

Former Beaufort mayor David Taub and Redevelopment Commission chairman Jon Verity sound off about the proposed redevelopment of Beaufort's downtown marina parking lot.

"Mad As Hell"

By David Taub

In Paddy Chayefsky's classic work titled "Network," a deranged TV anchorman Howard Beale goes bonkers on the air and declares: "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" His large viewing audience, equally angry and uproarious, chorus: "We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore!" Well, I know how Howard felt, and I am pleased to see that so many of my fellow Beaufortonians seem to feel the same outrage that has now enveloped the controversial and ill-conceived plan—River Place—for redevelopment of the marina parking lot.

I am optimistic to believe the Mayor and Council, the City's Redevelopment Commission and the sole-source developers City selected for the downtown marina parking lot project are listening now to the thunderous voices of anger and outrage being raised by an aroused citizenry unified in their opposition to River Place. I, like the growing list of well over a thousand of my fellow Beaufortonians, wish to see the City leadership replace the River Place project with what is being referred to as the Civic Green Plan.

What is the Civic Green Plan I endorse? In its simplest form it is, with some yet to be decided tweaking, a plan that the City has already adopted, namely Phase II of the Sasaki Plan for upgrading and expanding the Water Front Park (WFP). Phase I has already been done, comprised of renovation of the Pavilion, construction of public restrooms, remodeling of the children's playground, and additional brick work throughout the WFP. Phase II, on hold due to funding considerations, calls for elimination of asphalt and replacing it with open green space, an enhanced Farmer's Market, new Marina ship store, and a bandstand for live music performances. Billy Keyserling (now Mayor) and Donnie Beer (now Mayor Pro Tempore) were

on City Council when the Plan was adopted and they voted for it. It remains an unsolved mystery why now they and the other members of the current City Council (absent George O'Kelly, steadfastly in opposition) apparently have abandoned a highly desirable plan they previously adopted in favor of one of unknown speculative and uncertain virtue.

If the expansion of the Water Front Park was a good idea when the City adopted it around 2004, I, and my fellow Beaufortonians, believe it is an excellent plan today, far superior in every respect to that proposed in River Place. In the few weeks since Mr. Chaffin presented his ephemeral "vision" of River Place, over 1,500 of our citizens have signed a petition beseeching City's officials to abandon this project. But we are not in favor of only stopping what I, and many others, believe River Place is: "the wrong plan, at the wrong place, at the wrong time." Rather, we favor replacing it with a grand plan to expand the WFP and ADD more green space and open vistas—River Place proposes just the opposite. The Civic Green plan will add to the economic vitality of the City and its precious historic downtown. Virtually every study done in communities such as ours, regarding adding open green space to attract locals and visitors, is successful—economically, socially, and environmentally. The Civic Green Plan, in stark and graphic contrast to River Place, is "the right plan, in the right place, at the right time."

Good government demands elected officials lead with judiciousness and intelligence, and it also requires an informed active and engaged citizenry. If we believe in participatory democracy at its most basic level, now is the time for citizens to have their voices heard, loud and clear – a clarion call from them to our elected officials to provide true and meaningful leadership. Sign the petition by going on line and register your opposition on social media – the council members are checking these sites every day and they will hear your voices. Come to the council meetings, stand and be heard. The great 19th Century philosopher Edmund Burke is often quoted as saying with insight as certain today as then: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men should do nothing." Nothing less than the very foundation and future of our irreplaceable landmark historic district and its unique and treasured downtown and waterfront park is at stake. "We the People" cannot afford to be silent and do nothing.

David Taub is the former mayor of Beaufort.

Why Redevelopment? A Response.

By Jon Verity

Point, Counterpoint

Written by Editor

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It is reasonable that citizens ask the City to explain why it is focused on redevelopment of the marina parking lot. City Council directed the Redevelopment Commission (RDC) to pursue the project in 2011 when they approved Sector 1 of the Civic Master Plan. There have been many public meetings, documents and press releases about the project since then. As we approach the conceptual plan and architectural design stage, City Council will provide you with more information about the City's finances and why this and other revenue generating projects are important to you and your family.

Focusing on downtown, the City spends about \$600,000 or more per year providing services to Downtown than it collects in revenue. Public Safety services alone cost more than \$900,000/yr. Waterfront Park is particularly expensive. It is built above the water on a concrete structure. Every cave-in you see in the park costs about \$15k to repair. In 2014, the City will spend about \$48,000 per acre on the 13 acre park in operating and debt service costs. A few years ago, The City spent \$8 million in repairs and upgrades to the waterfront.

This situation would be manageable if we had stronger demographics and a healthy business climate. Parris Island graduations and bus tour visitors basically keep the lights on for the majority of businesses. Downtown businesses have had to focus on the winter season tourists to survive. They do okay from October to May, struggle through the summer, and hope they end the year with a small profit. Rents downtown are \$5-14/sq ft, barely adequate for many building owners to maintain their properties. Beaufort's residents can't help. Our per capita income dropped 38% from 2007 to now and unemployment is about 8%. As much as 20% of the properties downtown west of Charles Street to Bladen are now either abandoned or vacant, providing minimal tax revenue and no customers for merchants.

The solution we are pursuing at the Marina is to put more people into the core of the City as residents and multi-day tourists. We need to manage this transition without harming those who have invested in downtown or damaging the way of life that makes Beaufort special. We believe that in The Furman Company, Chaffin and Light and their planners, Design Workshop, we have found partners who can accomplish these goals while honoring Beaufort's National Historic Landmark designation, architectural heritage and special sense of place.

Parking downtown will also be addressed.

Jon Verity is Chairman of the Redevelopment Commission for the City of Beaufort.