



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: July 25, 2023
TO: THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH
FROM: METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION
SUBJECT: MPC RECOMMENDATION

PETITION REFERENCED:

Petitioner: Attorney John D. Northrup III, Agent
Owner: Capital Development Partners
Aldermanic District: 5, Dr. Estella Shabazz(unofficially)
County Commission District: 5, Milton(unofficially)
Neighborhood/Subdivision: Rockingham Farms
Current Zoning District: Residential-Agriculture – County (R-A-CO)
Future Land Use (FLU) Category: Residential-Suburban Single Family
File No. 23-002328-ZA-FLUM
Location: Buckhalter Rd
PIN: 10942 01003; 01002A; 01002B; 01002C; 01002D; 01002F; 01002E;
01007; 01008; 01009
Acreage: 52.86

MPC ACTION:

Approval of the request to amend the future land use map to include tight industrial from the southern parts of the parcels to the boundary of Buckhalter Road and to include a 350ft heavily vegetated barrier from Buckhalter Road and any other residential properties.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval of the Future Land Use Map amendment to reflect a split character area designation of Light Industrial extending 800 ft to the north and east of the rear property line, and Residential-General from the front property line adjoining Buckhalter Rd and extending 800ft to the south and west.

MEMBERS PRESENT: 9 + Chairman

Dwayne Stephens, Chairman
Laureen Boles
Elizabeth Epstein
Karen Jarrett
Traci Amick
Jay Melder
Wayne Noha
Jeff Notrica
Joseph Welch
Joseph Ervin

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE: Approve Staff Recommendation (9-1)

APPROVAL Votes: 9	DENIAL Votes: 1	ABSENT
Amick Boles Epstein Jarrett Melder Noha Notrica Stephens Welch	Ervin	Coleman Coles Woiwode Kaigler

Respectfully submitted,



Melanie Wilson
Executive Director

MW/sh

Enclosure

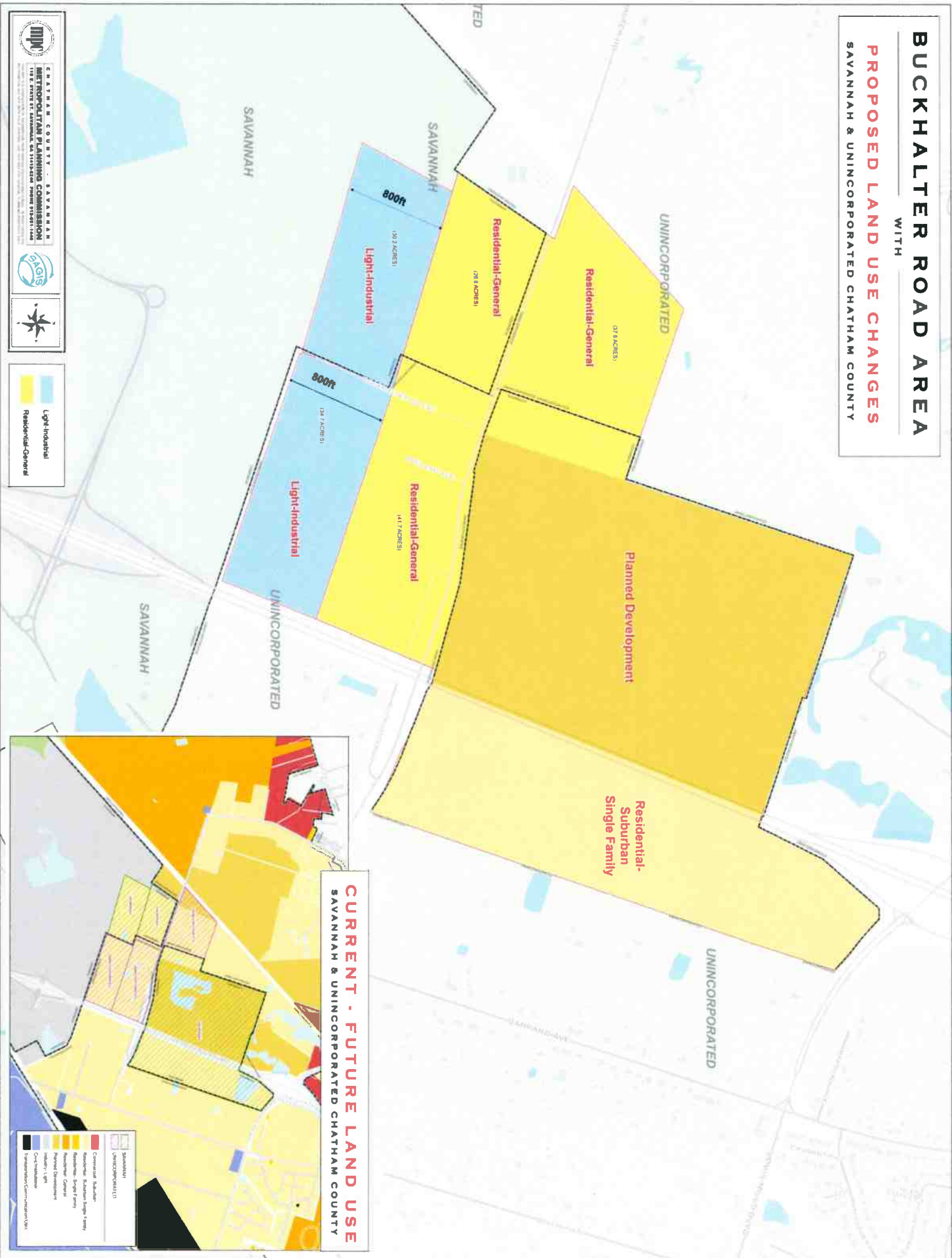
cc: Mark Massey, Clerk of Council
Lester B. Johnson, Assistant City Attorney
Jennifer Herman, Assistant City Attorney
Zarina Davis, Department of Inspections
Bridget Lidy, Department of Inspections

