



Board of County Commissioners

Office of Planning & Development

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Memo

To: Camden County Board of Commissioners

From: Eric Landon, Planning Director

Date: June 5, 2017

Re: Update and Direction on Cumberland Island

The County currently has two pending appeals for a Hardship Variance granted to LUMAR LLC on Cumberland Island. Prior to the appeal being heard by the BOC, the property owners and appellants asked for time to have discussions in hopes of reaching a compromise.

County staff has initiated discussions with Cumberland Island private property owners, those that are in opposition to any development, leading environmental organizations in the region and the National Park Service. The desire of these meetings was to find compromise on the LUMAR case, but also a long term solution for all private properties on Cumberland. One possible solution is to create a new zoning district that reflects the compromise found through these discussions.

All of the parties mentioned above met with the Director of the National Park Service on a recent visit. During that meeting the NPS Director expressed interest in taking the lead in negotiations. This would require the County to delay action and allow the NPS additional time to work with each party individually.

Staff is requesting direction from the Board on moving forward.

Options:

1. Select a meeting date to hear the variance appeal(s),
2. Initiate the creation of a new zoning district, or
3. Allow time for negotiation with the National Park Service

Staff recommends option #3.

Attachment: Letter from National Park Service



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Cumberland Island National Seashore
101 Wheeler Street
Saint Marys, Georgia 31558

IN REPLY REFER TO:

A3815(CUIS)

June 9, 2017


Mr. James H. Starline
Chairman, Camden County Board of Commissioners
P.O. Box 99
Woodbine, Georgia 31569

Dear Mr. Starline:

The National Park Service (NPS) believes that valuable progress is being made in the negotiations among parties concerned with the potential zoning and code changes for Cumberland Island, which are currently being considered by the Camden County government. As you know, the situation involves a difficult balance between private property concerns and the preservation of the character and purposes for which Cumberland Island National Seashore was established. The complexity is increased further by the number and diversity of the interests involved.

To try and strike this balance, the Park Service has committed to work with the landowners, county officials, and other stakeholders to investigate several possible options for Cumberland Island, including land exchanges and environmental easements. We believe these actions would help facilitate and define any potential changes to Camden County codes. The process for approving and implementing each of these potential solutions can be complex. As discussed with Acting NPS Director Mike Reynolds it could take up to one year to finalize any agreements. Therefore, the NPS respectfully requests that the Board of Commissioners grant additional time for negotiations to continue such that solutions can be presented to the Board that are amenable to all those concerned. Please be assured that the NPS will work diligently and as quickly as possible through these processes. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at 912-882-4336 x227 or Gary_Ingram@nps.gov

Sincerely,



Gary Ingram
Superintendent

cc: John Meyers
Eric Landon

THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2017

Tribune & Georgian, Community Newspapers Inc.

Park service takes lead on island Johna Strickland Rush johna@tribune-georgian.com

The debate over Cumberland Island's future isn't over yet — and won't be decided anytime soon now that the National Park Service has asked for time to negotiate a resolution. County commissioners had planned to hear the two appeals of a hardship variance if a resolution couldn't be reached by June 1, then acting National Park Service director Mike Reynolds came to town. Reynolds met with county staff, the two parties appealing the variance and the property owners June 2 and asked the county to delay action and let the park service take the lead in negotiations. With the National Park Service involved, it may take up to a year to finalize any agreements, prompting the request to the county. Commissioners unanimously agreed Tuesday to hold off. "The situation involves a difficult balance between private property concerns and the preservation of the character and purposes for which Cumberland Island National Seashore was established," island superintendent Gary Ingram wrote in a June 9 letter to the county, making a formal request. "The complexity is increased further by the number and diversity of the interests involved. "To try and strike this balance, the park service has committed to work with the landowners, county officials and other stakeholders to investigate several possible options for Cumberland Island, including land exchanges and environmental easements. We believe these actions would help facilitate and define any potential changes to Camden County codes. The process for approving and implementing each of these potential solutions can be complex. ... Please be assured that the NPS will work diligently and as quickly as possible through these processes." County staff presented the commissioners with three options: select a date to hear the appeals, start the process of creating a new zoning district or give the National Park Service time to negotiate. County commissioner Gary Blount said Tuesday that he had "absolutely no intention" of changing the island's zoning. The county planning commission approved a hardship variance in December to split about 88 acres on Cumberland owned by Lumar LLC into 10 lots to build a few houses. The vote sparked widespread discussion about further development on the island. Two parties appealed the decision to the board of commissioners in January. The county has met for months with representatives from Lumar and both appeals to try to negotiate a compromise, including potentially changing the zoning. The island is zoned conservation preservation and a zoning change would have to be approved for houses to be built. The county has prepared a draft zoning ordinance that would create a "Cumberland Island district" if enacted. "Recognizing that there is privately owned property within the national seashore, the CID is intended to find balance between protection of natural resources and private property rights," according to the purpose of the draft ordinance. There are only six allowed uses: single-family dwelling; cemetery; wildlife refuge or nature park; power and water supply service; accessory structures for single-family dwellings limited to storage sheds, pole barns and garages; and passive recreation usage consistent with maintenance of the natural landscape, such as unpaved paths. The draft also lays out special provisions that include no further subdivision of lots, no variances, any setback reduction would require a special use permit and one house per 15 acres with the possibility of waiving 50 percent of the density requirement if 80 percent of the parcel is placed in a conservation easement.

