

**HALL COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
RECOMMENDATION REPORT**

**Applicant** ..... Rochester | DCCM

**Request** ..... **Rezone** | from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1)  
to Planned Commercial Development (PCD)

**Proposed Use** ..... Ministry and retreat center

**Size** ..... 497.93± acres

**Zoning** ..... Current: Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) |  
Proposed: Planned Commercial Development  
(PCD)

**Location** ..... **3509 & 3595 Tanners Mill Circle; 3250, 3260,  
3262, 3264 & 3334 Tanners Mill Road; 4824 &  
4836 Weaver Road & 3585 Jones Lane** | Tax  
parcels 15029 000031, 000059, 15025 000004G,  
000066, 000065, 000004I, & 000003A (pt.),  
15029 000151, 000027A, & 000030

**Commission District** ..... One

**Planning Commission Date** ..... February 17, 2025

**Staff Recommendation** ..... **Approval**, as the proposed use is consistent  
with the intent of the future land use  
designation of “Rural Neighborhood” in the  
Comprehensive Plan.

**Record Number** ..... HZON24-0048

**Planning Commission Recommendation** ..... **Approval, with conditions**

**Vote: 4-0 (Varner absent)**

**Planning Commission Conditions:**

1. The property shall be developed in accordance with the site plan dated December 20, 2024, and as described in the project narrative dated December 20, 2024, modified as necessary for compliance with conditions herein and development standards enforced at the time of site plan approval.

2. All proposed internal roads and driveways must meet all Hall County Traffic Engineering and Fire access requirements. However, internal roads are not required to meet criteria for public streets.
3. All proposed and existing structures shall be subject to Hall County Fire Marshal and Building Inspection's standards.
4. The proposed development shall maintain a 100 foot transitional perimeter buffer except where adjacent to public right-of way.
5. Existing buildings within the 100 foot transitional buffer may be repaired, rebuilt, or expanded in accordance with setback requirements as specified in the provided narrative. These structures may be rebuilt or enlarged at their current location, provided all new construction is located at least ten feet further from the external boundaries of the development than it currently is located. No other buildings or amenities (other than trails) shall encroach into this 100 foot buffer.
6. No outdoor storage, loading or service areas shall be located within the 100 foot perimeter buffer.
7. All construction within the development, including the expansion of existing structures, shall be limited to a total of 390,000 square feet and shall be restricted to: day-use facilities such as chapels and outreach centers, overnight accommodations, including staffing residences, pastoral retreats, cottages, lodges, designed to accommodate guests and ministry members, bunkhouses, bath houses, a single dining hall, and supporting amenities. The developer shall not exceed the number of units per use as outlined in the narrative, but may choose to construct fewer; in no case shall new facilities and expansion of existing structures exceed 390,000 square feet, excluding existing square footages as of January 1, 2025. Open air amenities such as trails, pavilions, and lawns shall not be included in this calculation.
8. No variances or development exceptions are granted as part of this request that are not explicitly granted by Board approval. The development shall be compliant with the Unified Development Code of Hall County, as well as any other agencies or reviewing departments, including, but not limited to the Fire Marshal and Hall County Engineering. Where there are discrepancies between the proposed standards and County regulations, the County regulations shall overrule unless otherwise approved herein.
9. All conditions of zoning shall be made a part of any plats or construction plans created for the development.

### **Excerpts from the minutes of the February 17, 2025 meeting**

#### **Applicant's Presentation:**

**Katie Greenway, Planning and Zoning Administrator**, presented a summary of the request.

**Brian Rochester, 425 Oak Street, Gainesville** presented the request. The applicant is requesting to rezone a combined 497.925± acres from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) to Planned Commercial District (PCD) for the purpose of developing a ministry and retreat center called Shiloh Ranch. The subject property comprises ten parcels located along Tanners Mill Circle, Tanners Mill Road, Weaver Road, and Jones Lane. Historically, the site has had various uses, including agricultural and commercial activities for filming, but has largely remained undeveloped. The current property owners, a nonprofit organization called Tanners Mill Circle, LLC seek to develop the property for a ministry and retreat center and summer camp.

