

St. Joe Company Briefs Planning Commission about 110,000-acre development

By *BEN GRAFTON*

Opening the business portion of the Walton County Planning Commission meeting of July 10, Wayne Dyess, Director of Walton County Planning and Development Services advised the commission that a request has been received to continue, until the meeting of Aug. 14, the agenda item on the development order application for a spa and exhibit hall by Sandestin Hilton. He also said that a request to continue the development order application for a Long Term Master Plan in Walton and Bay Counties by the St. Joe Company until the meeting of Aug. 14 has been received, but that a representative of the St. Joe Company wants to address the commission briefly about the scope of the development at this meeting. The commission approved both requests.

Commission Chair Teddy Stewart asked the commissioners to give some thought to developing a sign-in sheet that would provide information about who attends meetings, who speaks to the commission, and what they speak about so that a more complete record of meetings will be available.

Stewart also reported that he has asked commission attorney Mark Davis to provide a half-day training session for board members on an annual basis that would include Sunshine Law subjects and what the board's role is in the development process.

Mac Carpenter of the planning staff presented a proposed ordinance to provide a General Commercial Text Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. This was explained as a move to provide more flexibility on general commercial land use designations in south Walton. An exception to the locational criteria is included for a 1.5 acre parcel on Gulsby Road within 3,000 feet of U.S. 98. Within the parcel stormwater management systems and passive recreation are allowed, however no buildings, roads, parking, etc. would be permitted.

A request was made to add the words, "on non-state owned lands" to the Commercial Text Amendment. Carpenter said he didn't have an objection to the requested change but that he didn't think it was necessary. A motion was made and approved to send the ordinance including the added language on to the Walton County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) with a recommendation for approval.

A proposed ordinance to amend the Sandestin DRI [Development of Regional Impact] Development Order was presented to the commissioners. The proposal would allow the Howard Group to develop a 60.72 acre commercial parcel, owned by them within the Grand Boulevard property, as a minor development with a future land use of Coastal Center.

The following proposed changes are requested: Define ancillary development spaces; amend the Grand Boulevard Master Plan tolerance table by adding acreage to the power line easement; use the alternate major review process; and officially recognize the Howard Group as the developer so it can submit reports to the applicable staff and agency. Staff reported that a letter from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity offers no objection to the proposed amendment.

An extensive discussion ensued with comments about current court orders, the impact on the Murray property [sometimes referred to as Blaylock's], storm water management, entitlements, open space, parking and other subjects. At the end of the discussions the commission approved a motion to send the ordinance with a recommendation for approval on to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC), but with wording that there would be no impact on the Murray property and that the Howard Group would be referred to as "a primary developer."

Jorge Gonzalez of the St. Joe Company spoke to the commission about its Bay-Walton Sector Plan for which an application will be submitted at the next commission meeting. He said, "The Sector Plan is an optional land use process preferred by Florida law for large scale geographic areas....There is a minimum acreage requirement of 15,000 acres. It is long range. The planning horizon is 20 to 50 years. It is a two step process. The first step is the master plan and the second step is the series of detailed specific area plans....The process we are currently in is just for step one....In our view it is a comprehensive and coordinated approach to land use.... It enables planning for larger functionally integrated conservation areas....And, equal in importance, it enables planning for significant regional transportation facilities. It's reviewed by local, regional and state agencies....The Planning Commission will review it, the Board of County Commissioners will review it. Full public notice. Full public

review."

Gonzalez continued, "Some basics about the Bay-Walton Sector Plan: It's an expansion and an up-date of the existing West Bay Sector Plan. The total project area of the Bay-Walton Sector Plan is 110,500 acres; 97,000 acres, roughly, are in Bay County and 13,000 acres, roughly are in Walton County....We are planning the Sector Plan comprehensively. However, it allows each local government to approve the Master Plan in its jurisdiction. So, the submittal of the Master Plan is to two local governments. We are proposing 53,000 acres of conservation land. The implementation will be gradual based on market conditions....The entire application is on the St. Joe Company website."

Emerald Coast Associates, Inc. submitted a major development order application seeking approval to amend the preservation area on Lot 3 of the E-SCAPE major development order to modify the limits of the preservation area so that construction could be undertaken south of the Coastal Construction Control Line. The development order would be approved contingent on the developer obtaining the appropriate permits from the state to build south of the Coastal Construction Control Line before construction begins.

However, the E-SCAPE plat provides that all preserved conservation areas are dedicated to the Home Owners Association (HOA). So, any proposal to modify the plat must be done by or on behalf of the HOA. In order to provide the HOA input and additional information on the development plans, a motion was approved to continue this application until the meeting of Aug. 14.

As a last item of business the commission approved sending a recommendation to approve a major development order application for the construction of a new fire station facility to the BCC. The station is to be located on a five-acre parcel south of Edgewood Circle on the east side of U. S. 331.

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