



**STAFF REPORT
PRELIMINARY PLANNED DEVELOPMENT
2415 JEFFERSON ROAD
PD-2025-05-0895
June 5th, 2025**

APPLICANT:Ed Lane, SPG Planners + Engineers
OWNER:Homewood Village, LLC.
ZONING REQUEST:From C-G to C-G (PD)
TYPE OF REQUEST:Type I
LOCATION:2415 Jefferson Road
TAX MAP NUMBERS:113 053
COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT:District 5
PROJECT SIZE:15.95 Acres
PRESENT USE:Commercial
PROPOSED USE:Multi-Family Residential
PUBLIC NOTICE POSTED:May 21st, 2025
STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**COMMENT ONLY**
PLANNING COMM. RECOMMENDATION:**COMMENT ONLY**
MAYOR & COMMISSION AGENDA SETTING: ...Tentative
MAYOR & COMMISSION VOTING SESSION:Tentative

I. Summary Recommendation

The applicant is requesting a Planned Development for 2415 Jefferson Road. The proposal requests to add two apartment structures and partially demolish the commercial buildings at Homewood Village Shopping Center. The site is 15.95-acre tract with 138,000 square feet of existing commercial multi-tenant structure, a second 5,000 sf commercial building and associated surface parking. The lot sits below the grade of South Homewood Drive and Jefferson Road as well as being bound on the southern side by railroad right-of-way.

The proposal is for two 5-story apartment structures to replace 46,000 sf of the commercial buildings in the rear of the parcel and maintain 92,000 sf of the existing commercial. The request is seeking to use the full allowable residential density for the site, but the proposal is less clear on how the remaining commercial portion will be brought into compliance with current code or relate to the proposed residences. The applicant references in their application that the Future Land Use Steering Committee has called for this location to be a “Town Center,” but the design focuses on adding the residential component and not creating a neighborhood business district. Further consideration should be given to the long-range plan for the site, creation of a human-scaled district and how this can properly fit in to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Infrastructure is important for this project as certain aspects have not received attention for years and it also sits in a basin that cannot accept peak flow sewage. Attention should be paid to making this site more manageable for ACCGov utilities and potentially withhold additional density until the system can handle the additional demand. The site is also traversed by a transmission line that is expensive to move and restrictive in terms of having development beneath and near it. Further

guidance on this is necessary and the applicant should work with Public Utilities to arrive at a single design approach for the next submission that accommodates access to ACCGov facilities and corrects incompatible infrastructure.

Revitalizing this aging shopping center and putting better use to the surface parking are admirable goals. Multiple commercial tenants have ongoing contracts that prevent some changes, particularly with regard to significant portions of the parking lot, but that does not prevent the applicant from installing a framework that could be built out into a viable business district. The commercial spaces to be removed happen to be of the scale that works better for a smaller commercial center and could also support local businesses. The scale of the proposed buildings in relation to the surrounding neighborhoods is much taller and also of a significantly larger footprint. Staff supports the redevelopment of this property to provide additional housing and valuable business opportunities. However, this proposal places a large and monolithic residential development in very close proximity to existing housing of a much smaller scale and does not provide a network to build upon going forward.

The applicant has requested six waivers that are not supported by Staff, and these waivers are listed in Section F of this report. Staff notes that one waiver needs to be evaluated using Special Use standards and the application should provide information addressing those standards for that waiver, and one waiver could be supported if the proposed design more closely approximated current code standards.

Staff also recommends that the following conditions of approval be considered for the design as presently proposed:

- 1) The proposed area and location of the conserved canopy area adjacent to railroad be binding.
- 2) The Bradford Pears as street trees along Homewood Drive be removed and replaced with a more durable, contextually appropriate, and less invasive species.

