

# **DeKalb County Zoning Board of Appeals**

Department of Planning & Sustainability 178 Sams Street Decatur, GA 30030



Michael L. Thurmond Chief Executive Officer Wednesday, June 12th, 2024

Cedric Hudson Interim Director

Tama Bag Factory Development, LLC

1777 Peachtree Street NE

Suite 200

Atlanta, GA 30309

# **Planning Department Staff Analysis**

Owner:

N6. Case No: A-24-1247013 Parcel ID(s): 15 173 07 048

### **Commission District 03 Super District 06**

Applicant: Craig Wasilewsky

Perennial Properties, Inc.

1777 Peachtree Street NE

Suite 200

Atlanta, GA 30309

Project Name: Vela Park

**Location**: 1881 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue

Decatur, GA 30032

**Request**: Variance from Section 27-5.4.5 (D) to reduce the minimum width of a required transitional buffer from 50 feet to

zero (0) feet along the subject property's line adjacent to 604 Fayetteville Road (Parcel ID 15 173 07 012) within

the MR-2 (Medium Density Residential-2) Zoning District.

#### Staff Determination:

Denial

### **STAFF ANALYSIS**

1. There is an extraordinary or exceptional physical condition(s) pertaining to the particular piece of property (such as, but not limited to, lot size, lot shape, specimen tree(s), steep slope(s), or preservation of historic characteristics of the property), which was not created by the current owner, previous owner, or applicant; by reason of a clearly demonstrable condition(s), the strict application of the requirements of this chapter would deprive the property owner of rights and privileges enjoyed by other property owners in the same zoning district, as distinguished from a special privilege or convenience sought by the property owner.

There may be existing physical conditions limiting development that were not originally created by the applicant, such as steep slope along the subject property's boundary with 604 Fayetteville Road. However, the development as originally proposed per rezoning case Z-22-1245577 and approved per Land Development Permit (LDP) #1246194 accounted for this existing topography; retaining walls were proposed along a private street in the northwestern corner of the development site (circled in red in the site plans included with this analysis). Although granting this variance request would result in a more uniform and regular grid layout, better facilitate future interparcel connectivity, and allow for gentler grading that could potentially eliminate the need for any retaining walls, the existing topography does not appear to be the limiting factor; rather it is the placement of the street relative to the transitional buffer, as established by the current R-75 zoning of the adjacent 604 Fayetteville Road. Granting this variance may constitute a special privilege or convenience for the applicant, as other property owners would also be subject to meeting the transitional buffer requirement.

# 2. The requested variance does not go beyond the minimum necessary to afford relief, and does not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties in the zoning district in which the subject property is located:

The variance request appears to go beyond the minimum necessary to avoid relief, as the originally approved site plan was in compliance with development standards of the *Zoning Ordinance*. An alternative design of the development site could account for the transitional buffer and still create a more regular street layout.

# 3. The grant of the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to the property or improvements in the zoning district in which the subject property is located:

Granting this variance request may not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to adjacent properties or improvements. While the request to reduce the transitional buffer along the subject property's boundary with 604 Fayetteville Road to zero (0) feet would result in the decrease of vegetation between the two properties, a six (6)-foot fence is still proposed along the property boundary - as would be required with the preservation of a transitional buffer. The area behind this fence (internal to the subject property) is proposed to contain some vegetation; a ten (10)-foot landscape strip is proposed which would consist of trees and other plantings normally required for perimeter landscape strips. Per Section 27-5.4.4. (C), a five (5)-foot perimeter landscape strip is typically required along any property lines that are not subject to streetscape or transitional buffer requirements; the proposed 10-foot strip would exceed the minimum requirements of the *Zoning Ordinance* were the adjacent property not zoned single-family residential. The grating of this variance request would only affect the adjacent property owner of 604 Fayetteville Road, as the transitional buffer requirement along other residentially zoned properties would remain as originally proposed.

# 4. The literal interpretation and strict application of the applicable provisions or requirements of this chapter would cause undue and unnecessary hardship:

Development of the site would be able to proceed as originally approved per LDP #1246194 without the approval of this variance. Thus, the application of the *Zoning Ordinance* would not be deemed a hardship either undue or unnecessary. Any changes to the site plan as a part of this variance request, including the proposed grid layout and more easily allowing for future inter-parcel connections, could also be accomplished with revisions to the approved LDP with out this variance approval.

