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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Howey-in-the-Hills Planning Board  
**CC:** J. Brock, Town Clerk  
**FROM:** Thomas Harowski, AICP, Planning Consultant  
**SUBJECT:** Lake Hills Commercial Development  
**DATE:** February 13, 2024

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The Town has received an application for Preliminary Site Plan Approval for the commercial portion of the Lake Hills Development. This project is governed by Ordinance 2011-008, Ordinance 2015-005 and a development agreement recorded February 24, 2016 in addition to the land development code including Section 4.03 which addresses site plan review. The commercial portion of the project runs along the SR-19 frontage from the location of the Town's new water plant east to the eastern edge of the subject property. The adopted development agreement designates the commercial area within the larger Lake Hills project, and the preliminary site plan under consideration will locate the buildings, roads, parking areas, landscaping and other features of the project in sufficient detail to assess compliance with the Town codes. The final site plan will complete the project detail based on final engineering, landscaping and other site improvements.

The project proposes a grocery store (50,800 square feet), a liquor store (2,100 square feet) and a retail building of 8,400 square feet. The project will also include four outparcels as follows:

Outparcel A	3.58 acres
Outparcel B	0.97 acres
Outparcel C	1.09 acres
Outparcel D	2.34 acres

The project includes an entry road from SR 19 that separates Outparcel A from the balance of the tract and also serves as a primary entrance to the residential development parcel. The commercial site includes an entrance from CR 48 along side the Town's water plant site. Outparcel A also includes a conceptual access to the properties to the east of the Lake Hills Project. The intent of this access is to allow future development in that area to access the commercial development without the necessity of driving on SR 19.

The development agreement specifically cites grocery stores, retail sales and services, restaurants and offices as permitted uses, and the uses identified to date fall within the list of permitted uses. When proposals are submitted for the outparcels, the permitted uses will be examined at that time. Note that convenience stores with fuel sales are permitted in the project.

The commercial development is part of the larger Lake Hills development which has been determined to meet the minimum requirements for a Village Mixed Use development. In addition to the residential and commercial components, the larger project includes private community recreation facilities, a four-acre public park and a bicycle/pedestrian link along the primary collector road connecting SR 19 with CR 48 through the main residential portion of the project. Additionally, the Town has purchased a 3.23-acre tract for new wells and a water treatment plant. This facility is currently under construction. The Lake County School Board has also purchased a 22-acre site at the northwest corner of the project for eventual development of an elementary school. However, no planned school improvements are programmed for at least the next five years.

The commercial project has been reviewed by the Town's Development Review Committee for compliance with the development agreement, compliance with the Town codes, and compliance with the Village Mixed Use development rules. The project includes several proposals that are not compliant with Town codes and the adopted development agreement. The applicant is seeking approval from the Town to vary from the affected requirements for parking lot design and some foundation planting landscape requirements. These items, along with some other items will be suggested as conditions to the Planning Board action.

### **Concurrency Review**

At the preliminary site plan stage, a review is conducted to determine if sufficient capacity is available to support the public services required by the project. At this stage the Town conducts a planning level review; no certificate of concurrency will be issued until the final site plan is approved. The key concurrency items are potable water, sanitary sewer, storm water management and traffic. The findings are as follows:

Potable Water: With the completion of the new wells and water treatment plant, the Town will have adequate water volume and water pressure to support the proposed project.

Sanitary Sewer: Sewer is not currently available to the site. Capacity may be available from the Central Lake Community Development District (CDD) or potentially from other options currently under consideration by the Town Council. If timing becomes an issue, the applicants have indicated they may propose an on-site treatment facility as an interim option. The sewer service issue will need to be resolved before a final site plan can be approved.

Storm Water Management: Storm water treatment will be provided in a retention area to be constructed to the north of the commercial tract in a facility that will be shared by the

commercial and residential development. The two projects will need to provide the Town with sufficient documentation to ensure access to the off-site retention area. The size of the retention area is an engineering issue that will be reviewed by the Town's engineer and reviewed and permitted by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

Traffic: The applicant submitted a traffic study that covered both the commercial and residential portions of the development. The study included existing traffic, growth in background traffic that is a normal part of traffic movement, and other development projects that have been approved. These projects include:

- Talichet Phases 1 and 2 (2023)
- Whispering Heights (2023)
- Drake Point (Unincorporated Lake County) (2025)
- The Reserve (All components) (2028)
- Watermark (2027)

While other developments in and around Howey have been discussed, and in some cases preliminarily reviewed, none of these projects have received any level of formal approval. These projects will rank behind the Lake Hills development in the pecking order for traffic capacity. The traffic study uses very compressed time lines for each of the background projects (as noted by the dates in parentheses) and for the subject project (both commercial and residential) at 2028. Actual traffic impacts will certainly extend over a longer period of time giving more opportunity to address identified needs.

