



# Opinion

June 4, 2009

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## David Cook: An Open Letter To The Planning Commission Of Signal Mountain - And Response

by David Cook  
posted June 3, 2009

Friends,

On Thursday night, you will discuss whether or not to repeal an ordinance that was placed over the 700-plus acres at the Shackleford Ridge Road area which would allow builders to build homes on 1/3 acre lots instead of the minimum 1/2 acre lots, standard outside of the area. For the longest time, I thought that there was a possibility that this land would remain untouched, as wilderness, one of the last uncut pockets on Signal Mountain. It seems I was wrong, that sooner or later, the trees will be cut down, power poles erected and new homes built.



David Cook

And if this is going to happen, I propose a third way of development. The issue is not one of lot size, for if homes are constructed in unsustainable ways, regardless of whether they sit on 1/2 acre lots, we are only continuing a cycle that does not adhere to the values, principles and behaviors of life. Of Creation.

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These principles and values are summed up: everything is connected. All action has consequence. When we ignore this, we destroy the life around us, and ourselves.

Simply put: every living system on earth is in dying. The atmosphere, the soils, the waters, the trees, the animals,

every single life system on our planet is in decline. We cannot solve this vast problem by doing things the old way. We must adopt new patterns, perspectives and behaviors.

And if we don't, we will no longer be able to live.

Require that all buildings in the Shackleford Ridge Road area be LEED certified.

Give tax breaks to homeowners – or developers – who install solar panels on the newly constructed homes.

Strongly encourage and recognize that the home market on Signal Mountain is dying. Who can continue to afford \$600,000 homes? No one is moving on Signal Mountain because home price is outrageous, and young families are doing things differently. I guarantee that if a community was created on Shackleford Ridge Road that attracted multi-cultural, environmental, progressive families, where homes were built with the next 100 years in mind, where the latest environmental practices were adopted, where community gardens, sidewalks and solar panels dominated the neighborhood, you would have more families moving onto this mountain than ever before.

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But if we continue to do things as we've done in the past – to build homes that require gobs of energy that will not available forever, homes that continue to perpetuate the fact that if the world lived like the average north American, we'd need five planets – we will wither as a community.

What do you envision the next 70 years to bring? More of the same, or a movement that is completely new? Do we honestly think that our great-grandchildren will live in homes, drive cars and look at the land in the same way we do today?

So use this opportunity, these hundreds of beautiful acres to help envision a positive ,healthy, sustainable future. There's help: Jeff Cannon and the Green Spaces team, who are making Chattanooga one of the leaders in LEED-certified buildings in the South. Tom Bartoo, lead architect for Method Architecture, mountain resident and one of the most honest humans I've ever met, has the skills and vision to help design homes that are, essentially, life-giving, natural, and something to be proud of. **Sustainable Futures, a business out of Knoxville, is one of the region's leaders in sustainable home practices.**

On Thursday night, remember that the land has rights too. Remember that the future – the generations of children to come – has rights too. Remember that humankind is currently the only species on earth that if we were to disappear, then nature would actually improve.

And also remember that we can begin to do things in healthy, responsible, positive and sustainable ways.

And, finally, I'd like to thank you. Your job is not easy, and there are many perspectives to consider. And no take-home pay either. But perhaps there's another reward out there: helping to co-create a mountain community that will endure for generations to come.

What more hopeful work is there?

My deep thanks,

David Cook

\* \* \*

Mr. Cook:

In today's news, Lamar Alexander is thinking along the same lines. See article in Breaking News.

I think this would be an excellent example of creative and responsible community planning. Signal Mountain is a wonderful community.

On the other hand, personally, I wish the committee would reconsider developing and let this land just remain a natural asset for the community.

Ninian Williams

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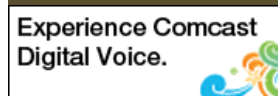
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