

Bluffton Opinion

Connect the dots to water threats

Posted: July 8, 2011 - 12:00am

By [Joe Croley](#)

When Life is Fair

When life is fair, all Bluffton schools will teach the students to play connect the dots because these students are likely to become our future public officials. And since test scores seem infinitely more important nowadays than actual learning, I will give the answers to this particular real-life puzzle.

Last month, in the course of about one week, there were three seemingly unrelated meetings held in the Bluffton Town Hall addressing three seemingly unrelated topics. But if the dots were connected they were all related by cause and effect.

The first dot appeared in a Town Council meeting concerning the annexation of about 150 acres along the Okatie River. In Beaufort County annexation is the not-so-secret code word for zoning shopping. It is a secret that has not yet been made known only to some elected officials; the electorate seems to get it. This particular request was for about 600,000 square feet of commercial space and somewhere in the vicinity of 250 residential-type units to be constructed on this parcel of grazing pasture.

The second dot appeared a week or so later, within the same building in a meeting discussing an economic development ordinance proposal for the town to implement. Now economic development is a feel-good term that conjures up images of large companies occupying large swaths of land, supplying a multitude of jobs to the residents of the town and the region. In reality, no one is really able to determine exactly what it means locally. But just the mention of those two words invokes a Shangri-La type picture.

The last dot appeared at the May River Watershed meeting less than 24 hours after the economic development meeting, in the same room, where concerned folks were trying to determine what is, was and will be the cause of our river deteriorating and how to best spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to protect our natural environment.

Now if these three dots are connected, what you might find is a triangle filled with newly laid impervious surface. It is indeed the effect of uncontrolled impervious surface that has led to the need for the Beaufort County Stormwater Commission and the May River Watershed Committee, along with a hefty new tax cleverly called a stormwater "fee" implemented throughout the county to pay to correct things we

never fully understood it the first place. However to paraphrase Einstein's definition of insanity, we continue to approve the same things over and over knowing the result will only worsen our environment.

As we approach Dr. Fred Hollings' Armageddon number of 30 percent impervious surface within our watershed, isn't it time to connect the dots and try something different? Done properly annexation and economic development aren't dirty words, but the way we currently do them just produces dirty water.

In the meantime, you can contact **Joe Croley** at Whenlifeisfair@gmail.com