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
APRIL 15, 2025

The Board of Commissioners of Effingham County, Georgia, Mr. Damon Rahn, Mr. Forrest Floyd, Mr. Roger Burdette, Mr. Jamie Deloach, Ms. Beth Helmly and Mr. Phil Kieffer met in work session at 4:00 pm on Tuesday, April 15, 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 Administrator, Mr. Edward Newberry – County Attorney, Ms. Stephanie Johnson – County Clerk, Ms. Tasheena Shiggs – Deputy County Clerk, Ms. Chelsie Fernald – Planning Manager, Ms. Kimberly Barlett – Planner I, Ms. Samantha Easton – Planner II, Mr. Steve Candler – Development Services Director, Mr. Xerxes Sabb – I.T. Support Specialist, Ms. Jennifer Rose – GIS Technician and Mrs. Sarah Mausolf – HR and Risk Management Director

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

None.

I - CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rahn called the session to order at 4:06pm

II- WORK SESSION TOPICS

DISCUSSION OF A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY CODE OF ORDINANCES, SECTION 3.3 - ACCESSORY STRUCTURES IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS (1):

Director of Development Services, Steve Candler, presented proposed revisions to the accessory structure ordinance, noting that the current regulations, particularly in R-1 and PD zoning districts, have generated numerous variance requests. The proposed amendment focuses on maximum height, suggesting a limit of fifteen (15) feet above the finished grade to the eave of the adjacent principal structure, not exceeding the principal structure's overall height.

Board members engaged in a detailed discussion regarding the clarity and implications of this language, specifically the measurement to the eave. Concerns were raised about potential unintended limitations on eave height and the need for clear, enforceable standards. The existing ten (10) foot setback requirement for accessory structures from the primary dwelling was noted, along with the provision

allowing breezeways to be considered part of the primary structure and thus match its height.

The purpose of the fifteen (15) foot limit was explained as an attempt to create a consistent standard across properties with varying principal structure heights. It was clarified that while the structure's height would be capped at fifteen (15) feet, the roof ridge could not exceed the height of the main house, allowing for varied roof pitches. The distinction between accessory structures and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) was highlighted, with ADUs (habitable structures) to be governed by separate regulations yet to be defined. The current ordinance prohibits habitation of accessory structures. The potential future classification of unfinished rooms intended for later occupancy as ADUs was also discussed.

A suggestion was made to simplify the height regulation for R-1 districts to a flat twenty (20) feet, not to exceed the principal structure's height, as this was believed to address a significant majority of the current variance requests and streamline the process. The role of Homeowners Associations (HOAs) and their potential architectural restrictions were acknowledged.

The Board expressed a desire for clear and unambiguous language in the ordinance to facilitate effective administration and enforcement. There was a general inclination towards further exploring a twenty (20) foot maximum height for accessory structures in R-1 districts, contingent on the structure not exceeding the height of the primary dwelling.

~~**DISCUSSION OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AR-1, AR-2, THE NEWLY PROPOSED AR-3, B-1, B-2, B-3, L-I (LIGHT INDUSTRIAL), H-I (HEAVY INDUSTRIAL), AND THE TABLE OF PERMITTED USES (TPU) (2):**~~
This item was not discussed.

EFFINGHAM COUNTY MASTER BIKE PEDESTRIAN PLAN (3):
County Engineer Jonathan Hulme provided an overview of the draft Master Bike Pedestrian Plan, a collaborative effort between the Foresight Group and county staff. The plan identifies potential routes for multi-use trails and bike lanes throughout the county.

Mr. Hulme outlined the extensive stakeholder engagement process, which included meetings with the Georgia Hi-Lo group, city and municipal representatives, and the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB). Public surveys and a general public meeting were also conducted to gather community input.

Board members were invited to provide feedback on the proposed routes prior to formal adoption. Specific routes of interest included Old Augusta Road and Ebenezer Road (Highway 275), given the observed cycling activity. While acknowledging limited direct jurisdiction over GDOT-controlled roads, Mr. Holmes indicated these could be included as recommendations. Existing infrastructure on Stillwell Road and the proposed Georgia Hi-Lo Trail, a significant north-south route, were also discussed.
Mr. Hulme provided an update on the Georgia Hi-Lo Trail, noting that plans are

currently under review by staff and Georgia Power due to easement considerations. Phased implementation of the trail is anticipated, potentially starting with a section from Guyton. The trails are designed to be pedestrian-friendly, with a proposed width of ten (10) to twelve (12) feet for separated asphalt pathways.

Concerns were raised regarding the safety of cyclists on high-traffic roads, emphasizing the need for separate infrastructure. The limitations of existing, narrow bike lanes directly on highways were also noted.

Potential funding sources for the plan were discussed, including TSPLOST funds, the possibility of incorporating trail contributions into developer impact fees (following Savannah's model), federal bike and pedestrian funds within the MPO area, and private grants pursued by groups like the Hi-Lo Trail organization. The concept of incentivizing developers to include multi-use trails in their subdivisions as part of green space requirements was also introduced.

The importance of creating a connected network of trails for safer and more accessible active transportation was underscored. The Safe Streets for All federal grant program, focused on safety improvements, was mentioned as a separate funding avenue.

The Board requested that the draft Master Bike Pedestrian Plan be distributed for their review and consideration of additional routes or modifications.

JENNIFER CIRCLE TREE DISCUSSION (4):

The Board addressed a situation concerning a significant tree located on Jennifer Circle, the root system of which has caused damage to the adjacent roadway, prompted by a citizen complaint.

Director of Development Services Candler reported that an assessment by a certified arborist identified the tree as a potential "champion tree," a designation for the largest specimens of their species within the state, with an estimated age exceeding 300 years. Recognizing the tree's ecological and historical significance, the county has previously invested in its preservation, including canopy stabilization.

To mitigate the ongoing roadway damage while prioritizing the tree's health, a proposed solution was presented. This involves the strategic closure of the section of Jennifer Circle directly beneath the tree's canopy to regular vehicular traffic. To maintain emergency access and connectivity for the Park West neighborhood, a restricted-use access point would be established over the existing ditch line. This access would be clearly designated for emergency vehicles, with consideration potentially given to school bus routes.

To physically delineate the closed area and protect the tree, the installation of a low-profile, open-style fence, consistent with county park standards, was suggested. Provisions for pedestrian and bicycle access through the fenced area would be incorporated. A survey was conducted among the approximately 40-50 property owners directly affected by the proposed road closure. The results indicated that approximately 75% of respondents were in favor of the concept of road closure, although the initial survey presented a cul-de-sac design rather than the proposed

emergency access. The remaining 25% expressed concerns related to the loss of an alternative egress route and potential impacts on school bus services.

The Board discussed appropriate signage to clearly indicate the restricted nature of the emergency access, acknowledging the challenges of preventing unauthorized use. The possibility of incorporating informational signage highlighting the historical significance of the champion tree was also raised.

Director of Development Services Candler will prepare the necessary documentation for a public hearing to formally consider the proposed road closure. This will include public notification to all affected property owners, providing ample opportunity for community input prior to any final decision.

III – ADJOURNMENT

At 4:57 pm, being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Damon Rahn, Chairman

Stephanie D. Johnson, County Clerk

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MAY 6, 2025