



FRIENDS OF THE PARKS

SOUTH CUMBERLAND & SAVAGE GULF STATE PARKS

Dear Friends of South Cumberland State Parks,

It appears the weather-related postponement of the Marion County Planning Commission meeting was a blessing. It gave us time to do significant background work on our position and to engage in extensive dialogue with Mr. Tony Perry, the majority owner and developer of the proposed Woodland Preserve subdivision. Mr. Perry has offered a significant number of assurances and commitments intended to prevent and mitigate impact to the land and water during construction and long afterwards.

Based on those commitments, which far exceed any minimum requirements the county or state will impose, and with much time needed to iron out the details, **the Executive Committee of Friends of South Cumberland State Parks voted on Sunday, April 7 to withdraw our current opposition to the development and to continue to collaborate with Mr. Perry.** We believe that under the circumstances our best and most impactful role will be to help ensure that the design, construction, and occupancy of the development is as environmentally sensitive as we can get it.

Feel free to reach out to us if you'd like greater detail about the areas around which we have agreement, but the key points include:

- Conducting a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment by an independent, qualified environmental engineering firm in the next six months. In order to ensure objectivity and transparency, Friends of the Parks will pay 50% of the cost of the study and will participate in selecting the firm, defining the scope of the study, and analyzing the results. The report from that assessment will help inform many subsequent decisions.

- Permanently protecting Little Gizzard Creek and a reasonable buffer with a conservation easement, sale, or similar mechanism.
- Ongoing testing of Little Gizzard Creek in two locations - where it enters and where it leaves the subdivision property - before, during, and after construction.
- Implementing measures to reduce soil impact during construction.
- Friends representatives will work with the development's design and landscape teams regarding designated conservation spaces, onsite trail systems, trail markers, and educational signage/materials that promote education and conservation and to develop planting guidelines to maximize native, reduce non-native, and eliminate invasive species.
- Developing a number of HOA policies (and funding mechanisms) that will help promote the intended community ethos and mitigate potential negative impact by residents.

We have not come to this position lightly. We at Friends **do not** believe that a housing subdivision is the best and highest use of that sensitive land adjacent to our park, but we also recognize - especially in light of Marion County's outdated and wholly insufficient building and planning guidelines and requirements - that the owner has the legal right to build there.

We commend Mr. Perry for engaging with us and seeking (often creative) ways to ensure that the design, building, and occupancy of the subdivision mitigates potential negative environmental impact. We are impressed with the clarity of his vision for this project, his passion for the natural world, and his willingness to include us and our interests in this process. We believe he truly desires to create a residential experience that focuses on the natural world, beauty, and healthy living.

We are confident that Friends of the Parks will get a better outcome by accepting Mr. Perry's invitation to us to be "co-stewards" of this land and seek to implement as many environmental protections as feasible. We hope that this process of productive dialogue in the early design phases will move our community toward a better model for inviting, planning, and monitoring additional growth. This is a work in progress. We are still in the early phase of a number of these discussions, and will keep you updated as things progress.

We also will continue to work with our strategic partners to encourage our government officials to adopt and implement policies and procedures meant to ensure that future development is wise and sustainable, taking into consideration all the costs and benefits, and protecting the value of our existing assets, most especially the natural world and our parks.

For this reason, we still encourage you to attend the Planning Commission hearing this Tuesday, April 9, at 4 pm. We need to show everyone involved that we care and we are watching.

Sincerely,

Ned R. Murray

Executive Director