



Staff Report

Author: Kimberly Barlett, Senior Planner
Department: Development Services
Subject: Variance
Meeting Date: April 21, 2026
Application: VAR-26-11

Existing Zoning: AR-2 (Agricultural – Residential, 1 acre or more)

Map & Parcel: 302-84A

Parcel Size: 0.267 acres

Applicant: Duane Gilchrist
148 Laurel Circle
Eden, GA 31307

Owner(s): Duane J Gilchrist III & Naomi M
180 Lakeshore Road
Guyton, GA 31312

Commissioner District: First District

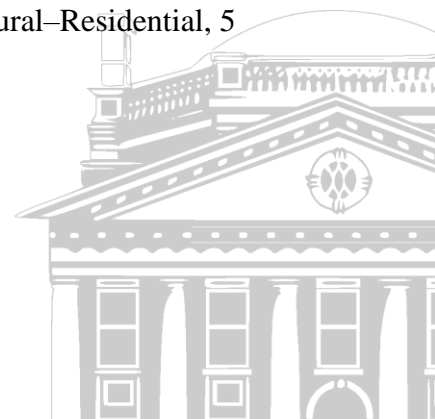
Location: 148 Laurel Circle
Eden, GA 31307

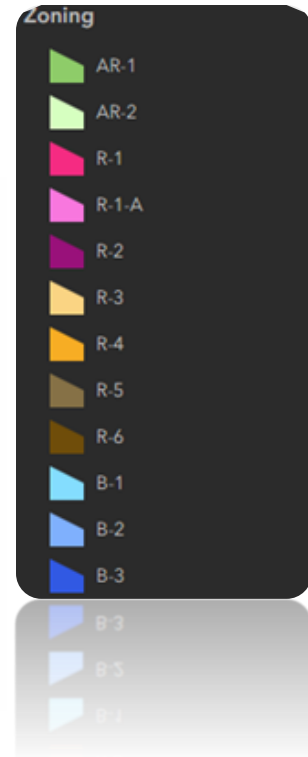
Existing Land Use and Zoning:

The subject parcel is located at 148 Laurel Circle and currently contains a mobile home, as confirmed by the Effingham County Tax Assessor’s database. Access to the property is provided via Laurel Circle.

Surrounding properties are zoned AR-2 and are characterized by low-density residential and agricultural uses:

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





The Proposed Request:

This **variance** request seeks to allow the temporary occupancy of a camper on the property while the existing mobile home is undergoing renovation. The home has been deemed uninhabitable due to mold. The proposed renovation work is limited to cosmetic improvements; therefore, a building permit is not required. The project will not include exterior modifications, electrical work, or plumbing.

Facts and Findings:

Site Characteristics

The subject parcel consists of approximately **0.267 acres** and is currently improved with a mobile home. Access to the property is provided directly from Laurel Circle.

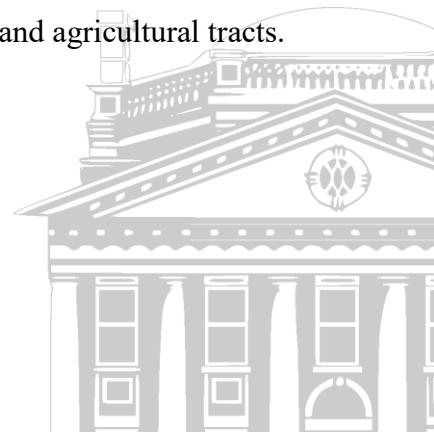
According to County GIS mapping, a portion of the parcel lies within **FEMA Flood Zone AE**; however, no identified **wetlands or other environmental constraints** have been noted.

Surrounding Development Pattern

The area surrounding the parcel consists primarily of rural residential homesteads and agricultural tracts. Development intensity remains low, with lot sizes generally 0.5 acre or greater.

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Zoning Context

The parcel is zoned AR-2, which requires a minimum lot size of one (1) acre. Surrounding properties are primarily zoned AR-2, with some adjacent AR-1 parcels. The district supports low-density residential development that blends with the rural landscape and serves as a transition between more intensive development and larger-lot agricultural areas.

