

GREATER LOWNDES PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
325 WEST SAVANNAH AVENUE
Monday, September 25, 2023 – 5:30 PM

GLPC Commission Members Present: Johnny Ball, Ron Bythwood, James Miller, Ed Hightower (Chairman), Steve Miller, Vicki Rountree, Chip Wildes, Chris Webb, and Tommy Willis

GLPC Commission Members Absent: Franklin Bailey

Staff: Matt Martin - City of Valdosta Planner; JD Dillard - County Planner, Lowndes County; and Molly Stevenson - Lowndes County Planning Analyst (Clerk)

VISITORS PRESENT:
(Sign-In sheet available in file.)

CALL TO ORDER, INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Hightower called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Chairman Hightower led the Pledge of Allegiance followed by the Invocation by Commissioner James Miller. Chairman Hightower welcomed everyone to the GLPC meeting and explained that the Planning Commission serves as an advisory (recommending) body to the local member governments regarding land use requests, and the final determination of the requests presented at this meeting will be made by the applicable local governments. Chairman Hightower then explained the meeting procedures and announced the dates of the public hearings for the local member governments, as listed on the agenda.

Agenda Item #2

Approval of the Meeting Minutes: August 28, 2023

Chairman Hightower called for additions, questions, and corrections of the August 28, 2023, GLPC meeting minutes. There being none, Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Commissioner Bythwood made a motion to approve the August 28, 2023, meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Wildes second. All voted in favor, no one opposed (8-0). Motion carried.

Agenda Item #3

REZ-2023-11 Flannigan, 2426 Joanna Dr., 0087 016, ~4.0 acres,
Current Zoning: C-C (Crossroads Commercial)
Proposed Zoning: R-1 (Low Density Residential)

Mr. Dillard presented the case in which the applicant is requesting a change in zoning on approximately 4.0 acres at 2426 Joanna Dr. from C-C (Crossroads Commercial) with conditions to R-1 (Low Density Residential) zoning, in order for the property to be developed in a similar pattern to the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Dillard then read a letter from the applicant. In 1984, the property was rezoned from A-U to N-C (Neighborhood Commercial) with the condition that it only be used for a Club.

The subject property is in the Urban Service and Suburban Character Area, with access to and from the property off Smith Street and Joanna Drive, both County maintained Local Roads. Per Comprehensive Plan guidance, R-1 zoning is listed as a recommended zoning within that character area.

The TRC considered the request and had no objectionable comments, and staff finds the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the existing land use pattern.

Chairman Hightower asked if there were any questions for staff from the commissioners. There being none, Chairman Hightower opened the Public Hearing portion of the case.

No one spoke in favor of, nor in opposition to the request.

Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Commissioner Rountree made a motion to recommend approval of the request as presented. Commissioner Webb second. All voted in favor, no one opposed (8-0). Motion carried.

Agenda Item #4

REZ-2023-12 GT's Wrecker Service, 1350 & 1326 Old Clyattville Rd.,
0123B 001 & 0123B 001B, ~3.2 acres,
Current Zoning: C-H (Highway Commercial)
Proposed Zoning: M-2 (Heavy Manufacturing)

Mr. Dillard presented the case in which the applicant is requesting a change in zoning on approximately 3.2 acres at 1350 & 1326 Old Clyattville Road from C-H (Highway Commercial) to M-2 (Heavy Manufacturing) zoning, in order for the property to be utilized for a Wrecker/Tow Service. Adjacent properties have recently been developed with a wholesale landscaping business to the east, and a metal roofing company to the northwest.

The subject property is in the Urban Service and Community Activity Center character area, and Valdosta Airport Overlay, with access to and from the property off Old Clyattville Road and St. Augustine Road, a County maintained Local Road and a Minor Arterial Road respectively.

Per Comprehensive Plan guidance, M-2 zoning is not recommended within the Community Activity Center character area, though the property abuts Industrial Activity Center character

areas across both roadways, which contain a mixture of M-1, M-2, and C-H zoning, along with some R-A and R-1 zonings.

Wrecker/Tow Services are not defined within the ULDC, and therefore the use is classified as a Junk or Salvage Yard, subject to the supplemental standards of 4.03.12 (attached), including buffering, screening, and setbacks. The Minimum Buffer Area of 40' would be required along the northern property line, including a solid wall or fence a minimum of 8' high to encompass the entire area used for storage and service of the vehicles. While a variance to the supplemental standards may be sought, staff is not supportive of the request due to the intensity of the proposed use.

