

GREATER LOWNDES PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
325 WEST SAVANNAH AVENUE
Monday, July 29, 2024 – 5:30 PM

GLPC Commission Members Present: Franklin Bailey, Ron Bythwood, George Foreman, Ed Hightower (Chair), James Miller, Steve Miller (Vice-Chair), Vicki Rountree, Chris Webb, Chip Wildes

Absent: Tommy Willis

Staff: Matt Martin, City of Valdosta/Hahira Planning Director; 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. Commissioner James Miller led the Pledge of Allegiance followed by the Invocation. 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

Welcome of New GLPC Member, George Foreman - City of Valdosta Appointee

Chairman Hightower introduced and welcomed new GLPC Member, George Foreman, who replaces Mr. Johnny Ball.

Agenda Item #3

Approval of the Meeting Minutes: June 24, 2024

Chairman Hightower called for additions, questions, and corrections of the June 24, 2024, GLPC meeting minutes. There being none, Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Commissioner Bythwood made a motion to approve the June 24, 2024, meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Chris Webb second. All voted in favor, no one opposed (8-0). Motion carried.

Agenda Item #4

CU-2024-05

Yazmin Saucedo, 2161 Bemiss Road
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 is located at 2161 Bemiss Road, which is along the east side of the road south of Langdale Drive. More specifically, it is the tenant space (about 4,200 sf) that is located in the farthest east end of this commercial center, immediately past the larger space that has a long history of being a nightclub. The applicant is proposing an event center called the “Enchanted Hall” that specializes in weddings, quincenaras, and family reunions, with an anticipated overall seating capacity of about 160 people. There will be no onsite kitchen facilities and all food or alcohol would be provided by licensed caterers. Refer to the Letter of Intent for more details.

The subject property is located within a Community Activity Center (CAC) 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 is proposing to utilize one tenant space of a much larger commercial center. The front parking lot area (facing Bemiss Road) has about 85 parking spaces that are on the subject property. There are additional parking spaces to the south which are located on the “Caste Park” shopping center property (different owner). However, there is no currently no active shared parking agreement between these 2 properties. It should also be noted that the existing parking lot to the east (about ** spaces) is also located on the Castle Park property. Even though the subject tenant space has two doors existing to this side of the building, the applicant/owner does NOT have permission to utilize these parking spaces. Therefore, the proposed use is only able to avail itself of the front parking lot facing Bemiss Road, and it must share this parking with the rest of the uses in the commercial center. The adjacent and much larger tenant space next to the applicant’s, has had a long history of different nightclubs over years, most of which have had negative track records – causing overflow parking and overcrowded conditions, numerous calls for law enforcement, and regarded as a general nuisance with complaints from surrounding properties.

As mentioned above, there are two (2) major areas of concern regarding this CUP request; lack of parking for large crowds, and negative history of assembly type uses such as an event center. However, the applicant’s Letter of Intent describes a proposed use that is not a nightclub, but instead focuses on private events such as wedding receptions and other family-related gatherings. With properly limiting conditions of approval which seek to avoid these negative impacts, an Event Center like what is being proposed by the applicant could be successful here by reactivating a currently empty space and helping to erase the negative history of this property.

Staff finds the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria, and recommends approval to the City Council, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) Approval shall be granted in the name of the applicant only for an indoor Event Center as described in the applicant's letter of intent, with events taking place indoors only.
- (2) Hours of operation shall be limited to within the hours of 8:00am – 11:00pm daily.
- (3) Total maximum facility occupancy shall be limited to no more than 160 persons.
- (4) All events shall be private and scheduled in advance with attendance numbers pre-determined and managed by the applicant. There shall be no open commercial ticket sales, entry cover charges, or other forms of open public admittance. All sounds generated by the facility shall be in strict adherence to the City's adopted Noise Ordinance.
- (5) All food and beverage served on the premises shall be provided as part of the scheduled event (not sold), and prepared by locally-licensed caterers or by the private lessee(s) of the facility, as pre-arranged through the applicant. All alcoholic beverages shall be served by a licensed alcoholic beverage caterer in accordance with City ordinance.
- (6) Conditional Use approval shall expire one (1) year from the date of approval if no City business license has been obtained by that date.

Commissioner Rountree inquired as to the number of parking spaces available. Mr. Martin stated there are at least 85. Vice-Chair Miller asked if there are any restrictions to alcohol service given the proximity to a church. Mr. Martin explained the requirement is 50 feet and this location exceeds that.

Chairman Hightower opened the Public Hearing portion of the case.

Speaking in favor of the request:

- Yazmin Saucedo, Applicant – 2161 Bemiss Rd.

