

**City of Gainesville
Department of Doing**

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DATE: 4/23/2018

TO: Lawrence Calderon, Planner – Department of Doing

FROM: Forrest Eddleton, Interim Environmental Coordinator – Department of Doing

SUBJECT: DB-18-017 Oaks Preserve Design Plat – Resource Conservation Report

Site Description

The subject property is roughly an upside-down funnel shape with the narrower portion adjacent to SW Archer Road. The site is accessed by unpaved roads that weave through the project site. The majority of the site is heavily wooded with the exception of the southeast corner which is used as pasture (Fig. 1). While heavily wooded currently, historically the area was largely clear and devoid of tree cover (Fig. 2). As a result the majority of the site is overgrown hammock with a scattering of quality Loblolly Pines, oaks, and other hardwoods. Invasive and undergrowth species such as camphor and mimosa are widely spread throughout the project site.

The northernmost portion of the site is pock-marked with borrow pits that are crisscrossed with off-road vehicle tracks and filled with garbage and debris. There are several abandoned buildings and a small number of single family homes on large lots on the southern portions of the site. Nestled between the Hogtown Prairie and Bear Hammock Strategic Ecosystems (Fig. 3) the site is host to a several resources that are regulated by sections of the City of Gainesville's (C of G) Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code (LDC).

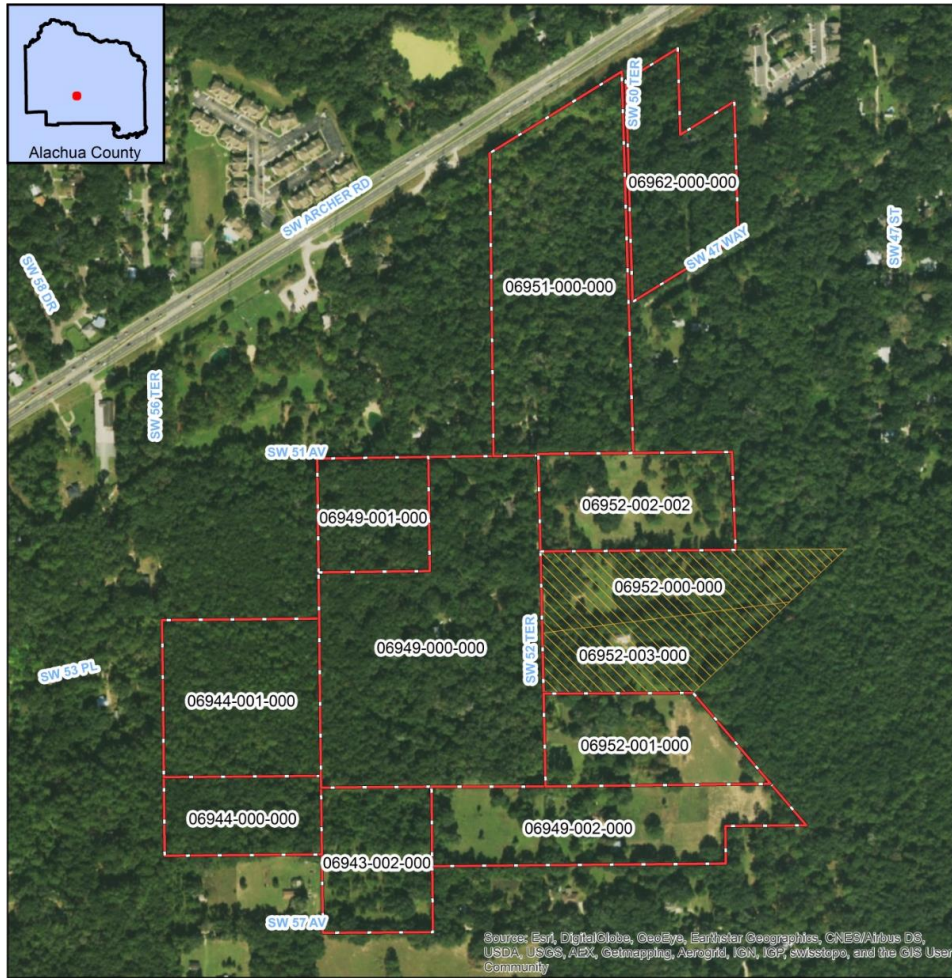


Figure 1: Aerial with Parcels (Normandeau Associates, 2018)

