



Staff Report

Author: Kimberly Barlett, Senior Planner
Department: Development Services
Subject: 2nd Reading- Zoning Map Amendment
Meeting Date: May 5, 2026
Application: VAR-26-17

Existing Zoning: R-1 (Single-Family Residential)

Map & Parcel: 272-29

Parcel Size: 34.81 acres

Applicant: SB Homes, LLC/ Sean Barlow
2929 Wyatt Place Road
Louisville, GA 30434

Owner(s): SB Homes, LLC
2929 Wyatt Place Road
Louisville, GA 30434

Commissioner District: Third District

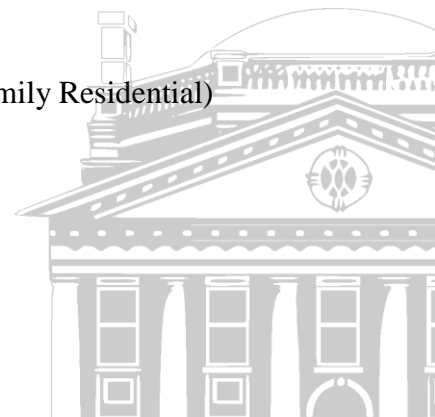
Location: Old Louisville Road
Guyton, GA 31312

Existing Land Use and Zoning:

The subject parcel is located on **Old Louisville Road** and is currently a vacant lot, as confirmed by the Effingham County Tax Assessor's database. Access to the property is provided via Old Louisville Road.

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

- **North:** R-1 (Single-Family Residential)
- **East:** R-1 (Single-Family Residential)
- **West:** AR-1 (Agricultural-Residential, 5 acres or more)
- **South:** AR-2 (Agricultural-Residential, 1 acre or more) & R-1 (Single-Family Residential)





Proposed Request:

This variance request seeks to modify the requirement for a berm for rear-facing lots within a major subdivision. The applicant is proposing the development of a 45-lot residential subdivision, Sagebrush Reserve. According to Section 3.4 Buffers of Effingham County Ordinance:

b. v. Major subdivisions with rear or side facing homes will install a six (6) foot tall berm with approved landscaping material at the apex of the berm. Minimum width of the berm is fifteen (15) feet at the base.

Due to the presence of mature trees along the right-of-way, the applicant is requesting a variance to allow for a 20-foot vegetative buffer in conjunction with a 6-foot privacy fence, while preserving the existing mature tree buffer along Highway 119 South as an alternative.

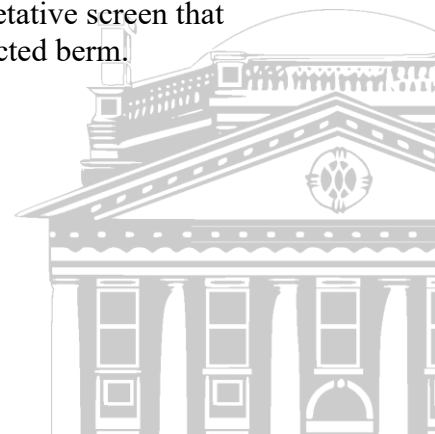
The applicant proposes that the intent of this request is to preserve the established mature trees within the 20' buffer that currently provides a natural visual buffer between Highway 119 and the rear-facing residential lots within Sagebrush Reserve. Construction of the required six-foot berm with a fifteen-foot base width along the right-of-way would necessitate disturbing and removing these mature trees.

The existing tree line should be preserved for the following reasons:

-Benefit to future homeowners: Rear-facing lots will retain a well-established vegetative screen that offers privacy, visual softness, and a more natural separation than a newly constructed berm.

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- Environmental preservation: Avoiding berm construction reduces unnecessary grading, root disturbance, and tree loss.

- Improved long-term appearance: The existing mature landscape provides instant screening value that would take many years for new berm plantings to replicate.

This alternative better satisfies the spirit and intent of the ordinance by maintaining an effective visual buffer while preserving existing natural assets that serve both the traveling public and future residents.



Facts and Findings:

Site Characteristics

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The subject parcel contains **34.81** acres and is currently vacant. Access is provided directly from Old Louisville Road. The parcel does not contain any identified **wetlands, floodplains, or environmental constraints** based on County GIS mapping.

Surrounding Development Pattern

The area surrounding the parcel consists primarily of residential homesteads and agricultural tracts. Development intensity remains low, with lot sizes predominantly ranging from 0.50 acres or more.

Zoning Context

The parcel is currently zoned **R-1**, which requires a minimum lot size of 12,000 square feet. The applicant intends to develop lots of approximately 0.50 acres. Surrounding properties are also zoned AR-1 & R-1, reflecting a transition from agricultural homesteads to lower-density residential development.