Planning Commission Recommendation: Comments Only

II. Purpose of Applicant Request

A. Proposal

The applicant has requested a Planned Development on a Commercial General (C-G) parcel for the construction of an apartment complex at 2415 Jefferson Road. The request also mentions façade changes to the remaining, existing commercial space. However the application does not provide information about the architectural treatment as is required for Planned Development consideration. The two proposed buildings are placed to the rear of the site, both are 5 stories in height and they would accommodate 382 bedrooms in 233 apartments (predominantly 1 and 2 bedrooms). The project would also demolish 46,000 sf of commercial space, leaving 92,000 sf in the larger format, commercial space (Dollar General, Foothills Charter School, Dial America, etc.). The site is currently accessed from Jefferson Road, South Homewood Drive (2 points) and Magnolia Blossom Way. The proposal would remove one of the access points to South Homewood Drive and keep the others. The request also proposes 646 surface parking spaces - which meets the requirements for the dwelling units and seeks to share some of the parking for the commercial space. Lastly, the proposal has about 25,000 sf of open plaza space to the east of the residences.

B. Existing Conditions

The property is located just outside of Loop 10 on Jefferson Rd, adjacent to the neighborhoods of

Homewood Hills, The Cottages at Homewood, and Moss Side as well as a church, adjacent office park and across Jefferson Road from the Athens Country Club. The site is bordered by the railroad to the south and has an outparcel at the intersection of Jefferson Road and South Homewood Drive (former Chevron). The total project area is 15.95 acres, but does not include the service station outparcel. Currently there is 138,000 square feet of commercial; large footprint in the front of the site (toward Jefferson Road) which is to remain and neighborhood-scale to the rear which is to be demolished. Main access to the site is via the signalized intersection at Jefferson Road and South Homewood Drive. The area is served by Transit Route 7 (Prince Avenue).

The property is currently zoned C-G, the surrounding properties are mostly residential (RS-8, RS-15, RS-25 and RM-2), the adjacent church is zoned Commercial Office (C-O) and the outparcel is C-G. The RM-2 property is across the railroad track and connects to Tallassee Road, there is a planned extension of the ACC Greenway Network through these properties, however the connection has not materialized and is not shown in this proposal.

The property sits at an elevation that is lower than both South Homewood Drive and Jefferson Road, but has been internally graded and slopes gently southwest toward an overgrown stormwater facility.

III. Policy Analysis

A. Compatibility with Comprehensive Plan

The 2023 Comprehensive Plan calls for the following policies that are partially supported in this project:

- *Infill and redevelopment should be prioritized over greenfield expansion.*

The 2023 Comprehensive Plan calls for the following policies that are not supported in this project:

- *Increase the supply and variety of quality housing units, at multiple price points, in multiple locations, to suit the needs of a variety of households.*
- *Improve safety and accessibility for people walking, biking, and busing around Athens.*

Overall, the proposal is partially compatible with the Comprehensive Plan. It does provide infill at an aging shopping center with unused surface parking. However, the housing proposed by this development is consistent with the large-scale apartment complex style that has been developed in Athens-Clarke County over the past 10+ years (some with waning occupancy) but not specifically within the context of the surrounding neighborhoods that exist in this area. ACC needs housing for purchase and delivered in forms that accommodate family occupancy and provide viable opportunities for prospective owner-occupants to enter into the residential market. The surrounding neighborhoods are one and two-story dwellings, and a smoother transition to those existing residences could include structures (or portions of the proposed structures) that are less than 5 stories in height and designed with more modest-scaled footprints. Staff supports the idea of ground floor residential in these nodes and notes that, when designed well, such uses can fit well with neighboring properties. Using a mix of housing options would also allow this project to set the groundwork for future development and opportunity. Lastly, there have been plans for the Greenway Network Plan expansion to the site, but the proposal does not show future interconnection in this regard.

