

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY

Chief of Executive Officer
Lorraine Cochran-Johnson

Director
Juliana A. Njoku

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS (ZBA) APPLICATION

to Amend the Official Zoning Map of DeKalb County, Georgia

Subject Property Address: 1102 Stewart Mill Rd

City: Stone Mountain State: GA Zip: 30087

Parcel ID Number(s): 18 079 02 004 Acreage: 47.51

District: _____ Land Lot: _____ Block: _____ Parcel: _____

Commission District(s): 4 Super District: 7

Type of Hearing Requested (check one):

- 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.*

I hereby authorize the staff of the Planning and Sustainable Department to inspect the property that is the subject of this application.

Owner Agent


Signature

04/14/26
Date

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS (ZBA) APPLICATION FEE:

\$300.00

**DeKalb County does not require payment by wire transfer.
Be aware of scammers and fraudulent emails.**

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.

I hereby certify that I am the owner of the property subject to the application.

DATE: 09/14/26

Applicant Signature: 

DATE: 09/14/26

Applicant Signature: 

Subject: Variance Request – Reduction of 200-Foot Buffer (Section 27-4.2.62, Commercial Campground SLUP)

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

My name is Matthew Keller, and I am writing to formally request a variance from Section 27-4.2.62 of the DeKalb County Zoning Ordinance. Specifically, we seek a reduction of the required 200-foot setback to 40 feet along the north and east property lines and 100 feet along the southern border of our property at 1102 Stewart Mill Road, Stone Mountain, GA 30087.

This request supports the thoughtful and sustainable expansion of **Ramsden Lake**, a Commercial Campground operating under the SLUP designation. The proposed improvements include approximately 10–13 additional accommodations, an operations building, and a small pavilion area. My wife and I have lived in DeKalb County since 2008 and have been navigating the zoning and permitting process for Ramsden Lake Glamping Resort since 2021. We currently operate 12 accommodations and a temporary operations building. This variance is one of the final steps required to complete needed improvements that ensure the long-term viability and responsible operation of the property while preserving its natural integrity.

Ramsden Lake is designed as a peaceful, nature-centered retreat where guests can rest and reconnect. The property maintains consistently high guest satisfaction, reflected in **228 Google reviews averaging 4.9 stars** and over **1,000 verified Airbnb guest reviews averaging 4.97 stars**, many from DeKalb County residents.

1. Physical Conditions of the Site

Unique physical conditions make strict compliance with the 200-foot setback impractical. The parcel is narrow and irregularly shaped, with the lake occupying much of its core. Along the northeastern border, the 200-foot buffer would render portions of the property unusable. The north, northeast, and south property lines already feature natural berms providing visual separation, and we are actively installing an 8-foot privacy fence near residential areas. Additionally, the northern and northeastern borders adjoin large parcels of 10–20 acres, not small residential lots. These constraints are inherent to the property and not the result of any actions by current or previous owners.

2. Minimum Variance Necessary

The requested reduction represents the **minimum variance necessary** to achieve functional use of the site while maintaining its character and open space. The proposed setbacks permit thoughtful placement of structures in areas that avoid specimen trees and preserve natural landscapes, consistent with the intent of the Commercial Campground SLUP. This results in a low-density, nature-based layout rather than any form of intensive development.

3. Public Welfare

The proposed improvements will generate a **net positive community impact**. We have received letters of support from adjacent property owners, who appreciate Ramsden Lake's preservation of green space and its positive contribution to the neighborhood's aesthetic. This project enhances the local environment, promotes eco-tourism, and upholds the scenic and ecological character of the area.

4. Ordinance Hardship

Strict enforcement of the 200-foot buffer would create an unnecessary hardship by rendering large portions of the parcel unusable, severely limiting the site's design flexibility, and undermining the intent of the Commercial Campground zoning designation. Without the variance, the remaining land area could only be developed in ways contrary to both our sustainability principles and the spirit of the ordinance.

