

An open letter to the 24,300 Citizens of Ridgeland, Mississippi

From: H.C. Bailey, Jr. and James L. Barksdale

October 9, 2007

To the Citizens of Ridgeland,

On October 10th your Mayor and Board of Aldermen will be asked to consider a request for a special exception allowing construction of a professional office building for the Butler Snow Law Firm, the Horne Group, and the regional headquarters of a Fortune 500 business. Allow us to quantify the significance of this request. The Butler Snow Law Firm is the largest law firm in the State of Mississippi, the Horne Group is the largest CPA firm in the State of Mississippi, and the regional headquarters would oversee a four-state region for the Fortune 500 Company.

This request raises some of the most important questions to come before the Mayor and Board of Aldermen in our memory. We believe we will all look back on this time as a monumental decision point in Ridgeland's history. Will Ridgeland take a bold step and raise the bar on quality growth, securing its long-term future? Or will Ridgeland miss this opportunity -- to the detriment of current and future generations of its citizens?

One doesn't need to look far to see the positive results that can follow great strategic decisions. Ridgeland won Northpark Mall by the forward-looking and decisive actions of its city fathers. The result has been tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue to the Ridgeland community and schools, and enormous growth in property values. Today, our proposed building with its stellar tenant lineup can achieve positive rewards of equal long-term value to Ridgeland. Major Class "A" office developments like this will stabilize and sustain the surrounding community, both residential and commercial, for generations to come. On the other hand, to deny this development will send a negative message that will haunt the city for years to come.

Allow us to address some of the issues involved in this matter:

- **The Building will comply with the Zoning Ordinance.** A few have suggested that it would violate the Zoning Ordinance to permit a building taller than four stories. But the Zoning Ordinance expressly authorizes buildings taller than four stories by special exception. Moreover,

Mississippi law mandates that zoning regulations be made in accordance with a city's comprehensive plan. The Comprehensive Plan of the City of Ridgeland states that the city will employ "flexible zoning techniques", specifically including special exceptions. Granting a special exception for a building taller than four stories is consistent with both the letter and the spirit of the Ridgeland Zoning Ordinance and its Comprehensive Plan.

- **The Mayor and Aldermen can be trusted to do the right thing.** It has been said by a few people that they can't trust the Aldermen to enforce the Zoning Ordinance because the ordinance calls for a four-story height limit. As pointed out above, the ordinance allows modification to the four-story limit by special exception if circumstances warrant. We would submit that the ordinance as a whole needs enforcement. The real question is whether the Board will be allowed, now and in the future, to use its best judgment to make decisions that are in the long-term best interest of the City.
- **Change is warranted.** It has been pointed out that there are seventy-two commercial buildings along Highland Colony Parkway and that not one of them is over four stories (until the Cellular South building was built). Why is that? It is because there wasn't demand for anything over four stories before. Now, however, Ridgeland happily finds itself in demand by companies that need significant office space. It is poor long-range planning if the City shackles itself by viewing its current four-story provisions as absolute and unchanging.
- **Traffic infrastructure is strong.** The area around the proposed building is blessed with some of the best traffic infrastructure in the state. If there were ever a place to put a major building, this would be the place – on an interstate, with access to a frontage road, and surrounded by interchanges. Our traffic study demonstrates that the roads will handle the traffic generated by this development. If we built two eight-story buildings as some have suggested, it would not reduce traffic.
- **The building is appropriate for the area.** The planning of Highland Colony Parkway began twenty-two years ago, in approximately 1985. The planning and construction phase took ten years, and the roadway has been in existence for twelve years. The Parkway was built to facilitate commercial development and was fifty percent paid for by the land owners who are now developing it. It was built for exactly the kind of development proposed, and existing, in Colony Park. It will not diminish but will enhance surrounding area property values.
- **Thirteen stories is a reasonable compromise.** In response to concerns from our neighbors, we have devised a way to reduce the height of the building to 13 stories from 17 stories. Further reductions in height

are simply not possible if these three high - quality tenants are to be retained. We have been asked if it would be possible to build two separate eight--story buildings to house the three prospective tenants. We have explored that and other alternatives, but because of land and site constraints, it is impossible and impractical.

- **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEEDS)** We think it is important to point out that this building will be built and certified by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEEDS). It will be the first of its size so certified in the state of Mississippi.
- **Tax revenues from the building will strengthen the Madison County School system including Ridgeland schools** The Madison County School system is one of the County's greatest assets and is largely responsible for its extraordinary growth. This building alone will add approximately \$400,000 in annual revenues to the Madison County Public School District. The development that either currently exists or is under construction in Colony Park will contribute \$1,950,000 annually, and, when completely built out, will double this amount. While this may be of little importance to those who have no young children, it is of utmost concern to the larger community.
- **The overwhelming majority of Citizens support the Building.** The City of Ridgeland is made up of some 24,300 residents, all of whom will share in the benefits of this development. The opposition is, we believe, a vocal and well - organized minority. A petition was presented at the Zoning Board hearing which contained approximately 700 signatures. Upon review of the petition, there were numerous duplicate signatures and the actual number of households was only 424. The vast majority lives more than one mile from the development and cannot see the building or be seen from the building.

Our elected City leaders have shown great wisdom, judgment, and trustworthiness in the past. They have made decisions that have enabled the City to become a vibrant and growing community. Today, Ridgeland's Aldermen are faced with another "leadership moment". By their election we have given them the responsibility to take into account all of the information available, use their best judgment, and decide based not on what's best for one particular interest group – including ours and our partners - but on what is best for the entire City of Ridgeland. In short, they have been given a collective opportunity – **and an individual responsibility** – to lead.

We urge the Mayor and Board of Aldermen to promote Ridgeland's lasting prosperity and ensure her future interest by joining us in welcoming these three outstanding businesses and their 650 employees.

Sincerely,

H.C. Bailey, Jr.

James L. Barksdale

Developers of Colony Park

Cc: Mayor Gene McGee
Alderman at Large Gerald Steen
Alderman Ken Heard, Ward 1
Alderman Chuck Gautier, Ward 2
Alderman Kevin Holder, Ward 3
Alderman Larry Roberts, Ward 4
Alderman Scott Jones, Ward 5
Alderman Linda Davis, Ward 6