

**PARTIAL MINUTES OF THE  
ZONING COMMISSION  
September 21, 2020**

**Z-20-09-010: A rezoning request from R-3 (Residential Single Family -3) to AG (Agricultural) for the property identified as 3630 Lewiston Road, generally described as east of Lewiston Road and south of Scarlet Haw Drive, (19.25 Acres). (Approved)**

Mr. Kirkman reviewed the zoning map and other summary information for the subject property and surrounding properties. Mr. Kirkman advised of the condition related to the request. Chair Holston inquired if there were any questions for Mr. Kirkman. Seeing none, Chair Holston requested the applicants to state their name, address, and present their case.

Susan Lambert, 5625 Francisco Drive, purchased the Lewiston Road property several years ago with the hopes of maintaining some green space in an area under a lot of rapid development. Ms. Lambert stated she is a fiber artist and aware of the superior quality of Alpaca fiber. Her intention was to have an Alpaca farm to promote the idea of local textile production on a small scale, similar to the farm to table idea but with textile production. Ms. Lambert's business partner is Melodi Fentress who will speak to their intentions with the land. Ms. Lambert stated they want to be a farm. There was a meeting with TRC with the result being they would need to request Agricultural zoning. They would like to start with a small herd of Alpacas to do fiber production and use the Alpacas as therapy animals on a limited basis. There is a program titled Alpaca Grams, a business where trained Alpacas can go to birthday parties and children's functions. She noted this was a good way to preserve the land and have good use of it at the same time. One of the considerations neighbors may have had when hearing about farms and animals is perhaps the smell. Alpaca manure has almost no odor whatsoever and is good for gardens. Ms. Lambert is hopeful Gate City Harvest will create a relationship with them to use the Alpaca manure. Ms. Lambert did not anticipate any additional traffic on Lewiston Road and her request fits well into the Greensboro's 2040 Plan.

Melodi Fentress, 3630 Lewiston Road, was not able to play a video, but did show a number slides to walk the Commission through the request and how the Alpaca farm would work. Mr. Engle asked how many Alpacas would be on the property. Ms. Fentress responded 7. Mr. Engle asked if there was any sort of regulation the city or state had with an Alpaca farm. Ms. Fentress stated there is no ordinance for Alpacas. They have submitted an ordinance determination to make it the same as sheep as Alpacas have the same fecal and urine output as sheep. Mr. Kirkman stated there are standards in the ordinance that speak to the distance from property lines for all agricultural operations and structures associated with agricultural operations. Mr. Engle stated one of the things spoken was about manure and being sensitive to that, asked what does the City's ordinance or State regulations state regarding storing any sort of runoff or otherwise. Ms. Fentress stated Alpacas generate 1.5% of their body weight in fecal outputs. The average Alpaca is approximately 200 lbs. so that equals about four pounds of poop a day. Seven Alpacas would create about 28 pounds a day which is less poop per day than one horse would produce. Alpaca poop is often referred to as black gold in the Alpaca community because it is such good fertilizer and sells for a lot of money. The intent is to use the Alpaca poop in their garden and sell some to local farms. Ms. Lambert advised there is no odor with Alpaca poop. It is pelletized and does not run off. The video presentation would show their site plan, the pasture lines, and that the barn and things are well within the requirements on the property lines. Mr. Kirkman stated Zoning defaults to the State and County in terms of health regulations and other things. There is not a local ordinance specifically for this use. The previous questions are not necessarily tied to a land use, but are more of an operational question. Mr. Engle was sensitive to the issues because of the types of livestock farming in North Carolina and the intensity of the residential uses around it. Ms. Lambert stated it would not smell like a pig farm.

