

MINUTES

GLYNN COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION HISTORIC COURTHOUSE AUGUST 27, 1998 7:00 P.M.

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

STAFF PRESENT: Charles Taylor, Community Dev. Director
Ron Milburn, Planning Official
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 amendment to the ordinance to consider establishing a St. Simons Island Planning Commission. Following staff's presentation, the floor would be open for public comments.

Mr. Charles Taylor stated that at the Board of Commissioners July 16, 1998 meeting, the Commissioners instructed staff to draft ordinances necessary to create a separate Planning Commission for St. Simons Island. The County Attorney's office drafted three ordinance amendments: 1) Amendment to the Code of Ordinances; 2) Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance; and 3) Amendment to the Subdivision Regulations.

Mr. Taylor stated that these amendments, when adopted, will accomplish the following:

- a) Create a separate Planning Commission for St. Simons Island;
- b) Provide that the Island Planning Commission act on issues involving the island and the Glynn County Commission act on issues involving the mainland;
- c) Both Commissions act on county-wide issues;
- d) Any conflict in the decisions made by the Commissions will be resolved by the County Commissioners;
- e) The Island Planning Commission consists of 7 members appointed by the County Commission. Members must be St. Simons Island residents. Each County Commissioner nominates one member.

Mr. Taylor stated that since the last Public Hearing, the County Attorney has made a change to the Code of Ordinances amendment. The new text clarifies that the Island Planning Commission will consider issues regarding Little St. Simons, Sea Island and Jekyll Island as well.

Chairman Jones then opened the floor for public comments.

Mr. S. C. Anderson pointed out that what the County Attorney proposed is not in accordance with the County Commissioners motion, which was for a District 2 Planning Commission on St. Simons to include Sea Island and Little St. Simons. He then questioned whether or not Jekyll Island should be included since it is not in District 2.

Mr. Anderson suggested that the Planning Commission's recommendation clarify that two new Commissions are being formed. He stated that he got the impression from Gary Moore that the existing Planning Commission would continue as is and those members would serve out their existing terms. However, in his opinion, this puts the island at a disadvantage in selection and volunteer of members that may be appointed by the Board of Commissioners. "Almost all of the members will be virtually green."

Mr. Anderson stated that if a separate Planning Commission for St. Simons is approved, the recommendation should include dissolving both boards, and members from St. Simons and Sea Island would transfer experience to both boards. He also feels that perhaps the Zoning Appeals Board should be dissolved.

Mrs. Eileen Hutcheson, President of RUPA (Residents United for Planning and Action) stated that RUPA strongly recommends that new and improved ordinances go along with the new Planning & Zoning Commission. She stated that because of the frenzy development on the island, there is destruction of the natural environment and a continuing loss of mature live oak trees, which is becoming increasingly prominent.

Mrs. Hutcheson stated she believes that a dedicated Planning and Zoning Commission of islanders, along with new ordinances would best serve the interest of the island community by having an intimate knowledge of its own district and an awareness of its unique needs.

Mrs. Hutcheson pointed out that an Island Planning and Zoning Commission could address the substantial development of St. Simons Island which now consists of one-quarter of the county's residents whose taxes and fees returned to the county coffers now approaching ten million dollars annually.

Referring back to the famous Boston Tea Party, Mrs. Hutcheson stated, "let's face the handwriting on the wall and acknowledge that the people of St. Simons Island are clamoring for a greater representation in making decisions which affect their quality of life and their

unique island home. Remember the words of your forefathers, 'No Taxation without Representation.' The people of St. Simons want and should be allowed to have a greater voice in deciding their own destiny."

Mr. Ed Hulse, former Brunswick City Manager, stated that his mission is to be in opposition of what appears to be a "done deal." He stated that when he came to Brunswick in 1966, he learned that the Planning Department in the City of Brunswick and in Glynn County had been in affect since the 1920's. The city and the county recognized the value of planning all of those years. "The master plan and the thinking of people have not been all wrong, as some people would have you believe." St. Simons Island grew because it was a desirable place for people to live.

Mr. Hulse stated that the system works and it has been working for a long time. It might not appease everybody, but it works. He stated that when he first heard about the proposal for a separate Planning Commission for the islands, he thought that it was totally illegal. He contacted the Attorney General's office and spoke to a Mr. Chris Grizwald who indicated that the "Home Rule Amendment" was now taking affect and advised him to seek assistance elsewhere.

