

MINUTES

GLYNN COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION HISTORIC COURTHOUSE AUGUST 19, 1998 7:00 P.M.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Glenda Jones, Chairman
Richard Altman
Lamar Cole
Hal Hart
Iris Touw
Jonathan Williams

ABSENT: Jeff Shell

STAFF PRESENT: Charles Taylor, Community Dev. Director
Deborah Taylor, Zoning Administrator
Janet Loving, Administrative Secretary

Chairman Jones called the meeting to order. She explained that this Public Hearing is a continuation for discussion of the Proposed Sea Island Development. She stated that Sea Island representatives would make their presentations, afterward, the floor would be open for public comments.

Attorney Jim Gilbert, representing Sea Island Company, presented a brief background history of the project, specifically, the commercial area on the south end of the island.

Mr. Gilbert stated that they began this process because Sea Island Company wanted to let the citizens of Glynn County and the State of Georgia know what they intend to do with the large land mass of property at the north end of St. Simons. The plan was generated by people who are the best in their field. They looked at the master plan and carefully studied the existing Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Gilbert pointed out the area on the map that was focused on at the August 4th Planning Commission meeting. One thing that was troublesome was the area on the map that showed all under one color and did not show a diversity of uses. He stated that staff will be presented with a plan that makes it crystal clear that the area in question will be for residential purposes, i.e., retirement community, and not for retail shops or offices. The area around this is the location of Christ Church, and Fort Frederica National Monument.

Mr. Gilbert then gave a brief history of the Jones family, their involvement in this area and why it is important to let citizens know that they would not do anything to harm this area. He stated that in 1930, Alfred Jones, Sr. began working on the area that we now know as Fort Frederica National Monument. Mr. Jones purchased the land and held it over the years until such time as the government could put together a plan to buy the land.

Mr. Jones did the same thing with areas we now consider to be Christ Church. After his death, Sea Island Company donated Wesley Memorial Gardens. Each church parcel was given a site by Sea Island Company. Mr. Gilbert stated that these areas will be protected. He stressed that the plan will be amended to reflect this concern.

Mr. Gilbert stated that there are some very important archeological sites that will be located, preserved and deeded to the National Monument. He pointed out that Sea Island Company has hired experts to redefine the historical sites. A comprehensive document regarding those sites was presented to Mr. Vernon Martin of the Regional Planning Commission.

At this time, Mr. Gilbert introduced Mr. Truitt Raburn, Principal Planner for Sea Island Company.

Mr. Raburn addressed the traffic associated with Frederica Village located at the south end of the Planned Development, which is the focus for the commercial and retail activity, and also the recreational needs of the area. Mr. Raburn stated that this is served in such a way to minimize the access points off of Frederica Road and emphasize the access on Lawrence Road, which will be the focus of the commercial, retail and service activity. He then pointed out the area to be used for the senior community and other residential areas. Mr. Raburn stated that the access points and the commercial activities are focused along Lawrence Road. There is one access point off of Frederica Road and an access point over in the senior community and residential area, which is the only existing access along the road. Mr. Raburn stated that there will be a second access just by nature of the land use. Senior community uses are low traffic generators.

Mr. Raburn stated that the wetland area will be part of the conservancy, which comes through the village center. He stated that they have worked with the Corps of Engineers to determine two crossing places in an effort to minimize impact to the wetlands.

Mr. Raburn explained that there have been some concerns about the aesthetics and buffers. He stated that in the plan, there is a 50 ft. buffer around the property. There have also been concerns about the possibility of developing the hummocks along Gully-hole Creek. However, in the conservancy plan the hummocks are included and have never been considered to be developed. He stated that because Sea Island is concerned about the appearance of this and the impact on the historic district, they have widened the buffer for additional protection.

