

LOCAL

Sports and Entertainment Complex envisioned for KM

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What once was fertile farmland is now a mega field of dreams for Kings Mountain and Cleveland County. In a plot of Earth stretched out over 40 acres off of Highway 29 and Margrace Road a seed of development has been planted. This is the true land of possibility.

On this intersection sprouts the dream of a sporting complex, so grand in design that initial plans for the field include 11 venues and 36 facilities. It establishes a home for four baseball fields, five softball fields, four football fields, a multi-use outdoor theatre seating about 20,000 people; a soccer complex with eight fields;

a baseball/football/soccer stadium seating 10,000-12,000 fans; a tennis complex with 10 courts; an amphitheater seating over 6,000; and a hotel and convention center. It also includes an RV park, camping and trails, with room for expansion. But will the dream of the "Southern Exposition Sports and Entertainment Center of the Carolinas" come true?

John Henry Moss, president of the Cleveland County Sports Commission, presented the proposal to the city council Tuesday night. Neisler Brothers, Inc. and CCSC have been working on the project for several months now. The Neislers have proposed to donate 40 acres of their land off of Margrace Road and U.S. Hwy. 29 for the development, management and operation of the sports complex.

"The development of the 40-acre site will be for a sports and entertainment center that is to be a 'phased in' program of development of facilities for sports and entertainment activities over 48-60 months," Moss said.

It will be funded through public and private investment. The location of the Center is not far off of I-85's Exit 4, providing easy access to motorists. Mayor Rick Murphrey said that it will be a big attraction for tournament play and sporting events within the surrounding area. The entire complex may even be made up of private and public facilities.

"The 'Southern Exposition

Sports and Entertainment Center's' plans are designed to feature 11 venues of sports and entertainment facilities to market to a potential population of 2,202,150," Moss said, adding that it will draw from a market of nine counties. "Cleveland County abuts six of the nine counties."

The Commission presented the draft of a billboard that will be seen by an estimated 46,000 motorists each day on Interstate 85. They also presented a map of the property and site plans.

Scott Neisler said that it was not a hard decision to provide land for the complex. "We thought it would be really good for the community," he said, adding that they are also looking at the possibility of leasing outlying parcels for more development around the site.

There were rumors months ago that the Cleveland County Fairgrounds was looking at the property to possibly relocate, giving them better access to I-85 and more room. But the fair has since renewed their lease to stay in its present location for 10 more years.

