

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management



MEETING DATE:	May 13, 2025
PROJECT:	Consideration of Approval of an Initial Master Plan Request by University Investments, LLC, for the Parkway Corners Master Plan Located Southwest of the Intersection of Buckwalter Parkway and Bluffton Parkway within the Buckwalter Planned Unit Development.
PROJECT MANAGER:	Kevin Icard, AICP Director of Growth Management Department of Growth Management

REQUEST: A request for consideration of an Initial Master Plan application (MP-01-25-019524) for Parkway Corners within the Buckwalter Planned Unit Development.

INTRODUCTION: The Applicant and Property Owner, University Investments, LLC, is requesting approval for an Initial Master Plan for Parkway Corners. The northern portion of the project site is identified as a commercial land use area within the Buckwalter Commons Tract. The southern portion of the project site falls within the recently created Grande Oaks Commons Land Use Tract, where the allowed uses are outlined in the Use Table attached to the Thirteenth Amendment to the Buckwalter PUD Development Agreement (Attachment 3).

BACKGROUND: The proposed Initial Master Plan (IMP) consists of 114.55 acres that will include 21.7 acres upland acres of commercial/mixed use development and 47.0 upland acres of medical/commercial development (Attachment 4). The IMP identifies seven (7) development areas labeled as Areas A through G, access points, an east-west spine road, and wetland and preservation areas. In Development Area G of the IMP, a conceptual site plan is provided and labeled as the Novant Site. This is the only area of the proposed IMP that provides conceptual site plan specific details, such as building location, parking, landscaping, and vehicular interconnectivity.

The Applicant's complete submittal booklet provides a master plan narrative and master plan exhibits including existing conditions, tree survey, initial master plan, master utility plans for sewer, water, and drainage, wetlands, open space, and updated will-serve letters from public agencies (Attachment 4). The Applicant has also provided a traffic impact analysis (TIA) and submitted it to Beaufort County for review and comment (Attachment 5). As of the date of posting, Beaufort County has not yet provided comments to the Applicant or Town Staff.

Comments on the Initial Master Plan application were reviewed at the February 12, 2025, meeting of the Development Review Committee. A Comments Response Letter was provided included in the February 26, 2025, resubmittal (Attachment 6).

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION: The Planning Commission recommended the following conditional approval at their March 26, 2025 meeting to the Town Council for the Parkway Corners Initial Master Plan subject to the following conditions. After each item of conditional approval, Staff has provided a response.

1. Provide updated will-serve letters as a part of the Initial Master Plan application.

Staff Response: Updated will-serve letters have been provided.

2. Provide an updated narrative that addresses the requirements of Buckwalter Concept Master Plan Section 5.8.8 and is consistent with the potential uses for the areas as well as the proposed internal site planning standards, such as typical lot sizes and widths, setbacks and buffers, aimed at addressing potential incompatibility between adjacent land uses and activities.

Staff Response: Section III.B. Site Design and Development Standards of the Narrative has been updated to reflect this request.

3. Ensure the Initial Master Plan is in compliance with the Buckwalter Concept Master Plan Section 2.D.11 requirement for a 10% open space exclusive of any freshwater or saltwater wetlands.

Staff Response: Section 2.G Open Space Plan (Exhibit G in Attachment 4) has been updated to reflect this request.

REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: Town Council is required to consider the criteria set forth in Section 3.9.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance in assessing an application for a Master Plan. These criteria are provided below followed by a Staff Finding(s).

1. **Section 3.9.3.B. Promotion of and consistency with the land use goals, environmental objectives and overall intent of the policies within the Comprehensive Plan.**

Finding. The application is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Land Use Element within the Comprehensive Plan provides a vision that suggests a balance of land uses to ensure a high quality of life, business opportunity, environmentally protected areas, and proper placement of commercial uses. The Parkway Corners Initial Master Plan proposes a mix of commercial, mixed-use and medical uses that will stimulate economic growth and contribute to the Town's goal of being a sustainable community with a diversified tax base to support Town facilities and services.

2. **Section 3.9.3.C. Consistency with the intent of the Planned Unit Development Zoning District as prescribed in this Ordinance.**

Finding. The application is consistent with the Town of Bluffton Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance that applies to the Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan.

The PUD district is intended to achieve the objectives of the Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan and to allow flexibility in development that could not otherwise be achieved through strict application of this Ordinance and that will result in improved design, character and quality of walkable mixed-use developments and preserve natural and scenic features of open spaces. The Master Plan Narrative proposes a mixed-use development that achieves the PUD District objectives through architectural guidelines, covenants and restrictions, that will meet or exceed the Town of Bluffton Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance (DSO) approved with the Buckwalter PUD.

3. Section 3.9.3.D. As applicable, consistency with the provisions of the associated Development Agreement and/or PUD Concept Plan.

Finding. The application is not consistent with the provisions of the Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan.

The proposed Initial Master Plan (Attachments 4) are not consistent with the Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan (Attachment 3). The Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan identifies a future realignment of the portion of the Bluffton Parkway west of Buckwalter Parkway that is not reflected on the Initial Master Plan.

4. Section 3.9.3.E. Compatibility of proposed land uses, densities, traffic circulation and design with adjacent land uses and environmental features, as well as the character of the surrounding area.

