



Staff Report

Author: Kimberly Barlett, Senior Planner
Department: Development Services
Subject: Conditional Use
Meeting Date: May 5, 2026
Application: CU-26-14

Existing Zoning: AR-1 (Agricultural–Residential, 5 acres or more)

Map & Parcel: 318-29 & 30

Parcel Size: +/- 34.18 acres

Applicant: James Carlson
405 N Laurel Street
Springfield, GA 31329

Owner(s): Carlsons Springfield Holdings LLC
405 N Laurel St
Springfield, GA 31329

Commissioner District: Third District

Location: 1501 Old Tusculum Road
Springfield, GA 31329

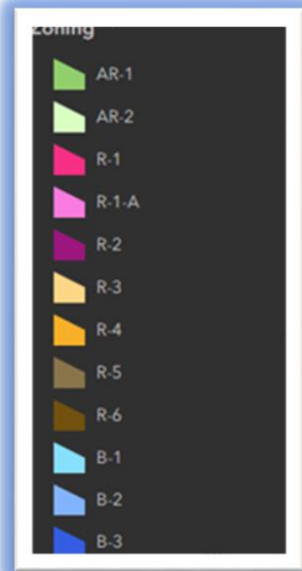
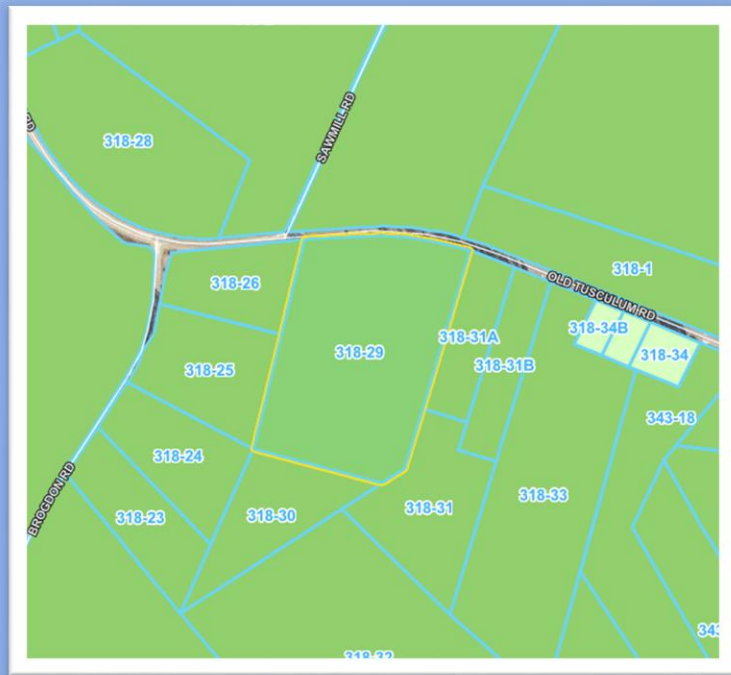
Existing Land Use and Zoning:

The subject parcel is located at **1501 Old Tusculum Road** and contains a stick-built home and a mobile home, as identified in the Effingham County Tax Assessor’s database. Access to the property is provided from Old Tusculum Road.

Surrounding properties are zoned AR-1 and are characterized by low-density residential and agricultural uses:

- **North, South, East, and West:** AR-1 (Agricultural–Residential, 5 acres or more)





Project Summary/Proposed Request:

The proposed conditional use encompasses a campus-style property project that will include a small farm, a private microschool, a main residential building with meeting space, life skills classes, and supporting accessory structures.

The main building will contain three bedrooms and will also function as a small event space for limited gatherings. A 5,000-square-foot community space is proposed. Future improvements may include additional outbuildings to support agricultural operations, such as livestock structures and storage buildings, as well as a designated playground area. The site will also include fencing and designated areas for agricultural and educational use.

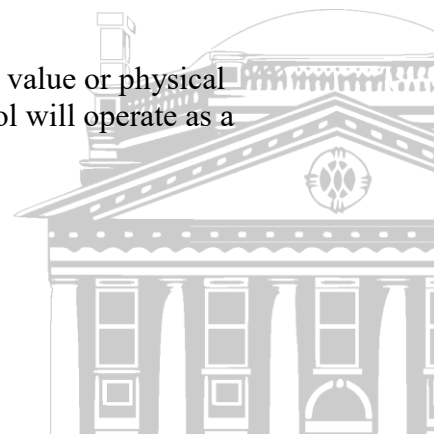
The overall intent is to create a low-density, community-oriented environment that integrates residential, educational, and agricultural uses in a manner consistent with the rural character of the surrounding area.

