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HB Bill 1056

Favorable, with Amendment that language be included that the Race Track parcels go to the City of Bowie

Members of the House Ways and Means Committee, I like many you will hear from support HR 56 with amendments to give the Bowie Race Track Parcels to the City of Bowie. I have a vested interest in what happens to the four parcels that make up the Bowie Race Track.

To put my comments into context you should understand the following. My wife is a Bowie State University (BSU) grad, we have three nephews who are graduates and two more currently scheduled to graduate; one with a Master's in May and one who is now a Junior. I am also a Distinguished Military ROTC Graduate and thirty-Year veteran and fully understand ROTC requirements. We have owned homes in Bowie since 1995, first in the Q section and since 2005 in Saddlebrook. We walk out our front door every morning, look right and see the Race Track (RT). Although neither of us are equestrians we bought both our homes knowing that horses were nearby.

I've actively been involved in the discussions about the RT. I appreciate all that the City Council has done to listen to the concerns of Bowie residents. The discussions have been well attended and generally civil. Sadly though, not all of the responses have been civil. These comments are thankfully exceptions to the public forums and those on social media. Take these two for example:

1. "If you don't like the traffic on Racetrack road you should just move, my granddaddy worked at the Race Track when it closed in 85, and you should just leave." This from a woman who lives over by Benjamin Tasker Middle School.
2. "I don't know why you're concerned about traffic on Racetrack road and the potential for the negative impact building more homes on the RT will have on you. You don't have any proof that traffic will be worse or that your home will lose value." This from a resident who lives off of 197.

When news that the Stoneman group wanted to get rid of the property, I was initially all in for just greenspace, hiking trails, bike paths, athletic fields and park space. But after listening to many who have family ties to the RT and to BSU, I'm convinced that we can find a compromise that supports all.

I am concerned about continued development, increased taxes, the impact on my home value and increased traffic on Racetrack road.

Let me state why I think it's important that the City have the lead on the parcels. BSU's sudden interest in obtaining free land makes sense but not necessarily for the reasons stated. I've read the BSU 2016 Facilities Master Plan which runs through 2022.

BSU has stated in its facility plan that it needs to have space to fix inadequate facilities for its ROTC program, something I fully agree with, but the 180-page plan mentions ROTC just four times and doesn't fix the problem. Having a facility so that cadets can do physical training, drill and ceremony and secure their personal belonging makes sense, but does giving the RT to an institution which is already underfunded make sense? An institution that didn't address the ROTC shortages its facilities

plan? I'd also ask if the assessment for growth stated in the facilities plan is still current because that might drive this discussion in a different direction.

Finding some manner to honor the horse racing community and historical significance of the RT also makes sense. People are inclined to ignore this little detail; I'd add that should include homage to the slaves that surely were apart of maintaining the tobacco plantations and horses and stables that make Bowie so significant a part of horse racing history.

The City Council has heard loud and clear, the cry from residents about slowing down development in our great City and they have clearly heard a cry for more green space, parks and from the equestrian community. The City Council has stated it has been talking with BSU and I believe there is already agreement for the City to build facilities for joint use.

My greatest concern for giving the land to BSU without legislation that forbids the sale of the land to developers leaves the future open to just that. It also ignores the desires of the majority of Bowie residents. If BSU is already underfunded, why then if the opportunity presented itself, would it not sell land to the highest bidder sometime in the future?

What we have heard from BSU is that it won't build dorms on the RT, their facilities plan already address that. What we haven't heard, though I've suggested it, is BSU clearly stating that it would be happy to work with the City if the City owned the land and that it supports legislation that forbids the sale of the land to developers.

Regarding language in HB Bill 1056, I am concerned that forming a committee to make recommendations only serves to kick this can down the road. What if the Committee can't agree on the future of the land, and who makes a decision on the Committee's recommendation? Isn't the solution with the City in the lead as owners of the land a better near and long-term solution?

One additional issue that I can't get anyone to listen too, is the already terrible traffic on Racetrack Road (RTR). If I need to head southbound in the morning, I take my life in my hand making a left turn and similarly, headed northbound from Hilltop at 0730 in the morning is just as difficult. Three people have died from auto accidents on RTR since we moved in our current house. I know there is a plan to improve **PARTS** of RTR, but that plan is now five years old, won't be implemented for two more years and doesn't take into account whatever solution is arrived at for the RT property.

In conclusion, I support HR 1056 with amendments to give the parcels to the City. But giving the parcels from the RT to the City with legislation that prevents the sale to developers, requires a MoU with BSU for joint use and accommodates some of the wishes of the equestrian community, the historical significance of all who were involved in the Race Track and those who want additional green space in Bowie is an even better solution. That's a win-win for us all! Thank you!