**Jeff Crocker, 410 Bradford Street, Gainesville** presented the request.

**Public Forum:**

**Donald Bloom, 3684 Tanners Mill Circle, Gainesville** spoke in favor. Mr. Bloom asked if the Georgia Power easement would be affected with this application, if the entrance off Tanners Mill Circle be closed at any point as it causes his driveway to be a turnaround point, and if the creek would be impacted by this development?

**Heather Palmer, 3697 Whitney Road, Gainesville** spoke in opposition. Concerns raised were the nature of the retreat and the impact on the community.

**Larry Frias, 3373 Tanners Mill Road, Gainesville** spoke in opposition. Concerns raised were if long-term stays would be allowed on the property, negative impacts on traffic, and how sewage would be handled.

**Sherry Evans, 5041 Weaver Road, Gainesville** spoke in opposition. Concerns included why the proposed zoning of commercial was used, and if the applicant be able to change what is developed on the property if the current proposal fails. Additionally, she noted that the Comprehensive Plan does not support commercial zoning in this area. Mr. Braswell explained the zoning would be dependent on the current proposal, and if there were to be a change, they would have to come before the county commission.

**Regina Dobbs, 4871 Sherman Allen Road, Gainesville,** spoke in opposition. Concerns raised included the proposed commercial zoning and the impact to her property which is adjacent. She also seconded previous concerns raised.

**Ken Grosch, 4727 Walnut Lane, Gainesville** spoke in opposition. Concerns raised included impacts to the current character of the area, the commercial development reducing land that could be used for residential development, and the disturbance to the surrounding residences that construction would cause.

**Shannon Kent, 3350 Tanners Mill Road, Gainesville** spoke in opposition. Mr. Kent's concern was negative impacts on traffic as a result of the development.

**James Cutler, 5639 Honeytree Drive, Braselton** spoke in opposition. Concerns raised were the commercial zoning and a decrease in nearby property values.

**Rebuttal**

The applicant explained that the development would not affect the Georgia Power lines on the property. Using the site plan, the applicant pointed out that the area close to Ms. Dobbs property is planned to remain natural with minimal disturbance. The applicant also showed the 100 foot buffer that surrounds the property to give separation to neighboring properties. Addressing the concern with the Tanners Mill Circle entrance to the property, the applicant explained it would only be open to those staying in the renovated barn and it would serve as an emergency entrance the remainder of the time. As Tanners Mill Road is a state highway, the applicant will be subject to all of GDOT's requirements for access. The applicant addressed the concern regarding Walnut Creek, stating there would be no development near the creek besides walking trails. The applicant explained there would not be any long-term residences

except for employees and acknowledged that there would be septic systems on the property as sewer is not available in the area.

**Planning Commission Comments:**

Mr. Sosebee asked the applicant to clarify the reference to an 800-home development. The applicant stated that when a previous property owner sold the property, he expected the buyer to be someone interested in creating the 800-lot development that had been conceptualized; however, Free Chapel Church purchased the property and is instead interested in a less impactful use.

***Motion: A motion to approve, with conditions was made by Frank Sosebee and seconded by Stan Hunt. Vote: 4-0 (Varner absent)***

Conditions:

