HALL COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT

Applicant	bSide Oakwood, LLC
Request	(A) **Rezone** | from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) to Residential Mixed (R-X) (B) **Variance to Section 4.7** | Overall development standards (C) **Variance to Article 8** | Site Development
Proposed Use	160-unit mixed residential development
Size	20.854± acres
Zoning	**Current:** Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) **Proposed:** Residential Mixed (R-X)
Location	0 Ridge Road **|** Tax Parcel 08154 000016
Commission District	One
Planning Commission Date	November 16, 2026
Staff Recommendation	(A) **Denial,** as the proposed zoning is not consistent with the Business Nodes and Corridors future land use classification within the Comprehensive Plan in the South Hall Character Area. (B) **Denial,** as the variances rely on approval of the associated rezoning. (C) **Denial,** as the variances rely on approval of the associated rezoning.
Record Number(s)	(A) HZON26-0033 (B) HVAR26-0052 (C) HVAR26-0051

(A), (B) & (C) Staff recommends DENIAL of the applicant's requests; however, if the Planning Commission chooses to recommend approval, staff recommends the following conditions:

1. The property shall be developed in accordance with the site plan received September 3, 2026, and as described in the project narrative dated September 11, 2026, modified as necessary for compliance with conditions herein and development standards enforced at the time of site plan approval.

2. The development shall be limited to a total of 160 units with no less than 20% of the development being either duplex or townhomes units.

3. Access to the development shall be subject to approval by the Hall County Public Works Department. Following review and acceptance of the Traffic Impact Study (TIS) by Public Works, all required improvements shall be incorporated into the development plans for review and approval. Any costs associated with these improvements shall be the responsibility of the developer.

4. The buffers and setbacks may be reduced as follows with labels referencing the "Site Plan Exhibit":

   Buffers: A – Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with a 6-foot privacy fence, **B** – Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet, **C –** Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with an 8-foot privacy fence, **D -** Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with a 6-foot privacy fence, & **E -** Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with a 6-foot privacy fence.

   Setbacks: A - Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet, **B** - Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet, **C** - Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet, **D** - Reduction from 50 feet to 15 feet, & **E -** Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet.

5. All buffers surrounding the development shall meet the definition of a "Buffer, natural" or "Buffer, landscaped" as defined in the Hall County UDC. Where the undisturbed or provided buffer does not meet this definition, the Director of Planning and Zoning, or their designee, may require supplemental plantings or other improvements necessary to ensure the buffer achieves the intent and performance standards intended.

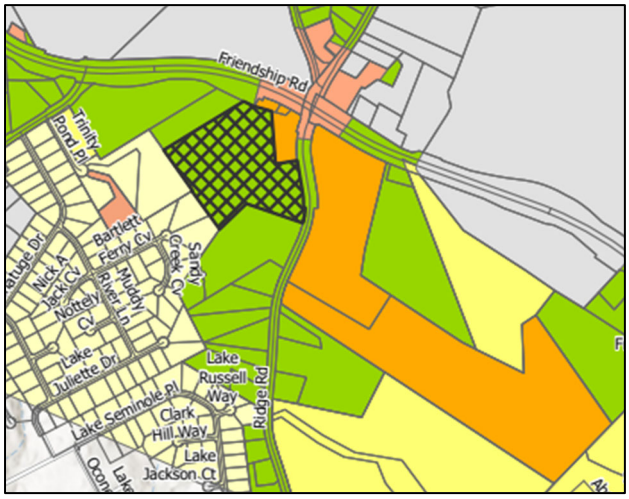
6. No variances or development exceptions are granted as part of this request that are not explicitly granted by board approval.

7. All conditions of zoning shall be made part of any plats created for the property.

Summary Analysis

The applicant has submitted three concurrent requests on a 20.854± acre tract: (A) Rezone from Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1) to Residential Mixed (R-X) for a 160-unit mixed residential development; (B) a Variance to Section 4.7 to reduce setbacks; and (C) a Variance to Article 8 to reduce buffer requirements. The proposed development includes 94 rear entry townhomes, 34 front entry townhomes, and 32 duplex units.

