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
JULY 01, 2025

The Board of Commissioners of Effingham County, Georgia, Mr. Damon Rahn, Mr. Forrest Floyd, Mr. Roger Burdette, Ms. Elizabeth Helmly, and Mr. Phil Kieffer met in work session at 3:00 pm on Tuesday, July 1, 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. Edward Newberry – County Attorney, Ms. Stephanie Johnson – County Clerk, Ms. Tasheena Shiggs – Deputy County Clerk, Mr. Clint Hodges – Fire Chief & EMA Director, Mr. Josh Moody – Deputy Building Official, Ms. Chelsie Fernald – Planning Manager, Ms. Kimberly Barlett – Community Planner, Mr. Xerxes Sabb – I.T. Support Specialist III, Mr. Mark Lastinger – Public Information Coordinator.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Ryan Thompson, Lindsey Smith, Travis Bazemore, Dave Burns, Jimmy Blakey, Rita Elliott, David Howze.

I - CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rahn called the session to order at 3:10pm

II- WORK SESSION TOPICS

DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED ZONING ORDINANCES AR-1, AR-2, AR-3, B-1, B-2, B-3, L-I, H-I, AND TABLE OF PERMITTED USES (1):

The work session delved into proposed revisions for the County's zoning ordinances, covering AR-1, AR-2, AR-3, B-1, B-2, B-3, Light Industrial (LI), Heavy Industrial (HI), and the Table of Permitted Uses (TPU).

Discussion on Agricultural Residential (AR) districts began with an overview of existing AR-1 (5-acre minimum) and AR-2 (1-acre minimum) zoning. A key concern was the increasing trend of subdividing AR-1 properties for development and sale rather than for traditional family transfers. While the Steering Committee considered eliminating AR-2, the recommendation was to retain it but restrict rezoning to family subdivisions or properties under 2.5 acres, with an affidavit required to certify family intent. This aims to protect rural character.

A new AR-3 classification was introduced for non-family subdivision requests, allowing a minimum 2.5-acre lot with two residential units. The Board debated balancing property rights with preserving rural character, discussing the enforceability of affidavits and the potential for a cleaner solution by simplifying to AR-1 and AR-3 only. The impact of two dwellings on 2.5 acres in AR-3 on density was also noted.

Steering Committee representative Ryan Thompson expressed enthusiasm for the proposed AR-3 classification, noting that as a Planning Board member, they frequently observe requests to subdivide larger agricultural parcels (five to ten acres). Mr. Thompson stated that they have previously voted against rezoning to AR-2 for family-based subdivisions, indicating a lack of perceived benefit in prioritizing familial divisions over other property considerations. He also expressed surprise at the current allowance for half-acre lots within AR-2, recommending its removal and advocating for the Future Land Use Map to serve as the guiding document for addressing non-conforming properties that regularly come before the Board.

Steering Committee representative and local real estate agent Lindsey Smith expressed strong concerns regarding proposed restrictions on property rights related to family-only transfers. She questioned the long-term implications for property owners, particularly in unforeseen circumstances such as a child's inability or unwillingness to inherit the land. Ms. Smith highlighted the potential negative impact on property valuation if sales are limited solely to family members, arguing that such restrictions could inadvertently create significant problems for landowners by limiting market access.

Travis Bazemore, representing EMC Engineering, inquired about the County's regulations regarding a waiting period for subsequent property subdivisions, noting his understanding that such a rule had recently been removed. Discussion then shifted to a minimum road frontage requirement. It was observed that while all three AR designations require a 100-foot minimum road frontage, the County's standard for accessing landlocked parcels is a 60-foot easement. This discrepancy was highlighted as potentially illogical, suggesting that aligning the minimum lot frontage with the 60-foot easement standard could provide greater consistency.

Dave Burns expressed skepticism regarding the proposed elimination of AR-2 zoning, citing the substantial number of existing properties already designated with this classification. The perspective was that properties should retain the right to adhere to the zoning regulations in effect at the time of their original designation. Speaking personally, the member voiced approval for AR-3 zoning, noting its suitability given the availability of open land and road frontage.

Jimmy Blakey articulated a dual perspective on property rights, stating a belief in individual autonomy over land use while simultaneously acknowledging the necessity of zoning regulations for the protection of adjacent properties and community standards.

Rita Elliott, representing Effingham Georgia Green AG, expressed her view that the proposed AR-1, AR-2, and AR-3 zoning changes alone may be insufficient to preserve the County's intended rural character. She advocated for the Board to consider broader conservation zoning strategies. Ms. Elliott outlined various methods for land conservation, including direct property acquisition, establishing conservation easements, and securing grants for land purchases. She cited examples of properties already placed in conservation trusts, as well as the Green Island project in Chatham County which utilized a $3 million grant for conservation land acquisition. She also mentioned the state's farmland preservation grant program, which matches local funding to acquire development rights from active farms.

For Commercial (B) districts, simplified standards will primarily reference the TPU for permitted uses. Key proposed changes include a new 15% green space requirement (with 50% street frontage landscaping credit) and a sidewalk requirement along public frontages, offering a payment-in-lieu option to fund future connections. Residential uses are also proposed to be removed from B-districts, directing live-work concepts to Planned Development (PD) zoning.

The review of Industrial (I) districts proposed separating the current I-1 zoning into distinct Light Industrial (LI) and Heavy Industrial (HI) categories. Both will have a 15% green space requirement, a new addition. The primary differentiator between LI and HI will be significantly higher buffer requirements for Heavy Industrial, providing the Board with more control over development intensity.

Finally, the Table of Permitted Uses (TPU) was highlighted as a major focus, with a plan to add specific definitions for each use to reduce ambiguity and allow for future amendments. Broader discussions throughout the session touched on the tension between property rights and rural preservation, the complexities of non-conforming lots, the practicalities of septic tank requirements on smaller lots, and the ongoing need to balance growth with maintaining the County's unique character.

DISCUSSION OF SECTION 3.4 - BUFFERS OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY CODE OF ORDINANCES (2):

The Board recommended specific penalties for disturbing buffers, including a minimum fine of $500 per quarter acre (up to a maximum of $1,000 per half acre). Property owners would also be required to replant the disturbed buffer at up to triple the standard rate, following a landscaping plan approved by the County administration.

It was noted that the current standard for buffer planting is one tree per every 15 linear feet, and that buffers require ongoing maintenance. The discussion highlighted the need for more specific requirements regarding replanting and emphasized the importance of a stop work order as a key enforcement tool. Work would not be permitted to resume until the buffer is fully restored to the County's satisfaction, a process that could take up to six months. Concerns were raised about existing buffer areas, such as the Goshen buffer, being misused for storage. The importance of a tree ordinance was also underscored, as it would enable the County to require tree

surveys for buffers and prevent clear-cutting.

David Howze inquired about regulations for industrial properties. The County clarified that larger industrial parks, which comprise a significant portion of the industrial-zoned land, maintain a 150-foot buffer between industrial and residential properties.

It was also noted that even if general buffer requirements change, specific conditions tied to a property's original rezoning, such as a 300-foot buffer and a 12-foot berm on Chimney Road, would remain enforceable.

III – ADJOURNMENT

At 5:07 pm, there being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Damon Rahn, Chairman

Stephanie D. Johnson, County Clerk

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JULY 15, 2025