosen by this process, resigned the office of mayor after a few weeks. Eventually, I was appointed to that office. That year the city council created a city charter review commission. One recommendation of that commission was that the mayor be directly elected by the people. This change to the city charter was approved by the electorate in 1978. The first mayor was elected in 1979. I was elected to a two year term of office.

In 1979, the city adopted a major update to its comprehensive plan, and then followed through with zoning changes that conformed to the plan. While the city's famous growth cap was overturned by the courts, city councils during the time of the cap instituted changes to the zoning code and the zoning map that implementing the spirit of the cap. Later city councils could increase densities and back away from these changes, but the fact that developers wanted to develop, now, to a great extent made low density development a *fait accompli*.

At that time, Arvida Corp owned the Town Center Mall, the Boca Raton Hotel and Club, many acres west of town, and 1,000 undeveloped acres in the city. The acreage in the city was located north of University Park and extended all the way to the northern and western city limits. This acreage was zoned residential, but Arvida brought forth a proposal to develop it as a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

My city council was known for holding marathon city council meetings, but in our meeting on this PUD, we really out did ourselves. We met with Arvida on two consecutive nights, from 7:00 pm to about 3:00 am, to reach final agreement on the PUD. Many details were worked out during these hours of negotiations, but the final details involved the parcels of property to be donated to the public. One of those parcels went to the county school board and became the site of Spanish River High School. Others went to the city to be the sites for parks and other public facilities.

During this same time period, the City Manager had been trying to find property for a new fire station west of I-95. That evening it occurred to me that Arvida still owned the former University Park city hall. Even though it was outside the area of the PUD, I asked for it, and Arvida agreed to donate it. That is how the City obtained property for a fire station just across the street from the mall.

Approval of this plan for the development of the last one thousand acres within the City of Boca Raton was little noted by the local press, but I believe it was a major event. It locked in low density development for the area. It provided a site for a high school to relieve a badly overcrowded Boca Raton High School. It provided a headquarters for the fire department and a site for a fire station west of I-95 and the SAL Railroad. It provided the Patch Reef park site and other sites to meet future public needs. I hope history has proved this assessment to be correct.

In 1981, my last campaign as mayor was not for my job, but for approval of general obligation bonds to expand city hall and the library. I am proud to say both bond issues were approved. The bond funds allowed a second floor to be added to city hall and the library to be enlarged.