

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 #4549
Name of Project:	Falconwood Farms Industrial
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	City of Covington

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer's request for rezoning and annexation into the City of Covington. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 10/3/2025 to 10/18/2025.

Proposed Development

Strategic Partners is proposing construction of 1,012,000 SF of warehouse space on an 81-acre site in Newton County that would be annexed into the City of Covington. The site is located at 10385 US-278 and the parcel numbers are 0081 070 and 0081 071.

The site plan includes three warehouse buildings, 670 automobile parking spaces, 247 tractor trailer parking spaces, and three vehicular access points on US Highway 278/GA-12. It also indicates that there would be a 75-foot zoning buffer on the east and west sides of the site to separate it from adjacent residential parcels. Cut and fill earthworks to adjust the site's topography are also indicated around the west, north, and east edges of the site. The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in 2029.

The applicant states that the proposal would not displace any existing uses; however, based on recent aerial images, it appears that the site is currently an equestrian facility. It includes a single-family residence, a barn, several small outbuildings, several pastures, at least two riding arenas, and a round pen.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

Compatibility with Regional Plan

The site is identified as “Developing” and “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	According to the applicant, the regional workforce is sufficient to fill the demand created by the proposed project. Additionally, the proposal would extend an existing industrial node southward, creating more warehouse jobs for the community. However, the connection between the proposed site and the existing industrial node would be limited, as the facilities in the existing node are all accessible from Lochridge Blvd, and the proposed new facility would be accessible only from US-278, which does not connect directly with Lochridge Blvd.
Elevates public health and equity	There is an existing single-family residential neighborhood immediately east of the project site, and all parcels on the east and west sides of the site are currently zoned as single-family residential. On the one hand, locating a warehouse next to a residential neighborhood raises equity concerns related to noise, visuals, and heavy truck traffic. Significant screening would be necessary to separate the neighborhood from the warehouses. On the other hand, the warehouses might provide a conveniently located source of employment for some of the residents of the neighborhood, especially for those who cannot or prefer not to drive. It is recommended that a sidewalk be added to connect the existing residential neighborhood with the warehouse facility.
Supports and adds value to existing communities	From a service delivery standpoint, annexing this parcel into Covington would likely be beneficial, as doing so would partly fill in an area of unincorporated Newton County that is surrounded by parcels that are part of the City of Covington.
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	All three proposed driveways would enter the site from US-278, as recommended in the submitted traffic study. The proposal is lacking any alternative transportation infrastructure that would provide pedestrian or bicycle access for employees.
Protects natural and historic resources	Two recommendations are noted under “Natural Resources and Stormwater Management,” below. The first is that the local government seek clarification from the developer about the conflicting information on the site plan about the area where the pond is currently located. The second is that as part of its evaluation of the proposal, the local government should consider the loss of ecosystem services currently being provided by the small wetland that would be impacted by the development. There are no known historic resources present on the site.

Compatibility with Regional Resource Management Plan

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 (81 Acres)	Wetland Acres ¹	4.4	5.5%
	“Conservation Land” ²	68.4	84.8%
	Regionally Important Resource Land ³	62.4	77.4%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land ⁴	68.4	84.8%
1 MILE BUFFER AROUND SITE (3,033 Acres)	Wetland Acres	483	15.9%
	“Conservation Land”	1,773	58.5%
	Regionally Important Resource Land	1,323	43.6%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land	1,772	58.4%

This acreage is 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.

One Regionally Important Resource, the Alcovy River, is located within 1 mile of the site. A tributary of the Alcovy River forms the northern site boundary, and the stream’s floodplain extends onto the site. Due to the site’s proximity and connection to this Regionally Important Resource, it is very important for the water quality and velocity of stormwater runoff to be well-managed on this site, as discussed under “Natural Resources and Stormwater Management,” below.

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

Natural Resources and Stormwater Management

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.

The applicant states that wetlands and floodplains would be affected by the proposed development, and that an estimated 55% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces. The northern site boundary is formed by a tributary of the Alcovy River, and the stream’s floodplain extends onto the site. No development is proposed within the floodplain, and a detention pond to manage stormwater is proposed between the floodplain and the rest of the site. A second detention pond on a different part of the site is also proposed.

According to the site plan, the proposed development would impact 0.10 acres of wetlands, but no mitigation is required for this impact. While current State and Federal laws do not require mitigation for the destruction of certain categories of wetlands, all wetlands provide valuable ecosystem services to the community, such as flood control, water filtration and

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).

purification, and groundwater recharge. It is recommended that the local government consider the unmitigated loss of these ecosystem services as part of its evaluation of this proposal.

There is also an existing pond present on the site. It is unclear from the application materials submitted what the applicant is proposing to do with this pond, as the site plan includes conflicting information: it shows the pond remaining on the site, surrounded by 150 feet of protective buffers, but it also shows a building, road, and parking lot being built on top of most of the area currently occupied by the pond and riparian buffers. It is recommended that the local government request clarifying information from the applicant to resolve the conflicting information presented in the site plan.

Transportation

Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc., completed a traffic impact study that projects 3,278 new daily trips, including 145 AM peak hour trips and 148 PM peak hour trips from the proposed development. This is projected to include 1,108 new truck trips, most of which would not occur during peak hours. The study recommends site-access improvements, including three new driveways and a new westbound right-turn lane to access the site from US-278.

Water Supply and Wastewater

The project would be served by the City of Covington water and sewer systems, with an estimated daily demand of 0.02-0.03 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. No water or sewer line extensions are anticipated.

Solid Waste

The applicant estimates the project would generate 1,300 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.

Lifecycle Costs and Revenues

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$120 million at build-out in 2029 and generate \$1.2 million in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$1.5 million and generate approximately \$15 thousand in 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

The proposed construction of approximately 1 million square feet of warehouse space on a 81- acre tract in the City of Covington is 2.4 miles from the Covington Municipal Airport (CVC). It is located outside of the FAA approach or departure surfaces, and airport compatible land use areas, and does not appear to impact any 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/oe3a/main/#/noticePrescreen>). 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.

Shena Applewhaite, Director, Newton County Department of Development Services

Development Services

The applicant is proposing a heavy industrial use on the property in the form of warehouses as follows: Building A approx. 386,000 sf, Building B approx. 326,000 sf and Building C approx. 300,000 sf. The site plan includes three warehouse buildings, 670 automobile parking spaces, 247 tractor trailer parking spaces, and three vehicular access points on US Highway 278/GA-12. It also indicates that there would be a 75-foot zoning buffer on the east and west sides of the site to separate it from adjacent residential parcels. **This proposed use is not compatible with the requirements for this**

district. It also falls within the Alcovy River protected Watershed Overlay and further it will dissect this district leaving remnant portions on either side.

These parcels fall within the county’s MU- 278 Hwy Mixed Use district (Division 290). The purpose and intent of the Mixed-Use District is to establish a zoning district classification that promotes the public health, safety, and general welfare by permitting greater flexibility in site planning and building arrangements within the core area of a mixed-use development guided by an overall master plan. The Mixed-Use District is intended to promote the following principles:

- A. Provide for a variety of supporting and compatible uses in close proximity to major employment centers;*
- B. Provide a clearly defined focal point and center of activity that serves the commercial, civic, social, and recreation needs of the surrounding community within a walkable area;*
- C. Provide a network of connected streets with sidewalks and landscaping to facilitate convenient, efficient, and safe movement within the Mixed Use and between the Mixed Use and surrounding neighborhoods and business areas;*
- D. Design streets, sidewalks, and buildings to provide an attractive and lively streetscape that encourages pedestrian activity;*
- E. Integrate parks, open space, and public space into the Mixed Use;*
- F. Use the placement of civic buildings on key sites to create landmarks and a strong sense of place;*
- G. Provide adequate public facilities and services; and*
- H. Promote quality development of attractive and cohesive design.*

According to the MU -278 Highway 278 Mixed Use district, the authorized uses include the following:

A. Authorized Uses

The Mixed-Use District development may consist of any authorized use or combination of principal uses as authorized in the Use Table below, except that the total of single-family detached dwelling units may not occupy more than thirty percent (30%) of the total developed acreage per permit application.

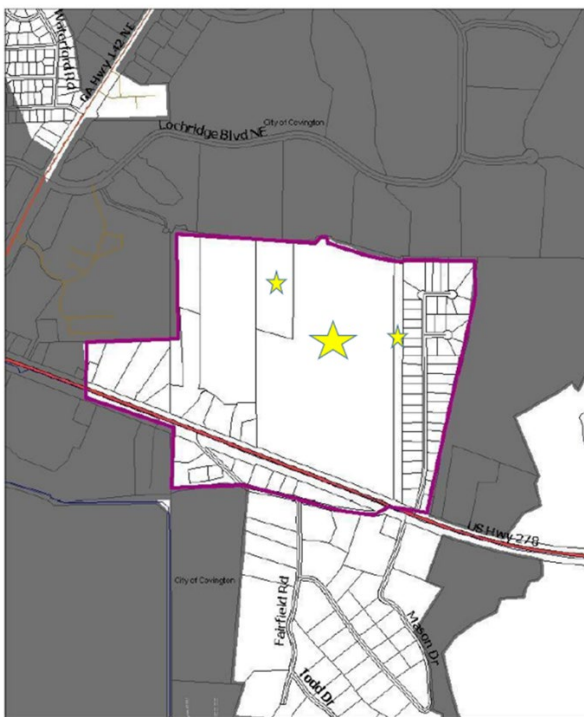
Sites shall contain a mixture of uses. A single use category (Commercial, Residential, Industrial, Office/Institutional, or Civic) shall occupy no more than 70% of either the gross site acreage (exclusive of open space) or of the gross square footage of total building construction approved for the project.

In buildings with a mixture of residential and non-residential uses, non-residential uses must occupy the ground floor.

Light manufacturing, industrial uses such as an assembly plant require a CUP.

Manufacturing, Heavy Industrial is prohibited.

Warehousing, Industrial, Wholesale Industrial is prohibited.



Highway 278 Mixed Use District Area Map

Newton County Fire Services

Fire Service does not have any comments for this development.

Transportation Department

The development is off of SR 12 (HWY 278) and should not have a negative effect on any County roads.