BUCKHALTER ROAD AREA

WITH

PROPOSED LAND USE CHANGES

SAVANNAH & UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM COUNTY



Light-Industrial
Residential-General

CURRENT - FUTURE LAND USE

SAVANNAH & UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM COUNTY



SAVANNAH
UNINCORPORATED

- Residential-Suburban
- Residential-Single Family
- Residential-Light Farm
- Residential-Corner
- Planned Development
- Commercial
- Transportation/Community Use

CHATHAM COUNTY · SAVANNAH
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION
118 S. STATE ST. SAVANNAH, GA 31404 PHONE 771-2511 FAX 771-2511
SACS



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y - S A V A N N A H
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

Planning the Future - Respecting the Past

To: Savannah City Council

From: MPC Staff

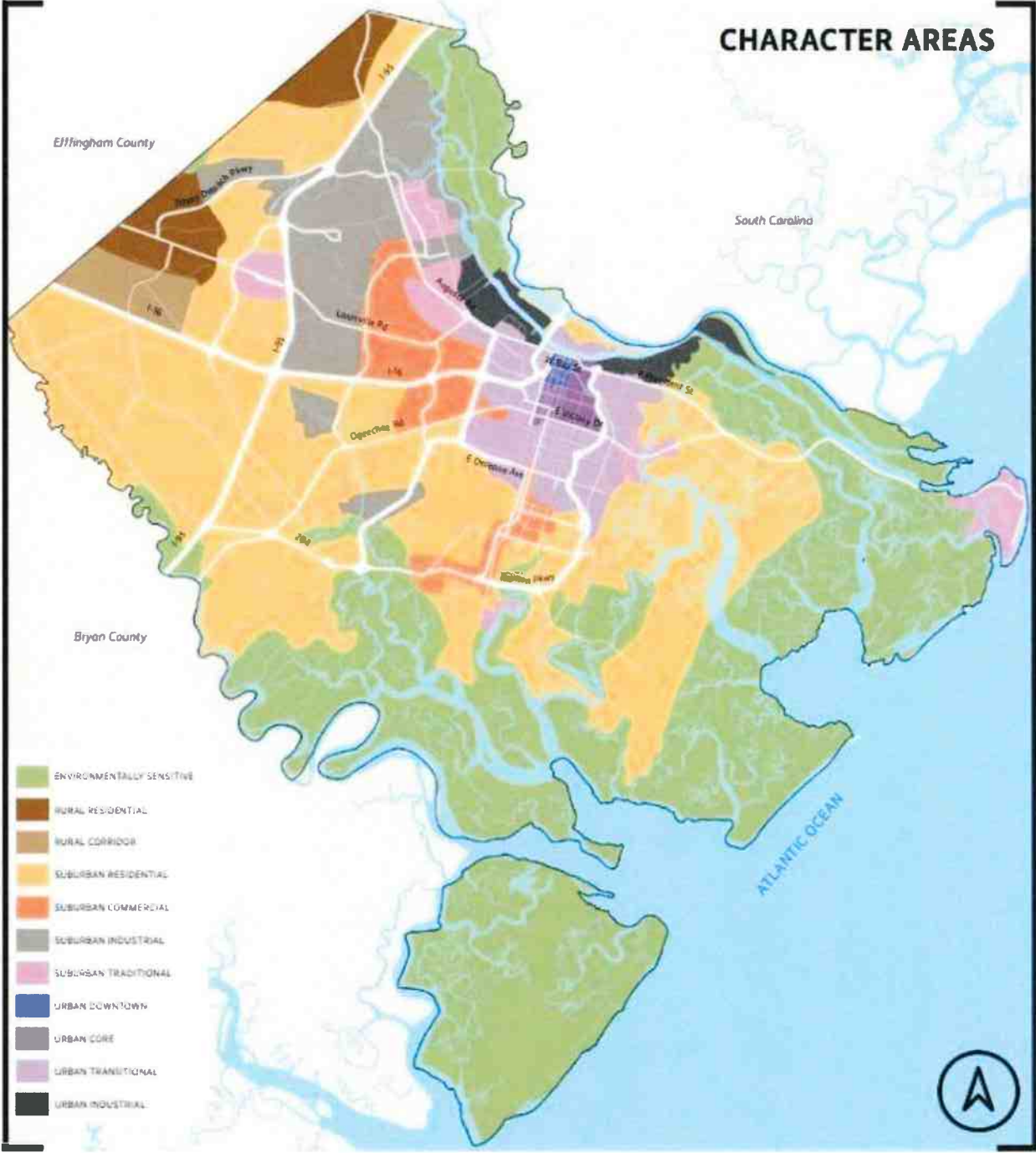
Date: June 13, 2023

Subject: Tricentennial Comprehensive Plan Amendment Future Land Use Map
Petitioner/Owner: Capital Development Partners
Agent: Attorney John D. Northrup III
Address: 343 Buckhalter Road
PIN's: 10942 01003; 01002A; 01002B; 01002C; 01002D; 01002F;
01002E; 01007; 01008; 01009
Site Area: 52.86 Acres
Alderman District: 5 – Alderman Dr. Estella Shabazz (unofficially)
Chatham County Commission District: 5 – Commissioner Tanya Milton
(unofficially)
File Number: 23-002328-ZA-FLUM - Buckhalter Road

Purpose and Intent of the Comprehensive Plan: Georgia's Department of Community Affairs requires that communities undertake a Comprehensive Plan update every 5 years to maintain Qualified Local Government (QLG) status. Each Georgia municipality that utilizes zoning or similar land development regulations within the scope of the state's Zoning Procedures Law is required to include a Land Use element within its Plan. At the core of this element is the intent to demonstrate how the locally adopted land use tools will be used to shape and improve the nature of land development within the jurisdiction to meet the social, economic, and ecological needs of its residents.

