

October 10, 2022
Statesboro GA

Listening Session

The Board of Commissioners met at 5:30pm in the Community Room of the North Main Annex. Chairman Thompson welcomed guests and called the meeting to order. Commissioner Mosley gave the invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

The following commissioners were present: Chairman Thompson, Commissioner Deal, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Gibson, Commissioner Mosley, Commissioner Stringer, and Commissioner Simmons. The following staff was present: County Manager Tom Couch, County Attorney Jeff Akins, Assistant County Manager Cindy Steinmann, and Planning and Development Director James Pope.

Chairman Thompson called on County Manager Tom Couch to initiate discussion on the reason for the listening session. Mr. Couch stated the meeting was a follow-up meeting to the Public Hearing held on September 19, 2022, regarding the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. He reviewed the information presented at the Public Hearing. Mr. Couch stated the goal is to balance the interests of rural landowners with the inevitable future development. He stated the goal is to direct growth and development into areas with planned and adequate infrastructure. Mr. Couch stated the Board and staff will need to figure out a way to preserve prime agricultural land. He stated he believes that the County and the community can work together to create a balanced approach.

Chairman Thompson asked for public comments from the audience at large.

Michael Bailey expressed his concerns about the impacts of development on the neighboring residents. He stated he is not opposed to growth but wants the right kind of growth in the area. Mr. Bailey stated the residents that will be impacted should have a say in what is going on. He is concerned about impacts on future generations.

Paul Abel stated he sent emails to the Board regarding suggested amendments to Section 414 of the Zoning Ordinance and his concerns regarding amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.

Donna Clifton expressed similar concerns to Mr. Bailey. She stated she is also concerned with the wells in the area drying out and the impacts on the school system. Mrs. Clifton stated the growth should be spread around the County instead of being centralized in one area.

Grace Aliffi expressed her opposition to development or changes to the area. She stated she is concerned about impacts on the Ogeechee River.

John Shuman expressed his concerns about the impacts on community traditions such as dove hunting. He stated the interests of developers and residents are too different and will cause conflict.

Mark Nemec asked questions about the Steering Committee members and how they were selected.

Kerrie Mason expressed her support for other comments made. She stated the petition circulating among the residents is about the residents having a voice in what is happening. Mrs. Mason stated she is not opposed to growth but believes the residents should have a say and be aware of what is taking place in their community.

Richard Hein stated he is not opposed to growth. He asked if the citizens' efforts were a waste of time.

Carol Williams expressed her opposition to changes to the Comprehensive Plan and changes to the area. She stated she is concerned about increased traffic and crime in the area.

Kristofer Howard, a representative from the Ogeechee Riverkeeper, expressed his concerns about the impacts on the Ogeechee River.

Cindy Thompson asked about the process for traffic studies. She also asked if the County had checked into bald eagle surveying and other wildlife surveying to see what the potential impacts would be.

Diane Harrell expressed her concerns about having more wells in her area. She stated there are issues currently with water pressure. Mrs. Harrell stated they moved from a congested area because they wanted rural life.

Len Fatica asked the Board to make developers legally liable for well management and maintenance. He stated the water utility providers in the County do not have regulatory oversight on how they operate.

Sarah Thompson expressed various concerns about how the public was informed of what was going on and how it relates to the public's right to information.

The following people signed up to speak in support of the comments made by the other speakers, but deferred making comments: Kyle Ray, May Wiley, Penny Nesmith, Pam Shuman,

Mike Clifton, Randy Scott, Debra Scott, Brandon Mason, Paula Shuman, Denise Grooms, Larry Williams, Cindy Thompson, Suzanne Smith, and Cathy Spacher.

Chairman Thompson called on the Board to address and/or make comments to the audience at large.

Commissioner Deal stated he believes the Board is working in the best interest of the residents.

Commissioner Simmons stated the purpose of the moratorium is to help direct growth so that the County will not be like the City of Pooler.

Commissioner Rushing stated the Board is aware of the residents' concerns and is trying to find solutions to address them. He stated Board is trying to get the information out to the residents so they are aware of what is going on in the community. Commissioner Rushing provided examples of well-water usage under different types of development.

After some discussion, Chairman Thompson stated the County is growing and the Board and staff will need to figure out how to handle the change. He stated the County is still in the process of gathering information and may not have all the answers at this point. Chairman Thompson thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting.

Chairman Thompson adjourned the meeting.