# 5. The requested variance would be consistent with the spirit and purpose of this Chapter and the DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan Text

Inter-parcel connectivity is highlighted in the *DeKalb 2050 Unified Plan* as a method of providing successful access management, which can reduce traffic congestion and allow for easier means of access for fire/rescue and other County services. A more regular and connected street grid would also create a more aesthetically attractive and pedestrian-oriented environment. These in tandem would allow for a development that better promotes and improves the public health, safety, and general welfare of its residents and others. However, it does not appear that the variance request is necessary to accomplish these goals, as it appears that the variance request may be the result of a self-induced hardship and the same ends could be met without a variance approval.

#### **FINAL STAFF ANALYSIS:**

The application fails to meet the majority of the variance criteria. While the proposed site plan would result in a better design for future interparcel access, the nature of the request does not appear to be justified based on the specific conditions of the subject property. While topography may be a concern, there are alternative designs that do not require the approval of this variance. Development of the subject property in substantial accordance with the site plan as per the variance request could be accomplished by other means that may be more appropriate, such as property acquisition and/or the rezoning of the adjacent property. Alternatively, revisions could be made to the approved LDP that could still provide the end results desired by the applicant. Therefore, upon consideration of the criteria of Section 27-7.5.3. of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning and Sustainability Department recommends Denial of this variance request.

**STAFF DETERMINATION:** Denial



Development Services Center 178 Sams Street Decatur, GA 30030 www.dekalbcountyga.gov/planning 404-371-2155 (o); 404-371-4556 (f)

Chief Executive Officer
Michael Thurmond

# **DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY**

Interim Director Cedric Hudson

# ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS APPLICATION FOR PUBLIC HEARING (VARIANCES, SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS, APPEALS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS)

Applicant and/or Authorized Representative:							
Mailing Address:							
City/State/Zip Code:							
Email:							
Telephone Home:	Business:						
ow	NER OF RECORD OF SU	BJECT PROPERTY	•				
Owner:			· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·				
Address (Mailing):							
Email:	Telephone Home:		Business:				
ADDRESS/LOCATION OF SUBJECT PROPERTY							
Address:		_ City:	State:	Zip:			
District(s): La	nd Lot(s):	Block:	Parcel:				
Zoning Classification: Commission District & Super District:							
CHECK TYPE OF HEARING REQUI	ESTED:						
VARIANCE (From Development Standards causing undue hardship upon owners of property.)							
SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS (To reduce or waive off-street parking or loading space requirements.)							
OFFICIAL APPEAL OF ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS.							

\*PLEASE REVIEW THE FILING GUIDELINES ON PAGE 4. FAILURE TO FOLLOW GUIDELINES MAY RESULT IN SCHEDULING DELAYS.\*

Email plansustain@dekalbcountyga.gov with any questions.

### **DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY**

## **ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS APPLICATION**

### **AUTHORIZATION OF THE PROPERTY OWNER**

I hereby authorize the staff and members of the Zoning Board of Appeals to inspect the premises of the Subject Property.

I hereby certify that the information provided in the application is true and correct.

Thereby continy that the information provided in the application is the contest.				
I hereby certify that I am the owner o	of the property subject to the application.			
DATE:	Applicant Signature:			
DATE:	ApplicantSignature:			

### DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY

### **ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS APPLICATION**

### AUTHORIZATION TO REPRESENT THE PROPERTY OWNER

I hereby authorize the staff and members of the Zoning Board of Appeals to inspect the premises of the Subject Property.

I hereby certify that the information provided in the application is true and correct.

I hereby certify that I am the owner of the property and that I authorize the applicant/agent to apply for a hearing to the ZoningBoard of Appeals for the requests as shown in this application.

