

From: Maybank, Burnet R. III <BMaybank@nexsenpruet.com>
To: Maybank, Burnet R. III BMaybank@nexsenpruet.com
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Washington: Richland still willing to work with Costco

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Richland County has been working diligently in the past two years to improve our business climate. The phrase “business-friendly” is tossed around frequently, but we have taken this to heart by working to create an environment where businesses can be successful. We have streamlined our permitting process to make it more efficient and responsive to the needs of business while maintaining the regulations necessary to protect the public health and environment. We also have created an economic development office to help attract new companies and help keep our existing companies healthy.

An article in the Dec. 11 paper, “Richland’s Costco deal falls apart,” would lead readers to believe County Council was were not interested in bringing this company to our area. To the contrary, we have been working with the developer to help alleviate problems with the site.

In general, retailers choose communities based on specific market criteria rather than incentives. No incentives can make a bad market good. This is why Richland County in the past has directed its incentives toward manufacturing and distribution companies, where the property tax rates are higher and decisions are based on the business climate.

In this case, we believed the combination of capital investment, jobs created, good wages and public support of the company justified assisting with infrastructure costs. The site chosen by the developer required extensive site work and road improvements to handle the traffic expected to be generated by the business. So we were willing to reduce the property tax burden over a number of years to offset the cost of the road improvements the company would have to make. In other words, the county was investing in public infrastructure to make the deal a reality.

We have a responsibility to the taxpayers to ensure that the benefits of incentives outweigh the costs. Our proposal was justified given the potential benefits. The company likewise must decide if the proposal is sufficient to overcome the deficiencies of the site it chose. In this case, the company decided it was not. The outcome, while not satisfactory to anyone, is not the fault of either party but a decision by both to evaluate the project on sound business principles rather than emotion.

To blame Richland County for Costco not coming to the Midlands is inaccurate at best. We hope the company continues to consider this wonderful community and selects a site that is beneficial to it. When it does, Richland County will welcome it with open arms.

Kelvin Washington
Chair, Richland County Council
Columbia

Read more here: <http://www.thestate.com/2013/12/19/3166256/washington-richland-still-willing.html#storylink=cpy>

Burnet R. Maybank, III

Nexsen Pruet, LLC

1230 Main Street, Suite 700 (29201)

P.O. Drawer 2426

Columbia, SC 29202

T: 803.540.2048, F: 803.253.8277

Cell: 803.960.3024

bmaybank@nexsenpruet.com

www.nexsenpruet.com

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