

**HALL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
STAFF REPORT**

Applicant Thumbs Up Mission

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

Proposed Use Non-profit retreat center

Size 89.56± acres

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

Location **6245, 6249 & 0 Ben Parks Road** | Tax Parcels
11065 000002 (pt), 000012(pt), 000023(pt)

Commission District Three

Commission Date April 9, 2026

Staff Recommendation **Denial**, as the proposed zoning is not consistent
with the “Rural Neighborhood” future land use
classification within the Comprehensive Plan.

Record Number..... HZON26-0003

Staff recommends DENIAL of the applicant’s request. However, if the Commission chooses to approve this request, staff recommends the following conditions:

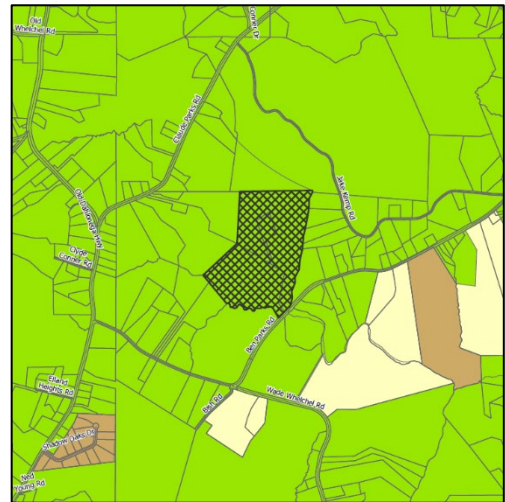
1. The property shall be developed in accordance with the site plan dated February 6, 2026, and narrative dated March 10, 2026, modified as necessary for compliance with conditions herein and development standards enforced at the time of site plan approval.
2. The following statement regarding the potential impacts of agricultural operations in the area shall be made a part of any plat recorded on the property: “Owners, occupants, and users of property shown on this plat are hereby informed of the impacts associated with normal farming practices which may take place on adjacent and nearby property including, but not limited to, noise, odors, dust, the operation of machinery of any kind, the storage and disposal of manure, and the application of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Therefore, owners, occupants, and users of the property shown on this plat should be prepared to expect the effects of such practices.”
3. Short term rentals are prohibited in this development.

4. All water and waste management systems shall comply with the requirements of the appropriate regulatory agencies.
 5. No variances or development exceptions are granted as part of this request that are not explicitly granted by Board approval.
 6. All conditions of zoning shall be made a part of any plats or construction plans created for the property
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Summary Analysis

The applicant is requesting to reconfigure and rezone a 54.30± acre portion of an 89.56± acre assemblage from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) to Planned Commercial Development (PCD) for a non-profit retreat center.

The site is currently developed with a single-family residence (RES20041-00988), a guest house (RES2001-01415), detached garage (RES2005-00622), inground pool (MIS2001-00288), barn (MIS2004-00250), and gymnasium (RES2019-01733). The site is impacted by County-studied and FEMA-designated flood zones and stream buffer requirements.



The surrounding properties are zoned Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) and developed with single-family residences and agricultural uses.

According to the submitted narrative, the faith-based development will offer a comprehensive range of services for patients with cancer and their families as well as other ministry organizations. The non-profit retreat center is proposed to be constructed in multiple phases over an anticipated 25-year period and will include a chapel, staff and guest lodging, day and overnight camps, a gymnasium, laundry and dining facilities, temporary and hardship housing, and a wide variety of supportive amenities as identified in the narrative. Phase One of the development will include the construction of two cabins or cottages. Phase Two will provide additional lodging units and a multi-purpose building designed to accommodate dining and group gatherings. This phase will also incorporate supporting features such as pavilions, trails, an activity lawn, and a camp store. The organization anticipates a total of three or four phases; however, the final number and sequence of phases will be determined as the project progresses.

The narrative states that select outdoor courts and fields may be illuminated for evening use and will comply with applicable lighting standards and positioned to avoid impact on adjacent properties.

The proposed development is further outlined below.

