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Zippin Pippin on National Register

Designation heartens proponents of preservation; fate still unclear

By [David Williams](#) ([Contact](#))

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The Zippin Pippin's new designation on the National Register of Historic Places makes an even stronger case for its preservation, proponents said Thursday.

"This merely ratifies what we have been saying all along," said Steve Mulroy, a leader of Save Libertyland and a county commissioner. "It deserves to be preserved as a working ride for families and children in Memphis -- and not bulldozed by the city of Memphis."

The city isn't threatening to bulldoze the Pippin, but the future of the historic roller coaster -- and of the Grand Carousel, also on the National Register -- remains undetermined as the Mid-South Fairgrounds redevelopment proceeds.

The city owns the carousel, and also claims ownership of the Pippin. The Save Libertyland organization contends it owns the coaster, but wants to give it to the city -- if the city pledges to keep it available to the public.

"What needs to be done is to have those two crown jewel rides be the core of a minipark ... somewhere on the fairgrounds," Mulroy said. "I think the most sensible thing is to leave the rides where they are and build the minipark around them. That would be the cheapest thing to do, and I think it would be the most sensible thing to do."

He estimated, based on a coaster expert's analysis, that the Pippin could be returned to working order for \$65,000 or more -- but that it would cost \$1 million to move.

A national consultant's report, released this week by the city, proposed that the Pippin and carousel could be moved from the old Libertyland site to a location near The Children's Museum of Memphis. The consultant also proposed a "seasonal skating pond" for that area.

Dick Hackett, CEO of the Children's Museum, said he has been a proponent of the skating idea, and that ice, a coaster and carousel would fit well together. But he said the museum couldn't fund such a project.

Hackett said of the coaster and carousel, "They're both very expensive treasures, not only to move, but to restore and then ultimately to maintain. And then, in addition to maintaining, they will not be, financially, money-makers."

Mulroy said relocating the rides on the fairgrounds, or elsewhere in Memphis, is acceptable as long as the financial commitment behind such a move is firm.

"We're basically for any outcome that keeps the rides in Memphis as working rides," he said.

Robert Lipscomb, the city's project director for fairgrounds redevelopment, said the fate of the coaster and carousel can't yet be known because of the ongoing redevelopment process. Currently, the city is in the early stages of seeking a master developer.

"We'll have to see where it goes (once a developer is picked)," he said. "If it's viable (to include the two rides in a redeveloped fairgrounds), I'm sure they would consider it."

The National Register designation does not prevent demolition of a property.

However, "it does prevent it from being demolished with federal dollars, basically," said June West, executive director of the Memphis Heritage preservation organization.

"If federal dollars are utilized for redevelopment of that area, it kicks in what's called a 106 review to determine whether or not the redevelopment impacts negatively on these historic landmarks," she said.

Attempts to reach officials of the National Register were unsuccessful.

The Zippin Pippin, nearly 100 years old, was beloved by Elvis Presley and, before Libertyland was closed in late 2005, was billed as the country's second-oldest operating wooden coaster.

Mulroy also announced a second grant to Memphis Heritage -- \$25,000 from the state -- to help fund a feasibility study on preserving the coaster and carousel. The county commission previously approved \$15,000 for a feasibility study.

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Historic fairgrounds properties

Mid-South Fairgrounds properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

Fairview School

Grand Carousel

Mid-South Coliseum

Zippin Pippin