Effingham County Georgia
Board of Commissioners

Damon M. Rahn, Chairman at Large
Forrest F. Floyd, District 1
Roger Burdette, District 2
Jamie Deloach, District 3
Elizabeth Helmly, District 4
Phil Kieffer, District 5

WORK SESSION MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 14, 2025

The Board of Commissioners of Effingham County, Georgia, Mr. Damon Rahn, Mr. Forrest Floyd, Mr. Jamie Deloach, Ms. Elizabeth Helmly, and Mr. Phil Kieffer met in work session at 10:00am to 3:00pm on Thursday, August 14, 2025 in the Commissioners Meeting Chambers at the Effingham County Administrative Complex located at 804 South Laurel Street Springfield, Georgia 31329.

STAFF PARTICIPATION

Mr. Tim Callanan – County Manager, Mr. Michael King – Assistant County Manager, Mr. Edward Newberry – County Attorney, Ms. Stephanie Johnson – County Clerk, Ms. Tasheena Shiggs – Deputy County Clerk, Ms. Chelsie Fernald – Planning Manager, Ms. Jennifer Rose – Planner I, Ms. Kimberly Barlett – Senior Planner, Ms. Maraya Durham – I.T. Support Specialist III.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Dave Burns, Ryan Thompson, Travis Bazemore, Anthony Rocco, Caleb Shoultz, Rob Merick.

I - CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rahn called the session to order at 10:04am

II- WORK SESSION TOPICS

DISCUSSION OF THE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS AND HOME OCCUPATION AND RESIDENTIAL BUSINESS ORDINANCES (1):

Planning Manager Fernald initiated the discussion by proposing to begin with the home occupation and residential business ordinance, followed by a review of the zoning districts.

Planner 1 Rose provided an overview of the proposed changes to the home occupation ordinance. The proposed changes would remove the two-axle vehicle restriction for daily pickups and do not include specific provisions for waste disposal or environmental standards.

The current ordinance was identified as having loosely defined regulations for noise, dust, and vibration, which makes consistent enforcement challenging. The new ordinance aims to address this by providing a more comprehensive and enforceable framework.

County Manager Callanan, Commissioner Kieffer, and Commissioner Helmly discussed the county's limited authority over trailer operations, noting that violations would be grounds for approval revocation.

Ms. Rose then detailed the proposed residential business ordinance, which provides a clearer framework for incidental use. The ordinance would establish maximum limits for outdoor activity areas, specify setbacks, and include requirements for screening. It would also set a noise limit of 55 dBA and prohibit certain types of equipment. To operate under this new ordinance, a conditional use permit would be required, along with a detailed floor plan and a business operational schedule.

Planner 1 Rose continued with the outdoor activity section of the ordinance. It prohibits outside storage, display, and the outdoor use of power equipment except during designated hours and retains character requirements.

Discussion continued with the Board, County Manager Callanan and Planning Manager Fernald regarding the sign ordinance.

Resident Caleb Schultz inquired about a discrepancy between the documents presented at the meeting and those included in the agenda packet for the upcoming Board of Commissioners meeting. In response, Planning Manager Fernald clarified that the submission deadline for the agenda packet had already elapsed, and the documents included were the most current versions available at that time. She assured the Board that the updated materials would be posted for the upcoming meeting.

In a follow-up question, Mr. Schultz asked about the addition of runoff specifications to the waste disposal section. County Manager Callanan confirmed that all uses must comply with EPD regulations and that any chemicals, such as those from pressure washing, must be environmentally friendly.

Regarding the requirement for backyard space, the Board explained that this provision was added to accommodate businesses that might need a small outdoor area, such as a daycare facility.

The discussion transitioned to updates for the R-1 zoning district, beginning with an updated intent statement for clarity. A key change is the reduction of the minimum lot size from 12,000 square feet to half an acre. Significant modifications were also made by integrating a modified set of design standards from the R-5 district into the R-1 district, though these were made less strict to suit the R-1's purpose. A key point of clarification was the new sidewalk requirement. Sidewalks will be mandatory for lots a half-acre or smaller, but not for lots larger than a half-acre. However, entrance features will be permitted on larger lots, provided they are well-integrated and approved by staff. It was confirmed that these entrance features do not need to match the homes' exterior finishes.

