

WHITE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING: LAND USE REGULATION

Monday, March 25th, 2024
6:00 pm

White County Senior Center
1239 Helen Hwy, Cleveland, Ga. 30528

Those present were Larry Freeman, R.K. Ackerman, Dona K. Burke, Charlie Thomas, Brad Ash, and John Yarbrough. Staff members present were Tammy Carter and Mercedes Dodd.

Chairman Thomas called the meeting to order. Mr. Yarbrough gave the invocation. No changes made to agenda. Chairman Thomas explained public hearing procedures.

Application of SW West Cleveland LLC, on behalf of Dennis Brown, to redistrict property located at 0 Ed Lewis Road, Cleveland, Georgia, 30528 from R-1 Residential Single Family District to C-1 Community Commercial District. Tax map and parcel 021-011A. Total acreage is 2.00. Present zoning is R-1 Residential Single Family District.

The applicant, Jason Fritz of 4175 Ashford Dunwoody Drive, Atlanta, GA, was present for SW West Cleveland LLC. Ms. Carter gave a summary of the application. Mr. Fritz explained this would be a DG Market with fresh produce and meat, larger fresh food aisles and cooler sections, and wider aisles. He explained this would be the second of this type in Georgia, the first of which was just completed recently in Lavonia. He explained the access would be off Ed Lewis Road and a 40-foot buffer would be included on the western property line consisting of trees and a wooden fence. He stated they would pave Ed Lewis Road just beyond the driveway and would accommodate approximately 35 vehicles in the parking lot. Mr. Fritz addressed the PowerPoint included in the application that documented the new logo and proposed architecture, which would consist of brick with color options. Regarding lighting, he said it is “shoe-box” style that directs light onto the parking lot and building. When asked about traffic patterns, Mr. Fritz said there are over 7000 cars on a day on Highway 115, with Dollar General typically adding 200-250 cars a day that would travel Ed Lewis Road. He explained the reason for the Ed Lewis access is due to side roads generally being safer than state roads.

He explained Dollar General’s site selection process that is based on metrics, adding that they tend to be near pockets of neighborhoods. He said he had not reached out to Georgia Department of Regulations (GDOT) since his engineer advised they would not meet sight separation required by GDOT regulations. When asked hours of operations, he said the store would be open from 7am until 10pm with deliveries from Dollar General once per week and various vendor deliveries. He said the closest Dollar General is about 4 miles in Lumpkin County and the other is in Cleveland. He said the closest residences are across Ed Lewis Road and along the west property line. When asked if he has ever built a Dollar General off a dirt road, Mr. Fritz said yes, in Elberton, Georgia about a year ago and the road was paved to county road standards. He explained he had spoken with White County’s Road Department, and they were okay with paving as long as it meets county road standards. Mr. Fritz explained he does not work for Dollar General but works for the developer Sullivan Wickley who buys the property and builds to suit the lease, which are 15-year timeframes and 5-year renewal terms.

Chairman Thomas asked if anyone would like to speak for the application, there was no response. He asked if anyone would like to speak against the application.

Earl “Chuck” Gilreath of 7130 Highway 115 West said his property has been in his family for over 100 years and has always been Agricultural. He said he has never been contacted by Dollar General or the

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current owner until he received a letter from the Planning Commission. He expressed concerns of allowing the Dollar General in a rural area, traffic safety and previous wrecks, complaints from owner or Dollar General when he puts fertilizer on his property, and not wanting the road to be paved because it will increase traffic. He requested the Planning Commission to do a traffic study on Ed Lewis Road before making a decision, adding that there is already high volumes of traffic, and asked them to stand up for the farmers in this farming community. He said he is not opposed to Dollar General, but is opposed to where it is at.

Rusty and Glenda Yother of 255 Ed Lewis Road said there are not 200 cars that travel their road currently but do have people traveling 60-70 miles per hour down it that would get worse with the addition of Dollar General. They expressed concerns of recreational vehicles, trespassing through their fields, farm equipment that travels on the road that requires pulling over to fit vehicles past them, opposition to paving the road, a neighbor that transports horses across the road that will be dangerous if there is additional traffic, safety of children, and the beginning of the end of their farming community. Mr. Yother stated the same scenario happened on Blue Creek Road that was turned down, except that was not on a dirt road like this one.

Doug and Kathleen Patterson of 326 Hawthorne Drive expressed concerns regarding proximity to their home, the proposed location and traffic accidents, outside lighting and light pollution on Highway 115, staffing due to current stores having this issue and competition with existing Dollar Generals, safety, and lack of local products in Dollar Generals. Mrs. Patterson said they are fans of Dollar General and visited the Lavonia location, adding that it was not much larger. She said Helen Highway would be a better location between Cleveland and Helen. Mr. Patterson explained there are already issues turning at this intersection and would cause more traffic on tributary roads as shortcuts.

Lisa Stover of PO Box 142 in Sautee Nacoochee explained she delivers meals to this area and this stretch of road has always scared her. She expressed concerns disrupting the farming and quiet area, increase in traffic, destruction of the neighborhood by paving the road, limited visibility and high traffic volume, staffing issues for other store locations, and what would happen when the lease runs up and Dollar General leaves the location for not doing enough business.

David Smith of 6744 Highway 115 said he owns two properties east of this location and has had multiple wrecks in his yard since he purchased his property. He said he plans to retire here and does not want to retire two doors down from a Dollar General.

Jennifer Wollett of 456 Ed Lewis said she moved from Henry County to get away from this. She expressed concerns of robberies, light pollution from commercial properties, traffic speeding and difficulties turning from high traffic volumes, and boxes in aisles of the existing stores because they do not have enough employees to stock. She said she plans to retire here and enjoy farm life. Kevin Wollett said there are 15-20 cars a day on Ed Lewis currently and 200 a day on a dirt road is absurd. He said someone is going to get killed on Ed Lewis Road and explained there are lawsuits pending on Dollar General, so they cannot have that in this community. He said they bought a farm for a reason.

Chairman Thomas asked Mr. Fritz if he had anything to add.

WHITE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING: LAND USE REGULATION

Mr. Fritz said they cannot control what GDOT will allow them to do, but they can look into putting in a left turn lane or deceleration lane on Ed Lewis Road, which they are open to having that as a condition on the application. He explained crime is usually regional or local from his understanding, but they can put in cameras. Regarding traffic, he said this is a heavy traffic corridor, which is where the county wants commercial, so they are going where they are told to go. He explained they would be paving and widening the road to 24 or 28 feet wide so it will not just be a single lane at that location. Dollar General brings in about 200 cars a day, but he does not know what the current traffic count on Ed Lewis Road is. He explained the proposed parking goes off the county ordinance and that there are 10-12 cars in a Dollar General parking lot usually at any time. Mr. Fritz explained they are fine with placing a condition on the property that it could only be for a Dollar General. For staffing issues, he said that is country wide in retail and that Dollar General is looking to serve local residents. He said he is not aware of any vacant Dollar Generals. When asked if they had considered any other locations, he said just west of there, which is storage currently, but they cannot afford it.

Chairman Thomas closed the hearing and answered questions from the public regarding dates and processes for the following meetings.

Motion to adjourn made by Ms. Burke and seconded by Mr. Yarbrough. Motion was unanimous.