DATE: 4/25/2024	Applicant/Agent Signature:	raig Wasilewsky
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:  (I)/ (WE): TAMA BAG FACTO (Name of Owners)	ORY DEVELOPI	MENT LLC
being (owner/owners) of the proper signed agent/applicant.  Notary Public	ASILE WOOTARY TO THE TOTARY TO	Owner Signature
Notary Public		Owner Signature
Notary Public		Owner Signature



1777 Peachtree Street NE | Suite 200 | Atlanta, GA 30309

April 25, 2024

VIA: EMAIL DELIVERY

Ms. Rachel Bragg, Zoning Administrator
Dekalb County Dept. of Planning and Sustainability
Current Zoning
178 Sams Street
Decatur, GA 30030

RE:

Application by Perennial Properties, Inc. ("Perennial") for a Variance from Section 5.4.5.D-Transitional Buffer Class by District (Table 5.2(a)) to Reduce the Minimum Width of Required Transitional Buffer to Zero Feet Along the Section of Vela Park's Property at 1881 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Adjacent to 604 Fayetteville Road (Parcel 15 173 07 012) to Facilitate Improved Opportunities for Interparcel Connectivity in the Future.

Dear Cedric:

Dear Ms. Bragg:

Founded in 1988, Perennial Properties is an Atlanta-based developer that specializes in creating high-quality residential and mixed-use communities. As long-term holders of the communities we develop, our core mission is to provide exceptional housing and retail experiences with extraordinary services for our residents and commercial tenants and their customers. We have developed and operated more than 20 properties in and around Atlanta since our founding. One of our most recently built multifamily communities is the new ELLA Apartments at 2201 Glenwood Avenue, next door to the Publix and just around the corner from the Bag Factory site.

In January 2024, Perennial began construction on the 328-unit development at 1881 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, known as Vela Park (formally known as the Bag Factory development), which includes 43 townhomes and 285 apartments. The Vela Park site at 1881 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue was rezoned in two separate cases: Case Z-22-1245577 on June 28, 2022 for the original 11.75-acre portion of the site, and Case Z-23-1246248 on March 30, 2023 for the two acre 710 Fayetteville Road portion of the site, which was originally landlocked and owned by the Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam before being purchased and rezoned.

The Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam (the "Masjid") owns (or has an interest in) and controls nearly eight acres of land between Vela Park and Glenwood Avenue and between Fayetteville Road and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, including three parcels west of Alexander Avenue and north Vela Park: 596, 600, and 604 Fayetteville Road (the "Three Parcels East of Alexander"). We herein refer to all the Masjid's contiguous parcels and parcels divided by a right-of-way as the "Masjid Corner Holdings." Because that portion of the Masjid Corner Holdings north of Vela Park and east of Alexander Avenue is commercially zoned, there is no transitional buffer between Vela Park and that portion of its holdings; however, because the Masjid's Three Parcels East of Alexander are zoned R-75, Vela Park was originally permitted with a 50 ft transitional

buffer alongside 604 Fayetteville, and the project's parking trays circumvent around this buffer with a steep grade change between the neighboring parcels and Vela Park's improvements.

When Perennial designed and entitled Vela Park in 2022 and 2023, it worked very closely with the Masjid to program the project with the community's concerns and desires top of mind, and with special attention to how Vela Park would interact with its closest and very significant neighbor to the north. Since that time, the relationship has blossomed with further cooperation as the Masjid has begun early visioning exercises for the redevelopment of the entirety of its Corner Holdings into a new mixed-use commercial development. The Masjid's redevelopment concepts include incorporating the Three Parcels East of Alexander into the wider development by rezoning them into a commercial use.

And while Vela Park has already started construction, considering the Masjid's nascent and quickly developing plans, Perennial wishes to implement minor modifications to the north side of the Vela Park site to best to anticipate and respond to the needs of the Masjid's future development plans, and to ultimately facilitate opportunities for synchronous interactions between our two sites.

To better respond to the Masjid's evolving plans as it explores a future development and to facilitate interplay and connectivity between Vela Park and the Masjid development between the boundary lines, Perennial respectfully requests a Variance from Section 5.4.5.D-Transitional Buffer Class by District (Table 5.2(a)) to reduce the minimum width of the required Transitional Buffer to zero feet along the section of Vela Park's property adjacent to 604 Fayetteville and replace it with a 10 ft landscape strip/setback.

