



LUMPKIN COUNTY
Board of Commissioners
Public Hearing Minutes
99 Courthouse Hill
Dahlonega, GA 30533

September 16, 2025
4:30 PM

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 pm. Present were Vice Chairman Rhett Stringer and Commissioners Tucker Greene, Bobby Mayfield, and Jeff Moran. Chairman Chris Dockery was absent.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Public Comment - Request from Ramakrishnan Srinivasan for Character Area Map Amendment on Parcel 083 100
Community Development Director Vanessa McGrath read aloud the details of the Character Area Map amendment request and a timeline of the project. Commissioner Stringer made some clarifying comments regarding concerns and rumors surrounding recent developments in the 400 Gateway Corridor area. He then read aloud the procedural rules for the hearing. The applicant and any supporters of the amendment will be allowed to speak first, followed by any in opposition to the amendment.

Applicant and United Family Homes representative Ramakrishnan Srinivasan, resident of 8740 Colonial Place in Duluth, said they have already reduced their initial plans because of both sewer capacity and GDOT's driveway/curb requirements. The proposed units have been changed to be 150 ranch-style, single-story townhomes, and he said they recently got permission from GDOT for their project.

Sean Phipps, Director of the Lumpkin County Water & Sewerage Authority, observed that the large crowd in attendance tonight is very different from when it was first approved, and he went over the history of the project as it regards the LCWSA. He said the developer first approached them in 2022 about developing a 40-acre lot near Hwy 400. At that point in time, the LCWSA did not have the capacity to serve the project, but we were already working to build the new wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Phipps said the developer was advised to refrain or hold back on their schedule until a point in time when the sewer plant was available. Initially, the project was approved for 288 multifamily units in 2024, but they have elected to reduce it to 150 residential-style townhomes. They have run into some issues over the years, but they have been working steadily. Mr. Phipps explained per the conditions of their last Character Area Map amendment, it reverted back to residential because building did not commence within a year. The developer is here tonight requesting for the CAM to be changed once again to Gateway Corridor Overlay District. They have paid \$376,000 in tap fees already, and more will be collected, he explained. Mr. Phipps said

this project has been in the works for three years now, and for some reason, there is a lot more community interest in it this time around. He said he is in favor of the project and has been for the three years it has been underway.

There was a brief recess from 4:47 pm to 4:53 pm before those in opposition to the project would speak.

Robert Harrier, 384 Temple Mountain Lane, was the first to comment in opposition. He discussed at length the traffic congestion of Highway 400 and how often there are disruptive car wrecks in that area. He said if it gets any worse, people will not be able to get to the hospital during an emergency. Sometimes the traffic on Highway 60 is backed up all the way to the funeral home. He told the Commissioners that as elected officials, they are supposed to work for the people. He said he pays too much in taxes already, and the county government needs to start cutting excess spending. Mr. Harrier said the Commissioners do not need to work for some millionaire developer just because he has a bunch of money, and he said if any of the elected officials here tonight at this meeting vote in favor of the project, they should be voted out. He said there are loads of houses being built in Dawson County right now, and more people mean more crime. He said it is unrealistic to expect their children to be able to afford a \$500,000 house. He said this decision should be up to the citizens, and the County should conduct a vote by mail, allowing every citizen to vote yes or no on projects like this.

Ken Corbin, 17 Bear Claw Terrace in River Knoll subdivision, brought a presentation with a series of questions and concerns. He said he recently emailed the BOC asking for traffic counts at the Highway 400/60 intersection and the Highway 60/Morrison Moore Parkway intersection from this year and from five years ago. Chairman Dockery had responded to his email and said he could obtain that information by reaching out to the GDOT office in Gainesville. The Chairman had also informed him of how the County has been working with GDOT officials for years to plan for improvements at the Highway 400 intersection, and they have not been complacent about the issue. He asked Chairman Dockery if there were any current plans to widen Highway 60, but he said no. Mr. Corbin said he wonders why the BOC did not feel it was necessary to review past and current traffic counts at this intersection before considering this CAM amendment. He brought up some of the proposed, pending, or current multifamily housing projects in the County and said, according to his calculations, traffic could increase by as much as 4,000 vehicles per day. He proposed a moratorium on all development in Lumpkin County, and he said the County needs to request that the University of North Georgia halt all development/expansion plans on the Dahlonega campus, and they should prohibit UNG freshmen from having vehicles. Mr. Corbin said UNG pays no taxes.

Steve Sylvester, 215 Stancil Dyer Road, said a lot has changed in the past three years since this project initially began, and it doesn't make sense anymore. Lumpkin County did a lot of work to develop our current regulations, including the classifications of restricted and general development. This property was designated as Restricted Growth, so the BOC should keep it as Restricted Development. We should keep it at one house per acre. He said he hopes the \$376,000 that was paid in tap fees does not influence the BOC's decision.

There are other developers who will not ask us to change our character area map.

Pam Dietz, 1645 Larmon Forks Road, said that the large number of residents attending this meeting shows how important it is to the citizens. She said everyone is concerned about where our county is going, and she expects our elected officials to give great consideration to this. Growth is needed for a community to survive, but we need well-managed growth to preserve Lumpkin County.

John Francisco, 225 Fawn Meadows, questioned the command and control that exists in this county. He asked where the \$375,000 that the LCWSA received in tap fees was. If it was spent, who spent it? Should a government employee speak in favor of a project like this during a public meeting? He said he heard from Chairman Dockery that the County is looking for quality, not quantity, regarding developments, so he said we need to postpone this and not have county employees backing up this project.

