

Berry family proposes 600-acre development  
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- Williamson A.M. -

FRANKLIN Three tracts of land that have been in the Berry family for generations are about to take on the look of the next generation.

Berry family members Avalyn Berry Swain and Tyler Berry IV have signed a joint venture agreement with Boyle Investment Company to develop roughly 600 acres into a mixed-use development which could include everything from residential, retail, restaurants, offices, hotels and institutional uses.

Swain, who became executor of her father, Tyler Berry Jr.'s estate when he died in 1996, said she could tell then that times were changing and the land that had been in her family for generations was about to change as well.

"I could see that the town of Franklin was going to be moving toward us down I-65 South," she said. "With progress coming you can only stand still for so long."

She said despite the many offers she's gotten for her family's land over the years, she never worked with anyone she felt had a compatible focus.

"I wanted to keep this property as a unit and not piecemeal it," she said. "We went to a lot of different people and the Boyles were in tune with what I had always wanted for this property. I want the history and heritage to relate to it. This will probably be a gateway to Williamson County at this last interchange and we want it to be something we can all be proud of."

Phil Fawcett, executive manager of Boyle's Brentwood office, said that plan is in very early stages and few details have been nailed down. He does know, however, that Boyle and the Berry family plan to work closely with the city of Franklin, Williamson County and neighboring properties in defining specifics.

Unlike a similar multi-use project attempted by Brentwood's Cal Turner, that was ultimately rejected by the City Commission, the Berry property preliminary plan fits into Franklin's developing long range plan for this area, which calls for mixed uses.

A study of this Goose Creek area by Franklin's long-range plan steering subcommittee, lists among the priorities for this area, gateway establishment, the need for quality neighborhood retail and commercial and respect for the existing character of the area.

The Berry land is in an unincorporated part of the county but is within Franklin's urban growth boundary. Fawcett said the plans are to work with both the city and the county. Those talks, coupled with input from the neighbors, could affect everything from annexation and sewers to specifics of the plan.

Swain said the family has embarked on this project with Boyle as a joint venture, not a land sale, to ensure that the result would be unique and consistent with their family's heritage.

"If you sell off the land, who is going to put what there and what's the quality going to be?" she said. "In order to retain this, I had to have some voting rights. We have some control and have been working together which is allowing me to shepherd this through. This is what I have been aiming for all along.

The Boyles have high goals in mind, too," she added. "They want this to be a legacy. No one should have any fear with what we are doing." Fawcett said working together with landowners helps create a legacy, not just a development.

"Doing partnerships with land owners allows them to participate in the long-term value creation of the development," he said.

"It was important to them to stay actively involved and it's important to us. What it does is allows for the community to have local ownership and a vested interest into the property."

But it's early in the game and both Fawcett and Swain know they have work ahead of them to get this project off the ground.

"We know it's going to be a multi-use project that will have a great sense of place and draw on the historic qualities of Franklin," he said, "From there, we just don't know yet. We haven't gotten feedback from the community, the key stakeholders, the aldermen, the Planning Commission and the county. We haven't even talked to the neighbors yet."