



MINUTES
LAURENS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
APRIL 22, 2021 – 5:30 P.M.
LAURENS COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE

Jim Royer, Chairman and Ed Burns, Vice Chairman;
Commission Members - George Austin, Sylvester Grant,
Casey Robinson, Bobby Smith and Abney Smith

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairman Jim Royer; Commission Members George Austin (arrived late), Casey Robinson and Abney Smith.

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice-Chairman Ed Burns, Sylvester Grant and Bobby Smith.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF: Chuck Bobo, Codes Official and Betty C. Walsh, Clerk to Council.

INVITED GUESTS: Rick Green, Director, Government Services Upper Savannah Council of Governments

AGENDA ITEMS : 1. Call to Order – Chairman Royer; 2. Invocation; 3. Pledge of Allegiance; 4. Approval of Agenda – April 22, 2021; 5. Approval of Minutes – April 4, 2021 – Called Session; 6. Old Business: a.) Update – Comprehensive Plan – Rick Green, USCOG; b.) Update – Ritchie Road ; 7. New Business: a.) Review and approval Reedy Creek Subdivision: 1.) Subdivision application (see documents); 2.) Subdivision variances (see documents); 8. Public Comment - Fifteen (15) Minute Period for Public Comment; 9. Commission Member Comments: 10. Adjournment

CALL TO ORDER – Chairman Royer called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

INVOCATION – Commissioner Abney Smith led the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chairman Jim Royer led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA – The April 22, 2021 agenda was approved from a MOTION from COMMISSIONER ROBINSON with a SECOND from COMMISSIONER ABNEY SMITH; VOTE 4-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – April 6, 2021 – Called Session, COMMISSIONER ROBINSON made the MOTION to approve as presented with COMMISSIONER SMITH SECONDING; VOTE 4-0.

OLD BUSINESS:

UPDATE – COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – Mr. Rick Green, Director, Governmental Services, Upper Savannah Council of Governments said, “Due to the slow down on the Administrative end working on the Plan is on hold”. Mr. Green spoke briefly on the upcoming Comprehensive Plan and provided literature from the Municipal Association on the Comprehensive Plan.

UPDATE – RITCHIE ROAD - * NOTE IT IS WITH REGRET, I WAS NOT ABLE TO SECURE THE NAMES OF THE TWO GENTLEMEN THAT SPOKE, THEREFORE THEY ARE NOTED AS SPEAKER #1 AND SPEAKER #2 – At the last meeting, it was determined that more discussion would be held at this meeting thus allowing more documentation to be provided to the Commissioners to help reach a decision.

In lieu of his absence, Mr. Dale Satterfield, Acting Administrator provided a memo on his understanding of the current standings on Ritchie Road as follows: “...Variance Request by Venice Page who owns the parcel at the end of a private right-of-way labeled as Ritchie Road. Mr. Page has agreed to survey a fifty foot (50’) easement to give access to parcel #150-00-00-031. This will qualify the parcel for subdivision and sale to the purchaser. Purchaser will no longer need to address the Commission for a variance request. I have agreed to approve the new plat showing access by way of the fifty foot (50’) easement. Mr. Ruch was granted his request for a variance at the Caller Meeting for Jerome Bailey Drive. He no longer needs action”.

Speaker #1, said, “I just do not understand this at all. Why from 1957 to 1967 would documents declare it as a County Road? They clearly state that the road goes all the way through. I believe there was one deed in about 2016 that stated the roadway went to the end of my property”.

