

Augusta-Richmond County
Planning Commission
Staff Report

Hearing Date: June 3, 2024 Case Number: Z-24-22

**Applicant:** Darren Meadows

Property Owner: Vitrified Brick & Clay Co.,

LLLP

Property Address: 2883 Gordon Highway

Tax Parcel No: 064-0-004-01-0

Current Zoning: A (Agriculture) and B-2

(General Business)

Fort Eisenhower Notification Required: Yes Commission District: 3-Catherine Smith

McKnight

Super District: 10-Wayne Guilfoyle



REQUEST	PROPOSED USE/ACTIVITY	APPLICABLE COMPREHENSIVE ZONING ORDINANCE SECTION(S)
Rezone from A (Agriculture) and B-2 (General Business) to B-2 (General Business)	Data Center	Section 22-1

# SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

This rezoning petition is to rezone approximately 165.21 acres currently zoned A (Agriculture) and B-2 (General Business) to B-2 (General Business) located 2883 Gordon Highway. The applicant seeks to develop the property into a data center. The proposed data center will consist of six 2-story buildings of approximately 239,000 square feet each for a total of 1,434,000 square feet. The proposed data center is projected to accommodate between 160 to 220 employees.

# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONSISTENCY:

The property is in the Belair Character Area. The vision for Belair Character Aera includes a suburban area with medium density residential development and well planned communities. New commercial and light industrial/warehousing being located at interstate interchanges, along frontage roads and identified nodes. The recommended development patterns promoting community objectives for the Belair Character Area include office uses and economic prosperity. The proposed rezoning is consistent with the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.



# FINDINGS:

- 1. Previous rezoning action, Z-22-26, requested to change the zoning from A (Agriculture) and R-MH (Residential-Mobile Home) to B-2 (General Business) for the same proposed data center use. This was approved by The Augusta Commission in 2022 with conditions.
- 2. The conditions with approval of the previous rezoning, Z-22-26 are;
  - a. Based on future development of the site a Development Regional Impact (DRI) review may be required.
  - b. The total height of any structure shall not exceed 4 stories or 55 feet, to include any attached or detached structures.
  - c. This project shall comply with all development standards and regulations set forth by the City of Augusta, GA at the time of development.
- 3. The size and nature of the previous rezoning request required a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) review. Review comments from that DRI in 2022 did not provide any significant issues concerning the proposed development and none of the comments are reflected in the conditions from the previously approved rezoning.
- 4. The previous rezoning application proposed a single 350,000 square foot building for the data center. This rezoning petition is an increase in intensity to six buildings for a total of 1,434,000 square feet. This is an increase of 1,084,000 square feet of building area.
- The Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission determined that a new DRI review would be required.
- 6. The new DRI request for comments to the appropriate reviewing agencies was transmitted by the Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission on May 9, 2024, via electronic mail.
- The comments from the latest DRI review have been received with receiving only one comment from Columbia County concerning the coordination with them during the site plan review process.
- 8. Fort Eisenhower was notified via electronic mail of the rezoning application on March 3, 2024. At the time of writing this report no comments have been received from them.
- A portion of the proposed overall development site is located within Columbia County to the north but is not a part of this rezoning petition.
- 10. City public water and sewer are available to the property.
- According to the Georgia Department of Transportation State Functional Classification Map, 2017, Gordon Highway is a principal arterial. Public transit is not available within half a mile of the property.
- 12. Adjacent properties to the north of the site are in Columbia County and the property adjacent to the northeast is in Richmond County and is vacant land zoned A (Agriculture). Adjacent to the east is a Georgia Power 100 foot electrical line easement. The Properties on the other side of the easement are zoned R-1 with single family homes and R-3B for a proposed 358 multi-family apartment complex and is currently vacant. The property to the south across Gordon Highway is part of Fort Eisenhower. Adjacent properties to the west are zoned R-3C (Multiple-family Residential) being currently vacant, R-1E (One-Family Residential), also currently vacant. Adjacent to property to the northwest is zoned R-1D (Single-Family Residential) with single family homes currently being constructed.