Perennial's variance request satisfies all the county's standards for such relief, as set forth in section 27-7.5.3(A) of the zoning ordinance, as follows:

#### I. VARIANCE APPROVAL STANDARDS

# 1. "There is an extraordinary or exceptional physical condition(s) pertaining to the particular piece of property..."

As currently planned, the elevations of Vela Park's parking tray and other improvements just inside the existing buffer, adjacent to the 604 Fayetteville Road parcel, are substantially below the undisturbed elevation of said adjoining parcel. With the buffer in place, the steep grade change is needed to simultaneously preserve the buffer and accommodate the grades for storm drainage and pedestrian accessibility around the north side of the Vela Park site. In fact, the parking tray just outside the buffer sits approximately six to nine feet below the grades of 604 Fayetteville. Such dramatic elevation differentials between Vela Park and the Three Parcels East of Alexander, the property lines between which are already envisioned as points of future connectivity, make pedestrian and vehicular access, or even just the experience of cohesiveness by the developments' users, practically impossible.

However, by removing the transitional buffer adjacent to 604 Fayetteville while maintaining a tenfoot landscaped setback, Perennial can design the Vela Park improvements adjacent to the Masjid Corner Holdings and its future commercial development as follows:

- Perennial can better configure the parking trays and other improvements on the north side of the property to align with the property lines for the Three Parcels East of Alexander to future proof Vel Park to eventually take advantage of opportunities for interparcel connectivity with more pedestrian interactions and possible vehicular access from Vela Park to the Masjid's new commercial development and, ultimately, out to Fayetteville Road.
- By positioning Vela Park's parking tray slightly closer to 604 Fayetteville the elevations
  of the parking tray and associated improvements can rise about three feet to be
  substantially more closely aligned with the grades of the adjoining parcels. With
  substantially smaller elevation changes, the transition between Vela Park and the
  adjacent Three Parcels East of Alexander through the 10 ft landscaped setback can be
  more subtly sloped to promote between integration of the two sites in the interim and
  future proof for physical connectivity between the developments in the future.

### 2. The requested variance does not go beyond the minimum necessary to afford relief...

As evidenced by the Variance Site Plan, attached hereto, the requested variance to remove the buffer but maintain a 10 ft setback will allow Perennial to locate the Vela Park parking trays and landscaping improvements in such a way as to grade the site and align the improvements in such a way that allows for future connections and cohesive interactions between Vela Park the Masjid's future development. The realigned parking tray maintains a straight driveway through Vela Park and aligns with the adjoining property lines; it doesn't not extend closer to 604 Fayetteville than necessary to align the parking and establish grades that more closely match those of the adjoining parcels. Furthermore, the revised plan seeks to maintain a 10 ft landscaped setback even though the minimum for two commercial properties in 5 ft.

# 3. The grant o the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to the property...

The variance only requests removal of the buffer between Vela Park and the neighboring property at 604 Fayetteville Road, a property that is controlled by the Masjid and that will be rezoned soon to commercial to facilitate a commercial mixed-use development. Furthermore, 604 Fayetteville is an unimproved parcel of land with now house and no one occupying the property. Perennial has the full support of the Masjid to remove the buffer an to construct the parking tray and other improvements adjacent to their properties in a manner substantially similar to that represented in the attached Variance Site Plan.

Finally, the Variance Site Plan preserves the required transitional buffers with all other adjacent properties, such as 610 Fayetteville Road.

4. The literal interpretation and strict application of the applicable provisions or requirements of this chapter would cause undue and unnecessary hardship...

The literal interpretation and strict application of the applicable provisions or requirements of the chapter will cause Perennial to have to construct a large wall and maintain a very steep grade change between the properties, thereby preventing opportunities for future interparcel connectivity, especially once the adjacent Masjid Corner Holdings are developed.

# 5. The requested variance would be consistent with the spirit and purpose of this chapter and the DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan text.

As stated in the zoning code, the purpose of the transitional buffer is to create a visual screen in order to diminish the potential negative impacts of non-residential and mixed land uses on adjacent residential land uses. However, the Masjid intends to rezone of the Three Parcels East of Alexander, including 604 Fayetteville Road, to commercial zoning and to redevelopment the parcels with mixed and commercial uses. Accordingly, Vela Park and the Three Parcels East of Alexander will share compatible zonings that do not require any transitional buffer for either property per Section 5.4.2.5. Furthermore, privacy and visual screening between Vela Park's improvements and 604 Fayetteville Road will be maintained because the elevation of Vela Park's parking tray is still set down about three feet below the adjoining parcels, and Perennial intends to plant the 10' perimeter setback/landscape strip with new plantings and materials consistent with those in Section 5.4.5.C.

