



Staff Report

Author: Kimberly Barlett, Senior Planner
Department: Development Services
Subject: Variance
Meeting Date: June 16, 2026
Application: VAR-26-15

Existing Zoning: AR-2 (Agricultural–Residential, 1 acre or more)
Proposed Zoning: B-2 (General Commercial) for approximately 1.0 acre

Map & Parcel: 352-73

Parcel Size: (±1.0 Acre Subject to B-2 Request)

Applicant/Owner: Lynn Jeffers Jr.
489 Noel C. Conaway Road
Guyton, GA 31312

Commissioner District: First District

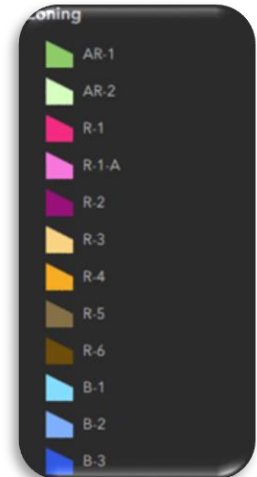
Location: 489 Noel C Conaway Road
Guyton, GA 31312

Existing Land Use and Zoning:

The applicant is requesting a **variance** related to buffering requirements associated with a proposed rezoning of approximately +/-1.00 acres from AR-2 (Agricultural – Residential, 1 acre or more) to B-2 (General Commercial), aligning with the zoning classification of a proposed automobile service shop (mechanic shop).

The property is currently developed with a stick-built home. The existing accessory structure is proposed to be utilized as the automobile service shop following the requested B-2 rezoning. The Effingham County zoning map indicates the following surrounding zoning pattern:

Surrounding Neighborhood
North: AR-1 (Agricultural–Residential, 5 acres or more)
South: AR-1 (Agricultural–Residential, 5 acres or more)
East: AR-2 (Agricultural – Residential, 1 acre or more) & R-1 (Single-Family Residential)
West: PD (Residential & multifamily)



Proposed Request:

This **variance** request seeks relief from the vegetated buffer requirements associated with the proposed **B-2 (General Commercial)** zoning classification. The subject property contains preexisting structures that were established prior to the current zoning and buffering standards applicable to the proposed rezoning.

The applicant is proposing to operate an automobile service shop on the property. The business will operate within an existing accessory structure approximately 3,500 square feet in size. The structure currently contains space for an office, two ADA-compliant restrooms, and seven bays for vehicle maintenance operations.

Due to the placement of the existing structure and the buffering requirements associated with the proposed B-2 zoning classification, a variance is required to accommodate the requested zoning change.

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Proposed Use and Operations:

The applicant proposes to rezone approximately one acre to B-2 to allow operation of a small-scale automotive service shop, including:

- Tire services
- Oil changes
- General vehicle maintenance

Parcel Two – Requesting B-2 Zoning



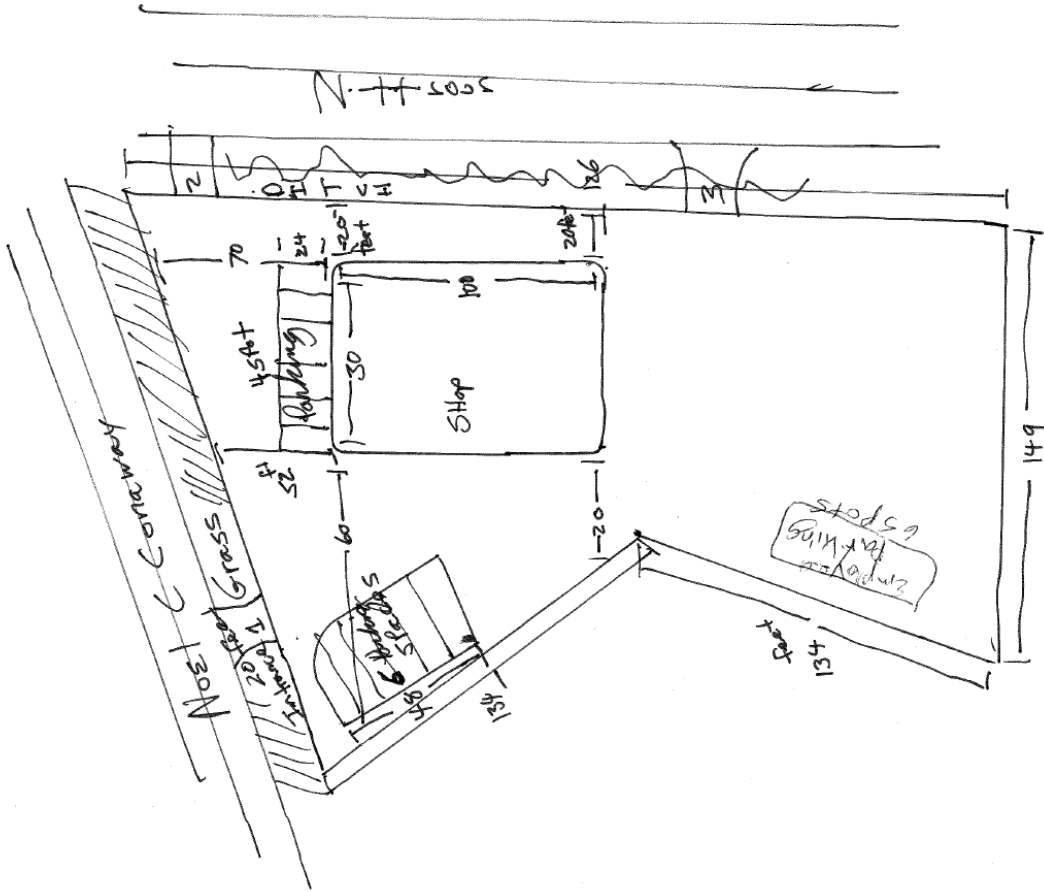
- The proposed operation is limited in scale, with approximately **four employees** and an estimated **15–20 customers per day**. The remainder of the property will continue to function in a rural residential/agricultural capacity.

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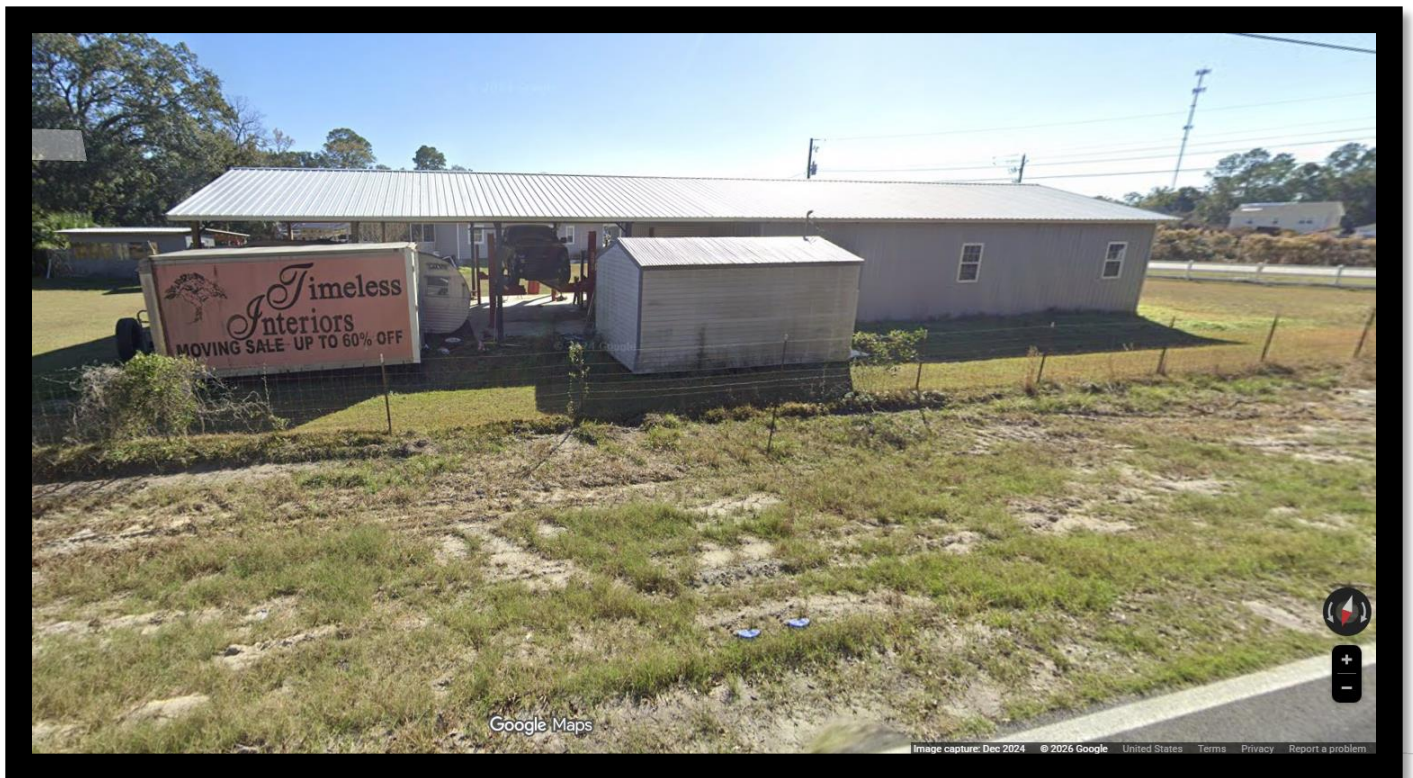
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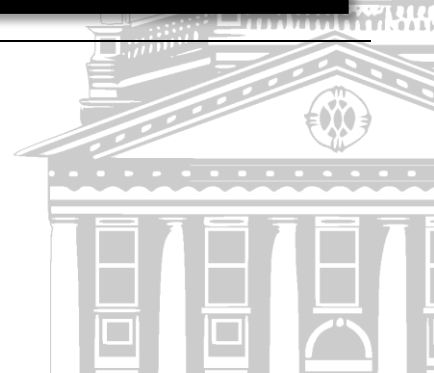
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Required B-2 Buffers

Front: 30 feet required → Vegetated buffers must be established along with proposed parking spaces

Side: Zittrouer Road → 30 ft required → proposing a 10-foot vegetated buffer and a 6-foot privacy fence

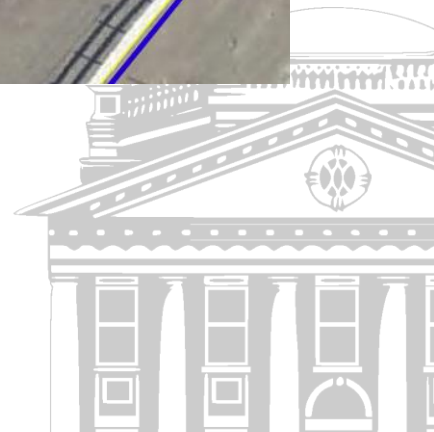
Side: Residence → no buffer proposed * Subdivisions of less than five lots are exempt from buffer requirements when neighboring property is under the same ownership.

Rear: no buffer proposed * * Subdivisions of less than five lots are exempt from buffer requirements when neighboring property is under the same ownership.



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Buffer Chart

	AR-1	AR-2	AR-3	R-1	R-2	R-3	R-4	R-5	R-6	B-1	B-2	B-3	PD	I-1	LI	HI
AR-1	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	300 ft	150 ft	300 ft
AR-2	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	300 ft	150 ft	300 ft
AR-3	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	300 ft	150 ft	300 ft
R-1	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft
R-2	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	20 ft	20 ft	15 ft	300 ft	150 ft	300 ft
R-3	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	20 ft	20 ft	15 ft	300 ft	150 ft	300 ft
R-4	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft
R-5	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft
R-6	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft
B-1	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	20 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	150 ft	50 ft	150 ft
B-2	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	20 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	150 ft	50 ft	150 ft
B-3	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	20 ft	20 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	150 ft	50 ft	150 ft
PD	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft	20 ft	20 ft	20 ft	15 ft	15 ft	15 ft	10 ft	300 ft	150 ft	300 ft
I-1	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	150 ft	150 ft	150 ft	300 ft	25 ft	25 ft	25 ft
LI	150 ft	150 ft	150 ft	300 ft	150 ft	150 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	50 ft	50 ft	50 ft	50 ft	25 ft	50 ft	50 ft
HI	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	300 ft	150 ft	150 ft	150 ft	150 ft	25 ft	25 ft	25 ft

Facts and Findings:

Site Characteristics

The subject parcel contains **1.00** acres and includes an existing accessory structure. There are two temporary accessory structures that will be moved to accommodate the required buffers.

Access is proposed from Noel C. Conway Road, if a GDOT permit can be obtained. If the applicant cannot obtain access, Zittrouer Road will be used as access. The parcel does not contain **wetlands**, nor are there any identified **floodplains or environmental constraints** based on County GIS mapping.

Surrounding Development Pattern

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The surrounding area is predominantly residential, consisting of a mix of single-family and multifamily housing. The area has experienced increased residential development in recent years, with minimal commercial presence.

- To the West of the property are townhomes and single-family homes in the Winfield Subdivision (PD), along with the Laurel Grove subdivision (R-6).
- To the North are rural residential tracts along with a Tiny home subdivision – Green Bridge Farm (AR-2) and a proposed townhome subdivision – Bulls Run (R-3)
- To the East are agricultural tracts along with Palm Ridge subdivision

Zoning Context

The property was previously zoned to B-2 at the June 6, 2006, Board of Commissioners Meeting. Then, on September 22, 2014, at the Board of Commissioners meeting, the property was rezoned back to AR-2.

