

PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR THE MARION COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
TUESDAY, APRIL 9
ON THE MATTER OF THE PROPOSED WOODLAND PRESERVE DEVELOPMENT

Thank you. I am Ned Murray, Executive Director of the 30-year-old Friends of South Cumberland State Parks, a local nonprofit organization with over 4,000 members, donors, and supporters.

South Cumberland and Savage Gulf State Parks attract over one million visitors each year. As a result, they are vital to South Cumberland's economic stability today and in the future. People come in droves to see our waterfalls, overlooks, and unique and rare flora and fauna. Mayor Jackson's county webpage says, "*Marion County has much to offer in natural beauty. We are home to...Foster Falls and Denny Cove ..so please come and let us show you just how great Marion County is.*" Elsewhere the website says, "*Foster Falls...is a focal point and a drawing card for thousands of outdoor enthusiasts.*"

They're right. Therefore, anything that discourages people from visiting our parks – or that diminishes the visitor experience – is detrimental to our community and the economy.

The people want you to do more to protect our economy, the value of our homes, and the quality of our lifestyle.

Please know that Friends of the Parks is not opposed to all development. We support wise, sustainable, and balanced growth that takes into account the full cost-benefit analysis. Before a project is approved, we have a right to know – and you have an obligation to know – what impact there could be to our ecological, cultural, and historical assets and also to our economy so dependent upon them.

You probably know that we, Friends of the Parks, were coming last week to oppose this development currently called Woodland Preserve. But we were told that this body wouldn't take action against development because it would add money to the tax rolls and that you didn't consider the long-term economic and environmental impacts. Fortunately for all of us, Tony Perry does care. And because he knows that it's possible to put in place protections and restrictions while still being economically feasible, we have begun to work with him to do exactly that.

Throughout hours of civil and productive conversation, Mr. Perry has agreed to implement a significant number of environmental protections and to consider countless more as we move forward, including among them:

- First and foremost, he has agreed to work with us to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment, so we have factual scientific knowledge – and not just conjecture – about what impact, risks, and opportunities are presented by the proposal for that specific

parcel of land, as well as what up-to-date options there are for preventing or mitigating that impact.

- He has agreed to permanently protect the creek and to test its waters before, during, and after construction.
- He has agreed, through marketing and HOA regulations, to help ensure that the community who lives there will do so in ways that honor, respect, and protect the natural environment and the park.
- And much more

Thank God he's willing to engage these issues. The next developer won't. And others are coming. This world is changing, and we call on you to be better prepared. We need you to adopt the guidelines, regulations, and other tools to do the work that is yours to do, not ours.

I recently have had two separate public officials complain of current problems related to raw sewage effluent, including one area where sewage is flowing into one of our park properties. More importantly they complained of the ineffectual enforcement and correction.

There's not much tourism business to be had by being known as Tennessee's Toilet.

It could cost our economies millions of dollars in revenue, and this kind of thing is easier and less expensive to prevent than to fix.

We call on you to do more to protect our assets.

Now, it might seem easy to just claim that you don't have the power. But that's not what The Subdivision Regulations of Marion County say, nor is it what the Tennessee Code Annotated, on which the regulations are based, says. The regulations say that this commission exists, "*for the purposes of promoting the health, safety, ...prosperity and general welfare of the county; [and] to encourage economically sound and stable land development.*" It goes on, "*Local planning commissions are authorized and directed by said Act to accomplish*" certain goals, including "*seek[ing] that which is for the greatest good of the greatest number of citizens...in order to assure that Marion County will become a more prosperous and more attractive area.*"

Before development happens - especially near our sensitive areas – we must measure and mitigate the impact to the natural resources that are why people are coming here in the first place. The benefits of more tax revenue must be balanced against other costs in terms of economic impact and jobs, public relations and tourism impact, and this is not to mention the potential costs to the county for various kinds of maintenance, repair, and cleanup – and our already overburdened public services such as water, fire, ambulance, etc.

We have already lived through an era where we allowed and encouraged the extraction and exploitation of our natural resources for maximum profitability. That approach led to depletion and poverty. It has taken us decades to claw our way out of that. In fact, many are still clawing. Let's not repeat that history.

We don't want to work with developers. We want to work with you to ensure protection and oversight. And we hope that our work on this project with Mr. Perry demonstrates that and will be an example for you, a model for moving forward.

We represent thousands of stakeholders in our area parks – taxpayers, citizens, consumers, employers, and employees. They are the ones you need to serve and protect.

Please invite us to work with you – just as Mr Perry has invited us to work with him – to help bring your toolbox up to date. You have the power and can adopt the measures to help ensure that growth in our area is wise, balanced, sustainable, and that the value of our current assets is protected.

The natural world is like our endowment, an asset to be leveraged but the value of the corpus must be protected. It's not like a checking account to be spent until it's gone. We can balance growth with protection of our sacred natural resources. But it won't happen on its own. It requires thoughtful, careful planning, management, and oversight.

It's time to get off the sidelines and into the fray. Friends of South Cumberland State Parks would rather partner with you than oppose you in that fight.

Thank you for your attention. I have a copy of my prepared remarks to submit for the minutes and the public record.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ned R. Murray, D.Min.
Executive Director
Friends of South Cumberland State Parks