



MINUTES

A meeting of the Planning Advisory Commission was held Wednesday, March 18, 2026, in the Council Chambers at Citizen Service Center.

Commissioners Present:

Chairperson: Brad Baker

Vice Chairperson:

Commissioners: Gloria Thomas, Zarome Lackey, Lakshmi Karthik, Patrick Steed, Anthony Smith, Rick Stallings,

Absent: Michael Ernst, Haley Lyman

Staff Members: John Renfroe, Assistant Director

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Baker called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. All in attendance stood for the pledge of allegiance to the American Flag. He explained the rezoning process to the audience.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

ZONING CASES:

- 1. REZN-07-25-1259: A request to rezone 2.96 acres of land located at 6821 Mobley Road. Current zoning is Single Family Residential 1 (SFR1). Proposed zoning is Single Family Residential 2 (SFR2). The proposed use is Single Family Residential. Randall Burkhalter is the applicant. This property is located in Council District 2.

Mr. John Renfroe read the staff report.

Table with 2 columns: Label (Applicant, Owner, Location, Parcel, Acreage, Current Zoning Classification, Proposed Zoning Classification) and Value (Randall Scott Burkhalter, Randall Scott Burkhalter, 6821 Mobley Road, 190-014-020, 2.96 Acres, Single Family Residential - 1, Single Family Residential - 2)

Current Use of Property:		Single Family Residential
Proposed Use of Property:		Replat at future date, if possible
General Land Use:		Consistent Planning Area A
Current Land Use Designation:		Rural Residential
Future Land Use Designation:		Single Family Residential
Compatible with Existing Land-Uses:		Yes
Environmental Impacts:		The property does not lie within the floodway and floodplain area. The developer will need an approved drainage plan prior to issuance of a Site Development permit, if a permit is required.
City Services:		Property is served by all city services.
Traffic Engineering:		This site shall meet the Codes and regulations of the Columbus Consolidated Government for residential usage.
Traffic Impact:		No adverse traffic impacts are anticipated.
School Impact:		N/A
Buffer Requirement:		N/A
Fort Benning Recommendation:		N/A
DRI Recommendation:		N/A
Surrounding Zoning:	North	Single Family Residential - 2
	South	Single Family Residential - 1
	East	Single Family Residential - 2
	West	Single Family Residential - 1
Attitude of Property Owners:		Twenty-Two (22) property owners within 300 feet of the subject properties were notified of the rezoning request. The Planning Department received one calls and/or emails regarding the rezoning.

Applicant Presentation: Scott Burkhalter addressed the Commission. Mr. Burkhalter explained that his current property is zoned SFR1 and that he wishes to purchase a portion of an adjacent property that is zoned SFR2. In order to combine the two parcels, his property must match the same zoning classification. The purpose of the combination is to gain access to the back side of his property via a 30-foot strip of land that currently divides the two parcels. The Chairman confirmed that the neighboring property was previously listed for sale but is not currently for sale; Mr. Burkhalter is proposing to purchase the strip directly from the owner.

Public Comment: None

Motion: Commissioner Steed made a motion to Approve. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Lackey. Approved with a 6-0 vote.

- 2. REZN-02-26-0346:** A request to rezone 2.43 acres of land located at 9055 Veterans Parkway. Current zoning is Residential Office (RO). Proposed zoning is Residential Estate 1 (RE1). The proposed use is Personal Care Home, Type 1. Nakia Miller is the applicant. This property is located in Council District 2.

John Renfroe read the staff report.

Applicant:	Nakia Miller
Owner:	Janet Lawand
Location:	9055 Veterans
Parcel:	079-001-004
Acreage:	2.43 Acres
Current Zoning Classification:	Residential Office
Proposed Zoning Classification:	Residential Estate - 1
Current Use of Property:	Vacant
Proposed Use of Property:	Personal Care Home, Type 1
General Land Use:	Consistent Planning Area A
Current Land Use Designation:	Single Family Residential
Future Land Use Designation:	Single Family Residential

Compatible with Existing Land-Uses: Yes

Environmental Impacts: The property does not lie within the floodway and floodplain area. The developer will need an approved drainage plan prior to issuance of a Site Development permit, if a permit is required.

City Services: Property is served by all city services.

Traffic Engineering: This site shall meet the Codes and regulations of the Columbus Consolidated Government for residential usage.

School Impact: N/A

Buffer Requirement: N/A

Fort Moore's Recommendation: N/A

DRI Recommendation: N/A

Surrounding Zoning:

North	Residential Estate 1 (RE1)
South	Residential Estate 1 (RE1)
East	Residential Office (RO)
West	Residential Office (RO)

Attitude of Property Owners: **Nine (9)** property owners within 300 feet of the subject properties were notified of the rezoning request. The Planning Department received no calls and/or emails regarding the rezoning.

Approval	0 Responses
Opposition	0 Responses

Additional Information: Personal Care Home, Type 1

Applicant Presentation: Nakia Miller (5026 St. Mary's Road, Columbus, GA) addressed the Commission.

Public Comment: None

Motion: Commissioner Stallings made a motion to Approve. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Steed. Approved with a 6-0 vote.

3. **EXCP-02-26-0319:** A request to allow a Tattoo Studio. Current zoning is Central Riverfront District (CRD). Ernest Smallman IV is the applicant. This property is located in Council District 7.

John Renfroe read the staff report.

Ernest Smallman IV has submitted an application for the Special Exception Use cited above. The property is located in the Central Riverfront (CRD) zoning district. The site for the proposed Tattoo Studio is located at 1023 Broadway. The purpose of the Special Exception Use is to allow for the operation of a tattoo studio located within the Central Riverfront (CRD) zoning district:

(1) Access: Is or will the type of street providing access to the use be adequate to serve the proposed special exception use?

Broadway will provide adequate free flow movement. This use will be in an existing building.

(2) Traffic and Pedestrian Safety: Is or will access into and out of the property be adequate to provide for traffic and pedestrian safety, the anticipated volume of the traffic flow, and access by emergency vehicles?

Access into and out of the property in question will provide for adequate traffic and pedestrian safety and emergency access.

(3) Adequacy of Public Facilities: Are or will public facilities such as school, water, or sewer utilities and police and fire protection be adequate to serve the special exception use?

Services such as water, utilities, police, and fire protection are adequate. This is an existing building.

(4) Protection from Adverse Affects: Are or will refuse, service, parking and loading areas on the property be located or screened to protect other properties in the area from such adverse effects as noise, light, glare or odor?

The property is surrounded by Central Riverfront (CRD) zoning district. Noise, light, flare and odor should not cause adverse impacts.

(5) Hours of Operation: Will the hours and manner of operation of the special exception use have no adverse effects on other properties in the area?

The hours of operation for this use will not have an adverse impact on the neighboring properties in the area.

(6) Compatibility: Will the height, size, or location of the buildings or other structures on the property be compatible with the height, size, character, or location of buildings or other structures on neighboring properties?

The business will run out of an existing building.

Council District: District 7 (Cogle)

Twenty (20) property owners within 300 feet of the property have been notified by mail of the proposed Special Exception Use. The Planning Department received no calls and/or emails regarding the rezoning.

Applicant Presentation: Ernest Smallman IV (67th Street) addressed the Commission. Mr. Smallman stated that the tenant would be Cleopatra Inc., which he described as the largest tattoo studio company in the world, operating in 17 countries with 140 studios globally and approximately 35 locations in the United States. He characterized the company as professional operators and stated that an international studio locating on Broadway would expand the city's offerings in the downtown district. Regarding hours of operation, Mr. Smallman indicated the studio would not stay open late, with an outside window of approximately 9:00 or 10:00 p.m.

Public Comment: None

Motion: Commissioner Lakey made a motion to Approve. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Steed. Approved with a 5-1 vote.

4. **REZN-02-26-0189:** A request to amend the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), Sections 2.5.25, 10.2.9 and Table 3.1.1 to create a Technology Overlay District. CCG is the applicant. (This case was tabled from the March 4, 2026 PAC meeting).

John Renfroe read the staff report.

Public Comment:

- **Gregory Foster (5446 Chattamwoods Court)** spoke in favor. Mr. Foster made seven points: (1) Noise would not harm residents; using online conversion tools accounting for distance, uneven ground, and forested terrain, he calculated the closest house would hear approximately 1.5 dB of sound, equivalent to a soft whisper. (2) Georgia Power will not raise rates, citing a \$22.4 billion Department of Energy loan guarantee to increase output without raising rates on existing customers. (3) Qualified local residents would be hired into all available positions, noting that excluding candidates based on residence would violate federal labor laws. (4) Managers would not import their own employees, as individuals qualified for \$80,000–\$120,000 positions do not need to relocate to Columbus for those salaries. (5) The financial benefit has been underestimated: 195 jobs at \$80,000–\$120,000 represents \$15.6–\$23.4 million in annual wages, plus over 1,000 construction jobs over what is likely a 10-year buildout. (6) Water Works capacity is adequate with ongoing purification expansion. (7) If the project does not proceed, the land remains unused, and the benefits to schools and underserved parts of Columbus would be lost.
- **Joshua Ferguson (6839 Whitesville Road)** spoke in favor. Mr. Ferguson thanked commissioners for their volunteer service and noted that when a project has

concentrated costs and diffuse benefits, those bearing the concentrated costs (nearby residents) will appear in larger numbers than those receiving the diffuse benefits (the broader community). He stated that substantial portions of the community, particularly schoolchildren and teachers, stand to benefit from additional tax revenue but cannot attend weekday morning meetings. He asked commissioners to weigh the interests of those unable to attend, including those who need the help the most.