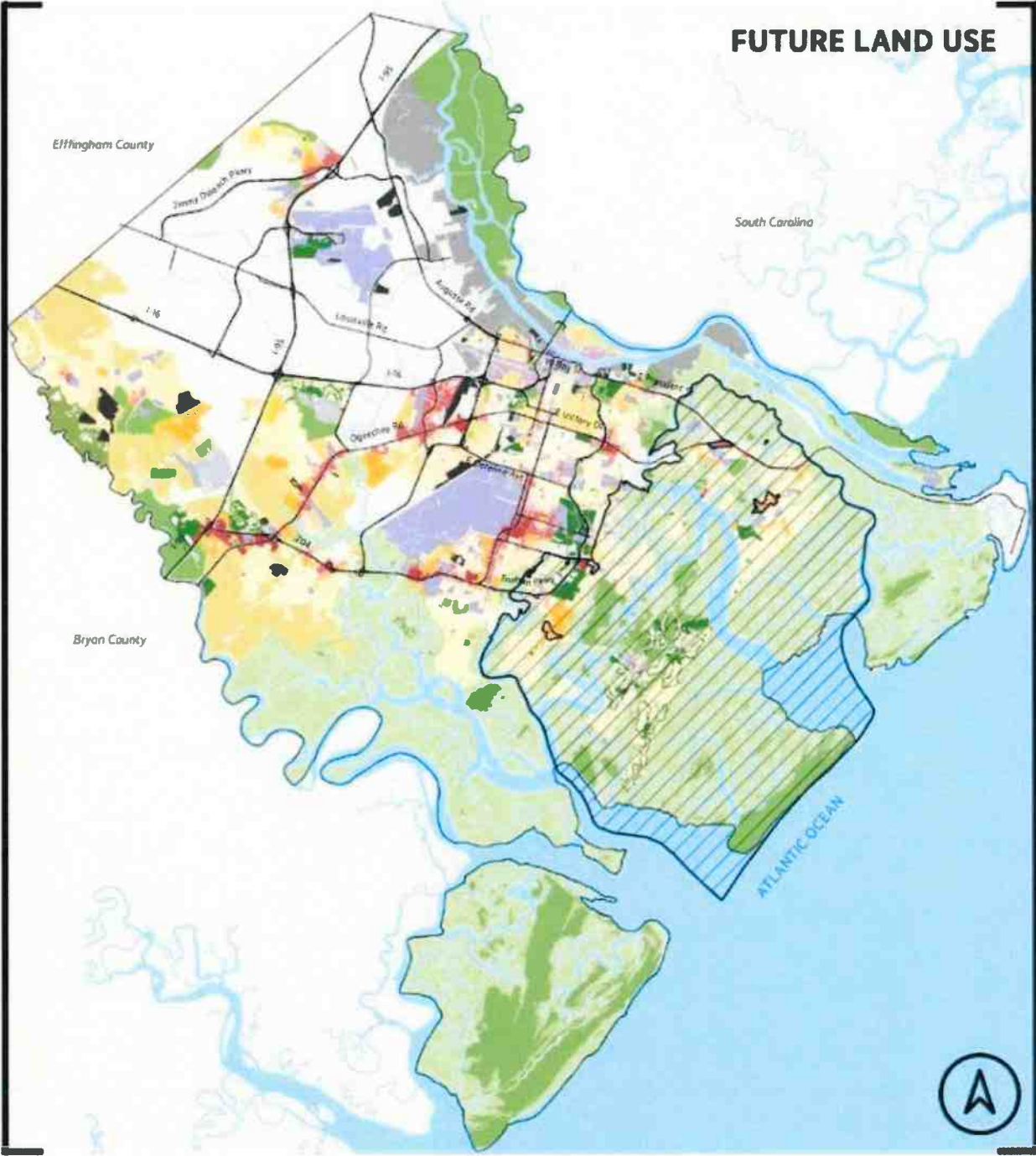
The *Character Area Map* is the chosen tool to convey Savannah-Chatham County's aesthetic and functional vision for each of its unique and dynamic neighborhoods. The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) provides general land use categories to inform zoning decisions based on the desired community character identified during the planning process. Together, these policy documents are intended to guide the direction of individual land use decisions as larger areas are incrementally developed over time. Section 1.1.6 of the City's Zoning Ordinance reinforces this notion, clarifying its relationship to the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans as guides for its application and implementation. While these designations are fluid and subject to change with fluctuations in broader economic, demographic, or ecological circumstances, their adjustment should be made only with thoughtful contemplation and utmost reverence for the community planning process.

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Potential Character Areas

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Future Land Use, Chatham County

The map above represents the Future Land Use Map at the time of adoption of Plan 2040. As FLUM amendments are made, the map is gradually updated with major updates occurring every 5 years with the Comprehensive Plan update.

**Comprehensive Plan Amendment
343 Buckhalter Road