Ms. Saucedo reiterated her intent is to open an event venue for the purpose of family friendly gatherings to include reunions, receptions, etc.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Motion by Commissioner Rountree to recommend approval of the request as presented with 6 conditions, Commissioner Bailey second. All in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried. (8-0)

Agenda Item #5

VA-2024-11

Freeman Investments, LLC, 3880 Bemiss Rd.
Rezone 1.89 acres from R-P to C-N

Mr. Martin presented the case in which the applicant is requesting to rezone 1.89 acres from Residential Professional (R-P) to Neighborhood Commercial (C-N). The subject property is located at 3880 Bemiss Road, which is an undeveloped landlocked parcel (vacant field) located diagonally behind the applicant's place of business (Freeman Electrical Contractors) at 3886 Bemiss Road. This property is also immediately to the west of the single-residences fronting the west side of Edinburg Circle cul-de-sac in The Highlands subdivision. The applicant is proposing to construct a commercial accessory building on the property, and/or combine it with adjacent commercial property for possible marketing purposes.

The subject property is located within a Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan which allows the possibility of C-N zoning.

The subject property is a remnant undeveloped piece of land from about 20 years ago when The Highlands subdivision was developed. It was never intended to be developed as part of the neighborhood, and was eventually forfeited by the original developers in 2012. The applicant later acquired the property in 2019 as investment or in hopes of later developing it themselves. However, as a landlocked parcel with no street frontage, it must be combined with other adjacent properties having frontage, in order to be developed. The applicant is the owner of the commercially-zoned properties to the north, and therefore has the ability to make this parcel developable as part of their own.

R-P zoning allows professional offices and all forms of residential usage, including multi-family apartments up to 18 dwelling units per acre (up to 34 units on 1.89 acres). Because the applicant is desiring to develop this property commercially, they are seeking the rezoning to C-N, which is the most intensive zoning allowable for a landlocked parcel in the NAC character area. C-N allows general retail and light forms of commercial, as well as offices, but does not allow multi-family apartments.

The subject property is irregularly shaped and fairly isolated from any form of development, except maybe that which is associated with development along Bemiss Road. Roadway connection to the abutting neighborhood to the east is highly unfeasible, and therefore the only logical scenario is for it to eventually be included as part of the adjacent properties oriented toward Bemiss Road, which will likely be developed commercially. Having the lighter intensity C-N zoning (instead of C-C or C-H) will help serve as a buffer/transition to The Highlands subdivision from future commercially developed properties along Bemiss.

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.

Commissioner Bailey inquired about fencing. Mr. Martin responded that he believes it is proposed. He further stated that the original concept plan for the Highlands Subdivision property 20 years ago was for multi-family apartments, but was changed to single-family homes, but the development retained its R-P zoning. There is no buffer yard or fencing required when R-P zoning is next to R-P zoning. Commissioner Bailey asked if an additional 4000 sq ft. building could be erected if rezoning is approved. Mr. Martin stated that given the size of the lot, several buildings could be added, however, access, parking and water detention could pose problems and expanding could require additional parking. Vice-Chair Miller reiterated that as it is currently zoned, a 33-unit apartment building could be constructed. Mr. Martin confirmed.

Speaking in favor of the request:

- Matthew Inman, Engineer for Applicant – 4560 Val North, Suite E
- Mike Freeman, Applicant – 3886 Bemiss Rd.

Mr. Inman stated the plan is to construct a 4000 sq ft building to store materials and supplies for the applicant's electrical business, providing a safe space to secure their inventory. Job trailers and vehicles will be stored outdoors. There is a partial fence but the applicant intends to fence the area for security purposes.

Commissioner Bailey questioned if the subject property was originally deemed for common space for the Highlands Subdivision. Mr. Inman stated that it was not as the code would have required access. The code allows for there to be no buffer but the applicant wants to be a good neighbor and intends to establish a buffer. Commissioner Rountree asked if the property has been utilized as common space. Mr. Inman stated he didn't think so as the parcel is not maintained and mowed regularly. Commissioner Rountree asked if a fence could be required via a condition to approval.

Mr. Freeman stated that they absolutely intend to put up a fence. The intent for the building is to be able to move what is currently stored in the store-front units that face Bemiss to the new building so the store-front units can be utilized for office spaces.

Commissioner Bailey asked if the new building would be a 4-side metal building. Mr. Freeman stated the side facing Bemiss Rd. would have a non-metal façade.

Speaking in opposition to the request:

- Richard Bates – 3838 Edinburgh Cir.
- Dan Johnson – 3833 Edinburgh Cir.
- Kameron Lamp – 3839 Edinburgh Cir.

