



**FREEPORT PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD**

July 12, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes
6:00 pm, City Council Chambers, Freeport City Hall

I. Meeting Called to Order

Meeting called to order at 6:04. Board members in attendance were Kevin Louthain-Chairman, Steve Thomas, and Lisa Robertson. Staff in attendance were Latilda Hughes-Neel-Planning Director, Mark Martin-City Manager, Marge Gay-Planning Coordinator, and Kelsea Roberts-Planning Intern. Latilda Hughes-Neel led the invocation. Chairman Kevin Louthain led pledge of allegiance.

II. Meeting Minutes to be Approved.

a. 06/07/2023 Regular Meeting Minutes (TAB 1)

Lisa Robertson moved to approve the minutes for the previous meeting, which was seconded by Steve Thomas. All were in favor, minutes were approved.

III. Freeport Hotel Major Development (TAB 2)

Ms. Hughes-Neel presented information regarding the Marquis Way expansion project which is underway to extend Marquis Way west across Four Mile Creek to Shipyard Road.

Because Kevin Louthain recused himself as an affected homeowner, there would be no quorum for this presentation. It was decided that the next item on the agenda would be presented in hopes that Board Member Manny Vitale would arrive to make a quorum for this agenda item.

Mr. Vitale arrived at 6:18PM; he said he was late due to traffic issues.

Ms. Hughes-Neel introduced the Freeport Hotel Project. The developer is requesting a sidewalk buyout in the amount of \$4,725. Staff recommendation is approval with conditions as stated.

Ms. Hughes-Neel addressed the board and attendees and gave history of the Commercial zoning designation and the PDP in proximity, LaGrange Landing and Lafayette Creek Landing, with the purpose of illustrating the appropriateness of a hotel in that area.



Ms. Hughes-Neel advised that Chairman Louthain was recusing himself as an affected property owner. Chairman Louthain clarified that he was not a part of the development, as there have been allegations that he was involved in the development personally.

Engineer David Forstrom presented information regarding the project, informing the Board that this would be a 3-story Mainstay Suites Extended Stay.

Lisa Robertson inquired if the hotel would be providing any security or cameras on the property. Mr. Forstrom advised that there would be cameras in place, but not security.

Steve Thomas inquired if homeowners had been informed at the time of purchase that their property was zoned commercial. The attendees' consensus was that they had not been informed.

Lisa Robertson inquired if the information might have been in any of the paperwork received in the purchase process. The attendee consensus was that it was not.

Citizen Shawna Baxley stated that HOA members were not aware of the zoning, wondered why as a residential community a hotel should be allowed and why the homeowners were not provided zoning information at the time of purchase. Inquired why the zoning did not change when the PDP was approved. Ms. Hughes-Neel informed that the zoning was commercial before the planned development project was approved and that all zoning is public information.

Citizen Bruce Merrill stated that he is a Lagrange Landing owner that resides in one of the houses outside the gated community and is on Marquis way. He stated concerns about traffic, effects on wildlife, and interruption of wetlands. He stated that the location in question was not the place for a hotel.

Attorney Amelia Beard from Moorehead Law Group representing the LaGrange Landing Owners Association inquired about plans for a buffer, including anything that would help with noise. She also inquired about the plans for undisturbed land on the other side of the proposed lot for the hotel. She requests that the City either not approve or approve with conditions of an increased buffer to help with sound and privacy. Engineer Forstrom advised that the buffer plans meet all compatibility requirements for a buffer. He stated that there were no plans for a fence at that time, but the developer was open to including one. Additionally, there are no plans for the undisturbed land.



Citizen Thomas Fitzsimmon voiced concerns about the potential rise in crime due to the nature of the Extended Stay hotel, increased traffic, decreased property value, emergency evacuation delays, and violation of privacy.

Citizen Melody Patton voiced concerns for the safety of children in the area due to the transient element, potential sex offenders, and tenants of the hotel potentially intruding into the neighborhood.

Chairman Louthain inquired if the HOA could submit a rezoning request on behalf of the neighborhoods. Ms. Hughes-Neel informed that it would require the permission and signature of every single homeowner in both neighborhoods. Additionally, rezoning the neighborhoods would not affect the property rights and development rights of the abutting commercial zone.

Citizen Matthew Patton raised concerns about decreased property value and asked for some clarification regarding the buffer.

Mr. Forstrom addressed buffer issues and stated that the owner would be willing to install fencing. Ms. Hughes-Neel stated that ordinance allows for between 4 to 10 feet of fencing.

Citizen Crystal Schoenberg voiced concerns about the Marquis Way speed limit, traffic, overflow parking, and lack of sidewalks. Mr. Forstrom advised that hotels are one of the lowest commercial traffic generators.

