
Planning and Zoning Commission

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January 14, 2026, Planning and Zoning Commission Minutes

Voting Board Members Present: Steve Coleman (Chair), James Freeman, Noah Harbuck, Martin Pennington, Kathy Rowland, Hal Clark, and Chris Soule

Voting Board Members Not Present: None

Staff Present: Dean Nelson, Will Campbell, Rachel Floyd, and Brian Causey.

- I. **Call to Order:** Steve Coleman called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.
- II. **Approval of Agenda:** Noah Harbuck motioned to approve the agenda, seconded by Martin Pennington. The motion carried unanimously (6-0).
- III. **Planning and Zoning:**
 - a) Mayor Pro-Tem Charles Wilder, Jr., administered the Oath of Office for returning Planning and Zoning Commission member Steve Coleman and new member Chris Soule.

Following the swearing in, Mr. Harbuck motioned to appoint Steve Coleman as chair. Mr. Soule seconded the motion. The motion carried. (6-0)

Mr. Coleman motioned to appoint Mr. Hal Clarke as Vice Chair. Mr. Harbuck seconded the motion. The motion carried. (6-0)

Mr. Coleman motioned to appoint Ms. Rachel Floyd as secretary. Mr. Clarke seconded the motion. The motion carried. (7-0)

IV. **Tabled Business:**

- a) Discussion to consider a petition by H&H Timberlands, LLC, for the conditional use of parcels 015 005E, 015 005D, 015 005C, 015 005H, 015 005G, 015 005F, 015 005K, 015 005J, 027 018B, 027 018, 028 006A, 028 010, 027 025, 027 014A, 028 012, and parcels 026 020, 015 005, 015 005A, and

015 005B contingent upon rezoning, totaling approximately 1,632 acres for the purpose of Data Center/Utility Substation.

Mr. Nelson presented a summary of the DRI Final Report by Mr. Greg Boike of the Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC). Mr. Nelson also stated that public comments made via email were placed in the agenda packet and distributed to the Planning and Zoning Commission members, and that the DRI Final Report has been made available to the public on the City's website.

Mr. Coleman stated that he will preside over the meeting but will abstain from voting and then explained the Planning and Zoning Board's advisory role.

Mr. Clarke inquired about light pollution and how the applicant plans to mitigate it. Mr. Drew Fredrick, an engineer for Trammell Crow, stated that the facilities will be designed with downfacing lights, and explained that this project requires minimal lighting compared to a shopping center. Mr. Fredrick acknowledged the center will produce a glow and will be visible. Mr. Coleman stated that lighting would also be addressed during the Planning and Zoning Board's design review process, should the project proceed.

Ms. Rowland asked what generator tier would be required for the project. Mr. Fredrick responded that the state will decide those requirements based on the power supply, then explained the differences in tiers. Mr. Clarke asked if the generators would use natural gas. Mr. Fredrick responded that the generators will likely be diesel. Ms. Rowland asked how often the generators are tested. Mr. Fredrick stated that they would be tested monthly.

Mr. Clarke inquired about project phases. Mr. Hanna responded that the project would be completed in phases, and that a more detailed schedule would be provided during the construction plan review for the project. Mr. Hanna added that running power to the site would require about two years. Mr. Soule asked where the phases would begin. Mr. Fredrick responded that the first phase would include the construction of the southernmost building, and the additional phases would work their way north. Mr. Soule asked if this project could stop mid-construction. Mr. Fredrick stated that each phase is fully funded before it begins, so a phase would not stop before completion.

Mr. Clarke asked how long the developer expects construction of the south section to take. Mr. Fredrick responded likely 2 to 3 years.

Mr. Coleman inquired if 500-foot setbacks would kill the project. Mr. Fredrick responded that due to the topography of the site, a 500-foot setback requirement would likely prevent the project from moving forward. Mr. Freeman stated that a 200-foot buffer is not enough. Mr. Fredrick responded that the buildings do not begin at the 200-foot undisturbed buffer, and a 100-foot setback in addition the 200-foot undisturbed buffer would be feasible.

Mr. Clarke inquired about noise mitigation. Mr. Fredrick stated the main source of noise would be the generators, which can produce around 75db with the enclosures that will be installed. He also explained that distance, vegetation, and topography will further mitigate any noise. Mr. Soule stated that 70-80db is standard from a distance of 50 feet. Mr. Fredrick stated that the interstate will be louder than the buildings. Mr. Clarke questioned if the generators are louder than the normal cooling system. Mr. Fredrick replied yes.

Noah Harbuck motioned to recommend approval of the conditional use with the following conditions:

1. In addition to the 200 ft. undisturbed buffer, an additional 100 ft. setback be required for all data center buildings. Also, no data center building is to be erected within 400 ft. of an existing residential dwelling or church.
2. The owner and/or operator is to conduct monthly monitoring of noise, vibration, and ground water quality which is to be reported to the City Manager.
3. No private wells are to be created, and no existing wells are to be utilized on the property.
4. All lighting is to be down facing.
5. All recommendations and requests made by GDOT within the Final DRI Report are to be implemented.
6. If there has been no groundbreaking on a data center building within five years of the conditional use approval, the conditional use permit is void. Any rezoning approval to Agricultural would, however, remain in effect.

Mr. Hal Clarke motioned to second with amendments of additional conditions:

7. All water, sewer, and electricity be purchased through the City of Forsyth, provided the City is able to provide it.
8. All necessary measures are taken to ensure glycol backflow prevention.

Mr. Harbuck seconded Mr. Clarke's amendments.

The vote resulted in a tie (3-3-1) with Mr. Soule, Mr. Harbuck, and Mr. Clarke in favor of and Mrs. Rowland, Mr. Freeman, and Mr. Pennington opposed. Mr. Coleman abstained.

Mr. Coleman asked if anyone would like to make a motion to amend. Mr. Rowland stated that the area is surrounded by county residents, and there are no benefits to them whatsoever. Mr. Hanna responded the county will receive 90 percent of the tax revenue generated, and that the county and school system receive the line benefit of the project.

Ms. Rowland continued stating her concerns about runoff and the need for more studies to determine potential effects. Mr. Fredrick replied that it is all part of the permitting process, and the project will still be reviewed by the state, city, and county for multiple sets of approval that will all look into water runoff. Mr. Coleman explained some of the approval process. Mr. Nelson stated that it will have to be approved by Athens and the city.

Mr. Clarke stated the city is not able to tell the landowners they cannot develop their property, but they can say how the property is developed, and that this project will be less of a burden on the school system and city than other potential developments. Mr. Clarke questioned what would be developed in place of this project if it was not approved.

Mr. Hanna explained that they sought this opportunity to follow the comprehensive plan and to avoid overburdening the school system and roads.

Mr. Soule discussed growth in the city and county, noting this development would be the least disruptive opportunity while creating revenue for the city, county, and school system that would finance the issues that come with growth. Mr. Soule also stated his preference for this project over projects that may not be required to come before the City for approval.

Mr. Coleman explained the applicant's previous interest in a Mixed-Use development that would be a combination of commercial, industrial, and residential. Mr. Soule voiced his concerns regarding traffic if the area is built out as commercial.

Mr. Harbuck asked if Mr. Clarke or Mr. Soule would change their recommendations to no at any point. Both responded no. Mr. Harbuck asked if Mr. Pennington would change his recommendation. Mr. Pennington responded that he would not change his recommendation.

Mr. Harbuck motioned to adjourn the meeting.

V. Adjournment:

Mr. Coleman adjourned the meeting at 6:14 p.m.