

Draft
Russell County Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 15, 2008 – 4:30 PM EST

The Planning Commission was called to order by Vice Chair Dillie Elliott. Chairman Adams was still recovering from injury he received in December. Members present were David Ellis, J.C. Batchledor, Bill Friend, Rick Perry, Dr Thomas Shelton, J.W. Brannen, Attorney Walter Gray, County Administrator LeAnn Horne kept the minutes. Also present Roger Conner of Russell County Water Authority, Chris Camp and Ben Elliott of the Engineering Department.

The minutes from December 4th 2007 were presented. A motion to approve was made by Rick Perry. Seconded by Dr Thomas Shelton. The minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

Dillie Elliott called for the new business items:

James McGill of McBride-McGill, LLC Engineering & Surveying presented/reported on Centralized Sewage Package Systems. Mr. McGill stated he is here to receive advice. This is not a primary set of plans. We're just looking for direction from the Board. We are representing Dan Carskey from Alpharetta, Georgia and others who want to develop in Cottonton, Al. Mr. Carskey is putting together property, piece by piece, and has acquired 150 acres with an option for 150 acres more and wants to get up to 3 to 4 hundred acres. This property is located on old County Road 4 at the end of the line is Saint James Road. This is Tonce Logan's Property. They are after the retired military market and are to be gated communities open to the public. The developers want to do a package treatment plant. We have sent information to the Russell County Water and Sewer Authority. The cost of that system will be assessed to the property estimated at about \$10,000 per lot. The developers want to do tax increment financing deal. In 1999 the State of Alabama allowed tax increment financing to be used. It allows and mandates the Revenue Department to have a role in this. They do collect for the taxes that pay for the infrastructure. We want to do a package treatment plant designed by Orenco. There are 18 different types of Orenco sewage systems in Alabama. A report given to congress in 1997 states a centralized system was not cost effective but recommended to use decentralized pods. There will never be a sewer line to serve the Cottonton, Alabama area. The plant and tank turn out a better quality water than the centralize systems than what they have in the city. You can process it to almost drinking water; not that it will be that. It is termed purple water. The purple water will be sold back to water the golf courses or water your own landscaping. The first phase is to get into the tax increment financing is around 200 lots. They are planning on building upscale housing, some town houses and the third phase some quad-plex(s) with 2 carports. There will be road to curb sidewalks and then the sewage treatment plant. They are planning a phase III and IV which is to include golf courses. This depends on how the economy recovers. Right now the market is bad and everyone with subdivisions is suffering. There is a (6) six-inch water line adjacent to the site and is served by Tallapoosa Electric. To make this financially feasible for the developers; the lot width is what we here today to get a wavier on.

The developer wants to put lots in the 60 and 75 foot range in the majority of Phase I. What will keep it more upscale is that there will be a homeowner association which will be maintained by them. The Homeowners Association will do all the landscaping and there will be an architectural committee who will keep up with new construction.

Bill Friend asked how many gallons per day will this package system produce. Mr. McGill: 22,500 gallons per day is what they are designed to do. Mr. Friend: questioned the cost to install and the cost per gallon? Mr. McGill: stated 450 gallons per day at 2.75 a day for this system, approximately \$30.00 per gallon(s) estimated.

Roger Conner, Russell County Water Manager stated that Mobile County charges \$4.00 per thousand gallons to treat.

Mr. McGill stated the developer pays for that. The tax increment financing picks up the tanks and plants. That is what the property owner pays to the Revenue Commission/County. The maintenance and collection side the sewer authority sets the value. We have seen ranges of \$25 to \$45.

Mr. Friend: I contacted ADEM because I wanted to know what could possibly happen; would we be held accountable for later. This person was to speak to his Supervisor to see if there was anyone experienced with any of these packaged systems and possibly set up a meeting with them.

Mr. McGill: An ADEM permit is not a health permit. I had hoped that it was but it is not. There are 16 systems right now in Mobile County with approximately 13000 customers. Mr. Friend: how many years have they been in service? Mr. Conner replied 5 years or more.

Mr. Conner stated that the water will have to be tested the same as water sold for consumption. There will be a monthly sample taken and sent off to an independent lab for testing and then submit those results to ADEM.