5. Alignment with the Spirit of the Law

We fully respect the purpose of the buffer requirement—ensuring privacy and appropriate separation between campgrounds and nearby residential properties. Our proposal **meets that goal** through existing natural berms, an 8-foot privacy fence, and preserved vegetation, maintaining meaningful visual screening while allowing for reasonable and balanced property use. We are committed to continued stewardship of the land and to operating in harmony with the surrounding community.

In conclusion, we respectfully request your **approval of this variance** to allow Ramsden Lake to continue operating responsibly, sustainably, and in alignment with DeKalb County's goals for thoughtful land use and community enrichment. We genuinely appreciate your time, attention, and consideration.

Warm regards,
Matthew and Blaine Keller
Owners, Ramsden Lake
www.ramsdenlake.com
April 8, 2026

Handwritten signatures of Matthew and Blaine Keller. The signature for Matthew Keller is written above the signature for Blaine Keller. Both signatures are in black ink and are highly stylized cursive.

Red circles are existing accommodations and Green circles are proposed new ones

Dashed line shows 200 foot buffer impact

Proposed New Accommodations (40 foot buffer)

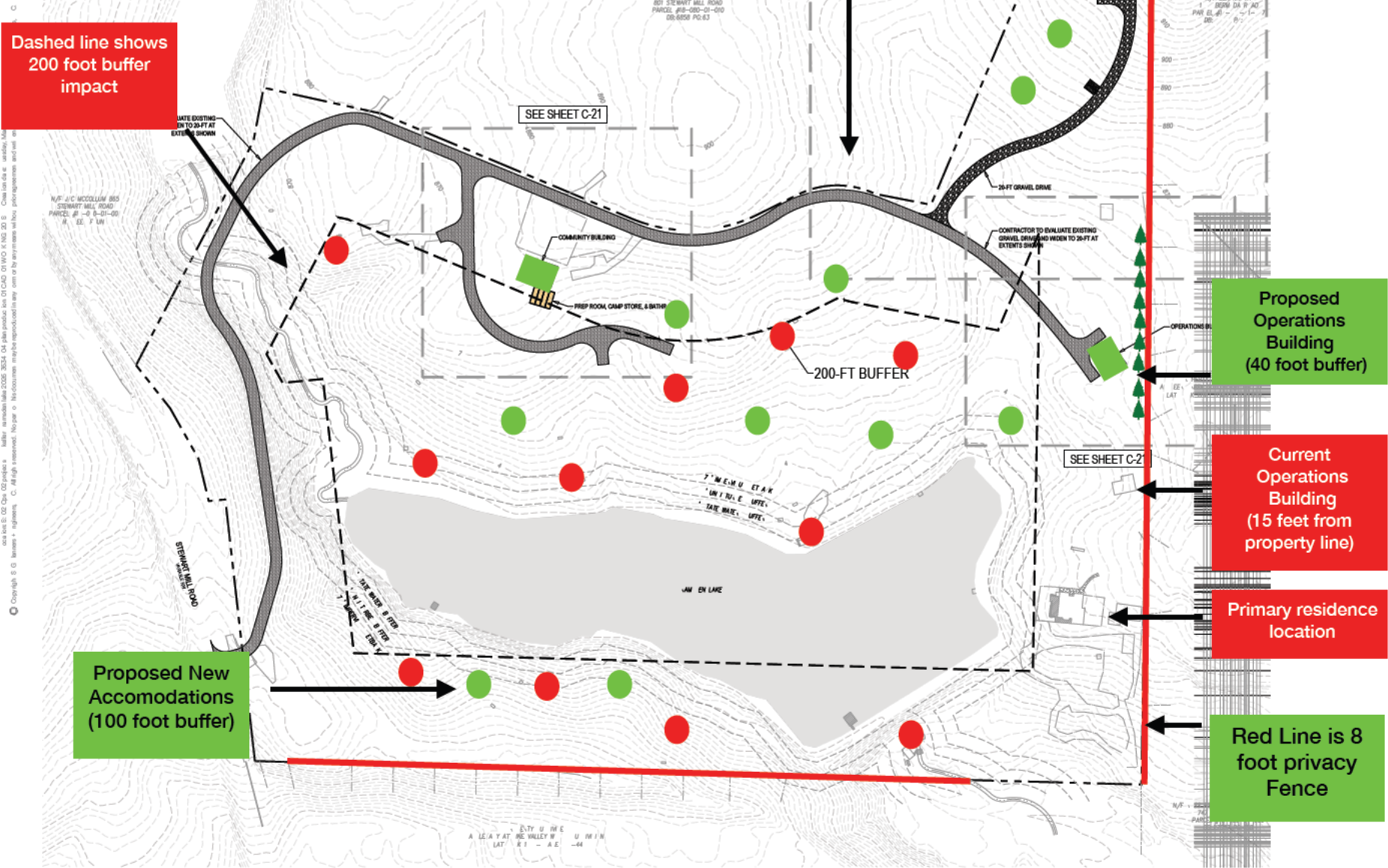
Proposed New Accommodations (100 foot buffer)

