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Cobb denies mixed-use development near industrial facilities

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The Cobb County Planning Commission recommended denying a proposed mixed-use development that would've neighbored heavy industry plants and businesses.

The Planning Commission voted 4-0 on Tuesday to recommend to deny the proposal. Commission Chair Nadia Faucette was absent from the meeting. The recommendation will be considered by the Cobb Board of Commissioners, which will hear the issue on Sept. 15.

The proposal was brought by Atlanta-based developer Branch Acquisition Company, and proposes redeveloping a 3.47-acre property just off Atlanta Road and Interstate 285, at 2840 Plant Atkinson Road.

The development would include a multifamily housing complex with 250 apartments. The complex is proposed to wrap around a six-floor parking deck and two courtyards.

It 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.

Other proposed amenities include a pool, fitness center, clubroom, business center, electric vehicle charging stations and bike racks. The applicant agreed to incorporate dedicated trail parking within the parking deck for a minimum of 12 spaces.

Kevin Moore, an attorney representing the developer, said the development would increase accessibility to the Silver Comet Trail and create pedestrian-friendly areas paired with businesses and living spaces.

He also argued that the development was compatible with the area, arguing that nearby areas have a mix of residential and commercial zones.

"Those are the mixture of uses along with the industrial and along with the commercial that's there, and they all happily co-exist today," Moore said. "It apparently hasn't harmed the industrial uses because they're very active and have been and continue to be."

The project has faced opposition, however, due to its proximity to heavy industrial facilities.

Such properties include the 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; and a C.W. Matthews asphalt plant.

Also nearby — less than half a mile away — is the controversial plant operated by medical sterilization company Sterigenics, which is accused of causing cancer in nearby residents, the Journal previously reported.

The Planning Commission voted about a month ago to table the proposal to allow the developer to meet with nearby businesses and potentially come to an agreement over development plans.

However, commissioners weren't satisfied with the outcome, and said Tuesday they still felt the development doesn't match the surrounding area.

Commissioner Sara Micheletto said while there is a need for more dense residential developments, she can't shake her worries over the nearby properties zoned for heavy industrial uses, which can pose health hazards to people living nearby.

"I think that there is a need for continued high-density residential...I think connectivity around these walking trails, these biking trails are an amazing

amenity that our community is continuing to embrace,” Micheletto said. “I have concerns about the proximity to potentially health-impacting services that occur in heavy industrial.”

Commissioner Fred Beloin echoed a similar point, and said he feels the development is mismatched with the industrial facilities, and that the commission would be violating their basic duties if it were to approve the project.

“This is an extreme case of a fundamental violation of the basic principles of planning,” Beloin said. “Why don’t we just get rid of this group altogether, and just get rid of zoning laws if we are going to start doing stuff like this?”

Beloin said the proposal was the most “egregious case of an incompatible use” he’s seen in his eight years on the Planning Commission.

This is the second time the project has been brought to the county.

It was first presented to the county in September 2022, but after almost a year of discussions and continuations, was ultimately denied by the Planning Commission in August 2023, citing the development’s location as the main concern.