Mr. Hulse stated that he came to the local planners (Mr. Dick Newbern) and pointed out that he considered this action illegal based on the fact that it was being given preferential treatment to one section of the county.

Mr. Hulse then went to the RDC and spoke to the head planner who advised that there is no precedent in the State of Georgia for this action. However, in Savannah there have been special advisory committees established from time to time to make recommendations to the overall Planning Department and Planning Board on specific matters; not general jurisdiction. Mr. Hulse spoke with Mr. Mike Gleaton, Director of Community Affairs Planning for the State of Georgia, who also advised that there is no precedent within the State of Georgia for having two planning jurisdictions in the same community.

In conclusion, Mr. Hulse stated that he can't help it if people don't like the way things are going. If he owned a piece of property on Sea Island or St. Simons and went before this board and was denied because they didn't like what he was going to do, he'd "sue the pants off of them." He stated that "you cannot deny anybody a rightful use of his property in accordance with the zoning regulations."

Mr. Jack Caldwell explained that over the years, a lot of mistakes were made that have had very unpleasant results for island residents. It is now too late to change some of those mistakes and we have to live with them. Mr. Caldwell stated that no member of this commission would have approved what has come to past, had it been presented as part of an entire concept plan. Instead, "little" decisions were made in the name of the right of people to develop

their land. Without any implied criticism of the present board, Mr. Caldwell stated that the problems are great enough and the opportunities are real enough to justify a separate Planning & Zoning Board for St. Simons Island. Therefore, he strongly supports this concept.

Mr. David Kyler of the Coastal GA Center for Sustainable Development was unable to attend, therefore, Mr. Victor Howard presented a letter to the Planning Commission on his behalf. The letter indicates Mr. Kyler's support for a separate Planning Commission for St. Simons Island. According to Mr. Kyler, "...by having a planning body solely responsible to the citizens of this portion of Glynn County, the ordinances and the procedures for their administration could be better tailored to the needs of local residents, property owners and tax payers..."

Ms. Nancy Thomason presented the following letter from the Glynn Environmental Coalition:

"The Glynn Environmental Coalition is strongly supportive of forming a separate Zoning & Planning Board for St. Simons Island, due to the unique features of the barrier island's environment. We are seeing the destructive trends of overdevelopment, accompanied by poor planning becoming especially evident on St. Simons Island..

"...Residents of St. Simons Island need a local Planning Board to look to for reasonable conduct when it comes to their homes, livelihoods and natural environment. While we all want to encourage a thriving tourist industry and a progressive resident community, we do not want to see the natural beauty and precious ambiance of St. Simons Island destroyed by unbridled development..."

Ms. Helen Thomason, speaking on behalf of the Cassina Garden Club, which consists of 125 members, stated that "Cassina endorses a separate Planning Commission for St. Simons and Sea Island. This in no way reflects on the dedication and ability of the present Glynn County Planning Commission. St. Simons has its own special concerns and problems... With all the growth on St. Simons and also parts of the mainland, all of Glynn County would be better served by having two separate Planning Commissions..."

Mr. Frank Quinby, St. Simons Island resident, stated that a lot of what is proposed in the ordinance to develop a separate Planning Commission has not been done on St. Simons Island. He stated that a number of developments have been put in and rezonings have occurred that will increase the water and sewer problems. Also, the infrastructure has not taken place. Mr. Quinby stated that "past and present Zoning Commissions and Planning Commissions have rubber stamped developers plans, and have tried to make a deal with developers." He stated that the people on St. Simons Island have not been given a fair shake, and feel that they could do a better job because they are closer to the problems. Mr. Quinby stressed that the people of St. Simons could do a much better job determining their future and what their Planning Commission should be like. Again, he stated that past and present Planning Commissions have not done a very good job. For example, he pointed out that the Planning Commission did

not allow proper turning radius at Frederica and Demere Roads and other locations on the island. Mr. Quinby stated that residents have been subject to poor planning in and out of St. Simons.

Regarding Mr. Quinby's complaint about improper turning radius at Demere & Frederica (near the Chevron Station), Mr. Hal Hart made it clear that the Planning Commission did not do anything with the Chevron Station. He explained that the area is zoned Local Commercial or Highway Commercial and the Planning Commission is not involved in the site plan review process. Mr. Quinby withdrew that particular complaint; however, he stated that somebody approved the plans, but they did not approve a radius to accommodate trucks.

Mr. Ralph Jensen, St. Simons Island resident, stated that he is curious about the mechanics of a new Planning Commission and he hopes that this board's recommendation to the County Commission would include membership terms that are staggered and a time limit to serve. Chairman Jones pointed out that the proposed ordinance does include staggered terms.