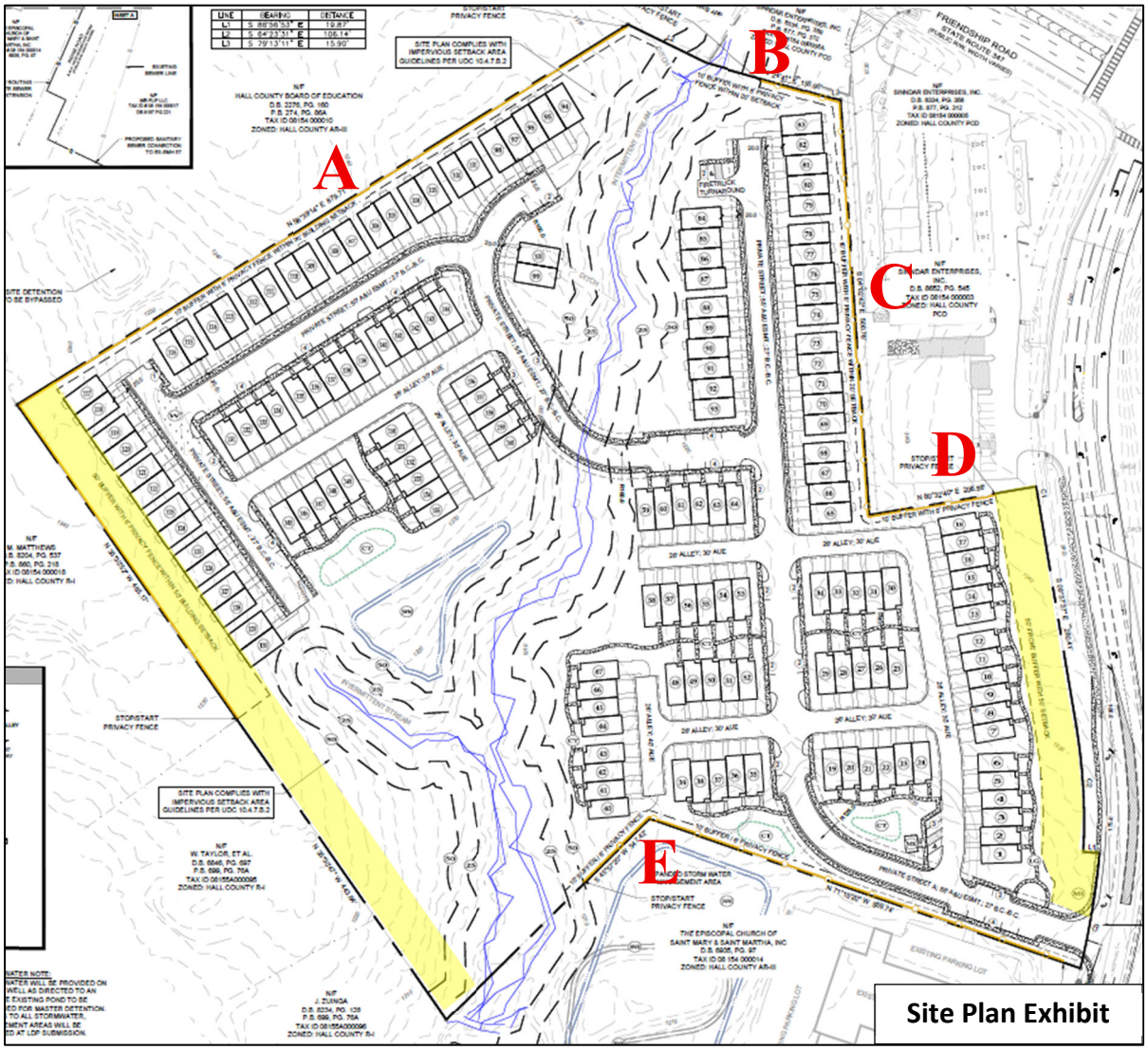
The subject property is currently vacant and bisected by a creek running south to north through the parcel. Surrounding properties are zoned and developed as follows:



- **North**: Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1): Friendship Elementary School; City of Buford: Buford Corn Maze; Planned Commercial Development (PCD): Approved for a gas station and self-storage facility (HZCU25-0013)
- **East**: Planned Commercial Development (PCD): undeveloped – approved for a mixed-use development (HZON24-0031)
- **South**: Agricultural Residential 1 (AR-1): church
- **West**: Residential 1 (R-1): Trinity Pond & Morgans Crossing subdivisions

