



I. Purpose of Applicant Request

The applicant has requested a rezone from I (Industrial) to RM-1 (Mixed-Density Residential) and has included a non-binding concept plan for 186 single-family attached units (townhomes) and 166 single-family detached units (350 units total) on approximately 120 acres at 610, 720, 730, and 760 Newton Bridge Road. The request requires a corresponding change to the Future Land Use Map, which is requested to change from *Employment Center* and *Rural* to *Mixed Density Residential*. Approximately 300 of the units would be served by alleys. Stormwater management facilities and open space are also included.

The property is undeveloped and largely wooded although two overhead electrical transmission line easements cut through the property. The property is bounded on the east and south by wetlands. Multiple light industrial buildings sit north and south of the property. Across Newton Bridge Road to

the west is a single-family house, the Hope Haven developmental disability support center, and a residential neighborhood of duplexes. All of the adjacent properties are zoned I (Industrial) with an exception for the corner lot at Vincent Drive and Newton Bridge Road (zoned Commercial-Neighborhood) and the duplex neighborhood which is zoned RS-5 with the RM Limited Overlay. Holland Youth Sports Complex is approximately 0.25 miles away, accessible via Vincent Drive or Newton Bridge Road. Further to the west and north, on the other side of the park, are a number of relatively low-density single-family detached subdivisions, zoned RS-15 and RS-25. The Greenway Network Plan calls for a greenway running along the creek at the back of the property that would eventually connect to the Sports Complex. This project creates potential for a tie-in to the Greenway.

II. Policy Analysis

A. Compatibility with the Future Land Use Map

The 2023 Future Land Use Map designates the subject parcels as *Employment Center* and *Rural*, which are described as follows:

Employment Center

These are areas of industry, office, research parks, and flex-space mixed uses. Large-scale employment areas, which include large industrial areas, manufacturing, office parks, and research centers, is incompatible with housing. Smaller-scale employment areas are appropriate to be in close proximity to a neighborhood area. Design standards regulating building placement, landscaping, and buffering should apply. Small amounts of retail may be compatible in some areas.

Rural

Rural lands are intended to have very low residential density. To maintain open space, clustering of dwellings is encouraged with common open spaces protected by conservation easements. Agricultural functions are encouraged, as well as other compatible uses, such as limited low-impact commercial uses, equestrian facilities and other animal boarding uses.

The applicant has requested a change to the Future Land Use Map from *Employment Center* and *Rural* to *Mixed Density Residential*. The requested *Mixed Density Residential* Future Land Use category is described as follows:

Mixed Density Residential

These are residential areas where higher density residential development is allowed and intended. Limited non-residential uses designed at a neighborhood scale may be incorporated into these areas (e.g. churches, schools, daycare facilities, small businesses and offices). Buildings should be oriented towards the street and include streetscape enhancements. Their design should include connections between uses, good pedestrian connections, and compatibility with public transit. Auto-oriented uses, such as vehicle repair and maintenance, drive-through restaurants, and vehicle sales, are not included in this designation.

In previous generations, the Newton Bridge Road area was intended to serve as the industrial district of Athens and industrial uses can be seen along the corridor to this day, particularly as one nears Chase and Barber Streets. The 1999 Future Land Use Map designated this area as Employment Center in light of the industrial history and intent. However, as industry shifted to other parts of the County and environmental sensitivities grew, the area—replete with wetlands—lost its appeal to modern industry. This particular property straddles the line between *Employment Center* and *Rural*.

The *Rural* Future Land Use was put in place in the 1999 Future Land Use Map as a means to restrict suburban expansion and preserve rural farmland. The *Rural* designation is also a reflection of the lack of suitable infrastructure for higher development intensities in certain areas, although this particular site does have access to sewer service, per the capacity evaluation of the Athens-Clarke County Public Utilities Department. The *Rural* Future Land Use designation for the parcel at 760 Newton Bridge Road does not match the Industrial zoning for that parcel, which invites an opportunity to reconsider the appropriate designation for the parcel.

Staff supports the reconsideration of the Industrial zoning and *Employment Center* Future Land Use since the area is unsuitable for industrial development and multiple residential neighborhoods have been built in the area. Given that Athens-Clarke County has already made infrastructure commitments to the area in the form of sewer service and a large park, a *Rural* Future Land Use designation is also inappropriate. Multiple residential neighborhoods have been built or are currently under review on or near this section of Newton Bridge Road, and the General Time site is poised to become a mixed-use node, so additional residential development along Newton Bridge Road would fit. It is also good practice to complement the public investment in the park with adjacent private land development, so that people can live in close proximity to these community amenities. Therefore, Staff analysis finds that residential land uses are the most practical use of this land.

The requested *Mixed Density Residential* Future Land Use does accommodate the requested RM-1 zoning district, although there are no other parcels with this designation in the area. Staff notes that the *Traditional Neighborhood* Future Land Use would also accommodate the requested zone and would be more compatible with the Future Land Use Map since multiple neighborhoods on the western side of Newton Bridge Rd already share that designation. Given shifting land use patterns and the public investment in nearby infrastructure, Staff deems the applicant's request for *Mixed Density Residential* to be compatible with the Future Land Use Map.

End of Staff Report.