Proposed Operations Building (40 foot buffer)

Current Operations Building (15 feet from property line)

Primary residence location

Red Line is 8 foot privacy Fence



Date: 4/14/2026

Dear Dekalb County Variance Board,

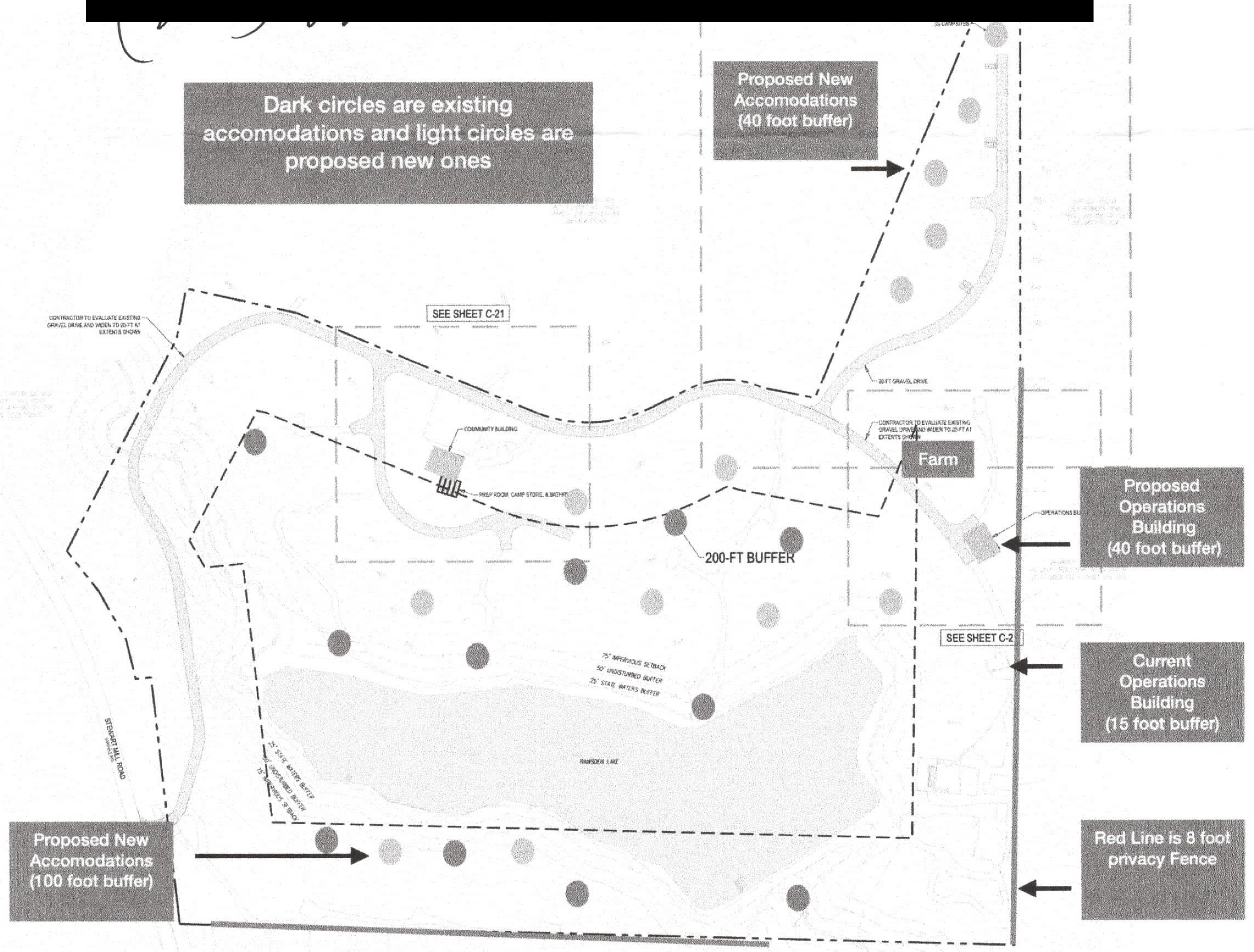
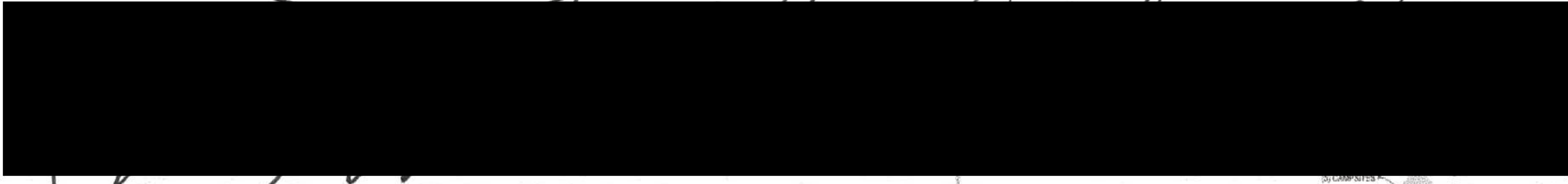
I Jonya Williams-Smoke owner and resident at property
[REDACTED] Stanton have seen and discussed the