Proposed Use	Number Proposed	# of Bedrooms per unit	Existing Facility (Square Feet)	New Facilities (Max Square Feet each)
Chapel	1	N/A	N/A	5,000
Activity/Ministry Center/Multi-Purpose Dining	2	N/A	N/A	15,000
Staff Accommodations	5	5	2	5,000
Pastoral Retreats	2	20	1	15,000
Cabin/Cottages	24	6	N/A	3,000
Lodge	3	30	N/A	20,000
Day/Summer Camp	–	–	–	–
Gymnasium	2	N/A	4,500	10,000
Laundry	1	N/A	N/A	3,000
Camp Commons	1	N/A	N/A	6,000



The site is currently served by wells; however, the applicant states that they are considering coordinating with the City of Gainesville’s Water Resources Department to extend a water line from Wade Whelchel Road. Sanitary services are currently provided by on-site septic systems. The comment provided by Hall

County Environmental Health states that the site's wastewater treatment and disposal will be required to be permitted by Environmental Protection Division.

Based on the future land use plan, staff finds the requested rezoning *is not consistent* with the Hall County Comprehensive Plan and the 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 specifically considered in the Comprehensive Plan; however, the proposed development does not directly align with the Plan's listed uses. Furthermore, the site currently lacks the necessary supporting infrastructure to accommodate the proposed development.

Zoning Analysis

When considering a zoning amendment to the zoning maps, the 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 property's future land use designation is Rural Neighborhood, which supports active farms and agricultural enterprises and low-density, large-lot single-family residential. The proposed development does not directly align with the listed uses. Furthermore, the site currently lacks the necessary supporting infrastructure to accommodate the proposed development.**
- b) Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property; **The proposed retreat center is not consistent with the surrounding development pattern and may adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent and nearby properties.**
- c) Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable economic use as currently zoned; **The property has reasonable economic use as currently zoned, however, the applicant cannot develop the property as proposed without approval by the Board of Commissioners.**
- 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 zoning could cause an excessive or burdensome use of the existing streets, transportation facilities, utilities, schools, police protection, fire protection, public facilities, or emergency medical service as the area has a lack of infrastructure to support the development. Furthermore, Hall County Public Works and Utilities has stated that a traffic impact study is required to determine if any improvements to the county road network will be required.**

- 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 development is unique in nature and was not specifically considered in the Comprehensive Plan; however, the proposed use is not 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. Additionally, the site lacks the supporting infrastructure necessary to accommodate the proposed development.**
- 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. 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 site is currently developed with a single-family residence (RES20041-00988), a guest house (RES2001-01415), detached garage (RES2005-00622), inground pool (MIS2001-00288), barn (MIS2004-00250), and gymnasium (RES2019-01733).**
- 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 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 request may be out of scale with the needs of the county as the use is not 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.

- 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 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.**

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 development; 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. **While the proposed development does not meet 100 or more residential dwelling units, comments provided by the Hall County Public Works and Utilities state that a traffic impact study is required to determine if any improvements to the county road network are required.**

Development Support and Constraints

Hall County Environmental Health

In an email dated March 5, 2026, Emily McGahee stated "Wastewater treatment and disposal will be required to be permitted through EPD as the total gallons per day for the entire development is greater than 10,000gpd. 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, and/or Pool permit/plan review may be required after review of business plan. No onsite sewage management systems to be permitted by Environmental Health. All existing septic tanks shall be pumped by a State certified pumper/hauler and crushed/filled and existing buildings connected to EPD permitted sewage disposal system. Property to be served by public water or by private well(s) permitted by EPD. Any abandoned well shall be properly closed as per Water Well Standards Act."

Georgia Department of Transportation

In an email dated March 2, 2026, Christopher Hash, D1 Traffic Operations Supervisor, stated "Off-system no impacts expected to the State Route."

Hall County Public Works and Utilities

In a memorandum dated March 11, 2026, Jorge Gomez, Director of Public Works and Utilities, provided the following comments:

Engineering:

The 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. Show stream buffer and impervious setback from wrested vegetation not the centerline of stream. Show FEMA and Hall County studied Flood plains that are present on the site.

Traffic:

A traffic impact study is required to determine if any improvements to the county road network are required.

Utilities:

There are no Hall County Sewer facilities in this area. The proposed development will need to be served by an on-site sewer treatment facility that will be reviewed and permitted through Georgia EPD.

Hall County Fire Marshal

In an email dated March 6, 2026, John Hornick, NPQ Fire Service Plans Examiner 1, stated “The Hall County Fire Marshal’s Office considers the plan conceptual and if approved may require modification during the development review process to meet fire code, currently there is no public water on Ben Parks Road. See attached Hall Fire development check list.”

Hall County Business License

In an email dated March 6, 2026, Brandi Smith, Business License Director, stated “This location will need a business license.”