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Hall Commission rejects Oakwood's annexation plan

City manager wants to amend request



Tom Reiter speaks out in opposition of the Oakwood request of annexation of some Hall County roads in his neighborhood during Thursday night's Hall County Commission meeting at the Georgia Mountains Center.



Charles McKinney speaks in opposition to the Oakwood request to annex some Hall County roads during Thursday evening's Hall County Commission meeting at the Georgia Mountains Center.

Oakwood's proposal to reach Lake Lanier through a series of key West Hall roads never gained traction among homeowners in the area and was shot down outright by the Hall County Board of Commissioners on Thursday night.

The board voted 4-0 against the plan, with Commissioner Ashley Bell absent from the meeting.

The commissioners said they believed the plan would have denied residents along the roads any say in future council decisions concerning potential property uses off the roads.

"You deserve representation," Chairman Tom Oliver told the audience, which included about 100 or so people from lake neighborhoods.

After the meeting, City Manager Stan Brown said the commission's basis for the denial could be applied to any annexation request.

"You could make the argument that any of the (surrounding) properties that are unincorporated ... have no say in what may happen on that piece of property," he said.

Oakwood, in an effort to gain access to Lake Lanier, wanted the county to allow the city to annex Flat Creek Road from McEver Road to Nags Head Circle, near Sunset Cove Marina, and Mountain View Road from McEver Road to Balus Creek Park.

Also being proposed in that area was annexation of Stephens Road from Flat Creek Road to McEver Road.

City officials were pushing the proposal as part of an overall land-use plan as the city might look in 2030.

The annexations would "empower the city to provide enhanced recreational opportunities in the Oakwood area," Brown wrote in a Dec. 22 letter to County Administrator Randy Knighton.

Area residents never bought the plan, instead rallying opposition and firing off letters to county commissioners.

Both sides pitched their views to commissioners at a work session Monday, with Brown saying he would meet residents in an effort to resolve the matter.

"We did have a meeting with representatives of the neighborhoods around Lake Lanier, and I'd like to say it was very positive," Brown said.

"We were able to clear up some of the misinformation about what our intentions were ... and it set a good foundation for us to work with the neighborhoods around there in the future."

However, not all issues were resolved, he said.

Residents also said they appreciated the city's meeting with them, but they weren't wooed by its intentions.

"The reservations we have in Timbercrest (subdivision) and shared by other (residents) is what would ultimately be the use of the properties (approaching the lake)," said one of the area residents, George Ordway. "It's a vision; there's nothing concrete."

"And I think that before we would want to move forward with anything, we'd like to see something more concrete. We'd want to see some architectural drawings, some renderings, something that gives some substance to the vision."

A stream of other residents spoke, with concerns ranging from uncertainty over potential development to satisfaction with Hall County providing sheriff's patrols along the roads.

One of the more animated speakers was Charles McKinney, who quoted William Shakespeare and Patrick Henry in his remarks.

"These roads would lead to me being located in an island that's like Australia," he said. "Everybody knows it's down there and nobody gives a damn."

The city's annexation request also covered roads around the city that run in and out of the city, from smaller stretches, such as Candlestick Lane, to more heavily traveled roads, such as the four-lane Thurmon Tanner Parkway between Mundy Mill Road and Ga. 13/Atlanta Highway.

The annexation of the roads also would "simplify and enhance public safety and public works response to service requests, thereby eliminating confusion when some roads have segments in both incorporated and unincorporated areas," Brown said in the letter to Knighton.

In his presentation Thursday night, Brown suggested commissioners at least consider "an amendment to our request" removing the lake access roads and allowing annexation of the others.

That part of the proposal was never specifically addressed by residents or commissioners, lost in all the talk about Lake Lanier access.

And Brown fumed about it after the meeting.

"There's a bona fide need here of these roads being properly maintained," he said. "What I'll be doing this week is we'll be ordering signs that say 'Beginning of county maintenance' and 'End of county maintenance.'

"I am no longer going to mow county right of ways and we definitely (will) not be paving any more county right of ways, even if it makes logical sense."

As far as ultimate Lanier access, "we are committed to still connecting our community to the lake," Brown said.

One further option is "the more traditional approach of contacting property owners and see if we can domino our way down the hill, which is what we did on Winder Highway," he said.