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# The Island News

## Letters to the Editor

January 4, 2023 · Letters to Editor

### The wrong type of investment for St. Helena Island

Greetings! All too often, the exploitation of undeveloped land with historic and cultural significance to our Gullah Geechee community is “promoted” to the citizens as an economic benefit.

This is no longer acceptable. Leadership must stand and recognize the cultural, economic, and educational significance of our Gullah Geechee culture which is inherently tied to the land.

In the spirit of Beaufort’s native son, Robert Smalls, the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce’s advocacy work is inspired by his leadership on May 12, 1862, when he commandeered The Planter, the ship he was enslaved on, and turned it over to the United States Navy.

Robert Smalls went on to purchase his former enslaver’s mansion in Beaufort and became a lobbyist for reform. He served five terms in the House of Representatives and was a community leader during the

Reconstruction Era. Robert Smalls stood up for what was right and fought for his people — now, I am asking you to return the favor.

While not as harrowing as stealing The Planter, I am calling on you to fulfill your civic duty and serve your community by attending the Beaufort County Planning Commission meeting on January 5. We must speak out against plans to rezone Pine Island and St. Helenaville.

This pristine, undeveloped 498-acre property is too culturally and historically important for developers to convert into an exclusive golf resort and a millionaire's playground. Instead, the land should be protected in its current state for future generations to protect Gullah culture and the environment on St. Helena Island.

While I grew up in Georgetown, my maternal family roots are deeply embedded in Beaufort and do not wish to see St. Helena Island gentrified. I am a successful businesswoman and community advocate. I believe the Gullah Geechee culture is an asset and investing in our communities benefits current and future generations. However, this is simply the wrong type of investment for St. Helena Island and must be stopped.

*– Marilyn L. Hemingway, CEO/President, Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce*

