

CLIFTONDALE COMMUNITY CLUB, INC.

Draft Minutes September 8, 2007

The Cliftondale Community Club met September 8, 2007 at the Cliftondale Community House. About 125 members and guests were in attendance. Special invited guests included Commission Chairman John Eaves, Commissioner Robb Pitts, and Delores Baskin representing Commissioner William Edwards. Randy Beck, Acting Deputy Director of Economic and Community Development, was also present.

President Ben Dye opened the meeting, and Tommie Steagall provided the invocation.

Corporal T. Blackmon of the Fulton County Police Department provided a community crime report. Over the past month there were 15 burglaries, 5 open door calls, 4 calls about discharge of firearms, 6 motor vehicle thefts (of which 3 were recovered), and numerous arrests for various traffic violations.

Mr. Dye recognized Veronica Mount and Jane Mitchell, co-chairs of the next community clean-up, which will be held on September 22. Volunteers will meet at the Clubhouse at 9 am. Vests, garbage bags, and pick-up sticks are provided. Further details will be provided by email, and the event is posted on the Club's website, www.cliftondale.org

The Secretary read notes of appreciation from former President Harold Reid and former Vice President Joseph Simien, who were honored at the last meeting.

The reading of the minutes and treasurer's report were suspended because of the meeting's special agenda. The Club invited all seven Commissioners (three responded) to acquaint them with the community and with Cliftondale's continuing support of its long-range plans as embodied in its Vision and Overlay. Related issues include broad development policies and the effects of the current housing crisis on the community. Mr. Dye offered a zoning moratorium and imposing impact fees as recommendations from the community. He then opened the floor for questions in an open forum.

[Note: questions asked during the meeting fell under two headings, zoning-development and the new City. For clarity, the questions are grouped under those two headings regardless of when they occurred during the meeting. For the most part, neither community questioners nor guest respondents are identified. Community leaders who made “Comments” are identified.]

Zoning and development.

Question: What can be done about the deep standing water after rain on Highway 92 in front of the Publix?

Response: Public Works would be contacted about the problem.

Question: Please explain the County’s budget process and what happens to the money not spent?

Response: There is a year-long budget process, starting with requests from department heads and proceeding through review, public comment, and approval by the Board of Commissioners. The County has three major budgeting funds: schools, the General Fund, and the Special Services District (South Fulton). Money budgeted but not spent goes back into the General Fund.

Question: Given the housing foreclosure crisis, how will the County deal with abandoned or half-built subdivisions (maintenance of unsold lots and common grounds, vandalism, rodents, crime, silt fence and detention pond maintenance, etc.) when their developers are having cash-flow problems?

Response: Foreclosures and financing are not the County’s issues, but the resulting empty houses can create the concerns as noted. The County requires developers to post large bonds to guarantee performance of such necessary work. Some negligent developers could end up in court. The affected neighbors need to be alert to problems and to contact Code Enforcement at 404-730-8355 so problems can be addressed quickly. Other remedies include barricading empty streets and stabilizing soils by grassing and seeding.

Question: Is it correct that rezonings revert to their original status (usually Ag-1 agricultural zoning) after 3 years if the developer takes no action?

Response: Yes, rezonings do have a 3-year life span if no steps toward construction occur. The County has a process for automatic annual review of the zonings from three years previous. However, because of current staffing shortages, the review has not taken place.

Question: A resident explained that a sewer line to serve a subdivision was installed on her property several years ago – but then the work was never completed. Pipes stick up out of the ground, raw land erodes, etc.

Response: Her address will be given to Code Enforcement for inspection and remedy.

Question: What was Fulton County doing about “growing smartly”?

Response: The County manages growth through a Land Use Planning process every several years, which defines guidelines for appropriate zoning and density. The County’s zoning process provides for community information and review, zoning staff review, Community Zoning Board review, and approval or denial by the full Board of Commissioners. Most of South Fulton is covered by official Overlays defining community standards for development.

Comment: Mr. Dye noted that the Clifftondale Club is dedicated to reviewing all zoning proposals by our Overlay and standards. For example, Clifftondale has a firm policy against multifamily housing, but developers continue to attempt such rezonings. The most recent case was an application for the West Stubbs-Demooney area, where the developer asked for attached cluster homes for seniors. Because of community resistance, the developer agreed to separate the multifamily units into single houses, but the community opposed the revised proposal because the lots and house square footage were below the norms for the community. The Commissioners passed the zoning in spite of negative recommendations from the community, the Community Zoning Board, and the County’s own zoning review staff. Cases such as these create fear that our standards, despite their incorporation into County zoning laws, are being eroded.

