

September 19, 2022
Statesboro GA

Public Hearing

Bulloch County Planning and Development Office held a public hearing at 5:00pm in the Community Room of the North Main Annex. Planning and Development Director James Pope welcomed guests and called the meeting to order.

The following staff was present: County Manager Tom Couch, County Attorney Jeff Akins, Assistant County Manager Cindy Steinmann, Planning and Development Director James Pope, and Clerk of the Board Olympia Gaines.

Mr. Pope provided background information on the purposes of a comprehensive plan and various zoning ordinances. He explained briefly the Department of Community Affairs rules and regulations for amending the Comprehensive Plan. He stated the County is attempting to streamline the review process for zoning requests that place equal guidelines for development. Mr. Pope stated the department is looking to codify routine conditions into the zoning ordinance.

He stated with the growth occurring in the Southeastern area of Bulloch and the expected expansion of this growth along with challenges of recent development, it is a good reason for the Comprehensive Plan to be updated. Mr. Pope stated the staff is looking at the following projects during the moratorium: (1) creating a stand-alone ordinance for stormwater; (2) zoning ordinance amendments; (3) planning for new infrastructure for water-sewer capacity.

Mr. Pope stated in order to amend the plan, the County is required to hold public hearings. He stated the Steering Committee is comprised of nine (9) members including elected officials, planning and zoning commission members, a representative of economic development, and a representative of the agricultural community. Mr. Pope stated they are proposing three (3) steering committee meetings to solicit community feedback and with a second public hearing tentatively scheduled for January 2023. He stated a special website was created for public access that contains the most current information regarding this process. Mr. Pope stated the County's goal is to be transparent and have information readily accessible to the public.

County Manager Tom Couch stated the plan is still in the processing and early preliminary stages. He stated the development of the plan would map the construction build-out of the facility. Mr. Couch stated the staff has been looking at viable solutions and will continue

to keep the public updated via the website. He stated the goal is to balance the interests of rural landowners with the inevitable future development. Mr. Couch stated the goal is to direct growth and development into areas with planned and adequate infrastructure.

Mr. Pope stated it is important for the Board of Commissioners to guide the growth in the water-sewer district and over time the expectation is that the district will grow out.

Mr. Couch called for public comments from the audience.

Cindy Thompson asked questions about the number of proposed steering committee meetings and public hearings. She asked about the number of proposed wells and if Bulloch County currently owned those sites.

Diane Harrell thanked the staff for providing timely notice to the public. She expressed her concerns about having more wells in her area. She stated there are issues currently with water pressure. Mrs. Harrell stated she is opposed to everything and asked why the public wasn't asked for input prior to the point of the public hearing.

Gary Cross asked a question about the size of the facility and proposed tax abatements. He asked if the growth projections were accurate.

Horace Harrell expressed his concerns with water and sewage. He also stated Mud Road, Arcola Road, and Highway 46 will require major maintenance.

Paul Able stated he was representing a group of concerned citizens who believes the plan amendment should be carried out in two stages. He stated the first stage should be to determine if amendments are needed and the second stage should be the amendment of the plan. Mr. Able stated it appears the County has skipped the first stage and immediately went to the second stage. He stated the current Comprehensive Plan is a good plan. Mr. Able stated the decision should not be left solely to one group and should be put to the public vote.

Carrie Mason expressed similar sentiments to Mr. Able. She stated the Steering Committee is only a small percentage of the voices of the community. Mrs. Mason asked what would happen if the citizens were in opposition to what was decided. She asked that the County keep the people in mind.

Mr. Couch stated there is no likelihood that a referendum will be called. He stated the steering committee is comprised of a responsible group of people who are forward-thinking in their approach and are attempting to balance the interest of all. Mr. Couch stated there was no reason in the prior Comprehensive Plan to believe the mega-site would have been mobilized at

the time. He stated the circumstances are much different than they were before and that decisions will not be made in a vacuum.

Hillary Salmon asked why the development was not going into places that had the necessary infrastructure.

Michael Bailey asked why the Commissioners were not present at the meeting. He stated the public should have input into what is being decided. Mr. Bailey stated he would like to meet with the Steering Committee. He asked for the names of the Steering Committee members.

Mr. Couch provided the names of the Steering Committee members.

Pam Shuman expressed her concerns about the impacts on the school system and public safety.

Mr. Pope stated that he will work with the public in ensuring that information is available and that the process will be as transparent as possible. He thanked the audience for their attendance.

The meeting was closed by Mr. Pope.