

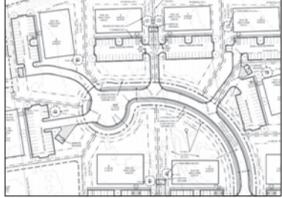


The Oconee Enterprise



Rezoning sought for restaurant

Planning Commission not keen on idea. News, **A6**



Large office park planned

Location would be Jimmy Daniel Road. Business, **B3**



Camp season nears an end

Oconee volleyball hosts skills camp. Sports, **B1**

Coming next week

We'll report on the Watkinsville City Council.

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The development may have several restaurants and office buildings across the street from Oconee Meadows Office Park. The historic Abe Jones House formerly housed The Yarn House. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

Construction underway on Hog Mountain development

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA
Seven years after an initial rezoning, developers have broken ground on a commercial park at 2411 Hog Mountain Road.

In September 2014, Nick and Jane Bath submitted an application for a rezoning where the historic Abe Jones House sat. In January 2020, the Baths received permission to move the historic house, which is believed to date back to the turn of the 20th century. At the time, Abe Abouhamdan of ABE Consulting told the Board of Commissioners that the amended plan reduces the

original footprint of office and retail from 56,835 square feet to 44,025 square feet.

All development will be according to the needs of the buyer and code qualifications, said the Baths.

The Abe Jones House will continue to be preserved and used for office purposes. Original plans to convert the historic home into a restaurant did not pan out, said Jane Bath. The Abe Jones house is named after its former occupants, Abe and Nancy Jones.

Bath said the six-acre parcel has room for three restaurants, though

no drive-thrus are allowed.

The first phase of Jones Corner will consist of a 6,000-square-foot restaurant plus a 2,000-square-foot outdoor patio area. The second phase will consist of a 3,000-square-foot restaurant plus 5,000-square-foot retail service. The other phases may consist of a combination of shops and professional offices.

The historic Abe Jones House, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was moved to the back of the parcel earlier this year thanks to James Casey.

SEE BATH DEVELOPMENT PAGE A2



The future homes are characterized as craftsman-style architecture. [Submitted rendering]

Houses proposed off Colham Ferry

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA
Colham Ferry Road property owner Jeffrey Bell seeks to rezone about 13 acres to develop a five-lot residential subdivision.

The property is outside the city limits of Watkinsville just north of the road's intersection with Greene Ferry Road.

On Monday, the Oconee County Planning Commission recommended approval of the request. The Board of Commissioners will vote on the rezoning and a hardship variance at its Aug. 3 meeting.

The hardship variance would allow the proposed lots access from Colham Ferry Road, rather than an interior subdivision street.

The lots would encompass two or three acres with homes ranging in size from 2,000 square feet to 2,400 square feet. The homes would be craftsman style architecture with pitched shingle roofs, shed dormers, wide overhanging eaves, wood masonry columns and divided light windows and doors.

The estimated value of the project is \$3.5 million. Construction would begin in early 2022, and the development would be completed in a single phase.

The traffic projections show an additional 47 average daily trips.



If the rezoning is approved, Bell Lake would become a private lake for a new small subdivision. However, the property owner will open another lake to the public for fishing. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

According to Oconee Planning Department staff analysis, the property lies within the Country Estates Character Area of the Future Development Map. The area is primarily medium-density residential and "provides a transition between the more rural areas of the county and traditional suburban residential development."

"Staff holds that the present

request is in conformity with the Future Development Map and the goals and objectives of the Oconee County Comprehensive Plan," according to the analysis.

Bell said that the popular Bell Lake would transition to a private lake for the new homeowners.

He said he has another lake that will be stocked with fish and open to the public.

Watkinsville sued over stormwater

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The city of Watkinsville was served last week with a lawsuit that alleges the city has diverted stormwater runoff onto private property.

The plaintiff is 60 South LLC, whose registered agent is Matthew Smith, according to the Georgia Secretary of State's Office.

The LLC took ownership of 60 South Main Street from Greg Veale in 2017, after the city invested in stormwater improvements in the area. At closing, Matthew Smith would have had a right to inspect the property.

