

A Town Hall Meeting of the Oconee County Board of Commissioners was held on Tuesday, April 17, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room of the Oconee Veterans Park Community Center.

Members Present: Chairman John Daniell
Commissioner Mark Thomas
Commissioner Chuck Horton
Commissioner W. E. "Bubber" Wilkes
Commissioner Mark Saxon

Staff Present: Justin Kirouac, County Administrator
Kathy Hayes, County Clerk
Lisa Davol, Parks & Recreation Director

Media Present: Michael Prochaska, Editor, The Oconee Enterprise

Chairman Daniell called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. and welcomed citizens to the meeting.

Purpose and Procedure of the Meeting:

Chairman Daniell stated that the purpose of the quarterly Town Hall Meetings is to give citizens the opportunity to ask questions of the Board.

Chairman Daniell gave a brief update of the County-wide Transportation Study by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). A link will be published on the county website for citizens to complete a GDOT survey regarding transportation needs within the County. Chairman Daniell encouraged citizens to take time to complete the survey.

Question and Answer Session:

Dan Mathews, Watkinsville City Council, stated that there bicycle paths are needed on county roads to connect schools and other areas and would like to work with the County to see this take place; asked about connecting Oconee Veterans Park to Herman C. Michael Park; and is concerned that Marshal Store Road is used as a dumping ground.

Russ Page stated that he continues to wait for an Agri-Tourism Ordinance and is hopeful with a new Planning Director that the ordinance may be created; would like to see a Transferable Development Rights (TDR) Program in place, which could protect south Oconee rural properties and historic/scenic sites.

Chad Keller asked if the Mars Hill Road Widening Project is on schedule. Chairman Daniell responded that it is and a committee is working on corridor beautification, which the Board hopes to share in the next few months. Mike Dirr (UGA retiree), Scott Nasworthy (installer), Cindy Pritchard (Oconee County Clean and Beautiful Executive Director), Lisa Douglas, Stuart Cofer (Cofer's Home & Garden), and Brad Davis (UGA) are working on the trees/plantings for the corridor. Funding has been set aside through the Oconee County Industrial Development Authority. Mr. Keller asked how much time until the next phase of the road widening, and Chairman Daniell stated that there will be some time in between with funding available in FY20. He also asked about the timeline to replace Wayne Haynie as Director of Water Resources and Chairman Daniell stated that the County is actively recruiting a replacement;

Unidentified Citizen asked if permanently opening the exit road at the back of Oconee Veterans Park is an option. Chairman Daniell stated that funding is not available at this time to permanently open the road with the amount of traffic that would use the road on a continual basis.

Dr. Carole Ludwig, Positively Oconee, stated concerns regarding the Development Code with the term "country crossroads," which allows a type of commercial enterprise, cottage industries, semi-public and institutional uses. People living in rural areas moved to these areas because they do not want to live in or near a town. The terms being proposed for the Unified Development Code are vague and could be interpreted in multiple ways. What is a cottage industry? What is semi-public and what is an institutional use? Turnover on the Planning Commission is to be expected. New people on the Commission could lead to a different interpretation. She asks that the Board remove the term "country crossroads." Peggy Hardigree stated that south Oconee is not broken and she doesn't know why people are trying to fix it. Those living in rural Oconee areas enjoy the rural scenery (hay bales, donkeys, cows, horses) while riding to the nearest store. Maria Caudill, member of the Planning Commission, asked that our Board and County Administrator consider Dr. Ludwig's request.

Dr. Bruce Hammonds, resident of Summit Grove, is concerned about a buffer between the new Calls Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant and the property of six residents in Summit Grove, including his property. He is concerned about the direct impact on property values. Chairman Daniell stated that trees were removed for construction. Once construction is complete, the County will evaluate the buffer between residents and the plant. Chad Keller asked if the expansion was on schedule and Chairman Daniell stated that it is scheduled to be completed in August. Michael Prochaska, The Oconee Enterprise, asked if a tour of the plant would be held after completion, and Chairman Daniell stated a tour would be held.

Maria Caudill asked that the Board consider the Eagle Tavern museum programs when preparing the budget. Chairman Daniell stated that the budget would be discussed at the Budget Hearing on April 18 at 9:00 a.m.

Tony Glen stated that a memorial ride is planned for Karen Tinsley on Sunday April 29 at 9:00 am.

Chairman Daniell stated that a survey prepared by MACORTS (Madison, Athens-Clarke, Oconee Regional Transportation Study) is available online on the MACORTS website regarding areas such as the 10 Loop, Epps Bridge Parkway and other areas in our region. Peggy Hardigree asked if there is a survey regarding Butlers Crossing. Chairman Daniell responded that the GDOT survey on the County's website is specific to county concerns.

