

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Orange County Planning Board is Dismissive, Unprofessional
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We are a group of neighbors and landowners - [A Voice for Efland & Orange](#)- who have come together over our concerns about the rezoning petition and proposed development of the largest gas station in the world – Buc-ee’s Travel Center at Efland Station – between the I-85/40 exits 160 and 161 in Orange County, NC. We have been speaking with our Efland, Cedar Grove, Buckhorn, and Hillsborough neighbors, and organizing virtual conversations to outline why we believe this development will negatively impact the quality of life for all residents and commuters in Western Orange County. We currently have 94 subscribers to our email list and 1,077 signers of our [A Voice for Efland Petition](#) with [over 80 comments from local signees](#) saying why they signed.

We want to bring specific attention to the disrespectful manner in which the Orange County Planning Board handled their November 4th meeting, in which the developer’s rezoning petition was heard and passed unanimously. In our opinion, the Orange County Planning Board did not seem to care about the details of a major development that will shut down an Interstate exit. In our opinion, they already had their minds made up about the petition, and seemingly were unable to act in a way that was respectful of Orange County and any of its residents or processes. We were embarrassed by how our community looked in front of the developer, and we felt completely dismissed.

Planning Boards in North Carolina handle issues pertaining to the development and land use in their communities. Most boards are tasked with serving in an advisory role to the County Commissioners and keep the Commissioners and public informed on issues related to planning and development. Board members must review and make recommendations on matters related to land use plans, policies, and regulations. Some issues that are handled by Planning Boards include land subdivisions, zoning ordinance amendments, and rezoning petitions like the one from Buc-ee’s to rezone two plots of 104 acres in Efland from Office, Research and Manufacturing (O/RM) designated zoning to a Master Planning Development Zoning District (MPD-CZ). Planning Boards are supposed to serve in the public interest to help grow their communities along “good civic lines.” Most Planning Boards, like Orange County’s, hold public meetings for county members to voice their concerns.

In the Orange County Planning’s Board’s [Code of Ethics](#), the Board is required to (but not limited to) behave consistently and with respect towards everyone with whom they interact, to treat other advisory boards and advisory board members and the public with respect, **to be**

careful not to reach conclusions on issues until all sides have been heard, to show respect for their appointed office, and not to behave in ways that reflect badly on the office, the advisory board, Orange County, or the Orange County Board of Commissioners.

The Board also introduces a Public Charge at the start of their meetings that states: “The Planning Board pledges its respect to all present. The Board asks those attending this meeting to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous manner toward each other, County staff, and Board members.”

We believe that neither the Public Charge nor the Code of Ethics was followed in the Planning Board meeting held on November 4th.

Seventeen people provided verbal comments in opposition to the developer’s rezoning petition. However, Board members did not seem engaged or interested in the details of a large proposal or the concerns of the community. A Voice for Efland and Orange also sent a website outlining all of our detailed concerns with a petition with over 900 signatures at the time one week before the meeting. This information was seemingly not read by any Planning Board member before the meeting.

The Planning Board passed the petition unanimously with no impositions in a 3.25-hour meeting. This was quite disappointing to our group. There were no responses to the seventeen presentations which were made in opposition to the zoning change except the sales representative from Buc-ee’s, who twisted our stated beliefs that we accepted the need for development into acquiescence to the need for development like Buc-ee’s. We feel that the Planning Board members had, for the most part, already made up their minds about the proposed zoning change, and therefore about allowing Buc-ee’s proposal to be accepted.

In fact, no one on either the Orange County Planning Board, from Buc-ee’s, or the Orange County Planning Department, addressed our concern about the loss of control over the Buc-ee’s Development Phase II by the Orange County communities which will be affected, by the BOCC, and the Orange County Planning Board. If approved, the MPD-CZ concept plans will ultimately be in the hands of the developer. The only ones with input into Buc-ee’s proposed Phase II will then be members of the Orange County Planning Department with no input from the public. This significant concern was not even mentioned once.

One Planning Board member was late to the meeting, one member did not attend the meeting with any provided public explanation, one member did not show their face on camera at all, one member showed their face once, one member only looked at the screen occasionally while they ate a meal, and two members were in their beds during the meeting, one of whom was with their husband who was snoring loudly. We understand that these are volunteer roles and that we are all living under unique circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we do not feel like these manners of acting were respectful to meeting participants.

Only 6 of the 9 members present asked questions of the Manager of County Planning and representatives of Buc-ee's. The opening of the meeting, the applicant's presentation, and questions from the Board only lasted one hour and forty minutes for a 1,000-page master conditional concept proposal petition. The rush to come to a conclusion and end the meeting as close to 10 pm as possible rather than allow for a second meeting also caused the discussion to be stifled and made for a hasty decision to end the night.

We believe the Orange County Planning Board violated their Code of Ethics during this meeting by reaching conclusions before all information was heard, by not behaving with respect towards meeting attendees, by not showing respect for their appointed office, and by behaving in ways that reflect badly on the office, the advisory board, Orange County, and the Orange County Board of Commissioners through the aforementioned actions.

We believe the Orange County Planning Board broke their Public Charge by not conducting themselves in a respectful, courteous manner toward each other, County staff, Board members, or attendees through the aforementioned actions.

For these reasons, A Voice for Efland and Orange strongly questions the legitimacy of the results of the meeting held by the Orange County Planning Board on November 4th.