

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
Special Called Meeting
Monday, June 12, 2023 - 5:30 PM

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Chairman Bill Slaughter
Vice Chairman Mark Wisenbaker
Commissioner Joyce Evans
Commissioner Scott Orenstein
Commissioner Demarcus Marshall
Commissioner Clay Griner

Chairman Slaughter called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Chairman Slaughter explained each side will get ten minutes and following after both sides are heard, each side will get two minutes for rebuttal.

PUBLIC HEARING

Rezoning Case REZ-2022-10 The Campus Transitional Facility – Validity of April 11, 2023, Decision,

County Planner, J.D. Dillard presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated on March 28th the Commission began and voted to table the public hearing on a request to rezone property located at 2193 Howell Road from Estate Agricultural (E-A) to Planned Development (P-D) for uses including a Transitional Care Facility until the April 11, 2023 board meeting at which the Board continued the public hearing on the request and voted to rezone the property to Planned Development. The County has received a challenge to the validity of the April 11, 2023 decision based on the notice to the public. Declaring the April 11, 2023 zoning decision invalid and reconsidering rezoning the property will make this challenge moot.

Savannah Baker, 4046 Old Naylor Road, spoke against the request. Ms. Baker stated she has addressed collective concerns from her family and the community regarding the rezoning of 2193 Howell Road for over a year now. Ms. Baker stated she has been able to provide cited facts and statistics in regards to a facility like this, yet they have been unable to provide a success rate for this program, which has been in business for six years, or cite where their statistics come from. Ms. Baker quoted a Valdosta Daily Times article titled "County should always lean to residents in zoning decisions" from May 6, 2023. The voices of the community have been silenced after several news articles and interviews have been altered since released or deleted without access. Ms. Baker mentioned the guys in this program know where drug houses are located on Howell Road, how are the people in your program aware of the locations and if this is true, is this the best place to put your facility? Also, has the Sheriff's Department been notified of the locations? Ms. Baker stated in looking at information provided by this program research was done and it was stated they have been at their current address for two years and law enforcement was called once; upon retrieving records it revealed in the past two years there have been four times law enforcement has been called. Ms.

Baker mentioned it was stated they do not allow people with violent crimes in their program, but she spoke with someone who committed a violent crime in September of last year and this facility cannot enforce their own rules. Ms. Baker mentioned this is referred to as ministry, but on their 501(c)(3) listed as non-religious and a halfway house.

Justin Stafford, 118 West Alden Avenue, spoke against the request. Mr. Stafford stated he is a recovering alcoholic. Mr. Stafford stated he sought help from Redeemed Living, to keep him accountable and to have a place to call home. Mr. Stafford stated no accountability took place and addicts seeking recovery came second to those in charge of handling their business first. Mr. Stafford stated Redeemed Living is not structured to keep the recovering addict accountable. The addicts living at the recovery house are also employed by the same person, who owns the house and this seems like exploitation and to expand his lawn care business. Mr. Stafford stated he was arrested due to previous warrants and after being incarcerated for three weeks, he was unable to contact Redeemed Living and he was blocked on social media as well as his items were removed from the house. Mr. Stafford stated if you are looking to receive help for your recovery and addiction, he would not recommend Redeemed Living.

Jed Allen, 2810 Howell Road, spoke against the request. Mr. Allen stated from past experiences in his construction business, he has worked with an employee, who had gone through a program and seemed to be on the road to recovery, but when given the time and additional money he reverted back to his previous ways, breaking the law and he went back to jail. Mr. Allen recounted another time when working with someone who had been in recovery for years and unfortunately went back to drugs and almost killed someone trying to get money.

Brent Moore, 3850 C L Moore Road, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Moore stated he is still friends with Mr. Justin Stafford on social media, he has not been blocked. Mr. Moore stated he was unaware of the two calls mentioned by Ms. Savannah Baker regarding law enforcement being called. Mr. Moore stated it was his friend who informed him of the drug houses on Howell Road, no one in the program and Mr. Moore did not report to the authorities since the addresses were not given. Mr. Moore stated regarding the 501(c)(3) it should be listed as non-profit faith based. Mr. Moore stated this is not a treatment facility, this is a secondary program to help people after completing a program. Mr. Moore stated Mr. Justin Stafford had a bad experience and Mr. Moore did not have a chance to speak with him.

