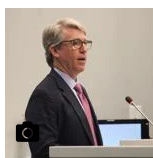
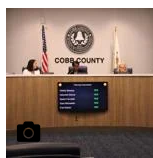
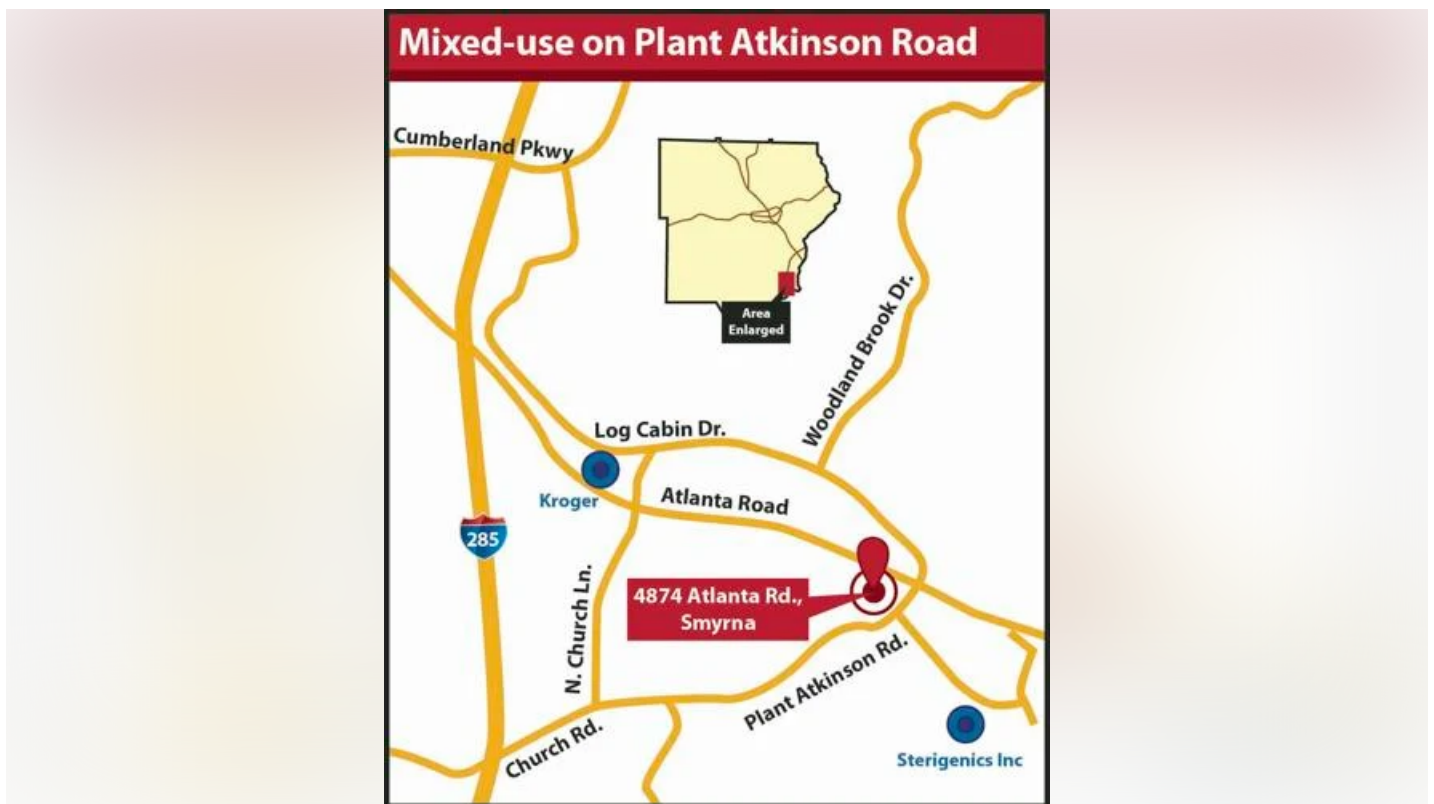


https://www.mdjonline.com/news/local/vinings-apartment-proposal-delayed-amid-industrial-site-concerns/article_85bdfd19-c4f4-42bc-bb14-ad2756fd7f46.html

Vinings apartment proposal delayed amid industrial site concerns

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Jennifer Cook

The mixed-use development proposed for Atlanta and Plant Atkinson roads would have been located near the controversial Sterigenics plant.

MARIETTA — For the first time in almost three years, the Cobb Planning Commission heard arguments about a proposed apartment complex and mixed-use development in Vinings.

