

STAFF REPORT

HEARINGS: Planning & Zoning Commission: June 9, 2025
Board of County Commissioners: August 5, 2025

APPLICANT: Meridien Development LLC (Mark Keschl)

FILE NUMBER: H-24-82

REQUEST: Rezoning from PDP(SU)/Planned Development Project (Special Use) to PDP(GC)/Planned Development Project (General Commercial) with a Specific C-2 use for drive in restaurant with deviations

GENERAL LOCATION: Northeast corner of Commercial Way and Spring Hill Drive

PARCEL KEY NUMBER(S): 411931

PUBLIC INQUIRY WORKSHOP: April 1, 2025

APPLICANT'S REQUEST

The petitioner is requesting a rezoning from PDP(SU)/Planned Development Project (Special Use) to PDP(GC)/Planned Development Project (General Commercial) with a Specific C-2 use for drive in restaurant with deviations to develop the 11.0-acre subject site commercially. The subject site was part of the original Spring Hill master plan and was designated PDP(SU)/Planned Development Project (Special Use) for a landscape buffer. In 1995 the parcel was sold by the Deltona Corporation to a private entity and has remained undeveloped and in private ownership.

The petitioner's current request is for a five (5) lot commercial subdivision for various commercial uses, including:

- Retail,
- Restaurants (including drive-thru),
- Financial institutions (with drive-thru)
- Medical and dental offices.
- Business professional, and non-profit organization offices to allow for financial institution with a drive-thru and medical/dental office establishments.
- Business professional, and non-profit organization offices to allow for financial institution with a drive-thru and medical/dental office establishments.

A separate parcel to the North end of the development abutting most of the nearby residential development will also be created for open space to create a buffer for compatibility with the residential use, including a Conservation Area. The development will not exceed 25,000 total square feet.

Deviations Requested

The petitioner is requesting the following deviations as part of the rezoning request:

- Frontage Road Wavier: Due to its location and inability to connect north.
- Setback Deviation: US Highway 19: 50' (deviation from 125')
- Buffer Deviation: Reduction to 5' along specific areas adjacent to Pinehurst Drive (Deviation from 35' for Large Retail Development Standards)
- Signage Deviation: Platted parcels to have individual signs and two multi-tenant anchor signs at both proposed US Highway 19 entrances. Additionally, two signs are requested at the corner parcel (US Hwy 19 and Spring Hill Drive).

SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Site Size: 11.0 acres

Surrounding Zoning;

Land Uses: North: C-1, PDP(SF); Bank, Single-Family
South: R-1C/(Residential); Residential
East: PDP(SF), PDP(GHC); Single Family, Retail Plaza
West: US HWY 19, PDP(GHC), C-2; Commercial Uses

Current Zoning: PDP(SU)/Planned Development Project (Special Use)

Future Land Use

Map Designation: Residential

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Soils: Candler Fine, Tavares Fine Sand

Protection Features: There are no Special Protection Area (SPA) on the subject site according to County data resources.

Hydrologic Features: There are no Wellhead Protection Areas or wetlands on the subject site according to County data resources.

Comment: It should be noted that the site has a seasonal ephemeral wetland in the center of the property. The property also abuts an offsite wetland along the northeast corner of the property. Mitigation could be required based on size.

Archaeological/

Historical: There are no archaeological or historical site according to County data resources.

Habitat: Vacant, cleared, undeveloped and identified as urban open pine, mixed hardwood-coniferous, and high density residential, 5 dwellings/acre according to FWC CLC mapping (Florida Cooperative

Land Cover Classification System that combines Florida Land Use Cover and Classification System with fish and wildlife data).).

Comment: Candler and Tavares Fine Sands provides habitat suitable for gopher tortoises and commensal species. A faunal (wildlife) survey shall be prepared by a qualified professional. The petitioner is required to comply with all applicable FWC regulations and permitting.

Water Quality: This project is located within the Weeki Wachee Priority Focus Area identified by FDEP as contributing nutrients to the Weeki Wachee Riverine System.

Comment: The petitioner must meet the minimum requirements of Florida Friendly Landscaping™ publications and the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program for design techniques, principles, materials, and plantings for required buffers, as applicable.

Flood Zone: C with portions of the property within AE. Including a large portion along the center of the property.

