

**Op-Ed - Mayor Gorton: 'I cannot support' proposed soccer complex in agricultural area
July 2022**

<https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article263665078.html>

Lexington is a growing, vibrant community that has benefited from balanced land-use policies since the creation of our urban growth boundary in 1958 — the first such boundary in the country.

As a Councilmember and as Mayor, I have always championed the importance of the delicate balance between the growth of our city, and preservation of our signature rural areas.

I support balanced growth because it works — the history of our community shows us that we can protect the beauty of the Bluegrass, while allowing strong economic growth. Our city of 325,000 is one of the fastest growing cities in our state.

We have created countless good jobs in both the urban and rural sections of our county. Don't be fooled into thinking that our green fields are just very, very nice scenery. When I look at our farmland I see jobs. Agriculture and agribusiness generate \$2.3 billion for Fayette County annually, and drive a \$2 billion dollar travel and tourism industry.

History shows us that the kind of balanced growth our community needs comes from long-range planning and long-term thinking. A recent proposal from the Lexington Sporting Club reflects neither.

The Lexington Sporting Club has proposed a soccer complex both in and bordering the rural area. While soccer fields are now allowed in our rural areas as a result of a recent Board of Adjustment ruling, the club's plan also includes a 750-space surface parking lot, and 12 soccer fields with lighting and concession stands. The proposal is to build a large commercial endeavor next to existing, working horse farms, as well as Fasig-Tipton, North America's oldest thoroughbred auction company.

The soccer club has asked the Planning Commission and Urban County Council to amend our Zoning Ordinance in order to allow a stadium to be built in an adjacent economic development area.

Development of the proposed complex would require significant permanent changes to our zoning ordinance – text amendments to both the A-R (Agricultural-Rural) and ED (Economic Development) zones. We would be allowing construction of a soccer stadium in an area designated for significant year-round job creation. The lighted stadium would be built next to equine farms and other agricultural operations. Approval of these changes sets a standard for other potential projects in the agricultural zone that could follow countywide.

I love soccer. I was a LYSA soccer coach when my daughter played soccer. I am excited about the Lexington Sporting Club and its goal to bring professional soccer to Lexington. I want it to succeed.

However, this is not about soccer. It is about changes to our rural zoning ordinance through text amendments in the A-R zone that would have the potential to have a negative impact on existing agricultural businesses and operations. I cannot support this change in precedent – in our longstanding policies that protect us from unintended consequences.

I have heard from many farmers, business owners and citizens with grave concerns about the proposal. I urge Lexington Sporting Club to listen to these concerns and to work with the community. We can work together to find a better answer.

Read more at: <https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article263665078.html#storylink=cpy>