

Gastonia Planning Commission June 6th, 2024 Meeting Minutes

The Gastonia Planning Commission meeting opened at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 6, 2024, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 181 S. South Street of Gastonia, NC.

Present: Chair Kristie Ferguson, Vice Chair Chad Ghorley and Commissioners Megan Chapman, Anthony Gallant, Glenn Silverman, Carl Harris, Julie Coffey, and Jeff Howe

Absent: All Commissioners present

Staff Members Present: Charles Graham, Quentin McPhatter, Jason Thompson, Jalen Nash, Maddy Gates, Tucker Johnson, and Amber Bridges

Item 1a: Role Call / Sound Check

Chair Kristie Ferguson declared a quorum for the meeting.

Item 1b: Calls/Contacts to Planning Commission Members

None of the other Commissioners received any contacts.

Item 1c: Approval of May 9th, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Vice Chair Ghorley made a motion to adopt the May 9th minutes as presented and Commissioner Harris seconded the motion. The motion unanimously passed (8-0).

Item 2: Public Hearing – Linwood Subdivision (Camp Rotary Road) (File #202300352)

Subject hearing involves a request for annexation and assignment of zoning for approximately 229.3 acres from Gaston County R-1 (Single-family Limited Residential) to PD-RRDD (Planned Development – Revised Residential Development District). The subject property is located on the southern side of Camp Rotary Road, across from Old Stage Road and is owned by Linwood Farms, Inc. The Gastonia City Council will be holding a Public Hearing for the annexation and assignment of zoning request at the **June 18th, 2024** meeting.

Chair Ferguson recognized Maddy Gates, Senior Planner, for staff presentation. The zoning map was presented. Ms. Gates stated that the tax parcel in question was located on the northern and southern side of Camp Rotary Road but that the applicant was only requesting to annex and rezone the southern portion for approximately 229.3 acres. She discussed the zoning and context of the surrounding area and noted that the property would be a satellite annexation. The site plan was displayed. Ms. Gates stated the request to PD-RRDD was for a 450-unit single-family residential subdivision with front loaded homes. She explained the details of the site plan, including the access points from Camp Rotary Road and Jake Long Road. Ms. Gates stated that a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) was required for the site and has been recently finalized by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the City. She discussed the agreed upon conditions and displayed the conceptual elevations, which represented a variation of one-story and two-story homes. Ms. Gates stated the request is consistent with the 2025 Future Land Use Map for residential uses and staff is recommending approval as presented.

With no questions for staff, Chair Ferguson recognized Alec Long, 1624 Lakefield Circle, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Long stated that he was present on behalf of his family and Linwood Farms, the property owners. He shared that the subject property had been in the family for a very long time and has always been for sale. Mr. Long explained that his family had received a lot of offers from other home builders but chose Suncrest as the developer of the property because they felt it was the best fit for the land. Mr. Long discussed the importance of preserving trees and green space, which he felt Suncrest would do. Lastly, Mr. Long stated that his family no longer lives on the property and that they intend to sell.

Chair Ferguson recognized Mark McAuley, 11331 Vanstory Drive, Huntersville, NC. Mr. McAuley stated that he is representing the applicant, Suncrest Real Estate & Land. He shared that Suncrest is based out of Phoenix, Arizona but that they have been one of the developers for Nolen Farms in Gastonia. Mr. McAuley stated that he envisioned the project to be age-targeted and produce a more outdoor oriented community. He discussed the internal trail system, green space and the ranch style home product. Mr. McAuley stated the original site plan had 500 plus homes, but that they decided to reduce the lot count to preserve more green area. He discussed the use of existing trees and wooded areas which he stated allowed the development to be internal to the site and created a natural buffer from Camp Rotary Road and adjoining properties. He stated that there are 60 acres of tree save area and the amenities include a pool, clubhouse, pickle ball courts, walking trails, and preservation of the original barn on the property.

Chair Ferguson recognized Chris Todd, 610 E. Morehead Street, Charlotte, NC. Mr. Todd discussed stormwater mitigations and the need for several ponds throughout the property for proper drainage. He

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mentioned that NCDOT was finalizing the review of the TIA but that he did not have the documents available to share. He discussed the trail system throughout the property and the approximate 5-acre amenity area. Commissioner Harris asked Mr. Todd what the TIA improvements were. Mr. Todd responded that Jake Long Road was currently very narrow and would be required to be improved. He also stated that a left turn lane was required on Jake Long Road. Mr. Todd stated he did not have the final review from NCDOT and was not able to provide additional information. Vice Chair Ghorley noted that he drove down Jake Long Road previously and stated that the large field area that currently exists was where the majority of the new homes would be located. Vice Chair Ghorley asked Mr. Todd how many parcels were included in the request. Mr. Todd replied "One".