In addressing building heights, Mr. Raburn pointed out that two statements were proposed in the plan. One statement deals with the maximum building height. He explained that they set the maximum building height throughout the entire PD at 45 ft., which is in accordance with the existing zoning for Resort Residential. He stated that Sea Island understands the sensitivity to building heights and the issues involved. Therefore, they are proposing a 35 ft. building height for all of the residential uses. The second statement deals with how the

building height is measured. Mr. Raburn stated that in the past, they have measured building heights from the FEMA flood elevation or existing grade. When the existing grade comes up above the flood elevation, then the height would be taken from the existing grade.

Mr. Raburn stated that another issue that has come to their attention is the rental apartments over garages. He explained that there are times when people build a dwelling over a garage to be used by family members. He stated that in the plan they used the term "rental apartment" which was the wrong term. They are proposing to change that terminology to say "guest houses" or "suites" which cannot be rented separately from primary dwellings.

Mr. Raburn stated that the last issue of concern is the buffer. He explained that they have proposed a chart that shows setbacks related to each specific land use in the Planned Development, which are very similar to the requirements in the existing Zoning Ordinance. He stated that there will be no setbacks between townhouses. There are 100 ft. and 50 ft. buffers around the perimeter of the property along Lawrence Road, Frederica Road and around the adjacent properties. He pointed out that in the Frederica Village, they have included very specific buffers, definitions and requirements.

In conclusion, Mr. Raburn stated that they have received a comment that Sea Island is proposing a 15 ft. waterway setback; however, that is a misinterpretation. They do not intend to have a 15 ft. waterway setback.

Mr. Gilbert made it clear that the Wood Stork and other colonial birds will be protected. He stated that other key representatives from Sea Island Company are present to answer questions on traffic and water & sewer.

At this time, Chairman Jones opened the floor for public comments.

Mr. Frank Quinby stated that the Board of Directors of RUPA unanimously approves the request proposed by the Sea Island Company with the following conditions and suggestions:

1. Because Frederica Road has many historical sites, we request that the plan have no entrances or exits directly on to the road.
2. An undisturbed 50 ft. natural buffer should be preserved between existing properties and the rights-of-way along Frederica Road.
3. The height limit should be 35 ft. maximum. No buildings should be visible from Frederica Road.
4. In order to preserve the historical integrity of the approach to Christ Church, Fort Frederica and Wesley Woods, all commercial areas should be moved farther north. Commercial entrances and exits should be placed on Lawrence Road with 50 ft. buffers. Commercial areas should have a service road off the main road.

5. The Water & Sewer Department should give a definite commitment regarding availability of water resources.
6. The Wood Stork Rookery must be preserved.
7. Subdivisions should be designed to have at least two entrances and exits to Lawrence Road.
8. We recommend that the entire development have walking trails and bike paths.
9. The plan as presented calls for 15 ft. buffers by waterways. The minimum requirement under state law is 25 ft. This should be observed. The buffers should remain in their natural undisturbed state.
10. The four separate zoning tracts should be addressed individually rather than as a total package.

Mr. Quinby stated that RUPA applauds the Sea Island Company development plan for this property. If the above details can be clarified, the plan should satisfy everyone.

Mrs. Helen Thomason, St. Simons resident, stated that it is irresponsible not to plan for another causeway in the northern part of the island. She stated that if Sea Island cannot, then perhaps Glynn County should take on this responsibility.

Mrs. Beth Kostka, representing the Coastal GA Land Trust, stated that she applauds the efforts of Sea Island; however, with a few changes, the plan will offer a more sustainable pattern of growth and greater public benefit for residents of Glynn County. She stated that these changes include the following:

1. Rezone to CP (Conservation Preservation) Cannon's Point/Couper Plantation.
2. Rezone to CP the Conservancy plus a buffer of no less than 100 ft.
3. Three buffers should be added: 100 ft. around all wetlands; 50 ft. along the tidal creeks/river; 50 ft. along golf course perimeter.
4. Sea Island should identify the numbers of acres defined for each lot type and open space to assure that cluster development is the majority.
5. Encourage trails which invite use, but not land degradation and soil erosion.
6. All trails whether private or public should be identified at least in square feet.