- **Jessica Warshel** addressed the Commission. After an extended personal statement including a Scripture reading (Isaiah 40), the Chairman respectfully reminded the audience of the need to stay on message given the limited time available and the number of speakers wishing to be heard.
- **Darlene Leard (McKee Road)** spoke in opposition. Ms. Leard disputed several claims made in favor of the project: (1) She stated that the 195 jobs are not guaranteed, citing Missy Kendrick's own statements. (2) She stated that the 200-foot buffer would be ineffective for noise mitigation since there are no trees around a data center site. (3) She disputed a recent City Council member's favorable characterization of conditions in Fayette County near the QTS data center, stating that the hospital expansion, Marvel Studios (originally Pinewood Studios, built 2012), and the Trilith Studios development all predated the data center's arrival and were not caused by it. She noted that the council member did not observe sewage leaks from the closed-loop system that had discharged into Ginger Creek and Sandy Creek, nor did he examine the utility poles placed 200 feet from residents' front doors. Ms. Leard urged the Commission to examine amended restrictions proposed by a citizen (Mr. Croft) and to consider alternative economic development that would complement the area's whitewater recreation, biking, and hiking trails. She provided personal testimony about her son, who was diagnosed with liver cancer at age 24 and asked to be brought to Columbus for clean air, green grass, and blue skies before his death, illustrating the quality of life at stake.
- **Mick Ederson (2121 13th Street)** thanked the Commission for revisiting the overlay but urged further tabling. He raised two specific concerns: (1) The \$1,000-per-infraction violation fine is inadequate for multi-billion-dollar companies and should be increased to \$10,000–20,000, particularly since violations would likely involve environmental spills or contamination. (2) The HVAC/cooling equipment setback of 200 feet from property lines should be increased to 300–500 feet to protect endangered and threatened species in the Upatoi area's rural environment, which he described as one of the last rural spaces in Columbus.
- **Stacy Mey (McKee Road)** spoke in opposition, raising several concerns about the overlay mechanism itself: (1) Once the technology overlay is in place, it stays with the land permanently and allows campus growth without new public votes. (2) The ordinance sets no maximum campus size; the site is already reported at approximately

987 acres. (3) The \$1,000/day noise penalty is not a deterrent for a multi-billion-dollar facility and should escalate for repeated violations. (4) There are no consumption caps, drought protocols, or mandatory public reporting for water usage written into the ordinance; Columbus Water Works, which would oversee water, is funded entirely by water rates. (5) Flint Energy issued a public statement on February 20, 2026 confirming no power commitments have been made and that protecting existing members is a non-negotiable condition that has not yet been met. (6) With rezoning, the public gets a vote every time; with an overlay, the public gets one shot, after which future expansion proceeds without a new vote. She argued that a project of this scale should go through full rezoning so residents have a direct voice at every step.

- *The Chairman asked staff to clarify how future data center applications would be processed under the overlay. Staff (Mr. Renfro) confirmed that under existing overlay districts (such as Veterans Parkway), properties that already meet the underlying zoning classification and overlay requirements can proceed without additional rezoning. However, under Section P of the proposed Technology Overlay District, any application of the overlay to a specific property must follow the full Chapter 10.2 rezoning process, making this overlay different from the city's existing overlays.*
- *A member of the public (unidentified, from the audience) noted that surrounding properties are owned by investment firms and timber companies, and that the campus could expand into Talbot County or Harris County, affecting surrounding areas.*
- **George McDow (citizen of Columbus)** stated that the citizens of Columbus are concerned and deserve transparency. He posed a series of questions: Who profits and who benefits? Are we trading land and resources for limited local return? What is the projected tax revenue after incentives expire? How many permanent jobs per facility are guaranteed? Who owns the land being rezoned? What infrastructure upgrades will taxpayers cover? Will utility costs rise for residents? What community benefit agreements are required?
- **Troy Keller (1315 17th Avenue)**, a 20-year Columbus resident, expressed concern that the overlay lays the groundwork for multiple data centers, not just one. He noted that while Project Ruby may not affect his Midtown neighborhood, a future project could, since the overlay can be applied anywhere the underlying zoning matches. He urged a piecemeal, project-by-project approach through the full rezoning process rather than a blanket overlay. Staff read Sections O and P of the proposed text into the record (development agreement requirements and the full rezoning process requirement) to clarify that each future application of the overlay must go through the complete rezoning process.
- **John Van Dorne (candidate for City Council)** issued a call for a moratorium on the Technology Overlay District and Project Ruby through 2026 to allow time for full consultation with subject matter experts, full public engagement, and a fully

democratically elected City Council. He cited concerns about uncontrolled runoff, inadequate emergency planning, unspecified cleanup responsibilities, inadequate enforcement fines, lack of regulation on high-power transmission line size and noise, lack of limits on power sent to the site, greenhouse gas generation, and no discussion of layover areas.

Motion: Commissioner Stallings made a motion to Deny. Without a second, the motion fails.

Motion: Commissioner Steed made a motion to approve with a condition increasing the minimum buffer from 200 feet to 500 feet. The motion was seconded. The commissioner also stated for the record a challenge to the Mayor and City Council to establish a separate advisory body or commission to study hyperscale data centers specifically, develop a comprehensive plan to address citizens' questions, and provide independent recommendations to the Planning Advisory Commission for each future data center proposal.

Approved with a 5-1 vote.

NEW BUSINESS: N/A

OLD BUSINESS: N/A

ADJOURNMENT: 11:15 A.M.

RECORDING: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHbXga56RGU&t=1s>



Brad Baker, Chairperson



Morgan Shepard, Principal Planner