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Traffic-calming circle confuses, costs Gretna

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Gretna spent more than \$160,000 to put a traffic-calming circle in Garden Park Estates. (*Andrea Shaw, NOLA.com|The Times-Picayune*)

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The traffic-calming circle at the entrance of Garden Park Estates on Willow Drive in **Gretna** isn't completely calming. For many, the \$166,000 project is a source of confusion -- and heartburn.

"You've got to slow down when you get to the circle. If you're going into the neighborhood, you're going to the right side," said City Councilman Jackie Berthelot, who lives in the neighborhood. "If you're coming out, you go to the left. Some people go the wrong way."

Berthelot's council predecessor, **Raylyn Beevers**, promoted the project and tried to address residents' complaints before it was put on hold. She is now a 2nd Parish Court judge.

Now the subdivision could finally see relief with a \$214,000 project that **Jefferson Parish** is undertaking to add a garden and parking at the neighboring library. Parish Councilman Ricky Templet said some of the work could address residents' complaints and make it easier for them to reach the library on foot.

"We may have to design it to provide safe access to the library," he said.

The traffic circle -- and a subsequent redesign -- dates from 2010. The total cost was \$166,873, and River West served as the contractor, according to Gretna Finance Director Raylyn Stevens. The money came from Beevers' discretionary account, funded with gaming revenues.

Stevens, who took her finance job at City Hall in 2012, said she thinks the project was shared with the parish and was done to address drainage issues.

Berthelot was president of the homeowners association at the time and said residents were not consulted. While Gretna was under no obligation to do so, Berthelot said, "It would have been a good idea to bring it to the association and let us poll our people. It may have been a different outcome."

Beevers tried to correct the traffic circle's flaws, but the plans were delayed by the parish, which expressed a need to increase parking at the Gretna branch library, Mayor Belinda Constant said. The 5,800-square-foot

library was built after Hurricane Katrina and has meeting space for almost 60 people but few than a dozen parking spaces.

The traffic circle ate into off-street parking for library patrons, Constant said.

"With the improvement of library post-Katrina, we are not able to use it to full potential because of its limited parking," she said. "We want to afford schools the opportunity to use the library."

Gretna will donate land across the street from the library for more parking.

What is clear, officials say, is that the library project will be the last chance to correct the traffic circle. "The money won't come from the city," Constant said. "They (parish) are going to review the parking, the circle, how you get to the library. It will become a part of the parish project."

Berthelot said he doesn't expect the final outcome will make everyone happy but that the discussions will be inclusive. "When we finally come back with another plan, most people will see it as a positive," he said. "Mayor Constant is driving this ship, and I'm supporting it to make sure the circle is finally put to bed."

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