

Chair

Ray Cobb

Planning Director

Tonya Caddle



Commissioners' Meeting Room

124 W Elm Street

Graham, NC 27253

July 20, 2023 at 7:00 PM

ALAMANCE COUNTY PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

Virtual-

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1QADkhkyUpac9rMs42imjA>

Members Present

Ray Cobb, *Chair*

Rodney Cheek

Ernest Bare

Stephen Dodson

Bill Poe

Amie Perkins

Anthony Pierce

Arthur Hall

Eric McPherson

Sandy Ellington-Graves

Members Absent

Stephen Dodson

Vaughn Willoughby

Blake Cobb

Julian Doby

John Paisley

Staff Present

Tonya Caddle, *Planning Director*

Ian Shannon, *Planner I*

Ryan Langley, *Env. Health Supervisor*

Rob Snow, *Env. Health Program Specialist*

Brian Baker, *Assistant County Manager*

Rik Stevens, *County Attorney*

Jesse Gwynn, *Deputy Fire Marshall*

I. CALL TO ORDER

Called to order at 7:01pm.

II. ROLL CALL

Staff handled roll call via in-person roster.

III. APPROVAL OF PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

1. May 11, 2023

Motion to accept as corrected, changing the word "week" to "month" when discussing Alamance County's population growth: Rodney Cheek

Second: Anthony Pierce

Vote: Unanimous

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS*

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1. Public Input on Minimum Lot Sizes

Rodney Cheek addressed the board and those who had come for public comment by talking about the current minimum lot sizes and how this discussion had started with the board in general. He mentioned that land can be more easily developed in Alamance County and his intention in starting this discussion was to have greater control over rapidly growing residential development. He noted that the meeting was a public input session, not a public hearing, and that the purpose was to gather information to be able to make a better decision at a later time.

Ian Shannon went over the procedure for public comments and clarified that there were no proposed changes to the ordinance at this time, that this was an opportunity for the Board to receive public input before making any official proposals.

Max Morgan told the board he believed lot sizes should stay the same, and said that he wanted them to consider cluster developments with smaller lots.

Jason Summers started by saying that he has lived for 20 years in the southern part of the county. He told the board that he has seen wells go dry before, and that he was very concerned with water. He wanted some more information on an approved subdivision near him on Perry Road and said he would like lot sizes to stay the same. He also told the Board that he would hope the county would not feel competition to put in a high cluster of homes in rural areas, noting that there was not enough infrastructure for increased traffic.

Tom Lane talked about a big tract of land sold between Mandale and Highway 87, and another tract near Eli Whitney that might be 100 acres. He also mentioned that he did not hear anything about this meeting. There were no postcards, nothing in the newspaper. He would appreciate giving people near these developments more information. He said he wasn't sure what all of the current regulations were, but he has heard developers talk about there being very few restrictions on land in the county.

Rodney Cheek chimed in and said that they were not trying to limit what people can do with their land, but trying to manage growth to keep up with county resources.

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Tom said that their concern was water and that he would push for larger lots. He was worried about responsibility for drying up wells. He also mentioned that he didn't want to do disservice for development.

Kevin Sasser told the board that he would like to keep the current standards. He said that he does work in development and owns a farm. He told the board that these decisions impact peoples' livelihoods. He stated that people working in construction and development know this, that there is not much affordable housing in the county right now. He said that development isn't as possible unless you sell land as a large farm.

Jerry Cooper stated that he had a different interest angle. He had spent a career calling on farmers and his decisions impacted their income. He agreed with Rodney over not wanting to stop people from selling their land for the maximum amount they could get but argued that increasing lot sizes does inhibit that. He stated that this was a form of retirement income for many farmers who had spent their lives working their land. He told the board that he was in favor of the current standards.

Jay Burke stated that he was on the planning board for 13 years, and that he is a lifelong resident of the county. He said that the only thing worse than being on the board is not being on the board, and that he appreciates the current board and government. He said that he has worked with the current rules for 30 years. He has a very small development advisory role right now. He stated that to have a 30,000 square foot lot on septic conditions need to be perfect. For other lots a community water system is necessary and the county does not have public sewer or water. The northern part of the county doesn't perc well, and a small percentage of the south is optimum. He noted that development is a blessing and curse. He operates a junkyard and has 500 houses near him. He told the board that those people have a right.

