

Tree sculpture doesn't bother most residents

By Amanda Casanova | Posted: Tuesday, June 28, 2011 12:00 am

Members from the housing authority board of commissioners knocked on doors in The Oaks development Sunday to speak with residents about a tree sculpture of boxing champion Jack Johnson in the neighborhood.

Of 28 occupied homes in The Oaks Paula Neff housing authority chairwoman and commissioner James Dennis visited with 16 homeowners at the development 4300 Broadway Neff said at Monday's board meeting.

Only two residents said they didn't want the sculpture in the neighborhood. The remaining had no opinion or liked the statue Neff said.

The sculpture will be discussed at the next meeting of GRACE a homeownership program in charge of The Oaks. Monday's housing authority meeting did not include an action item about the carving.

"This is a neighborhood of kids playing in the streets and parties July Fourth parties" said Councilman Rusty Legg who represents District 1. "More than a year ago the homeowners association had issues with the statue not the statue of Jack Johnson but a statue in general at that neighborhood.

"They wanted to keep that neighborhood quiet without any additional traffic" Legg said. "You need to hear the concerns about it from them."

Since carving on the Hurricane Ike-damaged oak started in February residents in The Oaks worried the statue would draw in heavy traffic into the small neighborhood. Homeowners also were upset that they were not notified the statue was going to be made in their neighborhood.

However others who spoke at Monday's meeting during public comment said those were not the only reasons for the proposed move.

"If this statue were of a cute little animal would we even be having this discussion?" said Joe Compian of Gulf Coast Interfaith referring to Johnson's personal history.

In 1912 Johnson an African-American was charged with taking a woman across state lines for "immoral purposes" in violation of the Mann Act.

He was convicted and sentenced to a year and a day in prison and fined \$1000. Johnson left the country for the next seven years before returning to surrender to police.

A 2009 resolution to pardon Johnson has been to the U.S. Justice Department. The department's policy is to deny posthumous pardon requests but the president still can pardon Johnson.

The carving of the famed boxer is the first of two planned statues of the late boxing champion on the island.

A second statue is planned for a park east of the Old Central Cultural Center 2627 Ave. M.