



MINUTES

6:00 PM, MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 2016

COUNCIL CHAMBERS

OCONEE COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX

Members Present: Mr. Ownbey, Chairman
Mr. Johnson
Ms. McPhail
Mr. Richards
Mr. Honea
Mr. Kisker

Staff Present: Josh Stephens, Deputy Director – Community Development
Gregory Gordos, Planner – Community Development
David Root, County Attorney

Media Present: none

1. Call to Order

Mr. Ownbey called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Honea motioned to approve the minutes from June 20, 2016. Ms. Richards seconded the motion. The motion passed 6 – 0.

3. Public Comment for Agenda and Non-Agenda Items (3 minutes)

None presented.

4. Introduction of New Staff Members

Mr. Stephens introduced to the Commission a new Planner for the County, Gregory Gordos. Mr. Gordos then introduced himself and spoke on his willingness to serve the Commission. General discussion on Mr. Gordos's background from the City of Great Falls, Montana followed.

5. Discussion regarding the following matters for purposes of prioritization, clarification and/or further action:

Mr. Stephens began with matters of discussion that have been presented to the Commission at previous public meetings. Commission members were asked to rank Agricultural Zoning Districts, Communication Towers, Development and Enforcement of Rustic Elegance Standards, Building Setbacks and Non-conforming Use Issues, Harmonization of Oconee County Code of Ordinances Chapters 26, 32, 38, Control Free District, and Comprehensive Plan Update respectively. Mr. Stephens collected the results, recorded by each Commissioner on a sheet of paper, while Mr. Root detailed each matter for discussion. Mr. Root explained that discussion on how each item is to be narrowly focused for the present meeting but may be expanded upon in greater detail at subsequent meetings.

Mr. Root notes that Mr. Stephens has already discussed the proposed Agricultural Zoning district to the Commission in recent meetings, whereas more questions have come up regarding telecommunication towers. The County is looking at both hiring a third party to redevelop the ordinance as well as short-term or stop gap issues, the latter of which would be discussed today. The concept of combining chapters of the Code of Ordinances into a UDO was also introduced by Mr. Root.

Regarding telecommunication towers, Mr. Root noted to the Commission that County administrators believes that staff-level review of tower proposals is possible, as the federal interpretation is not as strict as Mr. Root once thought. Key legal concepts to consider in the future are the inability for the County to discriminate location and the requirement of communication coverage. The concept of height had previously been put forward by Mr. Stephens, and the stated goal for the meeting was to put forward a rational basis for this matter. After discussion regarding communication tower height and its merits as both internet and cellular telephone use to residents, there was consensus among the members that the standard for administrative review of such towers should be preliminarily based on sixty five feet in height, the current standard for maximum building height.

Addition options were discussed, as were the merits of the Highway 11 overlay when concerning aesthetics. Presently a visual buffer is in place to protect the visual quality of this overlay. There was consensus among the Commission that the limitation on telecommunication tower placement within this corridor can remain, however Mr. Root noted that in order to provide the requirement of communication coverage under the law, a variance process must be made clear. There was consensus that clarifying the language on this matter is required and requested staff provides this language at a future date.

Mr. Root next introduced Rustic Elegance as an enforcement procedure. Commonly, an Architecture Review Board (ARB) enforce these standards; Mr. Root proposed an alternative of using the Board of Appeals or variation thereof to appeal Rustic Elegance review completed at the staff level. It was stated that this alternative commonly functions poorly. Mr. Richards noted that previous discussion has focused on application on potential road corridors or overlays and expressed that once Rustic Elegance is defined, the location of said corridors should be addressed simultaneously or shortly afterwards. Further Commission discussion on the merits of diverse design versus like designs followed. There was consensus among the members that the language, specifically the definition, concerning Rustic Elegance should be further developed prior to decisions to be made by the Commission; Mr. Stephens and Mr. Root agreed to follow up.

Finally, Mr. Root introduced the topic of building setbacks and the aim of staff to use the UDO as a catch-all to improve the Code of Ordinances as well as incorporate the topics of control free zones, nonconforming uses, et cetera. Mr. Honea voiced that many constituents in his district have nonconforming residential uses that need protected.

All seven matters of discussion were summarized to date by Mr. Root. Mr. Stephens commented that the Comprehensive Plan was ranked low in priority by the Commission, but that additional planning staff support by Mr. Huggins and Mr. Gordos will now be able to assist with completion of this project.

Mr. Stephens again called for ranking of the matters of discussion presented. Mr. Stephens noted that Communication Towers ranked as the highest priority, Harmonization of Oconee County Code of Ordinances Chapters 26, 32, 38, and thirdly followed by Development and Enforcement of Rustic Elegance Standards.

6. Old Business

None.

7. New Business

Mr. Stephens noted that a 1st Reading will be presented to the County Council the subsequent day on August 16th. Commission requested clarification on which item was to be presented at this meeting; Mr. Stephens confirmed it involved the rezoning of several thousand acres to Agricultural District and that numerous letters have been sent to the public in regards thereof. There have been over thirty responses for public comment to date.

8. Adjourn

Mr. Ownbey motioned to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 6:53 PM.