After hearing from a number of citizens in attendance at their August 19 meeting, the county's regional planning committee agreed to recommend to county commissioners a temporary moratorium on the building of more poultry houses in the county until environmental, social, and property value impact studies can be done.

"This county's adopted CAFO (confined animal feeding operations) regulations which are enforced by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and we can't tell a farmer 'you can't put in a chicken house.'

We can't override the EPA regulations," said E.C. Meadows, chair of the committee, in answer to Jeff Poppen's request for a temporary moratorium. Poppen, a farmer who owns property in the Red Boiling Springs area, runs a sustainable farm.

"Other counties do have regulations," said Poppen. "It might behoove you to think about that. If the majority of Macon Countians want them in here, then I want it – but I don't think they do.

"You're the planning committee, and I think you do have the right to say to the commission 'Let's go slow,'" said Poppen. "And I think the people of the county should have a say about whether they want more poultry houses or not."

Bonnie Davis, who lives directly across the street from the property that Cobb Vantress bought in the industrial park, pleaded with the commission to do something.

"I saw this same thing happen in Sumner County, where I was born and raised," said Davis. "We had tons of chicken houses and the city just died, until Donnelly Printing came in and said that if they were going to be there, there would be no more chicken houses.

Davis, who pointed out that the hatchery in the industrial park would have a 24-hour a day incinerator, said she had talked to both the Lafayette City Mayor and the County Mayor with little satisfaction and no answers given.

“Everybody runs us around in circles, saying they can’t do anything,” said Davis. “Nobody can say ‘I brought this here. I’m responsible.”
“I don’t even know who brought them in here,” said committee member Vernon Biggs.

“We’re not informed,” said Meadows. “Everyone out there knows more about it than I do,” Meadows commented.

Davis said that Lafayette City codes prohibit her and her neighbors from having farm animals within the city limits, and wondered why it would be alright for Cobb to bring chickens into the industrial park.

“We don’t have anything to do with city codes,” said Meadows.

“But you can make recommendations to the county. You need to think about what’s best for the county, and the city’s in the county” said Davis, pointing out that there were 500 people in the housing development across from the industrial park that will be affected by the presence of the hatchery’s incinerator.

“Are you going to sacrifice 500 people to provide 30 jobs in the hatchery?” Davis questioned. “You need to find out who has control over this and what you can do.”

A private act that was passed by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2003, which allows Macon County to impose certain regulations upon property in the county, was presented to Meadows by David Harper. The act states, in part, that the county may regulate health and sanitation nuisances, or any material deemed to be unhealthy, unsightly, unwholesome, or offensive to adjoining property owners.

Meadows said that he had not been aware of the act, and that it was a good point.

After a bit more discussion, committee member Hollis McClard stood and faced those in

attendance:

“We can make a recommendation for them to do a study on it,” he said. “Nobody else has done anything for you, right? I love Macon County and I’d like to see it improve. I don’t want any of you to think we’re trying to push something on you all.

“Go to the city planning committee,” McClard advised Davis.

A motion was made to recommend to the county commission that a temporary halt be put on the building of more poultry houses in the county until environmental, social, and property impact studies are done by the state, and the county gets the results of the studies. The motion passed unanimously.

“Now I’ll tell you what’s going to make a difference,” McClard advised the audience.

“If the courthouse is full when we make this recommendation, they’ll pay attention,” he stated. “If no one shows up, they’ll think nobody cares.”

In other business, the committee:

•heard a report from Codes Officer Mike Rogers that he had received no calls for inspections on an owner-built home. According to Rogers, he had been to look at the house and it was bricked and dry walled. The owner/contractor is responsible for calling for inspections at several steps along the way to a finished house, such as wiring and plumbing.

“I couldn’t inspect it now without having him tear out walls,” said Rogers, adding that he couldn’t and wouldn’t sign an inspection that he hadn’t been able to perform, putting the county at liability if there were future problems.

Vernon Biggs suggested that Rogers have the man tear out walls or do whatever was necessary for an inspection.

“That’s like a penalty,” said Biggs. “If there’s no penalty, people won’t wall for inspections.”

McClard agreed, saying that if he had to tear it out and redo it, the situation wouldn’t happen again.

A motion was made and passed allowing Rogers to go do what he needed to do, tear out walls or whatever, until he felt comfortable signing off on an inspection.

Rogers said later in the week that he had been to the house and put a stop work order on the front door of the house, telling the owner to call him.

•agreed to go by state regulations concerning a man who was combining two trailers into one dwelling out on Clifty Road.

According to state law, the two trailers have to be put under the same roof, and they have to be rewired as one unit.

•advised that a farm owner could apply to Rogers for a special zoning permit so he could do repair work on equipment at a shop on his farm.