

Cheap Land, Bad Plan

Why TexasLand USA's Hempstead site fails the three keys to theme park success: demand, accessibility, and visibility.

By Citizens in Defense of Waller County

Originally published in the Waller County Express Sep 2, 2025

When it comes to building a successful theme park, location isn't just important — it's *everything*. Unfortunately, TexasLand USA's decision to put their massive development outside Hempstead misses the mark on every critical factor.

At a July 24 meeting, Lizzy McGee explained the choice as a *"balance of cost, availability on the market, engineering considerations, natural beauty and location."* But those nice-sounding factors ignore the three fundamentals of theme park success: demand, accessibility, and visibility.

No Demand Generators Nearby

Theme parks don't succeed in isolation. They thrive when surrounded by hotels, restaurants, and attractions that create a steady flow of visitors. Hempstead, with fewer than 7,000 residents, has none of that.

Houston may be 50 miles away, but without easy access, it won't provide reliable crowds. And while a few local insiders quietly grabbed real estate in town hoping to profit from anticipated visitor traffic, that's not a substitute for a real demand base. A development of this scale should lift an entire community — not just enrich a handful of people with an inside track.

Poor Accessibility

Hempstead may sit on Highway 290, but the TexasLand site is five miles south — down narrow farm-to-market roads (FM 1887 and FM 3346). Neither the City of Hempstead, with its sharp turns and railroad crossing, nor these country roads were ever designed for thousands of cars a day.

There's no nearby interstate exit. Visitors will face long drives off the beaten path, and when a destination feels out-of-the-way and frustrating to reach, they're less likely to come back. Accessibility isn't just about being reachable; it's about how *simple* and *stress-free* the journey feels.

Successful parks like Dollywood and Silver Dollar City work because they connect directly to major highways. Hempstead's site, by contrast, is tucked away and hard to reach.

No Visibility

Visibility matters. Being seen by thousands of travelers daily creates brand awareness and spontaneous visits. Hempstead may sit on Highway 290, but the town has been bypassed for years. Travelers speed past without stopping, and the community hasn't benefited from its location on a major corridor.

The TexasLand site, five miles south of 290 on rural farm roads, doubles down on that problem. Out of sight means out of mind.

Why Houston-Area Land Costs More

Land closer to Houston is undeniably more expensive, but that cost buys something critical: infrastructure, market access, and visibility. That's why successful developments pay the premium.

TexasLand's team may have assumed Hempstead would be an easier option — a place they could slip this project through quietly, without resistance. After all, they had already been turned away in Waller. But in reality, that "welcome" came only from a small circle of insiders. The broader community was left in the dark, with no meaningful input on a project that could reshape their future.

The Bottom Line

Lizzy described Hempstead as the "best balance" of cost, beauty, and availability. But theme park success doesn't rest on cheap land or scenic views. It rests on demand, accessibility, and visibility — and Hempstead fails on all three.

This isn't smart growth. It's a bad business plan dressed up as a Texas dream.