1. The property shall be developed in accordance with the site plan dated December 20, 2024, and as described in the project narrative dated December 20, 2024, modified as necessary for compliance with conditions herein and development standards enforced at the time of site plan approval.
2. All proposed internal roads and driveways must meet all Hall County Traffic Engineering and Fire access requirements. However, internal roads are not required to meet criteria for public streets.
3. All proposed and existing structures shall be subject to Hall County Fire Marshal and Building Inspection's standards.
4. The proposed development shall maintain a 100 foot transitional perimeter buffer except where adjacent to public right-of way.
5. Existing buildings within the 100 foot transitional buffer may be repaired, rebuilt, or expanded in accordance with setback requirements as specified in the provided narrative. These structures may be rebuilt or enlarged at their current location, provided all new construction is located at least ten feet further from the external boundaries of the development than it currently is located. No other buildings or amenities (other than trails) shall encroach into this 100 foot buffer.
6. No outdoor storage, loading or service areas shall be located within the 100 foot perimeter buffer.
7. All construction within the development, including the expansion of existing structures, shall be limited to a total of 390,000 square feet and shall be restricted to: day-use facilities such as chapels and outreach centers, overnight accommodations, including staffing residences, pastoral retreats, cottages, lodges, designed to accommodate guests and ministry members, bunkhouses, bath houses, a single dining hall, and supporting amenities. The developer shall not exceed the number of units per use as outlined in the narrative, but may choose to construct fewer; in no case shall new facilities and expansion of existing structures exceed 390,000 square feet, excluding existing square footages as of January 1, 2025. Open air amenities such as trails, pavilions, and lawns shall not be included in this calculation.

8. No variances or development exceptions are granted as part of this request that are not explicitly granted by Board approval. The development shall be compliant with the Unified Development Code of Hall County, as well as any other agencies or reviewing departments, including, but not limited to the Fire Marshal and Hall County Engineering. Where there are discrepancies between the proposed standards and County regulations, the County regulations shall overrule unless otherwise approved herein.
9. All conditions of zoning shall be made a part of any plats or construction plans created for the development.

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**Staff recommends Approval of the applicant's request with the following conditions:**

1. The property shall be developed in accordance with the site plan dated December 20, 2024, and as described in the project narrative dated December 20, 2024, modified as necessary for compliance with conditions herein and development standards enforced at the time of site plan approval.
2. All proposed internal roads and driveways must meet all Hall Country Traffic Engineering and Fire access requirements.
3. All proposed and existing structures shall be subject to Hall County Fire Marshal and Building Inspection's standards.
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### **Summary Analysis**

The applicant is requesting to rezone a combined 497.925± acres from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) to Planned Commercial District (PCD) for the purpose of developing a ministry and retreat center called Shiloh Ranch.

The subject property comprises ten parcels located along Tanners Mill Circle, Tanners Mill Road, Weaver Road, and Jones Lane. Historically, the site has had various uses, including agricultural and commercial activities for filming, but has largely remained undeveloped. The current property owners, a nonprofit organization called Tanners Mill Circle, LLC seek to develop a ministry and retreat center and summer camp.

Adjacent properties are primarily zoned Residential 1 (R-1) and Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1), with nearby industrially zoned tracts along Candler Road. The surrounding development includes residential neighborhoods and agricultural land.

The applicant proposes several facilities within the development, and is proposing specific standards outlined in the narrative. These standards include:

- Maintaining a minimum 100-foot buffer along the property boundary to mitigate visual impact on neighboring properties. Exceptions to the buffer will be limited to existing structures and security features. Existing buildings within 100-foot buffer may be rebuilt at their current location and may be enlarged, provided all new construction is ten feet or more further away from the site boundary.
- Maintaining existing structures within their current setbacks
- Constructing new buildings no closer than 110 feet from the property boundary
- Adhering to a maximum height of 50 feet for new structures
- Landscaping and lighting will be managed to minimize intrusion on adjacent properties.

Primary access to the site will be from GA SR 211 (a.k.a. Tanners Mill Road) with additional restricted access points for emergency services and staff off of Tanners Mill Circle, Jones Lane, and Weaver Road. These entrances are shown on the conceptual plan.

The narrative and site plan outline the following key components:

- Day-use facilities such as chapels, wellness center, and offices for outreach programs, ministry programs, and family counseling.

