

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR SESSION**

November 3, 2020

7:00 P.M.

Commissioners Present (in person): Andrew Zuerner, Susan Andrews, Rob Grant. Commissioner Present (via telephone due to COVID-19): J. Harry Lange. Commissioner Absent: Becky Langston. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Russell Britt, County Attorney; Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk.

1. **CALL TO ORDER.** In the absence of Chairman Langston, Vice-Chairman Zuerner called the Regular Session to order. He then read a statement from Chairman Langston regarding her absence due to having had major surgery.
2. **MINUTES.** The motion to approve the minutes of the October 20, 2020, Regular Session, the October 22, 2020 Planning Session, and the October 22, 2020 Joint Planning Session with the Planning Commission was made by Commissioner Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Lange, and passed unanimously.
3. **NEW BUSINESS**
  - A. **Appointments/Reappointments: Various Boards, Committees Authorities.** Vice-Chairman Zuerner said several appointments/reappointments are needed for vacancies that currently exist or will be occurring. There was discussion regarding various vacancies, to include that Chairman Langston had indicated to the Clerk that she would like to fill the upcoming Commission vacancy on the Development Authority and that she was in favor of Dewey Batchelor being reappointed to the Board of Zoning Adjustments in her absence. Discussion also included that Commissioner Grant would be willing to fill the upcoming Commission vacancy on the Public Improvements Authority. Upon a motion by Commissioner Grant, seconded by Commissioner Lange, and passed unanimously, the following appointments and reappointments were made.
    - (1) Development Authority. Harry Boyd (at-large) reappointed and Becky Langston (commissioner position) appointed to the term of January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2024. (Note a vacancy still remains for the District 1 position.)
    - (2) Family & Children Services. Phoebe Dawson reappointed to another term to expire June 30, 2025.
    - (3) Housing Authority. Pam Jackson reappointed to another term to expire October 31, 2025.
    - (4) Library Board. Maurine Avery, Harry Lange, and Laura Severs reappointed and Heather Peebles appointed in Elaine Beall's slot, with terms of January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2023.
    - (5) Planning Commission. Chance Carlisle (at-large) and Chris Lintner (District 5 appointment), reappointed to another term of January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2024.
    - (6) Public Improvements Authority. Patrick Callaway (citizen) and Andrew Zuerner (commissioner position) reappointed to another term to expire June 30, 2023, and Rob Grant (commissioner position) appointed to complete Harry Lange's term, which expires June 30, 2021.
    - (7) Recreation Board. Brandon Fletcher (Pine Mtn YSA), Sondra Moss (at-large), and Lee Starling (Waverly Hall YSA) reappointed and Wade Pirkle (Cataula YSA) appointed to another term of January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2023.
    - (8) Tax Assessors, Board of. Lisa Scully reappointed to another term of January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2024.
    - (9) Water Bill Assistance. John Britt reappointed to another term to expire May 31, 2023.
    - (10) Zoning Adjustments, Board of. Dewey Batchelor (District 3) and Tim Shelton (District 1) reappointed to another term of October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2023

B. **Airport Five-Year Capital Improvements Plan (CIP)**. Vice-Chairman Zuerner asked Phil Eberly, airport consultant with Lead Edge, to review and explain the Airport's CIP. Mr. Eberly said that the plan must be submitted to Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) on an annual basis, by November 30 of each year; that it includes proposed Airport projects for the next five years (FYE 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026); and that the plan can be changed at any time should the Board desire to make changes. Following discussion, the motion to approve the CIP was made by Commissioner Andrews, seconded by Vice-Chairman Zuerner, and passed unanimously.

4. **COUNTY MANAGER**

A. **Project Updates**. Randy Dowling, County Manager, reviewed various projects, as follows:

- (1) **Replacement Telephone System for Courthouse, Administration Building and Community Development Building**. Project is ongoing and should be completed late this month.
- (2) **Live Stream Equipment for Commission Chambers**. Project is ongoing with half the equipment installed; that new microphones are in place but video is not; should be completed before the next meeting (November 17).
- (3) **Ambulances**. Two (2) should be delivered in February 2021.
- (4) **Courthouse ERU Replacement**. Project should be finished by the end of this month.
- (5) **Replacement Prison Kitchen Equipment**. Equipment should be delivered and installed next week.
- (6) **Restriping County Roads**. Bid preparation is underway, project should be awarded in January with completion by June 30, 2021.
- (7) **Repair/Renovation of Five (5) County Bridges**. Project is underway and is to be completed by June 30, 2021.
- (8) **Melody Lakes Dam**. Four bids received last month and are being evaluated with Board consideration scheduled for November 17.
- (9) **Rails to Trails Project**. On going with design and survey completed for Phase IV to continue the trail from behind the Mountain Creek Inn to Callaway Country Store; if the County received funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) the trail would continue another 2.5 miles past the Country Store.
- (10) **Soccer Field Poles and Lights**. Bid is being prepared and should go out next week.
- (11) **Water Works Administration Building**. Architectural proposals being evaluated with interviews having taken place yesterday.
- (12) **Land Use and Development Codes Update**. On going; focus group meetings, community workshops, and the "big idea" meeting have been held; draft should be available for public view in early January; there will be more public meetings to make sure the end product is what the County wants; and should be finished by March 2021.
- (13) **SPLOST Collection**. Lower than last month, but higher than same time last year.
- (14) **LOST Collection**. Lower than last month, but higher than same time last year.
- (15) **Single Family Building Permits**. 12 permits were issued in October, making a total of 70 for the fiscal year.

