

September 17, 2007

Mayor of the City of Sandy Springs and Councilmembers

Subject: Comments on proposed revisions to the City Zoning Ordinance regarding the Planning Commission

Dear Mayor Galambos and Councilmembers;

The Sandy Springs Council of Neighborhoods wishes to express its concerns about changes proposed by City staff that the Zoning Ordinance be amended to revise the authority and effect of hearings before the City Planning Commission. We believe this proposal is being offered in response to concerns voiced by a few petitioners about delays in the zoning process. I hope you will remember that a goal of the Zoning Task Force consciously was to lengthen - not shorten - the rezoning process from that being used by Fulton County in order to allow time for greater input from the lay community on these matters.

It appears that the offered revisions will render the Planning Commission almost meaningless – only to again become just a “dry run” for all parties with little benefit to anyone. This “new” approach was faced at Fulton County before the City was created. This made the Planning Commission meetings largely a farce and a waste of time for everyone. This will only discourage community involvement in this process. Is that what you want?

We understand with the proposed changes any petitioner would be allowed to completely disregard the recommendation by the Planning Commission, particularly regarding deferrals, and to proceed with consideration of their petition by the whole City Council. If unlimited deferrals are a problem then limiting the authority of the Commission to one or possibly two deferrals per case would maintain the validity of the process, respect the time the Commission members are contributing to the City and value their collective wisdom.

We realize that the purpose of the Planning Commission by law is advisory to the ultimate decision of the City Council. However the goal in the Task Force planning was to make this phase meaningful, and thereby give the City Council a tool to encourage greater agreement among the parties. This in turn should allow your decisions to more closely respond to the valid concerns of the impacted neighbors and neighborhoods. Is that not your goal in legislating well?

This step has been used successfully to require petitioners to respond to the legitimate concerns of a project’s neighbors. Reverting to the dysfunction and futility of a rezoning process like the one many of you fought to leave behind is the last thing the community wants or expects from this Council.

It also appears that you are considering a return to the minimum statutory requirements of the Zoning Procedures Act, rather than offering the community a real opportunity to affect rezoning matters. This is not necessary or beneficial to the City as a whole. Even if this “slows” the process, it allows the community to have an impact on what is sought to be shoved down their

throats by development professionals. Isn't this what you promised when you were elected? We believe it is what our community expects.

You have appointed a Planning Commission with considerable experience in these matters – experience in planning and zoning that exceeds many on the City Council. Would it not be wise to allow the Planning Commission you appointed, along with your professional staff, the ability to nudge petitioners to respond to community concerns before they present their petitions to you?

Please do not revert to a faulty system just because a few petitioners don't want to take the time necessary to work with the affected community. If you “defang” the Planning Commission for the sake of expediency, then its role is greatly diminished and the Citizens of Sandy Springs will suffer.

Respectfully submitted;

Larry Young, President  
Sandy Springs Council of Neighborhoods