

PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management



MEETING DATE:	March 26, 2025
PROJECT:	Consideration of approval of an Initial Master Plan for seven contiguous parcels located Southwest of the intersection of Buckwalter Parkway and Bluffton Parkway within the Buckwalter Planned Unit Development consisting 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.
PROJECT MANAGER:	Dan Frazier, AICP Planning Manager Department of Growth Management

REQUEST: A request for approval of an Initial Master Plan application for Parkway Corners within the Buckwalter Planned Unit Development (Attachments 1 and 2).

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).

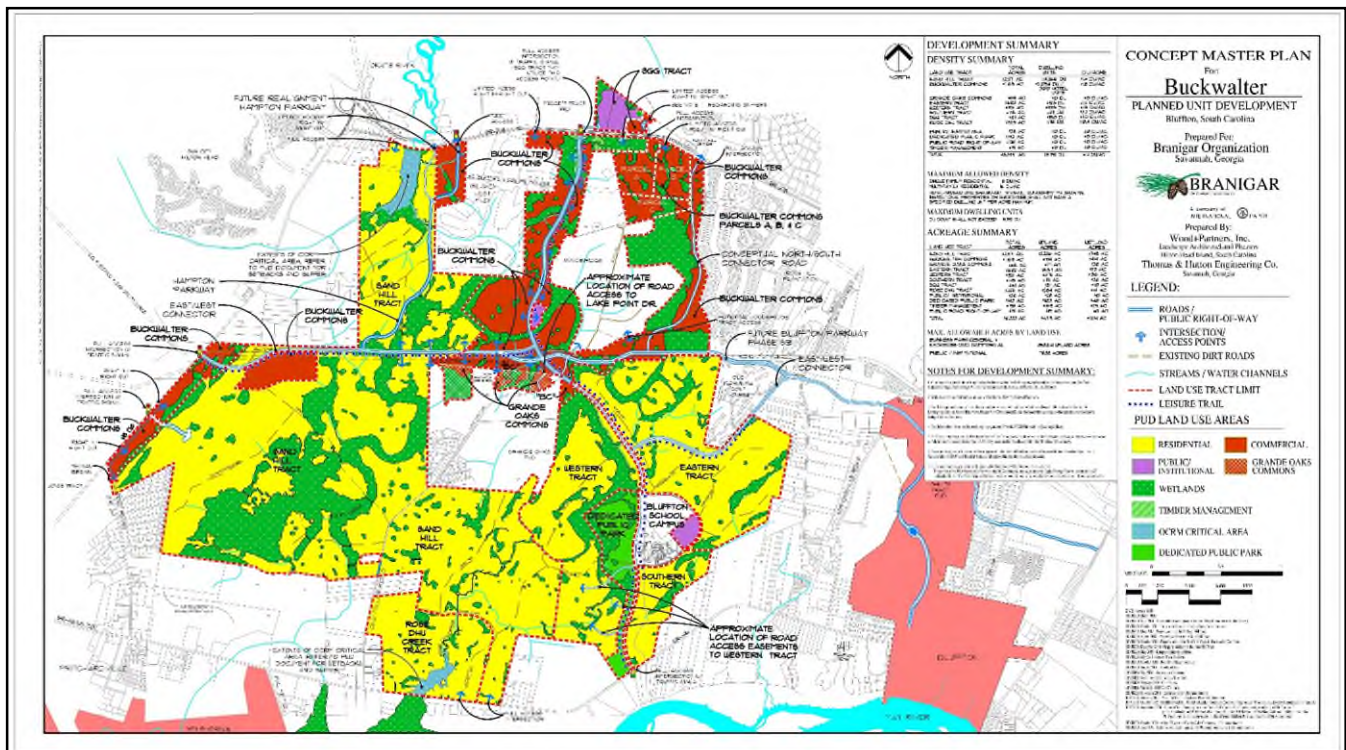
BACKGROUND: The proposed Initial Master Plan (IMP) consists of 114.55 acres that will include 21.7 acres upland acres of commercial/mixed use development and 47.0 upland acres of medical/commercial development (Attachment 4). The IMP identifies seven (7) development areas labeled as Areas A through G, 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 also provides a Conceptual Plan identifying a more detailed layout for the entire IMP area (Attachment 5). It should be noted that Master Plan minimum requirements and modifications (amendments) are listed in the Buckwalter PUD Development Agreement Attachment 1, Sections 5.8.8. and 5.8.9. While the IMP lacks some of the minimum requirements, including project area-wide lot sizes, building and parking locations, setbacks, buffers, and road locations and widths, these details are provided in sufficient detail in the Conceptual Plan provided in the submittal. The site layout shown on the proposed Conceptual Plan is recognized to be conceptual in nature, and subject to review and approval in accordance with the Buckwalter PUD Development Agreement and all subsequent amendments, and the Town of Bluffton

