

MINUTES

Valdosta-Lowndes Zoning Board of Appeals

Valdosta City Hall Annex Multi-Purpose Room
300 North Lee Street, Valdosta, Georgia

February 2, 2016

2:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Paul Alvarado
Nancy Hobby
John Hogan III
Dr. Willie Houseal

John "Mac" McCall
Satrina Plyler
Gretchen Quarterman
Allan Strickland

MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF PRESENT

Carmella Braswell
Tracy Tolley

VISITORS PRESENT

Laura Gayle
Larry Sanders
Bruce Smith
Chuck Smith

Agenda Item # 1: CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chairman Quarterman at 2:30 pm and it was determined that a quorum of members was present. Vice-Chairman Quarterman thanked everyone for coming and reviewed the meeting procedures with those in attendance today. Chairman Strickland arrived.

LOWNDES COUNTY CASES

Agenda Item # 2: VAR-2016-01—CrossPointe Church (Valdosta, GA)

Chairman Strickland announced the case.

Mrs. Braswell stated that CrossPointe Church of Valdosta is requesting a variance to ULDC Table 4.07.06 (C) and 4.07.04(A,7) as it relates to the minimum buffer area standards and the general landscape standards. The subject property consists of 14.61 acres and is located at 4100 N. Valdosta Road in a C-H zoning district. In this case, the subject property abuts property that has residential zoning to the north, which would require a minimum required buffer yard of twenty feet wide with a minimum of 4 shade trees and 25 shrubs every 100 linear feet, which would require a total of 32 shade trees and 202 shrubs along the northern property line. The church is requesting a variance to the tree planting requirement only. The applicants state their primary hardship is limited usability of property due to an existing utility easement. According to the applicant's survey there is a fifty feet utility easement from Colquitt EMC—an area that is flat and often ponds to drain eastwards. Additionally, the applicant cites the costs associated with maintaining the vegetative buffer to ensure the species' health. Regarding the property to the north, it is currently vacant and was rezoned to R-1 as a part of the adoption of the ULDC. Staff is not aware of any plans to develop the property to the north residentially. Staff is satisfied with the applicant's proposed vegetative buffer to contain shrubs only, which can provide a sufficient screen so that vehicles parked along the northern side of the subject property would not be intrusive onto the neighboring undeveloped property. With those factors in mind, the TRC reviewed the request and unanimously recommended approval with no conditions.

Chairman Strickland asked the Board if they had questions. Mrs. Plyler asked if there was an option to use a mix of trees and shrubs, rather than exclusively shrubs, IF the variance was granted. Mrs. Braswell stated that the Board could stipulate that a mix of trees and shrubs be used as a condition of variance approval. Chairman Strickland asked what the yellow highlighted portion was on the site plan. Mrs. Braswell stated it was part of the easement. Chairman Strickland stated that part of the parking appeared to be within the easement. Mrs. Braswell stated that Mike Fletcher, County Engineer, had requested that the applicant approach Colquitt EMC to obtain permission to place parking within the easement. Chairman Strickland asked how far away the parking spaces were from the property line. Mrs. Braswell stated that if the applicant planted the buffer as proposed there would still be about thirty feet of open space.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Strickland asked if anyone would like to speak in support of the application. Bruce Smith, architect, 2941 Loch Laurel Road, spoke on behalf of the application. Mr. Smith stated the area was a very low spot, and they were limited in terms of how much they could grade it and to what plants would grow there. An additional concern was the overhead utility lines; taller-growing trees would need to be trimmed or removed when they got taller so as not to impact the overhead utility lines. Mr. Smith stated that most trees that would do well in a wet environment were tall-growing trees that should not be planted near utility lines, which was one of the reasons they were requesting to utilize shrubs. Mrs. Hobby asked if they had looked at plantings that do well in wet environments. Mr. Smith stated that Laura Gayle, landscaping designer with his office, had done research to determine what species would be appropriate for a wet area. Mrs. Plyler asked how far the easement would come into the parking lot. Mr. Smith stated it would come about twenty feet into the parking lot.

