

From: Michael Gelb, Chairman Planning Commission
To: Vienna Town Council
Meeting Date: November 14, 2018
Re: Proposed Subdivision of lot at 307 Cabin Road SE

Overview

The Estate of Norma Margaret Payne proposes to subdivide the lot at 307 Cabin Road SE into two residential lots, replacing an existing one-story log cabin apparently built 70-80 years ago. County tax records say the cabin was constructed in 1925, but aerial photos indicate the lot was vacant in 1937.

No neighbors appeared at the Planning Commission meeting regarding the proposed subdivision, but Gloria Runyon, a representative of Historic Vienna, said the log structure may have historic value and that Historic Vienna wants to explore preservation/commemoration options. Ms. Runyon noted that the structure was erected by an African-American resident of Vienna. Historic Vienna had just learned of the proposed subdivision so did not have a specific proposal. She did not oppose the subdivision, but said Historic Vienna would like to work with the builder (American Signature Properties) and the Town on some type of recognition for the structure.

Separately, the Commission received an email from Cheryl Umbel, who owns the lot next door at 309 Cabin Road SE. Ms. Umbel did not oppose the subdivision but asked the PC and the Town Council to ensure that as many trees are preserved as possible and to strictly enforce the 25% lot coverage requirement. She also worries that changes on the lot could create stormwater problems.

PC Action and Concerns

Although the Commission voted 8-0 to recommend that Council approve the subdivision, Commission members were concerned about the fate of the log cabin. Fred Eisenhart of American Signature Properties noted that the structure is not registered as a historic property so that there are no legal restrictions on its disposition.

While acknowledging the absence of legal obligations, several PC members strongly urged Mr. Eisenhart to work with Historic Vienna on appropriate recognition of the log structure. Mr. Eisenhart said the company would talk with Historic Vienna, but some Commissioners voiced doubts about the depth of his commitment. Mr. Eisenhart responded that he did not mean to convey a lack of enthusiasm, but Commissioners agreed that the Chairman should note their concerns in this memo. However, there was no determination of what recognition would be appropriate. Commissioner McCullough also noted concerns among many Vienna residents about rapid change and the replacement of older structures.

Similarly, Commissioners asked American Signature to work with neighbors to protect trees on neighboring properties. Mr. Eisenhart said American Signature would talk with neighbors and noted that American Signature has the right to cut branches that hang over onto its property. He said American Signature Properties has no other rights or responsibility for trees on neighboring lots.