File Number 23-002328-ZA-FLUM - Buckhalter Road**

Request: The Petitioner requests amendment of the Future Land Use map from Residential Suburban to Industry Light for the subject parcels adjacent to Rockingham Farms on Buckhalter Road. The parcels have a combined area of 52.86 acres. The subject parcels are currently developed as single-family residences. The petitioner's intent is to combine these parcels with the Industrial parcel.

Background: The ten subject parcels each have an average size of 5 acres with 343 Buckhalter Road parcel being the largest in size at 16.9 acres. The parcels are large rural tracts facing Buckhalter Road (a two-laned road) with single-family residences. The rear of the properties abut the 100-acre Industrial Parcel which has access from Veterans Parkway and is a part of a larger Industrial Park on both sides of Veterans Parkway.

The overall area consists of a variety of different sized parcels from 5 acres to 100 acres. Most of the lots are residential for agricultural uses except for the 100-acre Industrial Park abutting the subject parcels facing Buckhalter Road. The road network includes Veterans Parkway limited access highway, Buckhalter Road a major collector road, and Ogeechee Road (US-17) a principal arterial road.

The major sites in the surrounding area are the Rockingham Farm Industrial Park, Red Gate Farms, The Coastal Empire Montessori School, The Oakland Missionary Baptist Church and across from Veterans Parkway there is the Hunter Army Airfield.

