

White County Planning Commission
Public Hearing: White County Land Use Regulation
Minutes

Tuesday, June 28th, 2022
6:00 pm

White County Senior Center
1239 Helen Hwy, Cleveland, Ga. 30528

Those present were Larry Freeman, R.K. Ackerman, Dona K. Burke, Charlie Thomas, Linda Dixon, and John Yarbrough. Staff members present were Harry Barton, John Sell, and Mercedes Dodd.

Chairman Thomas called the meeting to order. Mr. Yarbrough gave the invocation. No changes made to the agenda. Chairman Thomas imposed a three-minute time limit per person for public comment.

Public Hearing for addition to the White County Code of Ordinances Appendix C for the “White County Historic Area Overlay District” and amendment to Article V General Provisions to add “Section 521. Cemeteries”.

Ms. Dixon abstained from the hearing due to being part of the Historic Preservation Committee.

Will Wagner, Park Manager with Georgia Department of Natural Resources, gave a presentation of the proposed Historic Area Overlay District and amendment to Article V Section 521. Cemeteries.

Ms. Burke asked the public to raise their hands if they were born and raised in White County; two people raised their hands. She asked Mr. Wagner why the ordinance is only a recommendation. Mr. Wagner explained the purpose of the overlay district ordinance was for the purpose of having a tool for reference for developments. He explained the ordinance as a “Cultural Resource Protection” that was modeled after the Mountain Protection ordinance. When asked if people were aware of their property placed on the list, Mr. Wagner said no. Mr. Wagner explained that the proposed ordinance would not block Planning Commission decisions and would be voluntary for property owners. He also referenced a recommendation to Georgia DOT in the event a traffic light request in Sautee.

Chairman Thomas asked if there was any public comment.

John Erbele, a member of the Historic Preservation Committee, reiterated that the ordinance would be voluntary and that inevitable growth needs to be addressed in advance. Mr. Erbele explained that it would be a tool for the Planning Commission to use during initial review that could help determine recommendations for the final decision to be made by the Board of Commissioners. He said the purpose is for educational awareness that they are trying to broaden to countywide, not only Sautee. He stated the recommendation for the Georgia Department of Transportation would simply be to place a roundabout instead of a red light to protect the view sheds.

Sam Williams of 104 Bunting Road, Cleveland, spoke in favor of the proposed ordinance, stating it could be used as a tool and voluntary. He referenced the Mountain Protection Ordinance and the initial public opposition, but it is now used as a tool for selling property for realtors.

Alan Stovall of 223 Boulevard in Athens, GA, spoke in favor of the ordinance, explaining the long-standing tenure of landownership in Sautee is what helped make it successful. He referenced a study funded by a state grant showed the importance of the history in the area and the high-ranking visual values of the view sheds.

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William Huff of 3605 Town Creek Road, Cleveland, said he is in favor of protecting historic sites and structures, but he has objections to the ordinance as it is currently written. He cited objections pertaining to cemetery buffers, the accuracy of the overlay map, and the view sheds. Mr. Huff added that Federal and State agencies and municipalities could do as they wish and the county government could not stop them, with the exception of public opinion. Mr. Huff explained out the historic district map was created and listed properties that were omitted. He said it is not voluntary and if a property is listed, it is governed by the proposed amendment. Mr. Huff submitted his written statement to the board for review.

Charles Williams of 279 Wright Road, Sautee Nacoochee, spoke in favor of the proposed ordinance because it would give the opportunity to be forthright and honest with people about the historical significance and importance of the land in these areas. He said it would be "more of a notification" to new property owners so they would be aware prior to purchase.

Linda Harris of 583 Laurel Wood, Sautee Nacoochee, spoke in favor of the proposed ordinance and emphasized that the Board of Commissioners would be the ones to make the decision. She said this would give a chance to inform new buyers of the historical significance of that area. Ms. Harris said the county could benefit from tighter zoning to protect aesthetics and living conditions, adding that she would like to see more effort spent designating historic and environmentally fragile areas.

Tommy Williams of 279 Wright Road, Sautee Nacoochee, spoke in favor of the proposed ordinance and referenced a previous land use hearing where the owner was not aware of the importance of the property to the people of Sautee. Mr. Williams stated this would be another tool to use for historic sites when the Planning Commission makes their recommendations.

Michael Yarbrough of 118 Doe Run, Sautee Nacoochee, said Mr. Wagner's presentation sounded like a "statement of intent" for the people of White County to protect their environment, historical landmarks, and points of interest without being pretentious to those moving into the county. He said the importance and beauty of the county expands outside of Sautee and includes the entire county, adding that he agrees this would be a notice to put out as a way of saying this is a county that cares.

Chairman Thomas adjourned the hearing.