B. Compatibility with the Future Land Use Map

The 2023 Future Land Use Map designates the subject parcel as *General Business*, which is

described as follows:

General Business

These are commercial areas that serve a variety of needs for the residents of the region. It is intended for small- and large-scale retailing and service uses that are auto-oriented, such as Atlanta Highway, Lexington Road and US 29 North. Pedestrian-oriented design is particularly appropriate when these streets contain neighborhood-shopping areas or are adjacent to multifamily housing or residential neighborhoods. Pedestrian circulation in these centers is a primary concern, therefore, connectivity within and to surrounding areas should be encouraged. Internal pedestrian walkways should be provided from the public right-of-way to the principal customer entrance of all principal buildings on the site. Walkways should connect focal points of pedestrian activity such as, but not limited to, transit stops, street crossings, building, store entry points, and plaza space. Walkways shall feature adjoining landscaped areas that contribute to the establishment or enhancement of community and public spaces. The street level facade of these areas should have a scale and architectural elements that relate to pedestrians. Buildings should be oriented to the street corridors which should be lined with street-trees. Small and medium scale retail stores should frame the streets with large-scale retailers located behind with focus given to pedestrian circulation rather than automobiles. Parking lots should not be located at the street front and shared parking should be encouraged.

The applicant states that this site is being proposed as a “Town Center” node by the Future Land Use Steering Committee and they are seeking to use that framework as justification for the request. Staff does see opportunities for horizontal mixing of uses in nodal areas, however the integration of the component uses that comprise nodal development is very important. This proposal could set-up the site to be developed with an interior corridor and contextually appropriate residential and commercial. However, the location of this proposal on the site is out of scale for the adjacent neighborhoods, separating the residential and commercial uses, and appears to give the existing large-scale commercial structures a simple facelift instead of creating a business district. The proposal is also seeking to use the allowed residential density for the entire site in these two structures, without a cohesive overall site plan or bringing over half of the site into compliance with current design standards. While portions of the site are currently lease restricted, the design could build off an interior road network, install some residential while leaving opportunity for the future and plan for the eventual renovation of parts of the existing commercial. This would create a balanced business district for the neighborhood and surrounding area to bring value, housing and commercial opportunity to the location. The application mostly speaks to existing visibility from Jefferson Road; however this focus does not consider the full extent of what the Future Land Use Plan suggests. Designing an internal pedestrian and vehicle network that is supportive of a variety of uses would begin rebuilding value at the site and allow it to grow more organically for the area and not require drive-by visibility from the adjacent thoroughfare.

No change to the Future Land Use Map is required since the proposed use is compatible with the current designation. However, the project design is not compatible with the character description which calls for buildings to be oriented toward the street with good pedestrian connections and easy access to public transit.

C. Compatibility with the Zoning Map

The applicant has requested a Planned Development in a C-G zone. The waivers requested are intended to support the proposed design of the site rather than asking for new opportunities or a unique mixing of uses. Additionally, the site and potential business district would benefit from meeting many of the standards that the applicant is looking to waive. Creating human-scale

development on a relatively small development site such as this one would fit best with the surrounding uses and allow for new housing and business in an aging commercial center.

The Athens-Clarke County Zoning Ordinance includes a list of defined uses and designates where they can or cannot be established. For this request, the most noticeable difference between the current C-G zoning and the proposed C-G (PD) zoning is to remove multiple design standards that most C-G developments already follow.

D. Consistency with Other Adopted ACCGov Plans, Studies, or Programs

The Greenway Network Plan has a connection through or adjacent to this site. The proposal does not include a design for such an interconnection.

IV. Technical Assessment

A. Environment

The Arborist has reviewed the tree management plan and offered the following comment(s):

Due to existing site conditions, the ACC Arborist recommends an approval of the requested waiver from 8-7-15(c), tree canopy cover, required for the C-G zoning district. However, the Arborist recommends that the conserved canopy waiver be worked through during the Plans Review process. The administrative waiver of tree conservation is an iterative process requiring dialogue between the ACC Planning Department and applicant to find a solution meeting code.

ACC Arborist recommends that two conditions be placed on the tree management plan:

- 1) The proposed area and location of the conserved canopy area adjacent to railroad be binding.
- 2) The Bradford pears as street trees along Homewood Drive be removed and replaced with a more appropriate, longer-lived, and non-invasive species.

