

HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Conference Room, Commissioners' Office
104 North College Street, Hamilton, GA 31811

CALLED WORK SESSION

August 25, 2026
5:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Susan Andrews, Bobby Irions (via telephone), Rob Grant, Greg Gantt, Scott Lightsey. Staff Present: Russell Britt, County Attorney (via telephone); Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk; Greg Panzer, Economic Development Director. Also in attendance: Craig Greenhaw, Chairman of the Harris County Development Authority; Tracie Hadaway, Director of Planning and Government Services for the River Valley Regional Commission.

1. **CALL TO ORDER.** Chair Andrews called the Called Work Session to order at 5:30 p.m. and thanked everyone in attendance for joining them for the meeting.

2. **DISCUSSION.**

- A. **Comprehensive Plan Amendment.** Economic Development Director Greg Panzer addressed the Board and stated that this work session is to look at the possibilities to amend the future character development area for the Comprehensive Plan and the character area text that goes along with that; that he previously provided the Board with an overview and some information about the process; and that this meeting does not change anything but is to have discussion and be able to have a consensus on some potential areas of opportunity, understand a timeline for setting public hearings during the process, and to get an overview of the process.

Tracie Hadaway, Director of Planning and Government Services for the River Valley Regional Commission (RVRC), stated that that RVRC's role is to assist local governments in updating their comprehensive plan if they choose to use RVRC; that they do this as a part of a contract with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA); that they have assisted the County with its updates since approximately 1989; and that she is here to provide the Board with a brief overview of what the responsibilities are for a plan amendment. She further advised that because this possible amendment deals with land use that they would be required to hold two public hearings; that the public hearings would be advertised with the zoning procedures law timeline; that once the second public hearing is held, if the County wants to make an amendment, that the County would send a letter to the RVRC like they do with their Comprehensive Plan; that it is then sent for public comment; that it is sent by RVRC to DCA for their review to ensure that State law was followed; and that after the review and any recommended changes that the Board will adopt a resolution that is sent to RVRC and DCA. Ms. Hadaway advised that RVRC's role is to provide technical and administrative support, and to ensure proper formatting and adherence to all notification and review procedures.

Discussion included that the driver behind the proposed amendments is the need to diversify Harris County's tax base; that current land use data highlights a significant imbalance between agriculture/forestry (approximately 75% of the County's land) and commercial/industrial uses (approximately 0.4%); that residential use is nearly 10% and recreation/parks at 6%; that diversifying the tax base has been a key county objective for decades which lead to the creation of industrial parks and commercial nodes; that the motivation for the current push is from direct feedback from residents who want property tax relief; that the County's rural character is both its "greatest strength and its greatest weakness;" and that creating new revenue sources through non-residential development is essential to alleviate the property tax burden on citizens and to address financial pressures from past missed economic opportunities.

Mr. Panzer presented a detailed analysis of the County's land use and identified several potential sites for non-residential development. Mr. Panzer noted that the County only has 36 manufacturing-zoned (M-1/M-2) parcels which average 25 acres each, compared to approximately 11,000 agriculturally-zoned (A-1) parcels.

Mr. Panzer outlined the criteria for selecting "areas of opportunity," which include location within a gateway corridor, access to state highways, sufficient nearby residential population to support commercial activity, and the availability of infrastructure like power, water, and gas. He made a presentation and provided

the Board with information related to several sites that were recommended for consideration during the next full plan update rather than this targeted amendment. These included:

- Highway 27 & 315: A large, 2,500-acre tract suitable for future mixed-use development.
- Highway 27 (County Line): Two tracts of approximately 170 acres each, positioned as a potential commercial corridor.
- Fortune Hole Road Property: A 90-acre site near Hamilton with access to city utilities and suitable for commercial use.
- Harris County Airport: Adjacent areas that could support aviation-related services, such as maintenance and operations facilities.
- Northwest Harris Business Park Area: Parcels near the existing business park that could serve as a future extension and utilize West Point's infrastructure. One specific parcel is already slated for a site diligence grant.

Mr. Panzer is recommending two areas to be included in a Comprehensive Plan Amendment:

- Smith Road/Bilmiken Road would be reclassified from its current “Developing Suburban/Rural Residential” designation. This area is at the southern end of the county and has proximity to an interstate exit, access to existing infrastructure.
- Ridgeway Road (south of 315) would be reclassified from its current “Agricultural/Forestry” designation. This area is in the southeast corner of the county and has major power transmission lines in close proximity.

Discussion included that in addition to the map changes, that the industrial vision statement will need to be amended as the current text is very limited and would need to include newly identified areas and to reflect the Board’s vision for industrial growth; that the county has missed opportunities for revenue diversification in the past; that whether now is the right time for an amendment or whether the Board should wait and make changes when the Plan is required to be updated; and that waiting until that time could mean missing development opportunities.

After discussion, there was a consensus of the Board to include in a Comprehensive Plan Amendment the parcels located in West Point and near the Northwest Harris Business Park as well as the two other sites being currently recommended - the areas located at Smith Road/Bilmiken Road and Ridgeway Road.

3. **ADJOURNMENT.** The motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lightsey, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

Susan Andrews, Chair

Attest:

Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk