



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 #3204
Name of Project:	General Time
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Athens-Clarke County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s request for a rezoning from Athens-Clarke County. The proposed zoning change is from Industrial to Employment-Office (Planned Development). Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 12/16/2020—12/31/2020.

Proposed Development

The Ardent Companies is proposing construction of a mixed-use development on a 35-acre site (tax parcel 112 003) at the corner of Newton Bridge Road and Dairy Pak Road in Athens-Clarke County. The proposed adaptive re-use of a former industrial site consists of a 150-room hotel, 200 multi-family units, 69,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space, 45,000 sq. ft. of office space, and 154,000 sq. ft. of flex space. Additionally, four (4) stormwater management areas, an outdoor event space, a shared-use path that can connect to the Sandy Creek Nature Center in the future, and nearly 1,200 parking spaces are proposed. Currently, the site is home to a warehouse that is split between Terrapin Beer Co. and Wayfair, as well as other warehouse and manufacturing space that has been vacant since the shuttering of the General Time Corp. The project would be completed in 2022.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified as an Employment Center on the Athens-Clarke County Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map (dated 03/29/2018). Both the current I (Industrial) zoning and proposed E-O (Employment-Office) zoning are listed as compatible land use categories for an Employment Center. The Employment Center Future Land Use is described as, “areas of industry, office, research parks, and flex-space mixed uses. Large-scale employment areas, which include large industrial areas, manufacturing, office parks, and research

centers, is incompatible with housing. Smaller-scale employment areas are appropriate to be in close proximity to a neighborhood area. Design standards regulating building placement, landscaping, and buffering should apply. Small amounts of retail may be compatible in some areas.” The Plan does not establish specific thresholds to determine the difference between large and small-scale employment. The proposed residences may come into conflict with the industrial character of the area depending on what scale of industry is present. Industries that create excessive noise, light, odors, or truck traffic are not compatible with residential and hospitality uses; Athens-Clarke County should consider conditions of zoning regulating more intense industrial uses on the site to minimize potential conflict.

The site is identified as “Developing” on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Regional Land Use Map (dated 06/07/2018). The site is also identified as “Redevelopment” on the Areas Requiring Special Attention Map (dated 06/07/2018). Recommendations for this area include adaptive re-use of brownfield sites, re-use of existing vacant warehouses, improvement of sidewalks and street appearances, locating structures at the street front to improve the pedestrian environment, and infill development on existing infrastructure. Commercial, mixed-use, and light industrial/warehouses are listed as compatible land uses. Proposals should seek to create a sense of place, provide transportation and housing options, and improve economic prosperity. The Plan also recommends burying utilities, adaptive re-use of existing structures, sign regulation, and the implementation of multi-modal access to the surrounding street network. The proposal is generally consistent with these recommendations. That said, local parking minimums mandate that the project be delivered with approximately 1,200 parking spaces. Excessive parking spaces, particularly in large, surface lots, degrade the sense of place, devalue the property, raise prices for tenants, encourage auto-dependency, and increase stormwater runoff. Given the mix of uses in this proposal, the supply of parking can be reduced through shared parking because the demand for business and residential parking will have minimal overlap. The NEGRC generally recommends the reduction or elimination of parking minimums and the incorporation of shared, stacked, and on-street parking where feasible.

To create multi-modal access to the surrounding street network, the NEGRC recommends a road diet for Newton Bridge Road/Barber Street and potentially for North Chase Street. The current four-lane configuration encourages high vehicle speeds and provides limited or no access for people walking, biking, or riding transit. Converting the street into a three-lane configuration with a bi-directional middle turn lane and protected bike lanes would enable multi-modal access without degrading vehicle access. A mid-block crossing should be provided between the site and Terrapin Beer Company’s main campus across the street to provide safe pedestrian access, since the project could generate significant cross-traffic. In 2019, the Georgia Department of Transportation counted 7,300 annual average daily trips (AADT) on Barber Street, 10,200 on Newton Bridge Road, and 13,400 on the adjacent North Chase Street section. These figures are well below the threshold of 20,000-25,000 trips that can be accommodated in a three-lane configuration. Long term, if this proposal is constructed, the aforementioned streets should be considered as candidates for a “complete streets” upgrade. The Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan identifies Sandy Creek Nature Center and the North Oconee River Greenway as Regionally Important Resources within one (1) mile of the proposed site. The proposed multi-use path could eventually be extended to connect with these regional resources.

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) does not identify any wetlands onsite; 375 acres of wetlands are located within one (1) mile of the site. The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Conservation and Development Map (dated 07/19/2018) identifies 503 acres as "Conservation" within one (1) mile of the site and zero (0) acres onsite. The Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan identifies two (2) acres of Regionally Important Resource (RIR) area onsite and 1,089 acres of RIR area within one (1) mile of the site. This acreage is part of the Sandy Creek Nature Center, the North Oconee River Greenway, and the Northeast Georgia Green Infrastructure Network. Given the proximity of the site to these resources, the NEGRC recommends Low-Impact Development measures, including green infrastructure and multi-functional stormwater detention areas.

An estimated 75% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces. The developer proposes three (3) localized bio-retention areas to treat stormwater runoff at the source, several micro-pools, and an underground extended stormwater detention facility for water quality treatment and to attenuate post-development peak discharge to pre-development discharge rates. At minimum, the project should be in accordance with the latest edition of the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual (Blue Book).

The project would be served by Athens-Clarke County's water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.07 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. Water and sewer line extensions of 0.625 and 0.028 miles, respectively, would be required to serve the site. The life cycle costs of these extensions should be calculated to determine whether the extension would cost more in maintenance than this proposal would provide in tax revenue. The applicant estimates the project would generate 1,915 tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. No hazardous waste would be generated.

A traffic study performed by Atkins estimates that 6,555 daily trips would be generated by the proposal. An estimated 604 trips would take place during the AM peak-hour and 597 trips would take place during the PM peak-hour. The study assumes that traffic signals will be added to the intersection of North Chase Street at the Athens Perimeter Eastbound Off-Ramp and at the intersection of Kathwood Drive and Newton Bridge Road to handle general traffic growth in the area. Assuming that these signals are constructed, no further infrastructure improvements would be necessary to accommodate the trips generated by the General Time re-development. Four (4) driveways into the site are planned (two (2) existing and two (2) new construction). As stated previously, the NEGRC recommends bike and pedestrian improvements to the area to provide for safe and comfortable multi-modal access.

At completion, the proposal would be worth an estimated \$116,500,000 and would generate an estimated \$1,570,420 in annual tax revenue. On a per-acre basis, the proposal would be worth an estimated \$3,328,571 and would generate an estimated \$44,869 in tax revenue. Before approving the proposal, 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

Alan Hood, Airport Safety Data Program Manager, Georgia Department of Transportation

The proposed development is approximately 3.5 miles from Athens-Ben Epps Airport (AHN). It is located outside any FAA approach or departure surfaces, and airport compatible land use areas, and does not appear to impact the airport.

However, the proposed development is in proximity to a navigation facility and may impact the assurance of navigation signal reception, so an FAA Form 7460-1 must be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration according to the FAA's Notice Criteria Tool found here (<https://oeaaa.faa.gov/oeaaa/external/gisTools/gisAction.jsp?action=showNoNoticeRequiredToolForm>). Those submissions for the buildings and any associated cranes 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.