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# Pike Road dispute centers around choice

By Patty Payne

Montgomery County is a county with two significant histories. One aspect of its history played out in the growth of the city of Montgomery along the Alabama River in support of the cotton trade, and later in its role as the capital city of Alabama, the county seat, and the cradle of the American civil rights movement.

The other aspect of the county's history has been evidenced in the lives of the rural residents who have made their living from the land outside of the hub city. Over time, the city of Montgomery has grown and expanded from its humble roots along the river, gradually evolving into a destination city for both business and pleasure.

Nearly 13 years ago a group of rural citizens in east Montgomery County became alarmed by the encroachment of the city of Montgomery into their rural neighborhoods. In order to preserve and protect what they saw as their preferred way of life, these individuals worked together to incorporate the town of Pike Road.

Since then, and in the face of endless lawsuits brought by the city of Montgomery, the small town has grown from a meager population of less than 400 to more than 5,000 citizens who proudly call Pike Road home. The ability to make local decisions that impact local citizens has provided the greatest attraction to Pike Road. It is a natural extension of that capacity to desire a school system to service the community.

For more than a year, Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange and Pike Road Mayor Gordon



File photo

Pike Road Mayor Gordon Stone displays a model of the proposed school for the town



Alabama Voices

Stone worked diligently to achieve a settlement over issues of pending litigation to the betterment of both communities. There was hope prior to the end of the 2010 legislative session that the agreement, drafted as a bill, would obtain the blessings of the responsible delegates in the Legislature and each municipality could have moved forward. It was a win-win solution. Unfortunately, shortsighted and incorrectly motivated individuals in both municipalities fought against the greater good. Leaders need to consider what a vibrant town of Pike Road will bring to Montgomery County, and because it is the hub city of the county to the city of Montgomery itself. Some people view a potential school district in Pike Road as a threat to the Montgomery public school system. But do the math: with approximately 35,000 eligible public school students in the MPS district, only about 2 percent live in the town of Pike Road.

Then there are those individuals who fear a massive flight from the city to the town of Pike Road once a school district is in place, and the subsequent devaluation of city properties. I would argue that it is more likely growth in Pike Road will come from those individuals who have left Montgomery County because they wanted a choice in their public school options, and did not want to place a second mortgage on their home in order to pay for the private school education of their children.

Without a developing and robust town of Pike Road to bolster the population and the economy of east Montgomery County, county and city property values will inevitably decrease, as Autauga and Elmore counties and the city of Auburn become the residential destinations of choice.

It is precisely the ability to attract new residents back to the county that is the key to future security for all citizens who reside within Montgomery County. A strong and robust town of Pike Road will result in a strong and more vibrant county and, in the end, increase revenue and opportunity for the county's hub city - Montgomery. Again, it would be win-win.

Unfortunately, there are those in power, official or otherwise, who believe that if Pike Road fails, Montgomery wins. But truly who is going to win? Certainly there are no winners among the current or future residents who seek choice in where they live or how they educate their children.

Certainly Montgomery County, which would benefit from additional tax and retail

income of new residents in the eastern part of the county, is not a winner. And certainly not the city of Montgomery, which would otherwise benefit from the influx of new county residents working, shopping and enjoying the entertainment venues of the city.

Further, there are no winners among the homebuilders, shop owners and service providers who would all benefit by a larger, growing population in the county.

Whether the town of Pike Road is an asset or a threat is an important consideration for leadership and citizenship, as the city of Montgomery has again elected to take the town of Pike Road to court. The taxpayers will once again pick up the tab from the frivolous legal expenses incurred only to extract the failure of Pike Road.

As we await the outcome of legal proceedings we must ask ourselves whether Montgomery County have a bright and proud future that is secured by the growth of two potentially complementary municipalities, or will lose future opportunities for industry and growth because it does not offer the choice that people seek.

Let it be known, the residents of the town of Pike Road, who enjoy having a small town government and only hope to one day have their own school system for their children, will not give up. For if we do, our future generations will have to live in a place that offers the quality of life that is only provided through choice.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



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