Access to the property will be from Old Tusculum Road. Off-street parking will be provided on-site to accommodate the microschool, small events, and general property use. Parking areas will be designed to remain low-impact and consistent with the rural nature of the site.

The proposed use is not expected to adversely affect the neighborhood's economic value or physical appearance. Event use will remain occasional and limited in scale. The microschool will operate as a

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private, low-enrollment educational environment, further minimizing traffic and noise. Agricultural operations will be managed responsibly with designated livestock areas and appropriate setbacks.

The physical and environmental impacts of the proposed use are expected to be minimal. The agricultural component promotes responsible land stewardship and open-space preservation. The overall design maintains the area's rural character and avoids dense development. Fencing, spacing, and site layout will further reduce potential impacts on neighboring properties.



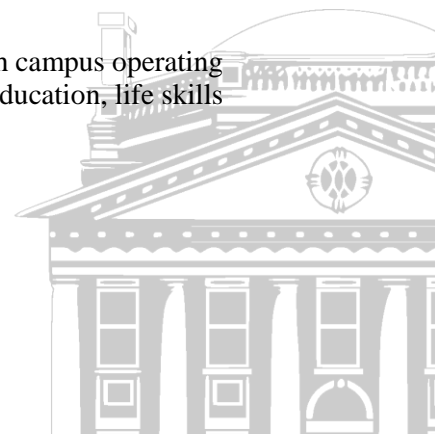
The concept plan shows the location of existing and proposed structures, including the main building, converted garage microschool, farm areas, playground, fencing, and any future outbuildings.

Applicant's Proposal Summary

The applicant proposes the development of a Christian education and community outreach campus operating under a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The campus is intended to support faith-based education, life skills training, ministry outreach, and community engagement.

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The project is organized around three primary components:

- Faith-based education
- Community life skills programming
- Christian ministry and outreach

The vision for the site is to create a regional hub where families, churches, nonprofits, and students can participate in educational, agricultural, and faith-based activities.

Proposed campus features include a schoolhouse facility, a residential mobile home for a groundskeeper, agricultural and outdoor education areas, event and community gathering spaces, and a future outdoor pavilion. A 5,000-square-foot community building is also proposed to accommodate events and provide assembly space for churches and the community.

The campus is expected to operate on a structured weekly schedule:

- **Monday–Thursday:** School operations
- **Friday–Sunday:** Community programming, life skills classes, ministry outreach, and events

The educational component, *Faithful Roots Schoolhouse*, is a private Christian microschool operated by Dalton and Jessica Mitchell. The school will serve up to 15 students and include one teacher, one paraprofessional, and one administrative staff member. The curriculum will emphasize agricultural education, including activities such as egg harvesting, fishing, food preservation, farming, and cooking. School hours are proposed to be Monday through Thursday, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Additional programming includes life skills classes for children and adults, offered on weekends by a third-party provider. The applicant also proposes recurring community activities, including a weekend farmers market and three annual events:

- Easter Resurrection Festival
- Christmas Nativity Festival
- Annual Family Fishing Day

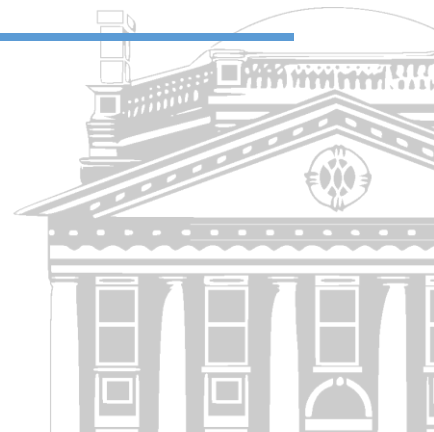
These events may include vendors, food trucks, sponsorships, and family-oriented activities.

The project is designed to integrate multiple complementary uses, including elementary school, event venue, agritourism activities, and adult education services.

The accessory uses will include fishing, crop production, open space, and trail systems, all of which are permitted within the AR-1 zoning district. The uses include:

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Elementary school. Refers to the first stage of formal education, typically covering the grades from Kindergarten through 5th or 6th grade, depending on the county or educational system. This usually involves children aged approximately five to 11 years old.

Agritourism. Defined as the activities conducted on a working farm and offered to the public or invited groups for the purpose of recreation, education, and/or active involvement in the farm operation. These activities link agricultural production and/or processing with tourism in order to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining and/or educating the visitors and generating supplemental income for the farm or ranch owner.

Adult education services. Programs designed to help adults improve their academic skills, gain new knowledge, or learn practical skills to enhance their personal and professional lives.

Private and public events venue. Any organized activity having as its purpose entertainment, recreation and/or education, such as a festival or celebration, concert, foot or vehicle race, parade or march, rally or assembly which takes place on a public street, sidewalk or right-of-way, or occurs on private property and impacts government services on public rights-of-way. This includes locations that are in the business of renting out their location to hold private and public functions.

Fishing. The activity of catching fish for food, sport, or commercial purposes. It plays an essential role in the global food supply, especially in coastal and inland communities, and supports numerous industries, including fishing, aquaculture, and tourism.

Crop production. Agricultural crop production refers to the cultivation and harvesting of plants for various purposes, including food, fiber, and raw materials. This process plays a crucial role in feeding the global population and sustaining economies. Agricultural crop production involves several stages, including land preparation, sowing, growing, harvesting, and post-harvest handling.

Trails. These are designated paths or routes used for walking, hiking, biking, or horseback riding. They can be paved or unpaved and often run through open spaces, parks, or natural landscapes, providing access to nature and promoting outdoor recreation.

Open space. Refers to any land that is preserved in its natural state or developed for public recreation, scenic beauty, or conservation. It is typically free of buildings and infrastructure, aside from minimal amenities like benches or signage. Examples include parks, greenbelts, nature reserves, and undeveloped natural areas. Can be natural or manufactured (e.g., paved or gravel). Parks and recreational fields, courtyards and plazas, greenbelts and buffer zones, cemeteries or natural preserves, undeveloped land within or near urban areas, and paved but non-building areas like civic squares are also available.

Facts and Findings:

Site Characteristics

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The subject parcel is **34.18 acres** and contains one stick-built home and a mobile home. Access is provided directly from Old Tusculum Road. The parcel is rural in character and contains **wetlands**, with no identified **floodplain or environmental constraints** based on County GIS mapping.

Surrounding Development Pattern

The surrounding area consists primarily of rural residential homesteads and agricultural tracts. Development intensity remains low, with lot sizes generally 5 acres or greater.

Zoning Context

The subject property is zoned AR-1, which permits certain low-intensity non-residential activities through the Conditional Use process.

Pursuant to Effingham County Code of Ordinances **Section 4.1A – Permitted Use Table**, an Elementary school, Event Venue, Agritourism, and Adult Education Services school requires a Conditional Use approval within the AR-1 district. Therefore, Conditional Use approval is required for the proposed activity.

Infrastructure and Services

The property is served by a **private well and septic**, consistent with surrounding development. Emergency access is adequate via Old Tusculum Road.

Compatibility with the Surrounding Area

Given the large parcel size (34.18 acres) and the Community Campus's location, the proposed use is unlikely to create significant visual or operational impacts on adjacent properties.

The surrounding area is characterized by large rural tracts and agricultural-residential uses, which provide substantial separation between neighboring properties.

Intensity of Use

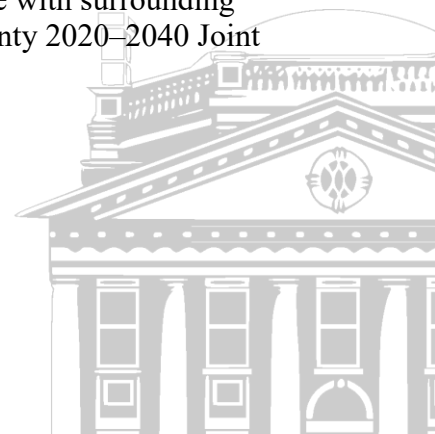
The scale and operational characteristics of the proposed business remain consistent with the rural residential character of the AR-1 district.