Citizens Wynn and Sharon Ferrell raised concerns about traffic and requested the board recommend denial of the hotel project. Ms. Ferrell inquired what Freeport had to offer that would bring occupants to this hotel instead of one closer to the beach. Ms. Ferrell also expressed disapproval of the Marquis Way Extension. Mr. Ferrell expressed his wishes that something other than a hotel would be put in place in that area.

Citizen Charles Willahan expressed that in his opinion a hotel does not make sense in that spot and his wishes for rezoning. Mr. Willahan also expressed a desire for a traffic light on Highway 20 behind Publix.

Citizen Bruce Merrill expressed concerns about traffic.

Citizen Jan Heatherly, whose property is directly adjacent to the hotel lot voiced concerns about safety, privacy, and traffic. Ms. Heatherly requested the board recommend denial.



Steve Thomas inquired about school bus routes in the neighborhood. Citizens stated the buses go into the neighborhood except for summer school.

Chairman Louthain closed the discussion to public comment.

Mr. Vitale inquired what the distance was from the Northern corner of the hotel to the nearest residential property line. Mr. Forstrom advises it abuts nearest residential property line.

Lisa Robertson advised that she felt as if cameras were not a sufficient security measure and that a security guard should be provided.

Steve Thomas made a motion to deny recommendation of the project to the City Council. This was seconded by Lisa Robertson. Mr. Vitale agreed and the motion to deny was unanimous.

IV. Alaqua Business Park Major Development (TAB 3)

Ms. Hughes-Neel presented the Alaqua Business Park Major Development. The developer Y Scape LLC requested a sidewalk buyout in the amount of \$4,725. Staff recommendation is approval with conditions of sidewalk buyout.

Engineer of record, Scott Jenkins presented his information for the project. He informed that the parcel was rezoned in 2019.

Chairman Louthain inquired if there is roadwork to be done and if there is a plan for a sidewalk to be put in place. Ms. Hughes-Neel stated there are no plans. Mr. Jenkins stated that their request was to tie into the existing multimodal pathway in lieu of creating a sidewalk.

Citizen David Douglas inquired about type of businesses, traffic impacts, has a traffic study been done, noise impacts, effects on multimodal trail, and whether the developer would be providing funding for a traffic light in that area. Ms. Hughes-Neel answered that there had been a traffic study, stated that all required entities had reviewed the project and found it in compliance with City regulations. Latilda also stated that the development is not allowed to impact the multimodal path aside from putting their driveway in place. Ms. Hughes-Neel also stated in reference to the question about traffic light funding, that the current Walton County ordinance for county projects is not applicable inside the City Limits.



Citizen David Douglas further inquired if there were any mitigation measures required for the development to proceed. Ms. Hughes-Neel informed him that there was no mitigation required.

Citizen Keith Jordan stated he was one of the homeowners that received a certified letter in regard to the project. Inquired if the city has any limitations on types of entities allowed in the warehouse, hazardous materials, etc. He inquired if the certified letter was due to the type of material that would be stored or type of business going into the warehouse. Ms. Hughes-Neel advised that all major developments require notification to impacted homeowners regardless of purpose. Ms. Hughes-Neel also referred back to Citizen David Douglas' question and stated that the City does not have a noise ordinance.

Citizen Keith Jordan stated that there is information regarding a noise ordinance on the website. Ms. Hughes-Neel states she will look into the matter but reiterates that the City does not have a noise ordinance in place.

Mr. Jenkins responds to Citizen Keith Jordan stating that he does not have a list of specific tenants but that in C-2 zoning there is a list of allowable uses, none of which are Industrial. He states that they are commercial uses, a known business is a landscaping company and that similar entities would be expected.

Citizen David Douglas raised concerns about the risk of Nitrate storage in relation to the landscaping business. Mr. Douglas brings to attention the Beirut incident with an ammonium nitrate explosion that was landscaping grade. Mr. Jenkins said he predicts that fertilizer would be on the premises but that it would follow all storage regulations.

Steve Thomas motioned to approve recommendation to the City Council for this project. Lisa Robertson seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

V. Adjournment

Lisa Robertson made a motion to adjourn at 7:15PM. The motion was seconded by Steve Thomas, all were in favor.

Minutes prepared by Marge Gay and adopted by the Freeport Planning & Development Review Board on _____.



Kevin Louthain, Chair

Attest:

Kathie Gatewood

City Clerk

The City of Freeport may take action on any matter during this meeting, including items that are not set forth within this agenda.

In accordance with Section 286.26, Florida Statutes, persons with disabilities needing special accommodations to participate in this meeting should contact the City Clerk's office at 850-835-2822 by 5:00 p.m. on the day prior to the meeting.

Consistent with section 286.0105, Florida Statutes, if a person decides to appeal any decision made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, he or she will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he or she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.