Interestingly, Wrecker/Tow Services are allowed in C-H zoning within the City of Valdosta, without supplemental standards.

The TRC considered the request and had no objectionable comments, noting that if approved, ingress and egress should be off Old Clyattville Road instead of St. Augustine. Staff finds the request consistent with the overall goals of the Comprehensive Plan, semi consistent with the surrounding land use and zoning pattern, though concerned that the proposed change may adversely influence existing conditions and be a deterrent to the value or improvements of adjacent or nearby properties. Therefore, as a compromise, Staff recommends M-1 zoning with the following six (6) conditions:

Development Feature	Standard
Screening Required Minimum Height	Solid wall or solid fence 8 feet
Buffering Required	Minimum buffer area of 30 feet along the northern property line in conjunction with the required screening
Outside Storage	Screened from view from adjacent properties and from the public right-of-way
Storage of salvaged or junk materials	Materials shall not exceed the height of the fence or wall. This shall not be construed to prohibit equipment and vehicles used in the salvage operation
Exterior Lighting	Directed and shielded to avoid illumination of adjacent properties
Maximum Number of Vehicles	There shall be no more than seventy-five (75) vehicles stored on the property in addition to employee's and customer(s) personal vehicles

Chairman Hightower asked if there were any questions for staff from the commissioners. Commissioner Willis asked for clarification that the recommendation by staff was for M-1 zoning with conditions as opposed to M-2 zoning. Mr. Dillard affirmed. Commissioner Rountree asked about the Ingress/Egress recommendation. Mr. Dillard stated this was a recommendation from the County Engineer. Commissioner Steve Miller asked if the applicant was agreeable to the recommendations. Mr. Dillard stated the applicant was present to speak.

Chairman Hightower asked if there were any additional questions for staff from the commissioners. There being none, Chairman Hightower opened the Public Hearing portion of the case.

Speaking in favor of the request:

- Thomas & Stephanie Sutton, Applicant – 3673 Johnson Rd. SE

Mr. Sutton explained that the business should not be considered a salvage yard because no vehicle parts are sold.

Commissioner Rountree asked if the applicant was agreeable to the conditions. Both Mr. and Mrs. Sutton stated they just want assurance they can run the business if it is zoned M-1 with the conditions. Mr. Dillard re-stated that was the compromise. Mr. Dillard also clarified that the fencing condition applies only to the vehicles would be stored, not to where the office would be located.

Commissioner Willis asked the applicants if they would still transport wrecked vehicles in addition to primarily towing to off site locations to which the applicant answered in the affirmative. Mr. Willis voiced concern about oil and other hazardous materials leaks.

No one spoke against the request.

Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Motion by Commissioner Wildes to recommend approval of the request as presented with six (6) conditions. Commissioner Willis second. All voted in favor, no one opposed (8-0). Motion carried.

Agenda Item #5

CU-2023-03 Kristie Jenkins (2525 N Ashley Street – Suites M & O)
CUP for an Event Center in C-H zoning

Mr. Martin presented the case in which the applicant is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for an “Event Center” in a Highway Commercial (C-H) zoning district. The subject property consists of 3.77 acres located at 2525 North Ashley Street. This is the “Garden Plaza” commercial center located along the east side of North Ashley Street, south of Emory Street and directly across from the North Campus of VSU. The applicant is leasing Suite “M” and Suite “O”

(combined adjacent tenant spaces) which are located near the middle of the Plaza, and which were previously occupied by the “25 North” restaurant/nightclub.

The subject property is located within an Institutional Activity Center (IAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan. The property is also located within the Urban Commercial Corridor Overlay District (UCCOD).

The applicant has stated she would like to use this as a home base (business office) for her existing mobile “Fun Time Party Rental & More” business, as well as hosting events on the premises. The applicant has submitted a very well-written Letter of Intent (see attached) which adequately describes the scope and operation of the proposed venture. However, the submitted floor plan/sketch indicates a bar area with an adjoining kitchen, a stage, and seating for 50+ persons. This gives the impression of a facility that is a little more intensive and with more of a focus on nighttime activities, than what the Letter describes.

