



2614 Thorn Grove Pike, Knoxville, TN 37914 | 865-546-0745 | www.ramseyhouse.org

December 8th, 2023

To the Knox County Planning Commission and others whom it may concern:

We, the Board of Directors for Historic Ramsey House (HRH), are opposed to having the historic overlay removed from the remaining 5.77 acres of the original 9.41 acres located at 3220 E. Governor John Sevier Highway at the corner of Thorn Grove Pike and sold by the former HRH Board to KME Development in 2014.

The L-shaped 5.77-acre tract extends behind the lot now occupied by the Dollar General and lies along the protected wetlands that adjoin the HRH property, which are used for educational purposes. While we understand the 2014 Board's reasoning at the time, we also note that by their own admission, no archeological excavations were conducted on this parcel once owned by Francis Ramsey, who died in 1820. Those Board members were not the same Board members who originally obtained the lands, nor were they the Board members who originally requested the historic overlay, which, as stated in the Knoxville/Knox County Historic Zoning Commission meeting on April 17, 2014, was intended "to protect the Ramsey House context from inappropriate development." Also noted, is that although the original request was for the subdivided 3.37 acres to be zoned CA (General Business), it was instead zoned PC (Planned Commercial) because of the site's proximity to HRH so that the MPC could still have input to what would be "compatible and functional" with the HRH property. This indicates the concerns held by the MPC that also motivate the current Board's stance to not remove the historic overlay.

The HRH Board president in 2014 stated at the meeting that "maintenance of the buffer and wetlands is part of their contract with the buyer as an additional level of protection." Obviously, despite the decision to sell that parcel, "protection" was still a concern for HRH. While the former Board members stated in 2014 that the tree line at that time created a buffer that they had "no interest in ever clearing," anyone observing the "buffer" today can see that the trees in that line are dying because of the expanding wetlands, which are protected. Thus, the "vegetation buffer," noted at that time by Zoning Commission staff member Kaye Graybeal "which would prevent being able to see the proposed commercial development," is falling away. The noise level from John Sevier Highway has already increased quite profoundly as the vegetation buffer continually dwindles due to the ongoing expansion of the wetlands.

As stated in the 2014 testimony of the former HRH Executive Director (2001 to 2004) and the president of the French Broad Preservation Association at that meeting, efforts to rezone the tracts in question were opposed by many. The additional attached signatures gathered for a letter addressed to the Historic Zoning Commission from residents nearby the tract in question demonstrate that the community still opposes this commercial development. Although zoning restrictions are in place, those are often ignored, and current commercial sites along Governor John Sevier Highway are in violation of those restrictions.

Historic Ramsey House Board of Directors and Staff

Jan Dickens - Board President | Chase McSpadden - Vice President | Lynda Blankenship - Treasurer | Dani Manley - Secretary

Adam Alfrey | Misty Anderson | Walter Lynn Bates | Kevin Bogle | Timothy Carroll | Michele Cox
Pamela Doane | Lacey Keefer | Julia Shiflett | Melissa Stowers | Henry Wilson
Mark Sledziewski - Executive Director | Sue Jones - Museum Assistant

The parcel in question, on Francis Ramsey's ancestral lands, has never been fully surveyed. While Dr. Charles Faulkner worked with the Ramsey House for many years doing archeological surveys, none were ever completed on the parcel in question. The land has a deep history to it, predating the building of the stone house itself. Prior to the Treaty of the Holston (signed in 1791) the entirety of the area of the Fork of the River was land used by the Cherokee peoples. It is the mission of Historic Ramsey House to share the stories of those who inhabited the land, not just the Ramsey Family. Part of our strategic plan is expanding our educational offerings to incorporate more of the land, its history and the benefits it provides us. We've been working with the University of Tennessee to develop a comprehensive land management plan, and to expand our offerings outside of the stone house and into the ancestral land we still oversee.

Once the historic overlay is removed from the 5.77 acres at 3220 E. Governor John Sevier Highway at the corner of Thorn Grove Pike adjacent to Historic Ramsey House, it can never be regained. Current conditions suggest that the assumptions made about "vegetation buffer" are proving to be in error, and the current Board of Directors and community members signed below are strongly opposed to the request. We appreciate the support of our District 9 Commissioner Carson Dailey, who is in agreement with our stance.

Sincerely,
Historic Ramsey House Board of Directors and Staff

Board President - Jan Dickens
Board Vice President - Chase McSpadden
Board Treasurer - Lynda Blankenship
Board Secretary - Dani Hood
Michele Cox
Melissa Stowers
Pamela Doane
Henry Wilson
Kevin Bogle
Misty Anderson
Lacey Smith
Adam Alfrey
Lynn Bates
Julia Schifflet
Tim Carroll

Executive Director - Mark Sledziewski
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