Mr. Michael Tennent of Fort Frederica National Monument expressed concerns about traffic at scenic entrances. He stated that these areas should be protected. Mr. Tennent stated that he has a great respect for Sea Island Company and he is willing to assist them in anyway possible.

Mrs. Meredith Trawick of 305 John Shaw Road expressed concerns about the commercial entrance in relation to Wesley Memorial Gardens and other historical and archeological sites. She stated that these sites are sacred and should be protected. Mrs. Trawick gave a brief background history of the area dating back to the year 1736. She stated that the Sea Island Company has been blessed. One reason for this is that they have been generous in donating property for the establishment of churches and memorials. However, she stated that she believes that "to whom much is given much is expected." Mrs. Trawick stated that the following should be considered:

1. There should be no entrances or exits on Frederica Road frontage.
2. There should be natural, undisturbed buffers to block the view of all commercialization.
3. There should be a map defining placement of all commercial structures.
4. There should be a lot layout for all single-family and multi-family dwellings.
5. Any rezoning should be tabled until a new separate St. Simons Island Planning Commission is functioning.

Mr. Ben Iannuzzi stated that most of his concerns have been addressed; however, he would like to see a more specific plan.

Mrs. Nancy Hancock of Oglethorpe Landing stated that a retirement center is a commercial business, which will generate more traffic from service trucks, visitors, etc. She stated that no one has addressed the schools in the area and the safety of the children riding and walking to school. She would like to see a bigger buffer in the area.

Mr. Jan Saltzgaber of 225 West Point Drive stated that if the plan is adopted, perhaps the Commission should take into account the undeveloped land in the area.

Mrs. Lori Perkins of 306 Dunbarton Drive expressed concerns relative to evacuating the island in case of a major storm or hurricane. She stated that a second causeway is needed as a means of escape in case of an emergency. As it stands now, there is only one road off of the island for 18,000 people.

Mrs. Iris Touw stated that her major point of concern has always been height and the method of measuring height. She stated that the building height committee and staff discussed changes in the current way of measuring height. They received input from developers, surveyors, etc. and were asked for a fair and equitable way to measure so that everyone had the same rules. The definition was reaffirmed as currently written in the ordinance, and they are in the process of establishing guidelines as to who will and who will not have to furnish a survey.

Mrs. Touw stated that if the Planning Commission were to allow this size of a development to exempt from the ordinance, they would have totally no control and a lot of resentment. She feels that the current Glynn County Ordinance is non-negotiable. She also stated that to her knowledge, there is no commercial district on St. Simons Island above 35 ft.

Mr. Charles Taylor requested that the Planning Commission allow staff to meet with the developer and incorporate as many of the comments as possible into their PD Text, and come back for the September 1st meeting with a new PD document. At that time, if there are any outstanding issues that Sea Island feel they cannot or should not accommodate, the Planning Commission can decide on how to deal with those outstanding issues.

Chairman Jones stated that her concerns deal with the method of measuring heights and setback requirements, which she discussed with Mr. Gilbert.

Mr. Taylor stated that for clarification, the setback requirement from state waters is 25 ft. The Georgia DNR has established the setback and is the only authority that can grant variances from that setback; however, the setback addresses "land disturbing activities." Under DNR's own rules some activities are allowed within that 25ft. setback as long as they don't disturb land.

Mr. Hal Hart asked that the PD Ordinance Text be made available for public view so that citizens can get a better understanding of the process and all of the steps involved, such as site plan approval, final plat approval, etc.

Mrs. Touw wanted to know if it is possible for the developer to provide the Planning Commission with specific uses in the various districts. She stated that she is concerned about the phrase "not limited to." Mr. Raburn stated for clarification the phrase "not limited to" can be deleted. Mrs. Touw also asked that mini-warehouses be deleted. Mr. Gilbert concurred.

Chairman Jones thanked everyone for attending and for their comments. This item will be included on the September 1st agenda of the regular Planning Commission meeting.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.