Finding. The Initial Master Plan lacks the detail required to assess the compatibility of proposed land uses, densities, traffic circulation and design with adjacent land uses and environmental features.

The Initial Master Plan identifies development areas, access points, an east-west spine road, and wetland and preservation areas. Development densities, traffic circulation and design are not provided in a level of detail sufficient to assess compatibility with adjacent land uses.

5. Section 3.9.3.F. Ability to be served by adequate public services, including, but not limited to, water, sanitary sewer, roads, police, fire, and school services. For developments that have the potential for significant impact on infrastructure and services the applicant shall be required to provide an analysis and mitigation of the impact on transportation, utilities, and community services.

Finding. The Applicant has provided updated will-serve letters from outside agencies.

6. Section 3.9.3.G. Demonstration of innovative site planning techniques that improve upon the standards in other allowable Town of Bluffton zoning districts with the purpose of enhancing the Town of Bluffton's health, safety and welfare.

Finding. Additional information will be needed. The Master Plan Narrative describes innovative site planning techniques that enhance the Town's health, safety, and welfare. However, the Applicant's Narrative will need to be updated.

The Master Plan Narrative proposes architectural guidelines, covenants and restrictions, that will meet or exceed the Town of Bluffton Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance (DSO) approved with the Buckwalter PUD. The narrative also states that Site Design and Development Standards set forth in the Buckwalter PUD will be adhered to, and building setbacks and heights will be reviewed by the applicant's Architectural Review Board and conform to life safety regulations and will further conform to the standards set forth in the Concept Plan and Development Agreement.

There are additional items in the Narrative that will need to be updated prior to approval. The Narrative needs to be updated to reflect that the fifty-foot (50') PUD Perimeter buffer applies to all adjacent properties, not just Grande Oaks PUD & that the maximum building height allowed is fifty (50') feet.

7. Section 3.9.3.H. Ability of the site to sufficiently accommodate the densities and land use intensities of the proposed development.

Finding. The property can sufficiently accommodate the proposed development.

8. Section 3.9.3.I. Conformance with adopted or accepted plans, policies, and practices of the Town of Bluffton.

Finding. The requested initial master plan is in conformance with adopted or accepted plans, policies, and practices of the Town other than the PUD Concept Plan as listed above in review criteria No. 3.

TOWN STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Town Staff finds that the requirements of Section 3.9.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance can be met with the following conditions and recommends that Town Council consider these items as part of their approval.

1. All Plan Exhibits, including the Initial Master Plan and Concept Plan, shall be updated to identify the future realignment of the Bluffton Parkway west of Buckwalter Parkway as shown on the Buckwalter PUD Concept Master Plan.
 - a. *Comment:* It should be noted that Town Staff recommended that this item be part of the Planning Commission's recommendation to Town Council.
2. At time of development permit applications, any proposed development that substantially deviates from the approved Initial Master Plan or Conceptual Plan, as determined by the UDO Administrator, may warrant a minor or major amendment to the Master Plan document.

3. Update the Narrative to reflect that the fifty-foot (50') PUD Perimeter buffer applies to all adjacent properties, not just Grande Oaks PUD.
 - a. *Comment:* The 1.5-acre property (R600 029 000 2409 0000) located at the corner of Lake Point Drive and Buckwalter Parkway is not part of the Grande Oak PUD. This statement is located on page 4 of the narrative (Section III.B).
4. Update the Narrative to reflect that the maximum height allowed in the Buckwalter Planned Unit Development is fifty (50') feet.
5. The final version of the Traffic Impact Analysis "TIA" will be updated, completed and either accepted or conditionally accepted by Beaufort County prior to final Initial Master Plan approval, including all recommended improvements.
 - a. *Comment:* Town Staff has concerns that the TIA does not accurately reflect the amount of development associated with Development Area "G". The TIA assumes that the amount of traffic generated is based on a 100 bed hospital. Based on updated information, the hospital is contemplating a Phase 1 (50 Bed hospital) and an additional 50 bed expansion in the future, a level 3 trauma care and possible maternity ward. The TIA does not accurately reflect these additional services which may increase the amount of traffic.
6. At time of Development Plan submittal for the Development Area "G" provide a secondary access point connecting to either the Buckwalter or Bluffton Parkway.
 - a. *Comment:* Staff's concern is that that while there are two access points onto Lake Point Drive, that is the only access point to Development Area "G". Lake Point Drive does not connect to any other arterial road.
7. Prior to final Master Plan approval, create a phasing plan related to traffic improvements with associated phases of development.

TOWN COUNCIL ACTIONS: Town Council has the authority to take the following actions with respect to the recommendation of the application to
Town Council:

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.

NEXT STEPS:

Master Plan Procedure	Step Completed	Date Completed
Step 1. Pre-Application Meeting	✓	December 5, 2024
Step 2. Application Check-In Meeting	✓	January 6, 2025
Step 3. Review by DRC	✓	February 12, 2025
Step 4. Planning Commission Recommendation	✓	March 26, 2025
Step 5. Town Council Consideration for Approval of Majority Vote	✓	May 10, 2025

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Application
2. Location Map
3. Buckwalter PUD Concept Master Plan
4. Proposed Initial Master Plan
5. Traffic Impact Analysis (September 2024)
6. DRC Comments and Applicant's Response to Comments