Infrastructure and Services

The property is served by **public water and septic**, consistent with surrounding development. Emergency access is adequate via Old Louisville Road.

***Variance Criteria- Article IX- 9.1:** The board of commissioners shall not grant such variances unless it finds based on the evidence presented to it in each specific case that:*

- a. The granting of the variance will not be detrimental to the public safety, health, or welfare or injurious to other property, and;*
- b. The conditions upon which the request is based are unique to the property for which the relief is sought and are not applicable generally to other property, and;*
- c. Because of the particular physical surroundings, shape, or topographical conditions of the specific property involved, a particular hardship to the owner would result, as distinguished from a mere inconvenience, if the strict letter of these regulations is carried out, and;*
- d. The relief sought will not in any manner vary the provisions of the zoning ordinance or comprehensive plan, except that those documents may be amended in the manner prescribed by law.*

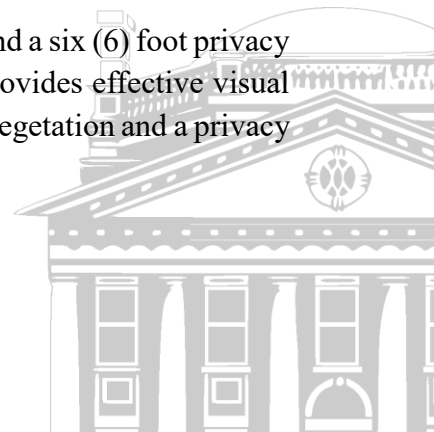
Staff Analysis of Variance Criteria

(a) Public Safety and Welfare

The proposed alternative buffer, consisting of a twenty (20) foot vegetative buffer and a six (6) foot privacy fence, is not anticipated to negatively affect public safety. The proposed buffer provides effective visual screening and separation between adjacent land uses. The combination of existing vegetation and a privacy

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fence offers immediate buffering benefits, whereas a berm would require significant time for vegetation to establish and achieve comparable screening. This approach supports compatibility between properties and helps minimize potential nuisances such as light, noise, and visual impacts.

(b) Unique Conditions

Strict application of the ordinance would require significant grading and site disturbance, resulting in the removal of these mature trees. The presence, size, and location of the existing vegetation make compliance with the berm requirement impractical without causing unnecessary environmental impact.

(c) Hardship

Strict application of the buffering requirements would create unnecessary hardship by requiring the construction of a six (6) foot berm, which would result in significant disturbance of the site and removal of existing mature trees within the buffer area.

The loss of these trees would eliminate an established natural screen that currently provides immediate buffering benefits. In contrast, installing a berm would require extensive grading and replanting, with new vegetation taking years to mature and reach comparable effectiveness.

(d) Consistency with the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan

The intent of the buffering requirements within the zoning ordinance is to provide adequate screening, separation, and compatibility between differing land uses, while also promoting environmental quality and minimizing adverse impacts.

Although the applicant is requesting a variance from the specific requirement of a six (6)- foot berm, the proposed alternative—a twenty (20)- foot vegetative buffer combined with a six (6)- foot privacy fence—meets the overall intent of the ordinance. The preserved mature trees offer immediate and effective screening, while the fence provides additional visual separation and security. Together, these elements achieve the functional objectives of buffering without requiring extensive site disturbance.

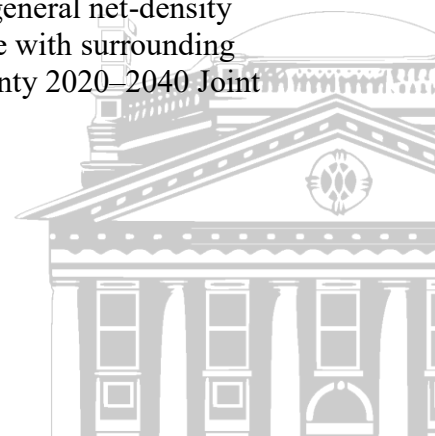
The request is also consistent with the goals and policies of the Effingham County Comprehensive Plan, particularly those related to preservation of natural resources and compatibility between adjacent land uses.

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:

The request is consistent with the Future Land Use Map and aligns with the intent of the zoning district. The proposal is unlikely to adversely affect surrounding properties. Based on the evidence presented and the findings contained in this report, staff finds that the request satisfies the variance criteria contained in Article IX, Section 9.1 of the Effingham County Zoning Ordinance. The hardship associated with this request arises from the requirement to construct a six (6)- foot berm, which would result in significant disturbance to the site and the removal of existing mature trees within the buffer area.

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