- Overnight accommodations including staff residences, pastoral retreats, cabins, cottages, lodges, bunkhouses, bath houses, and dining hall designed to serve guests and staff.
- Amenities include, but are not limited to, support areas and miscellaneous structures such as outdoor gathering areas, activity lawns, pavilions, maintenance buildings, guard house, security center, boathouse, stables, barns, walking paths and hiking trails; equestrian trails, stables, hay barn and exercise paddock; indoor/outdoor recreation courts and fields; firing range including skeet; putting greens; dog parks; canoe/kayaks; fishing pier/dock; low and high elements ropes/challenge course; and campfire ring.

The applicant states that the siting of the amenity and accessory structures are not shown on the concept plan and will be determined after the camp and larger structures like the chapels and lodge are located on the site.

A chart of all development standards outlined in the submitted narrative is provided below:

<b>Development Standard's</b>	<b>Proposal</b>
Minimum Lot Area	Property may remain in its current configuration or be combined, but is not intended for further subdivision unless in accordance with Hall County subdivision regulations.
Minimum Lot Frontage	Existing road frontages remain. No new access points or subdivisions.
Front, Side, and Rear Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing structures remain with current setbacks.</li> <li>• Existing buildings within 100 feet of the site boundary may be rebuilt or enlarged, but any improvements must be 10 feet further from the site boundary.</li> <li>• New improvements must be at least 110 feet from the site boundary to the nearest building line.</li> <li>• Smaller structures (e.g., security features, signage) may be within perimeter buffer and adjacent to site boundary.</li> <li>• Buildings may be connected by covered walkways, but not required.</li> </ul>
Maximum Building Height	50 feet, measured from the main building entrance to the ridgeline/apex of the roof.
Landscaping	Landscaping and hardscaping at the owner's discretion. Native, non-native, and exotic species allowed, with invasive species prohibited from spreading. No landscaping required in parking areas.
Sidewalks, Trails, & Pathways	Internal system of sidewalks, trails, and pathways to be developed over time. Roads may share

	pedestrian function. ADA compliance in applicable areas (e.g., parking to entrances). No sidewalk requirement along external road frontages.
Outdoor Lighting	Street lighting not required for frontage or internal private roads. Owner has discretion for parking lot, sidewalk, and building lighting, with the goal of minimizing light intrusion on adjacent properties. Changeable copy signs and neon signs prohibited within 100 feet of the site boundary.

Utilities will be provided by the City of Gainesville, with options for on-site septic systems or future connection to public sewer. Traffic impact is expected to be minimal, with internal roads remaining private and managed according to the property's specific needs. Private roads are also subject to Hall County standards for design and construction.

Overall, the proposed development aims to provide a low-density, religious-oriented retreat with facilities that cater to both day-use and overnight stays.

**Based on the future land use plan, staff finds the requested zoning designation *is consistent* with the intent of the Hall County Comprehensive Plan future land use designation of “Rural Neighborhood.”**

The intent of this future land use designation is for these areas to consist of active farms and agricultural enterprises and low-density, large-lot single-family residential uses of up to 0.75 dwellings per acre. These areas also consist of undeveloped lands likely to face development pressures for new residential or commercial development. Similar to Rural Agriculture, they should have deep setbacks and incorporate a high percentage of open space. Where it occurs, new development should preserve natural features, including tree canopy, waterways, and waterbodies.

The proposed development is unique in nature and was not considered as a typical request when drafting the Comprehensive Plan; however, the intent of this future land use district is to maintain low intensity uses that maintain the majority of the natural state of land. The proposed development meets this intent.

