



Staff Report

Subject: 2nd Reading – Zoning Map Amendment
Author: Kimberly Barlett, Senior Planner
Department: Development Services
Meeting Date: November 4, 2025

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

Map & Parcel: 461-65

Parcel Size: 7.20 acres

Applicant: Ms. Joyce Sowers
2333 Rincon Stillwell Road
Rincon, GA 31326

Owner(s): Ms. Joyce Sowers & Russell Sowers
2333 Rincon Stillwell Road
Rincon, GA 31326

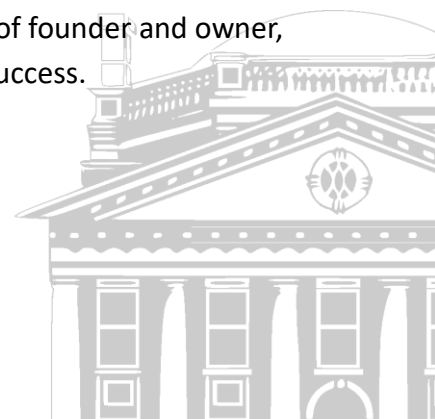
Location: 364 Old Augusta Road South
Rincon, Ga 31326

Existing Land Use and Zoning:

The parcel totals 7.20 acres. Located at 364 Old Augusta Road South, just east of Central Avenue. Currently, there is a site-built home and a mobile home on map/parcel 461-65. The parcel is currently zoned AR-1 (Agricultural–Residential, 5 acres or more). Properties to the north and south are zoned AR-2 (Agricultural-Residential, 1 acre or more), east and west are zoned AR-1 (Agricultural–Residential, 5 acres or more).

The Proposed Request:

The applicant, *Ebenezer Rose and Garden Nursery, LLC*, has requested approval for an Agritourism Business License for its existing plant nursery operation. This well-established business has been operating for approximately 15 years at its current location under the leadership of founder and owner, Mr. Russell Sowers, who remains the primary driving force behind its continued success.



In previous years, the business operated under a Home Occupational License, which was renewed annually. Upon review, it has been determined that the business's operations are more appropriately classified under an Agritourism License, as customers regularly visit the property.

The nursery is located off Old Augusta Road, approximately half a mile north of the Georgia-Pacific entrance and about a quarter mile south of the Rincon-Stillwell Road intersection. The business utilizes approximately two acres of the property for its operations.

As a plant nursery, Ebenezer Rose and Garden Nursery enhances the local landscape by providing vibrant greenery and colorful plantings that contribute positively to the area's rural aesthetic. The majority of its customers are local residents, although some visitors travel from several hours away, particularly to purchase from the nursery's extensive and unique collection of rose bushes.

The property contains three greenhouses, all situated well back from Old Augusta Road, with the nearest structure located approximately 250 feet from the roadway. The office and pump house are located centrally within the property, while the pole barn and garage, located on the southern side of the property, complement the rural character of Effingham County.

Business Operations:

- Hours: Monday–Saturday, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM (Closed Sunday)
- Noise: Limited to light equipment such as a small tractor, typically operated after 9:00 AM
- Staffing: 2–3 employees dedicated to plant care and customer service
- Business Model: Focused on horticultural expertise and community engagement—staff provide guidance and advice to customers free of charge, while the quality of the plants drives sales naturally
- Growth Plans: No significant expansion is planned beyond the current operational footprint

Visitor Volume:

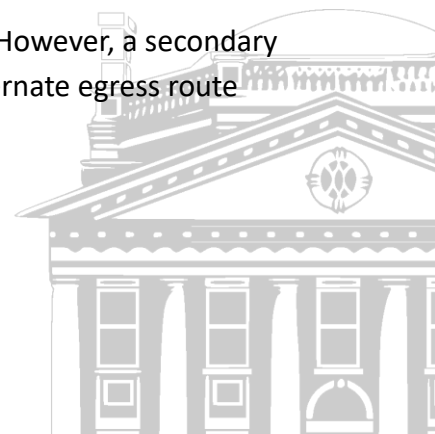
Visitor numbers fluctuate seasonally, with the spring months being the busiest. On peak spring Saturdays, the nursery may host up to 50 visitors. Conversely, during winter weekdays, visitation can be minimal or nonexistent.

Emergency Access and Evacuation:

The primary access and exit point is via the main driveway on Old Augusta Road. However, a secondary lane crosses the property and connects to Rincon-Stillwell Road, providing an alternate egress route

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that remains accessible at all times. In the event of a pedestrian evacuation, all directions are viable, with only minimal barriers such as a 3-foot field fence at certain points along the property boundary.

The following uses are allowed within the Agritourism Business ordinance: On-farm sales, Pick your own, Agricultural crafts/ gift sales, Fee fishing/ hunting, Wildlife viewing and photography, Equine-related activities. Wagon rides, School tours, Garden/ Nursery tours, Farm Technical Demonstrations and sales (canning, weaving, soap-making, etc.), Winery tastings or tours, Corn mazes, Haunted attractions, Small, private zoological attractions or sanctuaries, Christmas tree farms.

Comprehensive Plan:

The parcel falls within the Agricultural – Residential area on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM). This prominent use of land within this area is for single-family and multifamily dwelling units organized into general categories of net densities. Residential zoning ensures that land is used appropriately for housing, considering factors like density, building types, and neighborhood character (Effingham County 2020-2040 Joint Comprehensive Plan, pg. 37).

Determination:

Staff has reviewed the application, and the application is complete with the following stipulations:

1. The applicant shall obtain, and keep in good standing, an Effingham County Occupational Tax Certificate (business license).

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