Perennial respectfully seeks relief from the strict application of the Section 5.4.5.D zoning ordinance.

### II. CONSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Georgia courts have long held that an aggrieved party must present any potential constitutional objections to the local government during the zoning review process, which includes administrative zoning appeals. Applicants who fail to do so substantially deprive themselves of a legal basis to appeal adverse zoning decisions. Therefore, solely to satisfy mandatory requirements of Georgia law, Perennial respectfully advises Dekalb County of its constitutional objections. Perennial has demonstrated that its rezoning request fully satisfies all applicable standards for the approval of such applications. Therefore, any action by the Board of Commissioners to deny Perennial's requested rezoning or to grant some lesser form of relief would violate Perennial's rights to due process of law and equal protection under the laws.

For all the foregoing reasons, Perennial respectfully requests the approval of its rezoning application. Please do not hesitate to let me know if I may provide you with any additional information or clarify anything in this letter.

Sincerely,

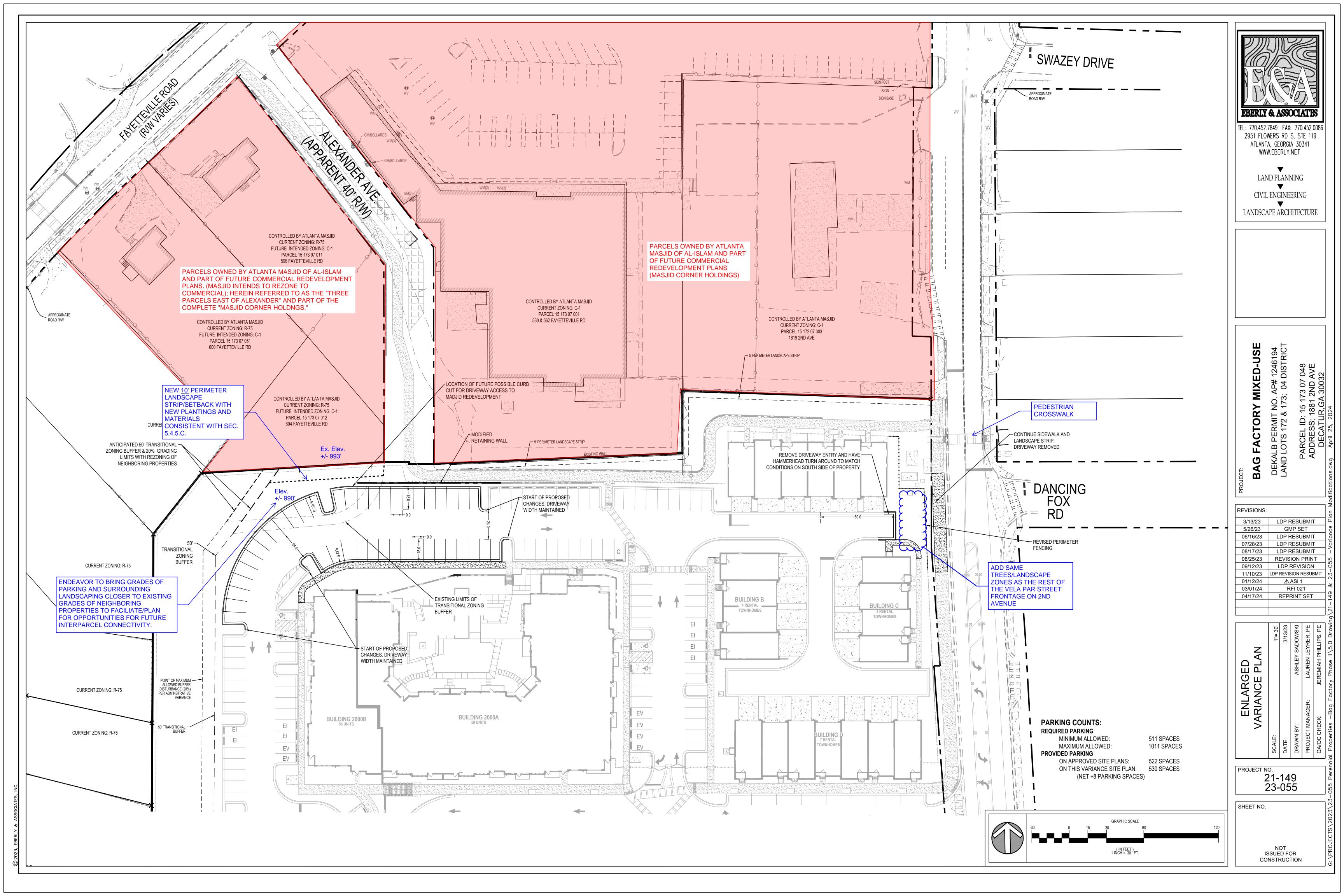
PERENNIAL PROPERTIES, INC.