The history of the area was farmlands such as the Red Gate Farms which use to be an active dairy farm known as, "Red Gate Jersey Cattle Dairy Farm" from 1931 till the 1960s. The property also had a Sod Co. & Landscaping service, a Red Gate Plantation Stables, and Pa-Ki Garden & Feed Center. Red Gate Farms has also operated as a wedding venue since 1946 along with the Mackey House venue and Red Gate Campgrounds.

Directly across the street from the ten subject parcels at 326 Buckhalter Road there is a single-family residence with a farm for horses, stables, and silos that used to be an active dairy farm in 1937 known as, "Rahn Family Dairy Farm". In 1943 Mr. Rahn began to raise cattle and horses on the farm along with living and building a family there till the 1960s. Moving the cows across the road was difficult for passing motorists and caused damage to the road's surface. The County built a tunnel under Buckhalter Road (that is no longer there) for the cattle to pass through. The farm also runs through 341 Buckhalter Road which is directly across the street from the subject parcels. Mr. David Rahn provided 5 acres to his daughter, Shirley Rahn Smith and son-in-law, James Smith. They have lived on the property for over 54 years and built a house for their family.

The neighborhoods on Buckhalter Road through Garrard Avenue were all active farms cultivating vegetables, with pigs, cows, and horses. The remaining parcels were single family residences with gardens.

The property at 5207 Garrard Avenue was called "Beverly Farms". In the 1950's, there were a few acres dedicated to cultivation, and the rest of the land was in pasture for a small herd of cows and a horse. The family grew many vegetables and used a tractor for their farming. The family would ride horses on the shoulder of Garrard Avenue, and then turned onto

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Buckhalter Road, which for a while, was still a dirt road. Generations have passed away and the children were left with the property. Their view from their backdoor is what the property owners have seen since childhood, beautiful fields, and green pastures with huge live oak trees that are several hundred years old. Deer still visit at night to graze. The property is approximately one (1) mile from Rahn's Dairy.

The Oakland Baptist Church was built by slaves in 1796, so they could have a place of worship. It was burned down by General Sherman, then rebuilt. The church experienced a second fire throughout the years and was re-built by the congregation. The church is 226 years old this year.

Areas of Annexations:

The City of Savannah continues to annex areas of unincorporated Chatham County into its jurisdiction, followed by major sewer and water expansions. To prevent urban sprawl and unmanaged expansions, future annexation areas should be identified and prioritized and should remain predominantly undeveloped until land areas within existing municipal boundaries are more fully utilized and before new, undeveloped areas are cited for construction.

The parcels of annexation in the surrounding area include the following:

- The subject ten (10) parcels.
- A Planned Development with an approved Master Plan that would include single and multi-family residential uses on both sides of Veterans Parkway. The Master Plan includes multi-family, duplexes, and town homes.
- A proposed rezoning for a multi-family was submitted in 2022 on a 10-acre parcel adjacent to the PD parcel but was never heard by the Planning Commission.



Annexation History Map

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Analysis:

Per Sec. 5.17.2 Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map Consistency – Industrial districts are allowed only in the Future Land Use Map Categories below.

