

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 #3255
Name of Project:	Accent Springs
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Barrow County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s request for a rezoning from Barrow County. The site is currently zoned C-2 (Community-Commercial), and the proposal would rezone the 44-acre residential portion into R-3 (High-Density Residential). Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 03/03/21 – 03/18/21.

Proposed Development

Westplan Investors is proposing construction of 438 residential units on a 73-acre site at the intersection of Carl-Bethlehem Road, Hwy 81, and Hoyt King Road in Barrow County (parcel numbers are XX053-033 and XX053-033B). The project would include 288 multi-family units, 150 townhomes, and set aside 26 acres for unspecified future commercial development. Additionally, a large number of parking spaces, two detention ponds, and an amenity area would be constructed. The residential portion of the project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in the summer of 2023. There are no plans to develop the commercial properties at this point. Currently, there are two houses on the site that would be removed. The rest of the site consists of undeveloped open space with a few stands of trees.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified on the Barrow County Comprehensive Plan’s Future Development Map (dated 10/24/18) as the “316 Innovation Corridor.” The Plan describes the intent for the area as the creation of employment centers and large-scale commercial uses. Future Land Uses include bio-tech, R&D centers, advanced manufacturing, warehouses, offices, large-scale medical, and regional commercial uses. The primary zoning is projected as C-3 (Intensive Commercial), O-I (Office/Institutional), and M-1 (Light Industrial). R-3 High-

Density Residential is listed as a secondary zoning category for the area. The Innovation Corridor will likely require housing for potential workers to attract more firms, and the proposed zoning for this project is listed as an appropriate secondary zoning category. It appears that the project is generally consistent with the local comprehensive plan; however, a more walkable design that incorporates a mix of onsite uses (vertically and horizontally) would likely prove more attractive to employees of an “Innovation Corridor.”

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 proposal’s townhomes and apartments would add diversity to the local housing supply, which is almost exclusively detached single-family houses. However, the proposed project’s design deviates from the Regional Plan’s recommendations, including failure to create a sense of place and provide multi-modal transportation infrastructure. While the proposal would create a more compact development pattern than adjacent properties, the site layout guarantees that the project would be auto-centric. Given the large size and lack of apparent topographical challenges, this site is ideal for subdivision into a relatively rectilinear street grid. A grid of slow, tree-lined streets would create an environment that is friendly for walking and biking, with potential for future trail connections to adjacent properties. These streets could also absorb a significant amount of parking, reducing off-street parking areas. The amount of off-street parking could be further reduced or minimized by cutting the number of spaces, sharing spaces between compatible uses, and using stacked parking. Where off-street parking is necessary, it should be shielded from streets by buildings to create a stronger sense of place and enhance walkability.

As designed, the development bifurcates the property into commercial and residential uses. Sense of place and walkability could be enhanced by incorporating more of a “complete neighborhood” layout, with commercial uses on prominent corners and streets, and a variety of alley-fed housing types on interior lots. In addition, centrally locating the apartments and other higher density housing units would increase access to any non-residential services and amenities provided onsite as well as providing a larger customer base for potential commercial uses. Better access and a larger customer base could also be achieved through diverse house-scale buildings like quad-plexes, courtyard apartments, and other “Missing Middle” housing types. These building typologies, when properly regulated, fit the character of single-family neighborhoods better than large apartment complexes. Recreational areas could be grouped into one large, publicly accessible park that would help create a strong sense of place. This park could anchor a “commercial main street” with second- and third-floor residential units. A vertical mixed-use layout is often more financially productive over the long term for the local government, and capable of generating enough revenue to maintain associated infrastructure.

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. No stream buffers are identified since there were no natural water features detected onsite.

An estimated 60% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and two retention ponds are planned to manage stormwater runoff. Reduction of off-street parking areas, through the measures suggested in the previous section, could significantly reduce the amount of runoff produced. Low impact design measures, like bioswales, should be incorporated into the project design. 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. Designing these retention ponds as stormwater parks could also add value and improve the sense of place.

