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Turner cows get to keep their pastures-

Prime land taken off the market after heated debates about possible development

By Karen Loew, staff writer

Brentwood- The scenic farm whose future dominated city attention for the better part of the year will remain the green, undeveloped, cow- and horse-populated place it is now, owner Cal Turner Jr. said this week.

Monday at noon an employee of the 555-acre Green Pastures farm took down the "For Sale" signs erected about four months ago along busy Franklin Road. Thus a drama begun last August when Turner invited the public to help him create an innovative plan for the property is ended. At least for now.

Acknowledging the attachment many Brentwoodians feel for the farm they drive by frequently, Turner said then that he wanted to help satisfy residents' aesthetic, recreational, residential and civic needs while ridding himself of costly care-taking expenses. After hearing public comment, the planning firm he hired drew up a three-village plan with lots of green space that needed a new zoning ordinance to become reality.

That plan became a major issue in May's election of two out of five City Commission members. When anti-plan incumbents were re-elected Turner vowed to sell off 40% of the farm for a subdivision and several large estates and to keep the rest for himself.

But now he and wife Margaret are going to keep the whole parcel. "I've had time to settle down and I just can't bring myself to 'usual and ordinary' development of that wonderful community asset," he said, repeating the derisive phrase the typical Brentwood subdivision he wanted to avoid, for which the land is now zoned.

"So I've had a consult with the next generation of Turners, and I think it's better for there to be non-decision now. I don't have plans to move away and I'm already accustomed to losing money every year so maybe I can hang in for a few more. I follow my heart a lot with this land," he said.

A year ago, Turner said one reason he wanted to divest was his son's lack of farming interest. Cal Turner II apparently changed his mind, because this week Turner said, "My son has the Turner genes when it comes to land and being the steward of it. And he joins my disdain for Brentwood ordinary land development." Cal Turner III could not be reached yesterday.

"I don't think I have it in me to be part of the development of this property. It is going to be largely up to him. I don't have it in me to through this anymore," said Turner, who was disappointed by the city's refusal of the plan created by Miami-based Dover, Kohl & Partners. Dover, Kohl is a leader in the New Urbanism movement that uses traditional design principles to create more appealing neighborhoods – principles also used the "Open Space Residential Development – Innovative Project" zoning category created by City Commissioners as another was to build smaller-unit residential villages.

Since Turner assembled the acreage in the early '90s, he's brought development proposals before city authorities several times, whether for an office building, a retirement community, a change in zoning or a change back to the former zoning.

In light of election results and the possibility that the most visible parts of the farm- those fronting Franklin and Concord roads- would be developed, some called for public purchase and preservation of the farmland. Vice Mayor Joe Sweeney was one who said such a project should be investigated.

"I'm very happy with his decision," Sweeney said yesterday, "There's a saying that real love stories never have endings. The whole community has a love affair with the Turner property, and I would hope it would stay in the family for years to come. But down the road Cal has to do what's best for him and his family, and I respect that, too.

"Status quo is fine with me," he said.

City resident Stephen Prince researched how a public purchase of the land could work and still aims to get a bond issue referendum on the February ballot when voters head to the polls for the presidential primaries. He's undeterred by Turner's announcement, because he's like to see other open spaces preserved too, such as Bill and Opal Primm's farm on Concord Road, where Parker-Grass Co. wants to put a Publix grocery.

"Now we can pursue it more as a concept itself, of preserving the green space, rather than just being a Turner property issue," he said. "I think there's a lot of passion about the preservation of the aura that is Brentwood. And a key component of what Brentwood is, is a large amount of green space."

The 220 acres listed for sale did draw "good, credible interest," Turner said. "There was no doubt about of ability to sell the property."

CK Development partner Bill Kottas of Brentwood wasn't so sure. He never made a serious inquiry about the property because he hears the asking price was \$100,000 per acre- when \$30,000 to \$50,000 per acre is more realistic. "I think the number was just so big that there obviously weren't many local developers-home builders that could step up to the bar," he said.

Developer Dudley Smith, partner in CPS Land in Brentwood, didn't raise that as an issue. His firm didn't work toward a purchase because the "Cal Turner project is a project that would consume you. It's big, it's important, it's vocal." But the land itself? "It's awesome," he said.