Jeff Allred stated that the biggest thing he hears about is the money. He said that there are some landowners that can only really give their kids the land itself, and that increasing the lot size minimums would be limiting what they could sell. He told the board that he thinks there might be more pressing issues than just overpopulating, mentioning that it takes 12 weeks for a soil improvement permit right now compared to 4 weeks in other counties.

Ken Walker told the board that as a real estate agent and former board member, this discussion seemed like working backwards. He mentioned the lack of land-use zoning in

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the county and that lots of different uses can be side by side. He suggested that if the board was going to make a change it needs to be more orderly. He said that it was a struggle enough to develop as it is and that the board also has to consider the infrastructure that goes into these kinds of developments.

Ike Holt said that he is a former board member from when the current 30,000 square foot minimum was put into place. He recounted that the board had a hard time convincing the commissioners to go with it and that they wanted an acre. The argument was affordability, but roads were also a concern. He argued that affordability is something to always remember. He stated that he knew all of the industry coming into the county would strain the housing industry here. He told the board that he would not have problems going up to an acre minimum lot size but said that the board also needs to think about the little guy here. He stated that there are a lot of people in the county who make just above minimum wage and that those people deserve an opportunity to find somewhere to live too.

Nina Allred stated that if her family hadn't given her land then her and her husband could not have afforded it at all. They have 2 acres and a house, and the recent tax increase had hit them hard. She told the board that they could not have afforded to pay for taxes, built a house, etc. off of farm income alone. She said that she wouldn't want a big subdivision near her but it wasn't up for her to decide what other people could do with their own land. She reiterated that people starting out right now would not be able to afford land if minimum lot sizes increased.

Judy Shaver made a point to the board that if you get more people in with more density then that would require more schools and more taxes.

V. BOARD/COMMISSIONER RESPONSES

Ray Cobb brought up the topic of affordability, arguing that nothing was really truly affordable in this economy. He mentioned the new school and how expensive it was to build but now it would need to be staffed and there was already another new school being discussed. He stated that the county's resources were overburdened. He stated that the intent of this was not to limit people selling their land but to limit larger developers coming in and taking advantage of the county. He said that aren't trying to impact affordability but also want to work with preserving the rural character of the county. There was also some

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discussion on water tables and well failures. Rob Snow commented that there were currently no county level considerations for water tables with well permitting. He mentioned that there were some projects in the north of the county that required multiple drill attempts for wells but he had not seen many major or long-lasting difficulties with wells or well failures in the county.

There was some discussion on current development trends and what some average lot sizes were. A common consensus was that new lots were being done around one or two acres. Jeff Allred made the point that around 25 to 30% of land gets taken up by infrastructure with larger developments as well. Sandy Ellington-Graves talked about her experience as a realtor and that a majority of the lots she worked with were over an acre. She also mentioned the new schools and stated that they were not trying to stop growth in the county because the county needs new schools but rather manage that growth. There was some more discussion on water and consideration for aquifers and a suggestion was made by Ron Spinhoven to have more consideration there. Ryan Langley clarified that setbacks were the primary consideration for wells at the moment under current regulation.

Nina Allred stated that there were a lot of people present with a lot of information about development that most people did not have. She urged the board to take more consideration in their research for these meetings. Amie Perkins asked if there was a way that the board could get some data on septic permits and average lot sizes and also noted that further meetings and more discussion might be necessary. There was also some minor discussion on how a large part of the county is impacted by Jordan Lake watershed rules and some other watersheds. The general consensus was that while the current lot size minimum was 30,000 square feet it is rare to have the right conditions in order to achieve that. The board decided that it needed to gather some more information and come back for further discussion.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

None at this time.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS/DISCUSSION

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IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn: Bill Poe

Second: Sandy Ellington-Graves

Vote: Unanimous

Adjourned at 8:57.

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