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Some 1,600 acres surrounding the interchange at highways 60 and 65 are prime for development, officials say.

## Economic development talks resume for land around 60/65



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Posted online February 21, 2025 | 1:43 pm



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Dean Thompson: Land development around 60/65 is "generational opportunity."

Early discussions are reviving economic development prospects for over 1,000 acres of land surrounding the interchange at highways 60 and 65, those involved with the talks say.

Larry Childress, who with his family owns some 600 acres that are mostly northeast of the 60/65 interchange, has long sought to develop the land. City Utilities of Springfield, which owns around 1,000 acres around Lake Springfield to the southwest of the highway interchange, is considering how its master plan for the site could be connected to the Childress land through a public-private partnership that would better



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### EDITORS' PICK



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### Open for Business: The War Zone Springfield (/stories/open-for-business-the-war-zone-springfield,98597)

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position the area for development, said Dean Thompson, CU vice president and chief economic development officer.

Childress and Thompson are among a group of stakeholders interested in renewing talks dating back decades for the acreage on Springfield's southeast side.

"This is a generational opportunity, in my opinion," Thompson said, speaking with Childress at Springfield Business Journal's office on Feb. 17.

And with the proposed \$1 billion master plan for ecological improvements to Lake Springfield and development of recreational, cultural and natural amenities surrounding unveiled in 2023 by the city of Springfield, the timing is right to start talks back up again, said Thompson.

"The timing is great," he said. "I think there's a way for us to work through it and come up with a holistic plan."

Thompson said stakeholders involved with the Lake Springfield plan and economic development efforts in the area met a week prior to discuss the potential of bringing in the Childress land to the Lake Springfield master plan.

"Literally, it's that fresh," Thompson said. "There are no agreements in place. We're just trying to figure it out."

### Decades of discussions

Childress said his family's ownership of the acreage dates back to the 1950s, before U.S. Highway 65 was formally established alongside Springfield's east side. His wife's mother and father originally had a dairy farm just north of where the 60/65 interchange now sits, and the holdings have grown from there as Childress came into the family.

"I always wanted to try to do something there," he said. "My wife and I started acquiring other pieces of ground to add to it."

A portion of the Childress family's land butts up to the 60/65 interchange, where a swath of CU-owned floodplain land also is located on the northeast side of the busy highway intersection.

Childress most recently had a development plan in the works that he and Thompson say became stalled during the Great Recession.

Through 60/65 Partnership LLC, Childress and other investors in 2009 unveiled a project calling for a \$400 million mixed-use development on both sides of Highway 65, north of Highway 60, according to SBJ archives. At the time, project officials pointed to the potential for hundreds of thousands of square feet of office space, hotels and residential opportunities, and they noted that the plan had been a decade in the making.

The project, with the name Crossroads at 60/65 attached, had myriad partners committed, including the likes of Miller-O'Reilly Co., Doran Communities and Foster Hospitality Group, according to SBJ archives.

Thompson said he first worked on the plan nearly two decades ago in his capacity as an economic development specialist. He said he's been impressed with the long-term strategy by the Childress family to get the project right.

"Kudos to Larry and his family for not just subdividing it," Thompson said. "It's pretty amazing that they've got the vision to preserve it."

He said that while the previous iteration of the plan stalled in the recession, work that was conducted leading up to it would help to support development now.

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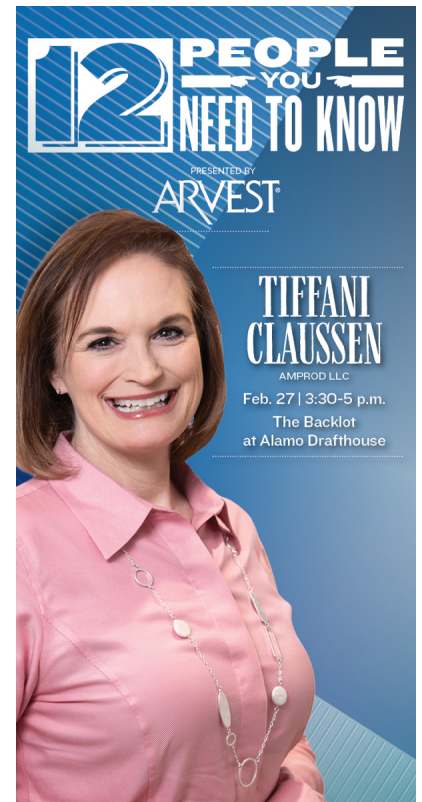
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“It’s more than just talk – it’s been looked at for zoning, it’s been looked at for potential layouts. There’s actually opportunities in zoning and how you’d have a planned development,” Thompson said. “We really need to start getting more fine-tuned. Some of that work has been done, but it’s old.”

