

TexasLand USA – What They’re Selling, What We’ll Really Get

From “5,000 jobs” to a 30-acre cow pasture, the promises don’t match reality for Waller County.

By Citizens in Defense of Waller County

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Developers and local promoters behind TexasLand USA are selling a vision full of big promises: thousands of jobs, booming business for Hempstead, rising property values, and a tourism draw that will “put us on the map.”

But promises are easy. Delivering on them is another story.

Across the country, communities have heard these pledges before, and too often the outcome is the same: clogged roads, higher public costs for infrastructure and services, and broken expectations. That’s why we are launching this series, *TexasLand USA - Promises vs. Reality*. Each installment will test the claims being made here in Waller County against independent data and ask the plain-talk questions our leaders should have asked before anyone signed on to the hype.

The Jobs Promise

TexasLand USA likes to talk about “5,000 jobs.” It sounds like a windfall - but the numbers they gave the Waller Economic Development Corporation tell a different story. Out of those 5,000, only 75 would be corporate, year-round positions - and even those would likely be remote or Houston-based, not jobs for Waller County residents. The rest are part-time and seasonal.

That means a handful of stable office jobs at the top, while thousands of locals would be left with short shifts and summer gigs. It’s the industry norm: a small permanent staff supported by a revolving door of temporary workers, many of them students, visa labor, or commuters.

The pattern shows up clearly with major operators. Cedar Fair - the company that owns Schlitterbahn New Braunfels and Galveston along with more than a dozen other parks - employs about 4,400 full-time staff and roughly 48,800 seasonal and part-time workers. That’s more than ten times as many seasonal as permanent jobs, and a total workforce of about 53,000 spread across 25 parks. Yet TexasLand USA is promising nearly the same headcount for a single unbuilt park in Hempstead.

And even if locals are hired, what are they paid? The median wage for ride attendants nationwide is about \$14.28 an hour. In Waller County, the living wage for a single adult is \$21.90. By that measure, TexasLand’s jobs don’t even cover the basics. These are summer jobs and side hustles, not careers that build a community.

The Business Boost

On July 24, local promoter Melissa Hegemeyer, speaking for TexasLand USA, assured residents that “over half of the economic impact happens outside the park’s borders from all the visitors that are going to local gas stations, local restaurants.” It’s a comforting picture: families streaming out of the gates after a day of rides and flocking to Hempstead cafés and shops.

But let’s pause and ask a simple, practical question: after driving an hour from Houston, spending an entire day in the park, and corralling tired kids back to the car, would you make another stop to explore downtown Hempstead?

The reality is clear. Studies of the industry show that 70-90 percent of visitor spending stays inside the park gates. Arlington knows this story well. Six Flags has been there for decades, sending millions of cars onto local roads, yet the economic boost to surrounding businesses has been minimal. The traffic shows up - the dollars don’t.

Dollywood in Tennessee tells the same tale. The park captures nearly all visitor spending, while nearby shops see only modest sales despite heavy tourist flow on the highways.

And it’s not hard to see why. Families who spend eight hours in a theme park don’t wander downtown afterward. They either drive home exhausted or check into hotels in Houston. The “half outside the park” claim is more marketing than economics.

The Agriculture Angle

At the same meeting, local promoter Kirby Cannon of the TexasLand USA team pledged that “our goal is to buy as much local food as possible - local beef, local hay, local produce, local feed. It’s going to be a huge boon to the Waller County ag community.”

It sounds good, but it doesn’t square with reality. Theme parks don’t buy their beef from the ranch down the road. They contract with national distributors who can deliver bulk orders at consistent prices. Even Dollywood, which trades heavily on its Appalachian roots, sources primarily through regional wholesalers.

The only “ag boost” likely to materialize here is symbolic. A 30-acre show pasture with a few cows - floated as part of TexasLand’s plans - may look nice in a brochure, but it won’t transform Waller County agriculture. Let’s be honest: it’s a photo-op, not an economic engine.

Why It Matters

When local promoters like Hegemeyer and Cannon repeat these promises without question, they set false expectations for families, farmers, and small business owners. If the jobs are mostly seasonal, if the money never leaves the park gates, and if agriculture is reduced to a petting zoo, then who really benefits?

The hard truth is this: outside developers and national suppliers win big. Waller County is left holding the bag - with clogged roads, worn-down infrastructure, and higher costs.

Closing

This is just the start of our *Promises vs. Reality* series. Next up, we'll examine claims about infrastructure, water, and the broader impacts of unchecked development - the hidden costs that fall hardest on local taxpayers and landowners when big projects come to town.

Hempstead deserves straight talk and solid answers - not marketing spin.

Editor's note: All sources cited in this column are documented on our "Promises vs. Reality" webpage at texasland-usa.com/promises-vs-reality.