

The Council of the City of Villa Rica met in a special dinner meeting with the Douglas County Commission on Thursday, May 6, 2004 at Leathers Restaurant. Those present were Mayor J Collins, Councilmembers Perry Amidon, Verland Best, and Danny Carter; City Manager Lamar Moody, City Clerk Jane Chastain, and City Attorney David Mecklin; Douglas County Commission Chairperson Rita Rainwater, Commissioners Buddy Gordon, Claude Abercrombie, Deborah Woody and David Latham; and County Manager Mike Cason. Councilmembers Jeane Williams and Woody Holland were absent with notification.

Mayor Collins opened the meeting at 6:40 p.m. He welcomed everyone and spoke of the importance of bridging the gap between the two agencies and working toward becoming more of a partnership. Mayor Collins asked for opening comments from Chairperson Rainwater and others. Chairperson Rainwater said she also is looking forward to working together with Villa Rica. She said the Douglasville-Douglas County Water-Sewer Authority [DDC-WSA] is in the process of a big expansion. Douglas County is currently rewriting their Comprehensive Plan and an important part of that will be to incorporate plans that will allow them to maintain the character of the individual areas of the County. County Manager Cason said he believes the two agencies have already begun the process of working together as was evidenced by the cooperation he witnessed during the fire at Mirror Lake in February. He said he looks forward to continuing to build upon that beginning. City Manager Moody agreed. He said the City experienced a 27% growth last year and is on track for at least that much this year. City Manager Moody said the City cannot support that amount of growth without a partnership between the agencies. He said the City is currently working on three documents which will define how big Villa Rica is going to be: (1) the Comprehensive Plan, (2) Rewritten Codes with the addition of standards, and (3) a workable Service Delivery Strategy. City Manager Moody said he would like to see a 20 year plan, not just a 5 year plan, in order for growth to be positive and controlled. Commissioner Abercrombie complimented the City on the quality of the new Medical Center and Hospital. Councilmember Amidon noted that the two agencies need to think as a region and work together. Commissioner Latham, who is the commissioner for the Villa Rica area of Douglas County, said he was pleased with the opportunity for both agencies to sit down together. He noted that the area on the west side of the County is growing because people like the nature of the area. Commissioner Woody said she is happy for the opportunity for both sides to express concerns and to get to know one another.

Chairperson Rainwater said the two agencies need to be in agreement on how to deal with growth. She would like to see it slow down somewhat while still having positive growth. Councilmember Best said he would like to see both agencies in agreement in that if Douglas County says no to a project, Villa Rica would also say no, and vice versa. In order to do that the agencies need to know what the other wants or requires.

Commissioner Abercrombie expressed concern over the Dog River Basin. He said the agencies need to be careful of anything going into that area. He said it is important that planning and zoning department of both agencies keep this sensitive area in mind. Mayor Collins said he hopes the Douglas County Commissioners will now know they

can pick up the phone and contact him or any other Villa Rica authority at any time. He said he welcomes the thoughts of the Commission and in fact needs to be aware of the direction Douglas County would like to see the City take. Commissioner Gordon said he would like to see no more annexation. He said that in the past if Douglas County told a developer no on something, the developer would go to Villa Rica and get annexed in. Then the developer would be able to go ahead and do whatever Douglas County had originally said no about. Commissioner Gordon said there needs to be a consensus on growth. Mayor Collins asked if a project meets Villa Rica's standards and also meets Douglas County standards, would the Commission be opposed to its annexation. Chairperson Rainwater said the main concern will be the Dog River watershed. She said this area has to be protected and that is their number one concern.

Commissioner Abercrombie said the County has changed its minimum square footage requirement from 1300-1500 square feet to 1500-1800 square feet per residential unit. A development can only have up to 5 houses at 1500 square feet. The remaining houses have to be at least 1800 square feet. Councilmember Carter said the City should look at that. He asked if that was for PUDs [Planned Unit Developments]. Chairperson Rainwater said no, that was for any [detached] residential unit.

Chairperson Rainwater also noted that the county is too overloaded with apartment units. She said the City of Douglasville has not been filling police officer vacancies, leaving the Sheriff's Department to pick up the slack. Most of the calls the Sheriff's Department has to cover are in apartment complexes. The Commissioners all agreed that they are against any more apartments in the county. Chairperson Rainwater also said the overbuild in apartments has lead to lower rent rates at the apartments which, in turn, has caused the rental house business to suffer. She said there are many cases where rental home owners have had to settle for less than the ideal tenants in order to have the business.

Commissioner Abercrombie said that Arbor Place Mall has not been what they expected. He said the crime rate has increased 15% to 20% due to the mall. This has ended up costing the County in jail and court costs.

Councilmember Carter asked how the housing can be controlled. Commissioner Latham said Code must include design specs to dictate quality. Chairperson Rainwater said the County is in the process of setting higher standards. For example, she said, commercial/industrial/manufacturing facilities may no longer use wooden fences as buffers or enclosures. They must use brick, wrought iron or similar durable materials.

County Manager Cason said that in the Dog River Basin the County has a three acre minimum lot size in place. He said his biggest fear is that the City will annex into the Basin and increase the density which would increase the amount of impervious surfaces. He said the tar, oil and fertilizer that washes off roofs, roadways and lawns will harm the Dog River which is the County's lifeline. Mayor Collins agreed that the Dog River is important. County Manager Cason added that the County's schools are over crowded and the jails are overloaded right now without adding any more population to the area. City Manager Moody agreed with the issues of impervious surfaces. He said the City will be focusing on square footage and standards as it rewrites the Codes.

Chairperson Rainwater asked if the City had considered letting Pete Frost of DDC-WSA handle its stormwater runoff. City Manager Moody said no but he has talked to Frost about other things which the City will be working on. He added that it is not the City's goal to annex any more property in Douglas County. Mayor Collins said the City's growth should be into Carroll County at this time. He said he realizes it will take time to earn the trust of Douglas County but it is not the City's intention to continue to grow into Douglas County. City Manager Moody said Highway 61 will become a "power corridor" south of the City and it doesn't make sense to go further east on Highway 78.

City Manager Moody said Carroll County is allowing "mini-systems", on-site sanitary disposal systems, in subdivisions in the Highway 61 area rather than pumping sewerage to wastewater treatment facilities.

Commissioner Latham said he would like to see Bankhead Highway [between Douglasville and Villa Rica] grow commercially. He has been asking for "niceties" like brick façade on businesses there. He also implied there is other growth headed that way. Project Rodeo will open high-tech jobs in the area.

Commissioner Abercrombie said green strips and recreation will be important issues for the two agencies to work toward. He said the most recent SPLOST referendum passed in Douglas County because of recreation. He said the County has 1500 acres on the Dog and Chattahoochee Rivers for recreation. City Manager Moody updated those gathered on the status of the gold mine park.

City Attorney Mecklin said it was good to hear the spirit of cooperation and hoped the two agencies would get started on making it a reality. He suggested the two agencies get their respective planning and zoning departments together to help mesh requirements. City Manager Moody said that would be the best way to have a seamless operation. Chairperson Rainwater suggested Douglas County's Eric Linton be invited to participate on the City's Steering Committee. She also suggested that Villa Rica send a representative to assist with their comprehensive plan. Chairperson Rainwater said Douglas County has recently formed a new Department of Transportation. She said Randy Hulsey is the Planner for that department.

All agreed to work together more closely for the benefit of the area. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

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J Allen Collins - Mayor

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Rita Rainwater – Commission Chair

ATTEST:

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Lamar Moody – City Manager

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Mike Cason – County Manager