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Turner urges 'no' vote

By Judith R. Tackett, jtackett@nashvillecitypaper.com

Brentwood resident and former CEO of Dollar General Stores, Cal Turner Jr., has asked citizens to vote no on the upcoming Open Space Referendum that would allow commissioners to raise taxes to issue \$50 million in bonds for the purchase of additional parkland.

The Turner family fears the referendum was drawn with their 555-acre Green Pasture farm along Concord Road in mind.

"My ownership of this property feels like a community stewardship," Turner said, adding that he feels this way because of the property's central location potential role for the community.

"My motive has always been to figure out how my ownership of it can make this property most valuable for the community 100 years from now," Turner said.

The Turner property drew attention last year when it was up for sale and Turner attempted to develop it. The proposal focused on three European-style villages that would have allowed for 250 acres of open land, which would have been donated to the City as parkland.

After the development proposal failed, the Turner family decided to keep the land and continue to live on it.

Turner said the decision to keep the land in the family came after he discovered that his son, Cal Turner III, was interested in keeping Green Pastures farm as a home.

"Everyone has a sense of ownership of this property it seems to me, and that feels good to me and yet, it can be bad also when they take that to a decision-making [level]," Turner said. "That feels invasive to me, ... and yet I'm burdened with the right thing to do.

"This whole referendum thing feels like pressure in the making," he said.

The Open Space Referendum started about a year ago after a group called Citizens for Brentwood Green Space (CBGS) started a campaign to 1,000 more acres to the city's 525 existing acres of parkland.

CBGS presented Brentwood's Board of Commissioners with a petition containing more than 1,600 signatures that asked for a referendum on issuing up to \$50 million in bonds

to purchase land for preservation. Commissioners consequently decided to allow the community to vote on the issue that could result in an increase of property taxes associated with the issuance of bonds.

“The primary concern for the Turners is the threat of condemnation,” said Jane Cleveland, who represents Cal Turner Jr. in this matter.

Cleveland said she believed CBGS developed \$50 million bonds initiative with the Turner property in mind.

However, Brentwood City Manager Mike Walker said the city has never used condemnation to acquire parkland.

“We do it a lot with right-of-way that’s required for road projects and water and sewer, utility easements, that kind of stuff,” Walker said.

CBGS board member Gil Hutchinson said the group would only support land purchases with owners’ consent.

Hutchinson said the referendum would show that citizens want the City to purchase more land and preserve it, and are willing to allow commissioners to raise taxes to acquire land.

The Open Space Referendum is Sept. 23. For early voting information, go to www.brentwood-tn.org.