

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 #3950
Name of Project:	Ackerman–E. Hightower Trail
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	City of Social Circle

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s requests for sewer, water, and permits. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 4/14/23–4/29/23.

Proposed Development

Baltise-Ackerman Social Circle, LLLP, is proposing construction of a 1.2 million square-foot cross-dock distribution facility in Social Circle. The proposed development would occupy property totaling 97 acres at 5023 and 5073 E. Hightower Trail in Social Circle. The parcel numbers are SC230011, SC230012, and SC230013. All three parcels are zoned LI (“Light Industrial”). The project would be completed in one phase, with an estimated completion date in January 2025.

Additionally, the site plan shows two vehicular entrances from E. Hightower Trail, 614 auto parking spaces on the east and west ends of the building, 320 trailer spaces in truck courts along the north and south sides of the building, 212 additional trailer spaces in a drop lot, and a proposed substation lot in the northeast corner. The site plan also shows a new detention pond, existing streams and buffers on the west end of the site that would be left undisturbed, and an existing pond and short stream segment on the north side of the site that are located where one of the trailer parking lots would be built.

According to available aerial imagery, the site contains two single-family homes built in 1920 and 1993, as well as multiple outbuildings such as barns and sheds. E. Hightower Trail is fronted by wooden fencing along all three parcels, and two of the parcels appear to have been planted with row crops. The site also includes Georgia Power and utility easements, some portions of which would need to be moved to the locations shown

on the site plan. The site plan states that FIRM maps indicate a portion of the project site is within Flood Hazard Zone A, but that a site investigation indicated no apparent floodplain on the property.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified on the Character Areas Map (dated 2/16/22) as “Industrial.” The Comprehensive Plan summarizes the Industrial Character Area as “industrial uses predominate. Entrances are well signed, building entries are distinctively landscaped, and a landscaped buffer with greenway trail network separates industrial areas from road frontage preserving the aesthetic character of the city.” Appropriate Land Uses listed include industry and offices. The proposed industrial use is compatible with the overall intent of the Industrial Character Area; however, the City should evaluate whether some modifications to the site layout and design would be necessary for the proposal to be fully consistent with the Character Area narrative, as summarized in the table below.

CHARACTER AREA NARRATIVE DETAILS	PROPOSED PROJECT’S COMPATIBILITY WITH DESCRIPTION
Industrial uses predominate	The proposed project is a warehouse, which is an industrial use. There is also an existing warehouse of similar size to the proposed project located on an adjacent tract.
Entrances well signed, building entries distinctively landscaped	No information was provided with the application that would enable evaluation of its consistency with this recommendation. As part of its evaluation of the proposal, the City should consider whether proposed entrance signage and landscaping would be consistent with the intended character of this area.
Landscaped buffer with greenway trail network separates industrial areas from road frontage	<p>The land across E. Hightower Trail Road from the proposed project is in unincorporated Walton County and is part of the Conservation Character Area, as indicated on the County’s Character Areas Map (dated 5/31/2022). Current land uses there are agricultural and residential. Because industrial land uses are incompatible with the County’s adjacent Conservation Character Area, the Social Circle Industrial Character Area narrative’s recommendation to include a landscaped buffer along the road frontage is especially important for this site. On this site, a buffer would need to be set a certain distance back from the road to accommodate the power lines and utility right-of way along the road frontage.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Industrial Character Area narrative specifies that a greenway trail network should be included along the road frontage, consistent with the Social Circle Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan 2020. The site plan submitted does not include a trail or a designated location for a future trail; however, since the project site is fronted by a utility easement, the City might be able to construct a greenway trail within the utility easement in the future.</p>

The site is identified as “Developed” 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 complements existing and planned transportation options—especially non-automobile transportation modes. The project’s compatibility with these Regional Plan recommendations is summarized in the table below.

REGIONAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	PROPOSED PROJECT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH RECOMMENDATION
Match the region's workforce	The applicant states that the regional workforce is sufficient to fulfill the demand created by the project.
Price in the lifecycle cost of infrastructure	No information was provided with the application that would enable evaluation of this recommendation, though it was noted that widening E. Hightower Trail may be required and an additional 30-foot right-of-way may need to be dedicated to the City.
Create a sense of place	Entrance signage, landscaping, and vegetated buffering that are consistent with the Industrial Character Area narrative, as summarized above, would help this development contribute to the area's sense of place. No design details were included with the proposal that would enable further evaluation of the project's consistency with this recommendation.
Create diverse and affordable housing	Not applicable to this project.
Build a compact development pattern on existing infrastructure	The site is bordered on two sides by a power line easement, and the applicant states that no sewer or water line extensions would be needed. The site is very close to existing residential neighborhoods, so some employees might be able to live nearby in the short term. However, over the long term, most of the nearby residential areas would be expected to transition to commercial, office, and industrial uses specified for the County's Employment Center Character Area.
Complement existing and planned transportation options	As noted above, this proposal does not include the greenway trail infrastructure that is called for in the Character Area narrative and in the City's bicycle and pedestrian plan. The City of Social Circle operates a rural, demand-response transit system whose service area includes this site.

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

Natural Resources

The applicant states that the project is likely to impact wetlands, floodplains, and other environmentally sensitive resources, and that the proposed impacts would require coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to obtain a Nationwide Permit prior to land disturbance. The applicant states that the project is unlikely to affect any of the other environmental quality factors identified on the DRI Additional Form, including water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, protected mountain and river corridors, and historic resources. Refer to the attached site plan for any stream, floodplain, and buffer locations.

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies 2 wetland acres onsite and 86 wetland acres within one mile of the site. The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Conservation and Development Map (dated 7/19/2018) identifies 48 acres of "Conservation" land onsite and 1,437 acres of "Conservation" land within one mile of the site. This "Conservation" land includes 48 acres of Regionally Important Resource land onsite and 1,172 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). The Northeast Georgia Green Infrastructure Network is intended to serve as a strategically planned and managed network of wilderness, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value that benefits wildlife and people, supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, links urban settings to rural ones, and contributes to the health and quality of life for the communities and citizens sharing this network. Aligning this purpose with the city's character area description noted above regarding landscaped buffers and a multi-

use trail network could provide improvements to the site plan not currently included. No specific Regionally Important Resource sites are identified within one mile of the proposed site.

Transportation

No traffic study was performed for this project. The applicant estimates 1,970 new daily trips, including 170 AM peak hour trips and 173 PM peak hour trips. The applicant stated that they anticipate providing right-turn deceleration lanes at both proposed driveways on E. Hightower Trail. Additionally, they stated that E. Hightower Trail may need to be widened, and an additional 30-foot right-of-way may need to be dedicated to the City. Refer to the site plan for the location of proposed infrastructure. Completion of a traffic study is recommended if the City needs additional information to determine whether these or other improvements are needed to manage the additional traffic generated by this facility.

Water Supply and Wastewater

The project would be served by the City of Social Circle water and sewer systems, with an estimated daily demand of 0.015 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity and that no water or sewer line extensions are anticipated.

Stormwater Management

The applicant states that an estimated 65% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and that a new wet extended detention pond is planned to manage stormwater runoff. Refer to the site plan for the proposed location of stormwater management infrastructure.

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.

Solid Waste

The applicant estimates the project would generate 10 tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. Note that this might be underestimated, as other proposals for similarly sized warehouses often include annual solid waste estimates over 1,000 tons. According to the Northeast Georgia Regional Solid Waste Authority's *Regional Solid Waste Management Plan (2021-2031)*, almost all municipal solid waste (MSW) generated in Walton County is disposed of in a landfill in Barrow County. The applicant states that no hazardous waste would be generated.

Tax Revenue and Lifecycle Costs

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$124 million at build-out in 2025 and generate \$1.2 million in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$1.3 million and generate approximately \$12,700 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

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

This proposal is 9 miles from the nearest open-to-the-public airport, and is located outside of any FAA approach or departure surfaces, and airport compatible land use areas, and does not appear to impact any airport.

However, if any construction or construction equipment reaches 200' AGL or more, 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.