

**LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021**  
**6:00 p.m.**

**I. Call to Order**

**II. Special Exception in Agriculture-Residential to Operate a Kennel-Robert Leigh and Heather Henderson**

Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that Robert Leigh and Heather Henderson have applied to operate a commercial kennel at 454 Forsyth-Yatesville Road. They purchased the property in 2020 and applied for and received a business license for "training", which is permitted in Agricultural-Residential. However, once they started their business, the neighbors complained that the dogs that were being kenneled on the property were being a nuisance. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that she contacted the owners by mail, explained the zoning code, and suggested they apply for a Special Exception. They currently house and train up to 33 dogs and are not asking to expand that number. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that the Planning Commission recommended approval.

**III. Public Comments**

Robert Leigh of 454 Forsyth-Yatesville Road addressed the board. Mr. Leigh said that he jointly runs Arete Canine LLC. He said that they provide canines for all branches of the Federal government. He said that this includes every branch of the military. Mr. Leigh said that they provide for homeland security, border patrol, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and every major branch in the government. He said that they are also known for the highest rated and value of selection for the number of dogs that they seek. Mr. Leigh said that if they need dogs, they give them a call. He said that they also provide dogs for various law enforcement agencies across the Country. Mr. Leigh said that they originally had a license for training and they do not house anyone else's dogs because they only house dogs that are preparing for the Federal, State, and Local Government.

Mr. Leigh said that before they had to reclassify their business as a kennel versus a training facility, the dogs that they had trained came from as far away as Nebraska and Florida. He said that they moved into their home in August of 2020. Mr. Leigh said that they had to shut down in March and up until that time the dogs in Lamar County were the only ones that they trained. He said that at this point in time the dogs that they trained had 40 felony tracks with finds. He said that this means the dogs found 40 violent criminals out of 60 felony tracks which also means that they tracked 60 people and 40 people were found. He said that the national statistic is a 30 percent find ratio. He said that during that time they had more than 150 felony drugs; non marijuana arrest associated with their dogs. He said that two of the dogs had narcotic arrests and one dog tracked fentanyl and heroin. Mr. Leigh said that

this dog saved a lot of lives. He said that the first dog that they trained when they moved into Lamar County was working with the Internet Crimes Against Children. Mr. Leigh said that they used that dog and it resulted in the apprehension of a human trafficking ring in North America. He said that the person that they brought to justice was a violent pedophile.

Mr. Leigh said that the other dogs were used in the State of Georgia but the dogs trained in Lamar County found more than 200 guns and those guns were taken off the streets. He said that this does not include the dogs that they trained in the past. Mr. Leigh said that this was only the dogs that they trained in a short time before they had to shut down. He said that they were turning people away because they could not operate. Mr. Leigh said that they have departments in Douglas County, Douglasville, Bremen, Carrollton, Carroll County and the City of Atlanta. Mr. Leigh said that they had to tell all of them that they could not do business with them because of the momentarily delay and said that he hoped that things would work out. Mr. Leigh said that during this time they used less than ten dogs. He said that the next time he hoped that they could use more than 10 dogs so they could provide dogs back into the Federal agencies. Mr. Leigh said that one of the programs that they were working on was to supply dogs for a special operations but said that they could not do that right now.

Mr. Leigh said that one of the concerns that the local community has is what will happen as they grow. He said that they do not want to be where they are right now because they live there. He said that they would love to come home at the end of the day crack a beer and sit on the back porch but said that this is also where they work. Mr. Leigh said that they want to grow inside of the community. Mr. Leigh said that this was a major investment for them financially. He said that this is one step in the process for them.

Mr. Leigh said that some of the adventures coming up for them includes Foreign Officials, and State Representatives coming to work with them and to support their company. He said that they will also have other leaders to work with them. Mr. Leigh said that there is obviously no hotel space and there are some others that they would love to have work with them. He said that every time they meet, they go somewhere local to eat such as Deraney's. Mr. Leigh said that they show them the community.

