

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 #3758
Name of Project:	Covington Industrial Park
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	City of Covington

Background

The City’s application for partial annexation of areas outside of city limits and the developer’s request for a preliminary plat initiated the review. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 7/26/22–8/10/22.

Proposed Development

Newton Land Investments is proposing construction of 4,081,792 square feet of industrial warehouse, manufacturing, and e-commerce space on a 478-acre site on multiple tracts between Alcovy, Flat Rock, and Gregory Roads (GPS Coordinates 33.636685, -83.827701) in Covington, Georgia and unincorporated Newton County (parcel numbers: 0079 009, 0079 011, 0096 006, C079 009, C079 079, C080 007, and C08 0071). Most of the site is in the City of Covington, and small areas of the site are located within unincorporated Newton County. The proposed development includes nine separate buildings which would be connected by two new roads within the site, one of which would connect Alcovy Road with GA-142. The site plan includes an unspecified number of car parking spaces, trailer parking spaces, and loading bays, as well as 15 detention ponds for stormwater management. Currently, the site is a combination of undeveloped woodlands, pastures, and wetlands. The project will be completed in two phases, and the entire project has an estimated completion date of 2030.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The portions of the site within the City of Covington (approximately 419 acres) are identified on the city’s Future Land Use map (dated 11/28/17) as “IND – Industrial.” In their comprehensive plan, Industrial is

described as “property used for warehousing, distribution, trucking, and manufacturing.” The intended use of the site described in the application and site plan is consistent with the city’s Future Land Use designation.

The portions of the site in unincorporated Newton County (approximately 59 acres) are within the “Flint Hill” character area on the county’s Character Area Map (dated 6/27/18). The “Flint Hill” character area is described as “a rural community tied closely to the preservation, recreation, and conservation of the Lake Varner Reservoir.” Suitable land uses within this character area include agriculture, residential, parks & recreation, and conservation. Suitable zoning includes A (Agricultural) and AR (Agricultural Residential). The vision for this area is “a mixture of rural communities tied closely to the preservation, recreation, and conservation of the Lake Varner Reservoir, and walkable conservation style residential communities with urban town centers.” The proposed development is not compatible with the existing character area classification of Newton County because industrial land use is not included as an appropriate land use in the Flint Hill Character Area described in Newton County’s comprehensive plan. Given the differing characteristics between the industrial site proposal and the surround Flint Hill Character area in unincorporated Newton County, the city should consider requiring buffers around the site area to lower the site’s impact on surrounding residential, agricultural, and conservation areas.

Most of the site is identified as “Developed” on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Regional Land Use Map (dated 6/7/2018), with the exception of the forest area in the northeast portion of the site, which is identified as “Rural”. 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. No information was provided in the application that would enable determination of whether the proposal prices in the lifecycle cost of infrastructure. The proposed site is partially built on existing infrastructure, as the project will not require an extension of water or sewer lines. However, according to the applicant, the city will need to improve the sewer system within the applicable basin, which is expected to be completed towards the end of 2023. Because of the nature of warehouses, this proposal does little to create a sense of place or to provide diverse and affordable housing. The proposed development is also not compact.

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

The applicant states that the project is likely to affect wetlands on the project site, yet the wetlands will be buffered, and all state permits will be obtained for crossing onsite streams. The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies 10.5 wetland acres onsite, and 272 wetland acres are located within one mile of the site. Much of the surrounding wetland areas are connected to the nearby Lake Varner Reservoir, which is located to the northeast of the site. An estimated 48% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and 15 retention ponds are planned to manage stormwater runoff. The site plan includes a 25-foot state stream buffer around all streams onsite. The applicant states that this project may fall within the Cornish Creek Watershed Protection Overlay District, and if so, the development must adhere to the requirement in Section 14.32.030 of the Covington Municipal Code. The applicant also states that other environmental quality factors identified on the DRI Additional Form, including water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, protected mountain and river corridors, floodplains, historic resources, and other environmentally sensitive resources, will not be impacted. 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.

