



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

STAFF REPORT

To: The Planning Commission

Through: Melanie Wilson, Executive Director and CEO

From: Subhashi Karunaratne, Planner – Development Services

Date: June 2, 2026

Subject: General Development Plan (GDP) with Variance

Applicant/Agent: Jamie Gwaltney, Kimley-Horn and Associates

Address: 170 Portside Court

PIN: 20981 01022

Site Area: 21.77 acres

Alderman District: 1 - Bernetta B. Lanier

Chatham County Commission District: 8 – Marsha Buford

File Number: 26-002045-ZA

Request

The petitioner is requesting a variance to reduce the wetland buffer from 35 feet to 0 feet along the northern portion of the wetlands adjacent to the proposed industrial development at 170 Portside Court. The request would allow grading and disturbance within an area that is otherwise required to remain undisturbed.

The applicant states that grading within the buffer is necessary to construct a floodplain mitigation area required to comply with the City's flood hazard regulations. According to the memorandum, providing the full 35-foot undisturbed buffer would significantly reduce the area available for the floodplain mitigation improvements. The applicant proposes to grade the area, reseed it, and reestablish a vegetated buffer after construction, arguing that the disturbance is the minimum necessary to accommodate the required floodplain mitigation while maintaining the environmental function of the buffer.

Facts and Findings

The subject property is zoned Heavy Industrial (I-H) and has an area approximately 21.77 acres. The proposed development consists of a large warehouse facility with associated parking, loading areas, internal circulation, stormwater facilities, and floodplain mitigation improvements. During permitting and site design, portions of the site were identified as Special Flood Hazard Area (Zone AE) requiring mitigation in accordance with the City's flood hazard

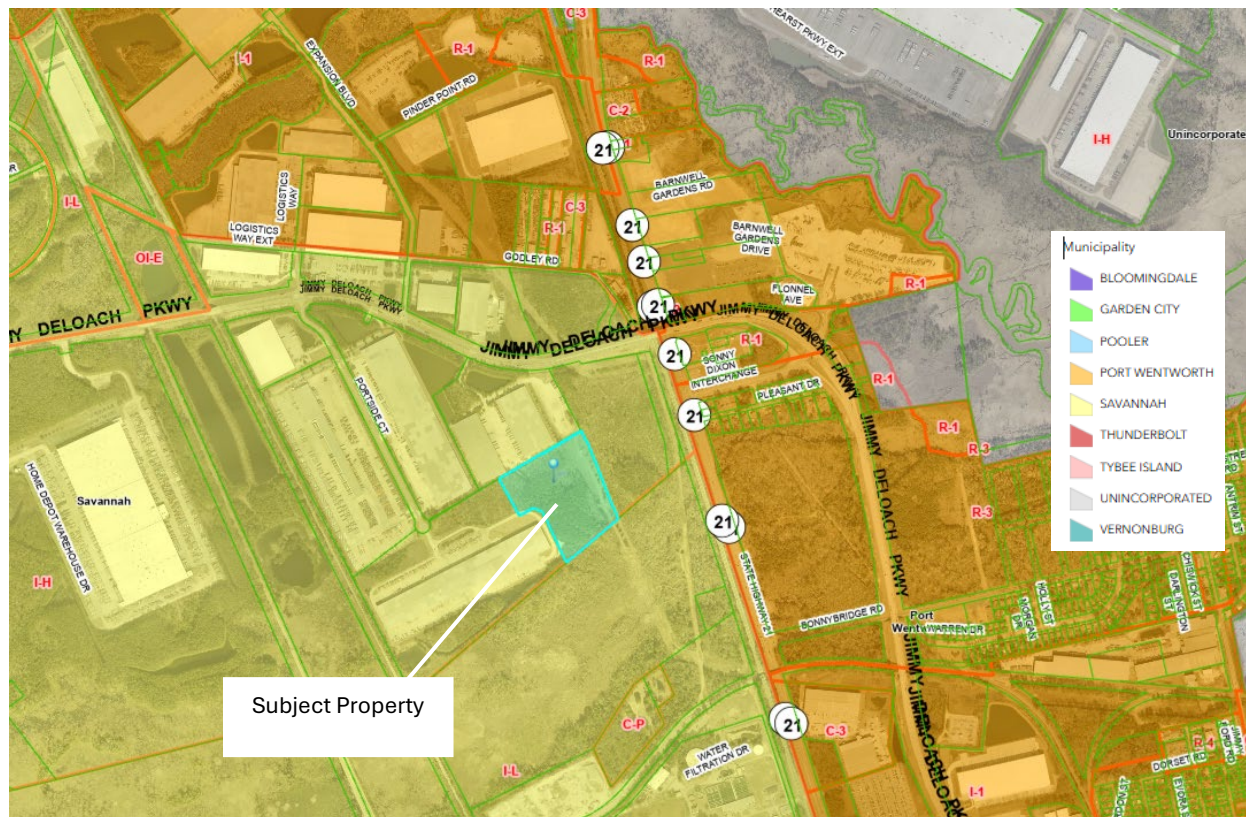
The applicant states that grading within the wetland buffer is necessary to construct a floodplain mitigation area required by the City's floodplain regulations. The mitigation area is intended to compensate for floodplain impacts associated with the warehouse development by providing flood storage volume and maintaining floodplain function. According to the applicant, providing the full 35-foot undisturbed buffer would significantly reduce the area available for the required floodplain mitigation improvements.



The property is zoned as Heavy Industrial. The IH district is established to provide sites for activities which involve large-scale warehousing, processing, manufacturing facilities, major transportation terminals and waste-related facilities that have a greater impact on the surrounding area than industries found in the IL-T and IL districts. It is the intent of this district to provide an environment for industries that is unencumbered by nearby non-industrial development.

The surrounding area is characterized by heavy and light industrial zones. To the east of the property there are residential zones within Port Wentworth jurisdiction.

Location	Land Use	Existing Zoning
North	Heavy Industrial	I-H
South	Light Industrial	I-L
East	Heavy Industrial	I-H
West	Heavy Industrial	I-H



Zoning Map

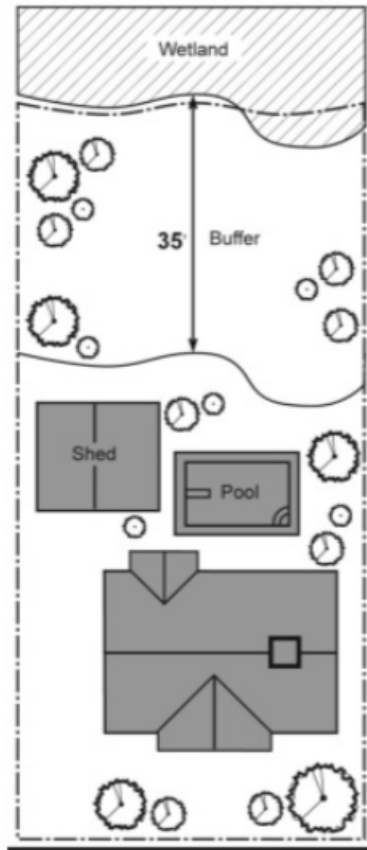
Public Notice

Mailed notice of the Planning Commission meeting was sent to all property owners within 300-feet of the subject property, signs were posted on site and required newspaper advertisements were run at least 15 days prior to the meeting. The mailed notice included instructions on how to access the public meeting via the internet.

Standards at Issue

1. [Section 10.5.4.a](#) of the Zoning Ordinance requires a buffer width of 35 feet is required for all wetland and marsh buffers. Wetland buffers are a minimum of 35 feet and are required along jurisdictional wetlands. The buffers shall be measured from the United States Army Corps of Engineers approved Jurisdictional Determination and/or the United States Army Corps of Engineers delineation of the waters on the site.

Figure 10.5-1 Wetland Buffer



The Petitioner is requesting a variance to reduce the required 35-foot wetland buffer to 0 feet to allow grading and disturbance within the buffer area to accommodate floodplain mitigation improvements associated with the proposed warehouse development.

