

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 #4042
Name of Project:	Sockwell Eastside Village
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Newton County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s request for rezoning from Agricultural Residential (A-R) to Community Oriented Residential Development (CORD). Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 8/11/2023 to 8/26/2023.

Proposed Development

Ed Hutter is proposing construction of a mixed-use development with 610 residential units and 35,000 square feet of commercial space on a 155-acre site in Newton County. The proposed development would consist of a combination of single-family detached homes, attached townhomes, and mixed-use live/work buildings in a traditional town center configuration.

The mixed-use portion of the site is situated along Highway 142. Five “flex units” are proposed in this area, which would include 180 condominiums and an unspecified amount of office and commercial space. This area also includes one commercial building, a town green, and an unspecified number of parking spaces.

The remaining developed portion of the proposed site would include 294 single family detached lots, 146 townhome units, three small green space areas, and a large recreational area that includes a clubhouse, a pool, tennis courts, and a soccer field. The greenspace at the southern end of the site would include trail head for community-wide use of the undisturbed green space as well as restrooms and a picnic pavilion. The site plan designates two different detached single-family lot sizes; the standard single family detached lots would be 40-55 feet wide and 100-110 feet deep, and the larger single family lots in the southern end of the site that would be 65-75 feet wide to 135-150 feet deep.

The site plan appears to include a total of six entrances. The mixed-use area would have four entrances along Highway 142, and the residential section of the site would have one entrance each along Highways 142 and 278. Fifty-five acres of the eastern portion of the site would remain as an undisturbed greenspace, and there would be a 100-foot undisturbed buffer around the site.

Currently, the site is wooded with two streams located within the proposed undisturbed open space. Surrounding developments include multiple churches around the intersection of Highway 142 and Highway 278, Eastside High School on the opposite side of Highway 142, and multiple residential areas surrounding the site.

The proposed development would be located near the southeast corner of the intersection of Highway 142 and Highway 278 in Newton County. The parcel number is #009900000009000. The applicant stated that the project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in 2032. However, the applicant also listed the estimated completion date for this phase as 2032 and for the overall project as 2037, which may indicate that this project is a phase of a larger project. No additional details about the larger project were provided in the application.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified as two separate character areas on the county's Character Areas Map (dated (6/27/2023)). The portion of the site that directly borders the Highway 278 easement is within the "Live/Work Corridor" character area, and the remainder of the site is within the "Emerging Suburban" character area. The proposed development is compatible with both character areas; the proposed rezoning (CORD) is listed as a compatible zoning for both character areas, and residential and mixed-use land uses are listed as appropriate in both character areas. Additionally, the proposed development would help achieve several of the goals included in both character area descriptions. A description of these character areas as defined in the Newton County Comprehensive Plan, as well as reasoning for the proposed development's compatibility with the character area descriptions, is summarized in the following table:

Newton County Character Area Compatibility

CHARACTER AREA	DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH CHARACTER AREA
LIVE/WORK AREAS	<p>“Characterized by their proximity to high traffic areas, such as Hwy 278 and Hwy 11, making them ideal for mixed use development. Live/Work Corridors Character Areas are suitable for a mix of neighborhood level commercial, multifamily residential housing and walkable streets.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed rezoning (CORD) is listed as an appropriate zoning category for this character area. • The proposed land use in this area (residential) is listed as an appropriate land use for this character area. • The design of the portions of the proposed development within the Live/Work Character Area is aligned with listed goals including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Housing Goal #1 ○ Land Use Goal #1 ○ Economic Development Goal #1 ○ Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources Goal #3
EMERGING SUBURBAN	<p>“Include existing suburban neighborhoods in primarily rural parts of the County that are facing pressure to transition to a more dense and urban style of suburban development. Emerging Suburban character areas are suitable for higher density residential subdivisions when future access to public water/sewer services, as well as any necessary transportation improvements, is available”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed rezoning (CORD) is listed as an appropriate zoning category for this character area. • The proposed land uses in this area (residential and mixed-use) are listed as appropriate land uses for this character area. • The design of the portions of the proposed development within the Emerging Suburban Character Area is also aligned with listed goals including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Housing Goal #1 ○ Land Use Goals #1 and #2 ○ Economic Development Goal #1 ○ Parks + Recreation Goal #1

The eastern half of the site is identified on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Regional Land Use Map (dated 6/15/2023) as Rural, and the western half is identified as Developing. The Regional Plan recommends developments that contain six characteristics that benefit the region’s people, economy, environment, and communities. The proposed project’s compatibility with these recommendations is summarized below:

Regional Plan Compatibility

REGIONAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	PROPOSED PROJECT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH RECOMMENDATION
Enhances economic mobility and competitiveness	The proposed development would facilitate economic opportunities by providing commercial and office space. The applicant also states that the regional workforce is sufficient to fulfill the demand created by the project.
Elevates public health and equity	The proposed development would promote the health of residents and the community at large through access to greenspace and recreational opportunities. While the club house, tennis courts, playground and soccer field would only be available to residents, the undisturbed greenspace would be available for community-wide use through a proposed trail head at the southern end of the project.
Supports and adds value to existing communities	The proposed development would add value to existing communities by providing access to the undisturbed greenspace on site as well as through the commercial businesses in the proposed mixed-use area.

REGIONAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	PROPOSED PROJECT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH RECOMMENDATION
Creates housing that is diverse, adequate, equitable, and affordable	The proposed development includes a mix of condominiums, townhomes, and different sized single-family detached residential lots. This mix would provide various price points for potential residents and would create a more mixed-income community. However, given that 27% of Newton County households were renter occupied in 2021 ¹ and that a large amount of affordable housing will be needed to house workers at the nearby Stanton Springs developments, the County should consider requesting the developer to set aside a portion of the units on site as affordable rental units.
Includes transportation choices and is well-connected with existing and planned transportation options	The proposed plan does not include details on pedestrian and bicycling safety infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, curb extensions, and bike lanes. The developer should ensure that these types of facilities are included in the final plan so that residents and visitors who choose to walk or bicycle throughout the site can do so safely. Additionally, given that the access points to the proposed development are along highspeed highway corridors, the County should ensure that these access points are properly equipped to provide a safe entry and exit from the site. The developer should consider adding a second access point to Hwy 278 to provide better traffic flow for entering and exiting the western side of the development. Street stubs to the two large adjacent parcels facing Hwy 278 could also be incorporated to enable future expansion of the street network as the area changes over time.
Protects natural and historic resources	While the proposed development would require clearing a large area wooded area, it would preserve nearly 55 acres of the wooded area on site. The proposed plan also maintains a riparian buffer around all streams on site.

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. Refer to the attached site plan for any stream, floodplain, and buffer locations.

The chart below summarizes the number of acres within the site area as well as within a one-mile buffer around the site that contains 1) wetlands, 2) conservation land, 3) regionally important resources, and 4) threatened regionally important resources. Please refer to the footnotes for definitions for each of these terms.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey

Wetland, Conservation, and Regionally Important Resources

	AREA TYPE	AREA (ACRES)	PERCENT OF AREA
SITE AREA (155 Acre)	Wetland Acres ²	2	1.2%
	“Conservation Land” ³	139	89.9%
	Regionally Important Resource Land ⁴	95	61.2%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land ⁵	49	31.7%
1 MILE BUFFER AROUND SITE (3,475 Acres)	Wetland Acres	94	2.7%
	“Conservation Land”	2,479	71.3%
	Regionally Important Resource Land	1,977	56.9%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land	1,478	42.5%

The Regional Important Resources located at this site are a 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. Additionally, portions of the Alcovy River Greenway, which is designated as a Regionally Important Resource, are located on-site.

Less than 50% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and 35% of the site would be permanently protected forest. Single family lots would retain 35% of their pervious surface, and attached townhomes would retain 20% of their pervious surfaces. The applicant states that stormwater would be managed through detention ponds northeast of the soccer field; detention ponds are not shown on the site plan. 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 traffic study has not been completed for this proposal, but the applicant projects 1,220 peak-hour trips per day from the proposed development. The applicant also anticipates that turn lanes as well as acceleration and deceleration lanes would be needed to serve the site. Due to the high volume of expected new peak-hour trips

² Wetland acres are derived from the National Wetland Inventory (NWI)

³ “Conservation” land is derived from the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Conservation and Development Map (6/15/2023).

⁴ Regionally Important Resources were identified as a part of the Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan for Regionally Important Resources (2/15/2018).

⁵ This area represents the intersection between Conservation areas (identified on the Conservation and Development Map, 6/15/2023), adopted Regionally Important Resources (RIR), and “Developed” and “Developing” Regional Land Use areas (identified on the Regional Land Use Map, 6/15/2023).

per day, it is recommended that a traffic study be completed prior to approval of this project to determine whether any additional transportation improvements are necessary to accommodate the increased traffic.

The project would be served by the City of Covington's water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.1125 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. The project would require a 1.95-mile extension of the City's water and sewer lines to serve the site. The applicant estimates the project would generate 1,076 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 \$250,000,000 at build-out in 2032 and generate \$3,229,000 in annual county taxes and \$4,947,000 in annual school taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$1,612,900 and generate approximately \$20,832 in county tax revenue and \$31,916 in school taxes. 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 proposed development is about 3.8 miles from the Covington Municipal Airport (CVC), and is located outside the approach and departure surfaces, and outside of the airport compatible land use areas, and does not appear to impact the 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.