below plans with the owners of Ramsden Lake and as a neighbor are in support and approval of their variance request to reduce the 200 foot buffer as seen below.

Sincerely yours,

Name: Jonya Williams-Smoke

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]



Date: 4-14-2026

Dear Dekalb County Variance Board,

I Ben Kight owner and resident at property

[REDACTED] have seen and discussed the below plans with the owners of Ramsden Lake and as a neighbor are in support and approval of their variance request to reduce the 200 foot buffer as seen below.

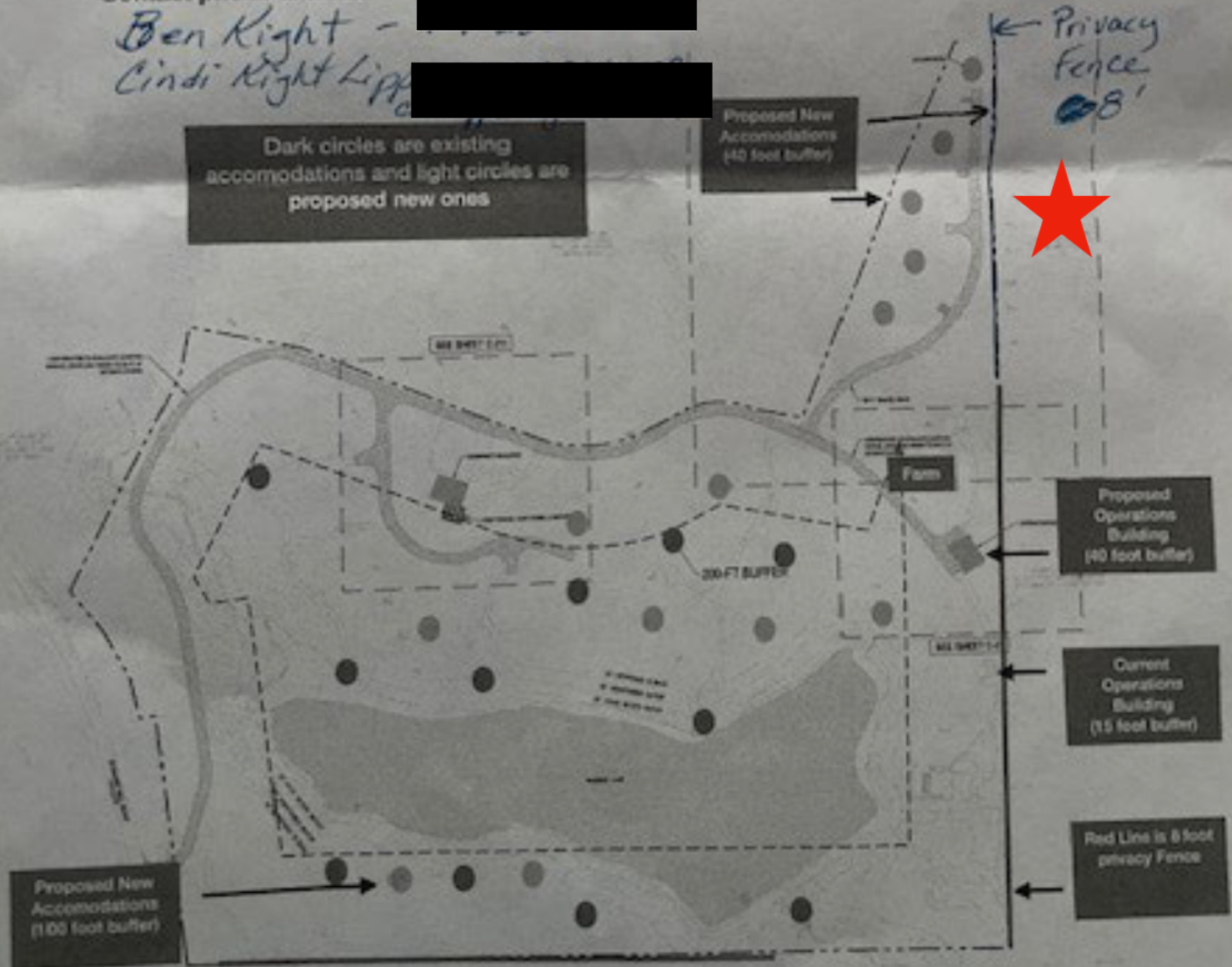
Sincerely yours,

Name: Ben Kight

Signature: [Signature]

Contact phone & email:

Ben Kight - [REDACTED]
Cindi Kight Lips [REDACTED]



