



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

College of
Environment
+ Design

February 28, 2020
Zach Williams
DeKalb County
Decatur GA 30030

285 South Jackson
Street | Athens,
Georgia 30602

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RE: BlackHall Land Exchange

Dear COO Williams,

I have been asked to review and comment on the Blackhall Dekalb county (TPL) proposed land exchange. I have communicated with Jay Scott of Greenrock (Blackhall's consultant) by phone and in person and have been provided numerous photographs, maps, plans, sand studies done by others with regard to the site. I have not been on site.

I have attached a short "Bio" stating my background and expertise but suffice it to say that during my 45 year professional career I have served in sequence as a chief planner for the Oklahoma State Park System, Executive Director of the Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission and as a Senior Commercial Real Estate Development Executive for a publicly traded energy company whose team designed and built more than \$2 billion in downtown mixed use projects across the country. Additionally, I directed the Oklahoma Department of Transportation before becoming the Dean of the University of Georgia's College of Environment and Design. Later I founded the professional graduate degree program in Urban Planning and Design where I presently teach and advise.

Upon examining the visuals and reading the studies and documentations of public concerns, I see no reason why the exchange as described should not be implemented benefiting both the interests of the public and the developer of the expanded film studio complex. What is clearly evident is that NOT implementing the exchange as described considerably reduces the benefits to the public and the developer. To not exchange properties is to miss an important and strategic opportunity.

The exchange in most simplest terms adds acreage to the public realm. Appraisals that have been done state that the public has gained roughly a half million dollars in land value.

I understand there have been concerns expressed about stormwater discharge and environmental quality.

- According to the tree survey and photographs, more significant mature trees will be protected because of the exchange. There are no such trees on the Entrenchment Creek property
- If the stages had been built along Bouldercrest, they would actually be closer to the creek than in their current proposed location. This will leave more of the sensitive area near the stream undisturbed.

- In either location, all construction will be governed by local, state, and federal regulations. All run-off will be captured, filtered and released according to these regulations. Also, this is clean industry. Short of prohibiting all development, this is really the best case scenario
- The most recent configuration of the new Blackhall tract (40 acres) has been shaped to avoid the primary drainage area for this property, further protecting water quality and ecosystems

Issues:

- Summary
 - Keeping industrial development off Bouldercrest (next to residential area) is good for the community.
 - This new park will Improve access to trail and natural areas for neighboring residents
 - Will create an open, multi-use, meadow park space unlike anything in Atlanta or DeKalb south of I-20. Similar parks around Atlanta (the Meadow at Piedmont Park is the most prominent) are strong community “centers”.
 - This exchange protects significant trees that would otherwise be lost
- Stormwater
 - New construction will be greater distance from creek than would be without exchange allowing greater dissipation of stormwater as it is released.
 - As per local, state and federal regulations, all run-off must be treated and managed to limit impacts. The exchanged (Blackhall) property is a better location to manage impacts which will come with all development.
- Vegetation/ecosystem
 - Amount of cleared land – is quite comparable over 16 acres on Entrenchment Creek parcel (open area, gas line, parking area, trail) versus 21 acres along Bouldercrest; location of open space along Bouldercrest is ideal for a multi-use community park
 - Quality of vegetation – as documented in the tree survey, there are three trees identified as ‘significant’, and all of these are in the 30-34 inch range (at least one is a pine). The Bouldercrest properties have 54 identified significant trees, with many of these being 35-55 inches in diameter. Most of these trees are hardwoods that contribute to the visible landscape along Bouldercrest Rd.
 - Support of wildlife – in the new configuration, 30 of the 40 acres to be received by Blackhall are east of the gas line easement, with more than 25 of these being along roads. Additionally, these areas are at the highest elevations, and thus the driest. These areas have the least value to wildlife. Most of the lower areas, where most drainage flows, has been removed from the tract. The wildlife that exists on this property is transitory in nature and will simply move to the larger adjacent property. It should also be noted that this land is part of an almost 1000 acres of contiguous greenspace

corridor that is owned by the county. The local wildlife will gain open land in a more corridor configuration. As the plans for the new park will include planting native plants that provide forage, this will be a net gain for the wildlife.

- Community impact/ecosystem
 - Quality of Life is an opportunity of this exchange
 - The greenbelt that will be created on Bouldercrest should have a significant impact on the community. It will create a permanent separation between the residential communities around McNair High School and the Industrial/trucking areas along Constitution. Directing truck traffic away from residential areas has been an ongoing concern for southwest dekalb for decades. This greenbelt also links Gresham Park with Entrenchment Creek Park across Bouldercrest.
 - The creation of community open space is very important. There are almost 1000 contiguous acres of county owned woods/greenspace in the area. There are no multi-use parks in the area. Other than sports fields and schools, there are no places where the community comes together. This park can be an important element in the human ecosystem in southwest DeKalb.
- Overall value
 - The improved park/community open space will benefit community
 - The new park provides better access to trails
 - Is part of 1000 acre contiguous greenspace owned by the county, so the impact of the exchange on the overall environment is negligible
 - Restricting industrial truck use to Constitution is a benefit to the community
- This will not set a bad precedent
 - The goal of greenspace preservation should be to provide the greatest benefit
 - This exchange meets standards
 - If future opportunities become available and if they provide similar benefits, then it would be short-sighted to not consider them as well.

It is also in the public's economic development interest that a relatively benign land use such as a film studio be encouraged just in terms of jobs, taxes and economic diversity. The exchange facilitates a more efficient consolidation of the studio complex. The state of Georgia has strongly sought the film industry with incentives. Dekalb should benefit from this as well. The exchange makes a lot of sense, both, from the community and environmental as well as the economic development perspective.

I am very professionally comfortable in encouraging the land exchange as it has been documented for me .

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Crowley", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John F. (Jack) Crowley, Ph.D., FAICP, FASLA
Professor, College of Environment + Design
jcrowley@uga.edu | 706-542-3117

John F. (Jack) Crowley

Short Biography:

Dr. Crowley has led a long, successful and varied career in government, the military, the private sector and in academia. He has been a planning director in a small city as well as in a large metropolitan region. He was the chief planner for a state park system. Jack was a senior corporate real estate development executive whose team built more than \$2 billion in downtown mixed use projects in Tulsa, San Antonio, Kansas City, Denver and Charlotte. He directed the Oklahoma Department of Transportation before serving for 10 years as the Dean of the College of Environment and Design at the University of Georgia. He then founded a professional graduate degree program in physical city planning and design, where he is a professor. Jack is a Vietnam era veteran who served as an Arabic Linguist and a Field Artillery Officer.

Degrees Held

- Masters of Regional and City Planning (MRCP), University of Oklahoma
- PhD in Urban Geography with research in urban hydrology, University of Oklahoma

Research Interests

- Urban planning and development, transportation, urban design, real estate

General Interests

- Art, travel, golf

Professional Organizations

- American Planning Association (APA)
- American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)
- Urban Land Institute (ULI)
- Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) and others

Honors and Awards

- Elected to the College of Fellows in both professions: Planning (FAICP) and Landscape Architecture (FASLA), and numerous other service and project awards.

Courses Taught

- Numerous landscape architecture and planning design studios, graphics courses, city planning, urban infrastructure, transportation and design courses.