Laura Gayle, 4154 Pebble Creek Drive, spoke regarding plant materials. Ms. Gayle stated that most of the vegetation that would do well in a wet environment would grow to be about 100 feet tall, and be inappropriate under power lines. She stated that she had thought of dwarf holly and wax myrtle shrubs, but she had concerns that the shrubs be tolerant to sunlight as well, due to the fact that there was no canopy to shield shorter vegetation from the sun. Ms. Gayle stated that it might be an option to place the vegetation required by the buffer somewhere else on site. Mrs. Quarterman suggested using native vegetation so it was more tolerant of sun. Ms. Gayle stated she had mentioned using native vegetation but she was concerned about accessibility because the church members intended to contribute vegetation to be used for the buffering. Mrs. Plyler stated she had concerns about any kind of vegetation there due to the wetness of the immediate area, and wondered about the possibility of piping out the water to a holding pond elsewhere on the property. Ms. Gayle stated that the project engineer could better answer that question than she could.

Larry Sanders, 6490 River Run, addressed the question as the engineer on the project. Mr. Sanders stated it was not appropriate to impound water but better to let the water drain as it naturally does. Mrs. Plyler asked if there was a holding pond on site. Mr. Sanders stated that there was a detention pond on site.

There being no more questions for Mr. Sanders, Chairman Strickland asked if anyone else would like to speak in support of the application. Mr. Chuck Smith, 1321 W Hill Avenue, the contractor for the project, spoke on behalf of the project. Mr. Smith stated the site was a challenging site, but the church wanted to be a good neighbor to everyone.

Mrs. Quarterman asked if there was a maximum impervious surface in the County. Mrs. Braswell stated yes, that there is, and this site is below that impervious cap, in part due to the detention pond. Mrs. Quarterman asked if the detention pond would be fenced. Mr. Sanders stated that the slope of the pond was not steep enough to require fencing. Mr. Chuck Smith stated that the pond would be a part of a nature area, as a water feature surrounded by a nature trail. Mrs. Plyler stated she understood that the church members would be donating the plantings and doing the work because they needed to be concerned about funds, but she was concerned about maintenance of the plantings and the buffer area. Chairman Strickland stated that that might be a code enforcement issue. Mrs. Hobby stated that in her yard, there was a French drainage system, and would that be an idea for this particular area. Mr. Sanders stated it was possible, but it was a very expensive option, and there would still be traffic or work in the easement. Mrs. Quarterman stated that utility easements were a part of life, and normally, one could not plant things, or put parking or buildings in the easement. Mrs. Quarterman stated that currently, part of the parking was in the easement, and if they moved the asphalt/parking, then there would be additional room for buffering. Mr. Sanders stated that the drainage may not work properly if the parking/asphalt was moved.

Given that there was no one else to speak in support of the application, Chairman Strickland asked if there was anyone to speak in opposition. There was no one. Chairman Strickland asked Mrs. Braswell if there had been any contact to her office. There was none.

Given that there was no further discussion, Chairman Strickland asked if anyone would like to make a motion. Mrs. Hobby made a motion to approve the request to utilize shrubs only with the condition that they be native vegetation, citing criteria "a," "c," and "d." Mr. Alvarado seconded the motion. The motion passed with a vote of 6 to 1, with Mrs. Plyler voted against the motion.

OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item #3: Approval of Minutes: January 5, 2016

Ms. Tolley stated that the draft minutes were unavailable but would be ready by the March 2016 meeting for consideration.

Agenda Item #4: Discussion Items

A: Name Badges

Ms. Tolley stated that, for those city appointees who wanted a photo ID, to see her to have a picture taken for the ID.

Agenda Item # 5: Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM.

/s/ Allan Strickland
Allan Strickland, Chairman

3-1-2016
Date