



Sea Island Corridor Coalition
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November 6, 2017

Mayor Billy Keyserling
City Councilor Philip Cromer
City Councilor Mike McFee
City Councilor Stephen Murray
City Councilor Nan Sutton

Dear Mayor and Members of the Beaufort City Council:

You are well aware of the proposal by MidCity Real Estate Partners and Sam Levin to develop the Whitehall property into seven apartment towers, a 100-unit Independent Living facility, and some 17,000 s.f. of retail/commercial space along the Sea Island Parkway just across the bridge from Historic Beaufort.

This plan is a significant departure from the initial concept drawings circulated when the developer first considered the project last spring, and it requires special attention.

All of you have traditionally been loud advocates of the need to enhance and maintain the special character of Beaufort. But with the City's annexations on Lady's Island, it is now incumbent on you to advocate for it and its residents, too. Lady's Island cannot be relegated to being a dumping ground for development that would never be considered for Beaufort proper.

And there should be little doubt that a project as muscular as that proposed for Whitehall will radically change the "special character" of Beaufort. Just last Friday, the City published a video on its Facebook feed – [click here](#) to see it - that visually extolled that character through views of the Woods Memorial Bridge, the river and Whitehall. It was a beautiful video, but we can only imagine the editing necessary if it had to "uncapture" seven apartment towers emerging from the tree canopy there at Whitehall.

Beaufort does have a “special character.” The City Council are the elected stewards, and this character has been carefully refined and honed by the City and Chamber of Commerce and others. That “special character” was captured well by Southern Living when it recently selected Beaufort as the South’s “Best Small Town.” The magazine wrote:

“No matter where you’re from, where you’ve been or where you’re going, Beaufort feels like home.

“Even the name is pretty: Beaufort. Contrary to the spelling, it’s pronounced “BEW-fert,” with the lips pursed as though blowing a kiss. Just hearing it, you can picture the quaint little town that’s been racking up accolades in recent years. It just sounds nice. Beww-fert, beckoning you to come hither, and see what all the fuss is about.

“And because of those accolades, you know what to expect from the Lowcountry gem: a storied history and rich heritage, splendid mansions framed by moss-hung oaks, and stunning views of rivers and marshes. Locals are much too polite to brag, but we’ve made a lot of “pretty places” lists, even in The New York Times.

“We’ve become a tourist destination, a must-see spot on any trip to the Coastal South. Set foot here, and you’ll see why. This place lives up to its billing. Everything about Beaufort is flat-out charming. As a matter of fact, you can’t turn a corner without swooning. Enchantment is in the air, along with the intoxicating perfume of Confederate jasmine. It could be said that Beaufort has it all. Beauty, check; scenery, check; heritage/history, check; charm, check and double-check. There are some bonus points, too cultural events, water activities, unique festivals, and fine eating joints featuring local seafood. All well and good, but the question is, what makes Beaufort so special? Besides the obvious, why do we continue to make the lists of great little towns, year after year? Is there something in the water that casts a spell on the list-makers? One visit to Beaufort and zap—you’re in love. It’s such a great place that you want everyone to know about it. You want to spread the love.”

We risk changing all this for the worse if the Whitehall proposal before the MPC Nov. 13 is approved, and with that approval, it will fall to the City’s Planning Department to manage the demise.

Many have registered their views on the plan, and others will comment at the Nov. 13 hearing. But there has been silence from City Hall; we have yet to hear a perspective from any of the elected officials from the City. We understand the decision is with another official body, but this has not in the past stopped officials from voicing a view on development matters. It should not stop you here, either.

The momentous nature of this decision cannot be underestimated. An approval of this plan by the MPC will change the character and skyline of Beaufort forever, and in our view, not for the better. This decision is one on which you, as the City’s elected officials, must provide some leadership and direction.

We invite you to comment on the future of Whitehall and this particular proposal. If you will e-mail your thoughts to us at mail@seaislandcoalition.com, we will consolidate your several perspectives and make certain that our 850 supporters, and MPC members, receive them in advance of the Nov. 13 MPC meeting.

Let us say here that the Coalition fully expects the Whitehall property to be developed at some point; we are not standing athwart the future and yelling stop! We *are* advocating for a smarter proposal from the developers, one that respects this thing called “special character,” and contributes positively to the skyline and the well-being of Beaufort. This is important: a decision to approve by the MPC on Nov. 13 will ring a bell that cannot be un-rung.

Thank you all for your continued service.

All best wishes,



Charles G. Newton, Jr,
President
Sea Island Corridor Coalition



Mary T. Somerville
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