5. **COUNTY ATTORNEY**. No business for discussion this evening.

6. **PUBLIC HEARINGS @ 7:30 PM**

- A. **Conflict of Interest Forms.** The Conflict of Interest forms were completed at the request of Vice-Chairman Zuerner.
- B. **Explanation of Public Hearings.** Vice-Chairman Zuerner explained the Public Hearing procedures.
- C. **Application of Edgar Hughston Builder, Inc., to rezone 85.83 acres on Map 045, Part of Parcel 014, Land Lots 86 & 115, Land District 19, from A-1 (agricultural) to R-1 (Single Family Residential); current use timberland; proposed use single family homes; property located 3/10 of mile west of intersection of James Road and Fortson Road, Fortson.** Vice-Chairman Zuerner called the Public Hearing to order, read the specifics of the application, and said that the Planning Commission and staff had recommended approval.

Edgar Hughston, of Edgar Hughston Builder, applicant, appeared before the Board, provided two map excerpts, and said that he plans to build 32 homes on lots of two acres or greater in size; that the width of the smallest lot will be 125' and the County requires at least 90', with the average being 150'; and that it meets all the criteria that the County currently has for single family residential homes. There being no questions or comments, Vice-Chairman Zuerner asked if anyone wished to speak in favor. There being none, he asked if anyone wished to speak in opposition. Approximately 15 people raised their hands, and he said that each speaker will have three (3) minutes in which to make their comments.

Jeff Pritchard, citizen who lives on Fortson Road, appeared before the Board and said his property backs up to the south end of the subject property; that the rezoning application should at least be tabled to determine the impact of other developments in the area; that he moved to the County 25 years ago; and that there is concern as to the impact of the development on the County and what it will look like in 5-10 years.

Brandon Glover, citizen who lives on Richardson Road, appeared before the Board and said that he moved here to get away from city life; that for the last seven years there has been an influx of subdivisions being developed; that he is concerned about the additional traffic; that he is concerned with the runoff from the development; and keep the schools teacher/student ratio at a minimum.

Frank Palkoska, citizen who lives on James Road, appeared before the Board and said he moved to Harris County three years ago for a better standard of living; that there will be an increase in traffic; that it's already difficult to turn onto SR 315 and/or get to the interstate; and that there will be an impact on fire, EMS, law enforcement, etc., which needs to be addressed before granting a rezoning.

Stacy Pritchard, citizen who lives on Fortson Road, appeared before the Board and said that she is not against growth but wants to see a quality development where all the trees are not cut down; that Poplar Place was not clear cut when it was developed; that this is not what the County should look like; and that the development should look more like Hickory Hollow, Dogwood Forrest and Poplar Place.

Brad Anderson, citizen who lives on Fortson Road, appeared before the Board and said that growth that is too much or too fast will cause issues that will not surface until well into the future; that it will impact public safety, fire, EMS, Sheriff's office, and schools; and that the accelerated growth rate will have a negative impact on the County.

Dana Newton, citizen who lives on Brenthaven Way, appeared before the Board and said that she moved to the County in 1999; that since that time three large developments have circled her neighborhood; that traffic is already horrendous; and that there will be an impact on law enforcement and fire services.

Thomas McNerney, citizen who lives on Elmwood Drive, appeared before the Board and said that it is unrealistic to think that the County will not experience expansion along the I-185 corridor; that he lives in Poplar Place where all the trees were not cut down; that when he was working it was difficult to get to work with all the traffic, which will only increase with more development; that traffic lights or roundabout will not help the traffic issue; and that the County should implement an impact fee for water, law enforcement, fire, etc.

Melissa Boggess, citizen who lives on Signal Court, appeared before the Board and said that her father, who is 77 years old, moved to Harris County about four years ago to be closer to his children and grand children; that he now has his house up for sale because of all the growth in the area; and that she is not against growth but it needs to be controlled growth.

Bill Berry, citizen who lives on Denney Road, appeared before the Board and said that there will be an impact on traffic; and that the Board should consider not allowing this to go through.

Dave Easley, citizen who lives on Richardson Road, appeared before the Board and said that he moved to Harris County for the quality of life; that traffic lights will not be the answer for the increase in traffic; that he is not against growth as it's going to happen, but the County needs to take a look at how growth should happen and not impact so many people so quickly.

