

Letter Read Before the City Commission Monday, December 14, 1998

During the spring and summer of 1997 the neighbors of Kingswood and Sherwood Forest subdivisions spent a lot of time attending Plan Board and City Commission meetings trying to persuade our city officials that a five-acre, densely-wooded parcel of land bordering our properties should not be rezoned from RSF-1 to RSF-4, as requested by the purchaser and developer, Cotton Fletcher. Several of you sitting on the Commission today were part of that process, and for your final vote retaining RSF-1 zoning, we were very grateful.

Much of the testimony presented during those meetings both by citizens and officials dealt with the adverse impact high density development of the kind Mr. Fletcher proposed would have on the tree cover. Ms. Hanrahan and Mr. Delaney both visited the site and agreed that it would be a shame to drastically alter the heavily-forested acreage. Anyone who has driven down N.W. 55th Street recently has seen how that shame has indeed been perpetrated--in flagrant defiance of city codes. Mr. Fletcher has virtually clearcut those five acres.

We are here to ask how this happened. Mr. Lawrence Calderon, Chief of Current Planning, said Cotton Fletcher had been told to clear only the roadway, then to carefully clear an area for each house as the individual lots were developed. The City Arborist had several meetings with Mr. Fletcher, making tree-saving recommendations which included at least one Heritage Tree. Even that tree fell to the axe. Another neighbor and we made calls to the Planning Division and to a commission member to ask someone to come out and survey the ongoing destruction. To our knowledge no one came until the parcel was a wasteland. During our conversation with Mr. Calderon last week, he apologized for the wreckage, and said the city was in fact citing Mr. Fletcher for his willful disregard of its ordinances.

Mr. Fletcher is supposed to replant, and in perhaps 50 years the parcel may again offer to some extent the tree canopy for which Gainesville prides itself. If Mr. Fletcher does not replant, he will be fined, in which case he will lose some of the profit he made from harvesting the trees in the first place, but the wasteland will remain.

It's too late for our neighborhood, but we are concerned about the city's future development. When Mr. Fletcher comes before the Planning Staff with yet another proposal, will he be trusted? If he wins approval, will there be code enforcement officials on site when the bulldozers arrive? What steps will you, as our elected officials, take to ensure that this rape of the land does not occur again?

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