- 13. According to the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) a portion of the property is in a Special Flood Hazard Area Zone A comprising approximately 5% of the property. Zone A has a 1 percent annual chance of flooding. It extends in a south westerly direction into the property approximately 740 feet from the eastern central boundary.
- 14. According to the Preliminary site plan submitted with the application, there are wetlands located on the property comprising approximately 10 percent of the site. A portion of those wetlands are in Columbia County. Based on the proposed preliminary site plan the developer will be required to mitigate those wetlands with the Army Corps of Engineers.
- 15. It has been confirmed by City staff that an inert fill area consisting of wood and mulch materials has been improperly buried with powerline easement situated along the east boundary of the tract. Materials must either be entirely removed or the owner will need to rezone the affected areas of the property to support the existing inert fill area.
- 16. A traffic study was submitted with the application and has been reviewed by the Augusta Traffic Engineering Department. The submitted study indicates that approximately 130 weekday trips will be generated per day. Traffic Engineering concurs with the study's conclusions for the proposed development to consist of one right turn deceleration lane into the property and two left turn lanes out of the property.
- 17. Planning staff has received a letter of support from the Augusta Economic Development Authority with no other public comments have been received prior to the completion of this revised staff report.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Planning Commission recommends <u>APPROVAL</u> of the rezoning request with the following conditions:

- 1. The total height of any structure shall not exceed 68 feet, excluding the housing of elevators, equipment required to operate and maintain the building, and parapet walls, but no structure or any space above the height limit shall be allowed for the purpose of providing additional enclosed space for commercial use and all elevators and equipment shall be screened.
- 2. A phase plan for the development will be submitted. The first phase that is outside of the wetlands and may be submitted for site plan approval provided the inert land field has been remediated per Augusta-Richmond County Engineering and Planning Department directors. The second phase of the site plan review plan will be for portions of the development within the wetlands and shall be contingent upon the Army Corps of Engineers approval and the remediation of the unauthorized inert land field per Augusta-Richmond County Engineering and Planning Department.
- 3. Materials in the existing inert landfill shall either be entirely removed, or the owner will need to rezone the affected areas of the property to support the existing inert fill area prior to submitting for a land disturbance permit and building permit.
- 4. The developer shall provide an enhanced landscape buffer along Gordon Highway, the development shall provide a staggard double landscaped street yard consisting of at least one (1) large tree for each forty-five (45) linear feet on the center of street frontage, with a large tree being located within twenty feet (20') of each side property line.



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- 5. The proposed development shall comply with all requirements of the Traffic Engineering Department and Georgia Department of Transportation at the time of submittal for site plan approval.
- 6. Approval of the rezoning request shall not constitute approval of the conceptual site plan submitted with the rezoning application. The proposed development shall go through the Site Plan approval process in compliance with the Site Plan Regulations of Augusta, Georgia prior to construction commencing on the property.
- 7. This development project shall comply with all development standards and regulations set forth by the City of Augusta, GA at the time of development.
- 8. All lighting shall be downcast and pointed away from the residential property line.
- 9. The development is subject to the parking regulation set forth in the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance as identified under shopping centers.

NOTE: This staff report includes the information available approximately two weeks prior to the Planning Commission hearing. It represents an evaluation of the facts presented by the applicant, research done by the staff, and consideration of the relevant factors in the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance of Augusta, Georgia. New facts may emerge, and staff reserves the right to make a verbal recommendation at the hearing based on all the information available at that time.



AUGUSTA AIKEN EVANS

# DARREN G. MEADOWS

DMEADOWS@HULLBARRETT.COM

March 25, 2024

Carla Delaney, Director Planning & Development City of Augusta 535 Telfair Street, Suite 300 Augusta, GA 30901

RE:

Letter of Intent for Rezoning Request

Tax Parcel #064-0-004-01-0 (and former Parcel #079-0-001-00-0)

Dear Carla,

On behalf of the property owner Georgia Vitrified Brick & Clay So., LLLP and my client Eagle South, LLC, please find enclosed the completed application forms and supporting documentation for our request for rezoning to allow the development of a data center business on the referenced property.