Zoning Ordinance Review

General Development Plan with Variances – Sec. 3.21.9.b.i

The Planning Commission is authorized to grant variances to the standards of *Article 5, Base Zoning Districts*, upon the basis of the criteria established in *Sec. 3.21.10*.

The following review criteria for Variances are prescribed in the Savannah Zoning Ordinance *Sec. 3.21.10*:

A. General Consistency

The variance shall be consistent with the intent of this Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan and shall not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.

MPC Comment: The requested variances are inconsistent with the development standards for the zoning district.

B. Special Conditions

i. Special conditions and/or circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, buildings or structures involved and which are not applicable to other lands, buildings or structures in the same zoning district.

MPC Comment: Yes. Special conditions exist that are peculiar to the subject property. The site contains floodplain areas subject to the City's flood hazard regulations, which require floodplain mitigation in association with the proposed development. The need to provide compensatory floodplain storage adjacent to existing wetlands creates a unique circumstance not generally applicable to other properties within the same zoning district.

ii. The special conditions and/or circumstances do not result from the actions of the applicant.

MPC Comment: The special conditions are a result of the petitioner's chosen design. However, the design reflects a reasonable effort to work within the site's constraints in order to expand the property's functionality and flood mitigation.

iii. The special conditions and/or circumstances are not purely financial in nature so as to allow the applicant to use the land, buildings or structures involved more profitably or to save money.

MPC Comment: The request is likely financial in nature.

C. Literal Interpretation

Literal interpretation of the provisions of the regulations would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same zoning district under the terms of the Ordinance and would result in unnecessary and undue hardship on the applicant.

MPC Comment: No. A literal interpretation of the Ordinance would not deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same zoning district, nor would it result in unnecessary or undue hardship. A conforming development that does not encroach into the required wetland buffer can be constructed on the property. The need for the variance results from the applicant's chosen site design rather than from conditions inherent to the property.

D. Minimum Variance

The variance, if granted, is the minimum variance necessary to make possible the reasonable use of land, buildings, or structures.

MPC Comment: The variance is not required to make use of the subject property; However, the requested variance is the minimum necessary to accommodate maximum buildability allowed on the lot.