Project will be expected to meet all requirements of the community tree management ordinance at time of Plan Review.

B. Grading and Drainage

The Transportation & Public Works Department has reviewed the proposal and offered no comments.

C. Water and Sewer Availability

The Public Utilities Department has reviewed the proposal and offered the following comments:

- *ACC water is available*
- *ACC sanitary sewer is available*
- *ACC water capacity is available*
- *ACC dry weather flow sewer capacity is available*
- *ACC wet weather flow sewer capacity is NOT available. A privately designed, owned, and maintained sewer storage facility to retain sanitary sewer on site during wet weather conditions is required in order to serve the development with ACC sanitary sewer, or alternative solution as deemed acceptable by PUD Director*
- *Conflict currently exists with the proposed locations of the onsite sewer storage facility and the*

stormwater management facility.

- *Tree conflicts appear to exist with utilities. Minimum of 10' horizontal separation is required between trees and water/sewer mains. Minimum of 5' horizontal separation is required between trees and water/sewer services.*
- *PUD recommends approval with the condition that tree and utility locations be non-binding.*

D. Transportation

The Transportation & Public Works Department has reviewed the proposal and offered the following transportation-related comments:

- *Regarding this project's impact to traffic congestion: this project is not anticipated to create a problem on its own as proposed. However, at some point in time, continued development along the Jefferson Road corridor will create untenable traffic level of service at some intersections along the Jefferson Road corridor in proximity to this site.*
- *Ensure connectivity of the sidewalk network from within the project to access the existing sidewalks on Homewood Drive and Jefferson Road, as well as to consider coordination with ACC Transit and impacts of this project on the operation of their existing transit stop located at the north corner of this project in the shopping center near the corner of Homewood Drive and Jefferson Road.*

E. Fire Protection

The Fire Marshal has reviewed the proposal and offered the following comments:

- *The site generally offers good access and response for the Fire Department; however, revisions are needed to include an approved fire apparatus turnaround on the project's south side.*
- *Some roads within the development also do not meet the required minimum width of twenty-four feet. Despite these access issues, the layout and location do not negatively impact emergency response times or routing. It is noted, however, that the increase in bedrooms could lead to a higher call volume in the area.*
- *Regarding water supply and hydrant coverage, the site has a sufficient firefighting water supply of 1900 gallons per minute (GPM) available at average flow. However, hydrant locations could not be identified on the current plan. Hydrants must be shown, spaced appropriately, and situated outside of driveways or other obstructions to ensure accessibility.*
- *Due to the size and use of the proposed structures, fire protection systems, including fire sprinklers, a fire alarm system, and standpipes, will be required for this project.*
- *A fire department connection (FDC) must be located remotely from the building in an approved, accessible, and visible location. While riser rooms and FDC placements are not yet shown on the current plans, the Fire Marshal's Office will coordinate with the developer to determine optimal locations.*
- *Due to the height and layout of the structures, the building design calls for special considerations, including ladder access. The closest ladder company is Ladder One, based at 700 College Avenue.*
- *This development does not anticipate unusual fire hazards or high-risk operations.*
- *The Fire Marshal's Office will continue to work with the developer to ensure that all fire code requirements are met and fire safety is maintained throughout the project.*

F. Compliance with the Zoning Ordinance and Development Standards

A Planned Development designation is intended to encourage development of compatible land uses on a scale larger than that of individual small parcels. This designation can be used to request waivers to the typically required development standards in an effort to provide design flexibility to account for special circumstances unique to the design or the development site, as long as the proposal meets the spirit and intent of the code and Comprehensive Plan. Planned Development requests include a binding application report, site plan, and architectural elevations in an effort to guarantee to the community that what is proposed will be constructed if approved. All exemptions to the zoning and development standards must be identified in the application prior to approval of a binding proposal since the development will otherwise be expected to adhere to the applicable ordinance standards.

