

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 #4751
Name of Project:	Dawson Park
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Oconee County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer's request for a permit. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 6/12/2026 to 6/27/2026.

Proposed Development

The Oconee County Board of Commissioners is proposing the construction of a recreation facility on an approximately 251-acre site in Oconee County. The development would feature 16 multi-use fields, an indoor basketball facility, 1.58 miles of multi-purpose trail, 2 pavilions, park concessions, 2 restroom facilities, a pedestrian mall, playground, pump station, and county services administrative building. The facility would have 2,269 parking spaces and 3 site entrances off Rocky Branch Road. The site is currently a mixture of wooded land and farmland, with a small cemetery that would be preserved as a distinct parcel with no development proposed in its boundary. The development would occupy property west of the intersection of Rocky Branch Road and Plantation Drive in Oconee County. The parcel numbers are B 03 017, B 03 017C, B 03 017D, B03 017E, and B 03 017F. The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in 2036.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

Compatibility with Regional Plan

The site is identified as “Developing” 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 project would generate 5 full-time employees at project buildout, which would benefit the surrounding area by providing employment opportunities. The project would also attract residents and visitors, increasing traffic to local businesses.
Elevates public health and equity	The project would improve public health by creating new trails, sports fields, pavilions, and a playground for active and passive recreation. The project is publicly accessible, which ensures that the park’s amenities and health benefits would be available to every resident.
Supports and adds value to existing communities	The proposed project would add value to existing communities by providing a public park that serves as a community hub and recreation space. It would also likely increase local property values.
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	The project has 3 connections to the existing road network off Rocky Branch Road and includes stub out connections for future development. The traffic study recommends converting the stop-controlled intersection of Rocky Bridge Road and Malcom Bridge Road into a single lane roundabout to address delays during peak periods.
Protects natural and historic resources	A tributary to Barber Creek flows across the western portion of the site and there is one existing pond on the site. There is no development proposed within the creek area, except for one area in the northern portion of the site where a heavy timber guardrail crosses the creek. The County should consider maintaining as much of the existing tree canopy as possible and maintaining the natural topography of the site, especially near the creek and pond. This would help reduce erosion, filter stormwater runoff, and minimize disruptions to the site’s drainage patterns.

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 (252 Acres)	Wetland Acres ¹	17	6.7%
	“Conservation Land” ²	67	26.6%
	Regionally Important Resource Land ³	0	0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land ⁴	67	26.6%
1 MILE BUFFER AROUND SITE (4,034 Acres)	Wetland Acres	209	5.2%
	“Conservation Land”	1,676	41.5%
	Regionally Important Resource Land	0	0%
	Threatened Regionally Important Resource Land	1,676	41.5%

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

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

Natural Resources and Stormwater Management

A tributary to Barber Creek flows across the western portion of the site and there is one existing pond on the site. The applicant states that an estimated 29% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces. The applicant states that stormwater infrastructure will be designed to meet state standards. The site plan includes 2 stormwater ponds to manage runoff and a 50-foot stream buffer around the tributary. 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 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.

Transportation

WSP completed a traffic impact study that projects 438 AM peak hour trips and 1,091 PM weekday peak hour trips and 2,017 AM and 1,275 PM weekend peak hour trips from the proposed development.

Water Supply and Wastewater

The project would be served by the Oconee County water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.0033 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. No water or sewer line extensions are anticipated.

Energy Supply

The applicant states that the proposed project’s estimated peak connected electrical load would be 10.6 Megawatts per day. Walton EMC would be the project’s energy supply provider.

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).

Solid Waste

The applicant estimates the project would generate 9 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. The applicant states that no hazardous waste would be generated.

Lifecycle Costs and Revenues

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$120,000,000 at build-out in 2036. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$478,088. The project would not generate any local tax revenue as it is County-owned.

Comments from Affected Parties

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

The proposed development is located more than 10 miles from any civil airport.

If the proposed project's vertical construction exceeds 200ft above ground level, an FAA Form 7460-1 must be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration. That may be done online at <https://oeaaa.faa.gov/oeaaa/external/portal.jsp>. The FAA must be in receipt of the notification, no later than 45 days prior to construction. The FAA will evaluate the potential impact of the project on protected airspace associated with PDK airport and advise the proponent if any action is necessary. I have copied Mr. Mike Van Wie, Director of the DeKalb Peachtree Airport (telephone: 770-936-5440).