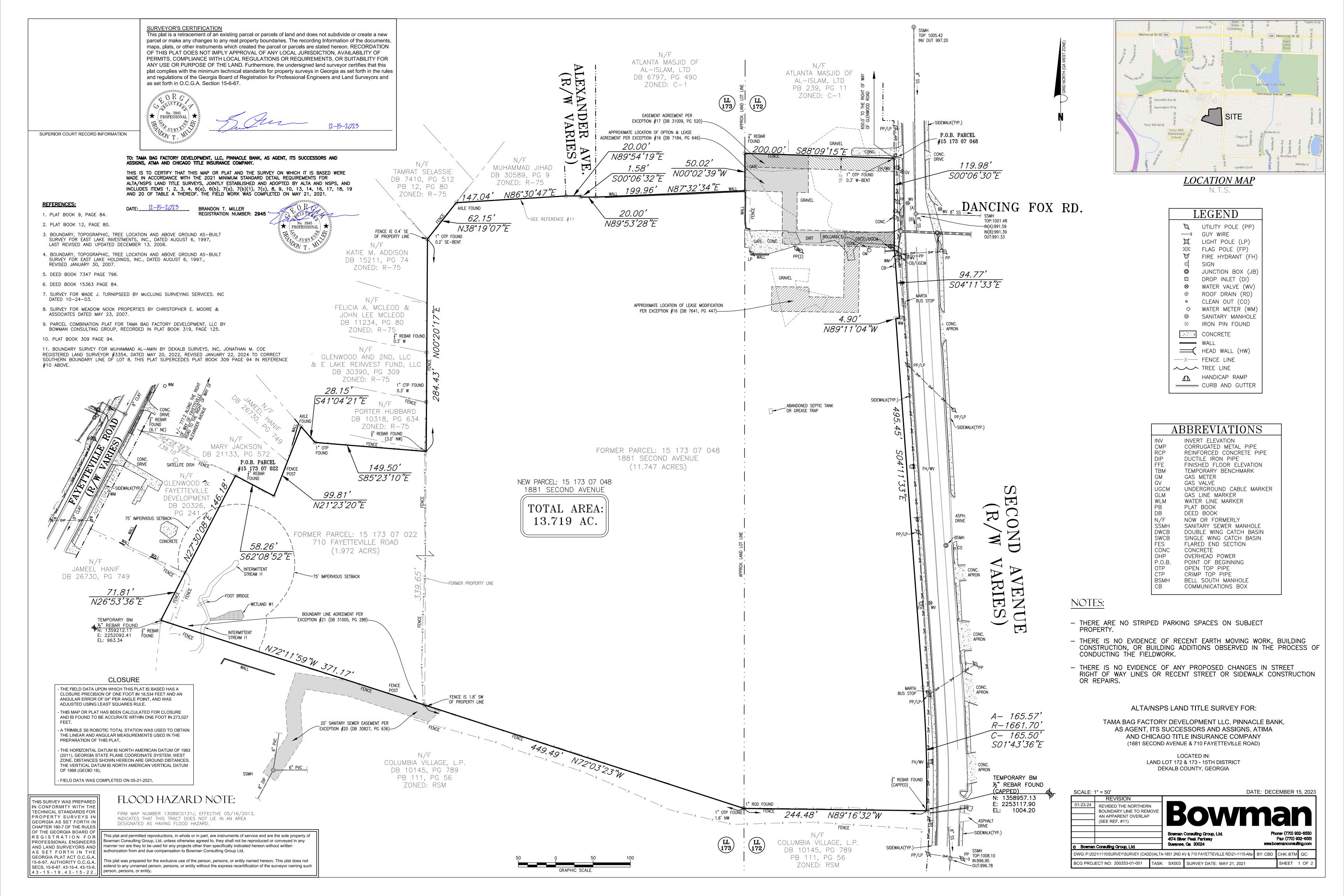
Craig J. Wasilewsky, SE Development Manager Perennial Properties, Inc.