Concerns:

- This site and project have the ability to set the stage for a great redevelopment in an underutilized space, but it simply puts two large buildings surrounded by surface parking near a large commercial structure with existing surface parking.
- Ground floor residential in a commercial zone is a Special Use, not merely a waiver request. Application report should address the special use requirements in Sec. 9-20 as they pertain to this request.
- The phasing of the proposal is unclear and gives no assurance that anything beyond the residential component will be constructed.
- The applicant does not propose to meet design requirements for over half the site, but is using the density for the full acreage.
- Plaza space is tucked into the side of the residential building and surrounded by surface parking. Additionally, it does not meet the plaza standards in sec. 9-25-8 F.
- Breaking up of parking areas and providing pedestrian circulation as required in sec. 9-25-8.C. needs attention
- Front entry porch areas are required for residential developments in C zones.
- 8% of the area is required for recreation, please demonstrate compliance
- Parking lot buffering needs to be shown
- More information is needed on the size of the project and whether sec. 9-10-5, Developments of Community Significance applies.
- Creating a mixed-use business district, especially when requesting waivers or using the planned development process, needs to bring additional community benefit. One opportunity is to design to the urban standards in 9-10-6 or at least consider some of those options to create a neighborhood within an urban environment.

Requested Waivers

1. *Waiver from Section 8-7-15 – A waiver from required minimum 10% conserved tree canopy to be reduced to 5%.*

Applicant's Purpose: The project site is predominantly asphalt and the existing stormwater facility which includes much of the canopy needs to be rebuilt and modernized.

Staff Analysis: The applicant states that due to existing paved areas of the site and the type and location of the remaining canopy that additional clearing is necessary to modernize the stormwater facility. Staff agrees that there is limited for viable tree conservation and that the volunteer growth in the existing stormwater area should be addressed. Staff does not agree that conserving the topped Bradford Pears along Homewood Drive is beneficial to the project. Those trees have been improperly maintained and present a conflict with utilities. These trees should be removed and properly accounted for in the tree management plan. Staff does not support this waiver as currently requested.

2. *Waiver from Section 9-10-2. L(1) – A waiver from the requirement that residential units must be on the second floor and above or in the basement.*

Applicant's Purpose: To separate the residential and existing, remaining commercial.

Staff Analysis: This waiver needs to be presented as a Special Use request and meet Special Use criteria as found in Sec. 9-20-5. Staff sees opportunities for horizontal mixed use or vertical mixed use as existing commercial sites and corridors are redeveloped. However, an integrated program for those uses is needed that provides more consideration to the ground floor of the residential units. There is little differentiation from the first floor residential and remaining stories outside of the leasing office area. In other urban environments in Athens-Clarke County, ground floor residential has been demarcated with additional attention and even provided outdoor space for a tenant and softened the transition to the units. Staff suggests referencing ACC's downtown design standards in sec. 9-10-6 as they address the defining characteristics that are expected as a community benefit in order to justify a waiver. Staff does not support this waiver in its currently designed form.

3. *Waiver from Section 9-25-8 C. 3. – A waiver from the maximum block size of 3 acres.*

Applicant's Purpose: Maintain existing retail and work with topography on site.

Staff Analysis: The site constraints are a challenge, but also an opportunity. The proposal places a large footprint for two buildings surrounded by surface parking and connects to the existing surface lot. In looking at revitalizing aging commercial areas, Staff encourages a framework for a neighborhood business district with manageable blocks, exterior facing units (when feasible) and transitions into surrounding neighborhoods. This layout places two, five-story structures adjacent to one and two-story residences as well as a lot of parking between the surrounding neighborhood and the commercial space. This proposal has the ability to set the business district up for success with a guiding street network and instead treats the uses as completely separate and disconnected. Staff does not support this waiver.

4. *Waiver from Section 9-25-8. F. 1 a & b – Additional Standards for Large Scale Developments– A waiver from the requirement for buildings to be less than 300' in length and provided curb, sidewalks and street trees.*

Applicant's Purpose: Allow existing commercial to remain with minimal updates.