Matthew Smith is the son of former Mayor Bob Smith, who for the past decade has repeatedly complained to the city about stormwater runoff negatively affecting his family property along McRee Street as well as 60 South Main Street.

"The city has breached its duty to plaintiff by artificially increasing, diverting and concentrating stormwater from the city's streets and rights of way onto plaintiff's property," according to the lawsuit. "The city negligently constructed a drainage system that has caused repeated flooding of plaintiff's property and other damage to plaintiff and plaintiff's property."

The lawsuit, which was filed with the Superior Court of Oconee County on July 12, does not provide evidence of those claims.

When contacted by The Oconee Enterprise, Matthew Smith declined comment and said his attorney, David Ellison of Ellison Law, could answer any further questions.

Watkinsville Mayor Brian Brodrick also declined comment, explaining that he doesn't generally comment on litigation.

60 South Main

In February 2018, the Watkinsville City Council approved a building permit with conditions for restoration of a house that fronts 60 South Main Street. In June 2018, the city denied plans for five detached residential lots on 2.077 acres of the same parcel due to concerns about density and stormwater runoff. The building permit to restore the front-facing house eventually expired.

In January 2019, Bob Smith asked for a demolition permit on behalf of his son, Matthew, for the house at 60 South Main Street. After tabling the matter for a number of months, the city denied the demolition request at its August 2019 meeting. During that meeting, Bob Smith, who had qualified to run for mayor earlier in the day, said it was cost prohibitive to rehabilitate the house and that the city was treating his family unfairly.

However, in May 2019, the Watkinsville City Council approved revised plans for four houses to locate at 60 South Main Street.

The unoccupied house facing 60 South Main Street has suffered severe termite damage and deterioration over the past several years.

The Enterprise previously reported that the city claimed the house was not protected from the elements for an extended period of time under the care of Matthew Smith.

The house on 60 South Main Street is next door to Bob Smith's residence at 58 South Main Street.

A neighbor on the other side of 60 South Main Street said that stormwater does tend to collect on the property but that she does not believe the city is intentionally diverting stormwater onto private property.

Stormwater

The Enterprise last week filed an open records request for recent correspondence between city officials and the Smith family regarding stormwater issues, as well as open records requests filed by Matthew and Bob Smith.

In May of this year, Bob Smith requested building permits and stormwater plans for 51 Greensboro Highway, the site of Watkinsville Storage.

Watkinsville Storage owner Ted Evans Jr. told The Enterprise that because the property of his business abuts McRee Street, he agreed to spend between \$45,000 and \$50,000 on stormwater infrastructure about seven years ago.

"[Bob Smith] came to me and asked to do something about water coming onto his property," said Evans. "I also built a retention pond at the city's request. We have done everything that the city and Bob have asked us to do."

In October 2016, the Watkinsville City Council agreed to spend \$55,985 on engineering to relieve further flooding issues along McRee Street.

A month earlier, Bob Smith threatened litigation against the city for criminal trespass, as well as diversion and concentration of stormwater onto real property.

"Govern yourselves accordingly," Bob Smith's attorney, Regina Quick, wrote in a Sept. 6, 2016, letter to then-Mayor Charles Ivie and the council.

Evans said that at one point, he received a cease-and-desist letter from Bob Smith.

Litigation

The lawsuit filed by 60 South LLC states, "The plaintiff is entitled to recover attorney's fees and expenses of litigation from the city because the city has acted in bad faith, has been stubbornly litigious and has caused the plaintiff unnecessary trouble and expense."

The city council met in executive session several times this summer to discuss potential litigation. Brodrick has declined to disclose the nature of those conversations.

In June, Watkinsville Code Enforcement issued a code violation to 60 South LLC due to the house being in a state of disrepair.

As of press time, the city has not filed an official response with the Superior Court of Oconee County.



A house at 60 South Main Street in Watkinsville has been in disrepair for several years. The registered owner of the LLC that controls the property is Matthew Smith, son of former Mayor Bob Smith. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

This issue was mailed Wednesday, July 21, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