As we discussed in our pre-application meeting on February 2, 2024, the property owner completed an application to combine the two tax parcels, which was submitted February 14. We received the approval from the appraiser's office just last week on March 20, 2024 (copy attached.) We completed the rezoning application forms, plats and figures before receiving that approval, so the enclosed documents will reference the application to combine as "pending". Mr. Rountree advised that the official maps will likely not be revised for several weeks. The combined parcels will retain the number of the larger tract, 064-0-004-01-0.

The address in the official GIS mapping system for the larger tract is 2111 Powell Road, although the property is not actually on or near Powell Road. I assume this is a carryover from when the tax parcel contained other acreage that is on Powell Road. The larger parcel is "remnant" acreage from an even larger tract the owner held for decades and has previously conveyed portions of to several other buyers. We have enclosed an updated legal description for the combined tax parcels.

The smaller 1.87-acre parcel (former 079-0-001-00-0) is currently zoned A, while the larger 161.48 parcel (original 064-0-004-01-0) is zoned B-2 with specific conditions imposed during a prior rezoning request by a different potential developer who did not purchase the property after the rezoning. We are requesting the combined parcel be rezoned to B-2 for use as a data center, the same use for which the prior rezoning of the larger tract was approved.

This property lies on the north side of Gordon Highway, across from Fort Eisenhower and very close to

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the Columbia County line. A small portion of the development tract will actually be in Columbia County, but all of the substantive development will occur on the Richmond County acreage, as shown on the enclosed figure labeled "PRELIMINARY TEST FIT". There is an existing Georgia Power substation at the southeast corner of the subject parcel, and a 100' Georgia Power transmission line easement runs along the entire eastern boundary. The surrounding properties north of Gordon Highway are mostly recent or in-process residential developments. As was addressed in the prior rezoning, the topography of the subject property made it a poor candidate for residential development, however my client is willing to undertake the work necessary to make the site accessible and functional for their data center use.

The initial investment estimate is up to \$2 billion to prepare the site and build out the data center campus, and investment by tenants in computer equipment is expected to exceed those development costs. During construction, the proposed project is expected to provide at least 620 construction jobs. At full buildout, we expect the data center campus to create 160-220 jobs, this includes jobs from the data center operator and its tenants. This facility will provide high-tech jobs, including opportunities for those without a 4-year degree and military veterans.

This development will not significantly add or adversely affect traffic in the area. Data center facilities typically do not emit noise to affect neighbors, and water usage is low. Exterior lighting needs are generally only those needed to maintain worker safety in the parking areas and can easily be managed along with buffers to avoid any light intrusion concerns for neighboring properties. As we discussed in our earlier meeting, we have laid out the Preliminary Test Fit to ensure that we have a substantial vegetative buffer along all boundaries of the site in order to minimize the visual impact of our facilities and allow residents on neighboring properties to continue to enjoy the wooded nature of the area.

We appreciate your time and attention, and look forward to working with the City staff, Commissioners, and neighbors to assure this project is conducted in the best interest of all involved. As required under Georgia legal precedent, we note that constitutional rights of the landowners are implicated in this rezoning request, and the applicants reserve their rights to contest any denial as a violation of such constitutional rights. It is obviously our hope and expectation that won't be necessary.

If there are any questions, or if any additional documentation is needed, please just let me know.