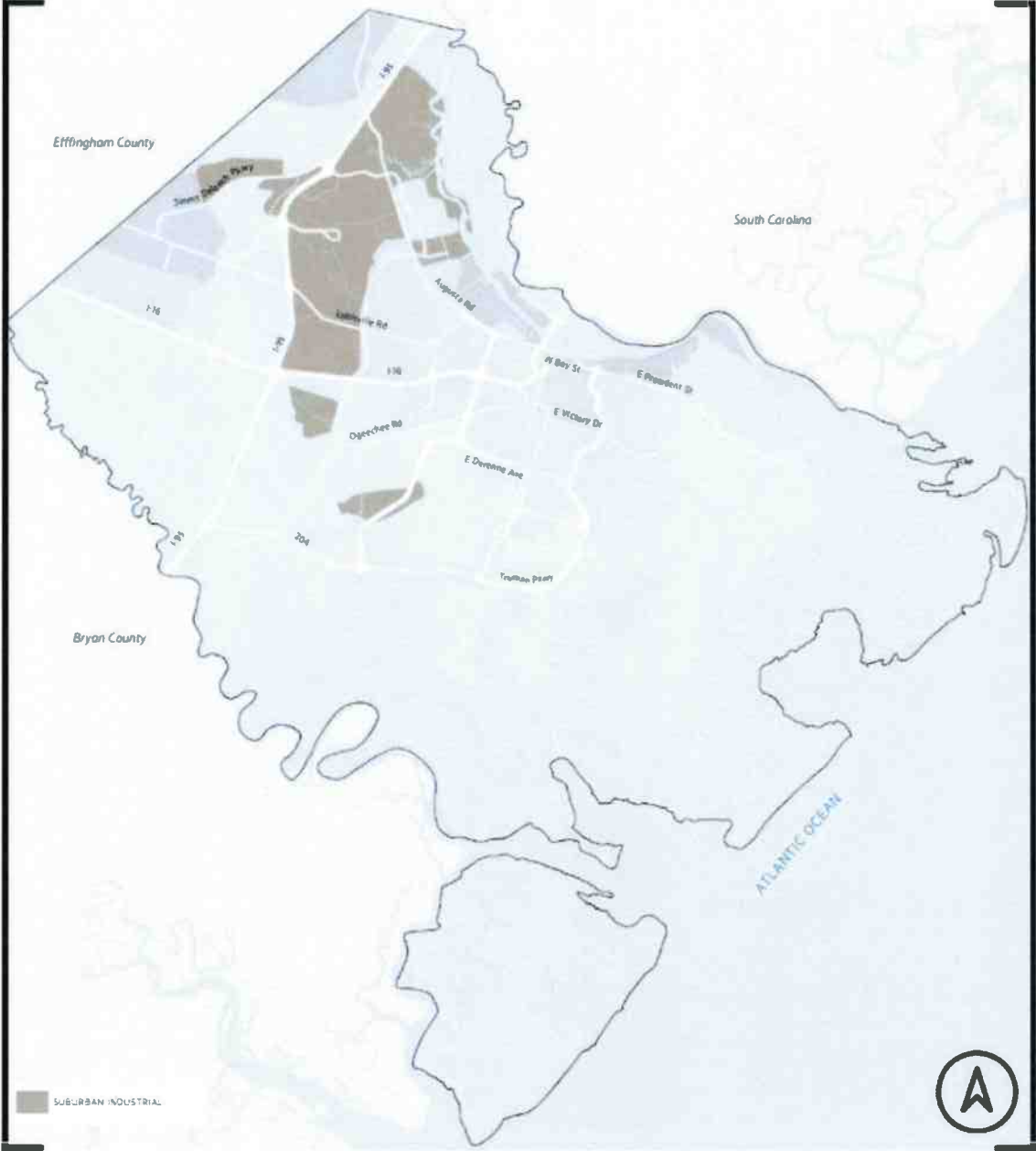
- a. **Industry-Light:** Light Industrial-Restricted, Light Industrial-Transition, Light-Industrial
- b. **Industry Heavy:** Light Industrial-Transition, Light Industrial, Heavy Industrial

Character Areas in Plan 2024 are intended to work in partnership with the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) to set a cohesive countywide vision for responsible growth over the next twenty years.

The Character Areas are not intended to represent or guide future zoning; however, it should be considered in tandem with the FLUM when policy makers consider land development. Character Areas are places defining characteristics, such as development intensity or available resources. Identifying community character across Chatham County is an important step in making compatible future land use decisions.

Suburban Industrial character areas generally contain large-footprint buildings and businesses that accommodate warehousing, light industrial, manufacturing, office spaces, and other uses such as airports and landfills. All these uses come with unique needs and building forms. A large extent of the Suburban Industrial character area is located between I-95 and Dean Forest Road from I-16 north to the Savannah River. Large surface parking lots and truck loading bays are common in this area. Suburban Industrial areas should look to landscaping requirements in order to screen development from the right-of-way and neighboring properties. Additionally, as these areas often contain large employment centers, special attention should be paid to transit connectivity – particularly links to urban and suburban residential areas.

