

Theme Parks & False Promises: What Jazzland Taught Us — and Why Waller County Should Pay Attention

*By Citizens in Defense of Waller County
Hempstead, TX — July 2025*

When a new theme park is proposed, the pitch is always the same: jobs for locals, a boost to the economy, entertainment for families.

That's the vision being sold today with TexasLand USA — a 200+ acre development proposed just outside Hempstead in Waller County. Developers promise a Texas-themed wonderland, complete with hotels, rides, restaurants, and retail. Supporters claim it will generate prosperity for generations.

But those who remember Jazzland in New Orleans know this script all too well.

In 2000, Jazzland opened with fanfare and federal incentives on 140 acres in New Orleans East. Its creators promised the same things we're hearing now: local employment, family fun, and long-term economic benefits. The park was designed around New Orleans culture, featuring Mardi Gras floats, Zydeco-themed rides, and a French Quarter-style promenade.

It lasted five years.

Even before Hurricane Katrina swept through the region in 2005, Jazzland (later rebranded as Six Flags New Orleans) was in trouble. Tourists didn't want to travel that far out. Local residents balked at high ticket prices. The summer heat and lack of shade made visits unbearable. Ownership changed hands multiple times. The public was left with empty promises — and debt.

After Katrina, Six Flags abandoned the site and took the insurance payout. The park sat vacant for nearly two decades, a decaying reminder of misplaced hope and poor planning. Locals call it a ghost town. It became a magnet for graffiti, urban explorers, and dangerous decay. Only now, 20 years later, is the land finally being cleared for something new.

What does this have to do with Hempstead?

Everything.

TexasLand USA proposes a massive theme park in a rural part of Waller County — with no major highways, no public transit, and no tourism base. It's a high-risk bet on speculative development. And yet again, the pitch is "jobs, economy, entertainment."

But we've seen how that story ends.

Jazzland was built in a world-famous tourist city — and it still failed. If a theme park couldn't survive in New Orleans, what chance does it have in Hempstead?

Instead of bold promises, Waller County deserves clear answers.
Instead of outside developers dictating our future, we deserve local control.
Instead of repeating Jazzland, we need to learn from it.

This isn't about saying no to fun — it's about saying yes to smart planning, transparency, and long-term sustainability.

Because 20 years from now, we don't want to be left with empty parking lots, rotting wood, and broken promises.