Leaders should represent our interests on dais

Dear Editor, Riddle me this: Have Cumberland Island (CI) residents agreed to help try and make Spaceport Camden a reality, in exchange for the chance to build houses on the island for themselves and their heirs? And this despite the fact that the legislation which established our national seashore says "The seashore shall be permanently preserved in its primitive state"? That would explain why our commissioners, who want a spaceport more than anything, would be willing to do the unthinkable to our county and ruin this pristine jewel of the Georgia coast. A recent letter to the editor indicated that CI residents "speak as one." So it's possible the reason they may be handed Cumberland Island on a silver platter is that there's something in it for those doing the handing. A plaintive response in the June 1 edition of the Tribune & Georgian asked: "Do the Camden County commissioners work for the Candler and wealthy developers or the people?" Or for those in high places that want a spaceport here? The go-to "space guy," who, in my opinion, is being paid an arm and a leg to convince the commissioners to build an insanely expensive spaceport that would fly rockets over a nuclear naval submarine base and a revered national park, asked on Dec. 7, 2015, essentially, "What if residents of Cumberland Island weren't an issue?" I believe this shocking statement is related to what we're seeing now with the Coca-Cola Candler/ Carnegie clan. Would you choose for Camden County to pursue a spaceport that's never going to happen, because of all the interruptions it would cause - bringing the entire sub base to a halt, stopping boat traffic around Jekyll, Cumberland Island and St. Simons Island, trapping people in their homes or forcing them to stay away for an extended or even indefinite amounts of time, forcing tourists to cancel their long-awaited plans, etc.? Or would you choose to keep Cumberland Island as it is, drawing in tens of thousands of visitors a year, being an economic blessing to St. Marys and a boon to our entire county, and a magical haven for the world forever? Hmm ... For those who keep bringing up jobs: According to the research, a spaceport here would likely bring very few jobs, and most of those would not be high-paying. We need to stop tiptoeing around the \$25 million — down payment — white elephant in the room. We're not going to stand idly by for the ruination of Cumberland Island for no good reason. We're not going to fall for hemming and hawing by our elected officials, saying they have no choice but to allow a handful of people to push them around to get houses that will take down St. Marys' economy and spoil the island visitors' experience for the foreseeable future. We pay Messrs. Lannie Brant, Chuck Clark, Jimmy Starline, Gary Blount and Ben Casey to protect the interests of the citizens of Camden County. They made a promise to us, and we expect them to keep it. Terri Keller Kingsland

It's tough to be a commissioner

Dear Editor, If I were a Camden commissioner, I'd be outraged. I'm expected to make a decision I am ill-prepared to make. It can have grave consequences. On the one hand, I might deny some corporations their rights, and on the other, I might forever harm Cumberland Island National Seashore. I'm in this predicament because I didn't do what I should have done. When Lumar LLC asked for a variance that was not legally supportable, I should have expected my planning department to deny it. But for whatever reasons, they approved it. Then citizens brought to my attention that the variance failed to meet any of the five necessary legal requirements, the county attorney could have defended the decade-old county zoning code. More than 100 years of U.S. Supreme Court decisions support our law! What should have been simple isn't, anymore. Now I'm asked to change the law for a thousand, scattered acres of land instead of defending our existing law over a

simple variance on one parcel. Some landowners claim a historic attachment to their land, but they are relatively recent purchasers. For instance, the corporation that bought the Lumar tract did so secretly less than 20 years ago. In fact, their ownership is still unknown as they hide behind their limited liability corporation. Can a corporation really have an emotional attachment to land they've never occupied? The property owners are cynically relying on the fact that the perpetually cash strapped National Park Service will not use its legal condemnation power to acquire the land so that it will remain unchanged and pristine for all future Americans. The leverage they are attempting works against the national seashore. For instance, fire control on Cumberland Island depends on periodic prescribed burning to make wildfires less damaging. But more homes make it much harder for the seashore to manage the entire island where Camden County has no fire station. As commissioner, could my vote result in a major fire? The leverage caused by subdividing into many more lots is also especially unfair to taxpayers who will have to pay exaggerated prices for multiple home lots instead of undeveloped properties. It's been done before on Cumberland Island with local politicians profiting. So a vote to allow subdivisions will cast doubts on my motives, even if I am squeaky clean. But won't new homes on Cumberland increase land value and tax revenue for the county? If I were a commissioner, I'd like that. But the downside is that I might be making a decision that would reduce Camden tourism and harm all the folks whose jobs and businesses depend on it. Many private land owners and Greyfield visitors leave from Brunswick and Fernandina Beach, Fla., never setting foot in another Camden business. What if folks with schoolage children decide to live on Cumberland? Shouldn't the school board have a say-so if they are the ones who will have to transport a child from the island to school? I think I'll just let the lawyers decide this thing. Steve Weinkle Harrietts Bluff

Saturday, June 24

A rally for Cumberland Island will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 24, at Howard Gilman Memorial Park on the waterfront in St. Marys. Participants are invited to add their voice to oppose development on Cumberland Island National Seashore. There will be free "Don't Develop Cumberland Island" T-shirts for the first 400 attendees, entertainment by The Friese Studio of Music, booths and exhibits, face painting and food trucks, including Tony's Outrigger Seafood, Chet's BBQ, Sweet Luncheonette and Bar None Vending.