Chair Ferguson discussed the rules of procedure for public comment and stated that each resident would have 3 minutes to speak. Chair Ferguson recognized Steve Benedict, 389 Camp Rotary Road, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Benedict stated that he lives across the street from the proposed development. He shared concerns for the density, the view from Crowders Mountain and the soil composition. Mr. Benedict stated that the proposed development was not consistent with the adjoining area in terms of look and feel, including the smaller lots and smaller setbacks. He discussed other neighborhoods along Camp Rotary Road which he stated had larger lot sizes and more land. Mr. Benedict expressed concerns for stormwater, flooding, and drainage in the area which he felt would get worse due to this development. He stated that the planned stormwater ponds would not be able to hold all of the runoff. Lastly, he noted that the development would only benefit three people and not the community as a whole. He stated the property could still be developed in the County with larger lots and less density which would be better.

Chair Ferguson recognized Michael Shomate, 278 Camp Rotary Road, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Shomate stated he was the third generation on a 110-acre tree farm. He stated that he also receives letters in the mail from developers looking to buy his land but stated he is not interested because the watershed and trees are more important. Mr. Shomate stated the development was high density and not compatible with the area. He also expressed concerns that the proposed development would overwhelm public services including nearby schools, fire, and police. He stated that the City of Gastonia is already paying bonuses for police officers and that more people will cause more crime. Lastly, Mr. Shomate stated he was concerned about the view from Crowders Mountain and noted that it will drastically change from trees to rooftops if the project is approved. Mr. Shomate expressed the need to preserve the green areas and nature.

Chair Ferguson recognized Wayne Coss, 2001 Wren Song Way, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Coss stated he has lived in Gastonia for a long time and now lives off of Camp Rotary Road which is close to this development. He expressed concerns for the views from the top of Crowders Mountain. He stated he was not against development, but was against the density of 450 homes. Mr. Coss also expressed concern for traffic, safety, and public services. He noted that the new development would cause public service problems for fire and police. He stated that he did not hear of any improvements to Camp Rotary Road which was a concern and disappointment. Lastly, Mr. Coss shared that he was not happy about the project and was in opposition.

Chair Ferguson recognized Glen Ramsey, 2915 Old Stage Road, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Ramsey stated his concern was traffic and the watershed. Mr. Ramsey stated that more pavement means more water runoff. He discussed the existing ponds and dam on the property which he felt are important to preserve. Mr. Ramsey stated that he was not happy that the lake on this property was drained. He shared concerns with where the runoff and water from this development would go. Mr. Ramsey expressed worry for traffic and the increase of cars on Camp Rotary Road. He also noted that the current condition of the roads is not sufficient for the increase in vehicles and volume of traffic.

Chair Ferguson recognized Donna Speed, 1025 Dove Meadows Drive, Gastonia, NC. Ms. Speed stated she lives in a subdivision that Mr. Long's family had previously developed. She asked the Commissioners to postpone their vote until they have driven through her neighborhood and seen the close-knit environment and large yards. Ms. Speed stated that she did not feel like this new development would allow for the same neighborhood-like atmosphere. She expressed concern for the traffic that this development and the other nearby developments will cause. Ms. Speed also discussed the lack of public services available in the area. She stated the closest fire department is a volunteer department and that this development will cause a strain on fire, emergency services and police.

Chair Ferguson recognized Steven Broom, 130 Jake Long Road, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Broom stated that he has lived on Jake Long Road for 5 years but has loved the Crowders Mountain area for a long time. He stated he was opposed to the density and was not in favor of so many new homes in such a small space. He stated that he will probably lose some of his property when Jake Long Road is widened. Mr. Broom expressed that he shared similar concerns that the other speakers addressed, including traffic,

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support services, and school capacity. Mr. Broom shared that his biggest concern was the views from Crowders Mountain and how it will change from trees to rooftops and asphalt. He stated that the natural beauty of the area needed to be preserved. Lastly, Mr. Broom shared that he was opposed to the project due to the density, urban look of the development, and compatibility with the area. He stated he did not believe the request was consistent with the surrounding properties.

