

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 #3960
Name of Project:	Seller’s Mill Tributary
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	City of Hoschton

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s request for a rezoning and annexation into the City of Hoschton. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 6/8/2023–6/23/2023.

Proposed Development

Rocklyn Homes is proposing the construction of 200,000 square feet of commercial space, 6.6 acres of commercial outparcels, 16 gas pumps, 404 townhome units, 651 single-family lots, a church expansion, and 3.6 acres of civic space on a 286-acre site in unincorporated Jackson County, which the developer has requested to be annexed into the City of Hoschton. The proposed development would be located east of Highway 53 just south of the City of Hoschton’s city limits and consists of parcel numbers 114 001A, 114 001B, and 114 002A. The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in 2032.

Commercial Area

The proposed commercial area would front Highway 53. Proposed commercial buildings include a 150,000-square-foot retail/restaurant/office building with a compactor, drive-through, and an unspecified number of parking spaces. The commercial area also includes a 50,000-square-foot retail building as well as 6.6 acres of commercial outparcels that are divided into 5 separate parcels. The site plan proposes constructing 16 fuel pumps in the southwest portion of the commercial parking area, and a large stormwater facility would be located north of the commercial buildings.

Townhome Area

The 404 proposed townhomes would be located to the north and the east of the proposed commercial area. This area includes a master amenity area, two pocket parks, three green space areas of differing sizes, and a stormwater facility.

Single-Family Residential Area

The 651 single-family lots would be located on the eastern portion of the site. Of these lots, 176 would be 4,500 square feet, 346 would be 5,500 square feet, and 129 would be 6,500 square feet. The developer has proposed six stormwater facilities, six pocket parks, a master amenity area, and four green space areas of differing sizes. The developer has proposed two stream crossings in this area. A pump station would be installed near the eastern end of the site, which will likely pump wastewater from the site to the new sewer main that will be built along Highway 53.

Other Proposed Development

The developer also proposes a 3.6-acre “civic area” along Highway 53 south of the commercial area. An existing church is located on the northernmost 2.5-acre parcel (parcel # 114 001A), and the developer has proposed an expansion of this church.

Site Transportation Improvements

The developer has proposed five separate entrances to the development from Highway 53. One entrance would serve the townhome community, one would serve the commercial area, and one would serve the single-family home area. The remaining two entrances would serve as general purpose access points and are located directly north and south of the commercial area.

Site Existing Conditions

Currently, the site is primarily open farmland with some forested areas. Two streams run through the site, and Indian Creek flows along the eastern boundary of the site area. The site plan shows the 100-year floodplain surrounding Indian Creek, and no development is proposed in this area. Numerous buildings including homes are in the southeast portion of the site, and these buildings would be demolished during construction. The site plan indicates an existing pond on the site, which would be retained.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

Jackson County has both a Future Land Use Map (dated 9/10/2020) and a Character Areas Map (dated 12/2/2020). The project site consists of four different Future Land Use designations and two different Character Area designations. The included Future Land Use and Character Areas designations as well as their definitions are provided in the tables below:

Project Area Future Land Use and Character Area Designations

	AREA DESIGNATIONS	PARCELS				
		114 001 A	114 001B	114 002A (AREA FRONTING GA-53)	114 002A (INSIDE FLOOD ZONE)	114 002A (REMAINING PORTION OUTSIDE FLOOD ZONE)
Future Land Use Areas	Public Institutional	X				
	Commercial		X	X		
	Parks/Recreation/Conservation				X	
	Agricultural/Forestry					X
Character Areas	Suburban	X	X	X		X
	Conservation				X	

Future Land Use and Character Area Designation Definitions

	AREA DESIGNATIONS	DEFINITION
Future Land Use Areas	Public Institutional	Federal, state, or local government uses, and a wide variety of institutional land uses
	Commercial	Land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, offices, services, and entertainment facilities
	Parks/Recreation/Conservation	Land dedicated to both active and passive recreation use
	Agricultural/Forestry	Predominately vacant or undeveloped land, but can also be used for low-density single-family residential land use
Character Areas	Suburban	Areas with an overarching principle of “neighborhood protection” and an overarching land use “predominantly residential but multiple uses permitted”
	Conservation	Areas with an overarching principle of “environmental protection”

The proposed project is mostly compatible with the Suburban and Conservation Character Area designations. However, the proposed development is incompatible with the Plan’s Future Land Use descriptions in large areas of the site. This information is summarized in the table below:

Proposed Development’s Compatibility with Jackson County’s Future Land Use and Character Areas Maps

PARCEL	FUTURE LAND USE (FLU)	CHARACTER AREA (CA)	PROPOSED PROJECT’S COMPATIBILITY WITH DESIGNATIONS
114 001 A	Public Institutional	Suburban	The development’s proposal of expanding the existing church on this parcel is fully compatible with the parcel’s FLU and CA Designations.
114 001B	Commercial	Suburban	While the commercial component of this parcel is compatible with the Commercial FLU designation, the included residential use is not mentioned as an appropriate use. The proposed development on this parcel is consistent with the Suburban CA designation.

PARCEL	FUTURE LAND USE (FLU)	CHARACTER AREA (CA)	PROPOSED PROJECT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH DESIGNATIONS
114 002A (AREA FRONTING GA-53)	Commercial	Suburban	The proposed residential area fronting GA-53 is not consistent with this area's Commercial FLU. The proposed development is consistent with the Suburban CA designation.
114 002A (INSIDE FLOOD ZONE)	Parks/Recreation/Conservation	Conservation	These areas are consistent with the FLU and CA, as no development is proposed in these areas.
114 002A (REMAINING PORTION OUTSIDE FLOOD ZONE)	Agriculture/Forestry	Suburban	The proposed development in this area is not compatible with the Agriculture/Forestry FLU designation. The Comprehensive Plan states that in Agriculture/Forestry areas, "future buildings of dwellings or manufactured homes that are not farm-related is restricted, except for an allowance to subdivide a small number of small tracts over time for 'minor subdivisions.'" The proposed development conflicts with this description because the proposed residential development is not farm-related and is not a minor subdivision. The proposed residential development in this area is consistent with the Suburban CA designation.

On 6/15/23, the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission adopted its 5-year update to its regional plan. While this DRI's Comment package included information from the 2018 plan, this report will include the proposed development's compatibility with the most recent 2023 Regional Plan.

The site is identified as "Rural" on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Regional Land Use Map (dated 2/14/2023). The Regional Plan recommends development that enhances economic mobility and competitiveness, elevates public health and equity, supports and adds value to existing communities, creates housing that is diverse, adequate, equitable, and affordable, includes transportation choices and is well-connected with existing and planned transportation options, and protects natural and historic resources. The table below summarizes the project's compatibility with these recommendations:

Proposed Development's Compatibility with the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan

REGIONAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	PROPOSED PROJECT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH RECOMMENDATION
Enhances economic mobility and competitiveness	The applicant states that the regional work force is sufficient to fill the demand created for the proposed project.
Elevates public health and equity	The proposed development includes pocket parks, amenity areas, and a civic center, all of which positively contribute to the health of residents. To further elevate public health, the developer could cater the commercial area to businesses that promote public health including grocery stores, healthcare facilities, and other essential services.
Supports and adds value to existing communities	The proposed development preserves the existing church, which helps to support the existing community. It also includes a 3.7-acre "civic area." The developer could propose amenities in this area such as parks, community centers, or educational facilities that surrounding residents can enjoy and benefit from.

REGIONAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	PROPOSED PROJECT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH RECOMMENDATION
Creates housing that is diverse, adequate, equitable, and affordable	The proposed development includes a variety of lot sizes and a mixture of single-family detached housing and townhomes, which would provide a range of housing prices in the area. However, the proposed townhomes and single-family detached homes are completely separated from one another. Mixing the housing types throughout the development would make the urban environment more varied and help create a more dynamic area.
Includes transportation choices and is well-connected with existing and planned transportation options	<p>The proposed site plan does not include any information on infrastructure to encourage bicycling or walking around the project site. The developer should be sure to include sidewalks, crosswalks, and protected medians to provide pedestrians a safe way to travel around the site. Additionally, the proposal includes many large blocks, which could encourage unsafe driving speeds. The developer should consider adding traffic calming measures such as speed humps, median islands, and chicanes to slow traffic or other traffic calming measures of appropriate scale to slow traffic.</p> <p>Additionally, the proposed site development's road network is completely insular and includes no road stubs to future surrounding developments. As the surrounding area develops, GA-53 will become more congested, so providing alternative exits and entries to the site would help ease congestion in the area. The City should consider requiring road stubs along the northern edge of the site that future developments can connect to so that a cohesive expansion of services and the transportation network can be achieved.</p>
Protects natural and historic resources	The proposed development does not directly infringe on any flood-prone areas. However, many proposed parcels are positioned in front of the 100-year floodplain, riparian areas, and stormwater facilities. Parcels that are in front of these areas should have extended rear parcel setbacks. This will help prevent flooding damage, especially if the current trend of increasingly frequent severe storms continues. It will also help mitigate the impacts of development on these natural areas.

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

The applicant states that the proposed development has the potential to impact floodplains in the area, but that land planning would be designed around floodplains so that they would not be affected. The applicant states that the project is unlikely to affect all other environmental quality factors identified on the DRI Additional Form, including water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, protected mountain and river corridors, historic resources, and other environmentally sensitive resources.

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies 23 wetland acres onsite, and 229 wetland acres are located within one mile of the site. The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Conservation and Development Map (dated 2/14/2023) identifies 28 acres of "Conservation" land onsite and 250 acres of "Conservation" land within one mile of the site. This "Conservation" land includes zero acres of Regionally Important Resource land onsite and 9 acres of RIR land within one mile of the site.

An estimated 55% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and eight retention ponds are planned to manage stormwater runoff. 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.

A&R Engineering Inc. completed a traffic impact study that projects 19,241 new daily trips, including 1,045 AM peak hour trips and 1,581 PM peak hour trips from the proposed development. In addition to the five proposed entrances, the engineer recommends improvements to existing intersections surrounding the site. The engineer recommends adding two separate right turn lanes and a separate left turn at the existing intersection of SR 53 at Jackson Trail Road and adding a traffic signal at the existing intersection of SR 53 at Bill Watkins Road. The engineer also recommends adding a traffic signal at the new intersection of SR 53 at Burton Drive/Site Driveway 2, which would connect to an entrance to the residential subdivision across the street.

The project would be served by the City of Hoschton's water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.45 MGD for each system. The City anticipates that it would need to expand both its water supply capacity and its wastewater treatment capacity to service the project. The city is actively studying groundwater availability and considering raw water purchases from adjacent and nearby local governments to meet future water demands. The city is also currently upgrading its sewage treatment plant. A 1,000-foot extension of both water and sewer lines would be needed to service the project. The project would also require building a regional pump station to pump wastewater to the City's existing sewer line.

The applicant estimates the project would generate 1,050 tons of solid waste per year and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. 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 Jackson County 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 \$526 million at build-out in 2026 and generate \$20 million in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$1.84 million and generate approximately \$69,930 in annual 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, Airport Safety Data Program Manager, Georgia Department of Transportation

This proposal is 7.1 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.