

July 19, 2021

To All Willow Lake Homeowners:

As you know board members have been working with the Columbia County Road Department for several months in an effort to have the County take ownership of the Willow Lake Roads. Everything was proceeding according to plan up until a couple weeks before the proposal was to be presented to the Columbia County Commission Board of Commissioners for approval in April. At that time apparently County Zoning Personnel were consulted as part of the approval process.

In late March the board received an email outlining a new set of additional and onerous requirements never discussed by county officials at any time throughout the entire construction and inspection phases of the project. There were several problematic issues but the most difficult requirement was a 50-foot utility right of way. Willow Lake right of way is only 40 feet. (In order for the County to assume ownership County Commissioners would have to grant a zoning variance. Their decision to grant this variance is based largely on a recommendation from County Officials.) Jonathan Crawford and Michael Carrigan then met with Road Officials to see if a compromise could be worked out. Shortly thereafter we received an email stating that a recommendation was not forthcoming.

After receipt of that communication Michael Carrigan and Tripp Nanney, president of JCOA met with Scott Johnson, County Administrator and District 1 Commissioner Connie Melear. We provided a timeline and documentation of all interaction with the county officials including; the initial approval for work to commence, County required road and storm drain improvements, County inspections and approvals. This was all to no avail. It was acknowledged the Willow Lake Board did everything asked by the county. It was further acknowledged that County Road Officials should have consulted with other departments prior to giving the go ahead for work to commence. Regardless of the sequence of events Scott Johnson confirmed county officials would recommend a variance NOT be granted. The reason being a variance approval would set an adverse precedent for current and future neighborhoods asking for a similar variance. In all practicality the Commissioners will not grant a variance without a county positive recommendation, therefore there is no path forward.

So where are we now? The Association owns the roads and storms drains and will continue to be responsible for ongoing maintenance and eventually replacement. In our estimation, the County will never consider this again.

The work completed was necessary regardless of whether the County took ownership or not. Keep in mind the improvements were made knowing the commissioners could always say no. The Roads are now in good shape and we are told with proper maintenance they will be functional for the foreseeable future. In addition, the storm drains are fully repaired and up to county code. Also, all the work was done at a significant discount due to the Covid shutdown and the total cost of the project was done without an assessment.

The board is extremely disappointed at the turn of events but it appears we have exhausted all options with the County

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact a board member.

Willow Lake HOA Board of Directors