Thompson sees those conversations being part of the Lake Springfield master plan talks that are now underway.

Steve Prange, vice president of Crawford, Murphy & Tilly Inc., the engineering and consulting firm for the Lake Springfield plan, said the potential connection to the Childress family’s property presents a unique opportunity where two large parcels are “smack dab in the middle of the growth for a community.”

“It’s very rare to find that type of property and accessibility to water, one of our biggest assets, the outdoors and recreation,” Prange said. “It would have a huge impact.”

The Lake Springfield plan has six zones envisioned. The plan, available at [LakeSGFPlan.com](http://LakeSGFPlan.com), points to a 450-acre Zone 6 that is referred to as the north activity area. That zone shows the potential use of acreage that’s southwest, southeast and northeast of the 60/65 interchange.

“The area includes the Nature Center, a connection to the Galloway Creek Greenway and the 65/60 interchange. A significant portion of the zone exists in the James River floodway and floodplain,” the plan reads. “Extensive analysis in this zone has already been completed looking for a trail connection from the Nature Center to the Galloway Creek Greenway to better connect bikers to this natural amenity.”

Prange said potential connections between the CU land and the Childress family property are being studied as part of the Lake Springfield master planning process.

“We’re just getting started on this,” he said. “We always talk about the lake upstream and downstream. This is a great example of how we’re looking upstream at the lake.”

### Access concerns

Childress has signage on Highway 60, near a cluster of business development that includes Citizens Bank of Rogersville and The Courageous Church, as well as on Highway 65 north of the 60/65 interchange, that points to 600 acres of land that’s ready to be developed.

In a Feb. 7 SBJ article, businesspeople drew attention to plans by the Missouri Department of Transportation to remove driveways and intersections with direct Highway 60 access along the stretch from 60/65 to Route 125 in Rogersville, with the existing interchange at Routes NN/J serving as the only access point to Highway 60. Officials with MoDOT – who were busy battling winter weather when contacted for this article – previously told SBJ that the Highway 60 project is funded through Statewide Transportation Improvement Program funds, and that work outside of its current scope would mean going back to the drawing board. MoDOT has cited safety concerns and freeway considerations for the work that includes the removal of the direct access points.

Childress said MoDOT initially approved an interchange that would serve his family’s acreage on Highway 65, north of the 60/65 interchange, 15-20 years ago, followed by approval around a decade ago for a “dogbone” style interchange at the Farm Road 189 intersection. Crossing over Highway 60, the Farm Road 189 access

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point connects vehicles directly to the Childress family's acreage, a Citizens Bank of Rogersville branch and The Courageous Church's south location, among other businesses.

Childress said he recently learned of MoDOT's plans to remove the direct access points along the stretch of Highway 60.

"It totally ruins the development possibilities for any kind of commercial on 60," Childress said, "not to say it wouldn't work on 65."

Childress said delayed proceedings on previous iterations of his family's developable land lost them at least one big retailer in Costco, which ultimately set up shop in 2021 farther north at Highway 65 and Chestnut Expressway.

"If we had had an interchange there, that's where the Costco would have been," Childress said of his family's land. "I was told that Costco wanted to be between the two Sam's [Club stores.] No interchange, no Costco here."

Childress and Thompson said they're now interested in having conversations with MoDOT to discuss opportunities as economic development talks pick back up.

"Interchanges are the key, and that's always been the bugaboo," Childress said.

He said he intends to attend public meetings that MoDOT plans to hold later this year on the Highway 60 work. A MoDOT project manager previously told SBJ that the tentative schedule calls for the Highway 60 project to be bid in fall 2028, with construction expected to start the following year and wrap up early next decade.

### **Waiting game**

Childress, who said he's had "tons of chances to sell 10 acres here, 15 acres there," acknowledged that patience has been key to the development of the land his family has long owned. Asked who would carry the torch decades from now, Childress said his kids are on board.

"They know where this thing is trying to head," he said. "I tell my kids things usually turn out for the best. When it's ready for the right thing, it comes."

Thompson said with the passage of time, though, knowledge of previous iterations of the economic development plans could be lost.

"We still have institutional knowledge about what has been visioned – work that has been done in the past," he said. "We're slowly losing that institutional knowledge. We don't want to start anew on this. I think we can get some momentum going to start chipping away at this."

Thompson pointed to Corporate Woods in Overland Park, Kansas, as a similar project with natural elements that could serve as a successful model to emulate in Springfield.

"I think it's the next big deal in Springfield, especially the southeast," Childress said.

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