

Island appeal delayed again

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Camden County commissioners won't hear appeals filed against a hardship variance to split a parcel on Cumberland Island next week as planned. The county proposed a six-month delay earlier this month and both sides agreed.

Commissioners had initially planned to hear the appeal Feb. 7, then the hearing was pushed to April 4 to allow more discussion. All of the parties gathered recently to talk about their concerns and hopes but no action has been taken to rezone the island, county planning director Eric Landon said.

"At this point, all we've done is put everybody in a room and see what we could agree on," Landon said.

The planning commission approved the hardship variance in early December to split 87.51 acres, which is owned by Lumar LLC and zoned conservation preservation, into 10 lots.

The 10-lot split is one of few actions allowed by right in a conservation preservation zone. A variance was sought because county code stipulates that minor plats must have frontage on a paved road and there aren't any paved roads on the island. The variance only permits the parcel to be split. A zoning change would have to be approved for houses to be built.

"This is a step toward what we want to do," Glenn Warren said at the Dec. 7 meeting. "Yeah, we want to build some residences for ourselves, for our own families. There are residences down there now."

The commission's decision triggered a 30-day period where their decision could be appealed to the board of commissioners. Two appeals were filed by St. Marys resident Bill Bruce with the support of dozens of other Camden residents and Southern Environmental Law Center along with the St. Marys EarthKeepers and the National Parks Conservation Association. Both groups say that the variance request didn't meet any of the county's five conditions and all five conditions have to exist for a hardship variance to be granted.

The parcel, which was once owned by the Rockefellers, stretches across Cumberland Island from the beach to the sound near the National Park Service's Sea Camp dock. Members of the Candler and Warren family purchased the property in 1998 through Lumar LLC.

If the land were split and houses were built, the structures could be close to the National Park Service's Sea Camp dock, facilities and campground and might be visible from the main road and parallel hiking trail.

"That concerns us and we don't want that first step to take place," Bruce said about his appeal.

The Lumar tract is currently zoned "conservation preservation," a designation created to "preserve and control development within certain land, marsh and water areas of this county." Allowed uses include

public utilities, a fishing supply or bait store, museum, historical site, nature park, wildlife sanctuary, marina or neighborhood recreation center. Accessory buildings for a church, museum or exhibit area or a caretaker residence in a nature preserve or wildlife sanctuary are also allowed by right.