

4/28/20

City of Jonesboro Arkansas

Planning Department and MAPC Members

It is my understanding that an initial proposal for Southern Hills Planned Development will be discussed at the MAPC meeting today. While I am not currently in opposition to this development, I would like to convey thoughts and concerns about the future use of this property. This land could be considered gateway property. Moreover, this type of development has the potential to set the stage and pattern for future development within our town that could begin to create a sense of place and community that could help us attract and keep the type of businesses and population that would make us thrive. Here is where a comprehensive plan would be of great service to you as decision makers.

We can all be hopeful that the intended development will undo the enormous harm done by the clearing of the land completed in anticipation of the proposed mall site years ago. Perhaps we might be tempted to say at this point, anything would be better. I hope, however, that the planning department and the MAPC will be more visionary.

While Jonesboro has many assets, one negative attribute is the on-going problem of sprawl and the strain it places on our existing infrastructure. I am hopeful that more care will be taken than was demonstrated north of town around the NEA Baptist Hospital. There doesn't appear to have been much thought or planning in where various developments and businesses located. As a result, the infrastructure has yet to catch up. There is a lack of natural beauty around this important northern entrance way into our city. Moreover, the Greensboro Village site was completely cleared of all trees, leaving in question the developer's plans for creating beautiful landscapes and views from the street. A tree buffer or green area could have enhanced the landscape and hidden what is currently a scar.

This brings me to my question: when will Jonesboro, like other prosperous and progressive cities in Arkansas, begin to require more from developers? I note in the proposed plans a strange mix of architecture and promise of green space. The picture provided with the one-page initial plan shows a mix of ideas that fail to demonstrate a true vision. There are positives to this proposal such as using the utility easement as a multi-use trail, but the retail area appears to consist of lots of pavement and lacking accommodation for anything other than automobiles. Also, the common spaces are not really integrated into the development plan. These ideas are not congruent.

The newly formed beautification commission is charged with improving the entrances to our city. This is not merely a problem of reducing litter and planting flowers. We must have the backing of the MAPC to help create beautiful and thoughtfully created spaces beyond what has been required in the past. I have spoken about this at MAPC meeting multiple times.

Although I understand this is a preliminary proposal, I ask the planning body to begin to look at new developments such as this one through a different lens. I believe that much of what we consider beautification actually begins with the thoughtful consideration and actions of a MAPC in terms of what we want our town to look like and become in the future.

This is a reminder that we do not currently have a comprehensive plan. Therefore, the citizens must rely on you as the first defense for making our town more liveable, appealing, and safe for our residents and guests. Jonesboro needs a comprehensive plan and needs one even more since the tornado tore through our town.

Please exercise the authority of your position and help us create that vision by moving towards developing a plan that will keep us moving forward as a city.

I appreciate all that you do in service to our community.

Sincerely,  
Beverly Parker  
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