Ms. Fentress then presented additional slides and stated this request was a step forward in implementing Greensboro's new unique multi-faceted GSO 2040 Plan which focuses on place making. When voting yes to rezone the Lewiston Road, the Commission would be voting yes to honoring the plan, creating jobs, environmental stewardship, sustainability, wild life preservation, supporting Greensboro's autistic community, and honor Greensboro's textile industry. Ms. Fentress indicated a large amount of development surrounding their property. Wildlife has been displaced and this land would be a good place for the animals to go. Concerns expressed with other development have been population density, overcrowding of schools, and displacement of wildlife. On the new future land map, this site is in the urban general place type allowing for mixed use areas and in the noise cone which allows non-residential types of development. TRC recommended agricultural rezoning. Looking into the 6 big ideas of the 2040 Greensboro Plan, the request fits into the unique character of their neighborhood. Ms. Fentress referred to the riding stables on Lewiston Road and stated another barn would fit into the area. She noted Alpaca Grams was already a business in Charlotte which has been purchased and would be moving to Greensboro. Ms. Fentress stated they would be providing the Triad area with mobile Alpaca therapy relieving their customers of the need to use cars. This property is registered as a certified wildlife habitat and they were part of the million pollinator garden challenge. Being agriculture promotes environmentally beneficial patterns of land use and preserving forestry in the area will help to balance the light pollution from the airport, surrounding activities and combat the urban heat island effect created by the airport. Ms. Fentress stated rezoning to AG supported her ability to start a business and generate much needed income for her family and provide a better future for Greensboro. Alpaca's are a Camelid species, they are not camels but within the same family and considered to one of the lowest risk species in North America agriculture with respect to potential human exposure to pathogens or bi-products of the animal waste. The species seem to be ideally suited to urban farm settings. Animal therapy will be provided to autistic individuals by autistic individuals. The prevalence rate of autism is higher than elsewhere in the nation. Ms. Fentress stated having this property rezoned to AG and getting the business going will pull her family out of poverty. Local fiber mills would be able to utilize the alpacas to process their fiber and commission local artists to create items for the online store.

Ms. Fentress distributed fliers on Hickory Ridge Road. An article was placed in the Northwest Observer. People in the neighborhood have stated they loved the idea. Emails were provided indicating support of the request. Ms. Fentress stated voting yes to rezone will be honoring the unique vision of the new Comprehensive Plan in creating jobs, lifting her family out of poverty, environmental stewardship, sustainability, preservation of wildlife, supporting Greensboro's autistic community, and honoring Greensboro rich textile history.

Chair Holston stated the presentation was very interesting and helpful and then asked if outreach was posted on the Next Door app. Ms. Fentress responded she did post it on Facebook with 145 likes. Chair Holston inquired if there were letters or door knocking. Ms. Fentress stated the emails shown were a result of a flyer that was put out. She did not knock on doors due to Covid but placed flyers on 60 to 75 homes in the Hickory Woods neighborhood with responses from people stating they wanted to join the Zoom meeting but was too late for some of them. Ms. Fentress reached out on Facebook and the Next Door App. Chair Holston asked if 7 Alpacas were a small herd. Ms. Fentress replied 7 is a small herd regarding Alpacas. They are herd animals and have to be together and the Alpaca Owners Association recommends having no less than 3 Alpaca. They are very docile, quiet, they hum, stick together and will not escape. Ms. Lambert stated they visited an Alpaca farm located in a residential area in Lexington, surrounded by houses on every border of the property. Ms. Lambert thought there were 60 Alpacas at that location which was approximately 10 acres. Ms. Lambert stated they do not intend to have that large of a herd as it would be more than they could manage. Ms. Fentress stated they are

purchasing, four of the Alpacas from Alpaca Gram who have been in training as therapy animals and are in the process of becoming USDA approved therapy animals. The focus is Alpaca therapy, fiber production and the Alpaca Gram for parties. Chair Holston asked how many Alpacas could be on the land. Ms. Lambert stated half of the land is heavily wooded and would be cost prohibitive to clear and turn it into pasture. It was originally a horse farm and there are two areas that are closer to Lewiston Road currently overgrown with small pine, shrubs, and other things, that would be easier to clear and return to a pasture. A picture was depicted showing the field on the left side of the house. Ms. Fentress stated they are considering growing lavender as the soil is not great but very good for lavender. The idea of fiber farming and fiber shed would include growing the plants used to dye the fiber in an ecofriendly way. There have been talks for that side of the property to be used for planting. Right of the property would be cleared and house the Alpacas. Chair Holston inquired if it would be open to the street and those passing by. Ms. Fentress responded it would be fenced. Chair Holston inquired if it was buffered at all. Ms. Fentress stated not with any vegetation but the fence will be a good distance off the street. On the right there is a large tree buffer between this property and the neighbor's property. Ms. Lambert stated Alpacas are valuable animals. Depending on the quality of their fiber, it could be up to \$30,000 for a single Alpaca. Alpacas need to be kept in their pasture and kept safe. Chair Holston inquired if there was anyone else wishing to speak in favor of the request.