Chair Ferguson recognized Daniel Sefton, 2912 Old Stage Road, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Sefton stated that he has lived in the area for almost five years. He noted that he concurred with the statements of the previous speakers and was in agreement with them. Mr. Sefton stated the density was a major concern. He also noted that stormwater and drainage issues exist in this area and are already problematic, especially after significant storm and rain events. He stated that additional asphalt and homes on the high points of the site would cause runoff concerns. Mr. Sefton asked why the applicant would target the neighborhood towards older people and not families or young professionals. Additionally, he added that the development should be inclusive for everybody. He mentioned main points of concern including school capacity, public services, degrading roads, and conditions on Camp Rotary Road. Mr. Sefton stated 450 homes was too much, it was too dense, and too close together. Lastly, he stated that he did not feel like the new neighborhood would have comradery like the existing neighborhoods have.

Chair Ferguson recognized Meg Koontz, 2013 Wren Song Way, Gastonia, NC. Ms. Koontz stated that she has lived in the area for almost 15 years. She noted one of the pleasures of the area is the existing trees and nature. Ms. Koontz stated the project was too dense and the unit count was too high. She asked the Commissioners to consider the road conditions, lack of utilities, traffic and school capacity. Ms. Koontz stated that there are several new developments in the area and that the combined traffic impacts will be severe. She also asked why the property owner wouldn't find a developer that would produce less homes and make a more beautiful neighborhood. Ms. Koontz highlighted existing water, runoff, and drainage concerns mentioned from previous speakers.

The applicants approached for a rebuttal. Commissioner Harris asked Mr. Todd where the water would be flowing after its captured in the stormwater management ponds. Mr. Todd replied that it depends on the topography, noting that ponds are located in the low points on the site. He stated that the site will be graded specifically to move any water into the ponds. Mr. Todd stated that there are several calculations done to determine the location, size, and composition of ponds to ensure they can catch the runoff. Lastly, he noted that all City, County, and State requirements will be met. Commissioner Harris asked for clarification on where the existing drained lake is located. Mr. Todd, referencing the site plan, stated the existing pond is on the northern side of Camp Rotary Road. He noted that the northern portion of the property is not included in the request.

In response to high density comments, Mr. Todd stated that the density for the proposed project is actually quite low, producing a dwelling units per acre (DUA) ratio of 1.97. He stated that the normal DUA for a property this size would be around 3.5 to 4.5. Commissioner Harris asked what the typical lot size would be. Mr. Todd replied that the lots are 56-feet by 120-feet which is approximately 6,700 square feet per lot. Commissioner Coffey asked the applicants to explain the reduction in unit count from 500 plus to 450 homes. Mr. Todd explained that the original site plan had around 560 units and included development in the northwestern portion of the site. He explained that the intent was to preserve natural areas and keep development internal to the site to allow for natural buffers. Additionally, he added that development is roughly 1000-feet off of Camp Rotary Road.

Vice Chair Ghorley asked the applicants if the DUA is for the entire project site or just the area where the homes would be built. Mr. Todd stated that it was for the overall acreage and noted that it is similar to a cluster development which allows for land preservation. Vice Chair Ghorley asked Mr. McAuley what the improvements were on Camp Rotary Road and what intersections were studied on the TIA. Mr. McAuley stated the studied intersections were Camp Rotary Road and Jake Long Road, Chapel Grove Road and Linwood Road, and Chapel Grove Road and Camp Rotary Road. Mr. Todd stated that the applicants did not do the TIA, and noted that it was prepared by Kimley Horn for the City.

Commissioner Harris asked the City Engineer, Tucker Johnson, to discuss the TIA improvements. Mr. Johnson clarified that the TIA is done for the City with the three consulting firms on rotation. He also noted that all roads in the study area, for this development, are NCDOT roads. Mr. Johnson explained how the TIA is produced, which includes nearby approved and proposed developments, traffic counts, and an applied growth factor. He stated that NCDOT has completed their review and that he has their comments available, but noted that it is not the final approved document.

