



September 6, 2018

Dear Chairman Neeves and Planning Commission Members:

On behalf of the Coastal Conservation League, Laila Johnston will comment on the proposed rezoning of 864 acres in the Bear Bluff area off Highway 90 and Old Highway 90.

We join the SC Department of Natural Resources, the Horry County Open Space Board and many county residents who have grave concerns about both the rezoning and the proposed high-density residential development in such an environmentally sensitive area of the county. These Bear Bluff tracts border Tilly Swamp and are surrounded on three sides by the Lewis Ocean Bay Reserve.

The county earlier this year spent \$12 million in RIDE II tax dollars to purchase 3,700 acres of the former Riverstone property adjacent to Lewis Ocean Bay. The county intends to put a conservation easement on this property, permanently protecting it from future development. This significant investment by the county (and by the taxpayers) is a public acknowledgment that this particular area of the county should remain designated as scenic and conservation.

Highway 90, a relatively small two-lane highway, is not well-suited for the proposed density of this project, which will strain the roadways, local infrastructure, and fire and public safety resources. The Institute of Transportation Engineers estimates that each single-family housing unit generates on average 10 car trips per day. This means 15,000 car trips in and out of this proposed development every day. You must consider the increase in traffic volume, the burden on Highway 90 and the cost to the county and taxpayers.

The developer is offering a one-time fee of \$1,000 per house to offset costs to the county of extending fire and public safety resources to this area. This is wholly insufficient. As we know, paying for these resources is not a one-time expense; the costs for roads and public safety are ongoing and continue to increase over time.

To its credit, Horry County has recognized the environmental sensitivity of this area. The county's *Envision 2025* Comprehensive Plan, created in 2008, designates this area as Scenic and Conservation, with the intent of keeping this land undeveloped into perpetuity. *Envision 2025* is an important guide that should direct the Planning Commission on what sort of development is appropriate or not. According to the county's plan, this land is not suitable for housing or development.

The County's dedicated and professional staff along with members of the Planning Commission's Ad Hoc Committee have guided the current eight-month long process of updating the county's Comprehensive Plan, called *Imagine 2040*. In the county's new

draft plan, these parcels remain Scenic and Conservation. This decision was intentional and must be upheld.

Approving this project would be a slap in the face to the county's planning staff and to the committee members who have created a fair and forward-thinking plan. If approved, the Planning Commission may as well toss it's *Imagine 2040* draft plan and start over. Approving this rezoning would signal to county residents that their input, through surveys, public meetings, and workshops, has been fruitless.

Lastly, the Planning Commission's own criteria for addressing a rezoning request include these questions:

- Would change alter the population density pattern and thereby increase the load on public facilities (schools, sewers, streets)?
- Will change create or excessively increase traffic congestion?
- Would the proposed change be contrary to the Future Land Use Plan?

The answers to these questions are clear. You must deny this proposal. We call on the members of the Planning Commission to maintain the integrity and intent of *Envision 2025* and the *Imagine 2040* plans.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns.

Respectfully,

*Erin Pate*

Erin Pate  
North Coast Office Director

*"Nature and Community in Balance"*

**North Coast Office**

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