



NEWS RELEASE

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Beaufort leaders address Lady's Island Walmart, tree-cutting and development plans

Development of the Lady's Island Walmart and retail outparcels on the site are within the Beaufort City limits but the project is governed by a decades-old legal agreement that started before the property was part of the City.

Standards in the Planned Unit Development and Development Agreement, including setbacks, parking design, paving and landscaping, are allowed to be different than standards in the rest of Beaufort.

"The Walmart project is something the City Council opposed several years ago," Beaufort City Manager Bill Prokop said. "The case proceeded to protracted litigation beginning in 2008 that resulted in a court order, an Arbitration Panel ruling, and a mediation agreement. The court ruled in favor of the landowner and the result is that Walmart is building the shopping center under a Planned Unit Development and Development Agreement, interpreted by the Court, that basically ties our hands," he said.

"We are working closely with their engineers and design team," he said. "But it's a big box store and they wanted that site for its visibility and for its access to both residents and tourists in our growing market."

The issue dates back to 1994 when Beaufort County approved a Planned Unit Development along with a Development Agreement for then-owner Fred Trask's 41 acres adjacent to and across Highway from the Lady's Island Airport.

Before any dirt was turned, in 2003 the property was annexed into the City of Beaufort. The Beaufort City Council accepted and later renewed a Development Agreement. After City of Beaufort leaders rejected an early Walmart proposal in 2008, the case went to court, to an arbitration panel, and eventually to mediation.

With construction starting, the project is expected to require 20,000 truckloads of fill dirt to raise the site above flood levels to meet federal requirements. When the project is completed, there will be a

newly-planted 15-foot landscaped buffer on Sea Island Parkway/US 21 with more than 50 understory trees and 250-plus shrubs.

Prokop warned area residents they'll see a lot of clear-cutting on the site, which is needed before the fill dirt can be trucked to the property. Beaufort and Lady's Island residents recently raised concerns about clear-cutting and tree protection after developer D.R. Horton cleared a large parcel on Sam's Point Road on Lady's Island for a new neighborhood.

The D.R. Horton project is outside the city limits and is governed by Beaufort County regulations. The Walmart project will be managed under court rulings and the City regulations with full cooperation of the developer, Prokop said.

"One of our challenges with the public is explaining what's inside the city limits and under our regulations," he said. For instance, on Lady's Island contiguous properties along US 21 are within the city, but at Chowan Creek Bluff, property on the northeast side by the gas station is in the county, but a turn toward Distant Island is back within Beaufort City limits. However, the City and the County try to work cooperatively on all development projects.

At the Lady's Island Airport Junction development, there are three outparcels being developed in conjunction with the Walmart store, Beaufort City Planning Director Libby Anderson said:

- On the center Retail Outlot, being developed with the Walmart, existing trees will be kept via a retaining wall in the front buffer area
- On the other two outparcels, the front buffer will be replanted and landscaped as part of site development – because of the massive amount of fill dirt to be trucked in, a considerable number of trees had to be removed
- Eventually the development on the three outparcels will help screen the view of Walmart and its parking lot.

A traffic impact analysis was required and approved by South Carolina Department of Transportation and the City. The Northern Regional Plan Implementation Committee will be studying land use and traffic/transportation issues in the Sea Island Corridor.

A complete tree survey has been completed on the parcel which contains very few large Live Oaks. The development plan is maintaining the healthy ones and the developer is working closely with City staff to ensure a favorable full-site landscape plan is part of the finished product.

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