Date: 04/15/26

Dear Dekalb County Variance Board,

I Leonid Pina owner and resident at property

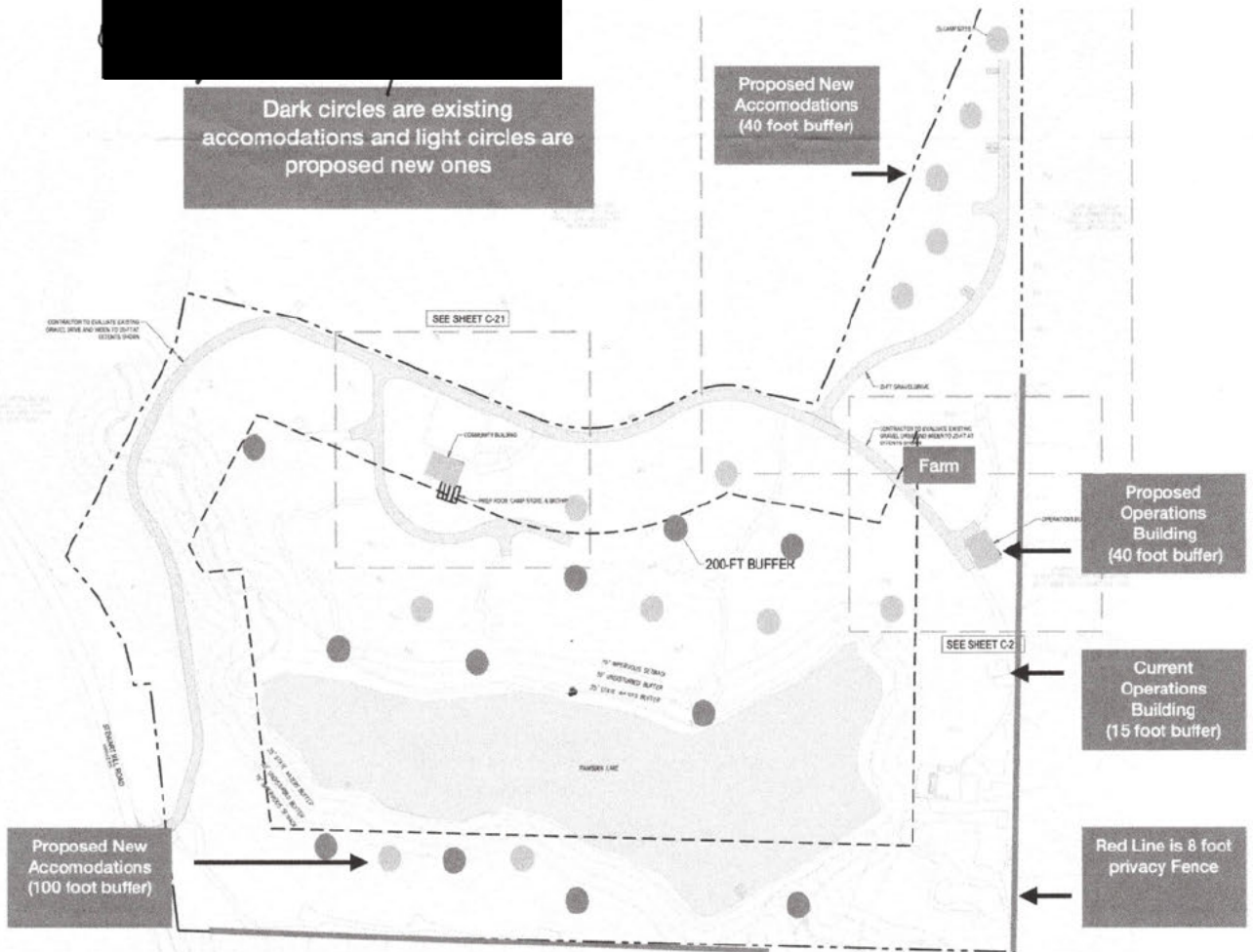
Deer Run Drive have seen and discussed the below plans with the owners of Ramsden Lake and as a neighbor are in support and approval of their variance request to reduce the 200 foot buffer as seen below.

Sincerely yours,

Name: Leonid Pina

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Contact phone & email:
[Redacted]



