

[Back](#)

Sale of precious resource could trigger Walhalla's twilight

Published: Sunday, February 4, 2007 - 6:00 am

First question: Why?

True, once Walhalla had apple orchards and textile plants. Then the world changed.

You don't see many full-time farmers driving pickups into town any more, either.

Farming is agribusiness now. Corporations do most all the farming. They mostly do it elsewhere.

Advertisement

When people in Walhalla get up in the morning and go to work these days, a good number of them drive away to places like Easley or Seneca.

So you can see why the mayor and city council would be willing to listen to a developer's offer for Walhalla's 440 acres, give or take a little, on Stumphouse Mountain.

"For us, a few million in the bank would be a blessing," Mayor Lamar Bailes has said.

But the question to answer is why the developer, who has built mostly in south Florida and the Caribbean, according to Bailes, and who was looking from Georgia to Asheville, makes an offer here.

I'll tell you why. Beauty.

Unspoiled mountain views. Great swaths of forestland unmarred by rooftops or asphalt. Here, a person can stand at his window and look out at wildlife.

People would pay money for that. People already do. Not just up the road in western North Carolina or north Georgia, but all around the country. There's a surging demand for the last best places.

Boomers and technocrats who can live anywhere want to build their dream homes or dream second homes next to or in the middle of that increasingly rare commodity: untouched land they can hike and fish.

Particularly untouched public land guaranteed to stay that way.

Unspoiled beauty is treasure for Walhalla.

Second question: Why the rush?


No one could blame a buyer for hurrying to snap up a deal. Or the developer in this case might have time pressures of his own.

But for a seller, it's different. Do you take the first offer that comes along? Without determining what your options are?

A gazillion old sayings advise: Look before you leap.

For Walhalla, the Stumphouse property's like a family heirloom passed from one generation to the next. A Van Gogh, only not everybody realized it.

Now that an art dealer's come around, maybe more are getting an inkling. But do you sell it out from under the grandchildren?

STORYCHAT 
What's your view?
[Click here](#) to add
your comment to
this story.

Several conservation groups, experts at this kind of thing, have offered to help the city find a way to profit from its heirloom and keep it, too.

And now the state Department of Natural Resources has declared an interest in making an offer. Again, money in the bank for Walhalla, but its treasure stays a treasure.

Which increases the value and desirability of the nearby town.

Third question: What do the people of Walhalla, the owners, want to do? Shouldn't somebody ask? Maybe they'd like their children to be able to use it.

There are layers on layers of other considerations. Example: What happens to Issaqueena Falls in the future, if a subdivision goes in above it? The pre-Civil War Stumphouse tunnel?

What happens to Walhalla once its treasure's gone?
