

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
SERVING AS THE PLANNING & ZONING BOARD  
UNION COUNTY, FLORIDA  
PUBLIC HEARING  
JANUARY 17, 2023

NOTE: If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at this meeting or hearing, he or she will need a record for the proceedings and may need to ensure that a verbatim record is made.

PRESIDING: Ryan Perez, Chair

RECORDING: Kellie Hendricks Rhoades, Clerk of Courts & Comptroller

ATTENDING: Commissioner Willie Croft; Commissioner Channing Dobbs; Commissioner Mac Johns; Commissioner James A. Tallman; James Williams, County Coordinator; Dianne Hannon, Board Secretary; Russ Wade, County Attorney; Pamela Woodington, Finance Director

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

Chairman Perez called the hearing to order at 5:45 pm. Commissioner Dobbs offered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chairman Perez called for public comments in favor of the application to amend the Future Land Use Plan Map of the Comprehensive Plan. Chairman Perez recognized Gerry Dedenbach, of CHW Professional Consultants, as agent for the Ann Christoforidis Trust approached the Board. Mr. Dedenbach explained that they were asking for amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations, with plans to build a small grocer on the property located at the intersection of CR 241 and CR 18. It is currently Ag-4, and they are asking that it be changed to Commercial 4. He gave a brief history of the site. Commissioner Dobbs asked if there was a particular company that was planning to build there, and Mr. Dedenbach answered that there was a company in mind, but at this point, the zoning is for land use only. Commissioner Johns asked if the property's proximity to the river has been considered. Mr. Dedenbach answered acknowledged the concern, and said that the property is very high and out of the flood plain, and also that it is very small, so they are not concerned about drainage and affluent into the river, and added that all construction will be in compliance with the Suwannee River Water Management District. Commissioner Johns asked if the study had been done yet, and Mr. Dedenbach answered that it will be done as part of the site plan. Commissioner Dobbs asked him to expand on the history of the site, and Mr. Dedenbach answered that many years ago there was a gas station and a meat packing facility on the site. He closed his discussion by saying that he would be happy to answer any questions that anyone may have about the project.

Chairman Perez called for additional comments in favor of the application, and hearing none, he called for any comments opposed to the application.

Chairman Perez recognized Bill Lennon to address the Board. Mr. Lennon stated that he and his wife moved here 50 years ago, to raise their kids in a rural environment. He explained that he was raised in New York City, and purposely chose to not raise his family in the same environment. He said he lives close to the site, and that the quality of life in the area is good, but that it would diminish with commercialization. He added that if someone wants a store right next door to them, then they should move to the city. He closed by asking the Board members what they would rather have in their front yards: trees, cows and a clean river or commercialization.

Chairman Perez then recognized Shawn Newsom. Mr. Newsom stated that he was a life-long resident of Union County, except that he had joined the Army and for a period of time lived in North Carolina. He stated that he had heard about the future development, and speaks for many families from the Providence area, when he says that they don't want this store. He added that he would like to bring solutions to the Board, and that the County needs

to grow, but in the right way, noting that we Union County is a bedroom community for Gainesville. Mr. Newsom said that we have a special thing here in Union County. He gave a personal history of the community that he lived in in North Carolina, adding that it, ironically, was a bedroom community of Union County, North Carolina. He said that when they moved there, there was no commercialization. A Harris Teeter grocery store was built, and after several years, had a Chic-Fil-A and many other restaurants and stores. Mr. Newsom noted that the planners of the project are from Alachua County, and the Trust is registered in Ohio. He said that it appears to be that the store is just a beginning, and that then there will be a gas station and then there will be anchor stores for a subdivision. Mr. Newsom told the Board that the development that he saw in North Carolina was so rapid and uncontrolled that they ran out of water. He suggested that three elected officials travel to North Carolina to talk to the folks there to see what they did wrong, and how they fixed it, and offered to make the connections. Mr. Newsom said that we pray here in our meetings, and we pray a football games, and that he values that; but bringing in the wrong growth will stop that. He noted that the applications were filed on December 15, and that the Trust has been filed in Ohio. He asked if the development was wanted, and then provided an answer that we should bring in developers that are invested in the county. He encouraged the Board to bring the growth, but after they go to Monroe, North Carolina and learn from their mistakes.

Chairman Perez recognized William McDaniel. Mr. McDaniel stated that he lives just down from CR 18. He said that for years, CR 18 has been in terrible condition, and questioned how much worse it would be when trucks start traveling on it. He questioned that if this is built, what the next zoning change would be. Mr. McDaniel stated that if he and his neighbors wanted to be near growth, they would move to town. He conveyed that he was concerned about safety and poor road conditions if this is built.

Chairman Perez recognized Mallory Southwell. Mrs. Southwell presented a petition of 150 signatures in opposition to the change, and noted that she focused on the area in question, and most citizens were unaware of the proposal. She stated the progress is going to come, but this would hurt other stores, specifically naming Mrs. Williams' store and Spires. Mrs. Southwell stated that research shows that small Marketplace grocers like the one proposed brings a 30% loss to local grocers, adding that many local governments are passing laws to keep this type of store out of their community. She said that they don't bring jobs. She gave evidence that "dollar stores" are not good for the economic environment.