Susan Waddell, citizen who lives on Dove Drive, appeared before the Board and said that she has lived in the County since 1993; that traffic is horrible and safety is a major concern; and that the Board should consider not approving this rezoning.

Jimmy Hart, citizen who lives on Fortson Road, appeared before the Board and said this his property backs up to the subject property; that he has about 40 acres; that no one really expects the Board to turn down the application; that everyone knows what the rules are; that he counted 864 cars getting on the interstate in a single day; that people will go through Poplar Place to get to the interstate; that turning left or right is dangerous; that consideration should be given as to the impact on the citizens; that there should be a pause to look at it and the resulting traffic issues; and that Hart Preserve and Oak Hill were clear cut.

Meghan Guenther, citizen who lives on Barnes Mill Road, appeared before the Board and said that she moved to get away from such development and growth; that traffic is getting worse; that drone video of school buses turning left on Mountain Hill Road having to wait a long time to make the turn; that she asks for a moratorium on all new rezoning until the land use and development codes are updated; that she is in favor of two acre lots; and that if approved there should be conditions about lot sizes.

Jamey Anderson, citizen who lives on Fortson Road, appeared before the Board and said that this development is not going to be in your backyard; that some of you voted to approve the Grove (aka Mulberry Grove) development and it's anyone's guess as to what it will look like; that the people (in the audience) voted to put you (the Board members) in office; that she is not against growth but it has to be smart growth; that you (the Board members) were put in office to listen to the citizens; and that she is asking you do so.

There being no further comments in opposition, Vice-Chairman Zuerner asked Mr. Hughston for rebuttal.

In rebuttal, Mr. Hughston said that the Grove (aka Mulberry Grove) development was approved about 10 years ago but he is not saying it was right; that development regulations have changed over the years in that the health department now requires an area to be cleared for the house septic system and another back-up septic system in the event of failure, so it appears that lots are clear cut; that sometimes it's the owners who want the trees clear cut; that in Hart Preserve, a conservation subdivision, he built on 100 acres and has a permanently preserved another 100 acres; that he builds in the County because the demand is there; that with people moving from Columbus, growth comes to the first interchange, which is SR 315, which was deemed as a growth corridor in the current Comprehensive Plan; that a lot of the traffic on the interstate is from others living in other areas of the County who work in Columbus; that for the 32 lots he is going above and beyond what is required with lot sizes averaging 2.5 acres and road frontage of 150'; that unless there is a downturn in the market, growth is going to continue; that people want two acre lots; and that he asks that the rezoning be approved.

There being no further comments or questions from the board, Vice-Chairman Zuerner closed the Public Hearing and asked for a motion.

Commissioner Lange said that nothing was mentioned about the water, which the developer is to provide from the nearest water source. Brian Williams, Community Development Director, said that the provision of water to the subdivision by the developer is a requirement.

Commissioner Lange then said that this rezoning meets all the requirements of the County and made the motion to approve this rezoning. The motion to approve was seconded by Commissioner Grant.

In discussion, Commissioner Andrews said she has lived in the county for 65 years; that she does not care for all the growth that is happening; that people want to move to the County for the country mode; that she appreciates that Edgar Hughston has increased the width size in this particular development; that that she is concerned about the water and understands the developer must provide same at his expense; that the Comprehensive Plan does indicate that SR 315 is the growth corridor; that when she was school superintendent, the average number of homes built was 400 a year, but we are now at 200 a year; and that citizens should not think that a development does not impact the Board.

Vice-Chairman Zuerner said that he agrees with the comments made by Commissioner Andrews.

Commissioner Grant asked about a traffic study, and Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that Georgia Department of Transportation has indicated they have performed traffic studies in and around the subject area, to include Mulberry Grove development, and have determined that no additional improvements will be needed for the next ten (10) years. Commissioner Grant said that while the County can impose a moratorium on rezonings, it will not affect this application; that the land development codes update was to be in place by the end of the year, but due to COVID-19 will be taking a little longer; that he does agree that growth should slow down; that he appreciates that Mr. Hughston is not proposing long narrow lots in this development; and that while he was elected as Commissioner of the Pine Mountain area, he is a Commissioner for the County as a whole.

There being no further comments, Vice-Chairman Zuerner asked for a vote on the motion to approve. The motion passed with three in favor (Lange, Zuerner, Grant) and one opposed (Andrews.).

7. **OTHER**

A. **Moratorium on Rezoning Applications.** Commission Grant said that he would like to see a moratorium on the acceptance of all rezoning applications until such time as the land development codes update takes place. There were no objections to the drafting of such a resolution, which is to be before the Board for consideration on November 17.

8. **ADJOURNMENT.** There being no further business, the motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Andrews, seconded by Vice-Chairman Zuerner, and passed unanimously.

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Andrew Zuerner, Vice-Chairman

Attest:

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Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk