Effingham County Georgia
Planning and Zoning Services

Staff Report

Author:	Kimberly Barlett, Senior Planner
Department:	Development Services
Subject:	Variance
Meeting Date:	October 6, 2026
Application:	VAR-26-29

Existing Zoning:	I-1 (Industrial)
Map & Parcel:	304-15 & 304-15A
Parcel Size:	±40.75 acres
Applicant:	C.W. Matthews Contracting Co., Inc. 12 Siebald Street Statesboro, GA 30458
Owner:	River Road Partners I, LLC 260 S Oceola Orlando, FL 32801

Commissioner District: First District

Location:	1085 Old River Road Bloomingdale, GA 31302

Existing Land Use and Zoning:

The applicant is requesting a variance from the applicable buffering requirements for an existing **I-1 (Industrial)** zoned property. The subject property consists of two parcels with a combined acreage of approximately **±40.75 acres**.

According to Effingham County Tax Assessor records, both parcels are currently classified as vacant land. The properties are undeveloped, with portions of the site cleared and the remaining areas wooded.

Proposed Request:

This **variance request** seeks relief from the vegetated buffer requirements applicable to the existing **I-1 (Industrial)** zoning district for a proposed **asphalt plant** on the subject property. The asphalt operations will be relocating from an existing Heavy Industrial parcel at 304-5.

A previous buffer variance was approved for the property in May 2020 in association with a proposed warehousing development. Because the currently proposed asphalt plant represents a more intensive industrial use than the warehousing use contemplated under the prior approval, the applicability of the previously approved buffer reductions must be reevaluated based on the potential impacts of the proposed use.

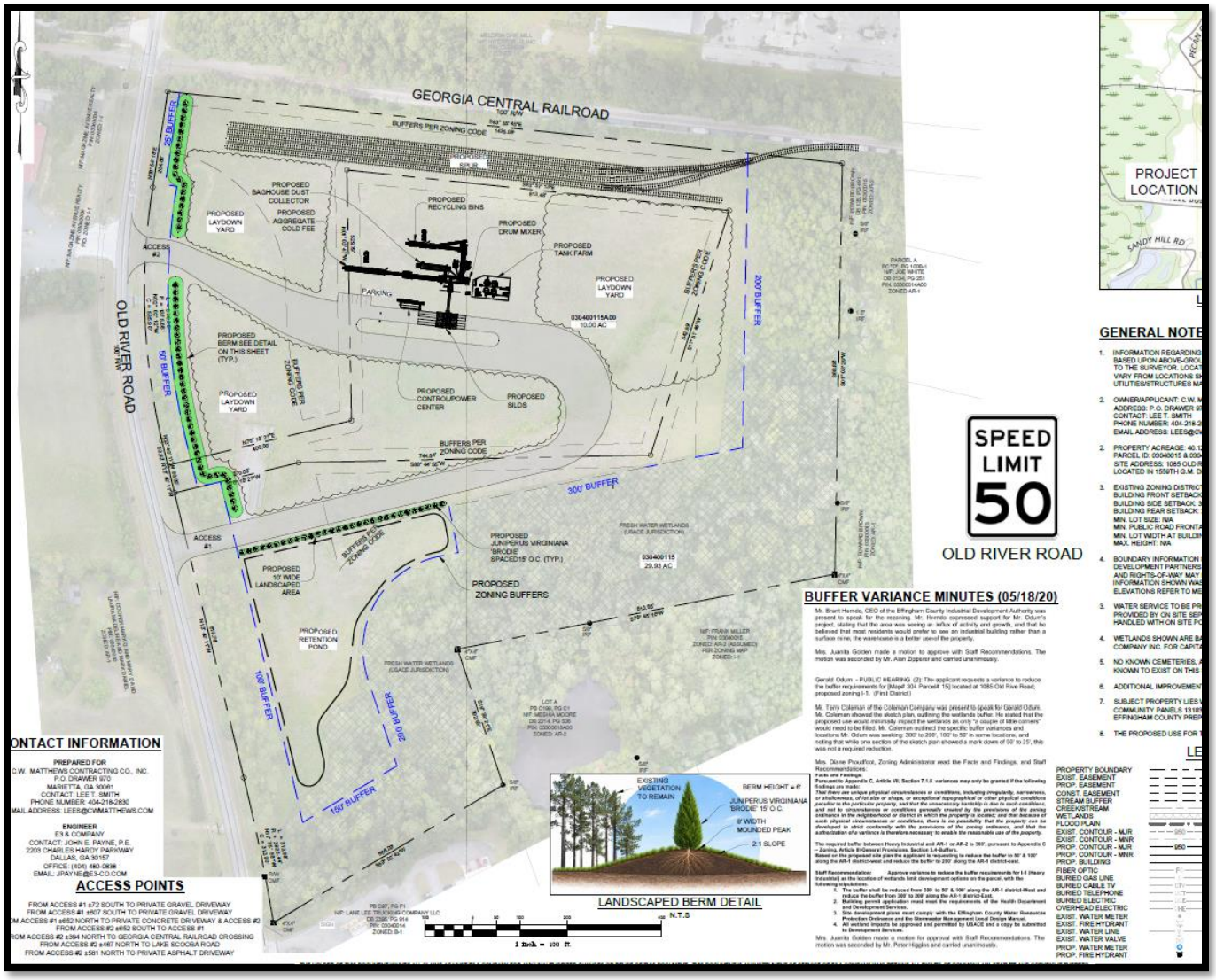
Proposed Buffers:

Location	Zoning relationship	Current required buffer	Proposed LI zoning requirement	Proposed buffer and landscaping
Northern boundary of Old River Road	**I-1 to AR-1; proposed I-1 to LI**	**300 ft**	**25 ft**	**50 ft, with a proposed 6-foot berm along the northern boundary and planted trees along the access road**
Southern boundary of Old River Road	**I-1 to AR-1; proposed I-1 to LI**	**300 ft**	**25 ft**	**100 ft**
Rear of property and southern boundary	**I-1 to AR-1, AR-2, and R-1**	**300 ft**	**-**	**200 ft**

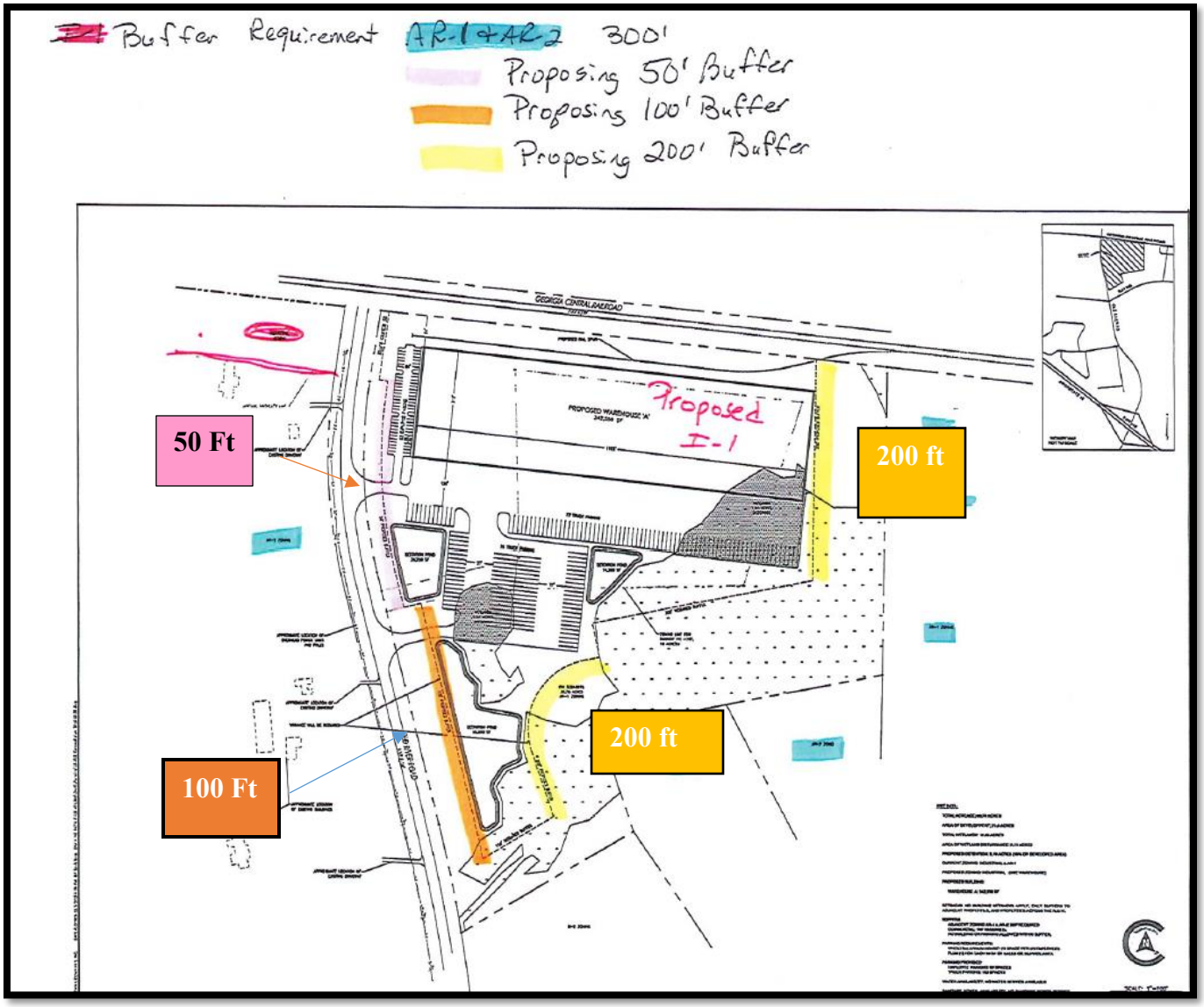
Operations:

To minimize impacts on neighbors, C.W. Matthews proposes using current emissions-control, dust-control, and operational technologies intended to reduce external impacts. These measures include closed-loop baghouse systems, carbon filtration systems, warm-mix systems, dust silos and collection systems, Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs) on electrical motors, and site-wide irrigation, which enhance safety and minimize noise, dust, heat, and fumes generated by site activities.

The applicant states that the site's proximity to Old River Road and I-16 provides convenient access to projects within the I-16 corridor. Several similar uses line Old River Road and I-16, and demand for local asphalt products will only increase as this area continues to grow.



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Surrounding Neighborhood
North: **I-1 (Industrial)**
South: **AR-2 (Agricultural – Residential, 1 acre or more) & B-2 (General Commercial)**
East: **AR-2 (Agricultural – Residential, 1 acre or more) & AR-1 Agricultural- Residential, 5 acres or more) & R-1 (Single-Family Residential)**
West: **I-1 (Industrial) & AR-1 (Agricultural – Residential, 5 acres or more)**



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Facts and Findings:

Site Characteristics

The subject parcel is combined and contains **±40.75** acres; the site is currently undeveloped.

The parcel contains **wetlands** and is not in a known **flood zone**, as per the **Effingham County GIS Map**.

Environmental Analysis

Reducing the required buffer between an asphalt plant and nearby residential uses may increase the potential for land-use conflicts and environmental impacts. Key environmental concerns include:

- **Air emissions:** hazardous air pollutants from production, loading, storage tanks, truck traffic, and fugitive dust.
- **Odors:** Asphalt fumes can create persistent nuisance odors even when emissions comply with permit limits.
- **Noise and vibration:** Equipment and heavy trucks
- **Dust:** Aggregate handling, stockpiles, unpaved surfaces, and truck movements can deposit dust on neighboring homes and yards.
- **Truck impacts:** More diesel exhaust, roadway dust, noise, and pavement deterioration along residential routes.
- **Stormwater and water quality:** Runoff may carry sediment

Surrounding Development Pattern

The surrounding area is a mix of industrial and residential uses. The area has experienced increased industrial development in recent years.

North/ Northwest

- Industrial (I-1)
- Agricultural Residential homesteads (AR-1 & AR-2)
- Pecan Grove Subdivision (AR-1)
- Asphalt production (HI)
- Industrial (I-1)

East

- Agricultural Residential homesteads (AR-1 & AR-2 & R-1)

South

- Dump Truck Company (B-2)
- Agricultural Residential homesteads (AR-1 & AR-2 & R-1)

West

- Agricultural-Residential homesteads (AR-1)
- Industrial (I-1)

*** DRI Report:

2.1 Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

According to the Future Land Use Map, the site is within the Industrial land use area. Based upon the adopted Comprehensive Plan, the proposed Asphalt Plant Development is compatible as most adjacent parcels are zoned Industrial, Transitional, and Commercial, while the area to the east is zoned Residential. The plan identifies the Industrial areas dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses. Light and Heavy industrial uses are permitted in these areas. Heavy industrial is generally defined as manufacturing uses, large-scale warehouses, concrete facilities, or any other process that could produce high levels of noise, dust, smoke, odors, or other emissions. Light industrial includes, but is not limited to, warehousing and distribution, trucking, and small-scale assembly and manufacturing. Development in this category requires supportive infrastructure and access to major transportation thoroughfares. It is important for industrial areas to comply with environmental regulations, implement sustainable practices, and mitigate their environmental footprint to minimize the adverse effects of commercial and industrial land uses on surrounding property and public thoroughfares; to act as a filtration zone for stormwater; to make the environment more visually attractive, and to preserve the undisturbed vegetative buffers in the county.

3.1 Regional Commission Recommendations and Environmental Considerations

The following comments from the CRC are recommendations. The CRC is not the approving body for new developments in Effingham County; that authority rests with locally elected representatives. The CRC is tasked with providing public notice, an opportunity for comments from affected parties, and recommendations based on existing comprehensive plans and best planning practices.
Water conservation is a key planning priority in coastal Georgia, particularly in support of long-term resource stewardship. The CRC strongly encourages the use of native or drought-tolerant landscaping and recommends that the applicant review the Coastal Georgia Regional Water Plan to ensure that the best practices for water efficiency and stormwater management are incorporated into site design.
The CRC strongly advises the applicant to evaluate the potential impacts on the overall drainage system and flood risks associated with the proposed development, taking into account FEMA flood zone designation.
The Georgia Department of Transportation submitted comments stating that if any construction equipment or construction exceeds 20' AGL, an FAA form must be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration. Submissions for any associated cranes may be made online, and the FAA must be in receipt of the notifications no later than 120 days

prior to construction. The FAA then evaluates the potential impacts of the project on protected airspace associated with the airports and will advise the proponent if any further actions are necessary.
Ogeechee Riverkeeper submitted comments addressing the
wetlands that are present on the site that raise concerns for flooding and stormwater management. In addition, wastewater management should be considered based on the proposed use. Ogeechee Riverkeeper urges the City of Bloomingdale to carefully consider proposed site designs and layout plans in order to reduce flooding, fugitive pollution, and wastewater concerns.
As with all proposed development submissions, we encourage the county to review and consider the comments and concerns of both residents and potentially affected local governments and public agencies.

Zoning Context

The property was previously zoned to I-1 at the August 1, 2006, and May 19, 2020, Board of Commissioners meetings. Then, on May 19, 2020, 2014, at the Board of Commissioners meeting, a variance was approved with the following stipulations:

1. The buffer shall be reduced from 300' to 50' & 100' along the AR-1 district-West and reduce the buffer from 300' to 200' along the AR-1 district-East.
2. Building permit application must meet the requirements of the Health Department and Development Services.
3. Site development plans must comply with the Effingham County Water Resources Protection Ordinance and the Stormwater Management Local Design Manual.
4. All wetland impacts be approved and permitted by USACE and a copy be submitted to Development Services.

5.15 Heavy Industrial districts.
5.15.1 Intent. The Heavy Industrial designation is intended to support and enhance employment opportunities by establishing areas specifically designated for a diverse range of industrial activities. These areas accommodate businesses that require extensive infrastructure, large-scale facilities, and access to key transportation networks, ensuring efficient operations and logistical support. The designation encourages the retention and expansion of existing industries while also attracting new businesses that contribute to economic growth. Additionally, it allows for complementary uses—such as logistics hubs, research and development facilities, and limited commercial services—that support industrial functions and workforce needs, fostering a dynamic and sustainable industrial environment.

Infrastructure and Services

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

Roadway Classification: Old River Road is classified as a Major Collector within Effingham County.

APPLICABLE ORDINANCE SECTIONS

Section 3.4.2 – Adjacent Public Street Buffers:

*"**C.** Street buffers for industrial property shall equal the required buffer for the use on the other side of the street in the above chart."*

***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

Staff reviewed the variance request to reduce the required buffers associated with a proposed asphalt plant, with particular consideration of potential impacts on public safety and general welfare. Because an asphalt plant is an industrial use that may generate noise, dust, odors, lighting, truck traffic, and other operational impacts, adequate separation from surrounding properties—particularly residential uses—is an important consideration.

Reducing the required buffers may decrease the physical separation intended to mitigate potential impacts associated with the proposed use. The effectiveness of the reduced buffers will therefore depend on the proposed screening, existing vegetation, site design, operational practices, and compliance with applicable environmental and development regulations.

(b) Unique Conditions

The proposed asphalt plant represents a more intensive industrial use, and portions of the surrounding area include residential properties; any reduction in the required buffers should be evaluated carefully. Site constraints alone do not eliminate the need to provide adequate separation and screening from adjoining residential uses. Supplemental landscaping, fencing, preservation of existing vegetation, or other mitigation measures may be appropriate where the full required buffer cannot be provided.

(c) Hardship

The hardship created by existing site conditions should be balanced against the purpose of the buffer requirements, particularly where the property adjoins or is near residential uses. Any relief granted should be limited to the minimum necessary and should incorporate appropriate screening and mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts on neighboring properties.

