

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 #3588
Name of Project:	Airabella
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Greene County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s application for a permit from Greene County. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 4/1/22–4/16/22.

Proposed Development

Smith Planning Group is proposing construction of a large mixed-use project on a 137-acre site at 6130 Lake Oconee Parkway (GA-44) and Linger Longer Road in unincorporated Greene County (parcel numbers: 056000003C and 0560000030). The proposal includes 85 townhomes, 132 single-family homes, 470 apartments, 125 hotel rooms, 125 hotel/condo rooms, 45,000 square feet of loft/office, 101,500 square feet of retail, and a 45,000 square foot grocery store. Additionally, an executive golf course, three stormwater ponds, and four parking decks are proposed. The project would be completed in multiple phases with an estimated completion date for phase one in 2023. The first phase covers 132 single-family homes, and the overall project would be completed by 2026. Currently, the site is undeveloped woodland.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified as Residential on the Greene County Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map (dated 9/2018). Land uses for this area include “conventional housing applications that include concentrations of efficient density and preserved greenspace.” Planned Unit Developments (PUD) are included as an acceptable use in this area, but the project is technically a CPUD. This project would deliver concentrations of efficient density and preserved greenspace, as envisioned by the Residential Future Land Use category, but it would also deliver a mixed-use component that the land use plan did not envision for this parcel. However, the adjacent properties around the intersection of Linger Longer Road and Lake Oconee Parkway are designated

as a Mixed-Use Community Center where CPUD development is encouraged. This project would be a natural extension of that node, and due to the exceptional design, this project would likely become the focal point of that node. While it does not match the specific land use that is designated for this area, it does seem to satisfy the spirit of the land use plan. Therefore, the project appears mostly consistent 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 applicant states that the project can be staffed with the region’s existing workforce, and the compact nature of the project is consistent with more fiscally sustainable development patterns. The project creates a variety of housing options that range from detached single-family houses and townhouses to apartments and condos. Households of varying sizes and ages will likely be able to find a residence that fits their needs. However, no expected price points were provided, so it cannot be determined whether the development will be accessible across a variety of income levels. The project does complement existing transportation networks in the area and its compact walkable design will reduce the number of car trips within the site. Nearby residents and vacationers could bike or walk to this project if the infrastructure is safe and supportive. The future phases include streets where buildings will front and engage with tree-shaded streetscapes and a central gathering place that should become a focal point for everyone. The development, as presented on the submitted site plan, appears to do a good job of creating a sense of place. No sample elevations or renderings were submitted (not required), so it cannot be determined whether that will be achieved when completed. Architectural elements, lighting, and signage should be utilized in order to optimize the development’s sense of place; for example, the large commercial and apartment buildings should have frequent usable doors and windows along the street. Architectural styles and elements in the single-family residential portions of the development should be varied. The project appears to align well with the Regional Plan’s recommendations.

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. An estimated 58% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and up to three retention facilities are planned to manage stormwater runoff. A creek runs through the site and carries a mandatory 25-foot buffer per state law. One stream crossing is proposed, across a creek that originates on the project site and drains directly to Lake Oconee, a resource maintained for drinking water and recreation, including fishing. The golf course would be designed around the creek and would provide additional buffering; however, the County should consider the potential effects of fertilizer and other chemical runoff associated with golf courses.

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies zero wetlands onsite and 245 wetland acres are located within one mile of the site. The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Conservation and Development Map (dated 7/19/2018) identifies all 137 onsite acres as “Conservation” land and 3,400 acres of “Conservation” land within one mile of the site. This “Conservation” land includes 137 acres of Regionally Important Resource land onsite and 3,400 acres of RIR land within one mile of the site. This acreage is 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). Lake Oconee, a Regionally Important Resource site, is less than one mile of the proposed project. The proposal should be designed to minimize disruption to the existing streams,

associated wetlands, and floodplains 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. However, given the proximity to the Regionally Important Resource of Lake Oconee and the extensive Conservation land onsite, the project should go above and beyond the minimum recommendations and protection standards.

The applicant projects 3,000 new daily trips, including 998 AM peak hour trips and 600 PM peak hour trips from the proposal. The project would have one entrance each on Linger Longer Road, Old Linger Longer Road, and Lake Oconee Parkway (GA-44). Four parking decks and additional surface parking are planned. The number of parking spaces was not specified. Given that the location is in a car-dependent area, it makes sense that the project would require more parking than a similar project in an urban infill location. However, the number of parking spaces should be minimized through sharing arrangements between uses like commercial and residential that have opposite usage cycles (residential parking demand is generally highest at night while commercial demand is highest during the day). Furthermore, providing biking connections along Linger Longer Road to the Ritz-Carlton and other lake properties would allow vacationers to access the commercial and recreational spaces within the project via a relaxing bike ride rather than by driving.

The project would be served by Piedmont Water's water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.229 MGD for each system. Piedmont Water is the local water and wastewater service provider. 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 18,828 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 \$210 million at build-out in 2026 and generate \$792,000 in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$1,533,000 and generate approximately \$5,780 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

Greg Boike, Director of Public Administration, Middle Georgia Regional Commission

MGRC does anticipate that there will be some effects on our region from this development. MGRC refers to the area directly across Lake Oconee in Putnam County as an "Area of Rapid Growth," and we would expect that many similar characteristics apply to the project area in Greene County. As such, developers, in coordination with local and state partners should pay special attention to ensure that growth does not outpace the availability of infrastructure in the area. This project appears to have infrastructure improvements in place for water and sewer service. However, additional analysis may be needed to determine if transportation improvements are needed. Increased traffic along GA-44 should be expected from this project, and that road already experiences higher traffic counts than many similarly-sized roadways throughout the region.

Tyson Brock, Assistant District Traffic Engineer, Georgia Department of Transportation

This development falls within a GDOT programmed project (PI 0006253). Currently parcel 056000003C has an existing driveway with auxiliary lanes installed along SR 44. However, the project proposes a raised median at this location and converting the access to a right in/out configuration. A traffic study is needed to evaluate the

impacts to SR 44 and the intersection at Linger Longer road. The study should evaluate based on the future design proposed under PI 0006253 and include an ICE evaluation for the intersections.