The minimum thickness for vinyl siding was increased to 0.04, based on recommendations from the R-5 requirements, to prevent material deformation from heat. Ryan Thompson noted that this is a step up in quality, explaining that the visual

appearance of the siding is more important than the material underneath. He shared an example of vinyl melting due to a window reflection, noting that such incidents, while rare, do occur. Lastly, Helmly recommended adding a provision regarding what is not allowed in high-wind zones, to which the County Manager agreed.

The discussion moved to the proposed R-1A ordinance. Key provisions were highlighted, including the requirement for 10% of the net usable area to be common outdoor open space, and a limitation that an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) cannot exceed 75% of the primary dwelling's square footage. This zoning district is specifically for manufactured homes on foundations, with the only change being to the minimum lot area.

Commissioner Kieffer sought clarification on the half-acre requirement, asking if it applies to both public water and sewer. County Manager Callanan confirmed that the half-acre standard applies as long as either water or sewer is available.

The conversation then addressed ADUs and "condominiums". The Board discussed a scenario where a property owner builds an ADU first. It was clarified that on lots of five acres or more, an accessory dwelling can be built first if it meets the 50-foot front setback. The minimum square footage for a residential building permit is 800 square feet, and if a condominium meets this requirement, it is permissible.

Ryan Thompson, a stakeholder committee member, voiced his opposition to the lot reduction. He expressed concern that requiring 10% open space in a half-acre lot neighborhood is excessive, especially since it is in addition to the required buffers.

The Board noted that the committee had recommended new street tree standards for the right-of-way, which are considered an improvement over the current ordinance.

Another point of discussion focused on the lot size options. County Manager Callanan expressed concern that making the R-1 district too restrictive could lead builders to opt for the least-regulated options, thus avoiding the higher standards intended for R-5.

The Board addressed a concern that while R-5 lot requirements were raised to a quarter-acre to improve neighborhood quality, developers began opting for R-1 zoning, which has similar lot sizes but allows for smaller homes.

A discussion on variance requests ensued. Chairman Rahn was asked about the possibility of creating a specific column for these requests in the ordinance. Commissioner Kieffer noted that any changes to R-5 lot sizes would require additional conditions.

The conversation also touched on development costs. Anthony Rocco of Stanley Morton Homes suggested that while a shift to half-acre lots with 6,000–8,000 square-foot homes would be desirable, the wider frontages would significantly increase development costs, potentially raising home prices to a range of $550,000–$600,000. It was noted that R-1 zoning has historically used 100-foot frontages, making variance requests for that district unlikely.

A proposal was made to create an R-5A zone with a quarter-acre minimum and a reduced green space requirement of 20%.

Commissioner Kieffer supported a 40-foot minimum structure width, mentioning that a 24-foot width aligns with a standard two-car garage.

To maintain community aesthetics, it was suggested that street trees could be located outside of the right-of-way, which would eliminate the need for space between trees and sidewalks.

The discussion continued with the topic of street trees, which Ms. Fernald and the Chairman will address at a steering committee meeting. A consultant is also working to refine sidewalk and width requirements. It was noted that the street tree issue has been a significant point of debate, as the committee aims to balance aesthetic appeal with the need to maintain utilities.

A challenge was identified in the discrepancy between the county's and the Health Department's regulations on minimum lot width for septic systems. The Health Department requires a minimum of 150 feet, which is greater than the county's current standard, forcing developers to revise their plans. It was suggested that the ordinance should either align with the Health Department's requirement or explicitly reference it. The group considered defining minimum lot width at the building line rather than the frontage, which would help accommodate properties on cul-de-sacs and could potentially reduce development costs.

When asked about planting native trees, Ryan Thompson suggested creating a list of prohibited species rather than a limited list of approved ones. He emphasized the importance of using diverse, non-invasive plants and ensuring the ordinance correctly addresses the need for street trees.

