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Oakwood rejects request for offices on annexed land

OAKWOOD — Plans for professional offices in an established West Hall neighborhood stalled Monday night.

The Oakwood Planning Commission voted Monday night to recommend annexing — but not rezoning as office/professional — five lots totaling 7.1 acres in Holiday Heights subdivision, which is off McEver and Mundy Mill Roads.

Commission members didn't comment as they voted separately on each rezoning and annexation application.

City Council will consider the annexation and rezoning matters at its next meeting, set for Oct. 12.

City Planner Larry Sparks recommended rezoning and annexation, saying office use at the homes wouldn't create much impact to the neighborhood, including traffic.

"It will increase traffic but not to the extent that it would warrant additional traffic control devices," he said as part of a report on the matter.

More than 20 Holiday Heights residents showed up at the meeting to protest the proposal.

"This rezoning will lower our property values," said Mitch Cohen. "... It's not good for our community at all. There is ample opportunity of office space very nearby without impinging on our long-standing community."

Oakwood resident Patricia Moore, who wants to buy one of the Holiday Heights lots and convert it to an office, said surrounding available properties cost much more than she can afford.

"We have looked at other properties," she said.

Plus, Moore said, "Our property is going to be very well maintained," and traffic shouldn't be a problem as the homes in the proposed zoning are located in a cul-de-sac separate from the rest of the neighborhood.

Upon entering the subdivision, "we turn left and you turn right," she said.

Opponents also argued that the office zoning simply didn't belong in a neighborhood.

"We've got to protect our people's homes," said Hazel Smith, a Holiday Heights resident since 1972.

The Hall County Board of Commissioners sent Oakwood a formal objection to the proposed changes in August, saying the proposed zoning doesn't conform with the surrounding area.

Sparks said in an earlier interview that the city felt like the application "was something to look at, in terms of if it did go office/professional, that it would be a transition area between the commercial on the highway and the neighborhood."

The neighborhood has stood at least since the 1970s, before growth took hold in Hall County.

Over time, McEver and Mundy became two of Hall's busiest traffic arteries and businesses began to dot the area surrounding the entrance to Holiday Heights.

When commercial rezoning was allowed "so close to that subdivision, I feel like and my clients feel like (government) created a situation that really puts these properties at a disadvantage," said Prudential Realty agent Tina Porter, who represents the homeowners.

"It's a situation where you've got a couple of houses — they're large homes, but nobody wants to purchase a nice home ... that close to commercial."