

hotel, motel, resort, cemetery or mausoleum, a church or religious facility.

Commission hears from both sides

At the meeting, the commission allotted 15 minutes each for comments from the applicant and those in favor and those against the request. The applicant was given a two-minute rebuttal.

Stephen Kinney, a St. Marys attorney representing the applicant, said the Candler/Warren family didn't want to pave the road and had been on Cumberland for more than 90 years.

about the request in general, noting that development so close to the park service's campground, beach and other sites for visitors could affect the experience.

"They have to manage their properties in accordance with federal laws that we have on the island and from what I've seen in the two years that I've been here, they've been very good neighbors," Ingram said.

"That being said, we want to preserve and protect the island for future generations."

In opposition, Camden resident Bill Bruce and Bill Sapp of the Southern Environmental Law Center both hadn't met the conditions for a hardship variance.

"This is slippery-slope-ism at its worst," St. Marys EarthKeepers chair Alex Kearns said. "To grant this variance is to send a clear message that you will also support re-zoning for the property and it will then go on from there."

Thornnton Morris, an attorney who lives on Cumberland and crafted the legislation for the Candler/Warens, Carnegies and Fergusons to create the national seashore, also spoke in favor.

Thousands respond

"These are the people who brought the park service here," Morris said. "These are not the people who opposed the park service and they are the protectors of Cumberland. Were it not for these families, Cumberland Island would have been another Hilton Head."

The commission received comments from hundreds of people who oppose the variance. An online petition against the request garnered more than 5,800 signatures in two weeks.

The comments came from people across Georgia, the Eastern Seaboard and the country. Some were from families that also own land on the island.

"The lots east of Main Road are especially egregious as it has always been the policy, intimated to the Carnegie family by the United States National Park Service, that any building in this zone would be denied in the application process to build. The density of five houses on the west side of the Main Road also seems excessive," Lucy Coleman Carnegie McFadden, who owns a parcel north of the

Lunar land, wrote. "Our family has worked to maintain the integrity of what is Cumberland Island National Seashore for over 130 years. The Warren family's intention to propose a subdivision with 10 lots seems an excessive violation of the spirit of the nation's interest in maintaining a pristine publicly protected asset of the American people."

"I have every intention to keep it a holy and majestic place and my other family members do too," Candler said.

Gary Ingram, superintendent of Cumberland Island National Seashore, spoke

O. Stillman Rockefeller also holds ownership in the parcel to the north and echoed McFadden's comments.

"Our one house was built in 1970 and we have not added another house or enclosed structure, only renovated the existing house, garage and caretaker's cottage," Rockefeller wrote.

"NO. NO. NO. NO," University of Georgia Ph.D. candidate Russell Curs wrote. "This plan to create a 10-lot subdivision on Cumberland Island NATIONAL SEASHORE should be rejected outright. There is no place for such a development on a NATIONAL SEASHORE whose mission is to protect and preserve WILDERNESS and heritage sites. There is NOTHING MORE TO SAY. Protect this invaluable resource and DO NOT DEVELOP THIS SUBDIVISION."

"I hope you make a choice that your grandkids can be proud of," Lisa Pellegrino wrote.

St. Marys City Council member Elaine Powierski cited concerns about providing emergency services to more residences and heavy construction traffic damaging the road and surrounding area.

"It is quite appropriate and logical for Camden County to not allow subdivisions if there are no paved roads," Powierski wrote.

"Why do this? Why propose this? Why kill the dream? Why kill the magic?"

Why take away a part of this paradise wherein 50,000 people a year chose to forgo modern convenience to step back into time, into a parallel universe, to experience the magic of Cumberland Island?" Evan Baker of Knoxville, Tenn, wrote. "Leave this island to the history, to the horses and those humbled by its mere existence."

Support for variance

Several friends or associates of the Candler/Warren family also wrote the commission in support of the variance, saying that the family had been great stewards of the island.

"The Candler/Warren history of respect of the unique and limited resources on Cumberland dates back to the 1930s and I fully expect that this respect will carry on for many generations to come," Art Rollins of Atlanta wrote. "I have known these families for over half a century and the legacy of extraordinary conservation and preservation runs very deep into the fourth and fifth generations of this venerable family."

"I have had the opportunity to visit them at High Point on the northern end of the island many, many times over the last 50 years," William Bridges of Smyrna wrote, noting that he had grown up with both families.

"They have always been excellent stewards and shown a strong commitment to the preservation of this beautiful place."

"It is so beautiful there and I know the Warren and Candler family will be an asset to your community as they have been to ours," wrote Peggy Still Johnson, executive director of the Callanwolde Fine Arts Center in Atlanta. She noted that Jimmy Warren and the Candler/Warren family had supported the arts center for more than 40 years.

"Knowing the owners of this property, I trust that they can preserve the heritage and the quiet beauty of Cumberland Island. They have great respect for the history and majesty of that property," the Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler wrote.

Candler said he has had an interest in "this and in other properties on Cumberland" for more than 60 years.

"I feel very comfortable that their plan for this parcel of land on the south end of Cumberland Island will meet the high standards and long-term care, which is their track record," president and CEO of The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation Mark McDonald wrote. "The Candler and Warren families have been closely involved with many other worthy preservation causes in Georgia."

"Without our hard work and sacrifice to preserve the island, it likely would not exist as it does today," Matthew Warren wrote.

"Therefore, I have no doubt that we will continue to protect and preserve the island's natural state and that we would never do anything to the detriment of any and all current or future stakeholders in the island."

"Why do this? Why propose this? Why kill the dream? Why kill the magic?"