Staff Analysis: The applicant is requesting a waiver from these code sections to be applied to the existing retail spaces that are to remain. Staff supports working with the ownership to maintain some retail on site, but the current proposal does not adequately address the design standards associated with commercial developments of this sort. The applicant is proposing to remove the business district-scaled retail and keep the large-scale tenant spaces. Staff understands that the current lease situation provides some limitations. However, these leasing realities have been agreed upon by the ownership and, if appropriate design considerations cannot be incorporated at this time as a result, then possibly this location is not yet right for redevelopment. The applicant has also stated that the remaining commercial structures will receive façade improvements, and

such investment suggests that these structures will not be changed anytime soon to work with the proposed residential character. As designed, the residential and commercial uses do not cohesively mix and both are at a scale that does not suggest pedestrian friendliness or attention to the surrounding neighborhoods. Staff does not support this waiver.

5. *Waiver from Section 9-25-8. F. 4 a – Parking Standards between building and street.*

Applicant's Purpose: Due to topography, amount of street frontages and existing parking it is tough to meet this standard.

Staff Analysis: Staff wishes to work with the applicant on the existing parking to address topographic challenges, however there are additional design solutions to minimize this request that are not being pursued. One major opportunity is to provide a good transition between the neighborhoods to the west of this proposed development site. This could allow the scale to be more contextually driven and pull some parking to the interior that would allow residential units to face the existing adjacent residential structures. Staff also understands that a major factor on this site is the challenge of relocating the Georgia Power transmission line that runs through the center of the property. This fact appears to show that a swath of the property will never be developed for anything other than roads, parking or possibly open space. If that is not going to be addressed, the applicant should seek to best maximize that space and build around it, not simply avoid it. Staff does not support this waiver.

6. *Waiver from Section 9-30-2 - Parking Spaces Required.*

Applicant's Purpose: Reduce the required parking amount due to the mix of uses.

Staff Analysis: Parking requirements associated with the proposed development and the demonstrated commercial needs of the site can be evaluated to find opportunities for sharing of spaces and reduction in overall parking provided where appropriate. The applicant could identify possible shared parking opportunities as the current proposal seems to have parking for residents and parking for the commercial without any integration of the two. Staff could support this waiver, but would like to see a more integrated design.

End of Staff Report.

Reviewed

Zoning Criteria Considered by Staff

The following factors have been considered as set forth in *Guhl v. Holcomb Bridge Road Corp.*,
238 Ga. 322, 232 S.E.2d 830 (1977).

- ☒ The proposed zoning action conforms to the Future Land Use map, the general plans for the physical development of Athens-Clarke County, and any master plan or portion thereof adopted by the Mayor and Commission.
- ☒ The proposed use meets all objective criteria set forth for that use provided in the zoning ordinance and conforms to the purpose and intent of the Comprehensive Plan and all its elements.
- ☒ The proposal will not adversely affect the balance of land uses in Athens-Clarke County.
- ☒ The cost of the Unified Government and other governmental entities in providing, improving, increasing or maintaining public utilities, schools, streets and other public safety measures.
- ☒ The existing land use pattern surrounding the property in issue.
- ☒ The possible creation of an isolated district unrelated to adjacent and nearby districts.
- ☒ The aesthetic effect of existing and future use of the property as it relates to the surrounding area.
- ☒ Whether the proposed zoning action will be a deterrent to the value or improvement of development of adjacent property in accordance with existing regulations.
- ☒ Whether there are substantial reasons why the property cannot be used in accordance with existing zoning; provided, however, evidence that the economic value of the property, as currently zoned, is less than its economic value if zoned as requested will not alone constitute a significant detriment.
- ☒ Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use and development of the property that give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal.
- ☒ Public services, which include physical facilities and staff capacity, exist sufficient to service the proposal.
- ☒ The population density pattern and possible increase or over-taxing of the load on public facilities including, but not limited to, schools, utilities, and streets.
- ☒ The possible impact on the environment, including but not limited to, drainage, soil erosion and sedimentation, flooding, air quality and water quantity.