

TOWN OF BLUFFTON



STAFF REPORT Department of Growth Management

MEETING DATE:	June 28, 2023
PROJECT:	Big Blue Marble Academy: Landscaping, Lighting and Architecture Certificate of Appropriateness Highway Corridor Overlay
PROJECT MANAGER:	Katie Peterson, AICP Senior Planner

APPLICATION REQUEST: The Applicant, Samantha Kozlowski, Development Manager, on behalf of the parcel owners EIG14T BBMA SC BLUFFFTON, LLC, requests that the Planning Commission approve the following application:

1. **COFA-03-23-017836.** A Certificate of Appropriateness to permit the landscape, lighting and architecture for Big Blue Marble Academy, an 11,293 SF one-story childcare facility including an outdoor child play area and associated parking, located at the intersection of Mill Creek Boulevard and Okatie Highway (SC HWY 170) off Slater Street in the Jones Estate PUD, within the Cypress Ridge Master Plan.

INTRODUCTION: The conceptual plan for the Jones Estate PUD was approved by Bluffton Town Council in June 21, 2000. As approved, the plan organized the 4,400-acre Jones tract into planning areas to provide for the regulation and arrangement of land uses as well as the allotment of densities. The subject parcel is located within the Cypress Ridge Master Plan planning area, which was approved by Town Council on February 23, 2005, and last revised in June 2020.



The Final Development Plan (DP-07-22-016969) was heard at the May 10, 2023 meeting of the Development Review Committee where comments were provided to the Applicant (Attachment 5). Town Staff is currently working with the Applicant to provide comments on resubmitted materials and ensure all comments have been addressed.

The Applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness – Highway Corridor Overlay application which is subject to review by the Planning Commission providing authority over the architectural, landscaping, and lighting design only.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS: As granted by the powers and duties set forth in Section 2.2.6.C.6. of the Unified Development Ordinance, the Planning Commission has the authority to take the following actions with respect to this application:

1. Approve the application as submitted by the Applicant;
2. Approve the application with conditions; or
3. Deny the application as submitted by the Applicant.

REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: Town Staff and the Planning Commission are required to consider the criteria set forth in Section 3.17.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance in assessing an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness- HCO. These criteria are provided below followed by a Staff Finding based upon review of the application submittals to date.

1. Section 3.17.3.A. The proposed development must be in conformance with applicable landscaping, lighting, and architectural provisions provided in Article 5, Design Standards.
 - a) *Finding.* The project is in the Jones Tract PUD and is part of the Cypress Ridge Master Plan. There are specific design standards established by the PUD via the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance and the Town of Bluffton Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCO) within of the 2000 Town of Beaufort Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance (ZDSO) which are attached to the PUD. In addition to these standards, as a result of the adoption the Town of Bluffton's Stormwater Design Manual (SWDM) in September of 2021, the landscaping design criteria of Article 5 of the current Unified Development Ordinance are applicable to review of this application.
2. Section 3.17.3.B. The proposed development shall be in conformance with any approved Development Agreement, PUD Concept Plan, PUD Master Plan, Subdivision Plan, or any other agreements or plans that are applicable.

The property is located in the Jones Tract PUD and is identified on the Cypress Ridge Master Plan as commercial land use. As a result, the

property is subject to the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance and the Town of Bluffton Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance and Design Guidelines contain architectural, landscaping, and lighting design standards for properties located in the Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCOD).

A. JONES ESTATE PUD/PUD CONCEPT PLAN

The Jones Estate PUD refers to the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance (ZDSO) and The Town of Bluffton Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCOD) for development standards.