Infrastructure and Services

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

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

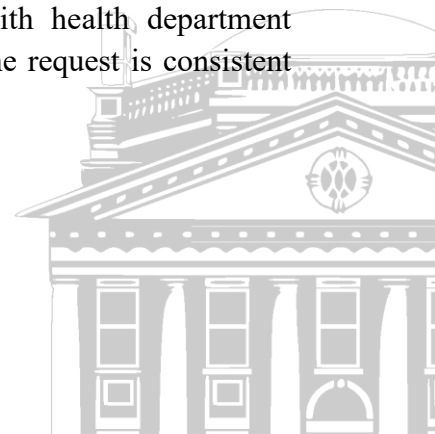
The proposed temporary use of a camper on the property during the active renovation of the primary residence is not anticipated to adversely affect public health, safety, or welfare. The request is limited in duration and scope and is intended to provide safe, temporary housing while the existing dwelling is under construction.

Additionally, the temporary occupancy will remain accessory to the principal residential use and will not alter the character of the surrounding area.

Provided that appropriate conditions are established—such as compliance with health department regulations, proper utility connections, and a defined timeframe for removal—the request is consistent with the maintenance of the public health, safety, and welfare of the community.

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(b) Unique Conditions

The subject property is affected by specific circumstances that are not commonly shared by other properties in the area. The primary residence is currently undergoing active renovation, which has rendered the home temporarily uninhabitable. This condition creates a unique situation in which the property cannot be reasonably used for its intended residential purpose during the construction period.

(c) Hardship

The requested variance is based on a claimed hardship associated with the temporary occupancy of a camper during the renovation of an existing residence affected by mold. The presence of mold in the home poses a legitimate health and safety concern, rendering the structure unsuitable for occupancy during remediation and repair.

The hardship is not self-imposed, as the need for temporary housing stems from unforeseen conditions that affect the home's livability. Allowing temporary on-site use of a camper would provide the applicant with reasonable accommodation while necessary repairs are completed, minimizing displacement.

Staff finds that the request is limited in scope and duration, as it is intended solely to accommodate temporary living arrangements during the renovation period. With appropriate conditions, such as establishing a defined timeframe for occupancy and ensuring compliance with applicable health and safety standards, the request would not adversely impact the surrounding area or be contrary to the intent of the ordinance.

(d) Consistency with the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan

According to County ordinance Section 3.21.1-Mobile homes, trailers, mobile home parks, and trailer parks states that parked or stored camping and recreational equipment shall never be occupied or used for living, sleeping, or housekeeping purposes.

Although the ordinance does not typically permit occupancy of a camper as a dwelling unit, the request is temporary in nature and associated with the active renovation of the existing primary residence.

The requested variance does not alter the permitted use of the property or conflict with the intent of the zoning ordinance. The request seeks limited relief from the ordinance restrictions to allow temporary residential occupancy by campers during the renovation of the primary dwelling. The proposed use remains incidental and subordinate to the principal residential use of the property and does not represent a permanent change in land use. With appropriate conditions and time limitations, the request maintains the overall intent and integrity of the zoning regulations.

Comprehensive Plan:

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The parcel is designated **Agricultural** area on the **Future Land Use Map (FLUM)**. This category supports low-density residential development that is compatible with nearby agricultural uses. The intent is to ensure residential development patterns that are compatible with surrounding densities, building types, and established neighborhoods characterized by low intensity development, larger lots, low pedestrian orientation and access, with a sizable amount of open space, and with a high degree of separation and deep setbacks. (Effingham County 2020-2040 Joint Comprehensive Plan, pg. 36).



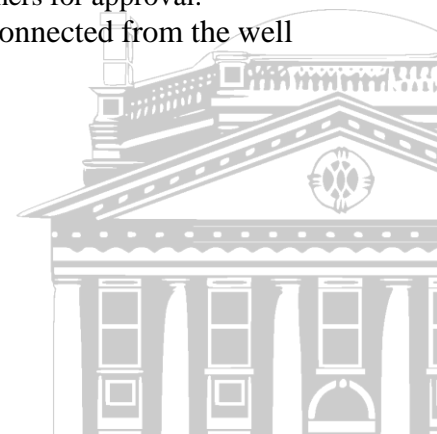
Recommendation:

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. Allowing limited, temporary use of a camper provides a reasonable solution that enables the applicant to remain on-site while ensuring the timely completion of the renovation. Staff finds that the request represents the minimum necessary relief and, if approved, should be subject to the following appropriate stipulations:

1. **The RV/camper may be occupied for up to twelve (12) months during the home renovation.** Should an extension be needed, the applicant shall come before the Board of Commissioners for approval.
2. **Upon completion of the renovation,** the camper shall be vacated and disconnected from the well and septic.

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