Mr. Hal Hart wanted to know what affect the second board would have on county staff. Mr. Charles Taylor explained that it would be helpful to staff if the new board's submittal deadlines, review process and meeting dates are as close to the current board's as possible in an effort to minimize confusion. He stated that staff is currently working on changes in the review process which could affect the new Planning Commission. Regarding manpower, Mr. Taylor pointed out that the county is growing on the mainland as well as the island, which keeps his staff backed up in the amount of work produced on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Jonathan Williams stated that it bothers him when people on St. Simons tell him that he shouldn't have anything to do with St. Simons because he lives in Brunswick. He has a problem with this, especially when he pays taxes on St. Simons and his parents still live on the island. He also expressed concerns regarding the comment that the board in the past did not try to protect St. Simons. Mr. Williams stated that during his term on the board, he doesn't know of any instance when something came before this board that the decision was based on the fact that the members did not know anything that was going on. He then expressed admiration for fellow board member, Iris Touw for her ability to not let anything pass without a thorough examination.

Mr. Williams stated that he attended several meetings during the time when the issue of consolidation was upsetting to residents of St. Simons. He pointed out that those meetings were overcrowded with people who wanted consolidation; however, when it was put in the referendum, it was defeated by a 5 to 1 vote. This makes him wonder if we're not going through the same thing with this item, and when it goes to a public referendum would the same thing happen again. Mr. Williams stated that he is going to weigh everything and when it is time for him to vote, he is going to cast his vote hoping that the vote will be what is

best for Glynn County, St. Simons, Sea Island, Little St. Simons, etc.

Mr. Williams pointed out that he received a phone call from Mr. Lee Bledsoe who stated that a separate Planning Board for St. Simons would still be governed by the same rules and would be a duplication of the current board.

Mr. Williams expressed dissatisfaction in the way that this proposal was handled by the Board of Commissioners. In his opinion, the County Commissioners should have petitioned the Planning Commission to make a recommendation to the Commissioners on this issue.

Regarding a citizen's comment that the St. Simons Island Planning Commission would have an awareness of the unique needs of St. Simons Island, Mr. Jeff Shell posed the question to each member. Each member, including Mr. Shell, replied that they have an awareness of the unique needs of St. Simons Island. Mr. Shell stated that it seems ironic that such a comment would come from someone who is not from St. Simons Island.

Mr. Shell stated that he considers the island part his because it is part of Glynn County and he lives in Glynn County. Therefore, he disputes the statement "Taxation without Representation" because he is here to represent St. Simons Island. Mr. Shell stated that he resents the comment that this is a "done deal" because if this is true, then he's wasting his time. He also resents and disputes the following comments: "rubber stampers"; "the current board does not see problems with the island"; "an Island Planning Commission can do a much better job than the current commission."

Mr. Shell reminded everyone that he feels a since of ownership for St. Simons Island regardless of the number of times speakers referred to it as "their island."

Mrs. Touw agreed with Mr. Williams and expressed dissatisfaction in the way that the Board of Commissioners handled this proposal. Mrs. Touw stated that many of the issues discussed tonight are not going to be handled by a St. Simons Planning Commission or any other Planning Commission. The turning radius on streets, the Chevron Station and Tabby Plaza never came before the Planning Commission. However, due to changes in the review process, such items will be brought before the Planning Commission in the future. Mrs. Touw advised citizens to direct their concerns toward ordinance changes. Otherwise, seven other people will be bound by the same restrictions as the current board.

Mr. Richard Altman stated that his feelings of opposition to the new Planning Commission are well known. He stated that citizens who think they can do a better job may have an opportunity one day. Mr. Altman stated that during his 18 months of serving on the board, they have looked at everything all across the county and he spends hours a month driving all over the county looking at planning matters.

Mr. Lamar Cole agreed with Mrs. Touw. He stated that a new board (just as they have) would still have to act in accordance with the zoning ordinance and regulations.

Chairman Glenda Jones reminded everyone that the Planning Commission is a recommending body. The Board of Commissioners, who are the elected officials, makes the final decisions.

Mr. Hal Hart asked if a survey had ever been done on the number of parcels on St. Simons that are owned by people who don't live on the island. Mr. Taylor stated that he is not aware of any type of property ownership study, but staff could research this through tax records.

There being no further business to discuss, Chairman Jones thanked everyone for participating in the discussion, and the meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.