The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Conservation and Development Map (dated 7/19/2018) identifies 11 acres of "Conservation" land onsite and 1,976 acres of "Conservation" land within one mile of the site. This "Conservation" land includes 11 acres of Regionally Important Resource land onsite and 230 acres of RIR land within one mile of the site. Portions of this acreage 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 specific Regionally Important Resource sites are identified within one mile of the proposed site.

Kimley Horn completed a traffic impact study that projects 8,832 new daily trips, including 978 AM peak hour trips and 1,189 PM peak hour trips from the proposal. The Traffic Study proposes the signalization of the intersection of GA-142 (John R. Williams Highway) at Stewart Drive/Driveway and building more turn lanes at this intersection. While the project area is located in a primarily industrial area, it is surrounded by residential areas along GA-142. This includes the Orchard Park subdivision and additional homes located along Stewart Drive. Therefore, the developer should incorporate pedestrian and bike infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and bike racks to promote non-automobile transportation modes. No pedestrian or bike facilities are currently indicated on the site plan.

The project would be served by the City of Covington water and sewer systems. The applicant originally stated that the estimated demand would be 0.06 MGD for the water system and 1.5 MGD for the sewer system. However, upon further clarification, the applicant stated that the project would only produce approximately 0.09 MGD of sewage. Additionally, the applicant stated in their application that currently there is not sufficient wastewater treatment capacity available to serve the project. The applicant later added that the city is working to expand the sewer system within the applicable basin with a planned completion toward the end of 2023. No water or sewer line extensions are anticipated. The applicant estimates the project would generate 7,470 tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. The applicant states that no hazardous waste would be generated.

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$150 million at build-out in 2030 and will generate between \$1.5 million and \$2.5 million in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$313,808 and generate approximately between \$3,138 and \$5,230 in tax revenue. Prior to approval, the City 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

Brock Tyson, P.E., Assistant District Traffic Engineer, Georgia Department of Transportation

Personnel from the Traffic Operations section of this office have reviewed the DRI package for the Covington Industrial Park and we offer the following comments:

- Access for this property has already been established by GDOT permit 1291-03-217 which was approved on December 9, 1991. This access is a local road (American Way)
- The proposed traffic signal at Stewart Drive will present a negative impact to several residential properties and it is anticipated that these impacts will lead to both operational and safety challenges for the signal operation. There is the concern that the roadway geometry required to support the signal operation cannot be achieved.

- Any proposed traffic control measures such as a traffic signal or roundabout that includes widening along SR 142 at Steward Drive will be challenged by limited right of way and significant grade differentials. Widening in this area particularly on the western side of SR 142 will have a negative effect on how backslopes, residential driveways and Steward Drive is tied in.
- We recommend this development consider using the already approved access on SR 142 with any necessary enhancement as their secondary driveway and establish their main driveway off Alcovy Road. GDOT recently completed a roadway project (PI 242230) along Alcovy Road from I-20 through its intersection with SR 142. The developer can continue this footprint up through their frontage and tie back down to the existing 2-lane section. Currently there are industrial developments in the area with access to Alcovy road (General Mills, SKC Film) in addition to the Newton County law enforcement center and Georgia Piedmont College.

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

The proposed construction of 4,081,792 square feet of industrial warehouse, manufacturing, and e-commerce space on a 478-acre site on multiple tracts between Alcovy, Flat Rock and Gregory Road is located 0.5 miles east of the Covington Municipal Airport (CVC). It is located outside of the runway protection zone (RPZ) but is within the FAA departure surface to Runway 10, and the instrument approach area for Runway 28.

An FAA Form 7460-1 must be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration. That may be done online at <https://oeaaa.faa.gov>. The FAA must be in receipt of the notification, no later than 120 days prior to construction. The FAA will evaluate the potential impact of the project on protected airspace associated with the airports and advise the proponent if any action is necessary.