Date: 5/13/2026

Dear Dekalb County Variance Board,

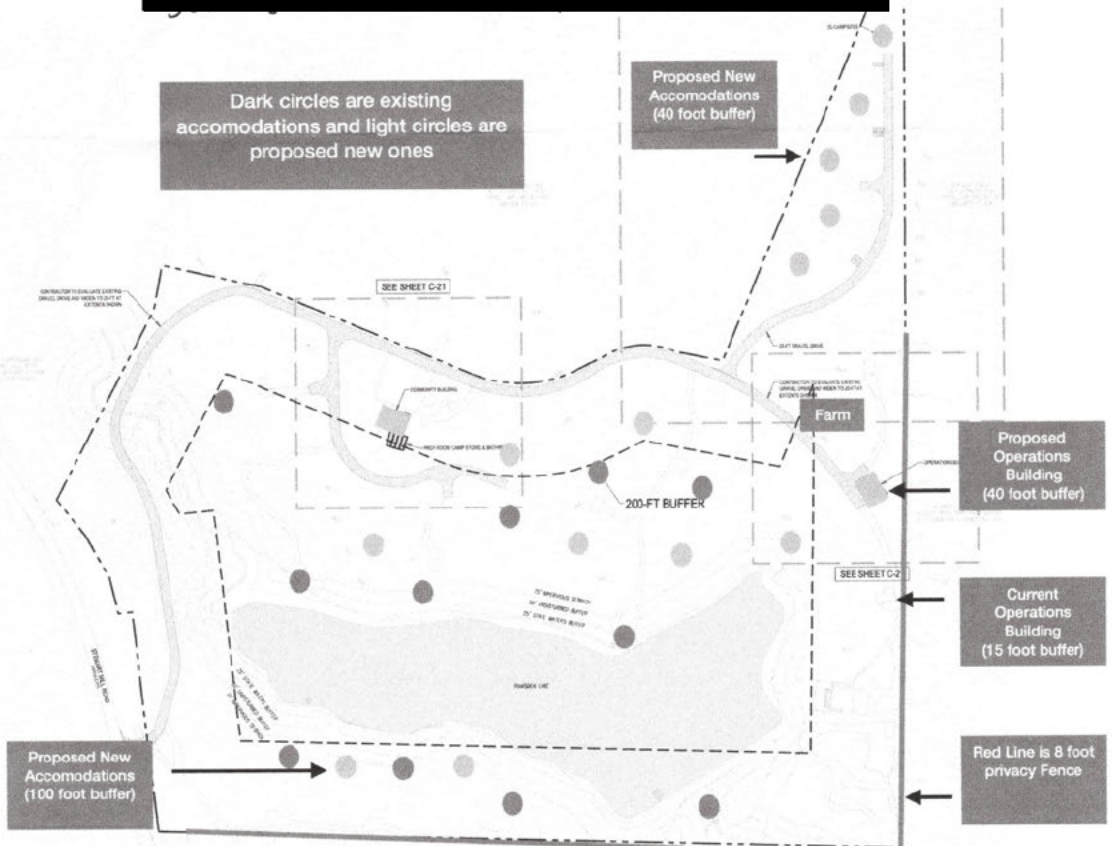
I John Pearson owner and resident at property Deer Run Drive Stone Mountain have seen and discussed the below plans with the owners of Ramsden Lake and as a neighbor are in support and approval of their variance request to reduce the 200 foot buffer as seen below.

Sincerely yours,

Name: John Pearson

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Contact phone & email: [Redacted]



