

**HALL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
STAFF REPORT**

Applicant USI Holdings, LLC

Request (A) **Rezone** | from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) to Light Industrial (I-1)
 (B) **Variance** | to section 2.2.2

Proposed Use (A) & (B) Permitted uses in Light Industrial (I-1)

Size 4.54± acres

Zoning **Current:** Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1)
Proposed: Light Industrial (I-1)

Location **888 & 890 Gainesville Highway** | Tax Parcels
 08170 001005A & 001005

Commission District One

Commission Date February 26, 2026

Staff Recommendation **(A) Approval, with conditions**, as the proposed use is consistent with the “Business Nodes & Corridors” future land use classification within the Comprehensive Plan
(B) Approval, with conditions, as hardship exists pursuant to the criteria of 11.1.1.D.11

Record Number.....(A) HZON25-0056
 (B) HVAR25-0067

(A) & (B) 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 October 13, 2025, and narrative dated July 19, 2025, modified as necessary for compliance with conditions herein and development standards enforced at the time of site plan approval.

Summary Analysis

The applicant has submitted two concurrent requests as part of an existing industrial development: (A) to rezone a 4.54± acre tract from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) to Light Industrial (I-1) and (B) a variance to the required road frontage.

Currently, the site is developed with a 24,200 square-foot office and warehouse building constructed in 1990 according to the Hall County Tax Assessors records. The surrounding properties are zoned and developed as outlined below:

- North: City of Buford, R-100 Single Family Residential: Developed with single-family homes
- East: City of Buford, M-1 Light Industrial: Developed with a single-family home
Highway-Business (H-B): undeveloped
- South: City of Buford, M-1 Light Industrial: Developed with an Amazon distribution facility
- West: Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1): Developed with a metal recycling business
Highway-Business (H-B): Developed with a used vehicle dealership



According to Hall County tax records, the property was developed in 1990. Business License records indicate that a steel manufacturing company, Stevens Steel Products, began occupying the site in 1992 (BUS-0009587). The current property owner, USI Holdings, LLC, purchased the property in 2004 and continued operations under the name Universal Steel, Inc. There has been confusion over time as to whether this property was located within the Town of Resthaven or unincorporated Hall County. Upon determining that the property is within unincorporated Hall County, the business transferred its license from Resthaven to Hall County in 2013 (BUS-0030205). To bring the property into compliance with its long-standing industrial use, the property owner is requesting to rezone from Agricultural Residential (AR-1) to Light Industrial (I-1), consistent with the historical operations on the site.

Per the submitted narrative, the property is currently used as an office and manufacturing plant that fabricates ornamental railings and various steel products for commercial use. Operations are conducted without generating excessive emissions, noise, or air pollutants. Additionally, the applicant indicates there are no plans for future expansion or changes to the site.

Per the submitted site plan, the existing metal warehouse and accessory structures comply with the setback and buffer requirements of the Light Industrial (I-1) zoning district. The two subject parcels, identified as Tract 1 (888 Gainesville Highway) and Tract 2 (890 Gainesville Highway) were created prior to the adoption of subdivision regulations. Due to the widening of Gainesville Highway (SR13) to a divided 4-lane highway, the minimum required road frontage has increased to 500 feet. The property owner proposes to combine the two tracts and maintain a single entrance to the site. Even in combining the properties, a road frontage variance is required as the resulting road frontage would be 149.77 feet. The maps below identify the road frontage lengths (shown in yellow and blue).

This property is located within the Gateway Corridor Overlay District (GCOD). However, the Gateway Corridor Overlay District (GCOD) standards do not apply to the subject property as it was developed prior to the adoption of the Gateway Corridor Overlay District (GCOD) standards. Any future development or redevelopment will be required to comply with Gateway Corridor Overlay District (GCOD) standards.

Water service is provided by the City of Gainesville Department of Water Resources and sanitary sewer services are provided by Buford sewer.

Based on the future land use plan, staff finds the rezoning request *is consistent* with the Comprehensive Plan's future land use classification of Business Nodes & Corridors. The intent of this future land use designation is for new development along major road corridors and intersections to consist of industrial and/or office uses housed in either formalized campuses or along major road corridors that have existing or future access to water and sewer. These areas may also include higher density residential uses, where appropriate. Site designs should use the quality development principals to the fullest extent possible.