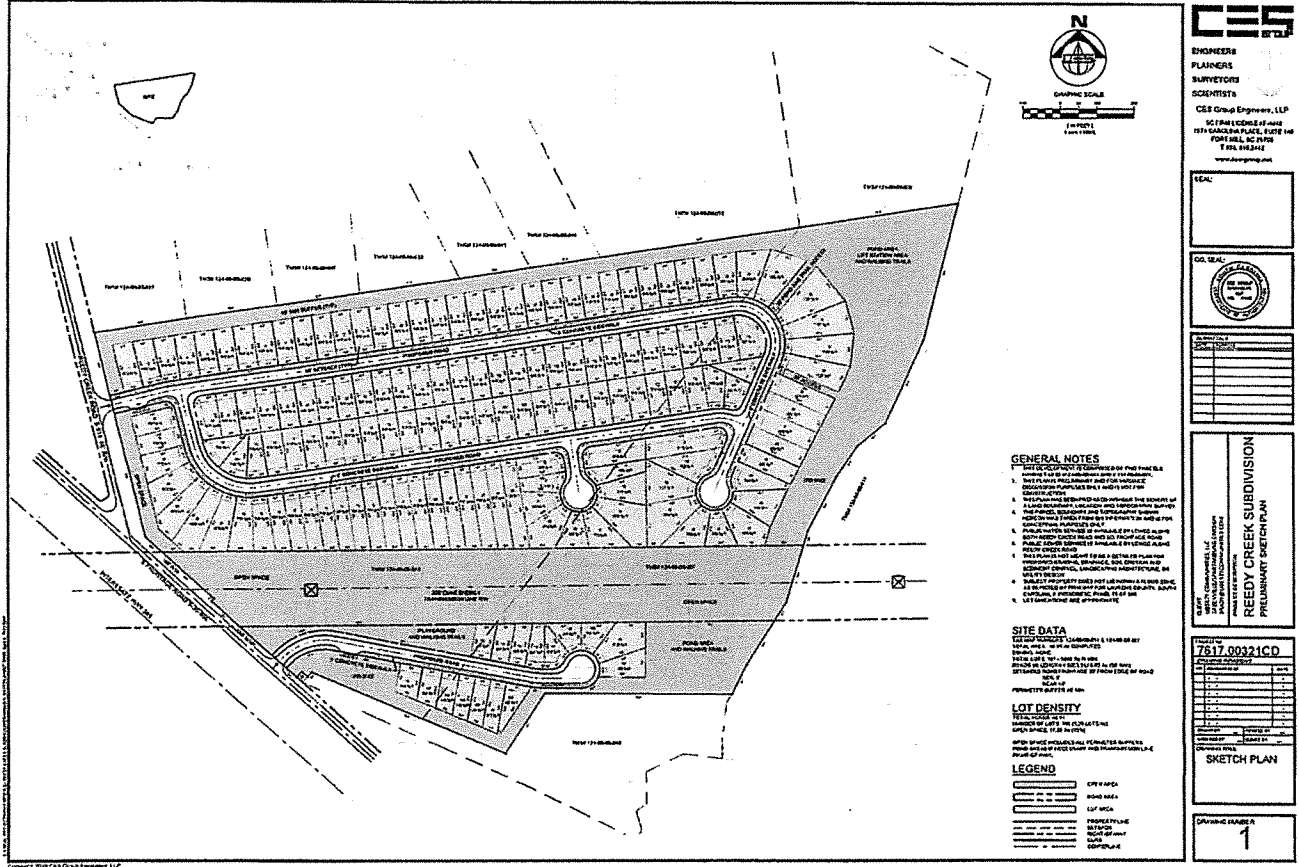
Chairman Royer stated that if records say a county road why is there such a debate and asked if a survey had actually been conducted? Speaker #1 replied that the sign there states, end of county maintenance. I can not find any records that indicate this to be decommissioned from this point. I have pulled deeds from one end of the road to the other end. Some deeds call it a public road from that point on or unknown County road. Speaker #2 said that Clay Rykard is presently surveying the property. The last survey says;; public roadway not paved. Bordered by unpaved road, bound by public road, bounded by unpaved public road, bounded by unknown county road. No one seems to know what is going on. I have lived in this area my entire life and this road has gone from Scuffletown Road to Pennington Road and was once maintained by the County. I spoke with a former county employee, Bob Wilkes, who actually had a motor grader that worked the roadway every so often. This puts all of us homeowners past that sign in the same situation. There was even one time when a bridge washed out and the County replaced it. The bridge was damaged at one time so they closed it. Over time, others bought property in the area and the rest is history. We can't do much of anything with our property. We need for the County to acknowledge that it all is a County road.

Speaker #2 said, "At the closing, the Attorney stated that this is not going to close because it says that there is one hundred seventy two feet considered as private property. What appears to me is that the County has illegally abandoned parts of this roadway. The Attorney at the closing recommended to get a recommendation from the Planning Commission that County maintenance does extend the distance of the road. There has only been one property owner of the property that at one time extended from Pennington road to Scuffletown Road".

Chairman Royer said that the only thing we can do at this point, is to share this information with the proper sources asking them as to how this can be remedied. Codes Officer Bobo provided his card to the gentlemen.

NEW BUSINESS:

REEDY CREEK SUBDIVISION - Mr. Brad Sandford of Liberty Properties and representing Engineer Mr. Tom Cannarella approached the Commission for approval towards the development of a housing development in the area of Reedy Creek Road and the South Frontage Road in Northern Laurens County.