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies less than one acre of wetlands onsite and 121 acres of wetlands within one mile of the site. The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Conservation and Development Map (dated 7/19/2018) identifies zero acres of "Conservation" land onsite and 141 acres of "Conservation" land within one mile of the site. Of this "Conservation" acreage, 37 acres are part of the Northeast Georgia Green Infrastructure Network as identified in the Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan for Regionally Important Resources (dated 8/7/2018). No Regionally Important Resources are identified within one mile of the proposed site.

The applicant estimates the project would generate 1,360 AM peak hour trips and 1,339 PM peak trips. However, a preliminary traffic study, prepared by Vaughn and Melton, estimated total trips at 2,674 per day—lower than the combined peak hour total of 2,699 submitted on Form 2. A full traffic study is currently underway, as required by Barrow County. Final infrastructure recommendations will be based on this study. Currently, the applicant proposes construction of an internal road between Carl Bethlehem Road and Hwy 81. The townhomes and apartments would be accessed directly via this road (plus one driveway on Hoyt King Road). Additional roads are proposed for future development on the remaining C-2 (Community-Commercial) portion of the site, but this is subject to change. The current design is auto-centric with no proposed bicycle or pedestrian infrastructure. Utilization of bike- and pedestrian-friendly design measures (including alley-loaded dwellings) would improve the sense of place and reduce the amount of internal vehicular activity.

The project would be served by the City of Winder's water system with an estimated daily demand of 0.01 MGD. The project would be served by Barrow County's sewer system with an estimated daily demand of 0.09 MGD. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. No water line extension is necessary, but a sewer line extension of 0.02 miles would be needed.

The applicant estimates the project would generate 438 tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. No hazardous waste would be generated.

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth approximately \$60 million at build-out in 2023 and generate approximately \$750,000 in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth \$1,363,636 and generate \$17,045 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

Parker Niebauer, DITO Traffic Operations Supervisor, Georgia Department of Transportation
GDOT is requesting studies/analysis for the following intersections

- 1) SR 316 @ Carl Bethlehem Rd
- 2) SR 81 @ Carl Bethlehem Rd
- 3) SR 81 @ Hoyt King Rd
- 4) The new driveway to the development off SR 81

GDOT asks if the county will require upgrades to Carl Bethlehem @ Haymon Morris Rd?

Athens-Clarke County Solid Waste Department

Waste generation of 438 tons/year appears based on a 1 ton per residential unit generation rate. EPA estimates nearly one ton per PERSON per year; waste generation should be revised upward based on number of occupants per unit.



March 12, 2021

Stephen Jaques
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission
305 Research Drive
Athens, Georgia 30605-2795

Re: Development of Regional Impact- Accent Spring Housing Development (DRI# 3255)

The Gwinnett County Department of Planning and Development has reviewed the Regional Review Notification (Review) prepared by the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission regarding the proposed 73-acre proposed construction of a mixed-residential community at the intersection of Carl-Bethlehem Road, Highway 81, and Hoyt King Road in Barrow County. A rezoning request has initiated this DRI.

The following comments are offered:

A preliminary traffic study was provided and indicated estimated total trips at 2,674 per day which is lower than the combined peak hour total of 2,699 submitted on Form 2. Barrow County requires a full traffic study and it is underway. This proposed development features a mix of housing that will be located near consumer services, retail, and Highway 316. The recent completion of the Highway 81 overpass will provide additional mobility and access to these amenities. Due to its location in Barrow County, within the Highway Corridor Overlay District, staff recommend that these development guidelines located in the Unified Development Code Section 89-1601 be followed.

As part of the Georgia Innovation Corridor, Gwinnett County, Barrow County, Oconee County, and Athens-Clarke County share in the promotion of a consistent development concept for this corridor. With infrastructure improvements along Highway 316 there will be the possibility for greater projects that will foster the growth of world-class research and development and knowledge-based projects. The recent announcement of Rowen will continue to ignite these opportunities along Highway 316.

Gwinnett County appreciates the opportunity to comment on this proposed development, and sincerely hopes that these comments will be given full consideration as the review process moves forward. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding Gwinnett County's position on this issue.

Best regards,

Cyndi Sloan, Planning Division Director
Gwinnett County Department of Planning and Development