Comment: Bruce Moody, who serves on the Community Zoning Board, added that another developer tactic to evade standards is to request variances, often based on “economic hardship”. In many cases, examination reveals the hardship claim to be bogus. The end result of variances is a softening of Clifftondale’s Land Use Plan and Overlay through exceptions and variances that become legal precedents for other developers. He urged the Commissioners to be cautious about applications to change site plans.

Question: When are schools going to be built to support the growing population of South Fulton?

Response: Nine schools are slated to be built here. By state law, a new school cannot be built until existing schools are over-crowded. The County's Board of Commissioners wants more dialogue and cooperation with the Board of Education -- because both Boards are elected independently, the Commissioners do not "control" the Board of Education's actions.

Comment: Mr. Moody, who is very active in attending Board of Education meetings, stressed that the Board needs constant pressure from South Fulton parents and residents regarding our needs. Unfortunately, southside parent attendance at Board meetings is very low (often no more than 5 or 6 parents). Until southside parents prove they care by showing up, the hard truth is that the Board will respond more to the well-attended meetings of northside parents.

Question: What can be done about the application for a package store in the inappropriate location of the Publix shopping center?

Response: Package stores are a legal use for the shopping center; and that location is covered by the South Fulton Parkway Overlay rather than the Cliftondale Overlay. (Liquor stores are excluded from Cliftondale.) Package store applications have their own process of advertising, public comment, and approval by a separate liquor license board. The liquor licensing board has already recommended the license, but the public can still appeal to the Board of Commissioners to deny it.

Question: What is being done to improve the intersection at Butner and Stonewall Tell Roads?

Response: The County has received \$800,000 from Congressman David Scott for a traffic study; however, the grant requires County matching funds, and the County is waiting on the referendum for the new City to decide about the matching funds.

Comment: Charlie Mitchell emphasized that a traffic light is needed at the intersection now, and it would cost less than \$800,000.

Question: Why did my property taxes go up \$2,000?

Response: The millage rate actually went down slightly, so the assessed value of your property probably went up. There is a County

process for appealing the assessment on your property through the Board of Equalization.

City of South Fulton.

Question: Will the annexations made by the existing cities stand, or will the annexed parcels go into the new City?

Response: The annexations by the existing cities will stand.

Question: What happens to the “islands” in South Fulton if we do and do not become a City? (Note: an “island” is a parcel or subdivision in unincorporated South Fulton completely surrounded by a city. Examples of islands or near-islands are the area east of the Parkway between Stonewall Tell and 92, and the Old National corridor. State law allows the surrounding city to annex islands.)

Response: If the referendum passes, the islands will all go into the new City. If the referendum fails, it is not clear by what process the existing cities can/will annex islands.

Question: What will we gain by becoming a city?

Response: A share of the County’s sales tax revenue based on the City’s population [about \$12 million]; local control by a mayor and 5 council members instead of by 7 Commissioners, only 3 of whom we vote for; and a stop to annexation.

Commission Chair Eaves stated that the decision on a City really is for the citizens of South Fulton to make; he preferred not to voice his position. As for the facts, Fulton County now provides city-like services; a new City will form its own local government to provide those services. The new City would still be in Fulton County.

Commissioner Pitts stated that his position is that the costs will be a wash (that is, a hundred policemen will cost about the same regardless of whether they are employed by the City or County); the numbers do work for a city. From his and Fulton County’s perspective, it makes no sense to provide city services just for the south County.

Comment: Mr. Dye added that forming our own City allows us to control our destiny. The Joint Legislative Study Committee, which is considering restructuring Fulton County, could recommend moving South Fulton into existing cities in order to get the County out of providing city services.

Question: What are the revenue sources for the new City?

Response: They are the same as now: property taxes, fees and licenses, etc.; and the revenue from those sources should be similar to the County's take until they are changed. *In addition*, the new city will get (see previous question) a share of the County's sales tax revenue based on the City's population, about \$12 million.

Comment: Harold Reid recommended looking at the new City's budget, which shows revenue sources and expenses, which is posted on www.southfultonconcernedcitizens.org

Question: What will the new City do about the Land Use Plan and zoning laws?

Response: The three new cities on the northside simply adopted the County's zoning laws and the existing Land Use Plan. Then, the mayors and council members make changes appropriate for their city.

Question: Who will be the leaders of the new City, because if they are not qualified, they could make bad decisions and bankrupt the city?

Response: By law, the City's charter provides for a full-time professional city manager, who will be chosen on the basis of qualifications and experience. The mayor and council members are defined as part-time; they make policies rather than "running" the city.

Mr. Dye thanked the guests, and the meeting was adjourned.

Gayle Lesser, Secretary