Mr. Johnson stated the studied intersections were Camp Rotary Road and Jake Long Road, Chapel Grove Road and Linwood Road, Lewis Road and Chapel Grove School Road, and Chapel Grove Road and Camp Rotary Road. He stated the improvements at Chapel Grove Road and Linwood Road are to

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1) realign the northbound approach at 90-degrees, 2) add a northbound right turn lane on Chapel Grove Road with 200-feet of storage, and 3) a westbound left turn lane on Linwood Road with 350-feet of storage. Mr. Johnson noted that the intersection in question has been studied for a general obligation bond for potential improvements by the City and may include future partnership, but as of now, the mentioned improvements are the developer's responsibility. He stated the improvement at Chapel Grove Road and Camp Rotary Road is a southbound right turn lane on Camp Rotary Road with 100-feet of storage. Mr. Johnson stated the improvements at Camp Rotary Road and Jake Long Road are to 1) realign the intersection to 90-degrees with a standard T-intersection, 2) provide a westbound left turn lane on Camp Rotary Road with 100-feet of storage and 3) improve Jake Long Road to meet NCDOT minimum standards including the designation of the appropriate width.

Mr. Johnson continued to discuss the improvements at the development access on Camp Rotary Road which would be internal to the site and include 1) a single northbound egress lane, 2) a single ingress lane and 3) a 100-foot internal protection stem (IPS). Chair Ferguson announced to the audience that the request in question would be heard again at the June 18th City Council meeting and asked for a motion from the board. Commissioner Chapman made a motion to close the public hearing and Commissioner Harris seconded the motion. The motion to close the public hearing was unanimously passed (8-0).

Commissioner Silverman clarified that the vote tonight would be a recommendation. Chair Ferguson replied "Yes" and noted that it is a recommendation on the zoning portion of the request if the property is approved to be annexed. Commissioner Silverman expressed concerns for stormwater, density, and impacts to the scenic view from Crowders Mountain. He asked the other Commissioners if there is a difference between tree canopy composition and tree save area; stating that a concern of his was the amount of trees per acre rather than preserving a cluster of trees. Assistant City Attorney, Charles Graham, responded that the tree ordinance is per the property acreage and is calculated to produce an overall percentage. Mr. Graham stated that there is no specificity to where the tree save area is located but rather that the percentage is met; which he noted that the applicant is proposing approximately double the code requirement. Mr. Graham discussed the differences between tree save area, buffers, and street trees. He noted that street trees will be required, per the ordinance.

Commissioner Silverman made a motion to recommend denial of the request as presented with the consistency and reasonableness statement. With no second, the motion dies. Commissioner Chapman asked Chair Ferguson to share her thoughts on water and runoff concerns. Chair Ferguson noted that she relies on staff's expertise, the staff report and conditions to facilitate her land use determinations. Chair Ferguson stated she had trust in City staff and other reviewing bodies to ensure any stormwater concerns are mitigated. Mr. Graham stated that there are legal regulations in terms of stormwater management. He stated stormwater is overseen by the State and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), which includes extensive regulations. Mr. Graham noted that the City and the developer have to comply and enforce such regulations. As a reminder, he added that stormwater would be reviewed later in the process.

Vice Chair Ghorley stated that he was concerned with the density aspect, but overall, felt it was a good project. He stated that he appreciated the improvements of the TIA and that he feels the stormwater issues will be mitigated. Vice Chair Ghorley said he was struggling on his determination due to the beautiful nature that exists on the property, but he also noted it is the owner's right to sell. Commissioner Chapman stated that she agreed with Vice Chair Ghorley in terms of density concerns. Commissioner Coffey noted that she also has density concerns but was encouraged that the unit count decreased and the tree save area is double the code requirement. Commissioner Chapman and Commissioner Silverman discussed concerns from the residents in regards to density and public safety.

Chair Ferguson stated that she was not struggling with the density aspect and thought the site plan was reasonable. She also noted that the majority of trees seen from the top of Crowders Mountain belong to property owners which of whom have a right to their property.

With no further discussion, Vice Chair Ghorley made a motion to recommend approval of the request as presented with the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Howe seconded the motion. The motion to approve the request as presented was passed (6-2). Commissioners Silverman and Chapman voted against the motion. All other Commissioners voted in favor.

Item 3: Adjournment

Assistant City Manager, Quentin McPhatter, discussed the joint meeting between Planning Commission and City Council taking place on June 11th.

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Item 4: Adjournment

Chair Ferguson entertained a motion to adjourn the June 6th Planning Commission meeting. Vice Chair Ghorley made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Chapman seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was unanimously passed (8-0). The meeting adjourned at 7:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jalen Nash, Planner

Kristie Ferguson, Chairwoman