Per the submitted narrative, the applicant is proposing a rental community consisting of 80% townhomes and 20% duplexes. This distribution is consistent with the requirements of the Residential Mixed (R-X) zoning district, which requires an 80/20 mix when two housing types are proposed, or an 80/10/10 mix when three housing types are proposed. Two styles of townhome lots are proposed: 22’ x 50’ rear entry units and 24’x50’ front entry units. Along Ridge Road, where the property has frontage, only the rear entry townhome facades are proposed to face the public road. Approximately 8.05 acres, or 38.6% of the site, are identified as open space. The proposed development density is 7.67 dwelling units per acre.

The proposed internal street network will consist of 27-foot-wide private streets and 26-foot-wide alleys that will be maintained by the property owner or a designated management entity. The property owner or management entity will also be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of all common areas, amenities, landscaping, fencing and stormwater facilities serving the development. Stormwater management for the development will include on-site stormwater facilities and the use and expansion of the existing detention facility located on the adjacent church property to the south.



Per the submitted site plan, the development will be served by a single access point from Ridge Road. The project will include a 50-foot undisturbed buffer along the frontage of Ridge Road and the westernmost property boundary bordering the Trinity Pond and Morgan Crossing Subdivisions (highlighted in yellow).

Water service will be provided by the City of Gainesville as confirmed in a letter from Nick Swafford, Permitting Services & GIS Manager, dated August 27, 2026. Sanitary sewer service will be provided by Hall County as confirmed in a letter from Jason Skarda, Assistant Director of Public Works, dated September 9, 2026.

Variance Analysis – Buffers and Setbacks

Variances related to buffer standards and setback standards will be required if the site plan, as presented, is approved. **NOTE**: The following letters indicate the property boundary being referenced and are identified in red on the site plan on page 3 of this report:

- A buffer of at least 50 feet in width must be established along the perimeter of all property boundaries as found in Section 8.2.3 Required Buffer Area.
  - **A** – Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with a 6-foot privacy fence. The applicant states that this property is reserved for septic drain fields and stormwater associated with the elementary school to the north. This has been confirmed through Hall County Public Works Records from 2001 showing stormwater improvements as well as through Environmental Health records identifying the site as used for drain lines and reserved for a backup septic system.
  - **B** – Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet due to existing vegetation from the on-site stream and deep separation from Friendship Road pushing the closest building over 100 feet from the sidewalk along Friendship Road.
  - **C** – Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with an 8-foot fence due to abutting a Planned Commercial Development (PCD) approved for a gas station and self-storage facility.
  - **D** - Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with a 6-foot fence due to abutting a Planned Commercial Development (PCD) approved for a gas station and self-storage facility.
  - **E** - Reduction from 50 feet to 10 feet with a 6-foot fence due to abutting a church and the associated stormwater detention facility.
- Rear, right, and left side yard setback requirement of 50 feet as found in Section 4.7 for the Residential Mixed (R-X) zoning district.
  - **A** - Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet
  - **B** - Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet
  - **C** - Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet
  - **D** - Reduction from 50 feet to 15 feet
  - **E -** Reduction from 50 feet to 20 feet

Although staff cannot support the requested variances, as they are directly associated with a rezoning request that is inconsistent with the Business Nodes and Corridors future land use designation, staff finds that the proposed reductions to the buffer and building setbacks could be supported under Section 11.1.1.D.11 if the Board elects to approve the rezoning request.



Townhome Rendering



Townhome Rendering



Duplex Rendering



Duplex Rendering

A Traffic Impact Study (TIS) prepared by Southeastern Engineering, Inc. and dated August 28, 2025, indicates that prior to build-out of the proposed project**,** the intersection at Friendship Road and Ridge Road/Hog Mountain Road is already experiencing poor performance, with the southbound approach operating at Level of Service (LOS) F during both peak hours and the overall intersection operating unacceptably during the AM peak. The TIS notes that these operating conditions are expected to persist as traffic grows, including contributions from the adjacent Ridgeview Estates. After construction of the proposed project**,** the driveway on Ridge Road is expected to operate acceptably with minor-street stop control and dedicated left and right turn lanes. The following are suggested improvements as outlined in the TIS.