Mr. Friend questioned who will be charged for the cost of testing?

Mr. Conner replied that the operation and maintenance is part of this charge which is paid for by the customer. It is the same as the cost of manufacturing water.

Mr. Friend: asked if the customer will then get a monthly bill. Mr. Conner: answered that is correct.

Attorney Walter Gray asked what kind of cost are we talking about?

Mr. Conner replied, that in Mobile County, they charge \$4.15 per thousand gallons and in other areas like the Newnan Utilities for example charge a flat fee of about \$40.00 to \$45.00 per month. This covers the cost of operation.

Attorney Gray asked is this per thousand gallons of water used or per thousand gallon of sewage? Mr. Conner replied that it is per sewage.

Mr. Gray asked if Mr. Conner was going to meter the sewage? Mr. Conner stated that is what I say they do down there. Newnan doesn't measure what they do. They know the cost to operate the system and charge a flat fee to each homeowner.

Mr. McGill stated what we are looking at is charging a flat fee; whether it is 6000 gal or 9000 gal as far as the maintenance and overhead on that system it not any different. The base rate was \$13.00 to \$14.00 per first 2000 gallons and \$4.15 per thousand thereafter. Phenix City charges \$2.30 on the wholesale side.

Mr. Friend: If they treat this sewage the way they are suppose to they should not have to pay for any outside water. Can it be use as non potable water? Are they going to be allowed to use it or will it be use for something else? Mr. McGill stated that the only system I have read about is that it is sold back to them. Mr. Conner stated they call it a purple pipe system.

Mr. Friend stated that it's already theirs.

Mr. McGill reported that the Orenco Company is out of Oregon. They have large gasoline type tank which have a warranty of 50 years. The pump has a life of 25 years; it's not maintenance free it and will fall back on Conner's staff. We are running out of perkable soil here in Russell County. We will be attending a meeting in Auburn tomorrow for the next two days hosted by Orenco who will be presenting. ADEM is supposed to be there. This has been approved I believe 26 times by ADEM; even though ADEM may not answer you correctly. I think Smiths Station, Alabama has one of these systems. I believe it was put in 1995. We are also trying to sell to Ft Benning this same type system on the Alabama side back gate.

Mr. Friend asked how many companies do you know are making this product?

Mr. McGill stated there are about 5 or 6.

Roger Conner stated there are a lot of off shore companies. We want to look for an American made product so if there was a problem you would be able to pick up the phone and have parts shipped overnight if it is an emergency situation and not have to wait 30 days or better.

Mr. Friend asked what if it shuts down or malfunctions?

Roger Conner stated that each home is just like having a septic tank, except it has a pump. This sends the waste product to the centralized plant. The tank will hold 1,500 gallons. If it shuts down; you just have to fix it.

Johnny Burrell with the Russell County Health Department stated that you're not dealing with the Health Department with this system he is talking about. The Health Department has no jurisdiction at all here. You are dealing with ADEM because it is over 10,000 gallons. The problem that you are running into with these systems is how you dispose of the waste products. In our concept of it, we have a decentralized system. If it is less than 10,000 gallons it works similar to this. If you have common field lines you may have a football field full of field lines then you dump sewage from 8 or 10 houses into a normal septic tank. ADEM has different things they can do and regulations. They can do injection wells or pump it into a creek. It depends on the clarity of the water and ADEM's regulations. That is the reason for the monthly reports and ADEM monitors that on a monthly basis. Mr. McGill stated that the BOD's is the total waste solids. If you exceed that number it is against the law. They will fine you and assess damages possibly.

Johnny Burrell stated that if you were putting this in under the Health Department Regulations, we have indemnity validation clauses. Someone would have to have enough money to cover any damages caused by the system. That is the reason why you do not see the Health Department getting into this very much due to the environmental hazards/liabilities. The utility systems have not figured out yet that this is a good way to dispose sewage with out central sewage. They do charge for that fee; however, the responsibility comes back to your Authority. In this case, it would be Russell County Water & Sewer Authority as I understand. They will be collecting the fees. The fees are suppose to take care of any problems. The responsibility will be on who maintains it.