Dr. Carol Ludwig asked about the sound system in Courtroom 1 where the Planning Commission held its meeting. She and other citizens could not hear the Commission or those that spoke at the meeting. County Administrator Justin Kirouac stated that over the weekend lightning had caused damage to the phones and sound system.

Chad Keller asked about the installation of the traffic light at Rocky Branch and Mars Hill Road. Chairman Daniell stated that the right of way has been cleared, additional survey work was done for utility relocation and construction will begin to install a turn lane and traffic light.

Russ Page is concerned about the location of roundabouts in Bishop and trucks not decreasing speed when going through the roundabouts. Dr. Carol Ludwig stated she has driven vehicles and followed trucks on roundabouts, including in foreign countries, and the roundabouts are safe. Based on research statistics, roundabouts reduce fatalities by 75%, and we should become accustomed to roundabouts. The County should follow the lead of engineers.

Chad Keller asked if billboards will be allowed on Mars Hill Road. Chairman Daniell stated that Mars Hill Road has an Overlay District, and the Board recently updated its Sign Ordinance. However, controlling signage will continue to be an issue.

Peggy Hardigree asked when the Comprehensive Plan will be finalized. Chairman Daniell stated that the Board will discuss the timeline for the Comprehensive Plan at the its Agenda Setting Meeting on April 24th with action taken at the May 1st meeting to send the document to the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). DCA will review and then the Plan will come back to the Board for final adoption. Unidentified Citizen asked if the Board can make changes and Chairman Daniell stated that changes can be made by the Board. Commissioner Saxon stated that the Comprehensive Plan is a plan/a "living document". Unidentified Citizen asked if there is a process to make changes and who can make the changes? Chairman Daniell stated that the Board can make changes. Dr. Carol Ludwig asked if the Land Use Map is "set in stone." County Administrator Justin Kirouac stated that an incorrect statement was made at the Planning Commission meeting. There was a statement made at the Planning Commission meeting that in order to do certain zonings, the map would need to be changed. Unless the Board of Commissioners wants to change certain character areas on the map, then the map is the document that will go forward. Oconee County does not change the map each time there is a zoning action.

Chad Keller asked about the possibility of having turf fields at the Recreation Department. Chairman Daniell stated that it was considered, but the funding was not available.

Michael Prochaska, The Oconee Enterprise, asked if the Board will consider a referendum for the November election, possibly TSPLOST. Chairman Daniell stated that, after the GDOT County-wide Transportation Plan is complete, TSPLOST may be a consideration.

Dr. Carol Ludwig asked if the "country crossroads" designation is being used to provide a tax incentive for the County. Chairman Daniell stated that a study has not been done to determine the tax effect of the Comprehensive Plan map, but that the designation "country crossroads" has been in the Unified Development Code due to community stores. There are certain business activities allowed in agricultural areas. Commissioner Horton stated that utility infrastructure curtails the type of business that can be placed in an area regardless of the map. Peggy Hardigree stated that in the 1950s/1960s, community stores may have been needed due to limited transportation.

Mike Powers, Power Building Products, asked if Oconee County is considering an increase in sales tax after Athens-Clarke has increased its sales tax to 8%. Chairman Daniell stated that it is not at this time, but could be discussed if TSPLOST is considered. Mr. Powers stated that he is opposed to it and would think it would be an anti-business move.

Lisa Douglas stated that "country crossroads" is in the Unified Development Code (UDC). It was in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan but it was not shown as a development strategy to change the UDC. The current plan on page 28 and 30 lists it as "a development strategy to amend the UDC to compatible commercial uses within agricultural zoning districts" and then it lists the three secondary uses that the Planning Commission had questions about last night. The Planning Commission did not understand it and they passed it. We should be careful with what is written in the UDC. Each rezoned or available use has been available for a citizen discussion. If we change the UDC, we remove the rights and interests of landowners in the area. Do you think that would happen with a change to the UDC? Chairman Daniell stated that the UDC is the action plan to carry out the Comprehensive Plan. The term "country crossroads" has been available previously. Ms. Douglas stated that it was not listed as "a development strategy" until the current Comprehensive Plan. If it is not an advantage for commercial development, we can continue discussing the merits of each case. The designation is listed as a

development strategy and not as a tool to preserve agriculture and rural life. It sounds like an advantage to commercial development. If it is not, then it is not necessary. Russ Page stated that the only time “country crossroads” was used could have been Agri-Tourism.

Chad Keller asked when the Board will vote on Unified Development Code changes regarding slab foundations. Chairman Daniell stated that the Board will discuss this issue at its May 22 Agenda Setting Meeting with action at its June 5 Regular Meeting. Revised changes are on the website for review.

Chairman Daniell thanked the citizens for attending the Town Hall Meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

County Clerk

Chairman

Date