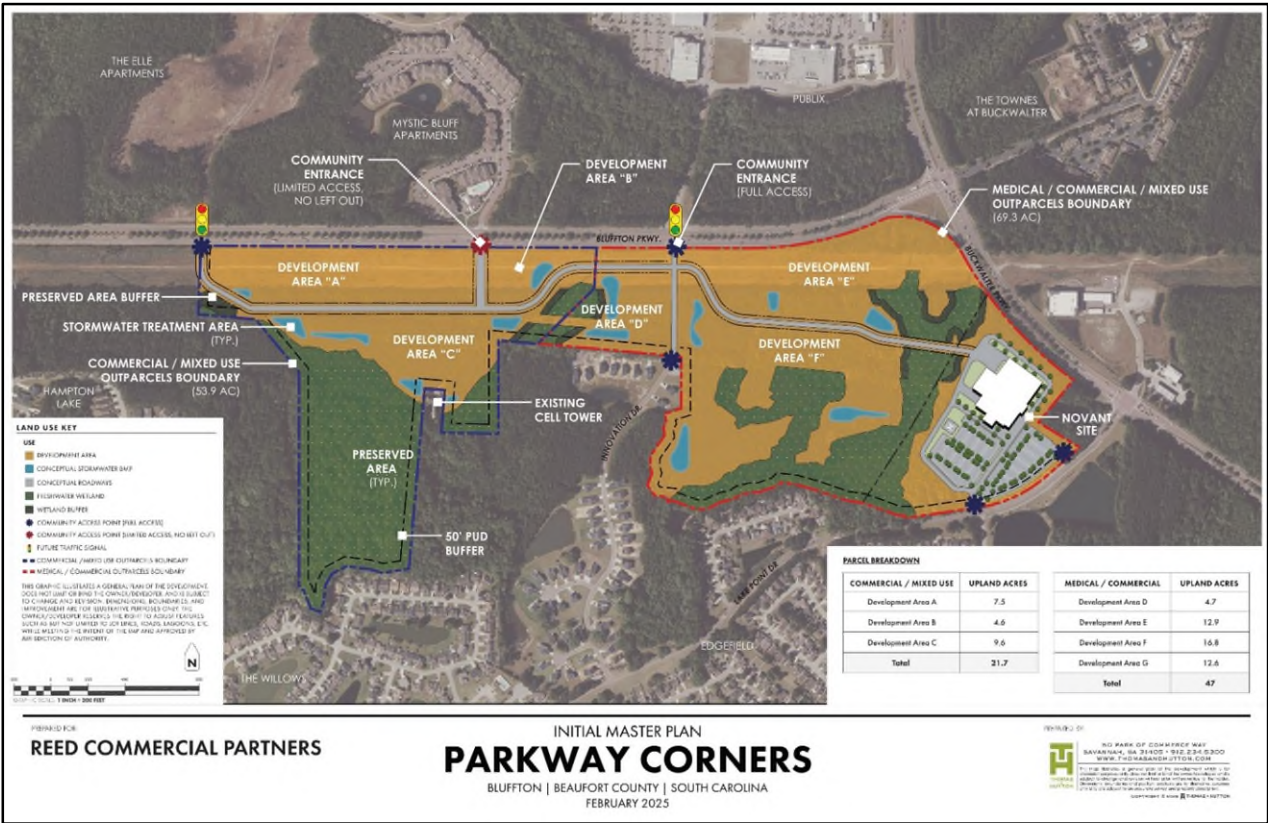
Unified Development Ordinance at time of development plan submittal.

The Applicant's complete submittal booklet provides a master plan narrative and master plan exhibits including existing conditions, tree survey, initial master plan, conceptual plan, master utility plans for sewer, water, and drainage, wetlands, open space, and original will-serve letters from public agencies (Attachment 6). The Applicant has also provided a traffic impact analysis (TIA) and submitted it to Beaufort County for review and comment (Attachment 7). Beaufort County has not yet provided comments to the Applicant. The preliminary site plans used in the TIA closely correspond with the Conceptual Plan (Attachment 5).

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 8).



Buckwalter PUD Concept Master Plan



Proposed Initial Master Plan



Proposed Conceptual Plan

REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: The Planning Commission 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 and Conceptual Plan (Attachments 4 and 5) 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 either the Initial Master Plan or Concept 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. The submitted Concept Plan provides this level of detail and confirms compatibility with adjacent uses.

Town Staff noted in Development Review Committee Comment 7 (Attachment 8) that the submitted Conceptual Plan (Attachment 5) will be included as a part of the Master Plan approval, and any Development Permit Applications that substantially deviate from the Conceptual Plan, as determined by the UDO Administrator, may warrant a minor or major amendment to the Master Plan. The Applicant's response to this comment states that the proposed Initial Master Plan is what the developer would be held to when determining if a major or minor modification is necessary. The Town Staff respectfully disagrees with the Applicant's response.

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. While the overall application demonstrates that the property can be served by adequate public services, the Applicant needs to provide updated will-serve letters.

The Master Plan Project Narrative and Sewer and Water Master Plans adequately demonstrate how these utilities tie into existing systems. However, the Applicant has provided only the original twenty-five-year-old utility will-serve letters that were approved as part of the original Buckwalter PUD Development Agreement approval. The Applicant needs to provide updated will-serve letters.

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. The Master Plan Narrative describes innovative site planning techniques that enhance the Town's health, safety, and welfare.

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.

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.

The site is consistent with the approved Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan.

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.

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 the Planning Commission provide a recommendation of conditional approval to Town Council for the Parkway Corners Initial Master Plan

1. All Plan Exhibits, including the Initial Master Plan and Concept Plan, shall be updated to identify a future realignment of the portion of the Bluffton Parkway west of Buckwalter Parkway.
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. Provide updated will-serve letters as part of the Initial Master Plan Application.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS: The Planning Commission has the authority to take the following actions with respect to the recommendation of the application to Town Council:

1. Recommend approval to Town Council of the application as submitted by the Applicant;
2. Recommend approval to Town Council of the application with conditions; or
3. Recommend denial to Town Council of the application as submitted by the Applicant.

NEXT STEPS: Forward recommendation to Town Council:

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	✓	TBD

ATTACHMENTS:

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