Mr. Bates voiced concern about privacy and noise, stating there is an adjacent berm and trees planted to help reduce noise. Commissioner Rountree asked Mr. Bates if he understood that with the current zoning, a three-story apartment building could be built right against his property line without requiring a buffer. Mr. Bates stated he is adamantly opposed to that prospect.

Mr. Johnson's concerns included compliance with the LDR regarding noise, smells, etc., as well as concerns that the homeowners' property values would decrease. He asked if the property owner sold the property if there would be restrictions as to the approved uses in C-N zoning. He stated that the proposed plan would create a breach of safety, comfort and common welfare, and further requested that if approved and a fence is constructed, to please require an opaque privacy fence and not merely a chain link fence. The applicant stated he will construct a 6' privacy fence.

Mr. Lamp stated he is currently maintaining a portion of the subject property and concurred with Mr. Johnson's thoughts that the proposed plan will diminish property values.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Hightower called for a motion. Motion by Commissioner Rountree to recommend approval of the request with 1 condition:

1. A six foot opaque wooden fence shall be constructed between the subject property and adjacent neighbors.

Commissioner Bailey second. All in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried. (8-0)

Agenda Items #6 & #7

VA-2024-12	Southern Gateway, LLC, Madison Highway Rezone 41.12 acres from C-H/P-D/E-A (county), to all M-2 (city)
VA-2024-13	Southern Gateway, LLC, Madison Highway Annex 41.12 acres into the City of Valdosta

Mr. Martin presented both cases together but explained the items will be voted on separately. Chairman Hightower asked if the annexation portion would require a separate discussion. Mr. Martin said no. Mrs. Stevenson pointed out that the agenda contained a typographical error in that both agenda item #s 6 and 7 had the same case numbers. Agenda item #7 should be VA-2024-13.

Southern Gateway LLC is requesting to rezone a total of 41.12 acres from a combination of Highway Commercial (C-H)(county) (35.39 acres), Planned Development (P-D)(county) (3.01 acres), and Estate Agriculture (E A)(county) (1.13 acres), to all Heavy Industry (M-2)(city). The subject property is located along the west side of Madison Highway, south of the intersection with Race Track Road, contiguous to the existing Valdosta city limits. The applicant is also seeking annexation of the property (file # VA-2024-13) in order to simply combine with their other properties and market all of them together for development under M-2 zoning. The subject property is currently vacant and uncleared. The applicant also owns the large adjacent tract of

land to the north and west of the subject property, which is already in the city limits and zoned M-2. The applicant is proposing to combine all their tracts together and market them for a potential larger acreage development.

The subject property is located within a Community Activity Center (CAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan. Upon annexation and pursuant to LDR Section 202-8(B), all of the property will be designated with the Industrial Activity Center (IAC) Character Area, which matches the applicant's adjacent property and allows M-2 zoning.

This property was previously developed as rural residential homesites, including a small mobile home park many years ago. The C-H portion was rezoned as such more than 30 years ago, but the commercial development never materialized. The northern boundary of the subject property is the former Race Track Road (unpaved) right-of-way which was abandoned and closed by Lowndes County earlier this year

Most of this area along Madison Highway between Exit 11 and the Valdosta Regional Airport has seen commercial development and redevelopment in recent years, which is anticipated to increase upon the completion of the Exit 11 interchange improvements. However, closer to the Airport there are current plans for industrial development – including the City of Valdosta “water plant # 2” as well as the adjacent vacant property owned by the applicant (~88 acres), all of which is zoned M-2. The Valdosta Lowndes County Development Authority (VLCDA) is marketing the applicant's existing M-2 property for industrial development and there is a desire to include all of the applicant's acreage in this marketing strategy.

The subject property is contiguous to the existing Valdosta city limits along its northern and western boundaries and it is fully eligible for annexation into Valdosta. This annexation request has been properly noticed to Lowndes County pursuant to State law and to date, there have been no land use disputes raised by the County as part of the request. Since the applicant's adjacent property is already in the city limits, and there is a desire to market all of the applicant's acreage together under one jurisdiction and zoning district, the proposed annexation is logical and beneficial.

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

Speaking in favor of the request:

- Bill Nijem, Attorney for Applicant – 1007 N Patterson St.

Mr. Nijem reiterated that the intent is to streamline the properties which are currently split-zoned, and combine them with adjacent properties.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Hightower called for motions.

For case # VA-2024-12, motion by Vice Chair Miller to recommend approval of the request as presented, Commissioner Bythwood second. All in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried. (8-0)

For case # VA-2024-13, motion by Vice Chair Miller to recommend approval of the request as presented, Commissioner Bythwood second. All in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried. (8-0)

There being no other business, Chairman Hightower adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

Ed Hightower, Chairman
Greater Lowndes Planning Commission

Date

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