Mr. Leigh said that some of the concerns that they have is how many dogs they going to be training at one time. Mr. Leigh said that they do not really want to stay where they are because it is too clean. He said that their dogs have to find people that are in highly contaminated scenarios. He said that they have to find people that are trying to escape in the City of Atlanta. Mr. Leigh said that they implemented a program where dogs were used to find criminals and his dogs are soaring up to the 40 percent find ratio in the City of Atlanta. Mr. Leigh said that for them they cannot train dogs on their 80-acre parcel. He said that it is too clean and there is no cross contamination. Mr. Leigh said that it is a great foundation place but as quickly as they can they remove themselves. He said that they have to work on cars and contaminated areas. Mr. Leigh said that when they go into the City of Atlanta, they call the guys at the Atlanta airport and they train with them. Mr. Leigh said that they would very much like to get back to operating like they were doing before this pause.

Commissioner Thrash said that she understood that they did a lot of construction to contain the noise. Mr. Leigh said that originally the building was all metal including the sides and the roof. He said that they found out that this became a megaphone and as soon as the dog made a sound it amplified in two open directions of the building. He said that neighbors such as Donna Zellner that lives behind them and her sister-in-law who lives across the street could hear the dogs because of that megaphone effect. Mr. Leigh said that they were unaware of this. He said that one of the neighbors cows escaped out of one of the fields and they were helping them and that is when they heard the dogs barking. Mr. Leigh said that they removed all of the metal on the structure. He said that they now have a half inch of foam board insulation between the metal on the roof. Mr. Leigh said that on top of that they put into place rockwool insulation. He said that they put up T1-11 wood siding in place of the metal siding. Mr. Leigh said that the whole structure now has wood around it with the exception of the roof that is still metal but there is half inch foam insulation and under that there is that rockwool insulation. He said that the endcaps are now covered and the electricians are there putting in the air conditioner units.

Commissioner Thrash asked why they have a 33-dog maximum. Mr. Leigh responded because they live there. Ms. Henderson joined the conversation and said that 33 is the number of dogs that they could fit into the current structure. She said that they live there and they do all of the training. Ms. Henderson said that they can only train so many dogs at one time. She said that they travel around the country including Europe to get dogs and then they bring them back and train them for the agencies. Ms. Henderson said that she does not want to have 33 dogs there very often. She said with the agencies reopening they should get dogs in and then they should be gone shortly after that. Ms. Henderson said that 33 was specific as to what they could have. Commissioner Thrash inquired about the dogs going outside at one time. Ms. Henderson said that have 3 rows of 11 so therefore 11 would be the maximum number of dogs that can go outside unless they are crated and getting ready to be put into a van. Mr. Leigh said that when training the dogs, they go from the kennel to a tie-out and at that time the dogs have on bark collars. He said that from there every dog is worked for about an hour a day and then they are put back into the cage.

Commissioner Thrash asked about the security of the facility since they have high end trained animals and the security of someone coming onto the property. Ms. Henderson said that they have a lot of security because the dogs are very expensive. She said that the building will be secure with locks on all of the entrances. Ms. Henderson said that they have already purchased the mechanical part of the gate and that will be going up and hopefully fencing shortly thereafter. She said that they do have some security cameras and they plan to add more to cover all of the areas. Mr. Leigh said that the electrician is installing lights with cameras on both ends of the facility.

Chairman Glass asked how much training involves drugs and if they have to go to other places or does law enforcement bring in the drugs. Mr. Leigh said that law enforcement will bring in the drugs and they also will be getting a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) license as well. Chairman Glass asked if they would allow them to bring the drugs into Lamar County for training. Ms. Henderson said that the drugs will be able to be stored at their facility but the process is very strict. She said that they will have to go through the State first and then once

that is approved, they can get the license through the DEA. Ms. Henderson said that they are very strict with civilians having controlled substances; how they are stored, the record keeping, and witnesses for things being logged in and logged out. She said that for now all the departments bring their own and this is how they have been operating for the last 20 years. Mr. Leigh said that they do not use pseudo or fake odors. He said that they have the departments bring their own narcotics with them.