The subject property is **zoned B-2**, which permits a wide range of business activities serving the general public, typically intended for moderate- to high-intensity commercial use compatible with surrounding businesses.

Infrastructure and Services

The property is served by a **private well and septic system** consistent with the surrounding development.

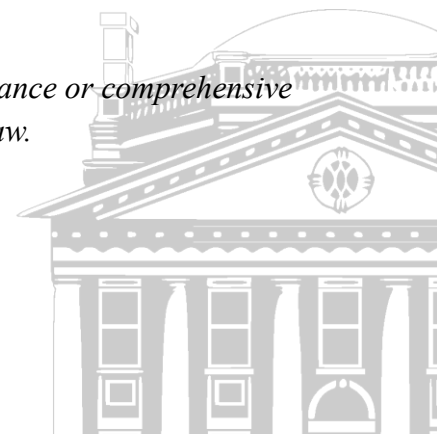
Road Routes: Zittrouer Road is classified as a local road located east of Noel C. Conaway Road (GA Hwy 30), a designated truck route, and a major collector roadway within Effingham County.

***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.*

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Staff Analysis of Variance Criteria

(a) Public Safety and Welfare

Staff has reviewed the requested variance to reduce the required buffer for property zoned B-2 General Commercial located within a predominantly residential area, with consideration given to the protection of public safety and general welfare.

The purpose of the required buffer is to lessen potential impacts between commercial and residential uses by providing visual screening, separation, and mitigation of noise and lighting. Although the applicant is requesting a reduction in the required buffer, the proposed alternative measures are intended to maintain compatibility between the commercial development and surrounding residential properties.

Additionally, the proposed development must continue to comply with all other applicable zoning, landscaping, and development standards intended to protect neighboring properties and the public.

(b) Unique Conditions

The subject property is located within a predominantly residential area despite being zoned B-2 General Commercial. The surrounding development pattern and the presence of existing residential uses create site conditions that differ from more typical commercially oriented areas where standard buffer requirements can be more easily accommodated.

(c) Hardship

Strict application of the buffer requirements would create a hardship due to the existing development pattern and physical characteristics of the property. The site contains a pre-existing structure proposed to be utilized as an automobile service shop within an area that is predominantly residential in character.

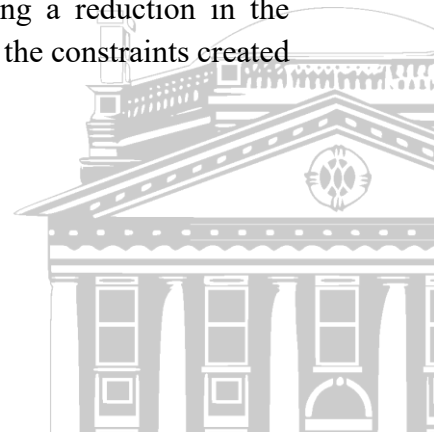
Because the structure already exists on the property, compliance with the full buffering requirements would significantly limit the reasonable use and improvement of the site and could require substantial alterations to the existing layout and operation of the business. The placement of the existing building and site improvements restricts the available area for installation of the required buffer without creating operational constraints for vehicle circulation, access, and customer parking.

(d) Consistency with the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan

The intent of the zoning ordinance buffering requirements is to provide compatibility and separation between commercial and residential land uses by reducing visual impacts, noise, and other operational effects associated with commercial activity. Although the applicant is requesting a reduction in the required buffer, the request pertains to an existing shop and seeks to accommodate the constraints created by the pre-existing structure and site layout.

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The proposed B-2 zoning is not fully consistent with the Agricultural-Residential future land use designation; the requested variance is limited to buffering requirements associated with the development of the site. Staff recognizes that commercial uses within predominantly residential or agricultural residential areas require careful consideration to minimize impacts on surrounding properties. The proposed alternative buffering measures and the use of an existing structure help reduce additional site disturbance and maintain a level of compatibility with adjacent uses.

The proposed B-2 zoning is **not consistent with the Agricultural–Residential designation.**

- The FLUM does not identify this location for commercial development
- Commercial uses are generally directed toward designated nodes and corridors
- The request introduces a higher-intensity land use into an area planned for residential development

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 Future Land Use Map designates the property as Agricultural Residential, making the proposed commercial use inconsistent with the Future Land Use Map designation.

Based on 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 placement of the existing building and site improvements, which restrict the available area for installation of the required buffer.

Staff finds that the proposed mitigation measures, including a ten-foot vegetated buffer and a six-foot privacy fence, may help mitigate impacts on surrounding residential properties associated with the proposed automobile service shop and provide reasonable screening from the more intensive commercial use.

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