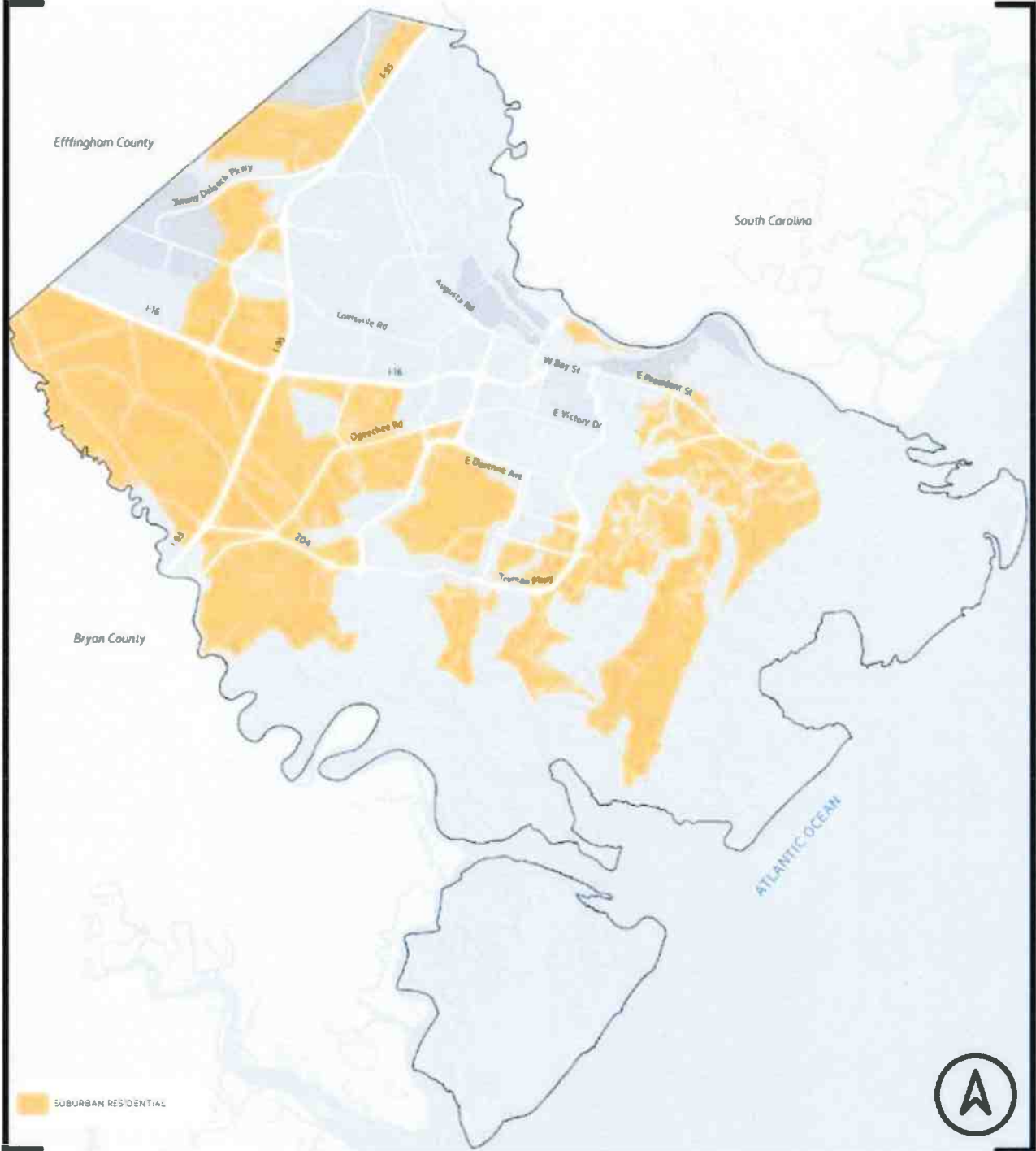
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Suburban Industrial Character Area, Chatham County

Suburban Residential character areas include low and medium density developments; generally, this character area features either single-family structures on large lots or medium lot residential subdivisions with relatively uniform housing types and densities. However, multi-family apartments and attached single-family residential subdivisions are also prevalent in this area. Local streets are laid out in curvilinear patterns, with occasional cul-de-sacs and limited sidewalks. Suburban residential areas adjacent to Suburban Commercial character areas should, to the extent possible, be designed as cohesive, connected neighborhoods. Alternative types of housing options should be encouraged in suburban areas to accommodate multi-generational households, seniors, and others.

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Suburban Residential Character Area, Chatham County

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Within the City of Savannah, the Zoning Ordinance requires amendments to the zoning map to be consistent with the FLUM. In instances where parity between a proposed use and the intent of the Plan is unclear, consideration of the following points may serve to elucidate whether the proposed amendment meets the intent of the guiding policy documents:

- The relationship of the proposed amendment to the existing and future land uses depicted in the Future Land Use Map;
- The relationship of the proposed amendment to any applicable goals, objectives, policies, criteria and standards adopted in the Comprehensive Plan;
- Other professional planning principles, standards, information and more detailed plans and studies considered relevant;
- Written comments, evidence, and testimony of the public.

