



Not All Theme Parks Are Built the Same — Let's Not Pretend They Are

By Citizens in Defense of Waller County

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TexasLand USA says it wants to be the next Dollywood or Silver Dollar City — a tourism anchor for Waller County. But here's the thing: Dollywood and Silver Dollar City weren't built in five years, and they didn't appear out of nowhere. They were the result of decades of steady investment, trust-building, and community-rooted planning.

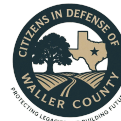
When we met with TexasLand's founder Lizzy McGee on July 24, she called those two parks her "north stars." It was an earnest statement. But the truth is, these comparisons don't hold up — and our community deserves to understand why.

Branson, Pigeon Forge... and Hempstead?

Let's take a look at how these communities stack up — then and now:

Location	1970 Population	2020 Population	Nearby Attractions	Highway Access
Branson, MO	~2,500	~12,000	Table Rock Lake, Marvel Cave, music shows	US Hwy 65 (4–6 lanes)
Pigeon Forge, TN	~1,400	~6,000	Smoky Mountains National Park, Gatlinburg	US 441 / 6-lane Hwy
Hempstead, TX	~3,000	~5,000	None comparable	FM roads, RR crossings, US 290 (5 mi), I-10 (20 mi)

Both Branson and Pigeon Forge started small, but they grew with the region. Their success was shaped not just by attractions but by geography, infrastructure, and time. They had built-in natural draws — mountain lakes, national parks, limestone caves. Highways were widened,



tourism support systems were put in place, and the populations grew in tandem with the local economy.

Hempstead, by contrast, has been stuck in infrastructure limbo for years. FM roads like 1887 and 3346 are narrow. Schools are underperforming. Traffic already clogs US 290. There's no natural tourism engine waiting to be unlocked. And yet, we're told this is the ideal location for a regional entertainment district?

Experience Can't Be Fast-Track

Dollywood's site opened in 1964 as Rebel Railroad. Dolly Parton didn't join until 1986, once the foundation was strong. Silver Dollar City started even earlier — built around Marvel Cave, which was first leased by the Herschend family in the 1950s. They spent a decade improving tours before they even opened a small 1880s village in 1960. Success came slowly and steadily, rooted in real community engagement and reinvestment.

Today, Herschend Family Entertainment owns over two dozen attractions across the country — including aquariums, resorts, and the Harlem Globetrotters. They didn't build overnight, and they didn't ask communities to take giant leaps of faith.

TexasLand, by contrast, wants to leapfrog that entire process in just 3 to 5 years. It's promoting a vision of a major attraction — possibly hundreds of millions of dollars in scale — without the track record, infrastructure, or ecosystem to support it. This isn't an anti-growth stance. It's a pro-due-diligence one.

The “Trust Us” Problem

To be clear: TexasLand USA has already purchased 229 acres. But they're asking the public to embrace this project — to welcome the disruption and burden of rapid development — without full vetting, long-term accountability, or transparency about operations, infrastructure plans, or contingencies.

That's a big ask in a region still waiting on school improvements, drainage repairs, and safe roadways. We're not against ideas. We're against untested, under-regulated expansion with no room for public input.

Vision is important. But so is patience. So is infrastructure. So is listening.

Hempstead Deserves Smart Growth

TexasLand isn't Dollywood. And Waller County isn't the next Branson just because someone says it is. These are long games. And we all know what happens when you try to skip steps and speed-run something that's supposed to last a generation.



We're ready to grow — but on our terms, with eyes open, and with smart investments that strengthen our community instead of overwhelming it. We want the next 20 years of Waller County to reflect what we build together, not what's pushed in from the outside without a plan.

Even Dolly waited until the foundation was ready.