Walter Muller, 2801 Cotton Bay Crossing, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Muller stated he is retired from the United States Air Force with 20 years of service and he is also retired from mental health substance abuse counseling with Penfield Addiction Ministries located in Alapaha with 23 years of service. Mr. Muller stated the same situation arose when trying to open Penfield Addiction Ministries residents were opposed, but the facility was approved. The difference between these two facilities is Redeemed Living participants are further along with more sobriety. Mr. Muller stated he is a recovering alcoholic and addict and celebrated 35 years sobriety and he has counseled addicts and alcoholics. Mr. Muller stated Lowndes County needs a facility like Redeemed Living.

David Barton, 603 West Park Avenue, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Barton stated he is a part of Redeemed Living. He came here three months ago after finishing a nine month treatment program. Mr. Barton stated there is accountability, he attends two church services, two AA meetings and a DAA meeting and a discipleship. Mr. Barton mentioned he came to this program because it is faith based and he would recommend Redeemed Living.

Joseph Lelonek, 603 West Park Avenue, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Lelonek stated he stays at the Redeemed Living house and this has been the best family to show him care and compassion since November 2022. Mr. Lelonek stated there has been no law enforcement at the house and he attends CR meetings on Monday and two church services.

Opposition - Rebuttal:

Savannah Baker, 4046 Old Naylor Road, addressed the commission regarding the comment Mr. Moore made regarding a friend telling him of the drug houses on Howell Road. Ms. Baker stated a friend of Mr. Moore who he socializes with knows where the drug houses are located, is this someone who should be running this facility? Ms. Baker stated the only people who should have that knowledge should be law enforcement or people who use drugs. Ms. Baker asked if this isn't a transitional facility, that includes a treatment facility, then why are we here for this rezoning? Ms. Baker stated they are drug testing people; when according to the state of Georgia they are not legally allowed to do so. They do not have enough knowledge, training, experience or licenses to be doing something of this measure. There is no structure to have these men follow with oversight by trained professionals.

In Favor - Rebuttal:

Brent Moore, 3850 C L Moore Road, addressed the commission and stated he does associate with people in recovery, it was his friend, who is currently in a treatment facility, that told him of the drug houses. Mr. Moore stated there is a form which is completed every Monday morning by the director with the meetings attended by the participants. There are requirements, to attend four meetings a week, with two being attending a church service. Mr. Moore stated he does not approach anyone in the program to work for him, they approach him for a job.

Commissioner Marshall made a motion to declare the April 11, 2023 zoning decision invalid. Commissioner Griner asked because it was advertised incorrectly this makes the decision invalid? Chairman Slaughter answered that is correct. County Attorney, Wallter Elliott, stated if you vote and there is a second on the motion and the motion passes, then proceed to the next agenda item, hear the rezoning request again. Commissioner Griner asked as our attorney, do you recommend we make the April 11th vote invalid and vote again? Mr. Elliott responded yes. Commissioner Griner seconded the motion made by Commissioner Marshall. Commissioners Orenstein, Marshall and Griner voted in favor of the request, Commssioner Evans and Vice Chairman Wisenbaker opposed. Motion carried.

Rezoning Case REZ-2022-10 The Campus Transitional Facility, 2193 Howell Road E-A to PD-R, Well & Septic, ~23 acres

County Planner, J. D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated this request is for E-A to PD-R zoning more specific for rural development as there is no public utility system and served by well and septic. It is within the agricultural character area, some wetlands on the property. Mr. Dillard stated the Planning Commission recommended denial.

Chairman Slaughter explained again each side will have ten minutes and following after both sides are heard, each side will have two minutes for rebuttal.

Savannah Baker, 4046 Old Naylor Road, spoke against the request. Ms. Baker stated she did not think it was necessary for her to repeat herself and welcomed other citizens from the community to speak.