Mr. Cannarella began by saying, “This proposed subdivision is on a forty-eight /nine (48.9) acre tract with one hundred sixty-one (161) proposed housing units. There are preliminary plans to preserve the natural scenic areas and to provide buffer areas around the perimeter, provide for sidewalks on one side the roadways and adequate open space for the residents in both active and passive recreational purposes. The sight is unique as it has a Duke Power right of way that cuts through the center of it actually going from east to west. We present to you tonight one hundred sixty one (161) family homes in varying sizes. The plan provides for forty to one hundred foot buffers. Greenspace is proposed to provide for active and passive recreation with preservation of most of the outer lay of lands. A survey will be conducted to acknowledge the tree line in the area. The homes are proposed to be serviced by public water and sewer.”

Chairman Royer asked if the Duke Power right of way was actually their land or was it on your land. Mr. Cannarella stated that it is on our land and we provide an easement to it.

Mr. Bobo asked about maintenance on the lands not included in the lots and as well the Duke Power right-of-way. Mr. Sanford replied that there would not be any obligations to the home owners association for that. But if any of the trails we are proposing intervene with the Duke Power right of way, we certainly would maintain those areas.

Mr. Cannarella stated that we are here tonight to request specifically three (3) variances on reducing the minimum lot width from seventy-five feet to a minimum of forty-two feet on road frontages and to reduce lot square footages from eight thousand to a minimum of five thousand forty (8,000 to 5,040). There are only fifteen (15) lots at the five thousand forty square feet; thirty five lots being proposed over eight thousand and the rest of the lots between six thousand to eight thousand square feet. The maximum is thirteen thousand two hundred sixty one square feet. This is a conceptual rendition of the plan and once this is approved a survey will be conducted and then a full blown engineering of the plan will be presented.

Commission Member Robinson referenced his concerns as to the various opens spaces and who is to maintain it and asked for more information on the pond areas versus stormwater retainage areas.

Chairman Royer asked for an explanation as to the use of the word preliminary plan used in conversation and stated that one would hope that an initial drawing was not changed later after having been approved. Mr. Cannarella replied that all of the design documents are not complete yet and we definitely don't want to give you the impression that they are. But in doing so we needed clarification as to our questions of variances to produce more documents.

Continuing, Mr. Cannarella said that the open space is equivalent to seventeen (17) acres. The density of this is 3.29. We feel that this will be a great subdivision for the County.

Elaborating more on the questions as to how complete the proposed plan is at this point, Mr. Sanford said that if the variances were approved, that this would be the plan that we would continue with as far as the lot widths. As to the open spaces, there are some requirements that we have not met. Is there a specific amount of public space that needs

Commission Member Robinson asked if there had been any traffic studies for the area.

Chairman Royer reviewed several areas that he had concerns with and needing more confirmed information – access for residents to playground; the Duke Power right of way; landscaping on roadway; the pie lots; cul-de-sac lots frontages.

Commission Member Austin asked if the sidewalks are on both sides are just one. Mr. Cannarella said that it is a common concept that sidewalks are best on one side and asked if the Commission preferred both sides. Chairman Royer replied it is preferred.

Commission Member Smith stated that he was still struggling with the variances and said, “I'm new to this Board and when we have certain specifics in an ordinance, I feel my due diligence to honor the specifics. I also feel that a variance request represents a specific problem with difficulties or a hardship”.

Citing the true variance requests at hand, Chairman Royer quoted; 1.) Subdivision application; 2.) Variance Request - Side Setback from ten foot (10') to five foot (5') minimum; 3.) Variance Request – Lot Dimensions from a minimum lot width of seventy five feet (75') to a minimum of forty two feet (42') – Cul-de-sac lots from row line to be thirty feet (30'); 4.) Variance Request – Lot Dimensions from a minimum lot area eight thousand square feet (8,000) to a minimum of five thousand forty square feet (5,040).

COMMISSION MEMBER ROBINSON made the MOTION to table the variance requests at this time in order to secure more clarification as to the actual project requests of variances. COMMISSION MEMBER A. SMITH SECONDING; VOTE 4-0.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

1.) G. W. Dailey – Mr. Dailey said, “These discussions only show how bad a Planner is needed for Laurens County and how one could solve these problems. I personally would like to say that a five-foot setback is borderline irresponsible and unsafe. At what point is too much too much? In this portion of the County, I see that we are trying to grow too fast too quick. It can be expected that the next approval process will be calls to the County Council saying we need more firemen and law enforcement presence. They are going to come in here and build the infrastructure with the understanding that the subdivision is coming. But who will take care of things if it doesn't? There is a lot of expense that the County takes on maintaining infrastructure, not building it. Long term maintenance of these projects will fall on to the County. You can't build things too fast; prime example - Five Forks and Anderson. We all say the mistakes they were making, so let's don't make those same mistakes. Let's slow down the train a bit. Too much is too much”.