Chairman Glass asked if they were the only ones at the facility. Ms. Henderson said that they have others in the community and outside of community that help them, some of which were in attendance at the meeting. Commissioner Traylor said that after hearing about what Mr. Leigh and Ms. Henderson do and the level of dogs that they train he was glad that they choose Lamar County. Commissioner Thrash said that she has always said that Lamar County needs good quality businesses and said that it sounds like that they are a good quality business and said that she was glad to have them in the community.

**IV. Special Exception in Agriculture-Residential-Fortified Telecom on behalf of Verizon Wireless to place a Cell Tower at 1444 Hwy 18 West.**

Planning and Community Development Director Buice addressed the board regarding a Special Exception request in Agriculture-Residential from Fortified Telecom and said that on behalf of Verizon Wireless the request is to place a Cell Tower at 1444 Hwy 18 West. The proposed facility is to be located on Parcel 010-013, 1444 Highway 18 W, Barnesville, Lamar County, Georgia. She said that the property is wooded and right at the Pike County line. She said that the cell tower will go back up into the property a little so you would not see the base of the cell tower from the road. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that there are no available suitable structures in the area upon which to co-locate the antenna so the only option was to build a new telecommunications tower to extend coverage to a section of Lamar and Pike County. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that the Board of Appeals recommended approval.

**V. Public Comments**

Greg Spence of 86 Bull River Bluff Drive, Savannah, Ga, on behalf of Verizon Wireless and representing Fortified Telecom, addressed the board. Mr. Spence said that he is seeking the same type of cell tower that he did in 2019. He said that this will bring wireless infrastructure to the western half of the County. Mr. Spence said that it will house four carriers. He said that it will not be lit and there will be no hazard to the air. He said that for Verizon the nearest tower is 3 miles away. Mr. Spence said that since this area in Lamar and Pike County has basically no coverage this will improve their coverage dramatically. He said that the code is for three carriers and they built it for four. Mr. Spence said that the only consideration that they are asking the board, other than approval, is for an exception to the landscape buffer since they are already in the woods. Mr. Spence said that in the future if the board deems that a landscape buffer needs to be added, because of a clearing or something other reason, Verizon will put in a landscape buffer. He said that the leased area is 60' x 60' of which 50'x 50' will be fenced.

Commissioner Traylor inquired about the length of the lease. Mr. Spence replied that it is a 5-year initial lease with a 25 total year term. Chairman Glass asked the proposed height of the cell tower. Mr. Spence said that it is 150' tower and Verizon will be at 145' so there is additional room at the top of the cell tower for a ten-foot (10') lightning rod. He said that the only noise from the site would be for a security generator that will cycle during the day for a half an hour. Chairman Glass asked if they surveyed the Pike County side. Mr. Spence said that the survey's were only to the parcel itself and the surrounding properties. Chairman Glass asked if there were houses on the Pike County side. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that there are some on the backside of an adjacent road and said that all of the residents in the surrounding area were notified.

Commissioner Thrash asked about the tree buffer. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that part of the cell tower regulations in the local ordinance is that there is a tree buffer. She said that the fenced in area is 50'x 50' but the total leased area is 60'x 60' and they are asking not to have to add trees since there are trees completely surrounding the buffer. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that there is more buffer than what is required.

**VI. Adjournment**

Chairman Glass called for a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing. Commissioner Traylor made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing at approximately 6:25 p.m. Commissioner Thrash seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

\_\_\_\_\_  
Charles Glass, Chairman

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Bennie Horton, Vice-Chairman

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Robert Heiney, Commissioner

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Ryran Traylor, Commissioner

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Nancy Thrash, Commissioner

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Carlette Davidson, County Clerk