**Zoning Analysis**

When considering a zoning amendment to the zoning maps, the Planning Commission must study the need and justification for the change based on a determination of the facts applicable to the particular case, and the following general lines of inquiry must be considered:

- a. Whether the zoning proposal will permit a use that is suitable in view of the use and development of adjacent and nearby property; **The property’s future land use designation is Rural Neighborhood, which supports active farms and agricultural enterprises and low-density, large-lot single-family residential. Although the proposed development does not directly align with the listed uses, the development upholds the intention of low impact development maintaining deep setbacks and preservation of natural features, including tree canopy, waterways, and waterbodies.**
- b. Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property; **It is not anticipate that the proposed development will adversely affect the**



**existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby properties as the proposed development proposes to maintain deep setbacks within minimal development on approximately 500 acres of land.**

- c. Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has reasonable economic use as currently zoned. **The property appears to have reasonable economic use as currently zoned Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1).**
- d. Whether the zoning proposal will result in a use which will or could cause an excessive or burdensome use of existing streets, transportation facilities, or utilities; **The proposed use should not cause an excessive or burdensome use of existing streets, transportation facilities, utilities, schools, police protection, fire protection public facilities, or emergency medical service.**
- e. Whether the zoning proposal is in conformity with the policy and intent of the land use plan; **The proposed use is consistent with the intent of the future land use designation Rural Neighborhood, which supports low-density agricultural or residential development and preservation of natural features. The proposed development is unique in nature and was not considered as a typical development during the drafting of the comprehensive plan; however, the proposal does align with the intention of low impact development with deep setbacks and preservation of natural features.**
- f. The extent to which property values are diminished by the existing zoning restrictions; **Staff is unable to determine the extent to which property values are affected by the existing zoning restrictions.**
- g. The extent to which the destruction of the subject property's value under the existing zoning promotes the health, safety, morals or general welfare of the public; **Staff is unable to comment on the impact of property values without a full market analysis. Multiple factors impact property value including construction types, proposed uses, and maintenance. Often it is difficult to determine the effect of a development on adjacent properties until the development is completed.**
- h. The relative gain to the public as compared to the hardship imposed upon the individual property owner; **Staff has not identified a hardship imposed on the property owner as the property is currently zoned.**
- i. The length of time the property has been vacant as zoned considered in the context of land development in the area in the vicinity of the property; **The properties are a combination of vacant parcels and parcels developed with a variety of single-family residential and agricultural structures dating back to 1977.**
- j. Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use or development of the property which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal; **There are no know existing or changing conditions affecting the use or development of the property which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal.**

- k. Whether the change would create an isolated district unrelated to the surrounding districts; **The proposed zoning is a Planned Commercial Development (PCD). Per the Hall County Unified Development Code, Planned Development Districts are to be utilized as a "floating zone" which shall mean that areas will not be pre-designated as planned development districts but rather each such designation shall result from a specific and separate application for amendment.**
- l. Whether the present zoning district boundaries are illogically drawn in relation to existing conditions in the area; **There is no evidence that the present zoning district boundaries are illogically drawn.**
- m. Whether the change requested is out of scale with the needs of the county as a whole or the immediate neighborhood; **The proposal is not out of scale with the needs of the county as a whole.**
- n. Whether it is impossible to find adequate sites for the proposed use in districts permitting such use and already appropriately zoned; **There are no other properties within the county that support this specific use based on the Future Land Use map as this is a unique development appropriate for a Planned Development zoning designation.**
- o. Whether the need for rezoning could be handled instead by a variance request to the [Planning Commission]; **The request could not be handled alternatively as a variance.**
- p. Whether there would be an ecological or pollution impact resulting from major modifications to the land if the request is granted; **Any land disturbance activities on the property shall be required to go through the land development permitting process and as a result are subject to local, state, and federal regulations. As a result, there should not be an ecological or pollution impact resulting from any modification to the land if the request is granted.**
- q. Whether there is reasonable evidence based upon existing and anticipated land use that would indicate a mistake was made in the original zoning of the property; **There is no indication that a mistake was made in the original zoning.**

The intent of a Planned Development District (PDD) is to permit for the development of property which allows for greater flexibility in development standards and site planning considerations; is in the best interest of Hall County in terms of its long range development plans; and encourages a mixture of uses which without proper design and planning might not be compatible with surrounding uses or zoning districts. The Planned Commercial Development (PCD) district allows for a variety of commercial uses; the proposed use of a ministry and retreat center aligns with other religious and civic uses, although on a larger scale than most. Development should conform to the existing character and development pattern of the surrounding area.

