

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 # 4130
Name of Project:	Quik Trip
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Oconee County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s request for a permit and rezoning. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 2/9/24-2/24/24.

Proposed Development

Quik Trip is proposing construction of a 5,312 square-foot convenience-store, 16-bay auto fuel canopy, and a 5-bay diesel fuel canopy (including 4 diesel pumps for trucks). The site plan also shows the location of a stormwater management pond, 50 proposed automobile parking spaces, fencing, drainage swales, landscape screening, access easements, and incompatible use buffers. No tractor-trailer parking spaces are planned, and the site plan includes “no truck parking” signs. Currently, the site is wooded. The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in April 2025.

The proposed development would occupy property totaling approximately 25 acres near the intersection of US-441/129 (Watkinsville Bypass) and SR-15 (Macon Highway) in Oconee County, north of Watkinsville. The project site includes parcel B 06 029 and approximately 2 acres of an adjoining parcel, B 06 029A. The proposal includes moving the parcel line to add these 2 acres to parcel B 06 029. The developer’s request for a permit and rezoning initiated the review. The site is currently zoned AR (“Agricultural Residential”), and the approximately 6-acre portion of the site where store and fueling station would be located would be rezoned to B-2 (“Highway Business”).

No information was provided by the applicant about future plans for the remaining acres of parcel B 06 29, other than that they are not included in the current rezoning request and would remain zoned AR. These remaining acres constitute the majority of the parcel. If the developer later proposes new development on any remaining parts of this parcel, the “Multi-phased Developments” provision of the Developments of Regional Impact Rules would apply.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified as “Civic Center” on the county’s Character Areas Map (dated June 2023). The project’s proposed uses are compatible with this character area’s narrative in the Oconee County Joint Comprehensive Plan; however, the proposed site layout is not consistent with some of the Development Strategies outlined within the character area narrative. The proposal’s compatibility with the Civic Center Character Area narrative is summarized in the table below

Character Area Compatibility

CHARACTER AREA	CHARACTER AREA NARRATIVE EXCERPTS	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT’S COMPATIBILITY WITH CHARACTER AREA
CIVIC CENTER	DESCRIPTION & GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS: Described as a center of civic activities that “includes a relatively high intensity mix of businesses, retail shopping, offices, sports and recreational complexes, public schools, a college campus, and other public and semi-public uses.”	Fueling stations and convenience stores are consistent with the high-intensity uses described in the plan. Gas stations are specifically listed in the Civic Center narrative as an example of a “typical nonresidential use” for this character area, and “consumer-based commercial establishments that offer goods and services” are listed as a Primary Land Use.
	DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: “Commercial retail and service development should be guided by the Community Village Character Area, including: Commercial retail and service development areas that can accommodate a mix of retail sales, professional and personal services, and offices....”	Because the proposed Quik Trip is a standalone facility, it is not possible to determine from the information provided whether the project would be consistent with this development strategy. Therefore, as part of its evaluation of this proposal, the County should consider whether this project, in the context of neighboring current and possible future uses, has the potential to become part of a well-connected, Community Village-style mix of uses as described in the Civic Center narrative.
	DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: “Design for each center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections....”	The submitted site plan does not include sidewalks along the street frontage, nor does it provide a clear pedestrian connection from the adjacent intersection to the convenience store. For this project to be consistent with the Civic Center narrative, the site would need to add pedestrian connectivity with neighboring parcels and from the intersection of US-441/129 (Watkinsville Bypass) and SR-15 (Macon Highway) to the convenience store.

The site is identified as “Developed” on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Regional Land Use Map (dated 6/15/2023). 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 on the next page 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 workforce is sufficient to meet the demand created for the proposed project.
Elevates public health and equity	<p>According to the site plan, the site would be visually well-screened by trees and/or wooden fencing on three sides: the existing frontage trees would be retained, the existing wooded area southwest of the proposed gas station would remain wooded, and there would be a 50-foot incompatible use buffer along the north side of the property, behind the convenience store and diesel fueling area.</p> <p>No information was submitted with the DRI application indicating what precautions will be taken to manage fuel spills or to minimize the release of air pollutants during refueling.</p>
Supports and adds value to existing communities	None of the other gas station/convenience store combinations within 2 miles of the project site appear to include a diesel truck refueling area; therefore, this project would be adding a service that is not currently available nearby. However, because the proposed project site is not near an existing concentration of warehouses, factories, or other facilities that would generate a large volume of local truck traffic, it is likely that this service would primarily benefit truck traffic as it passes through on US-441.
Creates housing that is diverse, adequate, equitable, and affordable	Not applicable to this project type.
Includes transportation choices and is well-connected with existing and planned transportation options	<p>The proposal includes options for truck and automobile traffic, including a separate entrance for truck traffic to enter the truck refueling area directly. However, the site plan does not include a sidewalk that would provide pedestrian connectivity between the proposed facility and adjacent sites or intersections, nor does it provide infrastructure enabling pedestrians to access the convenience store.</p> <p>The site plan includes a stub that shows how vehicular traffic on this site would connect with future adjacent development north and west of the proposed gas station, but no such future connection is shown that would allow for circulation between the gas station and future adjoining development south of it.</p>
Protects natural and historic resources	<p>The proposal includes a wet detention pond, as well as a channel and berm to divert water from offsite around the fueling area. This diversion channel and berm would help prevent offsite runoff from being contaminated by fuel leaks or spills on site. No other information was submitted with the DRI application indicating what precautions will be taken to manage fuel spills or to minimize the release of air pollutants during refueling.</p> <p>The site plan indicates that the portion of the parcel that is nearest to the proposed fueling station would remain wooded. No information was provided about development plans for the parts of the site that are blank white on the site plan, so it is unclear whether this larger area would also remain wooded.</p>

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

Natural Resources

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.

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.

Wetland, Conservation, and Regionally Important Resources

	AREA TYPE	AREA (ACRES)	PERCENT OF AREA
SITE AREA (25.5 acres)	Wetland Acres ¹	0.3	1.1%
	“Conservation Land” ²	2.7	10.6%
	Regionally Important Resource Land ³	0.0	0.0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land ⁴	2.7	10.6%
1 MILE BUFFER AROUND SITE (2,591.6 acres)	Wetland Acres	38.8	1.5%
	“Conservation Land”	693.1	26.7%
	Regionally Important Resource Land	0.0	0.0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land	693.1	26.7%

No specific Regionally Important Resource sites are identified within one mile of the proposed site.

Transportation

Keck & Wood completed a traffic impact study that projects 4,572 daily trips resulting from the proposed development, including 1,774 new trips and 2,798 “pass-by” trips (i.e., visits to the site by vehicles passing by in existing traffic streams on adjacent streets). This includes 459 AM peak hour trips (199 new, 260 pass-by) and 381 PM peak hour trips (107 new, 274 pass-by). The study also projects that truck traffic would account for 458 of the new daily trips, including 26 new AM peak hour truck trips and 17 new PM hour truck trips.

The entrance to the project would add a fourth approach (eastbound) to the existing intersection. The traffic study estimates that the current intersection is currently operating overall at Level-of-Service (LOS) C during AM and PM peak hours, which would change to LOS D with the addition of the new eastbound approach. The new eastbound approach would operate at LOS E during AM peak hours and LOS F during PM peak hours, which the analysis asserts could be addressed with minor changes in signal timing.

¹ Wetland acres are derived from the National Wetland Inventory (NWI)

² “Conservation” land is derived from the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan’s Conservation and Development Map (6/15/2023).

³ Regionally Important Resources were identified as a part of the Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan for Regionally Important Resources (2/15/2018).

⁴ 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).

According to the applicant, proposed intersection improvements include adding a southbound right turn lane, installing new signal heads to enable the recommended changes in signal timings, and trimming the existing island on the northeast corner to allow additional vehicle storage for westbound traffic. However, the site plan does not include these details and indicates that signal intersection design is outside of the scope of this project.

Water Supply and Wastewater

The project would be served by the Oconee County water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.0021 MGD for the water system and 0.0011 MGD for the sewer system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. The applicant also states that a 0.15-mile water line extension would be needed to serve this project, and that no sewer line extension would be needed.

Stormwater Management

The applicant estimates that 49.9% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces. A channel and berm are proposed to direct offset water around the site towards a stream on the southwest corner of the site, and one wet detention pond is planned to manage stormwater runoff from the site. The stream is in the section of the site where no development is proposed.

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 13 tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. According to 2022 annual tonnage reports from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, most municipal solid waste (MSW) generated in Oconee County is disposed of in a landfill in Banks County. The applicant states that no hazardous waste would be generated.

Lifecycle Costs and Revenues

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$7 million at build-out in 2025 and generate \$75,000 in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$275,000 and generate approximately \$3,000 in 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 proposed Quick Trip in Oconee County is about 6.4 miles from Athens-Ben Epps Airport (AHN). It is located outside any FAA approach or departure surfaces, and airport compatible land use areas, and does not appear to impact the airport.

If any construction equipment or construction exceeds 200' AGL, an FAA Form 7460-1 must be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration according to the FAA's Notice Criteria Tool found here (<https://oeaaa.faa.gov/oeaaa/external/gisTools/gisAction.jsp?action=showNoNoticeRequiredToolForm>). Those submissions for any associated cranes may be done online at <https://oeaaa.faa.gov>. The FAA must be in receipt of the notifications, no later than 120 days prior to construction. The FAA will evaluate the potential impacts of the project on protected airspace associated with the airports and advise the proponent if any action is necessary.