



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

March 17, 2026
4:30 PM

CALL TO ORDER

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

CONSIDERATION OF AGENDA

APPEAL HEARING

1. Appeal of Planning Commission Denial of a Variance Request at 110 & 115 Easy Street
Community Development Director Vanessa McGrath read aloud the history of the project and summarized the appeal, and then she read aloud the February Planning Commission Minutes, where this was denied. Vice Chairman Moran stated the procedural rules of the appeal hearing.

There was a five-minute recess at 4:40 pm.

Mr. Durant Wright spoke in support of the appeal as CFO of Blaze Properties and Mr. Ariemma's son-in-law. Mr. Wright said it is basically an office with extra space, so there won't be a lot of trash produced. He said not having the dumpster will not negatively affect health or safety because they will require tenants to enroll with a garbage service. Mr. Wright argued that the purpose of the code is to keep properties looking clean, and we will achieve that. He said they can add a dumpster in the future if it is needed during a later phase of the project, but none of the prospective tenants they have spoken to thus far will need a dumpster.

Mr. Johnny Ariemma, owner of Blaze Properties, spoke in support of his appeal. He said this project has been going on for over 2 years now, and he has invested about 20 million dollars in the community over the years through different businesses. Mr. Ariemma said he saw a need for a flex office/warehouse in Dahlonega after doing some research. He said he has built mini-storages before, and they did not require dumpsters. He stated that in his experience, dumpsters are rat havens. He said this project will be more of a come-and-go warehouse, and it will not be for industrial businesses that produce a lot of waste. Mr. Ariemma said it has taken two months to get this appeal to the BOC, and he is stressed to the max. He said they have a solution, and he feels like he is being micromanaged. He stated that if it turns out he was wrong and he does eventually need to get a dumpster, he

will do so.

Mr. Dave Schmitz, resident of 116 Fields Farm Road, spoke in support of the appeal. He said he is one of the prospective tenants for the flex office, and it's great for him because the price is right and he only lives 8 minutes away. He has been working in Dawson County, but he is in the process of moving his business to Lumpkin County. Because of this appeal delay, Mr. Schmitz said he cannot work. He does not anticipate producing any more waste than the average household, so he does not need a dumpster.

Mr. Steve Sylvester, resident of 215 Stancil Dyer Road, spoke in opposition to the appeal. Mr. Sylvester said his objection is not to what Mr. Ariemma is requesting, but the use of the variance request. He said variances are for unique characteristics of a property, not the applicant's personal situation. Every variance must be directly attributable to the unique characteristics of the property, and no variance may be granted for a personal hardship, stated Mr. Sylvester. He said this directive from the Code has been ignored in the past, and variances have been granted for personal hardships. He said the last three variances to come before the Planning Commission have been denied, and then those appeals have come before the BOC. Mr. Sylvester said all of these denied variance requests have not had a valid hardship associated with the parcel, and therefore were not valid variance requests.

Mr. Ariemma used his remaining time to give a brief rebuttal. He said in his opinion, this is an issue of the project being misclassified. He asked if he had called it a flex mini-storage, would it remove this requirement? Was it his mistake to not call it a flex warehouse/mini-storage? He said it is very different from an industrial complex. Mr. Ariemma said he would ask the BOC to consider a temporary reprieve if they do not want to fully grant his variance request. Perhaps they could give him a delay on the dumpster requirement until the final phase of the project? Vice Chairman Moran asked for clarification, and Mr. Ariemma said the final phase, phase A, will be on top of the hill in the front.

Commissioner Mayfield said he has always been a big supporter of the Planning Commission. Having said that, it appears that Mr. Ariemma has found a situation that doesn't quite fit in our code. Perhaps we need to adjust the code to include these new types of businesses that pop up. Commissioner Mayfield said he would be in favor of giving a conditional variance for a year. Vice Chairman Moran asked Ms. McGrath, would an office complex require a dumpster? She responded yes, and it would be considered commercial. Vice Chairman Moran said it appears that this project is more similar to being an office with extra storage space, not a mini-storage. In his opinion, having a dumpster would centralize the rodents to one spot where they could be controlled better.

Commissioner Greene said it seems to be an office space up front with a warehouse space in the back, like a miniature Amazon. He asked if the holdup on the issuance of the CO was the dumpster issue? Ms. McGrath said yes, but said we are also waiting on the final inspection, which should be on Friday. Commissioner Greene asked if two CO's would be issued, one for the interior and one for the exterior? Mr. Wright said the interior is pretty much finished, and Ms. McGrath said the interior build-out is still being worked on. There will be an exterior CO and an interior CO. Commissioner Greene asked if the interior was

built without the CO, and Mr. Ariemma said a lot had changed when the previous Planning Director left. Ms. McGrath said they have been waiting on a few items, such as the architectural and approval from the Fire Marshal.

Mr. Ariemma said he anticipates his tenants will be people like electricians and HVAC businesses, where they come in the morning to pick up supplies and then are out in the field all day. He said part of the problem for these businesses is that Google and other advertisers will not let them advertise without a brick-and-mortar location. He said there will be no manufacturers as tenants. Commissioner Greene said it appears that the original site plan included dumpsters, and Mr. Ariemma said the original plan included them, but it was never his intention. He said to be honest, he didn't even notice that the plan included dumpsters. Commissioner Greene asked about the proposed trash service, and Mr. Wright said they have actually obtained a special rate with ARW since they are requiring tenants to use their services. Mr. Ariemma said some tenants might not want to pay for a dumpster if they aren't going to use it, and he feels their solution will work.

Commissioner Mayfield said he is sympathetic to the in-between solution. He said time and time again, the County has encountered new situations, such as the shooting range off of Porter Springs Road and the rehab center from several years ago. Our regulations did not cover those at the time, so they were difficult issues to resolve. Vice Chairman Moran asked Mr. Scmitz how much trash he estimates he will produce. Mr. Scmitz said he doesn't expect to produce much more than the average household. Vice Chairman Moran then asked how tenants would deal with large garbage, such as boxes from new HVAC units or equipment. Mr. Ariemma said he isn't worried about large boxes because we have a state-of-the-art recycling center that everyone can use. The Vice Chairman said the BOC doesn't want to be the trash police, and neither does the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Greene said it seems like Mr. Ariemma needs a CO so he can start entering into contracts with lessees, and this dumpster issue is holding him up, along with a couple of other things. He suggested a solution: we could issue a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO) tied to the completion of the interior build-out. Mr. Wright said if they get a CO on Friday, they want to start opening to tenants as soon as Monday. Ms. McGrath said we do not yet have the permits for the interior build-out, so she cannot issue a CO yet. Mr. Ariemma said the delays have been due to the change of leadership at the Planning Department, and they have been browbeaten to death on this project. He claimed they have submitted everything required, and they have not heard back from the Planning Department in a timely manner.

Motion: Commissioner Mayfield moved to issue a conditional year-long variance to see if this solution (trash service) works or not, giving us time to adjust our regulations if needed. The motion died for lack of a second.

Motion: Commissioner Greene moved to issue a temporary certificate of occupancy (TCO) so they can continue, and the interior CO will be dependent upon the installation of the dumpster. At that point, the TCO will be converted to a CO. Commissioner Mayfield seconded the motion for discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Mayfield asked for clarification. Commissioner Greene said it will be dependent on the issuance of the CO for the interior buildouts. The TCO will allow them to do contracts, but not operate until the dumpster is in place, and that is dependent on the buildout.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:29 pm.

Date

Jeff Moran, Vice Chairman
Lumpkin County Board of Commissioners

Attest:

Melissa Witcher
Clerk, Lumpkin County