

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.

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<b>Project I.D.:</b>	DRI #4270
<b>Name of Project:</b>	Monroe Plaza Commercial Center
<b>Name of Host Jurisdiction:</b>	Oconee County

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### **Background**

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s request for a Special Use Permit and to rezone two properties from AG (Agricultural District) to B-2 (Highway Business District). Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 10/4/2024 to 10/19/2024.

### **Proposed Development**

Beall & Company is proposing construction of 257,160 square feet of mixed-use space on an approximately 24-acre site in Oconee County. The development would feature two retail buildings, five office buildings, 14 one-story self-storage buildings totaling 181,360 square feet, and a parking lot with 303 spaces. The site plan includes a 2.09-acre area for outdoor storage of recreational vehicles. The plan also proposes a new road to be extended from an existing street stub located directly across Monroe Highway from the eastern end of Ruth Jackson Road. A cul-de-sac labeled as a “temporary turnaround” is proposed for the end of the new road.

Currently, the site is primarily woodlands with two detached single-family homes. The site is located on SR 10/US 78 (Monroe Highway), across from Monroe Highway’s intersection with the eastern end of Ruth Jackson Road in Oconee County. The parcel numbers are B02-019, B02-019B, B02-026A, and B02-026. The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in September 2028.

### **Compatibility with Existing Plans**

The site is identified as Regional Center on the County’s Future Land Use Map (dated June 2023). According to the Oconee County Comprehensive Plan, the Regional Center character area is “characterized by regional-serving retail and commercial services, office complexes for medical and corporate offices, hotels, restaurants

and entertainment facilities, higher-density residential planned developments, and single-family detached subdivisions.” The proposed development aligns with this designation, as it includes office complexes and retail spaces, which are listed under “Primary Land Uses” for this character area. Additionally, the Comprehensive Plan requires that storage businesses screen vehicles stored on site from the public view. The site plan includes a screening area around the proposed outdoor vehicle storage area, meeting this requirement.

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 following table outlines the proposal’s alignment with these recommendations:

REGIONAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	PROPOSED PROJECT’S COMPATIBILITY WITH RECOMMENDATION
<b>Enhances economic mobility and competitiveness</b>	<p>The applicant states that the regional work force is sufficient to meet the demand created by the proposed project.</p> <p>The project would create a mix of employment opportunities for the community by providing office and retail jobs.</p>
<b>Elevates public health and equity</b>	<p>The site plan includes a 50-ft zoning buffer along the west and northeast sides of the development to create separation from the adjacent residential areas. The development would also feature sidewalks throughout the retail and office area.</p>
<b>Supports and adds value to existing communities</b>	<p>The proposed project would place employment opportunities near existing residential areas, which could create opportunities for a shorter commute time for residents. The project would also provide outdoor seating areas and retail facilities for the community.</p>
<b>Creates housing that is diverse, adequate, equitable, and affordable</b>	<p>The proposal does not include any housing.</p>

REGIONAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	PROPOSED PROJECT'S COMPATIBILITY WITH RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Includes transportation choices and is well-connected with existing and planned transportation options</b></p>	<p>The site plan includes a full-access driveway off Monroe Highway, across from the eastern end of Ruth Jackson Road. The GDOT Preconstruction Engineer has commented on the proposal, inquiring whether the angle of this driveway could be corrected to bring it closer to a 90-degree angle. Additionally, GDOT requires the developer to shift the first internal movement back at the site entrances to prevent traffic from backing onto Monroe Highway (see "Comments from Affected Parties," below).</p> <p>The developer should consider adding more crosswalks accessing the rear-most commercial buildings to enhance pedestrian safety on-site.</p>
<p><b>Protects natural and historic resources</b></p>	<p>The north end of the proposed project is located within the floodplain of McNutt Creek. No construction is proposed within the floodplain, and the site plan includes a stormwater management pond between the proposed development and the floodplain.</p> <p>The developer should consider the use of permeable pavement in off-street parking stalls to reduce stormwater runoff.</p>

### Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

#### Natural Resources

The north section of the development is situated near McNutt Creek, with the northernmost area falling within the creek's floodplain. No construction is proposed within the floodplain, as shown on the site plan. 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.

### Wetland, Conservation, and Regionally Important Resources

	AREA TYPE	AREA (ACRES)	PERCENT OF AREA
<b>SITE AREA (24 acres)</b>	Wetland Acres <sup>1</sup>	0.5	2.2%
	“Conservation Land” <sup>2</sup>	8.1	33.7%
	Regionally Important Resource Land <sup>3</sup>	0.0	0.0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land <sup>4</sup>	8.1	33.7%
<b>1 MILE BUFFER AROUND SITE (1945 acres)</b>	Wetland Acres	118.8	5.7%
	“Conservation Land”	919.3	47.3%
	Regionally Important Resource Land	0.0	0.0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land	919.3	47.3%

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

#### Transportation

W & A Engineering completed a traffic impact study that projects 2,450 new daily trips, including 368 AM peak hour trips and 563 PM peak hour trips from the proposed development. The site plan includes two full-access driveways off Monroe Highway, across from the existing Ruth Jackson Road (eastern end) and Hampton Parkway intersections. The developer plans to add two 250-foot right turn deceleration lanes on Monroe Highway before the site entrances. As stated in the comment section below, GDOT requires the developer to shift the first internal movement back from the intersections with Monroe Highway. The developer could extend the entrance into the development or remove the first parking spaces adjacent to the driveway entrance. These adjustments would facilitate smoother traffic flow into the development and prevent backups on the main road.

The traffic study recommends converting the Monroe Highway/ Ruth Jackson Road intersection to a Reduced Conflict U-turn (RCUT) and expanding the Highway’s eastbound and westbound left turn lanes to 250 feet. Additionally, the site plan includes a new road, which would extend northward from the existing street stub at the Ruth Jackson Road intersection, with a temporary turnaround proposed for the end of this new road. Refer to the attached traffic study for more details and the site plan for the location of proposed infrastructure.

#### Water Supply and Wastewater

The project would be served by the Oconee County Water Resources Department water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.004 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. A 0.54-mile water line extension would be required to serve this project. The developer plans to install and fund the water line extension.

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<sup>1</sup> Wetland acres are derived from the National Wetland Inventory (NWI)

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

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

<sup>4</sup> 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).

### Stormwater Management

An estimated 48.3% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and one stormwater management pond is planned to manage stormwater runoff. Part of the site is located within McNutt Creeks's floodplain, and according to the site plan, no construction is proposed within the floodplain. To mitigate stormwater runoff into the floodplain, the applicant plans to install concrete curbs and gutters, storm drains, and a sheet flow system that transports stormwater to detention/retention/infiltration basins. 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, where possible. 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 250 tons of solid waste annually and that sufficient landfill capacity exists to handle this waste. According to annual tonnage reports from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, almost all municipal solid waste (MSW) generated in Oconee County is disposed of in a landfill in Banks County or Barrow County. The applicant states that no hazardous waste would be generated.

### Lifecycle Costs and Revenues

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$27,076,150 at build-out in 2028 and generate \$3,585,580 in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$1,128,173 and generate approximately \$149,399 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**

*Justin Lott, P.E., District Preconstruction Engineer, Georgia Department of Transportation*

- If right of way is proposed on the new road across from Ruth Jackson Rd, could the skew be corrected to bring the new road in closer to a 90 degree angle?
- Traffic study recommended an RCut be constructed at Ruth Jackson and increased storage for SR 10/US 78 eastbound and westbound left turns. Please show on plans submitted to GDOT for permitting.
- RV storage and self storage are noted as one of the uses. Recommend 12' lanes on new road instead of 10' lanes.
- Shift first internal movement back from intersection with SR 10/US 78. See GDOT Driveway and Encroachment Manual, this prevents traffic backing up on the mainline if someone is waiting to turn left into the first internal movement.
- Ensure drainage follows GDOT Driveway and Encroachment Manual to not add an overall increase in flow to state right of way.
- Projects in area:
  - o PI 0013764 – SR 316 at McNutt Creek Road – Right In Right Out Slip Ramps
    - PE: FY 2022
    - RW: FY 2026
    - CST: FY 2027

- PI 0013765 – SR 316 at Mars Hill Road – Grade Separation
  - PE: FY 2023
  - RW: FY 2028
  - CST: FY 2030
- PI 0013766 – SR 316 at Julian Drive – Grade Separation
  - PE: FY 2024
  - RW: FY 2027
  - CST: FY 2030