UTILITIES REVIEW

The Hernando County Utilities Department (HCUD) reviewed the petitioner's application and provided the following comments:

Hernando County Utilities (HCUD) does not currently supply water or sewer service to this parcel. Water and sewer services are available. Via a 16" force main that runs along US 19. HCUD has no objection to the zoning change from PDP (SU) to PDP (GC) With specific C-2 and C-3 uses. Subject to a utility capacity analysis and commercial connection to the central water and sewer system at time of vertical construction.

ENGINEERING REVIEW

The subject site is located at the Northeast corner of Commercial Way and Spring Hill Drive. The petitioner has proposed access from Commercial Way and Pinehurst Drive.

The County Engineer has reviewed the petitioner's request and provided the following comments:

- This project is located on the northeast corner of US 19 & Spring Hill Drive:
- A Traffic Analysis has been received by the applicant. Any improvements identified by the Traffic Access Analysis will be the responsibility of the developer to install.
- This project lies within the Oman Quarry watershed, lying within three basins. The BFE ranges from 15.3' to 18.1' NAVD 88. This property contains three areas of 1% annual chance floodplain. Construction within the floodplain requires specific permitting and mitigation.
- Drainage design must meet SWFWMD ERP/Southwest Florida Water Management District Environmental Resource Permitting drainage permitting and Hernando County Facility Design Guideline drainage requirements.

- A Frontage Road is required along the entire frontage of Commercial Way (US-19). The Frontage Road will be required to connect into the Frontage Road network North of this Site.
- Driveway access configurations shall be appropriate with existing driveways along Pine Hurst Drive.
- The Driveway connections, Parking Spaces and Parking Lot Layout will need to comply with Hernando County Facility Design Guideline Standards.
- Work with the County Engineer on the results of "Road Safety Audit: Spring Hill Dr. from US 19 to east of Kenlake Ave"
- FDOT Access Management permitting is required. A FDOT Drainage permit may be required.

LAND USE REVIEW

Large Retail Development Standards

The LDR's require certain retail development standards for all projects in excess of 25,000 square feet. The large retail standards will ensure a cohesive and harmonious development. The standards include, but are not limited to, architectural style, parking design, internal pedestrian circulation, and buffering. While the subject site is anticipated to be approximately 24,000 square feet, less than the minimum required to trigger the Large Retail Development Standards, the project will be located at the gateway to Spring Hill. To ensure architectural design standards and the preservation of the existing residential development surrounding the project, the large retail standards shall be required, in accordance with Article III of Appendix A (zoning).

Building Setbacks

Proposed Building Setbacks:

US Hwy 19:	50' (deviation from 125')
Spring Hill Drive:	35'
Pinehurst Drive:	35'
North:	20'
Against Residential:	35'

Buffers

A buffer shall be required between a Planned Development Project land use which is multifamily or non-residential and a land use, external to the PDP, which is residential, agricultural-residential or agricultural.

Large Retail Developments of over 25,000 square feet shall be required a buffer along the full length of all streets serving a large retail development. The buffer shall be a minimum of thirty-five (35) feet in width and comprised of retained natural vegetation or planted with native plant species.

Comments: The petitioner is proposing a 35-foot landscape buffer along portions of the property that front or abut residential homes, specifically along Pinehurst Drive and the northeast corner of the parcel. Additionally, a drainage retention pond will serve as a supplemental distance buffer in this area. On the southeast side of Pinehurst

Drive, a 5-foot landscape buffer is proposed, along with a fence that will have a minimum opacity of 80%.

The remaining portions of the subject site where the project is adjacent to commercial development and along US Highway 19 are proposed as 20' buffers. The proposed 20' buffers along US Highway 19 are considered inadequate for the scale and location of the project. Furthermore, the subject site was originally allocated as a landscape buffer/entrance feature into the Spring Hill area. Although now privately owned, both sides of the Spring Hill Drive fountain/entrance were set aside for landscape buffers and are the main entrance features into the Spring Hill area.

If approved, the petitioner shall provide a minimum of twenty-five (25) foot buffer along US Highway 19 planted with native plant species. Furthermore, the petitioner shall retain (where feasible), refurbish and/or rebuild the existing brick columns historically known/used for the main Spring Hill area entrance. Said columns shall be incorporated into the overall landscape design along US Highway 19.

Additionally, the proposed thirty (30) foot wide buffers along Pinehurst Drive and the northeast portion (which abuts residential) of the property, shall be screened at 80% opacity and enhanced where necessary.

