

Thursday, April 27, 2017 Tribune & Georgian

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

1. Zoning changes should be more, not less, restrictive

Dear Editor, While in-holdings don't belong to the public, it's common practice for legal restraints to regulate acceptable in-holder land use on private property within the boundaries of public lands. For example, Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida, a less environmentally restrictive and, at 729,000 acres, a far larger land area than Cumberland's 36,415 acres, prohibits all new development on undeveloped in-holdings from 1986 onward. The 87.5 undeveloped in-holder acres that Candler-affiliated interests seek to divide into 10 parcels for the building of 10 new homes on Cumberland was purchased from a member of the Rockefeller family by Candler interests in 1998, not 130 years ago. The Candlers had no previous connection to that land and the intent of the American public and the National Park Service regarding Cumberland Island's future was well established by then. A shell company, a favorite stealth vehicle of the wealthy, Lumar LLC, handled the purchase in order to hide the identities of the purchasers. A Lumar spokesman stated in 1998 that the then mystery owners merely wanted a pristine piece of land on Cumberland Island. The Candlers sold their original High Point Cumberland Island holdings at the north end of the island to the National Park Service when the national seashore was established. At that time, they negotiated a retained-rights contract with the NPS that hasn't yet expired. Some Candler heirs want a do-over, and to have residences on Cumberland beyond the termination of their contract, when the NPS will take possession of High Point. Other former Cumberland land owners have relinquished their lands when their contracts of retained-rights have expired. I'm certain it was difficult for each and every one of them, but they honored the letter and the spirit of their contracts for the long-term protection of the seashore and wilderness. On the other hand, the greater public interest and the NPS have been playing an elaborate game of whack-a-mole with regretful Candlers who, over the years, have sought different avenues to accomplish their long-range goal of continued Cumberland Island residences; so far involving two, that I know of, fee simple tracts of land at the south end of the island. The Lumar property zoning variance request is only the latest attempt of which I'm aware. I believe unnecessary confusion has resulted from people misunderstanding the limits of private property rights. A review of Georgia zoning and property case law suggests these disgruntled Candlers have no reason to expect either a zoning variance for the Lumar property or lenient rezoning of the 1,000 acres of Cumberland island in-holdings. Any zoning changes made should be more rather than less restrictive in order to safeguard Cumberland's future. Those who have already relinquished their Cumberland holdings, or will eventually do so for the good of the entire American public and future generations, surely expect their sacrifice to have meaning; not for it to be subverted by our county commissioners to satisfy the interests of a well-connected, relentless few.

Jacqueline Eichhorn Harrietts Bluff

2. Decision-makers don't live in the downtown area

Dear Editor, During the last city council meeting Mayor John Morrissey and three of our city councilmen, Elaine Powierski, David Reilly and Allen Rassi refused to send a letter to our county commissioners

saying that changing the wilderness zoning on Cumberland Island would have a bad effect on commerce in St. Marys. This was after the mayor pointed out that a large percentage of the 60,000 annual visitors go to the island specifically for the wilderness experience and 100 percent of them visit our town to get there. When councilwoman Linda Williams explained why the letter should be sent, the capacity crowd applauded and was immediately reprimanded by the mayor. The mayor and these three councilmen have lost sight of the fact that they were elected to represent the views of the people that elected them. Morrissey, Powierski and Reilly all live behind the locked gates of Osprey Cove and they are joined by Rassi on almost every vote, giving this “gang of four” the majority. These people have résumés that made us think they would do a good job for us but it has become clear that they want to model St. Marys after the cities they came from. You hire people for their skill and experience — and you fire them for who they are! These four people vote like this often, and they are putting a zoning plan into action that they believe will increase tax revenue without considering the detrimental effect it will have on the downtown from the railroad tracks to the waterfront. In section 110-9 of this proposed zoning change, there is an exemption for Osprey Cove and other gated communities that have protective covenants; the people that are making these changes are exempt from the changes. We are to believe this new zoning plan was the will of the people, but a closer look shows the master plan steering committee includes councilwoman Elaine Powierski and chaired by attorney Michael Rich and four other people, all of whom live in subdivisions with locked gates to keep “those people” out. Their recommendations do not apply to themselves. The chairman, Michael Rich, will pass the steering committee’s recommendation to the chairman of the planning committee, also attorney Michael Rich, for public hearings. Four of the five planning committee members live or own property in Osprey Cove. That’s right: The zoning changes won’t affect their property either. The planning committee’s recommendations will be sent to the city council’s “gang of four” for a final vote. We are in trouble!

Rebecca Sedat St. Marys