

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) has completed its review of the following Development of Regional Impact (DRI). This report contains the NEGRC’s assessment of how the proposed project relates to the policies, programs, and projects articulated in the Regional Plan and Regional Resource Plan. Also included is an assessment of likely interjurisdictional impacts resulting from the proposed development, as well as all comments received from identified affected parties and others during the fifteen-day comment period.

The materials presented in this report are purely advisory and under no circumstances should be considered as binding or infringing upon the host jurisdiction’s right to determine for itself the appropriateness of development within its boundaries.

Transmittal of this DRI report officially completes the DRI process. The submitting local government may proceed with whatever final official actions it deems appropriate regarding the proposed project, but it is encouraged to take the materials presented in the DRI report into consideration when rendering its decision.

Project I.D.:	DRI #3505
Name of Project:	Vineyard Senior Assisted & Independent Living Campus
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Oconee County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s request for a rezoning from Oconee County. Currently, one parcel is zoned for OIP (Office/Institutional/Professional) and the other parcel is AG (Agriculture). The applicant is seeking to rezone the entire property to OIP. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 10/25/21 – 11/9/21.

Proposed Development

Valeo Americas, LLC is proposing a master-planned continuum of care senior assisted and independent living campus, comprised of 249 units on 31 acres. The site is accessed via Langford Drive, adjacent to GA-316, in Oconee County (parcel numbers: C-01AG001 and C-01-032). It connects to an existing office park. Additionally, a stormwater retention pond and 290 parking spaces would be constructed. Currently, it is an abandoned residential construction project with existing streets and utilities (i.e. a “pipe farm”). The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in December 2023.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified on the Oconee County Comprehensive Plan’s Character Area Map (dated 4/25/2018) as a “Regional Center.” The Comprehensive Plan describes this Character Area as, “Characterized by regional-serving retail and commercial services, office complexes for medical and corporate offices, hotels, restaurants and entertainment facilities, higher-density residential planned developments, and single-family detached subdivisions. While the area is currently a “multi-use” area of distinct and separate uses, planned mixed-use developments are encouraged.” Senior housing is listed as a compatible secondary land use and OIP zoning is encouraged. Development strategies for the Area include providing a mix of uses, buffering low-intensity uses

from high-intensity ones, building a community trail and sidewalk network that is friendly to non-automobile transportation options, and master planning sites. Based on the text, it appears that the project is compatible with the Comprehensive Plan.

The site is identified as “Developing” on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Regional Land Use Map (dated 6/7/2018). The Regional Plan recommends development that matches the region’s workforce, prices in the lifecycle cost of infrastructure, creates a sense of place, builds a compact development pattern on existing infrastructure, creates diverse and affordable housing, and compliments existing and planned transportation options—especially non-automobile transportation modes. The proposed site plan does not align with a number of the Regional Plan’s recommendations. It appears to provide an excess of parking to serve a population that tends to have one or no personal vehicles; a parking ratio less than one space per dwelling unit should adequately serve the site, including visitor and employee parking. The arrangement of the parking contributes to the “placeless” feel of the site plan; substituting on-street parking for off-street parking and placing parking spaces in the rear of buildings could help create a sense of place and enhance walkability. The duplexes, in particular, create a “snout-house” effect that negatively impacts the experience of walking in the neighborhood and degrades the ability to connect with neighbors from a front porch or yard. In addition, the dispersed building pattern wastes valuable land and may compromise the ability of the project to pay for infrastructure maintenance arranging them in a compact pattern that makes efficient use of the land could enhance the neighborhood feel while also creating room for additional units to improve the ratio of tax value to infrastructure maintenance expenses. Finally, the existing pond should be utilized as a dual-purpose retention pond and central park, instead of solely as a drainage basin; orienting the buildings around the pond would further optimize that greenspace.

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

The applicant states that the project is unlikely to affect any of the environmental quality factors identified on the DRI Additional Form, including water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, protected mountain and river corridors, floodplains, historic resources, and other environmentally sensitive resources.

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies 1.7 acres of wetlands onsite and 50 acres of wetlands within one mile of the site. The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Conservation and Development Map (dated 7/19/2018) identifies 1.7 acres of “Conservation” land onsite and 44 acres of “Conservation” land within one mile of the site. The 1.7 acres of Conservation land is the 1.7 acre wetland that is identified as an existing pond on the site plans. It appears this pond would serve as an active stormwater management area and some stormwater infrastructure had already been installed prior to this proposal. A stream/creek drains through the site into the pond. The site plans show a 50-foot conservation corridor to buffer portions of the stream; two roadway and three sewer line crossings already exist. No Regionally Important Resource sites are identified within one mile of the proposed site.

The proposal should be designed to minimize further disruption to the existing stream and pond to avoid future erosion, flooding, and degraded water quality onsite and downstream from the site. Low impact design measures, like bioswales, rain gardens, and other green infrastructure should be incorporated into the project design. As discussed in the previous section, it is also recommended the development take advantage of the pond and surrounding greenspace by creating a dual-purpose retention area and park. At minimum, the project should be in accordance with the latest edition of the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual (Blue Book) and meet all relevant EPD requirements.

The applicant submitted an updated traffic study that estimates 1,216 new trips would be generated by the project. The study estimates that 48 AM and 50 PM peak hour trips would be generated. The study says, "The new traffic [...] is expected to have little impact on the external roadway network." The site already has a pre-existing street network, which would be slightly expanded to serve the western portion of the site. As is, the site is entirely automobile-dependent and this will likely limit the ability of the aging residents living here to access other parts of the community. Care should be taken to site senior living facilities where they can have easy access to a variety of destinations without an automobile, encouraging healthy, active living and minimizing isolation. Additional walking, biking, and transit infrastructure should be considered to achieve this recommendation.

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$52 million at build-out in 2023 and generate \$481,520 in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth \$1,677,420 and generate \$15,533 in tax revenue. Prior to approval, the County should measure the life cycle costs of the infrastructure needed to serve this project to ensure that they would not be committing to more maintenance expenses than the new tax revenue can cover.

Comments from Affected Parties

Alan Hood, Airport Safety Data Program Manager, Georgia Dept. of Transportation

"The proposed senior housing project is about 8 miles east of the Athens Ben Epps Airport (AHN). It is outside the FAA approach and departure surfaces, and is outside airport compatible land use areas, and does not appear to impact the airport.

If any construction equipment or construction exceeds 200' above ground level, an FAA Form 7460-1 must be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration. Those submissions for any associated buildings or cranes taller than 200' may be done online at <https://oeaaa.faa.gov>. The FAA must be in receipt of the notifications, no later than 120 days prior to construction. The FAA will evaluate the potential impacts of the project on protected airspace associated with the airports and advise the proponent if any action is necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed development."