

May 30,
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Lake Oconee News

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Residents respond to Lake Oconee Estates lawsuit

By **Hannah Barron** on Thursday, May 29, 2025

GREENE COUNTY

Residents living near Veazey Connector are upset with a lawsuit filed three weeks ago by Lake Oconee Estates & Beach Club against Greene County involving the Board of Commissioners' denial of a rezoning request.

On April 8, 2025, Lake Oconee Estates requested a zoning change from A1 to PUD for three tracts totaling roughly 191.3 acres located at Leslie Mill Road and Veazey Connector. The developer planned to annex the proposed PUD into an existing PUD approved in 2024 to create the second phase of the development. The second phase would have added 325 single-family homes to the 365 homes previously approved.

The BOC shut down the request with a 4-1 vote following a public hearing filled with area residents' concerns about noise, traffic, and pollution.

Plaintiffs Thomas Jackson Bennett III, executor of the estate of Lucy K. Barrett, Nancy Bruce, Lucy Ashe Reed, Tarrea D. Ashe Williams, Tempie Ashe, Derome Ashe Pressley, and Victor T. Ashe — represented by

Greensboro, GA 30...

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Underwood Scoggins — filed a complaint on May 7 in the Greene County Superior Court for declaratory judgment and injunctive relief.

The plaintiffs asked the court to issue an injunction prohibiting the county to enforce the A1 restrictions and other restrictions that differ from the uses, layout, and standards described in the zoning request. They also asked the court to declare the BOC's denial of the request "null and void" and require the county to rezone the subject properties.

Plaintiffs also requested that the county pay their attorney's fees and litigation expenses.

The plaintiffs argued that they cannot economically or feasibly develop or sell the subject properties under the current A1 regulations and criticized the BOC for "unlawfully delegating its legislative zoning power to private citizens."

"The continued imposition of the A1 land use restrictions on the subject properties discriminates in an arbitrary, capricious, unreasonable, and unconstitutional manner between plaintiffs and the owners of similarly situated properties without any rational basis for such," the complaint read. "[The BOC] has improperly and in bad faith attempted to prevent plaintiffs' sale and development of the subject properties in order to curry political favor with neighboring residents."

The area residents are speaking out against the lawsuit, asking the court to consider the value of public input in the zoning process.

Alli Puglisi, who created a petition opposing the development that received over 400 signatures prior to the BOC meeting, is one of the residents speaking out.

"The developer's baseless accusation that the county denied rezoning simply to 'appease residents' reveals a blatant disrespect for this community and a reckless greed that puts profit over people," Puglisi said. "The county must protect our health, safety, and future, not bow to a developer whose actions show a shocking disregard for the well-being of its neighbors. This isn't



FRIDAY, MAY 30, 2025

Time	Event
11am	Touch Grass environmental exhibition
11:30am	Adult Book Club & Brunch
12pm	Milledgeville Al-Anon Group
3pm	Lego Club
5pm	Fifth Friday Art Walk

SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2025

Time	Event
10am	Block Party
11am	Touch Grass environmental exhibition
2pm	Lake Oconee Farmers Market

MONDAY, JUNE 2, 2025

Time	Event
4:30pm	English-Spanish Class
7pm	Al-Anon Family Group
7pm	Open Mic Night



just a land deal; it's a test of character, and the developer has failed it miserably.

"Rezoning is never guaranteed. Development comes with risk, and when you gamble on approvals you don't have, you don't get to sue your way into success. The board made the right call by listening to residents. This lawsuit is an insult to the people who live here.

"This lawsuit isn't about fairness — it's about forcing a dense subdivision into a rural community that overwhelmingly said no," Puglisi continued. "People move out here for space, quiet, and the freedom to farm, hunt, and live close to nature. Dropping 300-plus houses next to active agricultural land will disrupt all of that. It threatens the local environment, burdens our roads and emergency services, and sets a precedent that rural land is just waiting to be paved over."

Puglisi also questioned the plaintiffs' argument that they cannot develop or sell the properties under A1 zoning, saying there has been residents interested in using the land for agriculture.

"The developer claims the land can't be used or sold under agricultural zoning, but that's simply false," Puglisi said. "There's strong interest in that land for traditional rural use — I know because I bought agricultural land, as did many of my neighbors."

Heather Stokes, who lives next to one of the tracts, noted concerns with runoff pollution affecting Lake Oconee and nearby bodies of water, urging the court to consider the area's wildlife and environmental assets when deciding the case.

"The high-density allowance for this PUD community is up to two homes per acre, meaning that 28 homes would be built across the back of our property," Stokes said.

"The topographical positioning of most of these homes is directly uphill from our ponds and associated wetlands. This means that every time it rains, someone washes a car, applies fertilizer or pesticides, the runoff would flow into our ponds and then Beaver Dam Creek, and ultimately, Lake Oconee. Having seen the plans for the development, there is no indication for runoff mitigation.

“It has been well-documented that the above pollutants cause problems for humans and wildlife. Fish absorb the pollutants, those move up the food chain, and ultimately, humans are affected from getting mildly sick to full-on cancer or other issues.”

Stokes also cited other issues with the development, including the small-lot design uncharacteristic of other area developments; inconsistencies between the zoning map and future land development map; lack of community- friendly commercial services in the development that are listed as required criteria in the future land development map; and increased traffic demands ahead of Georgia Department of Transportation’s timeline to widen nearby Hwy. 44 to alleviate congestion.

Chuck Roberts echoed Stokes’ comments about the potential harm to the area ecosystem.

“This particular development is not like the other high-density projects that are already in the works within Greene County,” Roberts said. “None of the other properties include federal wetlands and certainly do not falsely advertise themselves as ‘beachfront.’ Wetlands serve as filters for trash and debris, thus protecting the Beaver Dam ecosystem in this proposed area. As it currently stands, this decision doesn’t reflect the proper stewardship of protecting our wonderful assets. The wetlands alone should shut down or greatly alter the developer’s request.”

Attorney Joshua Scoggins, who filed the lawsuit on behalf of the plaintiffs, could not be reached for rebuttal as of press time.



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