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# Editorial: Fort Myers should buy land for park

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Written by  
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The city of Fort Myers has a historic opportunity to expand its riverfront jewel, Centennial Park, by 25 percent at a fraction of what it would have cost to do so only a few years ago.

The real estate bust and foreclosure epidemic are horrible news overall, but they have made 2.4 acres in six vacant parcels adjacent to the park available for an estimated total of \$1.5 million. Not too long go, the land was valued at \$17 million.

Good for Councilman Mike Flanders for urging the city to explore the purchase. We should urge the mayor and council to make it.

Unfortunately, the same forces that devalued this land have withered public revenues from property taxes. It will not be easy to find money to buy land when even the once-untouchable ranks of public safety employees - cops and firemen - have been cut.

But this is the kind of chance the city has missed out on several times in the past, to acquire more land on or near the river with

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some of the highest value conceivable for the public, including visitors and residents countywide. Before the property bust, one of the parcels in question was to be the site of a controversial 27-story condominium tower looming over the park.

Mayor Randy Henderson says, "I have felt that we have politically missed public purchase opportunities in the past, and we have suffered from it. Once it gets into private hands, we can pull and tug on it, but it's private and subject to whatever private owners want to do with it. This is an opportunity."

Centennial Park is already a busy venue for entertainment and political and religious gatherings. It is a daily play- and picnic ground and weekly farmers' market.

The city is trying to finance an expensive re-make of the downtown waterfront just upriver of the park, to finally take fuller advantage of the Caloosahatchee.

This expansion of Centennial Park would open a lot of opportunities for a relatively low price.

Let city officials know how you feel about this issue.

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