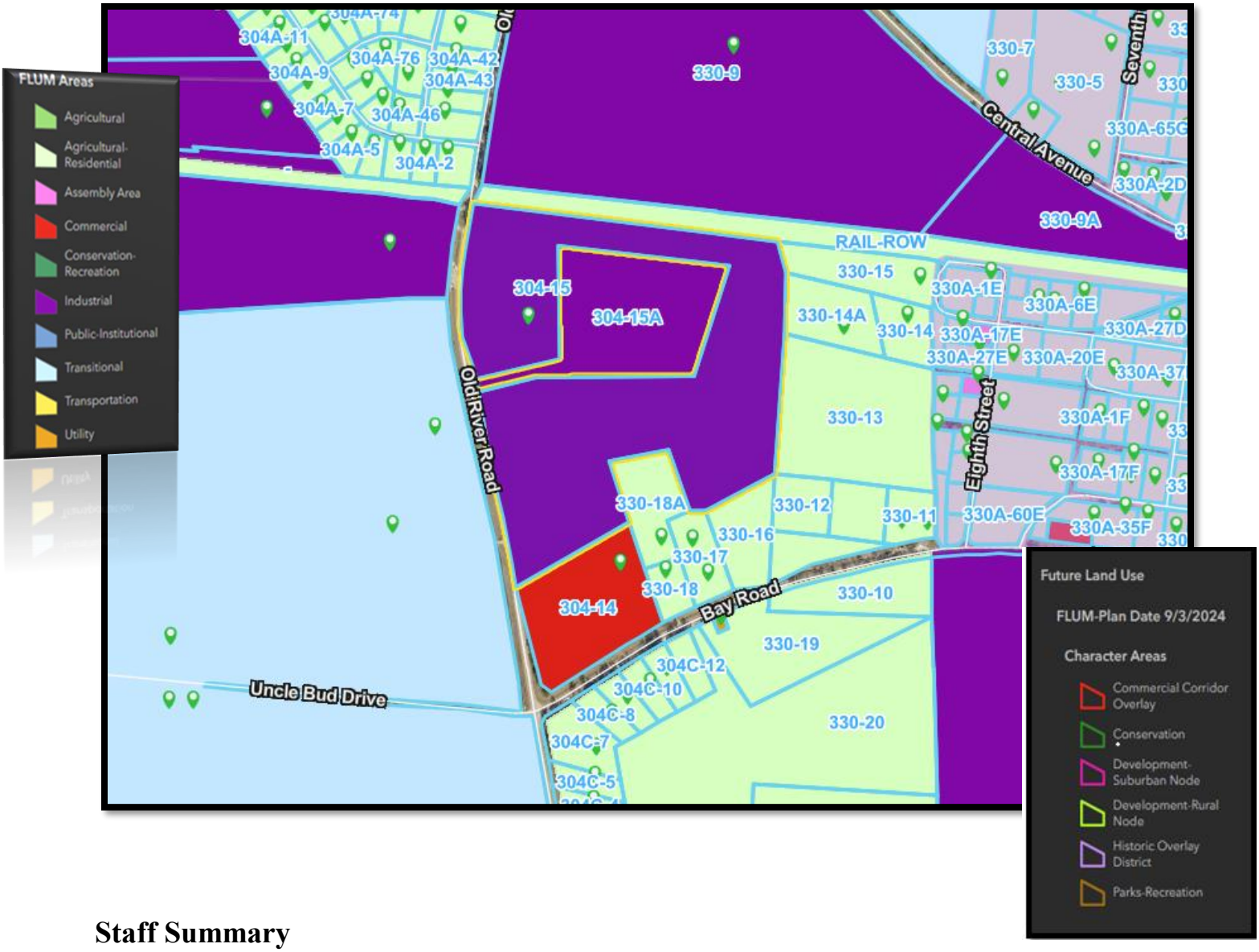
(d) Consistency with the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan

The subject property is located within an area designated **Industrial** on the Future Land Use Map. The proposed asphalt plant is generally consistent with the industrial character contemplated by this future land use designation, which is intended to accommodate industrial activities and associated development.

The requested variance, however, seeks relief from the buffering standards established by the zoning ordinance. These requirements are intended to separate industrial operations from surrounding properties and reduce potential impacts such as noise, dust, odors, lighting, and visual intrusion. Therefore, while the proposed industrial use is consistent with the Future Land Use Map designation, the reduction of the required buffers must be considered separately in relation to the purpose and intent of the zoning ordinance.

Comprehensive Plan:

*These parcels are designated **Industrial** on the **Future Land Use Map (FLUM).** This category is for land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses. Light and Heavy industrial uses are permitted in these areas. Light industrial includes, but is not limited to, warehousing and distribution, trucking, and small-scale assembly and manufacturing. Development in this category requires supportive infrastructure and access to major transportation thoroughfares. It is important for industrial areas to comply with environmental regulations, implement sustainable practices, and mitigate their environmental footprint to minimize the adverse effects of commercial and industrial land uses on surrounding property and public thoroughfares; to act as a filtration zone for stormwater; to make the environment more visually attractive; and to preserve the undisturbed vegetative buffers in the county.*



Staff Summary

The Future Land Use Map designates the property as Industrial, making the proposed use consistent with the Future Land Use Map designation and Industrial zoning district.

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