

## **Soccer complex would set aside decades of land-use policy. What comes next?**

**BY BILL JUSTICE**

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When my clients come to me looking to buy a horse farm, they're looking to buy in Lexington. Whether they're from the Middle East, Santiago, Dublin, or New York City, they're after the world-renowned Bluegrass farmland — the cradle of the Thoroughbred industry and the summer place to be for our sport horse industry.

As the owner and principal broker of Justice Real Estate, the largest farm firm in Central Kentucky, I was troubled as I watched a recent Board of Adjustment meeting adjourn following the approval of a proposal to build a soccer and parking complex in the heart of Lexington's Agricultural-Rural (A-R) zone. I was and continue to be even more concerned by their decision to disregard almost every single one of the 19 conditions set forth by the Lexington-Fayette planning staff to make the proposal an acceptable use of the rural land that is the bedrock of our community's very identity.

What is perhaps the most alarming to me, however, is what comes next. The June 28 Board of Adjustment meeting was just the first stone to slide down the slippery slope that comes into existence when decades of land-use precedent are cast aside. In just a few weeks, the Planning Commission will consider two zoning text amendment proposals that demonstrate the true intent of those seeking to develop what was supposed to be a recreational soccer complex: a proposal to install lights and permit concessions and retail sales at the complex in question in addition to a proposal to permit a full-fledged soccer stadium accompanied by thousands of surface parking spaces. Furthermore, the soccer stadium is slated to be developed in the neighboring Economic Development zone, which serves as a critical buffer between the A-R zone and the historic Urban Service Boundary.

As city and county officials contemplate making two of the most impactful zoning ordinance changes our community has seen since the nation's first Urban Service Boundary was established in Lexington in 1958, I ask not only why are we even contemplating this, but also, what is the rush? Why are we in such a hurry to unravel our finite and much sought after agricultural and equine landscape that is synonymous with the Lexington we know and love?

This is a serious decision with irreversible and lasting consequences; it should be subject to careful deliberation, study and consideration. One wrong land-use decision has the power to unleash a ripple effect with ever-increasing burdens that will be borne by future generations long after we are gone. We're already seeing 12 soccer fields turn into an intense commercial soccer complex accompanied by a major soccer stadium and event venue nearby. What comes next?

Soccer is everywhere, in every city across the country. Lexington is the Horse Capital of the World. We must do everything in our power to protect and maintain that.

*Bill Justice is the owner and principal broker of Justice Real Estate in Lexington.*

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