

# Minimum home size proposal dropped

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White County News

The White County Board of Commissioners has backed away from the idea of setting a minimum square footage requirement for residential structures in the county.

The issue had surfaced at previous commission meetings due to the trend (at least in some parts of Georgia) toward "tiny houses," which have interior space of 400 square feet or less.

Commissioners had expressed concerns that these structures would not meet local building codes. They asked John Sell, White County's director of community and economic development, to research whether any surrounding counties have ordinances regulating the minimum square footage of homes.

At the commission's Jan. 29 meeting, Sell reported his findings.

"Most surrounding counties do not have a minimum," he said.

The only place he could find that did set a minimum was Jackson County, which is not adjacent to White County. Its ordinance says a home can't be smaller than 1,400 square feet.

Commission chairman Travis Turner then questioned the need for local regulation.

"What are we trying to accomplish here?" he asked.

Commissioner Edwin Nix said his concern had been to protect the property values of homeowners living nearby.

Sell said the county's planning department has only received "a couple"

of inquiries regarding tiny houses.

"We're here to enforce whatever you want us to do," he said.

Nix said he was having second thoughts about the need for regulation. "I think we all agree there's enough government control as it is," he said.

Turner looked around at his fellow commissioners, who all nodded.

There was no further discussion of the issue, and they moved on to the next agenda item: appointing Sell to the Joint Development Authority of Dawson, Lumpkin & White counties. That position had been vacant since White County's previous economic development director, Tom O'Bryant, resigned last year.

In other business at the Jan. 29 meeting, Victor Anderson, chairman of the Habersham County Board of Commissioners, read a proclamation about Habersham's bicentennial celebration this year.

He said Habersham County was founded on Dec. 15, 1818, with an initial land area of about 713 square miles. But in 1857, a large chunk of that was split off to form White County. Other, smaller parcels were sliced off to create portions of Rabun, Lumpkin, Banks, and Stephens counties, leaving Habersham with only 279 square miles.

Anderson's proclamation names White and the other adjacent counties as "honorary Habersham Countians." It does not request that these neighboring counties become involved in Habersham's bicentennial preparations.

The White County commission also approved an updated land-use map of the county, reflecting all the land-use changes that the board has approved since December 2015. A public hearing was held before the commission voted, but no one commented.

The commission also adopted the corrected qualifying fees for the upcoming primary election. Candidates running for the commission's District 2 and District 3 seats will each pay \$360 to qualify. Due to a clerical error, the wrong amount had been previously approved.

The commission also approved renewing a joint-use agreement that allows White County parks and recreation teams to use ballfields at county public schools.

In addition, the commissioners approved Sheriff Neal Walden's request to allocate \$23,000 to purchase body armor for the White County Sheriff's Office's SWAT team. Walden said he had received a 100 percent grant from the Department of Homeland Security, but it requires him to buy the equipment up front and get reimbursed through the grant funding later.

The Jan. 29 meeting was supposed to be only a work session, but Turner made it a called meeting so the commission would be able to vote if necessary. At the end of the meeting, Turner said he felt the board had been able to address all pending business and there would be no need for the usual first-Monday-of-the-month meeting. Therefore, the previously scheduled Feb. 5 commission meeting has been canceled.