Mr. Friend: asked if this means it could fall back on the county?

Mr. Burrell stated no. In this case, it would fall back on the owners/developers whether they have enough money or not to take care of the system or any problems.

Mr. Friend asked if the housing developers will turn it back over to the utility system?

Mr. Burrell stated, no. The County and/or Utilities Board will have to accept it as they do other things in a subdivision. The builder cannot build the system and then tell the utility or County that they have to take it. They need to have an agreement with the developer upfront. Even if it is an ADEM system or who ever they give the permit to. They are the liable party. If you have the homeowner association; ADEM would go back to the individual homeowner(s). That is the reason the Health Department doesn't do it that way.

J.W. Brannen: then the homeowners would really own it unless the County accepts it.

Mrs. Elliott: then it would come back to The County Commission.

Mr. Burrell stated that it depends on how you set it up initially.

Mr. Conner stated that we have talked to two different utilities in two different states. The utility boards dictate and standardizes the systems. If a builder came to the utility board, we would have to sign off on it stating that yes this is where the water should be. Then, the plans are to be approved by the Water Authority. The builder installs it and turns it back over to the utility board. Then the utility is responsible for maintaining it and collects the fees.

Mr. Friend asked would ADEM have any say so as to who will be responsible for the system.

Johnny Burrell stated that the permit would be issued to the utility board. The utility would be responsible for everything and they also get all the money. It's like having city sewage services without the treatment plant because the treatment plant is on site in the development. The disposal of the water will be directed by ADEM and their standards.

Mr. Friend stated that it sounds like a great idea and will have to happen. However, before the county gets involved in this I think that ADEM needs to get down here and talk with us especially since ADEM will be a large part of this.

Mr. J.W. Brannen stated that he recommends that the board pay close attention to what we do with our minimum standards that we include in our subdivision regulations?

Mr. Burrell agreed.

Mr. Brannen stated he was told yesterday that a private system located in Baldwin County with 1500 or 15,000 customers is either already bankrupt or going bankrupt.

Mr. Roger Conner stated that was a system installed in the 1980's. It wasn't really a package system and was one Grady Harmon was involved with. Yes, there is a lawsuit right now because County Commissioners working with them on some things and it is the same group who is involved with that bankrupted organization from the 80's. Now Mr. Harmon is trying to start something else there now. The Systems that are out there today being installed and maintained not just in Georgia and Alabama but it is nationwide, they are having much success. The water that comes out, the clarity and the cleanliness is superior to the water that is discharged from a centralized system. Basically just a few steps from drinking water. They discharge in field lines not near a river or stream. One of the subdivisions that we visited has a system that will hold 30,000 gallons a day. They discharge into field lines not into creeks. They have a large field for this. It is located near a playground or common area. ADEM signed off on the use of that water. You have to get that permit from ADEM. They have also connected some field lines together where communities have a common road. They continued these lines onto subsequence systems. If there is a failure, they would have some redundancy. There is a lot of flexibility and possibility not only to help with our sewage problems. This also helps the developers with optimizing their lot sizes (reducing) if they want to increase the density. If the county planning board permits then they can go to smaller lots. They don't have to worry with soil perks which are frequent problems.

Mr. Friend asked who monitors the work while it is being installed? Mr. Conner stated that the utilities department will check on systems as they are being installed.

Mr. McGill stated that there is a one time payment made to you for \$500.00 a unit. What goes into the septic tank part is approximately \$4,500. It's about what it would cost to put in a septic system. When the soil gets in to 60 to 7500 and 12000 minutes to the inch; you start getting into these systems. You start inundating your lot with field lines and you need all the help from the Health Department to come close to fitting them. I think it's the way of the future. I think it's going to address our marginal land. Most of Mr. Carskey's land is in the flood plain. He is going to utilize it for green space and golf courses. He is going to do good things there. You saw how River's Reach took off. Then the economy got bad and everything shut down.

Mr. McGill stated there are about 11 subdivisions in a five mile radius of the Ft. Benning area. The Russell County Commission is trying to push this road thru to 169 opening up this area. This is beautiful land, this margin on the septic tanks will allow high end.