Attachments.

cc: Mr. Lucas Carter, Dekalb County Dept. of Planning and Sustainability (via email)
Mr. Adam Chappell, Dekalb County Dept. of Planning and Sustainability (via email)

# VARIANCE SITE PLAN WITHOUT TRANSITIONAL BUFFER ADJACENT TO 604 FAYETTEVILLE ROAD





# EMAIL OF SUPPORT FROM ATLANTA MASJID OF AL-ISLAM

### **Craig Wasilewsky**

From: Ihsan Saleem <ihsansaleem@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Friday, April 26, 2024 10:57 AM

**To:** Craig Wasilewsky

**Cc:** Bragg, Rachel L.; Chappell, Adam W; Keeter, Patrece

**Subject:** Re: Bag Factory Discussion

Rachel, Patrice, and Adam,

I just wanted to chime in and affirm that the Masjid is fully supportive of this proposal.

Please let me know if a formal letter of support would be helpful.

Ihsan

Ihsan Saleem Chair | Board of Trustees

Atlanta Masjid Community Foundation 560 Fayetteville Rd Atlanta GA 30316 M: 404.210.5129

Ihsan@atlantamasjidcf.org

On Thu, Apr 25, 2024 at 11:07 PM Craig Wasilewsky <<u>cwasilewsky@perennialproperties.net</u>> wrote:

Rachel, Patrece, and Adam,

I can't thank you all enough for hopping on this call on such short notice. Since I have everyone's attention and it's top of mind, I wanted to follow-up with some meeting minutes to memorialize the conversation and verify the required follow-up. I'm also including Ihsan, a leader at the Masjid and the one overseeing their redevelopment efforts. Attached is the plan with the proposed revisions and below is a summary of what was discussed:

- Removal of Fourth Access at North Side of the Site:
  - We understand that Traffic (Patrece) and Planning are supportive of removing the fourth access point onto 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue at the north in accordance with the attached site plan, contingent upon approval by Fire and Sanitation. I will get with Fire and Sanitation to confirm their acceptance of the change before ultimately submitting the LDP revision.
  - o The area where the access is removed will be planted with tress and landscaping in accordance with the same plans shown throughout the rest of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.
- Reduction of the buffer along the property line with 604 Fayetteville Road to realign the parking at Vela as shown in the site plan:
  - 596, 600, and 604 Fayetteville Road are either owned outright or controlled by the Masjid of Al-Islam and will be rezoned to commercial and consolidated into a larger redevelopment project of the corner.

- o By reducing the buffer to accommodate realignment of the parking lot:
  - We better align our parking aisles with the neighboring properties to future proof our project to take advantage of opportunities for interparcel connectivity with more pedestrian interactions and possible vehicular access from Vela to the Masjid commercial campus and, ultimately, out to Fayetteville Rd.
  - Currently, Vela Park's parking tray sits about six feet below the average grade of the Masjid's adjoining parcels, which makes future interparcel connectivity with vehicular and pedestrian routes impractical. By reducing the buffer as shown, the grade of Vela's parking will rise about three feet and be much more closely aligned with the grades of the Masjid's parcels. A more closely aligned grade will promote better integration and connectivity of the sites.
- The Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam, which controls and has an interest in 596, 600, and 604 Fayetteville
   Road, is supportive of reducing this buffer in anticipation of rezoning their sites to commercial and
   ultimately redeveloping them with a cohesive mixed-used project. If requested, we can secure a letter
   from the Masjid representing their position and support.

Again, thank you for getting together and responding to this request so quickly. We are over three months into construction and things are moving quickly. The attached drone image was a taken six weeks ago and since then there's been a lot more mass grading completed, underground utilities installed, and foundation walls constructed. The below photo was taken yesterday from our construction camera.



Craig Wasilewsky, SE

**Development Manager** 

**Perennial Properties** 

Cell: 678-478-9859

cwasilewsky@perennialproperties.net

