

DALTON-VARNELL-WHITFIELD COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
503 WEST WAUGH STREET
DALTON, GA 30720

MEMORANDUM

TO: Whitfield County Board of Commissioners
Robert Sivick
Robert Smalley
City of Dalton Mayor and Council
Andrew Parker
Jonathan Bledsoe
City of Varnell Mayor and Council
Mike Brown
Terry Miller
Jean Price-Garland

FROM: Jim Lidderdale
Chairman

DATE: November 26, 2024

SUBJECT: The request of the Whitfield County Board of Commissioners to amend Section 4-6-35 of the Unified Zoning Ordinance for Commercial Poultry Farming in unincorporated Whitfield County.

The most recent meeting of the Dalton-Varnell-Whitfield County Planning Commission was held on February 24, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Whitfield County Courthouse meeting room. A portion of the agenda included a public hearing concerning the above matter. A quorum of five members of the Planning Commission was present. All legal requirements for advertising and posting the public hearing were met. The petition was represented by Ethan Calhoun and Jean Price-Garland.

Public Hearing Summary:

Ethan Calhoun summarized the staff analysis which recommended approval of the UZO text amendments. Chris Shiflett inquired about the impact of the non-conformity policy on existing poultry operations that may prevent them from expanding existing structures to meet their integrator's future demands. Calhoun stated that improvements and repairs could be made to any existing structure so long as the building's footprint is not expanded. Octavio Perez asked Calhoun if the proposed ordinance would prevent any new poultry farms from being developed to which Calhoun stated that the amendments could be reasonably met on many tracts of land in Whitfield County for future poultry farms or farm expansions. There were no further questions for Calhoun.

Heath Ewton, a poultry farmer in Whitfield County, spoke in favor of the proposed amendments even though they may limit the number of large farm operations in the future.

Mike Key, a Whitfield resident, voiced his concerns that the proposed ordinance amendments were not restrictive enough and that he believed local oversight is necessary due to erosion runoff and other public health concerns that state and federal offices are unable to regularly inspect. Key requested a 90-day moratorium on new chicken houses until additional research could be conducted.

William Morgan, a Whitfield County resident, voiced concern regarding the ability to subdivide large properties and build additional chicken houses. Morgan suggested a commercial agriculture zone district for concentrated animal feeding operations. Morgan drew attention to the density of poultry houses in northern Whitfield County negatively affecting many citizens quality of life. Morgan then stated that he would support the previously mentioned moratorium.

Ferrel Cooksey, a Whitfield County resident, stated that he would like to see additional regulation on poultry farming in Whitfield County due to the lack of regulation at the state and federal levels.

Richard Holland, a Whitfield County resident, notes his concerns with existing poultry farm density on the south end of the county creating issues with commercial poultry truck traffic.

Chris Shiflett confirmed with the audience the collective opinion that the proposed text amendment did not address all the concerns of the audience and that additional regulations are of interest. Shiflett also confirmed with the audience that a moratorium was collectively supported until stricter regulations could be implemented.

Heath Ewton, rebutted by stating that developers have purchased large farms and divided them into multiple poultry farms. Ewton went on to ask the Commission to consider those under contract in the event a moratorium on poultry farming is entertained.

Suzanne Ratliff, a Whitfield County resident, expressed concern regarding public health risks associated with additional commercial poultry farms

With no further comments, Chairman Lidderdale closed this public hearing at approximately 6:52 pm.

Recommendation:

Chairman Lidderdale sought a motion for the proposed UZO text amendments. Some discussion occurred regarding moratorium capabilities and the public outcry for additional poultry farming regulations. Chris Shiflett made a motion to approve the text amendments as well as to pass a 60-day moratorium on new poultry house permits with the exception of those properties under contract for poultry production, and Jody McClurg seconded the motion. There was a unanimous recommendation to approve the text amendments as well as to pass a 60-day moratorium on new poultry house permits with the exception of those properties under contract for poultry production 4-0.