Mr. J. W Brannen stated that it sounds to me like we have a lot of sorting and researching to do. I believe this is the way of the future but I think we need to learn all we can about these systems. First we need to set up some minimum standards for our subdivision regulations which are what I thought someone was bringing today so we can start reviewing.

Mr. Brannen asked if this was a preliminary plat.

McGill: this was not set up to be a preliminary plat just a report.

Mrs. Elliott: you brought this for consideration only?

Mr. McGill stated I only brought this for advice. If it was preliminary plan; we would have lot sizes and other information. This is new concept. We're talking about spending \$15 to \$20 million dollars. This not something we are playing with folks. Mr. Carskey is putting their entire business up to do this one project. They have background checks on purchasers. They have done studies on what would come down here. They have a website. On the first day, they got 2,700 hits on who would come to something like this development. We think it is good. There is nothing around here like this. There is one in Callaway Gardens with different cliental that sold out.

Commissioner Cox reported that Commissioner Robinson and I went to North Georgia to visit 4 (four) different package plant facilities. These were anything from just a few dozen homes up to a thousand homes in a community. They discharge their water into streams, lagoons, and discharged it over a spray fields. They have been in place over several years now with out a problem. They work but they require a certain amount of maintenance as does with anything.

Mr. J.W. Brannen stated I don't know of anyone in this room that can give Mr. McGill any advice. I suggest you gather information and obviously get it to the all the board members. I think the Planning Commission should be involved in the sewage package plants to assist development but I don't think we will be involved in the tax increment financing.

Mrs. Elliot stated we were working on subdivision regulations and we have asked several times about getting minimum standards for these systems before the final approval. They have not been presented to us yet. I think it should be a part of the subdivision regulations as well. We have a meeting in two weeks can you get us that information?

Mr. McGill stated that he doesn't have one but we will be glad to get to you some standards as quick as we can get it.

Mr. David Ellis stated that it's my understanding you went to visit these places with Goodwin, Mills and Cawood out of Montgomery.

Mr. Conner stated that's correct.

Mr. Ellis stated it is also my understanding that this engineering firm also has put these systems in before.

Mr. Conner stated that's correct

Mr. Ellis stated I also understand they are helping you or writing something for to you to present back to this Planning Commission.

Roger Conner stated, yes. The Authority had standards when it was first created and that was when we had the agreement to discharge back into Phenix City. I asked

Goodwin and Mills to help redraft the standards to include the implementation of these package systems. They are to outline how they are to be maintained, etc. These would be standards for the subdivisions regulations.

Mr. McGill stated that the septic tanks are plastic and are water tight. They will have a 50 year life.

Commissioner Cox asked if the septic tanks have a grinder in them.

Mr. McGill stated they can have them in or can be separate. Roger Conner stated most of these have a turban pump.

Mrs. Elliott asked what kind of tanks was used in the system that went bankrupt you mentioned?

Mr. Conner stated I believe it was a centralized system not a package system.

Mr. J.W. Brannen stated that our first step is to get standards, learn what it is, then get funding so the County Commission or the County Water system does not get hung when one of these systems are put in wrong or breaks-down. The County and the Water System need to be indemnified. That will be a major step. There are two places they will look to if something goes wrong, The County Commission and the developer. The one with the deepest pockets for paying fines or damages.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne stated that I have presented the changes for the Subdivision Regulations thus far to the Commissioners. I want to suggest that the Planning Commission has a joint meeting with the County Commissioners prior to adoption of any new subdivision regulations or present the regulations in a public hearing. A joint work session to discuss the changes and minimum standards for the Centralized Package Systems. Then both Commissions will be on the same page before bringing the subdivision regulations to public. David Ellis motioned to have a joint work session with the Planning Commission and the County Commission. Seconded by Dr Shelton. The vote was unanimous.

Mrs. Elliott asked if there are any more items to be addressed. David Ellis stated that we had discussed at the last meeting all agenda items to be turned in by 10:00 am on Friday before the meeting the following week so there would be time to inform members of agenda items or the lack thereof. Then it would be determined if a meeting would be necessary. David Ellis made motion to have agenda items in by Friday which was seconded by Bill Friend. All votes were in agreement.

Vice Chair Elliott adjourned the meeting.