

From Pintail to TexasLand: Has Waller County Really Learned the Transparency Lesson?

By Citizens in Defense of Waller County

Originally published in the Waller County Express, March 17, 2026.

Waller County residents have faced this moment before.

More than a decade ago, the proposed Pintail landfill north of Hempstead became a defining local fight. But what many outside the county may not remember, and what those who lived through it never forgot, is how that project first came to light. It was not through open dialogue or a clearly visible public process. It was through discovery.

In 2014, a jury concluded that county officials had engaged in private discussions with landfill representatives for years before taking public action. The verdict found violations of Texas open-government laws and invalidated the county's approval process. Trust was damaged, leadership changed, and the landfill project eventually collapsed under legal and political pressure.

Residents believed that episode had reset expectations. Major projects affecting Waller County would be handled in the open, with meaningful local awareness.

Years later, the proposed TexasLand USA theme park development near Hempstead has unfolded very differently in scope and feasibility. But in one important respect, the process has felt uncomfortably familiar.

Recently, residents learned that the legally required public notice for the TexasLand-related special-purpose district filing with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) was not published in a Waller County newspaper. Instead, it appeared in the *Houston Business Journal*, a publication with limited local household readership.

This discovery followed an earlier legislative episode involving the same project. In 2025, public notice for House Bill 5685, which would have granted unusual governmental powers to support the proposed TexasLand USA theme park development, was published in the *Houston Chronicle*, again outside the county most affected. Many residents remained unaware of the bill until after it had advanced through key stages.

In both instances, required notices technically occurred. No laws were broken. But the practical result was the same: most residents never saw them.

This does not mean the TexasLand USA proposal is the same kind of project as Pintail. The circumstances are very different.

The Pintail landfill was backed by an established industrial operator with defined financing and a conventional regulatory pathway. TexasLand, by contrast, is a themed-entertainment proposal dependent on special district approval and large-scale infrastructure assumptions, with financing that has not yet been clearly established publicly.

But transparency concerns do not depend on project type. They depend on process visibility.

What the Pintail episode demonstrated was not merely opposition to a landfill. It revealed how major land-use decisions can take shape within narrow circles while formal notice requirements fail to produce meaningful public awareness.

That vulnerability remains.

Most residents learned about these steps much later, often through their own research rather than official communication. When notices appear in places local residents rarely see, the public remains unaware.

These questions matter regardless of what people ultimately think about the TexasLand theme park proposal. Residents may disagree about the project itself, but everyone benefits from a process that is open and visible from the start.

Development decisions affecting infrastructure, water demand, traffic, and public services impact the entire county, not just those who happen to follow legislative filings or specialized publications.

From Pintail to TexasLand, Waller County residents are again confronting a familiar question: Have we truly learned that public process must be not only lawful, but visible?

The answer will shape more than one project. It will define how communities and institutions move forward together, in the open.