Residential Protection Standards

The petitioner shall be required to comply with the following Residential Protection Standards:

- There shall be no speakers or other sound equipment located within 100' of any single-family residential district property line
- No commercial activities which include customer entrances, drive-up windows, ordering boxes, or loading/unloading areas shall be allowed to operate between the hours of 12 midnight and 7:00AM. within 100 feet of any single-family residential district property line.

Comments: The petitioner has indicated the potential for fast food restaurants and/or coffee service establishments which generally have extended hours of operation. If approved, entrances, drive-up windows, or loading/unloading areas must meet the minimum distance of 100 feet of any single-family residential district property and hours of operation to ensure residential protection during quiet hours.

Signage

County LDRs require that any commercially zoned parcel(s) with less than one hundred (100) linear feet of road frontage will be allowed one (1) sign not to exceed one hundred (100) square feet in sign area. Commercially zoned parcels with a road frontage in excess of one hundred (100) linear feet will be allowed one (1) square foot of sign area per linear foot of road frontage with a maximum of two hundred (200) square feet of sign area. For commercially zoned parcels on all other roads and for parcels within any zoning district other than commercial or residential – Maximum fifty (50) square feet of sign area.

Shopping centers, malls, strip plazas and other buildings housing more than one (1) business or activity may display no more than one (1) sign for each two hundred (200) feet of frontage, provided they are at least two hundred (200) feet apart along public streets and provided each sign does not exceed the maximum allowed according to subsection (1) herein.

Comments: The petitioner has requested that the platted parcels have individual signs. Two signs are requested for the corner parcel (US Hwy 19 and Spring Hill Drive) due to having two fronts. The drive thru restaurant parcels shall be entitled to their standard directional signs, order and menu signs. The petitioner must meet the minimum sign standards as required by the County LDRs.

If approved, all signs shall be designed as an integral part of the development and predominant sign material shall be similar to the material (e.g., brick, stone, etc.) of the commercial buildings developed on the subject property. Signs should also be limited to ground mounted monument type signs.

Landscape

The petitioner must meet the minimum requirements of Florida Friendly Landscaping™ publications and the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program for design techniques, principles, materials and plantings for required landscaping.

Lighting

County LDRs require lighting that enhances the visual impact of the project on the community and to specifically address lighting intensity levels and glare accordingly. Commercial buildings and projects shall be designed to provide safe, convenient and efficient lighting for pedestrians and vehicles.

Comments: The petitioner shall provide full cutoff fixtures for the proposed development. Additionally, all security lighting shall have appropriate shields to avoid spillage into neighboring residential homes.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW

The subject property is located within the Residential land use classification on the adopted Future Land Use Map. The subject site fronts US Highway 19, a Commercial Corridor) and the area is characterized by commercial uses to the north, south and west, and residential to the east.

Future Land Use Mapping Criteria

Mapping Criteria - Commercial Category: The Commercial Category includes commercial corridors along U.S. 19 and S.R. 50 and designated commercial nodes at intersections of arterial and/or collector roads intended primarily for commercial development with a wide variety of uses.

Map Interpretation Guidance: Areas considered to have a Commercial Category designation but not shown on the Future Land Use Map include neighborhood commercial and specialty commercial uses as described in this Plan, commercial approved as part of mixed use developments, commercial designated by planned development districts, the infill development

of existing commercial areas, commercial areas extending from designated commercial nodes, and pre-existing commercially developed and designated areas.

Comments: The subject site is located along the US Highway 19 commercial corridor. The site is in close proximity to existing commercial parcels and should be recognized as eligible infill development of an existing commercial area.

Future Land Use Element

Strategy 1.04A(6): The Commercial Category provides for commercial uses including products and services along major corridors and at roadway intersections to serve residents and visitors on both a localized and regionalized basis. The Commercial Category recognizes existing commercial use corridors along U.S. Highway 19 and State Route 50 and existing and planned commercial nodes at intersections of arterial and/or collector roads. The Commercial Category includes small unmapped existing commercial properties. The Commercial Category also recognizes the ability to designate infill parcels for commercial use lying in proximity to and between, but not necessarily contiguous to, other existing commercially designated properties

Comments: The subject site is located along the US Highway 19 commercial corridor. While the parcel is not classified as commercial, the property can be considered to have a commercial designation (infill) due to its proximity to existing commercial areas. Any approval should include appropriate conditions.