Landscaping

- 1) Finding – Site Design Standards. Section 4.16.3.A. requires the site of service yards, utility meters, above-ground tanks, and other such equipment be landscaped so that such facilities are not visible from the highway and shall not be located less than ten (10') feet from the side and rear property lines. While landscaping is shown around the transformer near the southern corner of the building, shrubs are shown as 30 inches in height, which will not screen a standard transformer. Due to the location, it will be highly visible from Highway 170 and the shrubs must be increased in height at this location to screen the transformer.
- 2) Finding – Parking Lot Requirements. Section 4.24.2.2.E. of the ZDSO requires that each landscape peninsula contain one (1) broad-leafed overstory tree with a minimum size of two and one half (2 ½) caliper inches at DBH and a minimum height of ten (10) feet. The Landscape Plan indicates Crepe Myrtles, which are understory trees, are proposed in the landscape peninsulas. The Landscape Plan must be revised to include a broad-leaf tree in each peninsula.
- 3) Finding – Parking and Loading Area Landscaping. Per Section 5.3.7.C. of the UDO, all parking and loading areas that are visible from the public right-of way shall be buffered to minimize the visual impact of parked vehicles by landscaped areas that include a mixture of trees and shrubs. Additional screening must be provided in the area between the Parking Lot and Slater Street, as the screening provided does not meet the screening requirements as indicated in DRC Review.

Architecture

- 1) Finding – Standards and Guidelines. Section 4.16.2.A. states that heating, ventilating and air conditioning equipment, duct work, air compressor, and other fixed operating machinery shall be either screened from view or located so that such items are not visible from

the highway. All roof mechanicals are shown on the front elevation, facing Highway 170, and must be revised.

- 2) Finding – Site Design Standards. Section 4.16.3.A. requires the site of service yards, utility meters, above-ground tanks, and other such equipment shall be landscaped so that such facilities are not visible from the highway and shall not be located less than ten (10') feet from the side and rear property lines. The electric meter is shown on front elevation, facing Highway 170 and must be revised or be fully screened with an architectural feature.
- 3) Finding – Inappropriate Exterior Materials and Architectural Elements. Section 4.24.3.A.3. of the ZDSO notes that cinder block and unfaced concrete block are considered incompatible and inappropriate for primary and accessory structures. The dumpster enclosure is identified as Split Face CMU but does not identify a finish material. The dumpster enclosure must be revised to a permitted material. Further, the Applicant should consider revising the door operation on the dumpster enclosure to minimize conflict with pedestrians entering from the building.
- 4) Finding – Information on the proposed metal fence has not been provided with the COFA materials. Additional information is required to ensure the proposed metal fence meets the material requirements. Further, there is a conflict with the fence at the southeast corner of the building. When the door is open, the sidewalk will become impassable. The fence location must be revised to be passable while the door is open.
- 5) Finding – Per Section 4.23.3.A. of the ZDSO, the Planning Commission, as the Corridor Review Board, shall review elements of design, including form, mass, scale, proportion, height, texture, color, architectural style, individual architectural elements, or orientation or specific location upon the site. The Front Elevation, facing Highway 170, appears unbalanced. The dormers proposed do not align with the elements beneath them, and while there is articulation, the highway fronting side of the building is less composed than the rear (facing the parking area). The Front elevation should be reconsidered to have dormers align with elements beneath them and ensure the Front (Highway 170 facing side) is appropriately designed.

Lighting

- 1) Finding – Lighting. Section 4.23.3.C.2.a.2. of the ZDSO allows for incandescent, fluorescent, metal halide, mercury, vapor or color corrected high-pressure sodium lights. As LEDs are not permitted by the ordinance, the Planning Commission must determine the appropriateness of the use of LEDs as a substitute lighting type for

those listed in the Ordinance. Staff finds they are an appropriate substitution.

- 2) Finding – Lighting. Section 4.23.3.C.2.a.2.1. of the ZDSO requires light fixtures to be a cutoff luminaire whose source is completely concealed with opaque housing and shall not be visible from any street. This provision includes lights on mounted poles as well as architectural display and decorative lighting visible from the corridor. While the light specs include options for cutoff, it is not indicated which options have been selected and additional information is required to ensure all fixtures will be cutoff luminaires.
- 3) Finding – Lighting. Light poles have been proposed in each of the Landscape Islands. The Landscape Islands require large canopy overstory trees in each. As this creates a conflict with the proposed light positions, the light poles must be relocated, and an updated Photometric exhibit provided to ensure it remains in compliance with the revised pole locations.

B. PUD MASTER PLAN

The Cypress Ridge Master Plan document refers to the Jones Estate PUD for design standards.

- 1) *Finding. Cypress Ridge Master Plan.* As there are no design guidelines established in the Cypress Ridge Master Plan for the site, no additional design review was performed.

C. DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Final Development Plan was heard at the DRC meeting. Revised documents have been submitted; however, comments have not yet been provided to the Applicant.

- 1) *Finding. Final Development Plan.* This project requires development plan approval from the Town of Bluffton. The Applicant has submitted the project for review, and it was presented before the Development Review Committee on May 10, 2023. Staff is working with the Applicant to finalize comments and ensure all conditions have been met. Once complete, a Final Development Plan will be approved.

D. DECLARATION OF COVENANTS, CONDITIONS, AND RESTRICTIONS

The Declaration of Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions for the Cypress Ridge Master Plan.

- 1) *Finding. Declaration of Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions for Cypress Ridge.* The applicant shall confirm conformance with the covenants and restriction which are recorded with the Cypress Ridge Master Plan with an approval from the Declarant.

3. Section 3.17.3.C. The application must comply with applicable requirements in the Application Manual.

- a. *Finding.* The application has been reviewed by Town Staff and has been determined to be complete and that it meets all requirements of the Applications Manual. It should be noted that any proposed signage is reviewed through a Sign Permit process separate from this review. Any proposed signage will need to submit Sign Permits for review and approval prior to installation.

TOWN STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Town Staff finds that with the conditions noted below, the requirements of Section 3.17.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance will be met and recommends that the Planning Commission approve the application with the following conditions:

1. Landscape.

- a. Per Section 4.24.2.2.E. of the ZDSO, Landscape Plan must be revised to include a broad-leaf tree in each peninsula.
- b. Per Section 4.16.3.A of the ZDSO, the shrubs screening the Transformer at the southern corner of the building must be increased in height to fully screen it from view of Highway 170.
- c. Per Section 5.3.7.C. of the UDO, additional landscape screening must be added to the area between the parking lot and Slater Street.

2. Architecture

- a. Per Section 4.16.2.A. all roof mechanicals are shown on the front elevation, facing Highway 170, and must be revised.
- b. Per Section 4.16.3.A. the electric meter is shown on front elevation, facing Highway 170 and must be revised or be fully screened with an architectural feature.
- c. Per Section 4.24.3.A.3. of the ZDSO the dumpster enclosure must be revised from unfinished Split Face CMU to a permitted material.
- d. The Applicant should consider revising the door operation on the dumpster enclosure to minimize conflict with pedestrians entering from the building.
- e. Information on the proposed metal fence must be provided for review as not enough information has been to complete the review.
- f. The fence location at the southeast corner of the building must be revised to remain passable when the door is open.
- g. Per Section 4.23.3.A., the dormers should be relocated to be centered over the elements beneath them.
- h. Per Section 4.23.3.A., the Front (Highway 170 facing) elevation should be reconsidered to better address the street.

3. Lighting

- a. Per Section 4.23.3.C.2.a.2. of the ZDSO, the Planning Commission must determine the appropriateness of the use of LEDs as a substitute lighting type for those listed in the Ordinance.
 - b. Per Section 4.23.3.C.2.a.2.1. of the ZDSO, additional information is required to ensure all fixtures will be cutoff luminaires.
 - c. Light poles need to be relocated to eliminate conflict with required Landscape Island overstory trees.
 - d. Photometric exhibit must be revised to ensure it remains in compliance with the revised pole locations.
4. Other
- a. All comments must be addressed, and a Final Development Plan must be approved prior to issuance of the Certificate of Appropriateness – HCO.
 - b. Per the Applications Manual, a letter of approval from the Cypress Ridge Declarant for the Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions must be provided.
 - c. Signage Permits must be submitted to the Town of Bluffton for review and approval for the signage proposed at each site in the proposed development.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Application and Narrative
2. Site Plan, Elevations and Materials
3. Landscape Plans
4. Lighting Plan and Details
5. DRC Comments 5.10.23