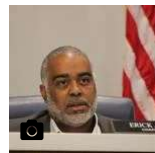
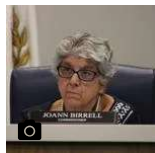
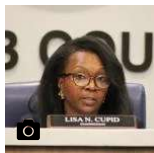


https://www.mdjonline.com/news/local/cobb-approves-controversial-residential-development-near-industrial-sites/article_6115b57b-1e1f-40db-a059-0eebb05bde76.html

Cobb approves controversial residential development near industrial sites

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Attendees at the Cobb Board of Commissioners zoning hearing raise their hands in opposition to a mixed-use development at 2840 Plant Atkinson Road on Tuesday.

MARIETTA — The Cobb Board of Commissioners approved the rezoning for a controversial mixed-use development in an industrial corridor on Atlanta Road during Tuesday's zoning hearing.

The proposal from developer Branch Acquisition Company aims to transform a 3.47-acre property just off Atlanta Road and Interstate 285 into a multifamily housing complex with 250 apartments.

Both county staff and the Cobb County Planning Commission recommended denying the request.

The commission approved the development 3-2 with commissioners JoAnn Birrell and Keli Gambrill opposed.

The request also split the crowd at the meeting with 40 people opposed and 22 in support of the development.

The development, located 2840 Plant Atkinson Road, is planned to wrap around a six-floor parking deck and two courtyards and include 8,500 square feet of retail, restaurant and office space adjacent to the county's planned extension of the Silver Comet Trail.

As part of the plan's approval, the developer will construct the portion of the Silver Comet Trail on the property and donate the needed right-of-way to the county.

Controversy surrounding the development comes primarily from its location near heavy industrial properties including the Plant Atkinson Transfer Station, a waste management transfer company, 300 feet from the proposed development; Quikrete Concrete Batch plant, a concrete packaging company; Georgia Power Plant McDonough-Atkinson; and a C.W. Matthews asphalt plant.

The controversial plant operated by medical sterilization company Sterigenics, accused of causing cancer in nearby residents, also sits less than half a mile away, the Journal previously reported.

The vote

Commissioner Erick Allen made the motion to approve the rezoning application, seconded by Chairwoman Lisa Cupid.

He said he asked for the approval as a means to prevent more heavy industrial developments in the area and connect the Silver Comet Trail along Plant Atkinson Road.

“And I’ve been very clear in my time in office here and even in the Legislature looking at that area, that I do not want more industrial or heavy industrial in that area,” he said.

He said the area does not need more businesses like Sterigenics or Quikrete, but they could move into the property without approval from commissioners if the zoning was not changed.

“And this project brings some significant positive additions, I believe, to our area. It fundamentally improves the safety of the Silver Comet, as we’ve talked about, ensuring that there is a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists who right now are traversing up Plant Atkins with no sidewalk or anything else,” he said.

Birrell said while parks and trails are beneficial for Cobb, the location is not a good fit.

“Residential in a heavy, heavy industrial area is not a good fit. It’s totally against the land use plan. And to get a trail paid for, you’re doing it at the expense of people’s lives,” she said.

Gambrill said if heavy industrial uses are a concern commissioners should restrict the land use rather than approving a residential development.

“I think it also sends a bad message to our business community that we are no longer going to be supporting them. Yet we’re saying that we want to welcome more jobs to support housing,” Gambrill said. “So, I do think if heavy industrial is your concern and making sure that it is something compatible with the neighbors, then we restrict uses that are incompatible instead of approving residential which is not compatible.

Cupid agreed with Allen.

“I know that when we zone it is our interest to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our residents,” she said.

She said the potential impact of the surrounding industrial areas has been noted and must be included on the development’s lease, warning of potential noxious odors and loud noises.

“I also recognize that you have few opportunities where the stars align for transformation of the area. It’s very difficult. Even when people that live in those areas know that there’s something different and something better. It’s very difficult to get someone to invest and see a vision beyond what is there,” she said.

She said she sees the development as a potential to transform the area into something beyond an industrial corridor.

“This is something we’ve been talking about for years and that can have a transformative effect similar to what we see of our neighbors with the Atlanta Beltline because people are enjoying the use of outdoors and seeing it in a different way,” she said.

Commissioner Monique Sheffield said she was conflicted by the request because, though there are many heavy industrial properties nearby, there are also residential areas.

She said she shared Allen’s concern about another industrial company potentially moving in.

“No stipulations, no variances required. They can essentially just develop. And they would have the right to do that,” she said.

Megan Jackson is a corps member with Report for America, a national service program that places journalists into local newsrooms.