Nonetheless, staff’s major concern with the proposed use is with the deficiencies of the site itself, particularly with its general lack of adequate on-site parking and lack of available overflow. This overall commercial center is non-compliant in terms of minimum required parking (that is available), and functional design of the parking layout, etc.. The commercial “plaza” portion of the site (excluding the motel portion) contains 16,000-sf GFA which requires a minimum of 72 parking spaces. There are only 49 spaces in this portion of the site, and some of these have sub-standard dimensions. The existing ingress and egress from the street, and to the buildings themselves, is adequate. However, the site layout in terms of parking space dimensions and access aisles is substandard in places, and this overall layout design has a high potential to cause on-site congestion. Even with 3-4 of the existing storefronts being currently vacant, staff has witnessed the parking lot being 100% full on multiple occasions. Adding another commercial use that has the potential for greater occupancy than a typical business in this complex, could be very problematic.

It should also be pointed out that the applicant currently has two (2) active Business Licenses for their party rental business at 1412 East Park Avenue, and also at 2157 Bemiss Road. Each of these locations is within an existing larger commercial center, with significantly MORE parking available and overall better site access than the subject property. Either of these locations, or another similarly conducive location in the City, would seem to be a much better choice. Staff believes that the proposed use, as described in the Letter of Intent, is a very good business model and proposal, but it needs to be in a location where such a business can flourish without potentially overloading its site capacity. Staff did consider recommending substantial conditions of approval (such as very limited occupancy and hours of operation) in order to mitigate the potential impacts. However, such limitations seemed unduly extreme for the proposed use, when the simpler solution would be to find a more a suitable location.

Staff finds the request inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria, and recommends denial to the City Council.

Commissioner James Miller asked if the parking lot is full during operating hours. Mr. Martin stated that it is during meal times.

Chairman Hightower asked if there were any additional questions for staff from the commissioners. There being none, Chairman Hightower opened the Public Hearing portion of the case.

Speaking in favor of the request:

- Kristie Jenkins, Applicant – 895 Clayton Dr.

Ms. Jenkins addressed the parking issue stating the adjacent property is available to rent for parking and that the parking lot behind the subject property is available and accessible. 69 total parking spaces are available. She also stated that parties are held during non-peak business hours of the other businesses and that the previous establishments at that location were more prone to longer hours.

Commissioner Bythwood asked if there has been any documentation provided by the adjacent property owner with regard to parking availability. Additionally, a question arose regarding the bar shown on the site plan. The applicant explained that it would be used solely for a buffet line. No alcohol will be served.

No one spoke against the request.

Commissioner Willis stated his concern about having to solicit for additional parking. Chairman Hightower asked how the applicant feels about the existing parking. Mr. Martin suggested more research is necessary and that there may be need for a possible Variance. Additional concern about how well lit the rear parking lot is. Commissioner Rountree verified that most events will take place in the evenings and on weekends.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Motion by Commissioner Rountree to recommend approval of the request with no conditions. Commissioner Bythwood second. Six (6) voted in favor, two (2) opposed (6-2). Motion carried.

Agenda Item #6

VA-2023-13 St Augustine Road Church of Christ (713 N St Augustine Road)
Rezone 2.64 acres from R-10 to C-H

Mr. Martin presented the case in which the applicant is requesting to rezone 2.64 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-10) to Highway Commercial (C-H). The subject property is located at 713 North St Augustine Road, which is along the east side of the road immediately north of Hightower Creek and 250 feet south of the intersection with Harmon Drive. The property currently contains a well-established church facility, which is a permitted use in C-H zoning and requires a CUP in R-10 zoning.

The subject property is located within a Community Activity Center (CAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan which allows the possibility of C-H zoning. It should be noted that R-10 is not a compliant zoning district within the CAC Character Area (not intensive enough).

The property has been developed and utilized as a church for more than 50 years, and there are no immediate plans for change. However, the church is contemplating the possibility to expand their facility in the future or perhaps to increase its marketability for commercial redevelopment. Commercial zoning would be beneficial under either scenario.

