

CAN's Unofficial Notes on the November 7 Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting

Planning Commission Meeting Notes, 11/7/2023, Submitted by Judd Vickers

Discussion only related to the Egypt Road Solar array, originally proposed in 2017. The proposal would eliminate hundreds of building lots that were platted and approved many years ago as part of what was generally known as the "Blackwater" subdivision and consolidate the property into two larger parcels. The solar field proposal differs from the 2017 proposal in that the "travel lanes" for maintenance of the solar panels are now proposed to be gravel. Large portions of the property are non-tidal wetlands, and it will need to be determined if new permits are required. Much review is required by Planning staff, which could include consultation with Soil Conservation and State agencies.

Discussion related to the sign ordinance or program, and the original intention was that electronic signs would be discouraged, if not outright prohibited, with the exception of official public road or street signs needed for public safety. There appears to be a loophole under the sign program for larger developments and/or lots to have an electronic sign. A property on the creek installed an electronic sign under the sign program and it has become a nuisance to neighbors at Cambridge Marketplace Condominiums, who have voiced concerns regarding constantly flashing and changing lights into late hours in the evening. The City may have only limited remedies. There can be action taken to restrict them from operating within the hours of 8am to 6pm, which was part of their conditional approval. The City might also be able to address the intensity of the lighting.

Discussion related to group homes and health care facilities, and an effort to align the UDC with State code on these types of facilities. The City has become aware through multiple sources that there are likely many group homes and health care facilities operating throughout the City without proper licensing or permitting. Small group homes (8 or less) are likely permitted in residential districts pursuant to FHA guidelines but should still have the appropriate State licensure. Group homes or health care facilities greater than 9 persons would only be allowed in multi-family type areas. There could be group homes operating with 9 individuals or more that are inappropriately operating in residential areas. There are also concerns that multiple individuals are being housed without any fire suppression systems. Issues were also cited where an owner or operator is required to be on site, and that in some cases might not be there. There is an organization on the internet advertising themselves for sober recovery homes in Cambridge yet deny that is what they are doing. City officials are meeting with these owners in the near future. The planning officer suggested the City needs to begin issuing zoning certificates that require properties are being used in compliance with the UDC. The Zoning official has the authority under the UDC (as in many other communities) to request reasonable access to a property to ensure zoning compliance. If access is not granted, it could be enforced through legal channels.

Discussion related to the location of recreational marijuana dispensaries. There appears to be general agreement that residential areas should be avoided, and it should be limited to commercial, or perhaps industrial areas. A likely course of action might be to permit recreational dispensaries in the same areas that currently permit medical dispensaries, as the State prohibits being overly restrictive as to where they can be located. Additional discussion related to prohibiting use of the product at the site of the dispensary, which State law would allow. The matter will be reviewed at a future meeting with maps.