Chairman Perez recognized Brandon Elixson, who stated that if all goes as planned, he will inherit land within a stone's throw of the site. Mr. Elixson said that he is in favor of personal property rights. He noted that the planners didn't hear any argument for the project, just a desire. He said the commission has the responsibility to manage the growth, and it need to be strategic with zoning. Mr. Elixson stated that he works in a local business and a pastor of a church. He added that news spreads fast, and he's spoken to no one that's in favor of this development. He asked the Board to consider if passing this amendment would be strategic in managing the growth.

Chairman Perez recognized Clay Dale, who informed the Board that he moved to Florida at age 11, and doesn't know many people. He conveyed that his dad worked hard to save for the piece of land that they own within a golf ball's hit from the site. Mr. Dale said his dad chose that site because they didn't want to be in Alachua County, and wanted a rural area. He said the majority of people who have chose to live in that area want it to stay that way.

Chairman Perez recognized Ryan Southwell. Mr. Southwell stated that this was dropped in his lap, and no one is thrilled about these stores anywhere. Union County has pride, and when he was able to work, he took pride in it. He noted that these stores have a history of building a very nice building, but that once they are built, they let them go, and they are trashy. Mr. Southwell questioned if marketplaces give back to the community. If the county is going

to grow, where and how is important. He said that he currently lives around commercialization in another county, but doesn't want that.

Mr. Dedenbach approach and asked Chairman Perez for permission to address concerns, and yielded the floor to him. He stated that since 2005, he has built approximately 300 stores, and his goal is to do a good job. He said they are not trying to rob the culture, and that change takes time. He's iterated that he's here to discuss any question, and find a way or conditional way to move forward with the project.

Chairman Perez recognized Matt Cason, who stated that he currently lives in Gainesville, but his family has lived in Columbia County for five generations, and that his in-laws live less than a five-minute drive from the site. He expressed that some people do want it, and gave examples of how Columbia, Suwannee and Levy Counties have managed growth. Mr. Cason said that this store would provide a convenience to residents, and that it would increase safety by reducing trips to further grocery stores.

Chairman Perez recognized Donald Parrish. Mr. Parrish stated that he is a life-long resident of Providence. He challenged that if Mr. Cason and his family care so much about Union County, then why did they leave?

Hearing no further public comments, Chairman Perez called for discussion from Commissioners. Commissioner Johns said that he has asked questions about the project, and is glad to see people that have shown up. He noted that no one from District 4 has shown up in favor of the change. He said that he ran his campaign on anti-growth of District 4, and that he does not want commercialization in District 4. He noted that Districts 4 & 5 are the only two that are undeveloped, and he wants to keep it that way.

Commissioner Tallman announced that came into the meeting expecting support of the change, and commended those for speaking up for rural life in Union County. He noted for the record that he owns a store which would compete with this, and asked Attorney Wade if he should abstain from voting. The attorney answered that it is a pretty tenuous connection, but would look into it.

Chairman Perez thanked the citizens that spoke, and appreciated their being a part of the democratic process. He expressed that their comments help the commissioners to make the best decision for the county.

Commissioner Dobbs said that he has spoken to many and feels their concerns. He is proud to see so many stand up to protect Union County life. He noted that it is a problem that many didn't know about this until very recently, and while he doesn't want the County to have a Facebook page due to public records issues, he acknowledged that there needs to be a better process to update the public of issues such as this.

Chairman Perez noted that he asked the Property Appraiser pull the taxes that the three Dollar General stores pay to the county, and that each store pays approximately \$4,000 per year. He said that the tax dollars paid by the store is not a big advantage.

Commissioner Croft expressed appreciation for all citizens coming out to express their opinions.

Mr. Dedenbach approached the Board, and asked that they vote, but remove the item from the Commission agenda, and also suggested that the Board vote first on the application to amend the Future Land Use Plan Map of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Newsom approached the Board again, and said that this seems to have been done secretly, and that's not the way to do things in Union County. He suggested that if developers want to please Union County residents, that they hold community forums to hear from the residents.

January 17, 2023  
Planning & Zoning Board Hearing

Attorney Wade advised that PZ CPA 22-04 is regarding amending the Comp Plan, the companion, Z22-03, is regarding zoning and is much stricter. If the legislative determination of the first fails, zoning is irrelevant.

**Commissioner Dobbs moved to deny the application by the Ann Christoforidis Trust for the amendment of the Union County Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Croft seconded the motion. Upon the recommendation of Attorney Wade, Commissioner Tallman declared a conflict of interest because of competition with his business and abstained from voting. All other commissioners voted unanimously to deny the application.**

Attorney Wade stated that Z22-03, the companion resolution regarding zoning was rendered moot by the failure of the application to amend the Future Land Use Map, and did not require Board action.

Chair Perez adjourned the meeting by general consent at 7:00 pm.

*Adopted by vote of the Board, February 20, 2023 regular meeting*