



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

December 2, 2013

It is a puzzlement.

–Rodgers and Hammerstein, *The King and I*

Park Pushback

The day after Save the Cape presented to the State Ports Authority our plan for a new State park on the 600-acre site on the Cape Fear River originally purchased for a megaport, Brunswick county officials immediately and vigorously denounced the project—on television and in the press. What? A State park for Brunswick County, where none exists, and they don't want it?

The stated reasons for this position are that the County needs that site for industrial development, and the County has plenty of parks. Both of those reasons are so obviously wrong that we wonder what is going on here.

Let's look at the suitability of the site for industry. The Ports Authority site is singularly unattractive for industrial purposes. It is near neither materials nor markets. The nearest four-lane highway is 15 miles away, the nearest common-carrier railroad is 20 miles away. As for water access, there is water adjoining the site, but the navigation channel is a half mile away across 200 acres of salt marsh and along an inlet that is two feet deep. When the Ports Authority was planning a container terminal for the site, the Corps of Engineers estimated the dredging costs at \$1.2 billion.

The County Economic Development Commission lists 2800 acres of industrial property available, including 2200 acres on US 74/76, next to the railroad and near the port, all at bargain prices. Yet years of conspicuous efforts to attract industry have been unsuccessful. The supply of industrial sites far exceeds the demand. And the closing of DAK Americas will add 1600 acres.

But the demand for parks is rapidly exceeding the supply. In each of the last four decades, Brunswick County has grown more than 40%. And the seasonal population of the County is 2.6 times the permanent population. New investment capital coming to the County is going to lifestyle-based housing, for both retirees and young families. Although the County has a fine park system of 745 acres (albeit focused on athletics), the County's Master Plan for parks "dictates an assertive program of growth in the parks and recreation program for Brunswick County because it is obvious from further qualitative research that the new residents will anticipate and expect a first-class system." To meet the guidelines of the National Recreation and Park Association for developed parkland, the County will need 565 more acres of parks in 2020. To accommodate the seasonal population: 2675 more acres. The polls taken for the Master Plan show that residents put the highest priority on a greater range of facilities for family activities, especially nature-based activities.

The future of Brunswick County is apparent—new people, new energy, new capital—all wanting parkland, not smokestacks. So why do people of influence in the County want the 600 acres at Southport for industry? Who gains? We know who loses.