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GUEST COLUMNIST ■ MAYOR PRO-TEM RODERICK GAY

**A transformative opportunity for South Fulton**

The proposal to establish a NextEra battery plant in South Fulton County has ignited vigorous debate within our community. Initially greeted with skepticism and concerns about safety and transparency, this project has divided opinions among residents and stakeholders alike. However, upon closer inspection, there are compelling reasons to support and embrace this development, which could bring transformative benefits to the South Fulton region.

Moreover, the NextEra plant aims to store up to 350 megawatts of surplus energy right here in the Tri-City area to be used at times of peak energy demand. This facility will help balance the grid, facilitating the integration of new sources of clean electricity that support local industries, reduce dependency on fossil fuels, and enhance energy security, particularly for critical infrastructure like Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. As global energy needs escalate and environmental concerns grow more pressing, transitioning to renewable energy sources represents a crucial step toward sustainability and resilience for our community. Statistically, the likelihood of a catastrophic incident at such facilities is minimal compared to every-



Roderick Gay

day risks like air traffic or the transport of hazardous materials. In the rezoning approval College Park required strict adherence to safety standards, any potential risks associated with the plant can be effectively mitigated to ensure safe operation within our community.

Furthermore, transparency and community engagement are particularly important in this decision-making process. While initial apprehensions about transparency in the approval process were understandable, subsequent clarification and public discussions have shed light on the project's merits. Input from financial consultants and technical experts has provided a comprehensive understanding of both the potential benefits and risks involved,

enabling informed decision-making by local authorities. When assessing opposition to the NextEra project, it's vital to distinguish between valid concerns and uncertainties. Community leaders and experts stress embracing technology and sustainable development for future growth. South Fulton has a history of overcoming industrial challenges, showing resilience and adaptability. As a fourth generation South Fulton native and College Park Mayor Pro Tem, I firmly believe that addressing concerns based on factual information rather than fear is paramount. While no development project is entirely risk-free, planning, adherence to safety standards, and transparent governance can mitigate these risks. With oversight and community involvement, the NextEra battery

plant could meet our energy needs and boost Tri-City's economy and environment. In conclusion, the decision regarding the NextEra battery plant is pivotal for our community's future. By embracing this opportunity with careful consideration of both perceived risks and tangible benefits, local leaders have the chance to propel our region forward economically, environmentally, and socially. It is my steadfast commitment that this decision will secure a prosperous and sustainable future for generations to come. This is our moment to seize progress responsibly and ensure a brighter tomorrow for South Fulton County.

Roderick Gay is College Park's Ward IV Councilman and Mayor Pro-Tem. He has served on City Council since 2015.

**Listening to one of the Public Comments made at the August 5 Council meeting, I felt it necessary to clarify some facts regarding this Electric Power Storage Facility:**

An easier way to understand what this facility does is to consider the analogy of our City water supply. Water that is pumped from the ground, or a river, must be used as it is pumped, other wise the pump would burn up or the pipes would burst. Rather than constantly adjusting the force of the pump to match the demand for water, the solution is to store the water in a tank (College Park has several tanks) - there the water level rises or falls in the tank as usage goes up and down during the day. The tank also serves as a backup to supply water in emergencies when the source of supply temporarily has to be shut down.

Similarly, electricity must be used as it is generated. So the generators must adjust as user demand changes throughout the day. If user demand on a hot summer day increases beyond the ability of the generators to adjust their output, another generator must be brought on line. If there are no more available generators, the voltage on the electric grid must be lowered to dim the lights a bit (**a brownout**), to forcefully lower electrical power usage. But appliances and other motor driven devices can't tolerate much of a reduction in voltage or they will burn up. So, at some point, if no more generation capacity can be brought on-line, power much be cut to a portion of the electric grid (**a blackout**). Thus you need to provide enough capacity to provide for hot days, or when some generators have to be turned off for maintenance. One solution is to build more generators than you normally need. **A more economical solution is to find a way to store excess electricity, ready to use in the heat of the day. Just like the storage tank for water, this is what the NextEra Battery Storage Facility will do for electricity.** However, unlike water tanks that are local to our City, this storage facility is connected to the high voltage lines that distribute power across our state. Thus **while the facility benefits our region, it does do not exclusively provide any emergency backup for College Park (or the nearby neighbors in City of South Fulton. Nor does College Park likely receive any savings in electric utility costs from MEAG.**

**As to economic benefits for our City,** installations like this frequently require a tax break to help finance the facility. One way they can get this is to temporarily (say, for 10 years) deed the property to the City's or County's Development Authority (making it non-taxable) and make (reduced) PILOT Payments (Payments In Lieu Of Taxes). If NextEra arranges such a deal with College Park BIDA, College Park will lose the tax revenue but gain the PILOT revenue. If they make a deal with the County BIDA, College Park gets nothing during the period of the the temporary property transfer, except what has already been pledged to Council in Approval Progress Payments. Note that for an installation of this size, it seems likely that revenue gain/loss would amount to \$Millions.

The eloquent article imaged at the left, attributed to Councilman Gay, appeared in the "South Fulton Neighbor" on July 31 (**click on the image to read the online article in the newspaper**).

I supported the battery plant when it was brought before Council for zoning approval in August of 2023, for the second time. At that time, my vote was defeated 2 to 1 (Councilman Gay left the dais during that vote). **However, in 2024, when it was brought before Council for the third time, had I been on Council, I would NOT have approved it. Why? It was added to the agenda at the meeting without any of the public, or even all Council members, being aware in advance, and without detailed documentation.** Since there was no documentation/discussion, there was no way to know whether all the safety requirements that I had negotiated prior to (and some even at), the meeting in August would be required to be met. Thus there was no way to promote the safety and wellbeing of the City of South Fulton neighbors.