Commercial Category

Objective 1.04G: The Commercial Category allows primarily retail, office, and commercial service uses with an overall average gross floor area ratio of 0.35 but also includes limited industrial, recreational and institutional uses. Residential and mixed uses may be allowed subject to locational criteria and performance standards.

Strategy 1.04G(1): Commercial development as envisioned on the Future Land Use Map is intended primarily for locations at major intersections and along major corridors where service to local and regional markets are enhanced by transportation patterns. New commercial zoning is directed to these mapped areas. Commercial areas that are not mapped but are allowed under this Future Land Use Category include neighborhood commercial and specialty commercial uses as described in this Plan, commercial approved as part of mixed use developments, commercial designated by planned development districts, the infill development of existing commercial areas, commercial areas extending from designated commercial nodes, and pre-existing commercially developed and designated areas. Frontage roads and cross-access between commercial uses is required where needed in accordance with the provisions of this Plan and adopted land development regulations.

Comment: While the subject property is not designated as commercial on the Future Land Use Map, it serves as an infill commercial piece due to the proximity to existing commercial uses and development. The property is located along the US Highway 19 commercial corridor, is located between commercially zoned properties, and should be considered appropriate for an infill designation.

Protection Standards

Strategy 1.10B(3): Protect existing and future residential areas from encroachment of incompatible uses that are destructive to the character and integrity of the surrounding residential area.

Comments: The subject site is near single-family homes and should be required to meet the Residential Protection Standards and provide a 35' landscape buffer along Pinehurst adjacent to residential uses; said buffer should be enhanced to 80% opacity to properly screen existing homes from proposed commercial uses.

Road Network – Frontage Roads

Objective 5.01B: Maintain and expand a system of frontage roads and cross-access easements parallel to County arterial and collector roads. The frontage road network is designed to enable the creation of shared drives, shared easements, and alternative routes. Frontage road configuration is intended to optimize corridor and roadway network function, maintain capacity on the functionally classified network, and provide aesthetic, safe and convenient access to multiple properties and business sites.

Strategy 5.01B(3): The County should require cross-access easements, shared drives, shared access and other techniques that optimize the function of the roadway network where frontage roads are not required.

Comments: The County Engineer has reviewed the proposed development and indicated that frontage road is required along the entire frontage of Commercial way. This frontage road shall be required to connect into the frontage road network North of this site.

FINDINGS OF FACT

A rezoning from PDP(SU)/Planned Development Project (Special Use) to PDP(GC)/Planned Development Project (General Commercial) with Specific C-2 and C-3 Uses with Deviations is appropriate based on the following conclusion:

The request is consistent with the County's adopted Comprehensive Plan and is compatible with the surrounding land uses subject to compliance with all performance conditions.

1. The subject parcel is currently zoned as PDP(SU) and currently serves as a landscape buffer between the existing residential development and US Highway 19.

2. The proposed PDP(GC) with specific C-2 and C-3 uses zone is compatible with surrounding zoning districts.
3. Residential Protection Standards, as necessary, will apply to the subject site at the time of site development.

NOTICE OF APPLICANT RESPONSIBILITY

The rezoning process is a land use determination and does not constitute a permit for either construction on, or use of, the property, or a Certificate of Concurrency. Prior to use of, or construction on, the property, the petitioner must receive approval from the appropriate County department(s) for the proposed use.

The granting of this land use determination does not protect the owner from civil liability for recorded deed restrictions which may exceed any county land use ordinances. Homeowner associations or architectural review committees require submission of plans for review and approval. The applicant for this land use request should contact the local association or the Public Records for all restrictions applicable to this property.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning and Zoning Commission recommend the Board of County Commissioners adopt a resolution approving the petitioner's request for a rezoning from PDP(SU)/Planned Development Project (Special Use) to PDP(GC)/Planned Development Project (General Commercial) with a Specific C-2 use for drive in restaurant with deviations and the following performance conditions:

1. The petitioner must obtain all permits from Hernando County and other applicable agencies and meet all applicable land development regulations, for either construction or use of the property, and complete all applicable development review processes.
2. Proposed Building Setbacks:
 - US Hwy 19: 50' (deviation from 125')
 - Spring Hill Drive: 35'
 - Pinehurst Drive: 35'
 - North: 20'
 - Against Residential: 35'
3. The petitioner shall meet all large retail development standards pertaining to roof layout, architectural features and building materials.
4. The petitioner shall provide a floral and faunal (wildlife) survey, prepared by a qualified professional, and submitted to the County prior to any land clearing activities. Copies of any required permits shall be provided prior to site alteration or construction.
5. The petitioner is required to comply with all applicable FWC regulations and permitting.
6. If needed, a Gopher Tortoise Relocation permit shall be sought prior to any geotechnical activities taking place on the property.