Jeff Mills, 3404 Hickory Woods Court, stated he was very much in support of the request. There were a number of horse farms in the area which have become housing developments. Mr. Mills lived at this location before Proehlific Park came to be. Going back to this area's agricultural roots is nothing but a good thing, particularly with these animals that are smaller, manageable, and very friendly. As the first house in the neighborhood and this site right up against his home, Mr. Mills was all for it.

Janet Mazzurco, 5443 Winters Way, supported the request, but was concerned about the lack of conditions. This would be an Alpaca farm but with no conditions that would keep it an Alpaca farm. If the business were to fail with the zoning Agricultural in the city, what uses would be allowed under City Agricultural on the 20 acres of land. From the report of the water resource review everything looks good but also appears that the water runoff discharges directly into Horse Pen Creek and the northwest Greensboro water. There are problems currently that are being managed with PFAs contamination and asked if the Alpaca farm would have any impact on the watershed. Ms. Mazzurco asked if there would be more TRC to go through as this request works through the process. Mr. Kirkman responded Agricultural zoning allows a variety of agricultural uses and would include growing crops, raising animals and all of the associated activities that would go with that and the storage of materials associated with those things. It is a broad category of agricultural development in the AG district. Mr. Kirkman was unable to speak to the water runoff question as there was no one from Water Resources present. Part of this will default more to the State. Ms. Fentress had stated during the TRC meeting it will be classified as a bona fide farm and some of the local regulations would not apply in that scenario. What will be built and how it is tied to the use of a bona fide farm would determine if TRC would become involved as it kicks in some of the local regulations out and would also go to county health and state level of regulations. Ms. Fentress stated this will be an all organic farm and will not be using any chemicals. There would not be any chemical runoff into the watershed. They are all about environmental protection and ensuring everything will be done for the environment. Ms. Lambert stated if the Alpaca farm fails, she receives calls at least once a month from developers asking if she would be interested in selling the parcel on Lewiston Road. The likelihood that someone would come along and buy that land with a different type of farm is unlikely. If the property were to become a different use, it would probably go to residential development as that makes more economic sense. It would perhaps be a better value for the land in dollar sense.

Enriching the community and the national environment. Their choice is for an Alpaca farm as the better one.

Chair Holston asked if the question on the TRC was answered. Ms. Fentress stated they went through TRC. There was a lot of confusion and miscommunication initially because TRC thought they were starting a big commercial farm operation. The Alpaca Farm is a family farm. It will have a business aspect but all of the business would happen off site with the mobile Alpaca therapy and mobile Alpaca Grams. The public will not be allowed on the property. TRC concluded that since it will be a bona fide farm and not having the public on the property, there was no need for implementation of anything in the TRC review but they would review if that were to happen in the future. Ultimately doing that would go against the environmental stewardship. Ms. Lambert purchased this land for her children to inherit and it would be part of her legacy. This land would be kept clean, support wild life, and will have a few Alpacas for a fiber family farm. Chair Holston inquired if there was anyone else to speak in favor of the request. Seeing none, Chair Holston inquired if there was anyone to speak in opposition to the request.

Janet Mazzurco, stated she was also in opposition but would like to work it out. Ms. Mazzurco was concerned regarding conditions looking to the future. If it failed as Alpaca farm, what conditions could be imposed ensuring there would be another Alpaca farm or something more palatable. Ms. Mazzurco stated she lives next to the only other bona fide farm in the city of Greensboro and the City has basically no jurisdiction over that farm. The farm is regulated by the State and the county, but the county does not have jurisdiction when it comes down to it. There have been challenges over the years working with that property owner. The lack of conditions is a big concern for a lot of people in the northwest Greensboro area. Ms. Mazzurco supported the applicants and their business venture but without conditions it was troublesome. Ms. Fentress asked where did Ms. Mazzurco live and where that was in relation to the where their farm is. Ms. Mazzurco provided her address and advised where she was in relation to the farm. Mr. Engle advised Ms. Fentress that typically the Commission does not allow those in support and those in opposition to speak in both segments. This is all new for everyone, especially to have someone with experience speaking on both sides of an issue. Chair Holston asked Mr. Mills if he was in opposition.