#### **11.2.6.E - Submission requirements**

1. Any person or persons requesting a change in the official zoning map or use subject to approval of the county commission must file an application with a plat or map of the property attached thereto, together with payment of such fees set forth in this Sec 11.2. to cover administrative and advertising costs, in the Planning and Zoning Department office. Such person or persons or their authorized agent must appear in person at the public hearing held

to consider the district change. **The proposal meets the requirement, and the applicant understands that someone must be present at both the Hall County Planning Commission meeting and the voting meeting of the Hall County Board of Commissioners.**

2. All applications for a change of zoning classification or use subject to approval of the county commission shall include:
  - a. A narrative statement identifying the existing and proposed use of the property and addressing each of the criteria set forth in this Sec. 11.2. **The proposal does provide a narrative outlining the intent of the request; however, the applicant has not prepared a response to each of the criteria listed in 11.2.6.E.2**
  - b. A narrative statement identifying the existing and proposed use of the property and addressing each of the criteria set forth in this Sec. 11.2. **The proposal meets this requirement.**
  - c. For any application for a slow rate land treatment system as defined in 7.6.9.D.1, additional requirements apply. **This standard is not applicable to the applicant's request.**
3. For any application proposing the development of 100 or more residential dwelling units, a traffic impact study must be submitted prior to consideration of the application by the County Commission. At the applicant's expense, the traffic impact study must be prepared by a professional engineer in accordance with requirements established by the Hall County Engineering Department. The Engineering Department must review the traffic impact study and forward any comments to the County Commission. **This standard is not applicable to the applicant's request.**

### **Development Support and Constraints**

#### **Hall County Environmental Health**

In an email dated January 16, 2025, Emily McGahee stated "If public sewer not available, development must meet all Environmental Health commercial septic system permitting requirements if able to be permitted by Environmental Health. Wastewater treatment and disposal may be required to be permitted through EPD. Further determination will be made during the civil plan review process. A detailed business plan must be submitted to Hall County Environmental Health for review. Tourist Accommodation permit/plan review and/or Food Service permit/plan review may be required after review of business plan."

#### **Hall County Fire Marshal**

In an email dated January 16, 2025, John Hornick, NPQ Fire Inspector 1, Plans Review Lieutenant commented:

- 1) Minimum 8 inch underground fire line with fire hydrants under pressure are required to be installed throughout the development where required by fire code.
- 2) Fire apparatus access roads are required by code to be no less than 20' wide.

- 3) The day use facilities because of size, use and occupant load will be required by code to have a supervised fire protection system designed, installed, tested, and certified to NFPA 13 standards.
- 4) The day use facilities because of size, use and occupant load will be required by code to have a supervised fire alarm system designed, installed, tested, and certified to NFPA 72 standards.
- 5) Any day use facility over 12,000 SF will be required by code to have an emergency responder radio communication system test completed, any building failing the test will be required to have a bidirectional antenna system for emergency radio communication installed.
- 6) All overnight accommodations are considered by code to be lodging and are required to have a supervised fire protection and fire alarm system installed throughout.
- 7) The plans are conceptual in nature and if approved may require modifications during the development review process.

#### **Hall County Public Works and Utilities**

In a memorandum dated January 17, 2024, from Director of Public Works and Utilities, Bill Nash, stated the following:

##### **Engineering:**

This site may require a stormwater management report should the site plan indicate the proposed development meets stormwater thresholds for impervious surfaces and/or disturbed acreage.

##### **Traffic:**

GDOT approval/permit required for SR 211 access.

Restricted access via county roadways will need to meet county standards.

##### **Utilities:**

No Hall County sewer available

#### **Georgia Department of Transportation**

In an email dated January 13, 2025, Henry Stevens, E.I.T, D1TO Civil Engineer 2, stated that GDOT coordination is required.