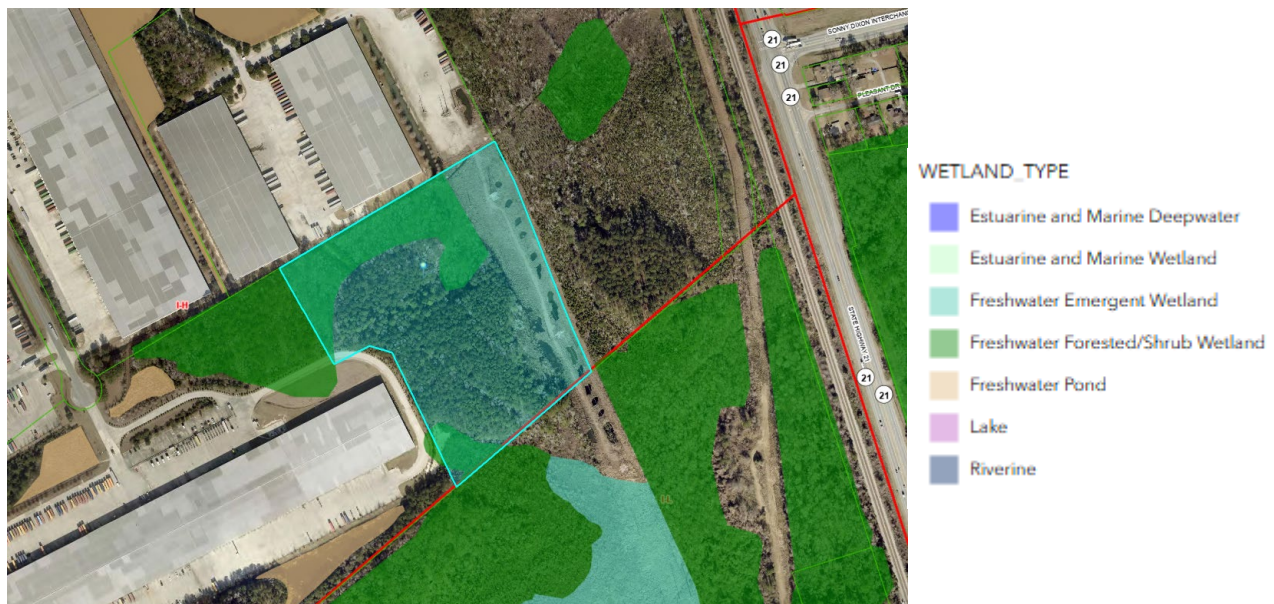
E. Special Privilege Not Granted

The variance would not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied by this Ordinance to other lands, buildings, or structures in the same zoning district.

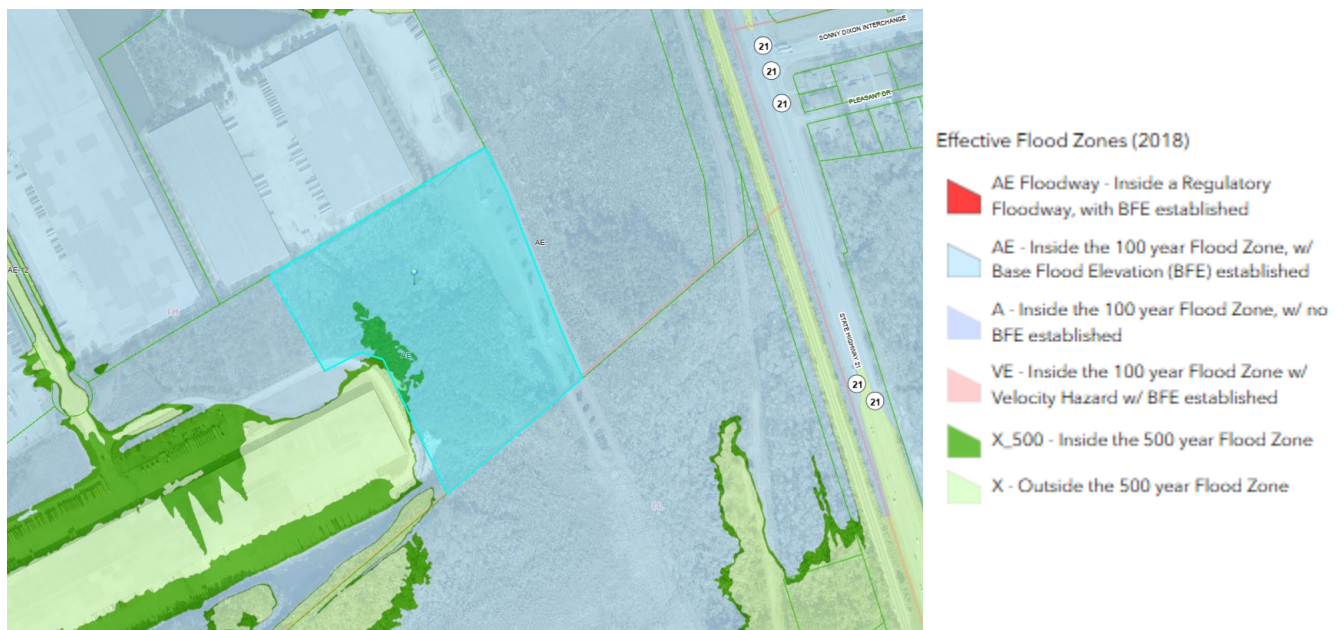
MPC Comment: The requested variance does confer a special privilege on the Petitioner if granted.

Staff Recommendation

MPC Staff recommends **approval** of the requested variance to reduce the wetland buffer from 35 feet to 0 feet along the northern portion of the wetlands adjacent to the proposed industrial development at 170 Portside Court.



Wetlands in the vicinity of 170 Portside Court (SAGIS)



Effective floodzones in the vicinity of 170 Portside Court (SAGIS)