The subject property is located within what is now a well-established commercial corridor along North St Augustine Road. As such, the surrounding zoning patterns in the area are dominated by mostly C-H zoning along the corridor itself, with R-10 zoning for the residential area behind the subject property. The surrounding land uses follow the same general pattern as the zoning. However, the redevelopment trends in the area have been for a slow expansion of commercial development (such as the recently constructed Candlewood Suites hotel, and the Hog-n-Bones restaurant to the north) as well as conversion of some of the single-family residential properties to multi-family apartments. There was also the recent rezoning of the adjacent vacant property to the north, for a proposed car wash facility. Even with no immediately-proposed changes to the subject property, it should be underscored that the existing R-10 zoning is not consistent with the Character Area nor is it consistent with a well-established commercial corridor. Therefore, the proposed rezoning of this property will help further a more consistent zoning pattern for the area, and help facilitate possible development/redevelopment of the subject property in the future.

Staff finds the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP) and recommends approval to the City Council.

Chairman Hightower asked if there were any questions for staff from the commissioners. There being none, Chairman Hightower opened the Public Hearing portion of the case.

Speaking in favor of the request:

- Deland Guthrie, Applicant – 3953 Johnston Rd.

Mr. Guthrie stated church leadership wants to make the property zoned consistent with that of the surrounding properties.

No one spoke against the request.

Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Motion by Commissioner Wildes to recommend approval of the request as presented. Commissioner Webb second. All voted in favor, no one opposed (8-0). Motion carried.

Agenda Item #7

VA-2023-14 Edward Jennings, LLC (1869 Madison Hwy)
Rezone 3.96 acres from C-H(county) to C-H(city)

Mr. Martin presented the case in which the applicant is requesting to rezone 3.96 acres from Highway Commercial (C-H)(county), to Highway Commercial (C-H)(city). The subject property is located at 1869 Madison Highway, which is across from the Valdosta Airport on the east side of the highway, between Horace Avenue and Ward Avenue. The property currently contains a single-family residence. The applicant is proposing to demolish the existing residence and redevelop the property with four (4) speculative commercial buildings (12,000-sf each) around a shared parking area and shared access driveway from Madison Highway. The applicant is also requesting ANNEXATION of this same property, which is being reviewed concurrently under casefile # VA-2023-15 (see next Agenda item).

The subject property is located within a Community Activity Center (CAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan, which allows the possibility of C-H zoning (the Character Area designation will remain the same after annexation). The property is also located within the Valdosta Regional Airport Overlay District, which may have some limitations on the final proposed uses/development of the property, and these are customarily addressed at the time of actual development (plan review process).

The existing land use and zoning patterns in this area are dominated by the Valdosta Regional Airport property (industrial zoning), as well as commercial zoning along the east side of Madison Highway, and residential zoning for the interior rural neighborhood to the east of that. In spite of its former residential use, this property was rezoned to C-H (in the County) by its former owner in 2009 for speculative commercial development. That development never materialized, and the new owner (the applicant) is wanting to increase the property's viability for commercial development by making it accessible to City utilities and other services.

Staff finds both requests consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP) and recommends approval to the City Council.

Commissioner Steve Miller asked if a decel lane would be required. Mr. Martin stated it is possible and that it will be determined during the formal plan review process.

Chairman Hightower asked if there were any further questions for staff from the commissioners. There being none, Chairman Hightower opened the Public Hearing portion of the case.

Speaking in favor of the request:

- Kevin Hollis, representing the applicant – 1525 BCT Gin Rd., Quitman, GA

Mr. Hollis stated he has met with GDOT and no decel lane will be required. If the County were to improve adjacent roads, they might pursue access to other roads.

Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Motion by Commissioner Willis to recommend approval of the request as presented. Commissioner Wildes second. All voted in favor, no one opposed (8-0). Motion carried.

Agenda Item #8

VA-2023-15 Edward Jennings, LLC (1869 Madison Hwy)
Annex 3.96 acres from C-H(county) to C-H(city)

As stated in conjunction with the previous case (VA-2023-14), the applicant is requesting to annex 3.96 acres into the City of Valdosta.

No one spoke against the requests.

Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Motion by Commissioner Rountree to recommend approval of the request as presented. Commissioner Steve Miller second. All voted in favor, no one opposed (8-0). Motion carried.

There being no other business, Chairman Hightower adjourned the meeting at 6:33 p.m.

**Ed Hightower, Chairman
Greater Lowndes Planning Commission**

Date