Date: May 12, 2026

Dear Dekalb County Variance Board,

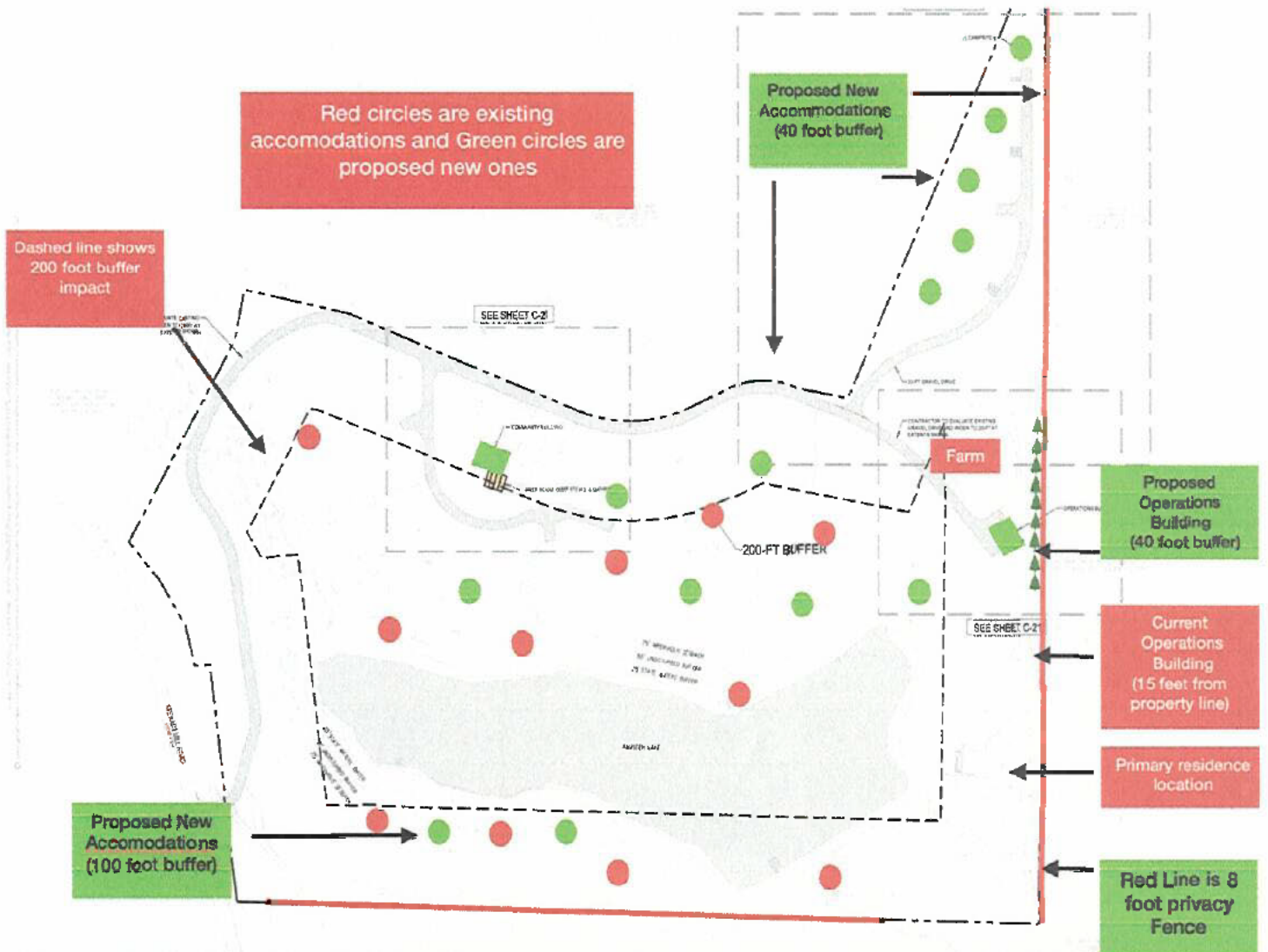
I Terence McDonald owner and resident at property [REDACTED] Pine Bark Rd, Stone Mountain GA 30087 have seen and discussed the below plans with the owners of Ramsden Lake and as a neighbor are in support and approval of their variance request to reduce the 200 foot buffer as seen below.

Sincerely yours,

Name: Terence McDonald

Signature: McDonald

Contact phone & email: [REDACTED]



Date: May 12, 2026

Dear Dekalb County Variance Board,

I Terence McDonald owner and resident at property [REDACTED] Pine Bark Rd, Stone Mountain GA 30087 have seen and discussed the below plans with the owners of Ramsden Lake and as a neighbor are in support and approval of their variance request to reduce the 200 foot buffer as seen below.

Sincerely yours,

Name: Terence McDonald

Signature: McDonald

Contact phone & email: [REDACTED]