The work session continued with a review of the proposed R-5 ordinance. Planning Manager Fernald noted that the steering committee recommended reducing the minimum lot area to 6,000 square feet from the previous 6,600 square feet. A significant change is the removal of the minimum road frontage requirement in R-5, which will now only specify the minimum lot width at the building line. The ordinance will also strictly prohibit individual septic systems, requiring all R-5 developments to utilize public water and sewer.

Key additions to the ordinance include a 25% open space requirement and the separate parceling of buffers to prevent residents from clearing them. The ordinance will also permit townhomes, detached townhomes, and duplexes within R-5 developments, provided they are constructed in accordance with R-2 standards. This change aims to prevent the need for multiple zoning districts within a single neighborhood.

A motion to cap the percentage of rental units at 20% until a year after the certificate of occupancy is issued was discussed. The purpose of this measure is to encourage developers to use PD or R-3 zoning for "build-to-rent" projects, ensuring community awareness of the development's intent.

Chairman Rahn emphasized that these rules are necessary to prevent developers from changing HOA rules to suit their needs, noting that the covenants remain enforceable even if the HOA dissolves.

Furthermore, it was decided that applicants requesting a variance will be required to provide an architectural visual of the proposed structure, which will be included with the preliminary plat. This requirement is intended to give the Board a clearer understanding of the development's visual impact, particularly in higher-density areas.

The discussion continued with the proposed R-5 open space requirement, which is a significant increase to 25% of the net usable area. While subdivision design requirements remain the same, there are notable changes to road standards, specifically introducing the concept of a "ball belt parking" design. This would include a wider grassy area between the curb and the sidewalk, potentially resolving the issue of planting street trees.

The Board also addressed parking solutions for R-2 and R-3 townhomes. It was suggested that garages be set back to provide a longer driveway pad for additional vehicles. Concerns were raised that requiring a garage setback on a 40-foot-wide home can restrict floor plan options. A solution was proposed to allow homes to be set forward on the lot to achieve a more traditional aesthetic, while requiring a larger backyard and windows on the garage doors to mitigate the visual impact of a forward-facing garage. This change aims to provide flexibility for builders while maintaining the desired streetscape.

The Board also discussed roadway design. While a 22-foot-wide road without parking and a 28-foot-wide road with parking were initially options, builders consistently chose the narrower option. County Manager Callanan stated that a minimum 28-foot section would now be required to accommodate on-street parking and improve safety. Ryan Thompson supported this decision, noting that narrower roads make it challenging to accommodate on-street parking.

The discussion moved to new development standards for R-5 zoning. Planning Manger Fernald proposed requiring an architectural garage door and an eyebrow roof or overhang to improve visual aesthetics. The committee recommended a more flexible approach, suggesting that only the architectural garage door with windows and hardware be required, while giving builders optional points for other architectural features like a roof over the garage. It was emphasized that this allows for a variety of elevations.

The conversation included insights from builders like Pulte Homes, Syntex, and Del Web. They noted that garage doors are a significant visual element on narrow lots, and that requiring architectural garage doors can improve the streetscape. A key concern was that increasing lot width to accommodate a larger home would significantly raise development costs. The committee supported a smaller minimum lot area of 6,000 square feet, which aligns better with developer needs and market demand.

The Board is proposing a significant increase in the open space requirement for R-5 to 25% of the net usable area. The goal is to ensure a better quality of life and a balance between development and green space. The open space ordinance will be a separate document to ensure it can be applied consistently across all districts with open space requirements. The Board also clarified that open space could include

amenities and hardscapes, while green space refers to vegetated areas. To encourage the development of amenities, the committee is considering a tiered credit system where hard amenities like pools and clubhouses would receive more credit toward the open space requirement than a simple field.

The discussion also touched on the use of traffic studies to determine the need for turn lanes, with the understanding that the entire anticipated unit count must be considered.

III – ADJOURNMENT

At 3:05 pm, there was no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Damon Rahn, Chairman

Stephanie D. Johnson, County Clerk

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SEPTEMBER 16, 2025