



DEVELOPMENTS OF REGIONAL IMPACT

Final Report

Northeast Georgia Regional Commission • 305 Research Drive, Athens, Georgia • www.negrc.org

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 #3144
Name of Project:	Westfield Village
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Newton County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer's request for preliminary platting approval from Newton County. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of August 5-20, 2020.

Proposed Development

Pulte Group is proposing the construction of a mixed-use development on a 187-acre site at the corner of Kirkland Road and Salem Road (behind an existing commercial site) in unincorporated Newton County. The site is located at 3900 and 3902 Salem Road, and currently consists of six (6) parcels: 0013000000051000, 0013000000046000, 0013000000051B00, 0013000000049000, 0013000000049B00, and 0013000000049A00. The proposal includes 517 residential units and a 28-acre commercial site. The residential component would include 131 townhouses and 386 single-family detached houses. The single-family houses would be offered on lots with minimum square footage requirements of 6,240 (223 units), 7,440 (108 units), and 10,000 (55 units). Additionally, five (5) water quality basins are proposed in addition to the existing pond. The site plan shows park and amenity areas would be constructed in compliance with Newton County open space requirements. The project would be completed in one (1) phase with an estimated completion date in 2025. Currently, the site is mostly wooded with an existing pond on the northern edge of the site. Part of the site was cleared and several streets were paved for a previous project that was never built. These streets would be incorporated into the new proposal.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified as part of the Salem Character Area on the Newton County's Character Area-Future Development Map (adopted 6/27/2018). The comprehensive plan describes this area as, "A loose collection of disconnected, residential subdivisions developed since 1970. The area is characterized by its automobile orientation, high degree of building separation, segregation of uses, and disconnected street patterns." The Vision for this Character Area is for, "A sense of community through high-quality education, local jobs, commercial developments, better quality homes, aesthetic standards, and family-oriented activity centers." Mixed-use developments are listed as an appropriate land use. The plan also states that, "New development should be master planned with mixed uses, blending residential development with schools, parks, recreation, retail businesses and services, linked in a compact pattern that encourages walking and minimizes the need for auto trips." Traditional development (TND) style residential subdivisions are preferred. The submitted site plan does show sidewalks and park areas throughout the residential portion of the development. However, there are no clear bicycle/pedestrian connections to the non-residential portions of the development and the layout of the proposed commercial sites appear auto-focused (large, surface parking areas, no pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure). The developer has not provided renderings, setbacks, driveway/garage locations, or otherwise indicated what form the residences will take, but TND-style design typically involves houses that are placed close to the street with front porches that allow for a usable transition zone between the public and private realm, automobile storage that is placed in the side or rear of the lot instead of dominating the street frontage, and a high quality pedestrian environment with street trees and convenient sidewalk access to local destinations. Without these elements of traditional neighborhood design, the project may fail to provide the sense of community, quality homes, and aesthetic standards desired by the comprehensive plan. The County should insist on quality design as a condition of approval.

The site is identified as "Developing" on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Regional Land Use Map (dated 6/7/2018). The site is also in the Rapid Development portion of Newton County, as labeled in the Areas Requiring Special Attention Map (dated 6/7/2018). The Regional Plan encourages development patterns that preserve open space through clustering, a mix of uses and housing types, shared parking, and neighborhood commercial centers in these kinds of areas. The commercial components of mixed-use properties should have attractive and accessible businesses for the people living in the residential portion of the project. Multi-modal transportation options are strongly encouraged to reduce the number of new automobile trips that a project may create. While the elements of mixed-use development are present, the pieces need better integration to meet the spirit of mixed-use development and to be consistent with the recommendations of the NEGRC's Regional Plan. For example, the commercial parcels are currently auto-oriented rather than pedestrian-oriented. The commercial structures should be re-oriented with their primary entrances along the right-of-ways, with on-street parking and the larger parking areas placed in the rear. The total amount of parking may also need to be reduced. Designs should avoid interrupting sidewalks with driveways and development of parcels as disconnected islands. The Future Commercial Area should also observe these principles.

The proposed street network does a good job of creating walkable blocks and connections with the surrounding street network like Rock View Lane and Pebble Blvd. In addition to these necessary connections, better pedestrian and bicycle access should be provided between the residential and commercial sections. For example, providing a multi-use trail connection from the stream buffer/water quality area, along the northern boundary of the townhomes, and into the commercial area; installing a connection through the linear park into the adjacent commercial area; and placing a sidewalk between lots 205 and 206 and extending into the adjacent townhome gap would make walking/biking between the residential and commercial areas a reasonable and attractive option.

The Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan identifies the Salem Methodist Church and Campground, located adjacent to the southern edge of the proposed development, as a Regionally Important Resource (RIR). The submitted site plan shows a 100-foot undisturbed buffer is planned between the RIR and the proposed project. However, if this buffer does not provide a sufficient density of foliage to maintain the sense of natural seclusion offered by the camp, the buffer should be widened and/or incorporate additional plantings and a berm or fence, as appropriate. The adequacy of this buffer should be verified as a condition of approval.

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 0.36 acres of wetlands and 180 acres of “Conservation” and “Regionally Important Resource” areas onsite; 82.3 wetland acres are located within one (1) mile of the site. The Regional Plan’s Conservation and Development Map (dated 7/19/2018) identifies 1,918 acres of “Conservation” area within one (1) mile of the site. Much of this acreage overlaps with the 1,858 acres of “Regionally Important Resource” area. Low-impact development and green infrastructure are recommended by the Plan to protect natural systems and reduce infrastructure costs. An estimated 36% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and five (5) water quality basins are planned, in addition to the existing pond, to manage stormwater runoff. Onsite streams would have 35-foot buffers, a 100-foot undisturbed buffer is proposed around the existing pond, and natural vegetated buffers of 20, 50, and 100 feet will be maintained between the proposed project and surrounding properties per the applicant’s Additional Information Form. Given the extensive Conservation Areas identified onsite, the NEGRC recommends best practices, as identified in the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual (Blue Book), should be used. The site plan shows approximately 31% of the site would remain as open space; tree save and protection measures should be implemented throughout development to ensure as much of the existing canopy is protected as possible. Street trees should be incorporated throughout the development. Newton County should consider a minimum tree canopy requirement, if one is not already in place.

Falcon Design Consultants estimates 11,989 trips would be generated by this project based on the ITE Trip Generation Manual, 10th Edition. An estimated 616 new trips would be generated in the AM peak hour while 1,158 new trips would take place during the PM peak hour. The site plan includes four (4) proposed connections to the existing street network. A pre-existing deceleration lane on Kirkland Road would be incorporated into the project. Based on these plans, the developer does not intend to add additional infrastructure to the surrounding street network. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is planning to widen Salem Road from two (2) to four (4) lanes. The site plan shows a possible realignment of Salem Road, but no further details have been provided. In order to maintain an attractive mixed-use environment for pedestrians, Salem Road should be designed as a Complete Street, with multi-modal access and automobile speeds that do not exceed 30-35 MPH.

The project would be served by the Newton County Water and Sewerage Authority with an estimated daily demand of .1866 MGD for each system. These demands can be covered by existing capacity. No water or sewer line extensions are anticipated.

The applicant estimates the project would generate 156 tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. No hazardous waste would be generated.

The project would be worth an estimated \$145,000,000 upon completion with an estimated tax revenue of \$750,000. These values translate to \$775,401 per in value-per-acre and \$4,011 in tax-revenue-per-acre. Before approving this project, the County should measure the life cycle costs of the infrastructure necessary 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

None received.