Ridge Road at Site Driveway/Ridgeview Emergency Driveway

- Driveway should be minor-street stop-controlled.
- Provide a northbound left turn lane on Ridge Road, per GDOT minimum standards.
- Provide a southbound right turn lane on Ridge Road, per GDOT minimum standards

Hall County Public Works commented that the provided Traffic Impact Study (TIS) has not been approved and any recommended improvements identified in the approved TIS must be incorporated in the Land Disturbance Permit (LDP).

Development Standards Analysis

The development standards for the project are summarized in the table below and are compared against the Residential Mixed (R-X) district standards and the applicable Article 8 Site Development requirements of the Hall County Unified Development Code (UDC):

Development Standard (§)	Proposed	UDC Standard	Compliance
Overall R-X Standards (§4.7)			
Lot Area	20.854± acres	5 acres minimum	Complies
Density	7.67 U/A	8 U/A max (urbanized)	Complies
Site Coverage	Not specified	60%	Shall comply
Overall Yard Setbacks	15-50 feet: See variances listed above	50 feet	Deficient
R-TF Standards (§4.4)			
Minimum Lot Area	N/A	35,000 sf	N/A – rental community
Minimum Lot Width	N/A	50 feet	N/A – rental community
Front Yard	20 feet	40 feet	N/A – rental community
Side Yard	10 feet between buildings	10 feet	N/A – rental community
Rear Yard	10 feet	20 feet	See variances listed above
Maximum Building Height	35 feet	35 feet	Complies
R-TH Standards (§4.6)			

Minimum Lot Area	1,100 – 1,200 sf	2,000 sf	N/A – rental community
Front Yard	20 feet (front entry)	15 feet	Complies
Side Yard	10 feet (building separation)	10 feet (building separation)	Complies
Rear Yard	10 feet	20 feet	See variances listed above
Maximum Building Height	35 feet	35 feet	Complies
Article 8			
Parking	2-car garage w/driveway parking for 2 vehicles/dwelling + 60 guest parking	2 spaces per DU TH: 2 spaces/DU plus 1 guest space for every 4 DU (40 guest parking required)	Complies
Buffers (§8.2.3)	See variances listed above	50 feet undisturbed	Deficient
Landscaping (§8.2.4.H.2)	Not specified	2 trees per lot	Shall comply
Frontage Landscape Strip (§8.2.5)	50 ft undisturbed buffer	20 feet planted unless 50 ft undisturbed buffer provided	Complies
Sidewalks (§8.4, 9.4.8.C)	5 feet wide	5 feet wide on both sides of street	Shall comply
Open Space (§8.5)	38.6%	30%	Complies
Architectural Standards (§8.7)	Shall comply per narrative	Various	Complies
Amenities Maintenance (§8.8.5)	HOA	HOA required	Complies
Cluster Mailbox Unit (CBU) (§8.10)	CBU with 3 parking spaces	CBU with 8 parking spaces	Shall comply

Comprehensive Plan Analysis

Based on the Hall County Comprehensive Plan, staff finds that the requested rezoning to Residential Mixed (R-X) *is not consistent* with the future land use designation of *Business Nodes and Corridors* within the South Hall Character Area. This designation supports higher-intensity commercial uses and low-intensity, consumer-facing industrial uses that house businesses that serve nearby communities. Site designs should use Quality Development Principals, particularly natural resource protections and high quality landscape installations, to the fullest extent possible.

However, as the subject property is located within the urbanized portion of the South Hall Character Area, where water and sewer services are available, the Residential Mixed (R-X) zoning district allows a maximum density of 8 dwelling units per acre. The proposed development has an overall density of 7.67 dwelling units per acre, which is within the permitted range.

(A) Zoning Analysis - Rezone

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 proposed rezoning and use appear suitable in view of the surrounding development pattern and nearby zoning. Adjacent and nearby properties include an undeveloped tract approved for a gas station and self-storage facility, an undeveloped parcel approved for a mixed-use development with 251 multifamily units, 209 townhomes, 65 detached homes, a hotel with 110 rooms, and 65,000 square feet of commercial space. Across Friendship Road is the Buford Corn Maze and a gas station. Additional surrounding uses include Friendship Elementary School, a church, and parcels developed with single-family homes.**

b) Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property; **The proposed rezoning does not appear to adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby properties.**

c) Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable economic use as currently zoned; **The property appears to have reasonable economic use as currently zoned.**

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 existing streets, transportation facilities, utilities, schools, police protection, fire protection public facilities, or emergency medical service. The property will be served by City of Gainesville public water, and sanitary sewer service will be provided by Hall County. Any improvements identified in the final approved Traffic Study and required by Hall County Public Works and/or the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) will be addressed with the Land Disturbance Permit (LDP).**

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 Residential Mixed (R-X) zoning *is not consistent* with the Comprehensive Plan's future land use designation of "Business Nodes and Corridors" within the South Hall Character Area. This designation supports higher-intensity commercial uses and low-intensity, consumer-facing industrial uses that house businesses that serve nearby communities. Site designs should use Quality Development Principals, particularly natural resource protections and high quality landscape installations, to the fullest extent possible.**

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.

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 subject parcel is undeveloped and has no history of building permits on file.**

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 Residential Mixed (R-X) zoning is a new zoning district effective November 14, 2024. Previously, this type of development would have been proposed under the Planned Residential Development (PRD) district, which has since been discontinued. The subject property is adjacent to a mixed-use Planned Commercial Development (PCD) and several Planned Residential Developments (PRD) across Ridge Road and along Friendship Road that share a similar residential character. Therefore, the proposed zoning change would not create an isolated zoning district or a pattern inconsistent with surrounding development.**

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 proposed development does not appear to be out of scale with the needs of the county as a whole, as there is a need for additional housing to support population growth.**

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 zoning districts that permit the mix of residential uses, density and lot sizes proposed in this subdivision. Because the R-X district is newly established, an appropriately zoned site for this residential pattern is not yet available elsewhere.**

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) and (C) Zoning Analysis – Variances

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

a) There are extraordinary and exceptional conditions pertaining to the 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 property has extraordinary conditions related to its topography. As noted in the provided exhibits, the stream bisecting the property creates significant elevation and slope. This hardship stems from the physical characteristics of the property, not from any personal or economic circumstance.**

b) The application of the requirements of this UDC to this particular piece of property would create an unusual hardship; **The application of the requirements of the UDC create an unusual hardship based on the conditions related to topography and the stream bisecting the property.**

c) Such conditions are peculiar to the particular piece of property involved and are not common to other properties in the neighborhood; **The conditions are unique to this property. The subject property is bisected by a stream impacting the topography of the lot. Additionally, the site is uniquely positioned between several sites that would mitigate the proposed deviations from the UDC as outlined on pages 3 and 4 of this report.**

d) Such conditions are not the result of any actions of the property owner**; The size, shape, and topography of the lot are not the result of any actions of the property owner.**

e) 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; **Relief, if granted, will not impair the purposes and intent of the Unified Development Code of Hall County. The reduction of the required buffers and setbacks are well justified through submitted exhibits from the applicant and further analyzed by staff. Due to the surrounding property's zoning and development, the relief requested would not impair the purpose of the UDC would still uphold the intent of the required Buffers and Setbacks.**

Development Support and Constraints

Hall County Environmental Health
In a memorandum dated October 19, 2026, the Hall County Environmental Health Department stated, "No comment. Public Sewer."

Georgia Department of Transportation
In an email dated October 7, 2026, Christopher Hash, D1 Traffic Operations Supervisor, stated, "Off-system. Impacts expected to the State Highway System. Applicant to submit TIS to GDOT District 1 for review. Potential improvements for SR 347 and Ridge Rd may be needed."

Hall County Public Works and Utilities
In a memorandum dated October 19, 2026, Jorge Gomez, Director of Public Works and Utilities, provided the following comments:

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.
Show stream buffer and impervious setback from wrested vegetation not centerline of stream.

Traffic:
The provided Traffic Impact Study (TIS) has not been approved at this time. Any recommended improvements identified in the approved TIS must be incorporated in the LDP.

Utilities
Property is in the Buford service district, but an IGA between Buford and Hall County has been obtained.

Hall County Fire Marshal
In a memorandum October 6, 2026, the Hall County Fire Marshal's Office stated, "The Hall County Fire Marshal's Office has no comments as proposed."