7. The petitioner shall meet the minimum requirements of Florida Friendly Landscaping™ publications and the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program for design techniques, principles, materials, and plantings for required landscaping, as applicable.
8. The Developer shall provide a utility capacity analysis and commercial connection to the central water and sewer system at time of vertical construction.
9. A Traffic Analysis has been received by the applicant. Any improvements identified by the Traffic Access Analysis will be the responsibility of the developer to install.
10. Drainage design shall meet SWFWMD ERP/Southwest Florida Water Management District Environmental Resource Permitting drainage permitting and Hernando County Facility Design Guideline drainage requirements.
11. A Frontage Road is required along the entire frontage of Commercial Way (US-19). The Frontage Road will be required to connect into the Frontage Road network North of this Site.
12. The petitioner shall coordinate with the County Engineer to ensure that the proposed driveway access configurations align with the existing driveways along Pinehurst Drive. Any adjustments to the driveway locations as approved by the county engineer shall not result in a master plan revision.
13. The Driveway connections, Parking Spaces and Parking Lot Layout will need to comply with Hernando County Facility Design Guideline Standards.
14. The petitioner shall coordinate with the county engineer on implementing safety measures for the site in accordance with the "Road Safety Audit: Spring Hill Dr. from US 19 to east of Ken Lake Ave"
15. FDOT Access Management permitting is required. FDOT Drainage permit may be required.
16. There shall be no speakers or other sound equipment located within 100' of any single-family residential district property line
17. Customer entrances, drive-up windows, ordering boxes, or loading/unloading areas shall not be allowed to operate between the hours of 12 midnight and 7:00AM. within 100 feet of any single-family residential district property line.
18. The petitioner shall provide full cutoff fixtures and retain all light on-site and prevent any light spillage onto neighboring properties. Additionally, all security lighting shall have appropriate shields to avoid spillage into neighboring residential homes.
19. Each platted parcel may have its own individual sign. The corner parcel at US 19 and Spring Hill Drive may have two (2) signs, One at each front.
20. County LDRs require that any commercially zoned parcel(s) with less than one hundred (100) linear feet of road frontage will be allowed one (1) sign not to exceed one hundred

(100) square feet in sign area. Commercially zoned parcels with a road frontage in excess of one hundred (100) linear feet will be allowed one (1) square foot of sign area per linear foot of road frontage with a maximum of two hundred (200) square feet of sign area. For commercially zoned parcels on all other roads and for parcels within any zoning district other than commercial or residential – Maximum fifty (50) square feet of sign area.

Individual business owners may apply for a variance to the sign code for their unique parcel through the standard variance process.

21. Shopping centers, malls, strip plazas and other buildings housing more than one (1) business or activity may display no more than one (1) sign for each two hundred (200) feet of frontage, provided they are at least two hundred (200) feet apart along public streets and provided each sign does not exceed the maximum allowed according to subsection (1) herein.
22. Drive-thru restaurants shall have signage consistent with the Hernando County Sign Code.
23. Buffer Requirements:
 - 35' landscape buffer where abutting residential homes, specifically along Pinehurst Drive and the Northeast corner of parcel.
 - 5' landscape buffer along Southeast perimeter of the site along Pinehurst Drive
 - 25' landscape buffer along US HWY 19

All buffers shall be required to include native plant species. A comprehensive planting plan shall be required at construction drawings. Landscaping along Pinehurst where abutting residential homes and at the Northeast Corner of the parcel shall achieve a minimum of 80% opacity, notwithstanding the fence as additional visual attenuation.

The remaining buffers may utilize a fence to achieve the 80% required opacity due to the width limitations of the buffer. The specific landscape layout shall be provided at the time of conditional plat for the commercial subdivision.

In addition to the landscape buffer, the petitioner shall develop a plan to retain, refurbish and/or rebuild the existing columns to be approved by the County Engineer.

24. The petitioner must meet the minimum requirements of Florida Friendly Landscaping™ publications and the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program for design techniques, principles, materials and plantings for required landscaping.
25. The petitioner shall provide a revised plan in compliance with all the performance conditions within thirty (30) calendar days of BCC approval. Failure to submit the revised plan will result in no further development permits being issued.