

PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management



MEETING DATE:	July 26, 2023
PROJECT:	Consideration of approval of an Initial Master Plan for property referred to as Parcel B-1 within the Buckwalter Planned Unit Development consisting of 21.92 acres that will include 16.02 acres of residential development and 5.9 acres of commercial development.
PROJECT MANAGER:	Dan Frazier, AICP Principal Planner Department of Growth Management

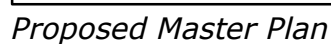
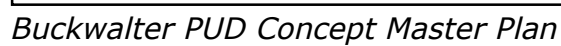
REQUEST: A request for approval of an Initial Master Plan application for Parcel B-1 within the Buckwalter Planned Unit Development (Attachments 1 and 2).

INTRODUCTION: The Applicant, Brian Witmer of Witmer Jones Keefer, Ltd, on behalf of Millstone Ventures, LLC, and with the approval of the property owner, Parcel 8A, LLC, is requesting approval for an Initial Master Plan for Parcel B-1. The subject parcel is identified as a commercial land use area within the Buckwalter Commons Tract of Buckwalter PUD Concept Master Plan (Attachment 3).

BACKGROUND: This initial master plan application request was previously submitted as a master plan amendment application requesting to amend the Buckwalter Crossroads Master Plan. On May 24, 2023, the planning commission recommended approval of the request subject to conditions. The request was subsequently withdrawn prior to proceeding to town council for consideration.

The Initial Master Plan consists of 21.92 acres that will include 16.02 acres of residential development and 5.9 acres of commercial development (Attachment 4). More specifically, the applicant proposes a conceptual site layout that includes a 150-unit multi-family development and two outparcels. Outparcel A proposes a 4,500 s.f. gas station/convenience store located at the northeast corner of Gibbet Road and SC Highway 170. Outparcel B proposes three professional office and retail buildings totaling 17,700 s.f north of the proposed multi-family development. The conceptual site layout provides interconnectivity between the uses and northward into the adjacent properties located within the Buckwalter Crossroads Master Plan.

Site layouts shown on the proposed master plan are conceptual in nature and are subject to review and approval in accordance with the Town of Bluffton Unified Development Ordinance at time of development plan submittal. As the subject properties are located within the Highway Corridor Overlay District, a Certificate of Appropriateness-HCOD is required. The marginal access road providing interconnectivity between developments is recognized as a requirement of the master plan.



The Applicant's complete submittal booklet provides a master plan narrative and master plan exhibits including existing and proposed conditions, wetlands, and a tree survey (Attachment 5). The Applicant has also provided a traffic impact analysis that has been reviewed and approved by the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) (Attachment 6). The five site access locations and movements shown on the conceptual site layout are consistent with the conclusions of the traffic impact analysis.

The Beaufort County CONNECTS 2021 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, adopted by resolution by the Town of Bluffton on September 14, 2021, identifies a bicycle and pedestrian facility to be installed on the "Northbound side of SC-170 from SC-46 to Bluffton Parkway". The location of the 10-foot path is to be determined at the time of development plan submittal, and long-term maintenance of the path will be provided by Beaufort County if SCDOT does not assume this responsibility. Whether located on or off-site, the path is to be included in development plan applications and installed in conjunction with individual developments as they are constructed. A statement shall be placed on the amended master plan declaring that all development within the Buckwalter Crossroads Master Plan shall conform to the requirements and recommendations of the Beaufort County CONNECTS 2021 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Comments on the current master plan amendment were reviewed at the June 28, 2023, meeting of the Development Review Committee (Attachment 7). The Applicant satisfactorily addressed the DRC comments in a July 7, 2023, resubmittal.

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 Parcel B-1 Initial Master Plan proposes a mix of residential and commercial 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 Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan was designed to be a mixed-use development, which includes residential and commercial uses. The initial master plan application proposes a mixed-use development that is consistent with the Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan.

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 consistent with the provisions of the Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan.

The initial master plan application is consistent with the Buckwalter PUD Concept Plan, which identifies the subject properties as being within the Buckwalter Commons Land Use Tract, which allows for General Commercial and Multi-family Residential land uses.

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 application is compatible with the surrounding area.

The proposed land uses and densities are compatible with existing development in the surrounding area. The traffic impact analysis provided with the application was prepared in April 2023, and has been reviewed and approved by SCDOT. The five site access locations and movements shown on the conceptual site layout are consistent with the conclusions of the traffic impact analysis.

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 property can be served by adequate public services.

Existing water mains, located along both Gibbet Road and SC170, will serve the parcels. The water supply system will be designed to provide flow and pressure for fire protection. The wastewater will be collected and pumped to an existing wastewater facility owned and operated by BJWSA. As previously stated, the traffic impact analysis provided with the application was prepared in April 2023, and has been reviewed and approved by SCDOT.

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 includes innovative site planning techniques that enhance the Town's health, safety, and welfare.

The site will be required to use best practices in stormwater management and is subject to the requirements of the Town of Bluffton Unified Development Ordinance and Stormwater Design Manual (SWDM), to include the Southern Lowcountry Stormwater Ordinance & Design Manual.

The site will also be required to meet the requirements and recommendations of the Beaufort County CONNECTS 2021 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, to include installing a bicycle and pedestrian path along SC 170 frontage.

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 Parcel B-1 Initial Master Plan

1. A statement shall be placed on the initial master plan declaring that all development within the master plan shall conform to the requirements and recommendations of the Beaufort County CONNECTS 2021 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.
2. Whether located on- or off-site, it shall be the responsibility of developers to install a 10-foot-wide bicycle and pedestrian path along SC Highway 170 frontage consistent with the requirements and recommendations of the Beaufort County CONNECTS 2021 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in conjunction with individual site development within the Parcel B-1 Initial Master plan.
3. Site layouts for all parcels are subject to full Town review and approval at time of development plan submittal.

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 1, 2022
Step 2. Application Check-In Meeting	✓	January 24, 2023
Step 3. Review by DRC	✓	June 28, 2023
Step 4. Planning Commission Recommendation	✓	July 26, 2023
Step 5. Town Council Consideration for Approval of Majority Vote		TBD

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Application
2. Location Map
3. Buckwalter PUD Concept Master Plan
4. Initial Master Plan
5. Complete Submittal Booklet
6. Traffic Impact Analysis (April 18, 2023)
7. DRC Comments (June 28, 2023)