The traffic study made recommendations in three areas including impacts to road segments, impacts to intersections and access control design. The impacts can be addressed as follows:

- SR-19 from CR 561 to Central Avenue is projected to operate over the designated level of service. In part, this segment can be addressed through a reclassification of the link in the FDOT system. The segment is mis-classified and should have a higher designated capacity. There is a current project to widen SR-19 to four lanes from CR 561 to Citrus Avenue. The project is currently funded through the PD&E stage and the segment will eventually move through construction.
- SR 19 from CR 455 to US 27 is another segment that would operate within the designated level of service if the link was properly classified in the FDOT system.
- The intersection of SR 19 and CR 48 falls below the adopted level of service with delays generated by a traffic signal. The traffic study examined the intersection with a roundabout traffic control and found that it would operate within the designated level of service under that scenario. FDOT has determined that the intersection should be managed with a roundabout, and the applicant will be required to contribute funding to the project equivalent to its fair share of the traffic generation.
- The intersection of SR-19 at Central Avenue can be addressed with a traffic signal, and the Town has been working with FDOT to review a warrant study for

installation of a full signal. This project does not generate traffic on the eastbound approach which is the source of the problem.

- The intersection of SR 19 with the project east entrance, which serves both the commercial and residential portions of the project, will initially operate with stop sign control, but will eventually need a signal upgrade. The signal will be provided by the commercial and residential project components. There is some discussion about using a roundabout at this project entrance as well as at the intersection with CR 48. The proposed project will need to fund the final option selected.
- In reviewing site access, turn lanes will be required at all interesections based on the design and permitting requirements of FDOT for SR-19 and Lake County for CR-48. Part of the access mangement review will include an analysis of right-of-way increases if any are required. If right-of-way is needed, the projects will be expected to provide that area as part of the permitting process.

### **Discussion and Conditions**

The proposed commercial development is consistent with approved Lake Hills adopting ordinance and development agreement with regard to the location of commercial uses and the type of uses proposed. The most recent version of the preliminary site plan does not fully comply with the land development code and the development agreement. Therefore any recommendation for approval offered by the Planning Board should include a set of conditions addressing these items. The conditions offered for consideration include:

1. Redesign of the parking lot layout to include landscaped medians between facing rows of parking stalls (Section 7.05.01) unless the requested variance is approved. The applicants are proposing a design with no medians between rows of parking stalls.
2. Foundation plantings around buildings (Section 7.04.02) be provided unless the requested variance is given.
3. Perimeter buffers of 10-feet or 15-feet as required be provided along the north side of the parent parcel and along the perimeter of each proposed outparcel. The applicant has agreed to this condition.
4. A 10-foot landscaped buffer be provided along the interior parcel lines between the parent parcel and the outparcels. The applicant has agreed to this condition.
5. In areas where existing trees are to be retained, no grade change or only minor grade change be allowed to support the tree preservation. Tree preservation areas are along the east side of Outparcel A and the south property line of Outparcel C, so preservation should be reasonably completed. The applicant is proposing removal of seven trees to allow for the driveway construction alongside Outparcel C. The applicant has agreed to this condition.

6. The access point to Outparcel C from the entrance drive be shifted further north. The applicant has agreed to this condition.
7. The sidewalk on SR 19 in front of Outparcel C be constructed with any improvements to Outparcel C. The sidewalk is required of the applicant, but the timing is being adjusted to allow for the final resolution of the SR-19 and CR 48 intersection. The applicant has agreed to this condition.
8. The applicant needs to calculate the “fair share” cost of its impact on the SR-19 and CR-48 intersection and provide the payment for use in intersection improvements. Design and construction will be coordinated with FDOT and Lake County.
9. The applicant needs to provide an adequate guarantee for improvements to the east entrance of the project from SR 19. This guarantee can be done in conjunction with the residential development component. These improvements are solely project related and the funding contributions need to be assured if the intersection upgrades do not occur with the initial construction. The traffic study recommendations suggest signalization may not be warranted with the initial project phases.
10. The applicant will provide at its cost the access controls required by FDOT for SR-19 and Lake County for CR-48 as part of their respective permitting process. These items will include turn lanes, deceleration lanes, and other access controls and, if necessary, right-of-way required by the permitting agencies.

## **Recommendation**

The staff recommends approval of the preliminary site plan with the conditions noted above.