Continuing, “A 3.29 density. That is a hard thing to grasp. As an Appraiser, that is a hard thing to interpret in your head. I went and found a 3.3 density in another portion of the County. The area was Clinton Mills – from the Post Office to the Mill Store to Bailey Street to Elizabeth Street. A density of 3.29 is very close. We don't need to take on more than we can handle in our minds. I feel like the County is drinking from the fire hose when it comes to these developments. Also, the 3.29 density very dense. It is nice to have one red-light between my house, the school and the grocery store”.

Commission Member Robinson asked Mr. Dailey, in his opinion where should the actual density be? Mr. Dailey presented Southwood on #72 to Greenwood as 4.67 (too close) and Merry Oaks 6.5 (high end). We don't need to stop development, we just need to slow down and do it right. When you get the right size lot, there is always a ratio to the builders. Its no coincidence that they are all wanting the same thing – the ratio to house size, house cost and house value to lot size. That size lot gets a price size home and more disposable income. We want people to live here”.

Mr. Bobo said, “The lowest in the front is thirty feet with ten feet in the back and ten on the sides. What some people do not understand is that with five foot setbacks, anything that encroaches into the five feet has to have one hour fire protection and shows that it is becoming hazardous. There is a question as to where the thirty foot starts and stops”. The introduction of sidewalks will have to be addressed as well”.

Mr. Dailey ended by saying, “The County trying to grow too fast and too quick. If it continues to grow, we will all be demanding more EMS, more Fire protection and more law enforcement. We can't even maintain the infrastructure now”.

2.) Mrs. Hollie Welch – Mrs. Welch said, “I have spoken with the Laurens County Council and the City Council. I am really encouraged by what I heard in the discussions. This is a new Commission and I hope it becomes a new direction. I am a Forester by trade and I don't know what is really good for a community but, I am concerned about what is built and how it will burden a community. Residential development usually costs a community on the average one dollar and fifteen cents (\$1.15) for every dollar that is brought in. Consider this, all schools are now at capacity and how can we afford new schools. When you look at the proposed developments one needs to think about families and schools for the children. With that, how can we afford to build new schools? We already see an increase in traffic; the present road conditions are terrible, and we can't even afford to fix them now. I have spoken with the local law enforcement agencies and all are concerned about law enforcement personnel when they don't even have the capacity with existing personnel now. It costs to add personnel with growing communities. There are two housing developments going on in the Gray Court Community – one with four hundred eighty-nine homes and the other with two hundred sixty nine. So with averaging at least one child per home, the numbers get higher with more needs”.

3.) Mr. Jeff Norwood – Declined addressing the Commission and stated that he was observing.

4.) Mrs. Bryson Shultz – “I am a landowner and live in the City of Laurens. I have just of recently gotten involved with a lot of people talking about this particular discussion. I am encouraged about the conversations held tonight. I love this Commission holding their feet to the fire. I plan on speaking with Laurens City at their next meeting and my challenge to them will be asking them what is their number; what is your percentage of growth desired population for the future? Is County Council and the City speaking to each other? My percentage is around twenty percent (20%) with

fifty percent (50%) being way too much. I don't want to live in Greenville, I want to live in Laurens. I was born and raised here and we have family generational property here that will be passed down to my children. To grow up in small town Laurens, not Simpsonville or Greenville. With my challenge to City Council, and if the percentage is thirty percent, how do they intend to stopping at thirty percent (30%) so that we don't become a Greenville County. Lets have a plan and get a number. I want to see the County flourish but we need to grow cautiously – Dream big or go home”.

COMMISSION MEMBER COMMENTS:

Chairman Royer said, “Addressing a Planner, the position would take a load off of the Planning Commission and the existing staff too. The County needs to address where the new building needs are to be done...it all comes down to planning. We have no zoning. If the people don't want zoning, then how do you control an industry here and housing there and a dump way over there. We can't stop the bad issues. We all want more but who picks up the difference in funding it?”

ADJOURNMENT – With no further business to discuss, Chairman Royer called for a motion to adjourn. COMMISSIONER ROBINSON made the MOTION with COMMISSIONER SMITH SEONDING; VOTE 4-0 to adjourn at 6:40 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted



Betty C. Walsh
Laurens County Clerk to Council