

STAFF REPORT

HEARINGS: Planning & Zoning Commission: July 14, 2025
Board of County Commissioners: September 2, 2025

APPLICANT: Greater Tampa Bay Area Council Inc. Boy Scouts of America

FILE NUMBER: H2514

REQUEST: Establish a Public Service Facility Overlay District (PSFOD) for an electric utility operations center for Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative

GENERAL LOCATION: South Side of Cortez Boulevard, approximately 1377' west of Hunt Lane (a portion of the Sand Hill Scout Reservation)

PARCEL KEY NUMBER(S): A 52-acre +/- portion of 346708

PIW DATE: May 12, 2025

APPLICANT'S REQUEST

The petitioner has submitted a request to establish a Public Service Facility Overlay District for an electric utility operations center, including administrative offices, customer service, customer and employee parking, equipment parking, warehouse, transportation and equipment shop, fuel island, and indoor/outdoor storage for equipment and materials. A portion of the site will be used as a staging area for emergencies, such as hurricanes. The Master Plan also includes a location denoted for a future substation at the western edge of the property, adjacent to the power line easement.

The remainder of the parcel shall remain in the ownership of the Greater Tampa Bay Area Council Inc. Boy Scouts of America and is not included in this application.

SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Site Size: A 52-acre +/- portion of 346708

Surrounding Zoning; Land Uses:

North: Combined Planned Development Project with Commercial and Office Uses; Hospital and Residential Uses

South: AG (Agricultural); Existing Boy Scout Reservation

East: AG (Agricultural); Existing Boy Scout Reservation

West: PDP(MF) Planned Development Project (Multifamily) and Public Facility Uses; powerline and vacant

Current Zoning: AG

Future Land Use Map Designation: Recreation

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A preliminary environmental site assessment was completed by the petitioner on March 3, 2025. Their findings included the following:

- The subject property is moderately forested with an assemblage of turkey oak, sand, live oak, slash pine and long-leaf pine trees.
- The groundcover contains leaf litter, pine straw and various vine species.
- Gopher tortoise burrows were detected; however, their density is low
- No other state or federally listed species were detected.
- A jurisdictional wetland (karst sink) is located on the southern portion of the site

Comments: At the time of site development, the jurisdictional wetland line shall be set. A 25-foot vegetated buffer shall be placed along the perimeter of the wetland in accordance with all South West Florida Water Management District regulations and shall be shown on all civil site plans for the subject site. The petitioner shall be required to comply with all federal, state, and local environmental regulations.

UTILITIES REVIEW

The Hernando County Utilities Department (HCUD) currently supplies water to this parcel via an existing 8-inch water main crossing under Cortez Boulevard to a fire hydrant onsite. The closest wastewater infrastructure is located within the Cortez Oaks commercial development on the north side of Cortez Boulevard.

HCUD has no objection to the establishment of a Public Service Facility Overlay District, subject to a utility capacity analysis and connection to the central water and wastewater systems as required per ordinance at time of site development.

ENGINEERING REVIEW

The subject site is located on the South Side of Cortez Boulevard, approximately 1377' west of Hunt Lane (a portion of the Sand Hill Scout Reservation). The County Engineer has reviewed the petitioner's request and has the following comments:

- When developed, a Frontage (or reverse) Road will be required along the entire frontage along Cortez Boulevard.
- A Traffic Access Analysis will be required. Any improvements identified will be the responsibility of the developer to install.
- This project lies within the Willow Sink watershed and multiple sub-basins.
- Florida Department of Transportation access management permit required, Florida Department of Transportation drainage permit may be required.

LAND USE REVIEW

Public Service Facility Overlay District is a mechanism to allow governmental uses and structures, as well as public service facility uses and structures in all zoning districts. The Public Service Facility Overlay District is approved by the Board of County Commissioners for a site-specific location and use.

Governmental uses and structures and public service structures are permitted within the Public Service Facility Overlay District which may be approved in all zoning districts after review and approval by the Commission and Governing Body. The procedures for review and approval of the Public Service Facility Overlay District shall be consistent with those for rezoning of any properties within the zoning district.

Permitted Uses

The following uses are permitted within a Public Service Facility Overlay District:

- Any use permitted in the underlying zoning district.
- Governmental uses and structures consistent with the PSF approval.
- Public service uses and structures consistent with the PSF approval.
- Lime Stabilization and Residual Management Treatment Facilities in the C-4 Heavy Highway Commercial District, the I-1 Light Industrial District and the I-2 Heavy Industrial District only.

Comments: The proposed use for the subject site is a not-for-profit utility service, to include administrative offices, customer service, customer and employee parking, equipment parking, warehouse, transportation and equipment shop, fuel island, and indoor/outdoor storage for equipment and materials. These uses are permissible in the Public Service Facility Overlay District (PSFOD).

Special regulations:

The following special regulations apply to all Public Service Facility Overlay Districts

- No building, structure or use within a Public Service Facility Overlay District shall be located closer than fifty (50) feet to the property line of an adjoining parcel containing a residence or the property line of a residentially zoned parcel.
- No odor- or dust-producing substance or use, except in connection with the cultivation of permitted uses, shall be permitted within one hundred (100) feet of a property line if the adjoining property is being used for residential purposes.

Comments: The petitioner is not proposing any building or structure within 50' of a property line of an adjoining parcel containing a residence, or any residentially zoned parcel. Additionally, no odor or dust-producing substance or use is proposed through the creation of this Public Service Facility Overlay District.

Site Development Requirements:

All development must meet, at a minimum, the dimension and area regulations of the underlying zoning district and the standards and criteria in this section. The Board of County Commissioners may increase the minimum dimension and area regulations for the proposed use if it is deemed necessary to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Hernando County. Any reduction of the minimum dimension and area regulations or other development standards and criteria contained in this section must be specifically enumerated in the application and requires the approval of a deviation by the Board of County Commissioners.

The petitioner has not indicated any deviations from the setbacks or locational requirements for the Public Service Facility Overlay District or underlying Agricultural District.

If approved, the petitioner shall be required to meet the following setbacks and building heights for the Agricultural district:

- Front: 125'
- Side: 35'
- Rear: 50'
- Building Height: 45'

Buffers

The petitioner has proposed the following buffers for the subject site:

- A 5-foot vegetative buffer along S.R. 50 (Cortez Blvd) that meets the requirements of the Community Appearance ordinance for commercial projects.
- A 5-foot vegetative buffer around the parking lot/pavement that meets the requirements of the Community Appearance ordinance for commercial projects.
- All other perimeter buffers will consist of 10-foot-wide buffer consisting of natural vegetation supplemented with landscaping where needed.

Outdoor Storage

The petitioner has proposed the following outdoor storage for equipment and materials. In addition, a portion of the site will be used as a staging area for emergencies, such as hurricanes. Hernando County LDR's require that screening of outdoor storage from adjoining and contiguous properties by a wall, fence or other approved enclosures. Screening shall meet an eighty (80) percent opacity standard. Such screening shall be located behind the building line with a minimum height of 5-feet and maximum of 8-feet.

Lighting

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

Comments: If this project is approved, the petitioner should be required to provide full cutoff fixtures and retain all light on-site preventing any light spillage onto neighboring properties.

Impact Statement

The petitioner has conducted an impact statement for the subject site, It has identified that the property is moderately forested with an assemblage of turkey oak, sand live oak, slash pine and long-leaf pine trees. The groundcover contains leaf litter, pine straw and various vine species. Gopher tortoise burrows were detected; however, their density is low. No other state or federally listed species were detected. A jurisdictional wetland (karst sink) is located on the southern portion of the site

Comments: Based on the analysis of the site, the proposed Public Service Facility Overlay District will not create a significant impact for the site or the surrounding parcels. Staff has no objection to the request.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW

Public Facilities Category

Strategy 1.04K(1): Minor public facilities that do not need to be designated with the Public Facilities Category may be allowed in any Future Land Use Map Category. These include local facilities such as wellfields, sewage collection facilities, water distribution facilities, communication towers, public buildings, schools and other governmental or public service structures and uses.

Comments: The electric substation is considered a minor public facility in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan and may be placed in any future land use classification. The use is consistent with the surrounding land uses and is conditioned to avoid any negative impact to the surrounding community.

Strategy 1.04K(2): The Public Service Facility Zoning Overlay District will be used to evaluate and review all proposed public facilities. Conditions and performance standards may be required through the public facility review process which are binding for purposes of issuance of development orders and permits.