Gail Dowsett, 494 Calhoun Road, said she lives very close to the college in town. She said the county needs to return the developer's tap fees and implement a moratorium. She said she moved here in 2011 and could not believe how beautiful and quaint the town was. All of that is changing rapidly, and she said she hopes the BOC will listen to the people here tonight.

Joe Hecht, 88 High Trestle Court, discussed the problems they experienced when they lived in a subdivision off Settingdown Road in Forsyth County. He moved to Dahlonega two and a half years ago, and he has witnessed the traffic and accidents. He said we need to sit back and think about our expansion, and that we don't need 85 single-family homes behind Home Depot, and we don't need 150 townhomes at the corner of Highway 400.

Robin Chapman, 47 Bull Creek Road, said if we have something in place that says one house per acre, that is a way we can allow growth without having excessive traffic. She understands people have invested in these parcels and want to make money, but we need a minimum acreage per unit.

Tom Gordineer, 339 North Chestatee Street, said he has lived in a lot of places over the years. He said the same thing that is happening here happened in most of those places. A lot of people moved to Dawsonville because they loved how it looked, and now those people are leaving. Mr. Gordineer said, obviously, we have to have property rights, but he would be happy if we took the \$376,000 of tap fees and used it to build a wall across the end of 400, and new people wouldn't be allowed in unless someone passed away. He said he knows that isn't realistic, but that is kind of the way he feels about it. Judging from the plans from the developer, this project doesn't have much room for trees or parking. Mr. Gordineer said a developer's only goal is to make money by cramming in as many people as they can on that property. If this developer knew the property was residential when he bought it, make him abide by that. He said the citizens would not be upset if the developer was proposing to build single-family homes on at least one-acre lots.

Bill Halderson, 60 Aspen Court in Mountain Park subdivision, made some comments

regarding his own neighborhood. He said it has turned into a disaster, and he thinks the City realized they made a mistake in approving it. There are 149 townhomes, none of which have a bedroom on the first floor, and it is essentially a "student ghetto," said Mr. Halderson. Leaving the neighborhood to enter Highway 60/South Chestatee Street is difficult, he said, and there will be increasing car accidents.

Clinton Crane, 6737 Dawsonville Highway, said he has been following the County's land regulations for years. He asked the audience to raise their hands if they were born and raised in Lumpkin County, and only one other person besides him raised their hand. He told the audience that everyone needs to show up while these rules and regulations are being decided, and that no one showed up to the meeting the last time the regulations were changed. When something happens, most of the time it is too late to stop it. If they are following the rules, they cannot be denied. Mr. Crane urged everyone to show up to the meetings when the regulations are being discussed.

Mark Townsend, 172 Wild Azalea Trail, said while the applicant has spent \$376,000 on tap fees, how much did Lumpkin County spend on formulating the Comprehensive Plan and Gateway Corridor regulations? He said these changes and variances make no sense to him because it seems like every time the Commissioners make new regulations, they then make exceptions. Why do you want to violate what you set up? Mr. Townsend said this parcel needs to stay residential because that is what it was designed for, and the tap fees should be returned to the developer.

Katherine James, 37 Blueberry Hill, said she expected the large turnout for this meeting, and while she opposes the CAM amendment request, she understands there is a process. Part of that process is public comment. She said based on the three-year history of this project, she suspects that the BOC will approve the request. Ms. James said she is not opposed to growth, but she is opposed to things like Iron Mountain Park that continue to be major nuisances for the people who live around it. She agrees that we need to have a variety of price points for homes, and we need a certain number of rentals. While some renters may be families, others may be transients with no ownership obligations or the interest that comes with taking pride in your own home. Ms. James said we already have apartments being built in the City. This project is a rental project, as confirmed in the August 11 Planning Commission meeting. The developer does not have approval for selling units, only renting them. The project has been reduced, but the question is, how do we allow 150 units without adversely affecting the area?

Ms. James said most people probably are not aware that the City of Dahlonega asked the County for a joint traffic and parking study over a year ago, and that request sat on a desk for over a year, only recently being signed by the County. She said the County is now demanding that the study be completed by November. She also spoke to a PhD in Criminology at UNG who used to be a detective, and he said high-density housing always results in an increase in crime. The other factor to consider is the burden on our schools. Ms. James said during the plan to develop the Comp Plan in 2022, 74% of responsive citizens said high-density housing was not favorable. She said there are over a thousand rental units a short distance away in Dawson County. We need to be smarter about what we

allow to be built, and we do not need the increased traffic, crime, and burden on our schools that come with high-density apartments. If this rental project is approved, said Ms. James, please allow it to be the only one of its type. She said if we go forward with the project, we must put severe and enforceable stipulations in place. No agreement is worth its salt if it cannot be enforced. Do not allow additional units to be built once this is approved. Get a digital copy of the plans with proposed sight lines and the topography. Understand exactly what things are going to look like, she urged. We need to consider if the property will be kept clean and maintained, what will happen if noise becomes an issue, and other considerations.

Ms. James said she is sensitive to the need for the tap fees because, after attending some LCWSA meetings, she understands it is needed for the wastewater treatment plant. She said the County needs to include the City when considering allowing these types of developments. We should not look at developments in isolation. Additionally, we need to consider the ramifications if the stipulations are not followed. She mentioned Iron Mountain Park's citations as an example. If we allow a project like this, we need to get it right.

The applicant was allowed to speak after the opposition. Mr. Srinivasan said he spoke with GDOT, and they are working on an expansion of lanes. Part of the reason he reduced the number of units in his plan was so he could obtain a driveway permit from GDOT.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Commissioner Greene moved to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Commissioner Moran. The motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 5:47 pm.