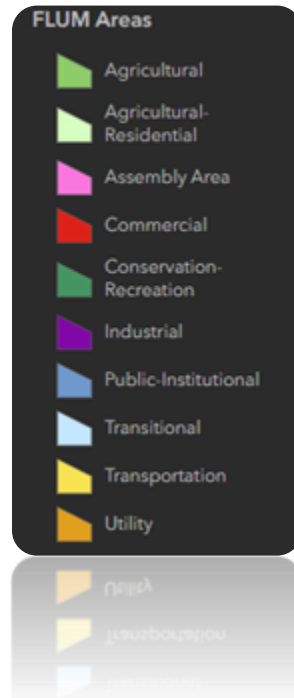
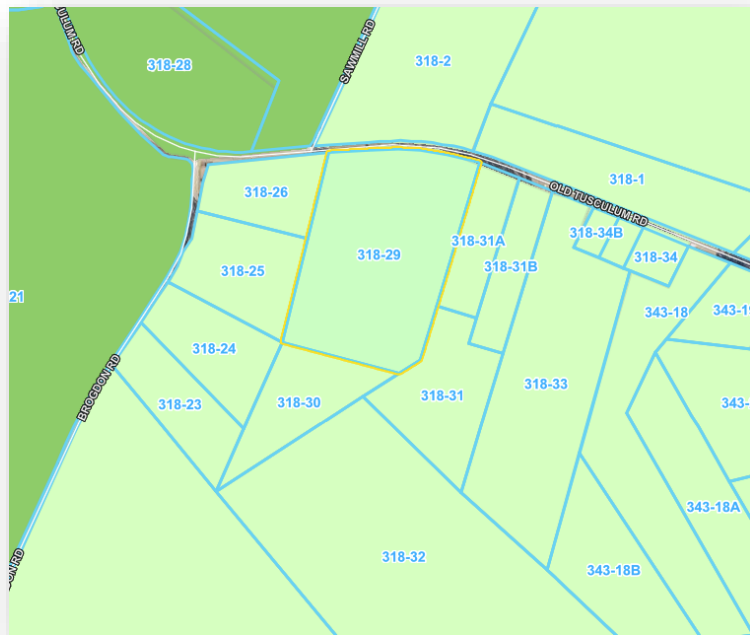
Comprehensive Plan:

The parcel is designated **Agricultural–Residential** on the **Future Land Use Map (FLUM)**. This category supports single-family and multifamily residential uses arranged within general net-density ranges. The intent is to ensure residential development patterns that are compatible with surrounding densities, building types, and established neighborhood character (Effingham County 2020–2040 Joint Comprehensive Plan, p. 37).

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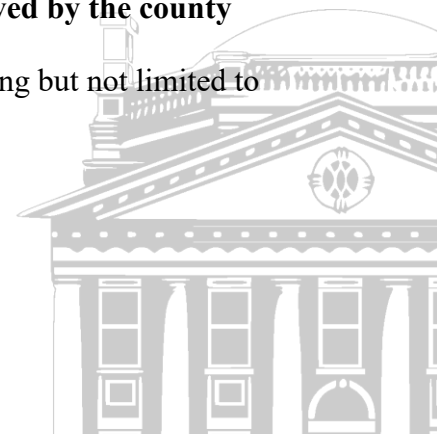
Recommendation

Staff finds that the proposed conditional uses, including a private microschool, agritourism activities, adult education services, and limited event use, can be compatible with the Agricultural–Residential (AR-1) zoning district given the subject property’s large size, rural setting, and surrounding pattern of low-density residential and agricultural uses. The proposal maintains elements consistent with the Comprehensive Plan’s Agricultural–Residential designation by preserving open space, incorporating agricultural activities, and limiting development intensity, subject to the following stipulations:

1. **An Effingham County Occupational Tax Certificate (business license) shall be obtained and kept in good standing.**
2. **Parking Requirements**
All parking shall be provided **on-site**. No parking shall be permitted within the public right-of-way. Parking areas shall be designed to comply with all parking requirements for each use on the property.
3. **Any additional encroachments on Old Tusculum Road must be approved by the county Engineer.**
4. **All applicable zoning and development standards must be met**, including but not limited to setbacks, access requirements, and any departmental review standards.

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5. **The Conditional Use approval applies only to the business as described in the application.**
Any expansion of the business, addition of employees, or significant increase in customer traffic may require additional review and approval by Effingham County.
6. Exterior amplified sound shall not be permitted after 10:00 p.m.
7. Vegetative sound barriers shall be installed along the eastern boundary of the event venue.
8. The elementary school shall be subdivided into a separate parcel.
9. Alcohol shall not be provided to the general public. Any alcohol service shall be limited to private, scheduled events and provided exclusively through properly licensed and insured vendors.

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