1. The relationship of the proposed amendment to the existing and future land uses depicted in the Future Land Use Map.

Savannah-Chatham County's joint Comprehensive Plan, *Plan 2040*, identifies the subject parcel and surroundings as suitable for a 'Suburban Residential' character of development. This character area anticipates relatively low-density residential developments, not exceeding 5 units per acre. Small multi-family developments and attached single-family dwellings are also appropriate uses with an eye toward creating a gradient that blends into more intense adjoining areas envisioned as Suburban Commercial character areas or less intense areas characterized as rural corridors. Small-scale commercial, civic, institutional, and community recreational facilities such as parks and golf courses are appropriate within the Suburban Residential character area. The proposed rezoning would permit the development of warehouses, outdoor storage yards, large-scale commercial uses, and manufacturing – all uses inconsistent with the desired community character.

The FLUM currently indicates the subject parcels should be zoned and developed in a low-density, suburban residential manner. Additionally, all parcels adjoining the subject parcels (with the exception of those to the south) are currently zoned and developed or have pending development plans that align with the development pattern prescribed by the Comprehensive Plan. The requested industrial zoning classification represents an encroachment of this incompatible land use into an overwhelmingly residential area. It is inconsistent with both the current FLUM designation and provisions of §5.17.2 of NEWZO which permit Industrial zoning only in an area with corresponding Industrial FLUM designation.

2. The relationship of the proposed amendment to any applicable goals, objectives, policies, criteria, and standards adopted in the Comprehensive Plan.

While the Comprehensive Plan's character areas and FLUM do not dictate the future zoning of a parcel, they should be viewed as persuasive regarding the general direction of land development in a given area. "The land use information, recommendations, and strategies contained in [the land use element] are intended to provide guidance for the

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location and intensity of land uses to support Chatham County and the City of Savannah in future land use policy decisions” (p. 142). To date, no evidence suggests there have been significant changes in surrounding circumstances or findings that the identified character area and FLUM designation were a poor fit for the parcels in question. Conversely, removal of this potential transitional zone between the new warehouses and residential uses adjoining on all other sides would likely have the result of changing the character of Buckhalter Road and prompting further industrial encroachment.

Character areas offer a generalized vision of the nature of development in a given area. They are flexible and accommodating of a diversity of uses but carry the expectation that all nearby uses be of a similar or complementary scale and intensity (p. 162). The proposed zoning and uses are inconsistent in both scale and intensity with the goals, objectives and policies encouraged within *Plan 2040*.

3. Other professional planning principles, standards, information and more detailed plans and studies considered relevant.

The present request presents a unique opportunity for Savannah-Chatham County and its jurisdictions to evaluate the sufficiency of several current development standards to avoid or deter the rapid, unforeseen, and detrimental enlargement of adjoining incompatible uses. Among them: the consideration of proportional and/or performance-based buffering standards between industrial and other land uses, and the adoption of node or overlay standards for the preservation of the natural environment, quality of life for nearby residents, and the functional enhancement of performance for large-scale commercial, industrial, or institutional land uses.

Rockingham Farms, in particular, which is slated to encompass in excess of 1,000 acres and to contain more than 10 million square feet of manufacturing and light industrial square footage, is a development of a scale unanticipated by adopted development standards. Current regulations provide for only a 40-foot buffer between industrial or manufacturing uses when abutting a dissimilar use. This has proven insufficient as 400,000 square foot warehouses are erected just a stone’s throw from single-family residences.

Numerous regulatory tools have been employed by jurisdictions facing similar development pressures. Among them is the consideration of proportional standards that trigger buffering requirements which are scaled in relationship to the overall acreage of an activity center, employment center or large site. Additionally, performance-based standards have been adopted, relying upon clear visual and auditory expectations to eliminate or significantly reduce unsightliness, noise, and light pollution where industry and heavy commercial uses are to be sited in proximity of residential uses. Finally, the adoption of node or overlay standards has been utilized for the preservation of the natural environment, quality of life for nearby residents, or for the functional enhancement of site’s performance for large-scale commercial, industrial, or institutional land uses.

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4. Written comments, evidence, and testimony of the public.

Residents of the Buckhalter Road area have protested the subject rezoning. Approximately 86 individuals appeared at the public meeting held on June 5, 2023, with the majority opposing the rezoning. Those in opposition spoke about the rich rural history and legacy of the area, its farms, long-standing congregation, and enduring scenic charm. They expressed a desire to preserve what remains in the interest of the current and future residents. Approximately 10 people appeared voicing support for the rezoning, the majority of whom were the residents who have been constructively displaced by the construction of adjoining warehouses.

MPC Recommendation:

The Planning Commission recommended approval of the amendment to the Future Land Use Map from Residential Suburban to Industry light for the subject parcels with the condition that 350 feet of vegetative buffer extend southwest from Buckhalter Road toward the Rockingham Farms industrial site.