

City of Cleveland Planning and Zoning Board Minutes

Thursday, February 27, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

Oak Springs Community Center – Police Department – 342 Campbell St, Cleveland Georgia

Attending: Nadine Wardenga, Michelle Ash, Terry Goodger, Aaron Greene, Rush Mauney and Henrietta Sutton.

Nadine Wardenga, Chair, opened the meeting and welcomed those attending. She especially welcomed the new board members.

Ms. Wardenga called and introduced the first item on the agenda:

Consider an application from DLBP LLC on behalf of Grace of Georgia Developments LLC, requesting annexation and re-zoning for approximately 27.19 acres, Tax Map and Parcel 048C 135 located at Donald E Thurmond Parkway and US 129S and on Underwood Farm Road. The current White County zoning classification is A-1, Agriculture Forestry District. The requested city zoning classification is PM-U, Planned Mixed Use District. The current use is vacant and single family residential. The proposed use of this property is for medical offices, hotel, and assisted living facilities.

Ms. Wardenga asked Tom O'Bryant to present the application request. Mr. O'Bryant reviewed the application stating the request for the annexation of the property into the city and a request to zone the property PM-U, Planned Mixed Use, for medical offices, hotel and assisted living. He detailed and discussed the specific location for each use on the site, the square footages, parking, and stormwater management, for the project. He made reference to the surrounding uses, the current county zoning, the proposed zoning. He discussed consistency with the comprehensive plan and the submitted traffic impact study from the proposed uses. Mr. O'Bryant also discussed the access to the site from Donald Thurmond Parkway and the secondary access from Underwood Farm Road. He informed the Planning and Zoning Board that the annexation request to the White County Board of Commissioners was approved at their recent meeting, but they conditioned the approval on restricting the access onto Underwood Farm Road only as a locked, gated emergency access. This condition will ensure the development does not have any impact on Underwood Farm Road.

Rush Mauney asked about the city's water resources and available water capacity to serve the development and other future developments. Mr. O'Bryant told him the water capacity was available, and the city has sufficient water resources for service to this development and others in the future. The city just added a new deep well to the water system and was beginning to pursue additional well resources. Henrietta Sutton asked if the city could possibly work with the county on improving Underwood Farm Road. Mr. O'Bryant responded that decision would be up to the elected officials from both governments. Rush Mauney also asked about the widths of the doors in the living quarters at an assisted living facility. He explained an experience his family has had with such a facility where an emergency occurred, and residents had to evacuate the building – the door was not wide enough to roll the bed of a bed bound resident out to safety. The emergency personnel on scene had to lift and carry the residents out. He asked that the facility consider the use of doors similar to nursing homes that are wider and allow for easy removal of a bed.

Chair Wardenga invited the applicant to present the proposed project. Dominic Lawson, President with DLBP LLC, representing Grace of Georgia, discussed the project. He introduced his staff and also Mr. Ray Black, current owner of the property. He said the overall development is designed to be sensitive to the community and the local environment, having spent the past year discussing community needs with city staff and crafting a project that fits within the community and meets their needs. He stated that Grace of Georgia primarily focuses on developing and providing quality assisted living facilities and services. He stated they focus their design on comfort and safety for the residents. He stated the next steps they would undertake with their team of engineers and design professionals to work with the city towards an approved, detailed plan, and then construction. He also said that Grace of Georgia will not operate the other uses, but they will have separate operators using the medical offices and the hotel.

Chair Wardenga asked why they were only proposing 24 rooms for the hotel. Mr. Lawson said their focus would be more towards a boutique hotel and the niche tourism market in the area for weddings, etc. He said their design would be such to attract the best prospect for a boutique, specialty hotel. Terry Goodger asked about the proposed buildout schedule and thought it was aggressive. Mr. Lawson responded that if the project is approved, they plan to immediately design and permit the project with no delay. He said the 2027 completion date would be the end of that year. Henrietta Sutton asked if the hotel could be utilized by families that had residents in the assisted living facility. Mr. Lawson responded they certainly would be able to use the facility. Chair Wardenga asked why Grace of Georgia selected Cleveland. Mr. Lawson explained Grace of Georgia employs a research methodology that identified the market potential in the foothill and Appalachian Mountains of North Georgia. The company reviewed and considered sites that were well located and would achieve their goals. Cleveland met the criteria and was selected. Aaron Greene asked if the hotel would need any extended stay. Mr. Lawson stated that it was not their intention to allow extended stay at the proposed hotel. Mr. O'Bryant spoke and referred to the city's hotel/motel ordinance that identifies the allowable length of stay at a hotel, and has a procedure and conditions for the city council to grant an extended stay, if needed.

Ms. Wardenga asked if any visitors attending had any questions or comments supporting or opposing the proposed project. A representative from the neighboring American Legion said they were happy with the proposed use and asked if they could use the hotel for when they are hosting events at their facilities. Mr. Lawson responded the hotel would be available for the public and they could certainly have rooms available.

Ms. Wardenga closed the hearing and presentation and asked the board to make a recommendation on the annexation request of the property into the city. Henrietta Sutton made a motion to accept the request and make a recommendation to the city council to annex the property into the City of Cleveland. The motion was seconded by Rush Mauney. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Wardenga asked the board to make a recommendation on the request for zoning the property to PM-U, Planned Mixed Use. Terry Goodger made a motion to zone the property Planned Mixed-Use (PM-U). The motion was seconded by Aaron Greene. The motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Wardenga explained to the applicant that the Planning and Zoning Board provides only a recommendation to the City Council. The City Council will meet on March 10, 2025 to consider and take action on the application. DLBP and representatives will need to attend that meeting and hearing.

Chair Wardenga moved to the next item on the agenda to discuss the Joint Comprehensive Plan Update. Mr. O'Bryant explained the State requires the comprehensive plan go through a full update every ten years. The city participates in a joint with the county and the City of Helen. The joint plan is schedule for the full update during 2025 and must be in adopted and in place by February 2026. Georgia Mountain Regional Commission will provide assistance to the local governments update the plans. The full update requires participation and input from the community. The city Planning and Zoning Board will play a role in providing information and input into the update of the plan. The city will hear from GMRC in March on the plan update requirements and the steps to undertake to complete the planning process,

Ms. Wardenga stated with no other business to adjourn the meeting. Terry Goodger made a motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Michell Ash. Motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned.