



DeKalb County Department of Planning & Sustainability

178 Sams Street

Decatur, GA 30030

(404) 371-2155 / [Planning and Sustainability | DeKalb County](#)

Planning Commission Hearing Date: September 12, 2024

Board of Commissioners Hearing Date: September 26, 2024

TEXT AMENDMENT ANALYSIS

AGENDA NO.:
N9-2024-0635

ZONING CASE NO.:
TA-24-1247028

COMMISSION DISTRICTS:
ALL

APPLICANT: Department of Planning & Sustainability

SECTIONS OF ZONING ORDINANCE AFFECTED BY AMENDMENTS: Addition of Section 27-4.2.62 – Commercial Campground Regulations.

REASON FOR REQUEST:

The proposed text amendment seeks to establish clarity and consistent application of regulations for commercial campground facilities. The need for this amendment was prompted when Ramsden Lake, a camping operation, sought to expand its business to include additional camping opportunities. They are currently unable to do so due to the lack of specific code provisions, which would also apply to future campgrounds seeking to establish operations in DeKalb County. This text amendment aims to fill that gap by establishing regulations specifically for commercial camping while facilitating business opportunities in line with the DeKalb Unified Plan by ensuring safety, environmental protection, and harmony with surrounding residential communities.

This proposal is designed as a Special Land Use Permit (SLUP) for R-100 and RE zoned districts, rather than permitting campgrounds as a standard allowed use. This approach allows the county to evaluate the appropriateness of individual campgrounds on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that their location and operation are suitable for the specific residential area in question. By requiring a SLUP, the community, planning staff, and the Board of Commissioners can consider the unique context of each proposal and mitigate potential negative impacts on neighboring properties.

The amendment defines key terms such as "Commercial Campground," "Campsite," and the distinctions between temporary, semi-permanent, and permanent structures. These definitions establish a common understanding and ensure the consistent application of the regulations. For example, maximum densities vary based on structure type, and the ordinance stipulates that campgrounds are only permitted on parcels zoned R-100 and RE, with a minimum lot size of 35 acres. These requirements are based on the availability of parcels within the county and other jurisdictions' campground regulations.

Notably, the amount of proposed regulations has been reduced by cutting redundancies and ensuring consistency with existing code. This refinement simplifies the ordinance while still providing the necessary safeguards to protect county residents and the environment. The amendment focuses exclusively on commercial campgrounds and does not apply to public or private camping operations.

The amendment sets limits on the number of individuals and structures per acre of habitable land to prevent overcrowding and ensure safety. Temporary camping is limited to five (5) structures per acre, while semi-permanent and permanent structures are limited to two (2) per acre, with dimensional requirements as imposed by R-100 and RE zoning. These limits are intended to strike a balance between providing recreational opportunities and preserving the land's character and usability while protecting surrounding residential areas. Planning staff does not anticipate this ordinance will create a camping boom, as it is unlikely that companies will prioritize camping over other business ventures, and the available stock of suitable land is limited by the proposed parcel requirements layered with the dimensional requirements and land development standards as it stands currently in the code.

Buffer requirements mandate a 200-foot landscaped buffer from surrounding single-family residential lots, providing visual screening and mitigating potential impacts, such as noise, on adjacent properties. Emergency access and fire prevention measures are also mandated, requiring campgrounds to maintain clear emergency routes and implement fire safety protocols. Waste management standards are outlined in the proposal to prevent environmental contamination, including proper sewage disposal and regular trash removal, with options for alternative sewage measures such as composting toilets.

The amendment regulates the duration of stays and the hosting of events by setting maximum stay limits of 15 days within a two-month period. These guidelines are designed to prevent long-term occupancy and ensure that events do not disrupt the surrounding community or create excessive noise and traffic. Accountability for the impacts of events remains with the operators, who are responsible for managing their impact.

By establishing clear definitions, zoning requirements, occupancy limits, and operational standards, this amendment aims to promote safe, responsible, and environmentally conscious campground operations. These regulations will help preserve the quality of life for county residents while allowing for recreational activities in a controlled and sustainable manner. Planning staff recommends approval of this amendment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL