

PLANNING COMMISSION



STAFF REPORT

Growth Management Department

MEETING DATE:	March 26, 2025
PROJECT:	<p>ANNX-02-25-019605 by the Applicant and Property Owner, Beaufort County School District. A request for annexation of Certain Real Property Contiguous to the Town of Bluffton’s Corporate Boundaries Consisting of a Total of 24.12 Acres, More or Less, Located at 1105 Bluffton Parkway and Bearing Beaufort County Tax Map Nos. R600 029 000 011A 0000, R600 029 000 1736 0000 and R600 029 000 0034 0000 into the Town of Bluffton corporate limits – Public Workshop</p> <p>ZONE-02-25-019606 by the Applicant and Property Owner, Beaufort County School District. A request for Zoning Map Amendment for approximately 77.93 Acres, More or Less, located at 1105 Bluffton Parkway & the 3050 River Ridge Drive to zone the annexing parcels and to rezone the existing school campus to the Preserve (PR) District – Public Workshop</p>
PROJECT MANAGER:	Kevin P. Icard, AICP Director of Growth Management

REQUEST: Town Staff requests that Planning Commission review and provide direction on Annexation and Zoning Map Amendment applications to annex certain properties containing 24.12 Acres (Annexing and Zoning) and 53.81 Acres (Rezoning) for a total of 77.93 Acres, More or Less, Located at 1105 Bluffton Parkway, and 3050 River Ridge Drive, Bearing Beaufort County Tax Map Nos. R600-029-000-011A-0000, R600 029 000 1736 0000 and R600-029-000-0034-0000 (Annexing and Zoning) and R610 029 000 0012 0000 and R610 029 000 0084 0000 (Rezoning) (the “Properties”); and establish zoning as Preserve (PR) as described in the Unified Development Ordinance (“UDO”).

Per Section 3.2.2.F. of the UDO, Planning Commission Workshops are intended to be the first official presentation of a proposed project to provide the public with information and a forum to initially review the application and identify applicable application review criteria. Meetings are encouraged as opportunities for informal, non-binding communication between the Applicant and neighboring property owners who may be affected by the application.

INTRODUCTION: On February 24, 2025, and as amended on March 19, 2025, in accordance with Section 5-3-150 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina and the *Town of Bluffton Annexation Policy and Procedure Manual* (“Annexation Manual”), the property owner, Beaufort County School District,

submitted a 100% Annexation Petition Application for three parcels totaling 24.12 acres located 1105 Bluffton Parkway (“Property”) into the Town of Bluffton’s municipal boundary (Attachment 1 & 4).

Pursuant to the Annexation Manual, the Applicant initially submitted a concurrent Zoning Map Amendment application requesting the Properties to be zoned Residential General as regulated by the Unified Development Ordinance.

Per the Annexation Manual, the initial step in the public review process was an initial briefing, or “intent to annex” with Town Council for general discussion of the request and its associated applications such as the appropriate zoning classification and possible negotiation items. Town Council unanimously accepted this annexation at their March 11, 2025, meeting; however, they directed staff to work with the Applicant to determine how the properties could be zoned without entitling any Residential rights.

Staff determined that with a text amendment to the UDO to allow Schools by-right in the Preserve Zoning District, that the properties could move forward with a school and all ancillary uses associated with a school on the property while not allowing for the ability to have residential entitlements.

The School District has updated their Zoning Map Amendment Application to include the two parcels that currently make up the River Ridge Academy campus requesting that all Properties are zoned Preserve (PR) (Attachments 2-5).

PLANNING COMMISSION WORKSHOP: As required by the Unified Development Ordinance, Applications Manual, and Annexation Policy & Procedures Manual, the Planning Commission must hold a Workshop to review the requests prior to holding a public hearing. Such workshops are intended to be the first official presentation of a proposed Annexation and Zoning Map Amendment and to provide the public with information and a forum to initially review the application.

Following the Planning Commission Workshop, the Applications will return to the Planning Commission for a public hearing and recommendation to Town Council. Town Council will review the application twice, the second of which is a public hearing. If approved, the Applicant will then submit for approval of a Public Project formally approving the site development. This Public Project application will be reviewed and approved administratively through the Development Review Committee.

BACKGROUND: The Properties that are part of the annexation request contains approximately 24.12 acres located within Unincorporated Beaufort County as shown on the Vicinity Map in the Application (Attachment 1). The Property contains a single-family house but is otherwise vacant. There is an approximately 4.3 acre pond on the property that was a former borrow pit.

The Property is currently zoned T2-Rural (T2R) which is intended to preserve the rural character of Beaufort County. This Zone applies to areas that consist of sparsely settled lands in an open or

cultivated state. It may include large lot residential, farms where animals are raised or crops are grown, parks, woodland, grasslands, trails, and open space areas. The T2 Rural Zone implements the Comprehensive Plan goals of preserving the rural character of portions of Beaufort County.

Beaufort County Current Zoning District. Property is currently zoned as T2 Rural (T2R), allows a very limited mix of residential and commercial uses such as:

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| 1. Single Family Residential (0.34 DU/Acre) | 12. Mining & Resource Extraction |
| 2. Family Compound | 13. Gasoline Service Stations |
| 3. Group Home | 14. Civic |
| 4. Home Business | 15. Church |
| 5. Cottage Industry | 16. Agriculture |
| 6. General Retail 3,500 SF or Less | 17. Recreation |
| 7. Gas Station/Fuel Sales | 18. Ecotourism |
| 8. Animal Services: Kennel | 19. Safety |
| 9. Day Care: Family Home (up to 8 clients) | 20. Public Assembly |
| 10. Lodging: Short-Term Housing Rental (STHR) | 21. Infrastructure |
| 11. Lodging: Inn (up to 24 rooms) | 22. Transportation |
| | 23. Communications |

Under current Beaufort County zoning, a school is not an allowed use.

The Applicant has requested the Town’s Preserve (PR) Zoning District as part of the concurrent Zoning Map Amendment which allows a very limited development and mainly civic type uses such as:

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| 1. Agricultural Use and Structures | 5. Parks |
| 2. Campgrounds and RV Parks | 6. Museum |
| 3. Recreation Facility | 7. Utilities |
| 4. Government Building | |

While the use of a school is not currently permitted in the Preserve Zoning District, the Town’s UDO Administrator has initiated a UDO Text Amendment to include Schools as a use by-right. The Town of Bluffton defines a school as the following.

An education facility that provides regular daily classroom, lab or other similar learning environments for students, including activities, facilities and grounds accessory to education, including pre-, primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education institutions. Schools are broken into different scales of use based on context and the type of buildings permitted in the specific zoning district.

The immediately adjacent properties vary as to jurisdiction and zoning as follows:

Direction	Jurisdiction	Zoning District	Current Use
North	Town of Bluffton	Residential General (UDO)	BCSD – River Ridge Academy K-8 School – 3050 River Ridge Drive
South	Town of Bluffton	Buckwalter Planned Unit Development	Beaufort County – Bluffton Parkway - Road Right-of-Way
	Town of Bluffton	Buckwalter Planned Unit Development	Hampton Lake Community Association Inc. – No Address – Common Property
	Town of Bluffton	Buckwalter Planned Unit Development	Gohl Holdings LLC – No Address – Undeveloped
East	Beaufort County	T2 – Rural	Zakki LLC – 1125 Bluffton Parkway - Vacant
West	Beaufort County	T2 - Rural	Antoine Iskander– 51 Bufflehead Lane – Single Family Residence
	Beaufort County	T2 - Rural	Antonio Mercado – 65-69 Bufflehead Lane – Single Family Residences
	Beaufort County	T2 – Rural	Carolyn Theodore – 32-40 Hubbard Lane - Undeveloped
	Town of Bluffton	Residential General (UDO)	River Ridge Road – 3050 River Ridge Drive – Right-of-Way

The Applicant proposes (based on feedback provided by Town Council during the Intent to Annex presentation) that the property is zoned Preserve and that the adjacent River Ridge Academy parcels owned by Beaufort County School District are also rezoned to the Preserve Zoning District. The Property will serve as an expansion of the existing River Ridge Academy campus for education land use, athletic fields and/or the construction of an early childhood school. Annexation of the three parcels and rezoning of all parcels, including the existing River Ridge Academy campus parcels, to Preserve will permit the expansion of the school campus to occur. This rezoning will meet the Town Council intent of not entitling residential density on the property.

The Applicant does not have a specific plan for the Property but notes that current preliminary planning for this expanded area contemplates that the early childhood center will be constructed on either:

- (1) the Property to be annexed into the Town of Bluffton; or
- (2) the River Ridge campus athletic field owned by Beaufort County School District and currently within the Town of Bluffton. If the early childhood center is constructed on the existing athletic field, the athletic field will be relocated to the Property being annexed into

the Town of Bluffton. The Property proposed for annexation will be a part of the River Ridge campus in some capacity.

Lastly, all future development of the Property would be required to be reviewed through the applicable Town of Bluffton planning processes including a Development Plan, Stormwater review and Building Permits.

SCHEDULE: The proposed schedule for the applications is provided as Attachment 3.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Application Submittal
 - a. Annexation Application
 - b. Petition for Annexation
 - c. Vesting Deed
 - d. Plat Book 30 Page 36
 - e. Annexation Location Map
 - f. Annexation Narrative
 - g. Parcels to be Annexed
 - h. Existing River Ridge Academy
 - i. Zakki, LLC Property to the East
 - j. Parcel 8C, LLC Property and BCSD property to the South
 - k. Zoning and Parcel History Letter from Beaufort County
 - l. Zoning Map Amendment Application
2. Addendum to Annexation Narrative
3. Executed River Ridge Amended Petition for Annexation
4. Amended Annexation Application
5. Amended Zoning Map Amendment Application
6. Draft Schedule