Mr. Mills responded he was not in opposition, and stated it was worth noting when he first moved to the area, the land was not overgrown, and it was vacant. The previous owners used it to ride four wheelers and that type of thing, which was more offensive than what the Alpacas will be. Chair Holston inquired if there was anyone else to speak in opposition to the request. Hearing none, Chair Holston advised the applicants or anyone else had a total of 5 minutes in rebuttal. Ms. Fentress stated in speaking to Ms. Mazzurco she understood the concern regarding what would happen if the Alpaca farm failed. Ms. Lambert stated they would not engage in something that they thought may fail. As everyone had seen within this past year, there are no guarantees. Ms. Lambert stated she could not imagine that someone would want to create a large farming operation with that land. Ms. Lambert did not know what the options are as far as placing conditions and restrictions about different types of farming such as large cattle, horses, pigs like that could be obnoxious to other residents in the area. Ms. Lambert stated she is open to conditions because their only interest is raising the Alpacas for fiber and as long as that would not be restricted, she did not see why there could not be a good way to please everyone. Chair Holston asked if Ms. Lambert was saying she would be open to conditions. Mr. Kirkman stated this is a straight zoning request and conditions are not applicable. Mr. Kirkman advised this was getting into a question of operation versus use and Zoning is not designed to address operation questions. Ms. Lambert stated the Alpaca industry is not a hugely profitable industry. That is why there is not one everywhere. There are tight margins to be successful as a business with that and having the agricultural zoning will help them with some of the taxing and things like that

which would give them a better shot at being successful. Chair Holston inquired if there were any additional comments for those wishing to speak in favor of the request. Ms. Fentress asked the Commission to consider that Ms. Lambert purchased this land for her children to inherit and the likelihood of anyone trying to do anything other than the Alpaca farm on this property in the next 20 years is slim to none. Chair Holston inquired if there were any questions from the Commissioners. Seeing none, Chair Holston inquired if there was anyone wishing to speak in opposition in rebuttal. Ms. Mazzurco asked staff if they could connect her with the applicants to get together and perhaps work through this a little bit. Ms. Fentress was in agreement. Chair Holston inquired if there was anyone else to speak in opposition. Chair Holston closed the public hearing and requested to hear from staff.

Mr. Kirkman stated the GSO 2040 Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Urban General on the Future Built Form Map and Residential on the Future Land Use Map. The request is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan because the uses requested are of a similar scale, intensity, or off-site impact as existing nearby uses. The proposed AG zoning would allow uses that complement those found on adjacent properties. Staff recommended approval of the request. Chair Holston inquired if the Commissioners had any comments, questions, thoughts, discussion or a motion. Mr. Engle advised the applicants they did a great job on their presentation and requested them to work with Ms. Mazzurco as he believed it was a win/win for what they are doing.

Ms. O'Connor stated in regard to agenda item Z-20-09-010, the Greensboro Zoning Commission believes that its action to recommend approval for the rezoning request for the property described as 3630 Lewiston Road from R-3 (Residential Single Family-3) to AG (Agricultural) to be consistent with the adopted GSO 2040 Comprehensive Plan and considers the action taken to be reasonable and in the public interest for the following reasons. The request is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's Future Built Form Map and Future Land Use Map. The proposed AG zoning district allows uses that are complimentary to existing uses in the surrounding area. The request is reasonable due to the size, physical conditions, and other attributes of the area. It will benefit the property owner and surrounding community. Approval is in the public interest. Seconded by Mr. Trapp. The Commission voted 8-0. (Ayes: Chair Holston, O'Connor, Trapp, Jones, Bryson, Rosa, Engle, and Alford. Nays: 0). Chair Holston advised the approval constituted a final action unless appealed in writing to the Planning Department within 10 days. Anyone may file such an appeal within 10 days. All such appeals will be subject to a public hearing at October 20, 2020 City Council Meeting. All adjoining property owners will be notified of any such appeal.