(A) Zoning Analysis – Rezone

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, development and zoning of adjacent and nearby property; **The proposed Light Industrial (I-1) zoning district and existing use is consistent with the use, development, and zoning of adjacent and nearby properties.**
- b. Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property; **It is not anticipated that the use would adversely affect adjacent or nearby property provided required buffers are maintained.**
- c. Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable economic use as currently zoned; **The subject property is currently developed. The applicant is planning to use the property as it currently exists and is not proposing any additional improvements.**
- 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, utilities, schools, police protection, fire protection, public health facilities or emergency medical service; ; **The proposed rezoning is not expected to cause an excessive or burdensome use of the 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 future land use plan for the physical development of the area; **The proposed use is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Business Nodes & Corridors future land use designation.**
- 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 values including construction types, proposed uses, and maintenance.**
- h. The relative gain to the public as compared to the hardship imposed upon the individual property owner; **Denying the rezoning would provide no meaningful public benefit, as the use has operated safely and compatibly for more than 30 years. However, it would impose a hardship on the property owner by leaving the long-established business in a legal non-conforming status, limiting routine maintenance and operational certainty. Rezoning removes this hardship without negatively affecting the public.**
- 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 subject property is zoned Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1). The site is currently developed with an office building and manufacturing plant, constructed in 1990 as reflected in the county tax records. Records indicate that it has been utilized for metal fabrication for the past 22 years.**
- 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; **Staff is not aware of any changing conditions affecting the use or development of the property.**
- k. Whether the change would create an isolated district unrelated to the surrounding districts; **The proposed zoning of Light Industrial (I-1) would not create an isolated district as other surrounding properties are also zoned I-1.**
- 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; **No, the request 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 other properties within the County that support light industrial uses based on the Future Land Use Map; however, the current development requires rezoning approval by the Board of Commissioners.**
- 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 are no anticipated ecological or pollution impacts 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.**

(B) Zoning Analysis – Variance to 2.2.2

The Commission may grant variances in individual cases of unnecessary hardship upon a finding of the board that:

1. There are extraordinary and exceptional conditions pertaining to the particular lot in question because of its size, shape, or topography (the hardship must relate to the physical character of the lot and not to a personal or economic hardship); **The subject parcels were created prior to the adoption of subdivision regulations. With the recent widening of Gainesville Highway (SR13) to a divided four-lane highway, the combined parcels cannot meet current standards, creating a hardship directly related to the physical conditions of the property rather than any personal or economic circumstance.**
2. The application of the requirements of this UDC to this particular piece of property would create an unusual hardship; **Yes, application of the UDC standards, specifically the increased road-frontage requirement, creates an unusual hardship for this property as the parcels were established before subdivision regulations, the increased road frontage requirements, and road widening.**
3. Such conditions are peculiar to the property involved and are not common to other properties in the neighborhood; **The subject parcels were created prior to the adoption of subdivision regulations, resulting in road-frontage dimensions that do not meet current standards. While some nearby properties also have reduced frontage, the specific configuration and combined frontage of these two parcels create a condition that is distinct to this property.**
4. Such conditions are not the result of any actions of the property owner; **The configuration of the parcels and the greater road frontage standards are not the result of any action of the property owner.**
5. Relief, if granted, would not cause substantial detriment to the public good or impair the purposes and intent of this UDC; provided, however, that no variance may be granted for a use of land or building or structure that is prohibited by this UDC or for a Conditional Use Permit which has been denied by the Planning Commission. **Approval of the requested variance would not negatively affect the public good, nor would it compromise the intent of the UDC. The request simply recognizes long-standing, historically established conditions and does not authorize any prohibited or previously denied use. The character of the area would remain unchanged.**

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. The applicant has paid the appropriate fees and understands that someone must be present at 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 must 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 provides a narrative outlining the intent of the use; however, the applicant has not prepared a response to each of the criteria listed in 11.2.6.E.2.**
 - b. A site plan drawn to scale designating the area covered by the application and identifying existing and proposed buildings and uses, adjacent existing land uses, zoning on contiguous parcels, including those across an abutting public right-of-way, and any other significant site improvements proposed to accommodate the proposed use or buffer adjacent uses, etc., or a plat of the subject property where no specific land use is proposed. In cases where only a plat or map is provided and no land use is proposed, the Planning Commission and County Commission may evaluate the application based on the most intense possible land use permitted in the proposed district. **The proposal meets the 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**
 - d. 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 15, 2026, Emily McGahee stated, "No comment."

Georgia Department of Transportation

In an email dated January 13, 2026, Christopher Hash, P.E., GDOT D1 Traffic Operations Supervisor, stated, "Will need to permit with our office. Old residential access will need to be removed. Improvements may be needed to existing commercial access."

Hall County Public Works and Utilities

In a memo dated January 16, 2026, Jason Skarda, Assistant Director of Public Works and Utilities, provided the following comments:

Engineering:

No comment

Traffic:

Access permit from Georgia DOT will be required if change of use proposed.

Utilities:

Buford sewer area.

Hall County Fire Marshal

In an email dated January 14, 2026, John Hornick, NPQ Fire Service Plans Examiner 1, stated, "The Hall County Fire Marshal's Office has no comments as proposed."