Nora Pratt, 2403 Howell Road, spoke against the request. Ms. Pratt stated she is the parent of an addicted child. Ms. Pratt mentioned her son is in Florida and she's watched twenty years of him going through programs and the most successful have been those in close proximity to facilities, whether medical or employment opportunities, with meetings every day. Ms. Pratt stated there are no facilities or transportation on Howell Road. Ms. Pratt stated she is personally afraid to live down the road from this type of facility. Sandra Canada, 2211 Howell Road, spoke against the request. Ms. Canada stated she lives next door to this property and she lives alone. Ms. Canada mentioned her father was in law enforcement and she is familiar with drugs and alcohol due to his job. Ms. Canada stated she is not

comfortable having men next door and she does not feel she should have to move. Ms. Canada stated she is against this rezoning and this may also lower her property value.

Kellie Fesler, 117 West Alden Avenue, spoke against the request. Ms. Fesler stated she grew up with a family of alcoholics. Ms. Fesler mentioned her 19 year old son has an addiction and she supports the people that have addictions, but if you're going to help people, they have to go through a facility that is accountable, educated and regulated. Ms. Fesler stated it is not the location, we need to hold the people accountable and consider how will the facility be regulated.

Beth Ann Crady, 3615 Deerwood Road, spoke against the request. Ms. Crady stated she has spent eight years with a man that has chosen drugs over her and her daughter. Ms. Crady mentioned he went through a program and once he was released, his life changed again for the worst. Ms. Crady stated she spent the first twenty-five years of her life in Akron, Ohio, born and raised in some of the worst drug-contaminated towns. Ms. Crady stated she is uncomfortable with this facility being located so close to her property. Savannah Baker, 4046 Old Naylor Road, spoke against this request. Ms. Baker read from the Georgia Attorney Generals Consumer Protection Division website regarding recovering residences.

Kimberly Hall, 2215 Riverside Drive, spoke in favor of the request. Ms. Hall stated she is Brent Moore's mother, she has been involved in her son's ministry since he started with one of her rental homes. Ms. Hall mentioned that she checked with the neighbors consistently to make sure there were no issues. Ms. Hall stated there is accountability in this program. Additionally, Ms. Hall stated she knows her son's heart was never to hire the people in the house, but everyone wants to help, with no one wanting to hire them. Amanda Moore, 3850 C L Moore Road, spoke in favor of the request. Mrs. Moore is Brent Moore's wife and she read a letter written by her father, in support of Redeemed Living Ministries.

Opposition - Rebuttal:

Savannah Baker, 4046 Old Naylor Road addressed the commission stated there is plenty of faith in this community and would like this facility to be run correctly and access resources. If this is a ministry and not a treatment facility, why is this rezoning being entertained?

Jeese Bush, 2942 Dasher Johnson Road, addressed the commission and commended those that spoke about their personal experiences with addictions. Mr. Bush stated if the men are here for three months, it's about numbers, this is a huge group that could fail, but this is a risk for the community.

In Favor - Rebuttal:

Walter Fish, 603 West Park Avenue, addressed the commission and stated he is 66 years old and lost his career in Atlanta due to alcoholism. Mr. Fish mentioned the fellowship and accountability at Redeemed Living made him a productive citizen and has kept him alive.

Kyle Dickson, 603 West Park Avenue, addressed the commission regarding the attacks on Brent Moore's character. Mr. Dickson stated there were activities on the property this past Saturday, with the property being already purchased, cleaning the house and property. Mr. Dickson stated everybody there was volunteering to do this work and all of the equipment using gasoline was paid for by Mr. Moore.

Commissioner Griner made a motion to approve the rezoning request as presented from E-A to PD-R as shown on the site plan, Vice Chairman Wisenbaker second. Vice Chairman Wisenbaker and Commissioners Griner and Orenstein voted in favor of the request, Commissioner Evans and Marshall opposed. Motion carried.

Adjournment

Vice Chairman Wisenbaker made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Orenstein second. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the meeting at 6:36 p.m.