

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 #3861 |
| Name of Project: | Calls Creek WRF 3.0 MGD Upgrade Phase 2 |
| Name of Host Jurisdiction: | Oconee County |

Background

The scale of the project is a greater than 50 percent expansion of the existing wastewater treatment facility’s capacity, based on the information provided by the applicant; therefore, a DRI review is required during the local government’s approval process for the project. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of November 18th, 2022, to December 3rd, 2022.

Proposed Development

Oconee County proposes to expand an existing wastewater treatment plant from a capacity of 1.5 MGD to 3.0 MGD. The expansion would be located on the site of the existing treatment facility in the City of Watkinsville on Durhams Mill Way. No existing uses would be displaced by the proposed expansion. The expansion project would include a new digester, grit removal system, effluent pump station, and reuse system for the plant. It would also include new head works. The proposed development would occupy property totaling 23 acres at 1100 Durhams Mill Way in Watkinsville. The parcel number is C 03 021E.

To service the newly expanded capacity, a transmission line would be constructed separately for discharge into the Middle Oconee River. The 24-inch effluent transmission line would extend 18,300 linear feet (approximately 3.5 miles) from the wastewater plant. From the wastewater treatment plant, the line would run west along Fuller Road, north along the full extent of Summit Grove Drive, north along US-129, and then east along Rockinwood Drive to its outfall area along the Middle Oconee River. The outfall area would be across the river from the State Botanical Garden of Georgia.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified as “Public Institutional (Watkinsville)” on the Oconee County Joint Comprehensive Plan Character Areas Map (dated April 25, 2018). This plan includes Oconee County and all its municipalities. The Comprehensive Plan (dated June 30, 2018) describes this character area as “the various civic functions scattered throughout the City of Watkinsville” and includes county and city government offices, libraries, schools, law enforcement facilities, emergency services, and other areas owned or operated by the city or county government. The proposed expansion of the wastewater treatment facility is consistent with the specified land use classification and supported by the quoted policy.

The site is identified as “Developed” on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Regional Land Use Map (dated 6/7/2018). In addition, the Regional Plan’s Areas Requiring Special Attention (ARSA) Map (dated 6/7/2018) identifies the discharge site for the transmission line as being in an area of “Threatened Regionally Important Resources.” 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 regional workforce is sufficient to fill the demand created by the proposed project. It is not possible from the information submitted to evaluate whether the proposal prices in the lifecycle costs of infrastructure. While the expansions would primarily be located on the site of and connected with the existing wastewater treatment infrastructure, new infrastructure is needed to convey treated wastewater to the new discharge location. It is important during the construction of the new pipeline that land disturbance is minimized and that the discharge site is constructed in such a way as to prevent negative impacts to the Middle Oconee River. While this project would not create housing on its own, expanding wastewater treatment capacity would enable the development of additional housing within the area served by the sewer system.

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

The applicant states that the project would affect a water supply watershed because the expanded plant would discharge an additional 1.5 MGD into the Middle Oconee River at a new location. The applicant states that the discharge is regulated by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division and would be within their standards and specifications. The applicant also states that the project is unlikely to affect any of the other environmental quality factors identified on the DRI Additional Form, including groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, protected mountain and river corridors, floodplains, historic resources, and other environmentally sensitive resources

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies zero wetland acres onsite and 146 wetland acres 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 2,720 acres of “Conservation” land within one mile of the site. This “Conservation” land includes zero acres of Regionally Important Resource land onsite and 2,401 acres of RIR land within one mile of the site. This acreage consists partially of the Northeast Georgia Green Infrastructure Network as identified in the Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan for Regionally Important Resources (dated 8/7/2018). Eagle Tavern, located in Watkinsville, is a Regionally Important Resource site within one mile of the proposed site. 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 applicant projects an increase of seven trips to the facility by staff each day. No traffic study was performed for the proposed project.

The applicant states that after completion of the current phase of the project, an estimated 14–18% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces and that the existing stormwater management facilities on site can handle the expansion.

The project would be served by the Oconee County water system, with an estimated daily demand of 0.235 MGD. The applicant states that there is currently sufficient water supply capacity to serve the project. The proposed project would increase the county's wastewater capacity from 1.5 MGD to 3.0 MGD. No water or sewer line extensions are anticipated, but a new pipeline would be constructed to convey treated wastewater to the new discharge location. The applicant estimates the project would generate an additional 200 dry tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient capacity exists to handle this waste. According to the Northeast Georgia Regional Solid Waste Management Plan, all of Oconee County's municipal solid waste is disposed of in a landfill in Banks County. The applicant states that no hazardous waste would be generated.

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$18 million at build-out in 2024 and generate between \$12 and \$25 million in annual local taxes. The estimated range of generated annual local taxes is calculated based on the expected revenue from future developments that this project would allow. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$782,609 and generate between \$521,700 and 1,087,000 in annual 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 waste water treatment plant expansion is more than 6 miles from the Athens-Ben Epps Airport (AHN) and is located outside of any of their FAA surfaces, and compatible land use areas, and does not appear to impact the airport.

However, if the proposed project's vertical construction, or equipment exceeds 200ft above ground level, 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 60 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed development.