

STAFF ANALYSIS

§ 36-67-3. Zoning proposal review standards

In any local government which has established a planning department or other similar agency charged with the duty of reviewing zoning proposals, such planning department or other agency shall with respect to each zoning proposal investigate and make a recommendation with respect to each of the matters enumerated in this Code section, as well as carrying out any other duties with which the planning department or agency is charged by the local government. The planning department or other agency shall make a written record of its investigation and recommendations, and this record shall be a public record. The matters with which the planning department or agency shall be required to make such investigation and recommendation shall be:

(1) Whether the zoning proposal will permit a use that is suitable in view of the use and development of adjacent and nearby property;

The proposed use of a large-scale solar energy system is suitable for agricultural zoned properties. However, the disconnected proposed layout of the solar system creates a larger impact area of 23 neighboring homes and a vast amount of farmland that is not consistent with the intent of Brooks County (See Number 5).

(2) Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property;

Staff is concerned with the potential impacts of the 127.05 Acres of jurisdictional wetlands and 10.15 acres of non-jurisdictional wetlands upon and leaving the properties. The properties range from 1-3 miles west of the Withlacoochee River. Although the applicant has submitted a preliminary Erosion Control Plan with the intention to submit full plans to the GA EPD, the concern is relating to maintenance of the site after construction (maintenance of the proposed 18 drainage basins, utilization of filter socks, any chemicals to be utilized for weed control). There is also concern for the threatened and candidate species found upon the properties, the potential for habitats of these species, and migratory species to the properties. Although the applicant is maintaining a 25 foot buffer from areas of present/potential wildlife and avoiding the area west of Section 2, the area of wildlife around the Transformer and Substation (near and adjacent to Section 1) remains a concern with the equipment and fencing.

(3) Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable economic use as currently zoned;

Yes, the current zoning of the 11 parcels proposed is AG – Agricultural and is currently being utilized for crops, timber, pasture land, and/or rural residences. Of the 952 acres proposed for the solar farm, 782 acres (82%) is considered “prime farmland” per the Federal Register or “farmland of statewide importance”. The applicant is also proposing clearing 13% (121.9 Acres) of timber from the properties. However, the existing pecan trees to be affected by Section 1 and 2 were not addressed in the tree survey. Existing vegetation is to be retained where possible for a vegetative buffer.