Infrastructure Services

GOAL 1.12: In accordance with the County's growth strategy to provide for directed high-quality infrastructure services and discourage urban sprawl, the provision of adequate facilities shall be ensured for new development through a variety of mechanisms.

Urban Sprawl

GOAL 1.11: In accordance with the County's growth strategy to provide for directed high-quality infrastructure services and discourage urban sprawl, Hernando County will provide mechanisms that prioritize public infrastructure and direct growth towards urbanized and urbanizing areas of the County.

Directed Infrastructure

Objective 1.11A: All County infrastructure planning shall ensure that the existing and future infrastructure needs, especially for roads, wastewater service, and potable water service, are prioritized for urbanized, urbanizing and infill areas of the County, especially in the Residential, Commercial, Industrial and Planned Development District Future Land Use Categories.

Strategy 1.11A(2): The County shall manage infrastructure availability to influence the timing and location of development. **Strategy 1.11A(3):** Direct infrastructure toward the urbanized area and areas designated under the Plan for new development to prevent urban sprawl.

Comments: The electric substation as proposed by Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative will ensure that Hernando County has adequate electric infrastructure for its expanding population. The subject site is located

immediately across S.R. 50 (Cortez Boulevard) from its existing operation, within the County's existing Urban Service Area. Locating the expanded facility within the urban service boundary will not create urban sprawl and will ensure the continuation of electric service and Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative's capability to respond to urgent and emergent situations in the community.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The request to establish a Public Service Facility Overlay District for an electric utility operations center is appropriate based on the following:

1. The proposed use is a minor public facility and is allowable within any Comprehensive Plan land use classification.
2. The Public Service Facility Overlay District is the appropriate land use tool for placement of minor public facilities.
3. The petitioner has not requested any deviations to the underlying AG (Agricultural) zoning setback and building height criteria.
4. The proposed use will not adversely impact any adjacent parcels or uses.

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 to Establish a Public Service Facility Overlay District (PSFOD) for an electric utility operations center with the following performance conditions:

1. The petitioner must obtain all permits from Hernando County as well as other applicable agencies, meeting all applicable land development regulations, for either construction or use of the property, and complete all applicable development review processes.
2. At the time of site development, the jurisdictional wetland line shall be set. A 25-foot vegetated buffer shall be placed along the perimeter of the wetland in accordance with all South West Florida Water Management District regulations and shall be shown on all civil site plans for the subject site.

3. The petitioner shall be required to comply with all federal, state, and local environmental regulations.
4. The petitioner shall be required to submit a utility capacity analysis and connect to the central water and wastewater systems at the time of development.
5. When developed, a Frontage (or reverse) Road will be required along the entire frontage along Cortez Boulevard.
6. A Traffic Access Analysis will be required. Any improvements identified will be the responsibility of the developer to install.
7. The petitioner shall coordinate with the Florida Department of Transportation to determine the applicable access management and drainage permits required for the project.
8. At the time of development, the petitioner shall be required to meet all commercial site development requirements.
9. Minimum Setbacks and Building Height:
 - Front: 125'
 - Side: 35'
 - Rear: 50'
 - Building Height: 45'
10. The following buffers shall be placed within the development:
 - A 5-foot vegetative buffer along S.R. 50 (Cortez Blvd) that meets the requirements of the Community Appearance ordinance for commercial projects.
 - A 5-foot vegetative buffer around the parking lot/pavement that meets the requirements of the Community Appearance ordinance for commercial projects.
 - All other perimeter buffers will consist of 10-foot-wide buffer consisting of natural vegetation supplemented with landscaping where needed.
11. Screening of outdoor storage from adjoining and contiguous properties by a wall, fence or other approved enclosures. Screening shall meet an 80 percent opacity standard. Such screening shall be located behind the building line and shall have a minimum height of 5-feet and maximum of 8-feet.
12. The petitioner shall be required to provide full cutoff fixtures and retain all light on-site preventing any light spillage onto neighboring properties.
13. The petitioner shall provide a master plan in compliance with all the performance conditions within 30 calendar days of Board of County Commissioner's approval. Failure to submit the revised plan will result in no further development permits being issued.