

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 #4288
Name of Project:	Commerce 2.0 MGD Grove Creek Water Pollution Control Plant
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	City of Commerce

Background

DRI review was initiated following the City of Commerce’s proposal to annex and rezone parcel 019 00C for the purposes of constructing a new conventional wastewater treatment facility. This parcel is currently zoned A2 (“Agricultural Rural Farm District”) in unincorporated Jackson County. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of September 23–October 8, 2024.

Proposed Development

The City of Commerce is proposing construction of a new conventional wastewater treatment facility on a 42-acre site that would be annexed into the City of Commerce from Jackson County and rezoned. The proposed project also includes a lift station and a pipeline to convey wastewater from the lift station to the treatment plant. Proposed wastewater treatment plant structures and facilities are detailed on the attached site plan, and include primary, secondary, and tertiary treatment components. The site plan also includes a retention pond and emergency spillway. Currently, the site is wooded. The proposed development would occupy a total of 47 acres, including the 42-acre wastewater treatment facility site (parcel 019 002C), plus the lift station, outfall, and conveyance structures. The proposed locations of the lift station and wastewater treatment plant are in Jackson County, and the proposed locations for the outfall and most of the conveyance pipeline are in Banks County. The water would be discharged to Grove Creek in Banks County.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

Compatibility with Jackson County Comprehensive Plan

The site is identified as “Urban” on Jackson County’s current Character Areas Map and as “Commercial” on Jackson County’s current Future Land Use Map.

The Urban Character Area is Jackson County’s highest-density character area. In the County’s Comprehensive Plan, industrial uses are described in this character area’s narrative as “permitted and encouraged in locations per plan.” The suitability of wastewater treatment and other utility facilities within this character area is not directly addressed within the character area narrative. However, wastewater treatment can be considered an industrial use, which is listed as permissible within this character area.

The Commercial land use category is described in the Jackson County Comprehensive Plan as applying to “lands dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, offices, services, and entertainment facilities.” This narrative doesn’t encompass utility or industrial sites like wastewater treatment plants. However, adding a new wastewater treatment plant in this area has the potential to support the future commercial development nearby, as only relatively short new sewer lines would be needed to connect new commercial sites to the facility. Odor controls and visual screening are recommended to ensure that this facility does not detract from nearby shopping centers.

Compatibility with Commerce Comprehensive Plan

The land within Commerce that is nearest the project site is identified on Commerce’s Character Areas Map (adopted 3/15/21) as part of the “Highway Commercial” Character Area, which is described in the City’s Comprehensive Plan as consisting of “primarily automobile-service commercial uses” offering “larger-scale lodging, big box retail, convenience stores, auto sales, and chain restaurants and retail.” The comments above about Jackson County’s Commercial land use category also apply for Commerce’s Highway Commercial Character Area: this use is not directly addressed in the character area narrative, it has the potential to support future commercial development nearby, and odor controls and visual screening are recommended.

The project site is also near the “Industrial Workplace” Character Area, which is described as consisting of “manufacturing, industrial, storage, and warehousing sites.” As an industrial use, a wastewater treatment plant would fit in with the Industrial Workplace Character Area.

Additionally, adding a wastewater treatment plant would help fulfill the following items listed in Commerce’s 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update:

- “Expand Wastewater Treatment Capacity” (from Short-Term Work Program)
- “We will sustain the City through investing in and improving necessary infrastructure by...expanding the capacity of water, sewer, gas, and fiber systems” (from Goals and Policies).

Compatibility with Regional Plan

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
Enhances economic mobility and competitiveness	Increasing Commerce's wastewater treatment capacity would enable future growth in the area, enhancing Commerce's economic competitiveness.
Elevates public health and equity	The proposed development could elevate public health by increasing the number of homes and businesses that have access to sanitary sewer in the area. The City should consider the use of odor control systems during the treatment process to reduce any negative impacts to the health and quality of life for shoppers and employees at nearby shopping centers. There are no residential developments near the proposed treatment plant site.
Supports and adds value to existing communities	The proposed development adds value to the community by investing in existing infrastructure and planning for future water treatment needs in a developing area.
Creates housing that is diverse, adequate, equitable, and affordable	The recommendation to create housing is not directly applicable to this project type. However, as access to sewer service enables the construction of denser residential neighborhoods than are possible with septic tanks, and homes can be built more affordably on smaller lot sizes than on large residential lots, expanding Commerce's wastewater treatment capacity could indirectly help facilitate the construction of additional affordable housing in the city.
Includes transportation choices and is well-connected with existing and planned transportation options	This development type is not anticipated to generate a significant amount of additional traffic. However, some trucks would be expected to travel to and from the site on a regular basis, such as to deliver septic tank waste to the facility or to dispose of dehydrated sludge. Therefore, nearby roads should be evaluated to ensure that they can handle the weight of additional truck traffic.
Protects natural and historic resources	Care should be taken during engineering and construction to ensure that discharge from the outfall in Banks County does not cause excessive erosion along the banks of Grove Creek.

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. 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
SITE AREA (47.4 acres)	Wetland Acres ¹	0.1	0.1%
	“Conservation Land” ²	0.3	0.7%
	Regionally Important Resource Land ³	0.0	0.0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land ⁴	0.3	0.7%
1 MILE BUFFER AROUND SITE (4652.2 acres)	Wetland Acres	265.9	5.7%
	“Conservation Land”	238.4	5.1%
	Regionally Important Resource Land	0.0	0.0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land	238.4	5.1%

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

Transportation

No traffic study was completed for this proposal, and the applicant has indicated that no significant increases in traffic are anticipated as a result of this project. Refer to the site plan for the location of proposed transportation infrastructure.

Water Supply and Wastewater

The project would be served by the City of Commerce water and sewer system, and the applicant anticipates that the project would generate no additional water or sewer demand. While the facility’s staff and visitors would use water and generate wastewater while on site, these amounts would be negligible when calculated as MGD. An additional 2,600 linear feet of 8” water main would be installed along Haggard Road to serve the facility.

Stormwater Management

An estimated 15% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and one retention pond with swales and check dams is 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.

Solid Waste

The applicant estimates the project would generate approximately 4,300 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 Jackson County is

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).

disposed of in a landfill in Banks County. The applicant states that no hazardous waste would be generated by the project.

Lifecycle Costs and Revenues

The applicant estimates that the project would cost \$45 million to build. Annual local taxes do not apply to this project. The facility would generate revenue through sewer utility fees. Additionally, it would indirectly contribute to the City's tax digest by enabling future residential and commercial development. Prior to approval, the City should assess the life cycle costs of this facility to ensure that they would not be committing to more maintenance expenses than could be covered by tax revenue and sewer utility fees.

Comments from Affected Parties

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

The new conventional wastewater treatment facility on a 42-acre tract zoned A-2 in Jackson County is 6.8 miles from the Jackson County Airport (JCA). 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed development.