

Zack Lawson
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Re: Public Comment Opposing Rezoning Request

Commissioners:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the rezoning request (File #1-I-25-RZ) seeking to change 19.09 acres from Agricultural (A) to Planned Residential (PR) with up to 5 dwelling units per acre.

Having grown up in Crystal Springs off Shady Lane, I purposefully chose to return to this area when establishing my law practice in Knoxville, purchasing a home off Shady Lane because of its unique character—safe streets, quiet atmosphere, large lots, golf course access, and a close-knit community. I wanted my family to enjoy these same benefits I had growing up. Like my neighbors, I paid a premium for these qualities that make our neighborhood special. The proposed rezoning threatens these very characteristics that drew us to invest in this area. My objections are based not just on personal preference, but on significant concerns about safety, infrastructure capacity, and community impact. I am submitting this comment in lieu of speaking at the meeting because I will be out of town.

1. *Traffic Safety & Infrastructure:*

- The addition of 963 daily vehicle trips would overwhelm our current infrastructure. This is not merely a number—it represents nearly a thousand new opportunities daily for accidents at Cunningham Road's intersection with Shady Lane, nearby side streets, and the four pedestrian and golf cart crossings adjacent to the property, which already pose significant danger for existing residents and Beaver Brook Country Club members.
- The proposed development's frontage runs to the bottom of a blind hill with golf cart and pedestrian crosswalks just beyond the hill's crest. The traffic increase, and any entrance to the development onto Cunningham Road, creates an unacceptable safety risk. Vehicles turning right onto Cunningham Road would face an immediate hazard, having to navigate both the hill and crosswalks with severely limited visibility. This is particularly dangerous given the speed of traffic on Cunningham and the frequent presence of golf carts and pedestrians using the crosswalks. Cars often have to accelerate quickly when turning onto Cunningham from its side streets due to the amount of traffic already on the road. Combining these factors with a pedestrian and golf cart crossing just over a blind hill at the property's edge will increase the danger exponentially, as those

crossing would have limited, if any, view of cars pulling out of the proposed development. And with a density anywhere near the proposed density here, that danger is significant. For context, these crosswalks are used more than 20,000 times in a given year, based on the number of rounds played. Countless of these are children who carry their bags across these crosswalks nearly every day. The proposed density increase would put people, including children, in danger.

- Shady Lane's narrow 21-foot width is fundamentally inadequate for the proposed increase in traffic. The road was designed and built for low-density residential use, and the addition of potentially hundreds of new residents would create dangerous conditions, particularly during school hours when buses and parents are navigating these narrow streets.
- Emergency vehicle access would be severely compromised by the increased congestion. The combination of narrow roads, increased traffic, and the blind hill could create critical delays for emergency responders trying to reach residents in need.

2. *Neighborhood Character & Property Values:*

- The existing character of our neighborhood is defined by large-lot, upscale residences that create a harmonious transition between the golf course and surrounding areas. This careful balance of development and open space is what makes our area unique and desirable, attracting homeowners who specifically seek this type of environment.
- As it sits, the property is surrounded by the Pete DeBusk Mansion (and its 20+ acres of plush landscaping), Beaver Brook Country Club's golf course, a beautiful horse farm, and high-end single family homes with large lots on Shady Lane and in Crystal Springs. The proposed density of 5 units per acre would radically alter this established pattern. To put this in perspective, this level of density would place *far* more homes in this one development than currently exist along the entire length of Shady Lane and Crystal Springs, fundamentally changing the nature of our community.
- The contrast between the proposed development and existing properties is particularly stark given the adjacent multi-million dollar properties and golf course setting. This jarring transition would disrupt the cohesive character that has developed organically over many years.
- One need not look far to see the negative impact of zoning allowing for multi-unit dwellings in this area. Decades ago, adjacent to the golf course's fifth hole, two multi-unit properties were allowed to be build. Those two

properties remain an eye sore, and stick out amongst all the other single family homes that border that side of the course.

3. *Inconsistency with Zoning Requirements:*

- Article 6.30.01 of the Knox County Zoning Ordinance requires that rezoning be “necessary because of substantially changed or changing conditions in the area.” No such changes have occurred in our vicinity. While the staff report notes transitions in the broader area, our section of Shady Lane maintains its original character and development pattern, making this dense development both unnecessary and inappropriate. Again, this property sits between the open space of a golf course, the Pete DeBusk Mansion and its acreage, a horse farm, and large single-family homes. This has been the case for decades and is what makes it a desirable and unique part of the North Knoxville Community.
- The Knox County Comprehensive Plan Implementation Policy 2 explicitly requires that development be “sensitive to existing community character.” While we do not yet know what the eventual development will look like, *any* development with 5 units per acre directly contradicts this requirement. Many of the existing homes in our area sit on multiple-acre lots and *all* sit on large lots; introducing quarter-acre lots would create an incompatible and jarring contrast to the existing community character. This would diminish the value of homes on Shady Lane and in Crystal Springs.
- The proposal fails the ordinance’s requirement that amendments “shall not adversely affect any other part of the County.” The traffic impact alone—963 daily trips—would affect not just our immediate neighborhood but anyone traveling Cunningham Road. The precedent set by allowing such density could threaten similar neighborhoods along Cunningham Road and throughout Knox County.

4. *Environmental & Topographical Issues:*

- The blue line stream running through the property requires substantial water quality buffers that significantly limit developable area. This isn’t merely a regulatory hurdle—it represents a critical environmental feature that helps manage stormwater and maintain the ecological balance of our area. Dense development around this stream could have far-reaching impacts on drainage patterns throughout the neighborhood and on the homes on the other side of Cunningham, which is where the creek leads and commonly experiences flooding already.

- The Hillside Protection area on the southeast portion presents serious development constraints. According to the slope analysis provided in the staff report, this area requires reduced disturbance, with slopes between 15-25% requiring 50% reduced disturbance. Attempting to maximize density on this challenging terrain could lead to erosion issues and long-term stability concerns.
- The increased impervious surface from dense development would dramatically alter the site's natural drainage patterns. With 5 units per acre, the amount of pavement and rooftop area would significantly increase stormwater runoff, impacting both the blue line stream and neighboring properties that have historically enjoyed stable drainage patterns.

5. *Additional Considerations:*

- The proximity to the golf course raises significant safety and operational concerns. The increased traffic near the golf cart and pedestrian crosswalks would create dangerous conflicts between vehicles and golf course users, fundamentally altering the safe operation of a long-established recreational facility.
- The proposed development would place unprecedented demands on our infrastructure. While utilities may technically be available through Hallsdale-Powell Utility District, the intensity of development could strain existing systems designed for low-density residential use.
- The irreversible loss of agricultural/open space land deserves serious consideration. If the land were developed at the proposed density, the rural character that defines this portion of Knox County will be permanently altered. This would set a concerning precedent for similar agricultural properties along Cunningham Road.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Planning Commission to deny this rezoning request. At minimum, any approval should require density more in keeping with the existing character of Shady Lane. If you have any questions about anything in this public comment, I can be reached at zack@litson.co.

Thank you,

Zack Lawson