

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 #3557
Name of Project:	Robertson Bridge Road Development
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Barrow County

Background

The developer’s request for a rezoning from Barrow County initiated the review. The site would be rezoned from Agricultural-Residential (AR) to R-3 Master Planned Development (for the residential side) and C-2 (for the commercial side). Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 2/23/22–3/10/22.

Proposed Development

MHC of Georgia, LLC. is proposing construction of 508 single-family houses and 93,700 SF of commercial retail on a 219-acre site at the corner of Hwy 53 and Robertson Bridge Road in unincorporated Barrow County (parcel numbers: XX121 060B, 060C, 060D, 060E, 060F, 060G, 060H, 060K, 060L, 060N). An additional outparcel would be created for future commercial development. An existing pond would be converted into a stormwater detention pond. Currently, the site is mostly comprised of open fields and an old farmhouse. The house would be demolished to make way for the proposal. The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in June 2027.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified as “Suburban Neighborhood” on the Barrow County Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map (dated 10/24/2018). The intent of this character area is to preserve established neighborhoods and create quality new residential development that is consistent with surrounding suburban densities. Single-family homes at low-to-moderate densities (1-2.3 du/acre) is the preferred type of development. Tree cover should be maintained, open space should be provided, and high quality materials should be used, per the Plan’s design principles. R-1 and R-2 zoning are the only categories that are considered compatible in this area.

Neither the current zoning nor the proposed zoning is consistent with the Plan's desired zoning categories for the area. However, the proposal's density, at 2.3 du/acre, is consistent with the Plan's density recommendations. No renderings or designs were submitted for this review (not required), so it cannot be determined whether the quality of the building materials is consistent with the Plan. Approximately 17% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces and 25% of the site would be preserved as open space. Most of the site is open fields, so there is limited tree cover to preserve. Minimal shared greenspace appears to be provided on the submitted site plan, outside of required buffer areas, a narrow landscape strip along the northwestern border of the project, and an isolated "Rec Area" on the northeastern end of the site. No proposed landscaping is shown on the submitted plans to determine whether the project would meet the spirit of the Plan. The basic proposal of single-family houses at 2.3 du/acre seems to meet the Plan's preferred type of development. It cannot be determined whether the proposed development is consistent with the quality and character of development the Plan calls for.

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 site plan shows a suburban development pattern that does not meet these recommendations. At 2.3 dwelling units per acre, the proposal creates the sprawling, automobile-dependent development pattern that the Regional Plan recommends avoiding. This kind of development pattern has been shown to create fiscally unsustainable maintenance liabilities. The proposal also fails to create a sense of place. There is no central green, plaza, or gathering place that can serve as a value-creating landmark for the neighborhood. For a project that covers 219 acres, a village block design with houses organized around central parks and greens would be more effective at creating a sense of place, building longevity into the project. The commercial part of the proposal could be built to serve as the heart of the neighborhood, but the current proposal is completely auto-oriented and has no connection to the residential portion of the site. At the least, the commercial portion should have inter-parcel access to the residential side of the proposal to give future residents easy access. Sidewalks and trail connections should be provided throughout the site. The Regional Plan recommends building a variety of housing types at varying price points, but this project only delivers detached single-family houses—one of the most expensive types of housing. Incorporating "Missing Middle Housing" types like duplexes, fourplexes, mansion apartments, accessory dwelling units, and townhomes are recommended for a project of this scale. The project is also located in a part of Barrow County that is completely dependent on personal automobiles for all transportation needs. Children and others who cannot drive will have virtually no access to destinations outside the subdivision without someone to drive them around. Integrating the commercial site with the residential side and locating the rec area more centrally would help reduce the amount of traffic generated by the project. Street stubs to adjacent properties should be provided to incrementally build out street network connectivity and multi-modal access. At this time, the proposal appears generally inconsistent with the Regional Plan's recommendations for new development in this area.

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. However, the site plan states that some area of the residential development is within a floodplain and that wetlands are present onsite.

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies zero acres of wetlands onsite and 159 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 156 acres of "Conservation" land within one mile of the site. This "Conservation" land includes zero acres of Regionally Important Resource land onsite and 60 acres of RIR land within one mile of the site. No specific Regionally Important Resource sites are identified within one mile of the proposed site.

An estimated 17% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces and an existing pond would be used as a retention pond to manage stormwater runoff. The site plan shows an intermittent stream flows into the pond and no construction is proposed in the stream. The applicant states that locally required 75-foot buffers would be maintained between construction and wetland areas. However, these are not labeled on the site plan. The site plan also states the developer will devote 25% of the site to open space. The proposal should be designed to minimize disruption to the existing water resources 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. 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.

KCI Technologies Inc. has performed a traffic impact study that projects 7,602 new daily trips, including 497 AM peak hour trips, and 824 PM peak hour trips from the proposal. Six entrances are proposed including two on Hwy 53 and four on Robertson Bridge Road. The study recommends adding a right turn lane on Robertson Bridge Road and right and left turn lanes on Hwy 53 at the Robertson Bridge Road intersection. With the exception of Driveway #2, all driveways would be full-movement entrances. Driveway #2 would be a right-in/right-out driveway with a deceleration lane. Driveway #1 projects to have a low level of service during the PM peak hour, but the other driveways are projected to have acceptable levels of service. However, the lack of nearby destinations and the auto-centric nature of the design guarantees that residents will be dependent on automobiles for all of their travel needs. Given the limited street network in the area, additional development may lead to traffic bottlenecks. Although the transportation network may be able to absorb new trips from individual projects, the cumulative impact of developing in a car-centric manner naturally leads to a level of congestion that even expensive road widenings struggle to solve. The Regional Plan recommends a walkable, compact development pattern with "complete" streets to prevent and address traffic congestion.

The project would be served by the Barrow County water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.127 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. No water or sewer line extensions are anticipated.

The applicant estimates the project would generate 325 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 \$150 million at build-out in 2027 and generate \$1,750,000 in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$685,000 and generate approximately \$7,991 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 Department of Transportation

This mixed use development is 4 miles southeast of the Barrow County Airport (WDR), and is located under or outside any FAA approach or departure surface, 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 studies are needed for any building or crane taller than 100' above the ground. Those submissions to the FAA for the building 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.

Aries Little, Atlanta Regional Commission

Below, you will find my comments concerning the referenced DRI. I do understand this is not a formal review as the other DRIs but the referenced comments are along the lines of the traditional review. Therefore, the comments may or may not apply. If there is anything particular needed, please let me know.

- On University Parkway/SR 316, from SR 53 and Bethlehem Road, there are several projects identified to add an interchange or grade separation. These projects are referenced and described below.

Project ID	Project Description	CST FY
BA-010	SR 316- New Interchange at SR 211 Bethlehem Rd	LR 2026-2030
BA-184J	SR 316 Grade Separation at McCarty Rd (includes extension of Sam Sims Rd west of McCarty Rd south of SR 316)	LR 2031-2040
BA-184I	SR 316 Grade Separation at Wall Rd	LR-2031-2040
BA-184K	SR 316- New Interchange at Barber Creek Rd	2024/2025

- Based on the review, it appears the development doesn't offer internal pedestrian facilities or external pedestrian facilities to the proposed retail development and/or future adjacent development.