Developer Branch Acquisition Company presented its idea to redevelop a 3.47-acre property into a five-story, multifamily housing complex located at 2840 Plant Atkinson Road, just off Atlanta Road and I-285.

Described as providing “warehouse modern residential” spaces, the complex would include 250 apartments ranging from studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom spaces. Each unit would be between 600 and 1,200 square feet, with an average of around 900 square feet, according to county documents.

If constructed, the apartment complex would also wrap around a six-floor parking deck.

In addition to housing, the proposed development would also include about 8,500 square feet of retail, restaurant and office spaces, all located adjacent to the county’s planned extension of the Silver Comet Trail.

Those spaces would be located beneath the residential units on the ground floor of the complex.

The plan is to use the mixed-use space as an area for trail runners, bicyclists and visitors to shop and purchase food and drinks before continuing down the trail, a concept similar to the Atlanta Beltline, according to Kevin Moore, an attorney representing the applicant.

“I believe (Branch Acquisition Company) are certainly unparalleled in their ability to execute on mixed-use projects,” Moore said. “They know what they are doing when it comes to executing and being successful for a mixed-use project such as what is being proposed here.”

The site is currently zoned under the heavy industrial code. Branch Acquisition Company is asking the commission to rezone the space in order to construct the complex, according to county documents.

The problem, however, stands in the proposed development's location, which sits adjacent to several other heavy industrial-zoned properties.

Among the varying businesses located near the proposed development include:

- ◆ Plant Atkinson Transfer Station, a waste management transfer company, located 300 feet from the proposed development;
- ◆ Quikrete Concrete Batch plant, a concrete packaging company;
- ◆ Georgia Power Plant McDonough-Atkinson;
- ◆ A C.W. Matthews asphalt plant.

Also included in the nearby industrial facilities is the controversial plant operated by medical sterilization company Sterigenics, which is accused of causing cancer in nearby residents, the Journal previously reported.

The plant is located less than half a mile from the proposed development site.

The site's close proximity to these facilities, opponents argued, would expose potential residents to loud noises at odd hours, unpleasant smells, dangerous fumes and chemicals and increase traffic on an already busy section of Atlanta Road.

The Vinings Village Homeowners Association has been a vocal opponent of the proposal, and that continued Tuesday.

Bill Millkey, vice president of the HOA, said the location proposed by Branch is not suitable for a mixed-use development.

“Development should not come at the expense of public health, appropriate land use, compatibility and community trust,” Millkey said.

Jennifer Burbine, an attorney representing waste management firm RTS Landfill, located adjacent to the proposed property, said her client “strongly oppose(s)” the proposed project.

“The development of apartments, retail and restaurants next to this waste management facility — as well as the other heavy industrial facilities in the area — is not a reasonable land use,” Burbine said.

Commissioner Sara Micheletto proposed tabling the commission’s decision for 30 days, advising the developer to meet with nearby businesses to see if disagreements over plans for the development might be reconciled.

In a unanimous vote, the commission elected to delay the proposal for another month.

Project history and updates

This was not the first time the commission has heard the case, as the project was first presented to the county in September of 2022. After almost a year of discussions and continuations, the application was ultimately denied by the Planning Commission in a 4-0 vote in August 2023, citing the development’s location as the main concern.

Branch Acquisition’s newest application was first included in the Planning Commission’s June agenda, but was held until Tuesday’s meeting.

Compared to its previous application, Branch lowered the number of apartments from 360 to 250 and lowered the amount of retail space from 40,000 square feet to 8,500.

However, similar to the applicant's first attempt in 2022, county zoning staff is once again recommending the Planning Commission deny Branch's latest application due to its location next to heavy industrial businesses.

Moore addressed concerns about the complex's location during his presentation Tuesday, saying the area is "in fact, far from" an industrial-exclusive area, highlighting two nearby residential and townhome complexes.

Moore also touched on the county's incoming Silver Comet extension, saying it does not make sense to deny Branch's application when thousands of residents will already be using the trail to run through the same area once it is constructed.

"From my standpoint, that tells me that Cobb County says this is an appropriate area for thousands of residents per year to come through, be part of and enjoy what the Silver Comet Trail provides," Moore said. "To then say, on the other hand, that our project ... is somehow inconsistent with this same area are two concepts, I think, that are entirely inconsistent and cannot be true at the same time."

John Pederson, the county's zoning division manager, said the zoning staff felt there would be constant conflict between residents and the existing industrial businesses should an apartment complex be built so close by.

"There's no doubt that the applicant is a Class A developer, and they build the highest quality product, but we just felt like the location was not proper for this proposed development based on what's around it and what the anticipated uses are," Pederson told commissioners.