

Kevin Costner's fine film, *Field of Dreams*, provided symbolism for a generation: If you wished for something hard enough; if you had good unfinished business that you felt compelled to finish, in a good way, well, if you could dream it; then you could do it.



One of the great things about this country is how much it still is a “Field of Dreams” for so many of us. But sometimes, dreams collide and one person’s dream quickly becomes another’s nightmare and so, with a simple statement, Beaufort’s planning director said “no” to a 200,000 sq. ft. Wal-Mart on Lady’s Island, clearly validating the wishes of the large majority of the people around here, but, as a result, challenging the land owner, the developers involved and her own city council to a rather uncertain series of still unknown confrontations bound to bring unexpected results.

In a nutshell: The City Council has been saying (up to the time of my writing) that the PUD must renew automatically on February 25th unless there has been a “material breach.” It has also been learned that even if the PUD runs out, the land is still zoned commercial and so maybe we don’t get a gigantic Wal-Mart but we could still get several big box stores and a massive parking lot. People more knowledgeable than I are suggesting to council that the very plans for such a huge Wal-Mart were, in and of themselves, a material breach. That actually makes sense. Unfortunately, the “material breach” thing will not be determined by common sense; it will be wrangled and twisted and “legalesed” until none of us can possibly understand it. To assist, your humble servant offers up a few perspectives on some of the players’ Fields of Dreams:

THE LANDOWNER: The man has a right to sell his land. Those who take risks deserve rewards. He once said, of that piece of land and of the Wal-Mart, that he would do whatever the law allows. Many have asked if he might also do what’s right; as he clearly and beautifully has with the residential projects he has nurtured and grown around here. Blaming him is wrong. His dreams are to buy, sell, profit, grow and contribute to society and he does. So the question to him is; can his dreams also accommodate the wishes of so many of his neighbors.

THE CITY COUNCIL: It’s a hard job. Here we have one mayor and four councilors dealing with changes in their community that might not have been imagined or considered even five years ago, when the City of Beaufort annexed the land and sweetened the pot for development. The fact is that the council is experiencing a depth and fierceness of voter concern, engagement and demand that is unprecedented and, that being the case, this council needs to come out from behind facile statements like “there’s nothing we can do” and do a little dreaming about how to get creative so that we all can do what’s right for Beaufort and Lady’s Island. A little risk is required, even a little boldness.

THE PEOPLE: It’s been suggested, correctly, I think, that we need to engage in this, not with fury and vindictiveness. but with reason and cooperation. Whatever “groundswell” may come, will come from us and, if it’s a groundswell that results in seeking legal opinions from towns or attorneys that have more experience with what “material breach” means, then that’s the way to go. We need to urge our Mayor and Councilors to find the way. We need the proverbial

If You Build It, We Will Not Come

Written by Bernie Moscovitz

“win-win.” The land will not go to fallow. It will be developed. So, our dream should be to encourage the hard work needed to avoid lawsuits and to encourage smart, creative solutions. We, the people, do not want the Wal-Mart or the cookie cutter commercial centers. If you build that, we will not come.

For what it's worth, here's my own Field of Dreams: The owner's land is sold and developed and, at its core is the new Performing Arts Center being talked about. Placing the Performing Arts Center on that land sets it perfectly for its users; the people from Fripp and Dataw, the residents of St Helena and Lady's Island, the people of Beaufort and Port Royal and Cane, Cat and Gibbs. The new Performing Arts Center would be on Lady's Island and the proposed new Convention Center would be over by the new hotels at and around the new Beaufort Town Center on Boundary Street. Sensible distribution, no?

The Performing Arts Center would be surrounded by mixed use development on all the acreage in the existing PUD and would include: A new home for the Arts Council, maybe even akin to the one in Key West where art and dance and drama and film and writing classes ensue day and evening; a new home for a Gullah Cultural Center; a new home for Beaufort Performing Arts and a great new venue for touring companies, for our orchestra, for our schools' productions. Heck, we might even consider an actual School for the Performing Arts, too. Visually, think Main Street over on Hilton Head; think Fresh Fields between Kiawah and Seabrook: Planned, beautiful, architecturally in harmony with the Lowcountry; the antithesis of the malls and mini-malls strewn across highway 278 in Bluffton. There would be clusters of residences and studios above commercial enterprises. Office clusters for small businesses; restaurants and coffeehouses; a great bakery, daycare center, paths and benches and green spaces; a kind of town center for the Sea Islands. If they build that, will you come?

OK, here's the point: Did that get you thinking? Did that seem a little more like “smart growth” than a big box store or seven? And, could the landowner, the council and the people all agree to do something creative and of long term value, lose nothing and maybe even gain something? If you answered yes to any of it, then let's all start thinking outside the big box and do something grand and triumphant. It does not have to be difficult.