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## Popeye's plans to build in Williston

Joseph Schuemann of BluRock Commercial Real Estate LLC speaks to the City Council as Heather Coons, managing partner, listens. Schuemann had wanted Publix, Wendy's and other vendors to build in Williston, but the research by those

franchises showed the market is not strong enough in Williston for those interests to justify building there.

### Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 8, 2020 at 9:39 p.m.

**WILLISTON** – Popeye's Chicken plans to build on the land currently housing the old, dilapidated buildings that were once Williston High School.

(from left)  
Williston City  
Council President  
Nancy Wininger,  
City Councilman  
Charles Goodman  
and City  
Councilman Elihu  
Ross listen during  
the meeting.



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**(from left) Williston City Council Vice President Marguerite Robinson, City Councilman Justin Head and Mayor Jerry Robinson listen during the meeting.**



**(from left) City Manager Scott Lippmann, City Attorney Frederick L. Koberlein Jr. and City Clerk Latricia Wright perform their duties during the meeting Monday night.**

This is thanks to a 4-1 vote of approval on Tuesday night (Jan. 7) for a future land use and a zoning revision for some of the property, so that it could be developed.

Williston City Council members voted 4-1 on those issues with City Councilman Elihu Ross voting in the minority against allowing the revision or rezoning that was sought by the property owner.

When asked why he voted “No,” Ross said he did not want to say why he voted that way.

City Council President Nancy Winger and City Councilman Charles Goodman both said during the discussion Monday night that they went into the meeting leaning toward a vote of “No” rather than a “Yes” vote. City Planner Jackie Gorman said she had recommended a “No” vote from what she saw as the will of participants in the revision of the growth management plan for Williston.

After property owner Joseph Schuemann of BluRock Commercial Real Estate LLC and Heather Coons, managing partner of BluRock Commercial Real Estate LLC, spoke

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to the City Council, everyone but Ross saw the positive value to Williston of allowing the property to be zoned commercial, changing part of that land from mixed use public/residential to commercial.

Councilman Goodman asked if Schuemann would remove the buildings before starting development, which currently will include a Popeye's Chicken. Schuemann said he will demolish and clear the buildings, where he has already paid \$300,000 to have asbestos removed.

Goodman said he was concerned that the developer would place the Popeye's Chicken franchise there and leave the old high school buildings.

A Tasty Freeze ice cream outlet that also had been planned to be in that location is now out of the picture. Due to a 1950s Williston zoning ordinance that prohibits structures that look like dinosaurs, ice cream cones and the like, Tasty Freeze is out of the running to be placed there.

Schuemann said he is not going to battle with the city government on that issue, although Tasty Freeze would have been a nice addition to Williston, where people could have met and enjoyed tasty ice cream. Since the structure for this franchise resembles an ice cream cone, it is not able to be built in Williston due to the city ordinances.

The varying elevations on that old WHS property, as well as a high lime stone content in the ground below the structures, Schuemann said, reduce the footprint of what can be built there. Currently Popeye's Chicken is in. A small grocery store may be built there too. That leaves other acreage, he said, for other commercial development.

A house in the lowlands of the property he bought will be removed, he said, so that a retention area for runoff water can go there. He said local folk say there is a sinkhole there; so, this is a natural place for water to flow.

Publix was one possible tenant, but it chose to not build in Williston, Schuemann said. Wendy's and Burger King are other vendors that do not see Williston as a market currently that can sustain their business.

Williston is not The Villages, Schuemann said.

Meanwhile Monday night, a pocket neighborhood of 40-plus residential structures was given the green light for its mixed-use rezoning near Winn-Dixie. This creates high-intensity residential facilities with limited vehicular traffic as that subdivision comes to fruition in a series of phases.

## **OTHER MATTERS**

In the area of other matters where the Williston City Council had unanimous votes, they agreed to move forward with putting new stripes on Main Street, south of Noble Avenue (U.S. Alt. 27) to Seventh Avenue for as much as \$3,000. This will only be if that price includes lines on the sides of the street too.

As for Levy County lining Main Street on its property going south of Seventh Avenue, there is no confirmation if the county will do that. During discussion, it was mentioned that it would be the most efficient method for the county to join the city, but it may not. If that is the case, the new striping would end at the point where the city's ownership ends.

City Manager Lippmann said he would speak with Levy County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks to see if the county wants to line the street like the city is doing. Chairman Brooks heralded his first meeting in the position as chairman earlier that same Tuesday.

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The line repainting by the city, though, hinges on \$3,000 as a maximum price. Williston Utilities Director C.J. Zimoski was on vacation Tuesday night, and he is the man who has the answers on restriping Main Street.

In regard to the Federal Aviation Administration allowing the city to charge less than the accepted nominal rate for lease of Williston Municipal Airport property, for non-profit groups like the Levy County Fair Association, Williston City Manager Scott Lippmann said he has had any word from the FAA on the question.

As it stands, federal law requires airports to charge non-profits the same as companies or other interests that make a profit.

On another money matter, the Williston Chamber of Commerce told the City Council that the room it uses rent-free in City Hall need lettering to mark it.

Williston Chamber of Commerce President Marc Pompeo let the city know the Chamber found signage that would cost \$475. Pompeo asked if the city will help fund that.

City Councilman Charles Goodman said that before the Chamber paints on City Hall, it needs to have authority from the City Council. Goodman also said he thinks that sign cost is too expensive.

Pompeo was not present at the meeting. Carolyn Ten Broeck, the only paid Williston Chamber of Commerce employee, was in the audience. When asked about this matter, Ten Broeck said she was clueless about the sign or the request of the city.

City Manager Lippmann said he would speak with the Chamber president about the signage that the business organization want to put on City Hall, where it uses a room rent-free. Ten Broeck also works for a weekly newspaper in Williston, which has no office in Williston.

On yet another business matter, the Williston City Council learned from City Manager Lippmann that the city's procedure of seeking secondary deposits for utility service to commercial interests is not uncommon.

Likewise, the city manager found that the city policy in this regard has been uniformly applied to companies with structures in the city, since the inception of the policy. The owner of Sirius Pizza had said he was not happy about what he saw as an overburden in regard of this secondary security deposit.

While Bobby Brown, the former owner of King Munchie's Pizza, has said he will shut down Sirius Pizza and move it to Bronson or Trenton if the City of Williston persists in demanding more money for its utility deposit, that could be bluster.

If Brown was at the meeting Tuesday night, he made no comment.

Mayor Jerry Robinson confirmed with City Manager Lippmann that the added deposit could be paid over a period of months.

On Monday, Councilman Goodman asked if commercial accounts earn interest. When that same question was asked at the most recent meeting prior to Tuesday night's meeting by *HardisonInk.com*, City Manager Lippmann said "No."

Therefore, regardless how long a business remains in Williston, the city keeps the money put down as a commercial deposit, until the business closes.

As was obvious weeks ago, when the question was first posed, but was restated by Goodman, the city is keeping a large sum of money that it could invest to make interest and could pay interest to the depositors.

Lippmann said he would report back on this issue.