Sincerely,

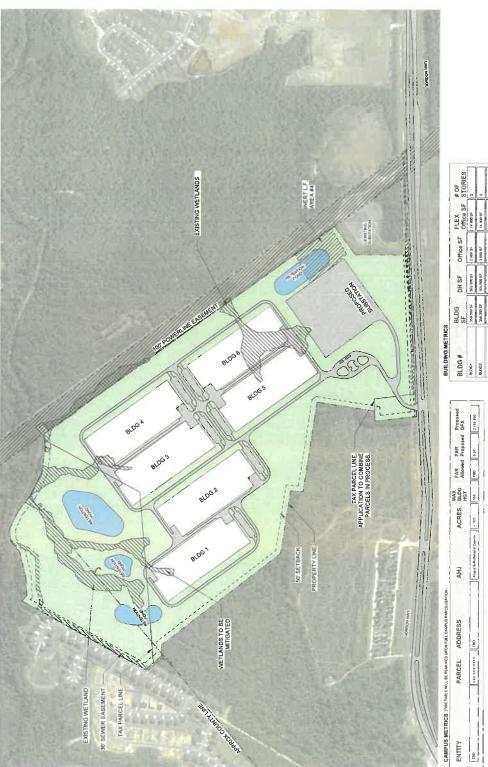
Darren Meadows

CC: David Jones, Trotter Jones

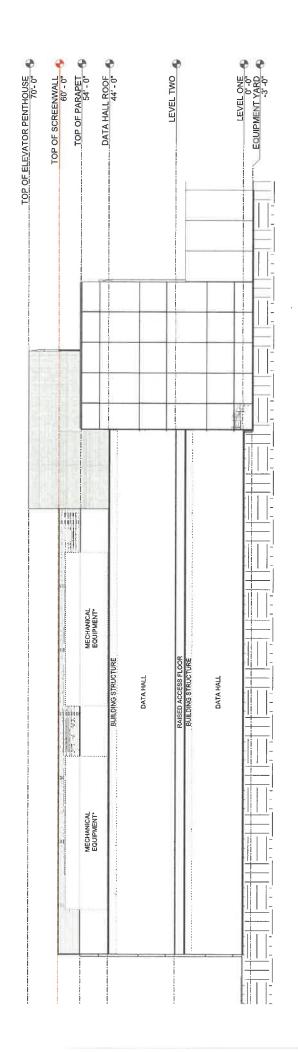
Att: 1. Check

- 2. Rezoning Application Forms
- 3. Tax Appraiser Parcel Combination Approval
- 4. Legal Description
- 5. Plat
- 6. Preliminary Test Fit
- 7. Photographs at current frontage

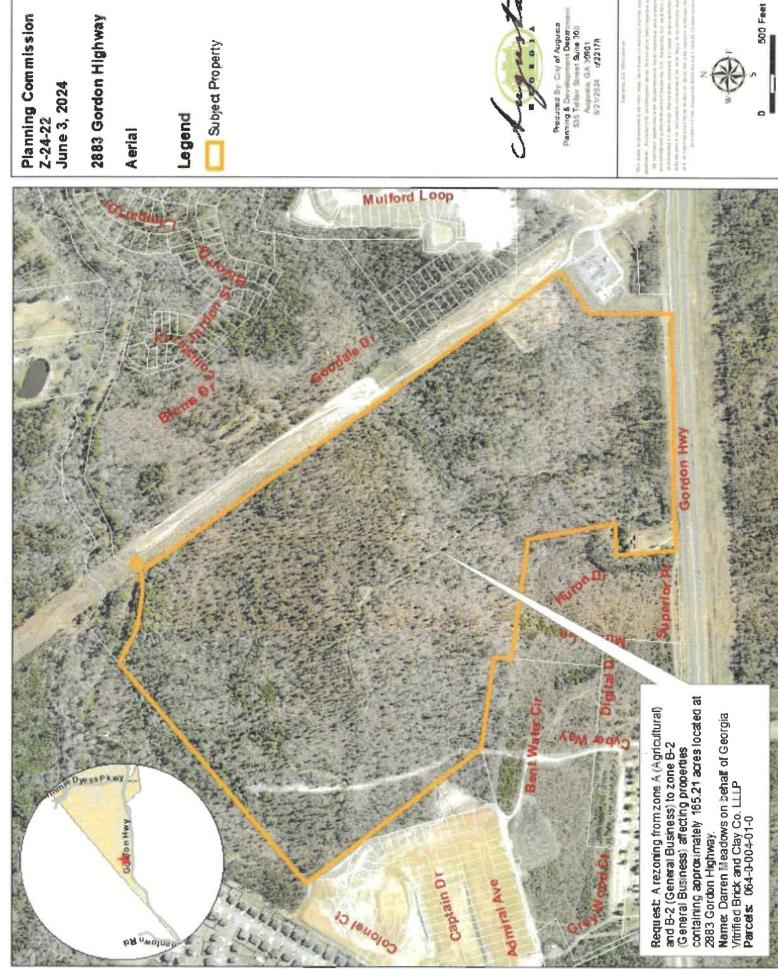
# PRELIMINARY TEST FIT - AUGUSTA



BLDG#
BLDG?
BLDG3
BLDG3
BLDG3
BLDG4
BLDG6

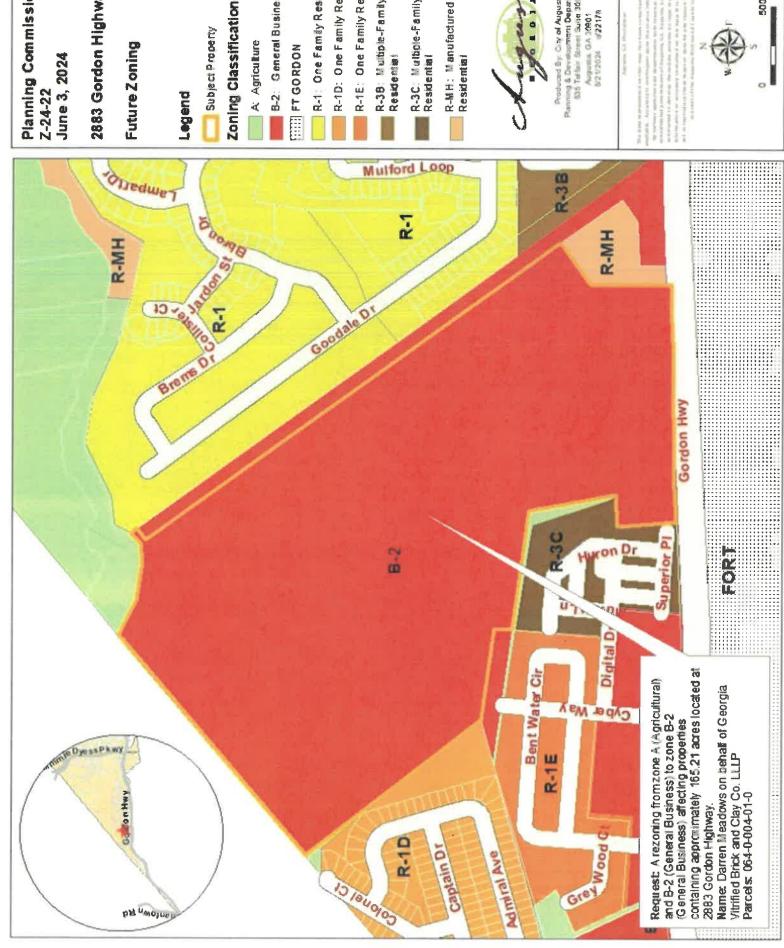


\* ALL ROOF TOP EQUIPMENT SCREENED BY PARAPET OR SCREENWALL



Subject Property





Planning Commission

2883 Gordon Highway

Subject a moenty

8-2: General Business

R-1: One Family Residential

R-1D: One Family Residential

R-1E: One Family Residential

R-38 Wultple-Family

R-3C. Wutbole-Family

R-MH: Manufactured Home

Produced By: City of Augusta Planning & Development Departs SSS Teffer Strom Suite 300 Augusta, GA 30801 821/2024 d/22178



500 Feet