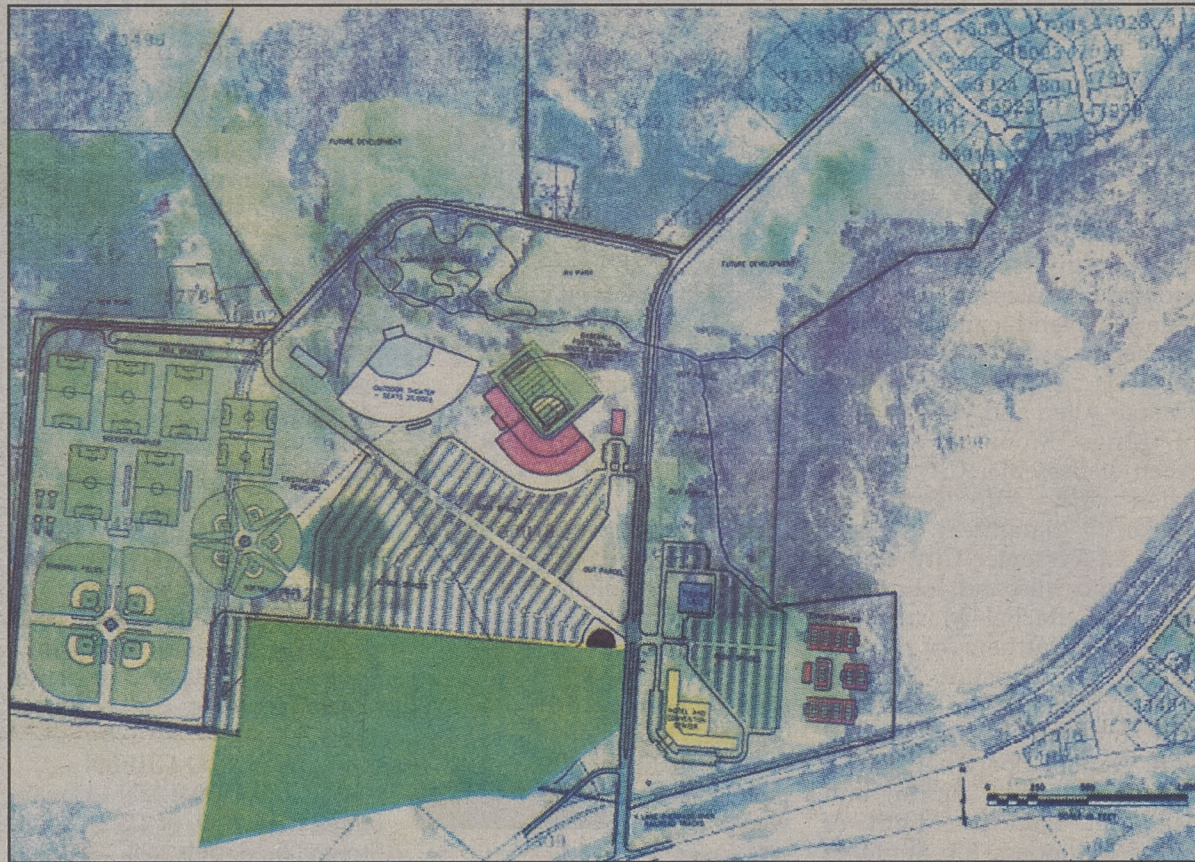
"This should be a real big thing. It's just a matter now of finding the funds to support this," Neisler said.

The vision is alive, but others will be needed to see it to completion. "I'll be looking to appoint a finance committee to work together to provide the project funding," said Murphrey, who is also a member of the CCSC board.

Although this is a Sports Commission project, it will take the Neislers' donation of land, the city annexing the property into its limits to provide utilities, and hundreds of public and private donors before construction can begin.

"We are thankful to the Neisler family and to the Cleveland County Sports Commission. The Neisler family has always been community-involved to improve the quality of life in Kings Mountain and the county," Murphrey said. "We have a vision for our children's future to play in and have access to a state-of-the-art recreational facility."

The new sports and entertainment center is not meant to replace the Jake Early Sports Complex used by the KM Family YMCA. The



PROVIDED BY THE CC SPORTS COMMISSION

Pictured above is the initial layout plan for the Southern Exposition Sports and Entertainment Center, including 36 facilities and room for expansion.

mayor said that each complex fills important needs and there is room enough for both.

"The Cleveland County Sports Commission is entering its second year of activity," Moss said. "The mission of the Commission is to develop the sports and entertainment industry in Cleveland County to foster economic growth and provide opportunity for Cleveland County youth and adults to actively participate in and enjoy wholesome, affordable family activity here, at home."

Murphrey said that members of the sports commission, county commissioners, city council and others visited a complex in Houston, TX, recently to gather some ideas. "We were impressed so we're looking forward to making this happen," he added. "This

could be the largest thing in Cleveland County. The economic impact will be tremendous for our region...It will draw restaurants, hotels, and shopping centers and a lot of jobs to our community."

However, he, Moss and Neisler have stressed that this complex won't just be important for Kings Mountain, but for the entire county and region. "We want to include everybody and let everybody be involved," Murphrey said. "It will give name recognition for the whole county."

The land on which the "Southern Exposition Sports and Entertainment Center of

the Carolinas" is set to be located, falls on 375 acres owned by the Neisler family. The land along Margrace Road was once used for farming. Mary Neisler and Pat Neisler Plonk both said that there was once a dairy farm on the property, called "Archdale Dairy Farm." They sold milk to residents all over Kings Mountain.

Plonk used to ride horses on the land. The farm raised crops, cattle, pigs and chickens. The farming operation stopped between 40-50 years ago. But the land is still fertile for growth.

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