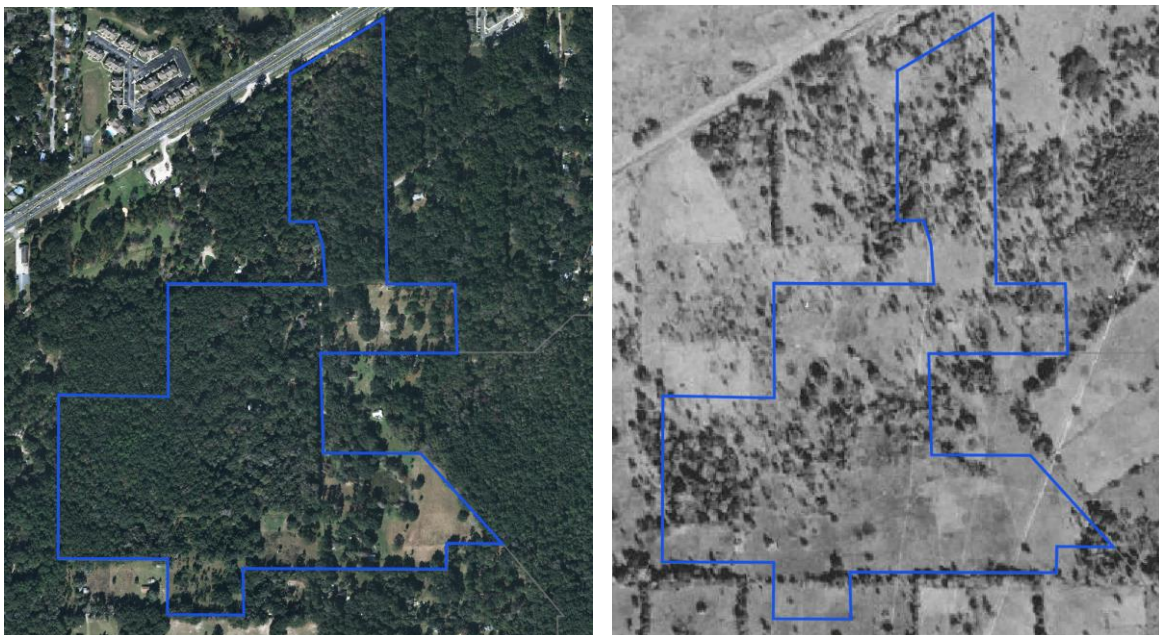


Figure 2: 2014 and 1938 Aerials

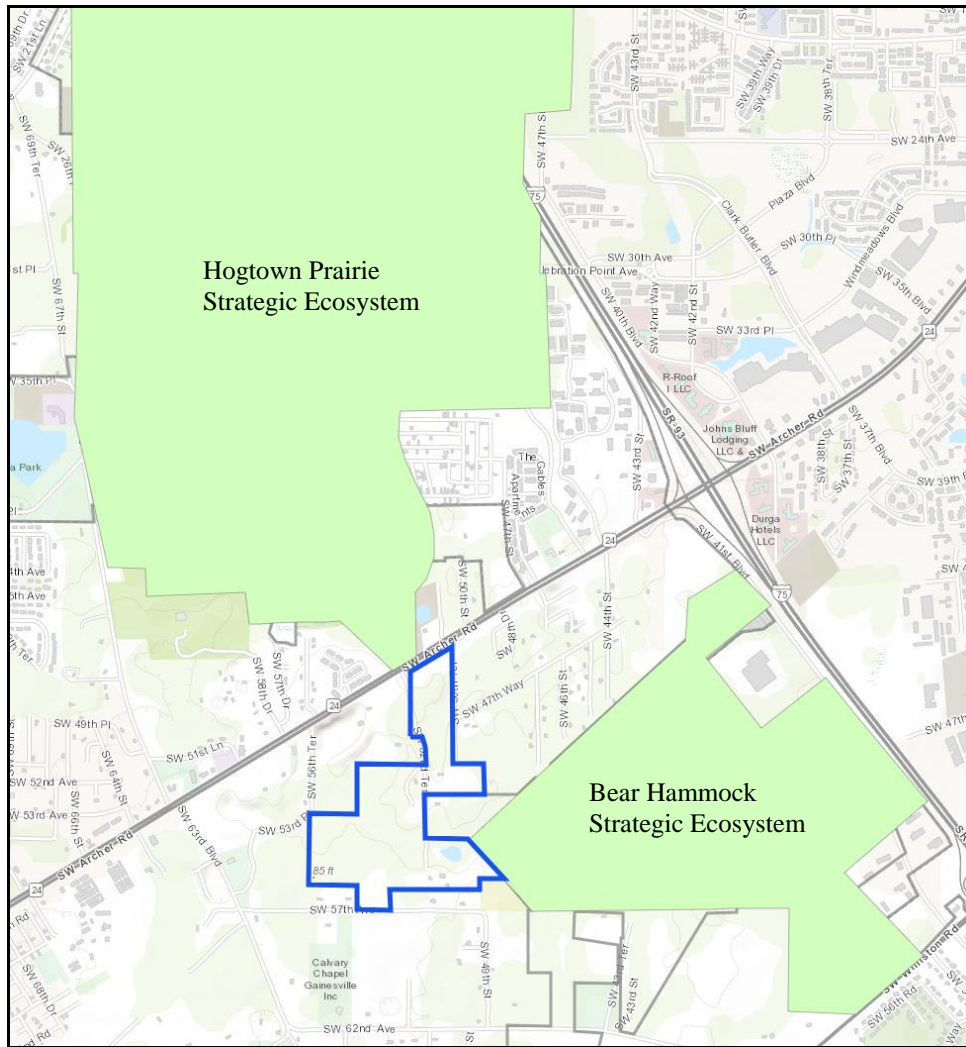


Figure 3: Adjacent Strategic Ecosystems

Wetlands

At the time of application City of Gainesville and Alachua County data indicated two wetland areas and two “urban ponds” (Fig. 4). However, the report submitted by Normandeau Associates identified four wetland areas occurring in the southern portion of the project site (Fig. 5) and did not include the northernmost “wetland.” C of G and Alachua County Environmental Protection Department staff conducted field verifications and concur with Normandeau’s findings. What is shown in C of G data as a “wetland” nearest SW Archer Road is actually a manmade depression with little to no ecological value. The most southeastern and largest wetland is a freshwater pond lined with Cypress, Oak, Cabbage Palm, Cat-tail, and Maidencane. Just to the west is the second largest wetland which is

currently bisected by an access road. The final wetland is just to the west of the other wetland areas.

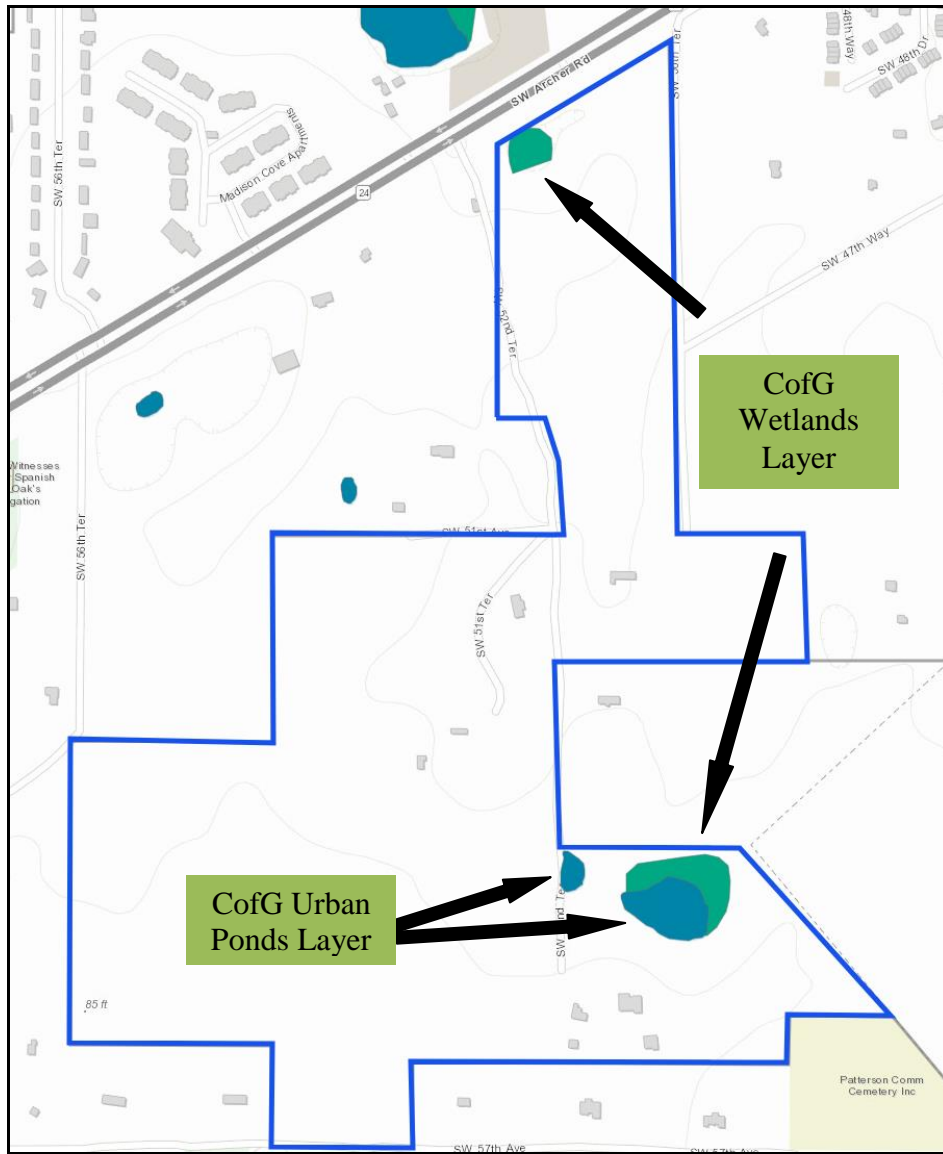


Figure 4: Pre-application Wetland and Urban Pond Data



Figure 5: Identified Wetlands (Normandeau Associates, 2018)

The proposed Design Plat shows a wetland buffer of a minimum of fifty feet and a maximum of seventy-five feet which significantly exceeds the City's minimum requirements (Fig. 6). In addition, much of the site's stormwater treatment is designed to be adjacent to the wetland buffers creating a larger connected open space and greater potential for supporting habitat restoration. In one such area stormwater facilities are proposed directly to the east of the wetland areas. The applicant has been encouraged to include a more "natural" connection to the Bear Hammock Strategic Ecosystem to establish and promote a larger interconnectivity between conservation areas. However, staff is aware of the various design challenges inherent on the site in regards to connectivity and is largely supportive of the proposed wetland buffer design.

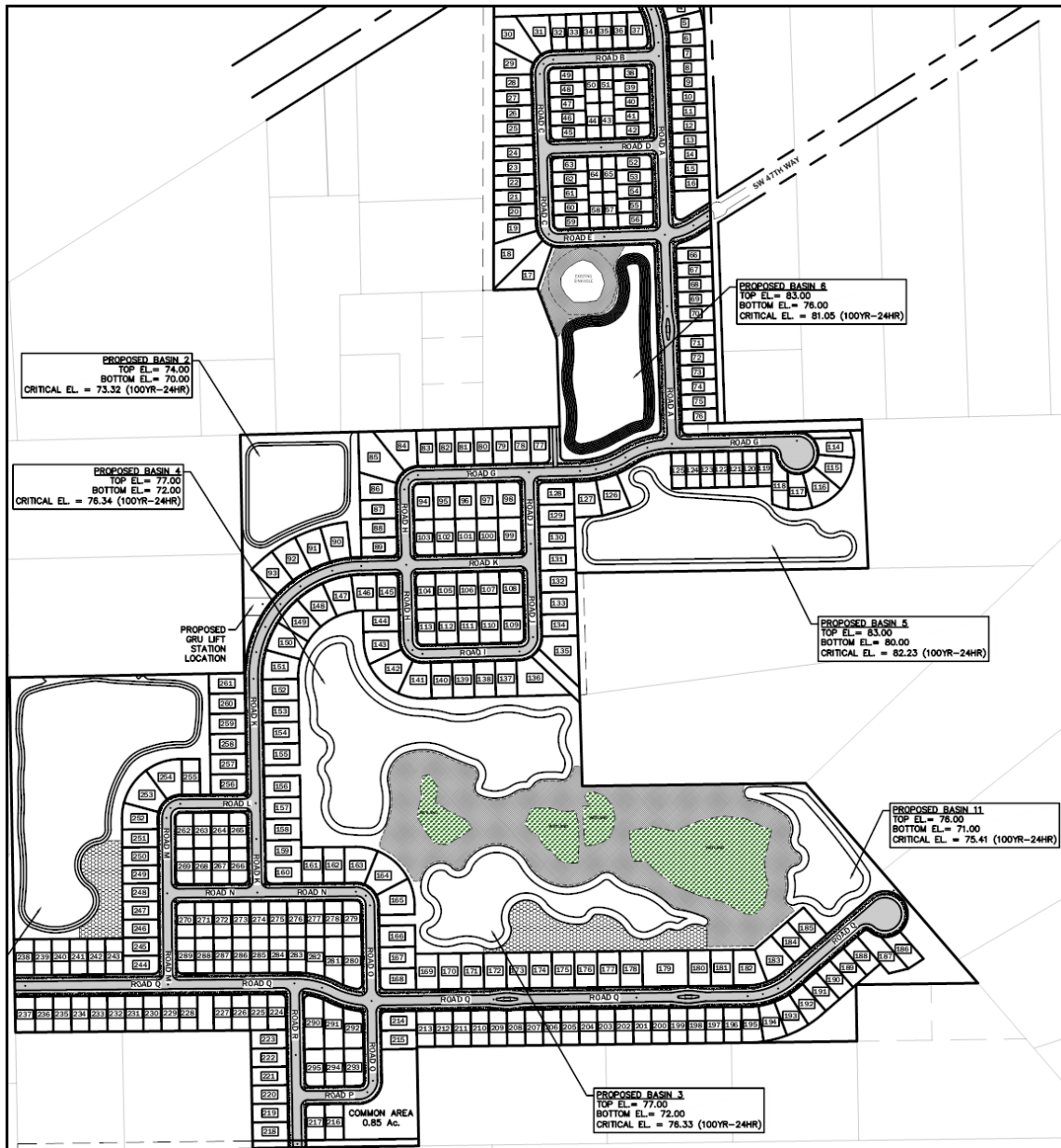


Figure 6: Proposed Wetland Buffers

Sinkholes/Significant Geological Resource Features

C of G and Alachua County did not have any data on existing sinkholes on the project site at the time of application. The Normandeau report identified four potential locations for sinkholes on the property based on existing topographic data (Fig. 7). Physical review of the site showed that two of these features were non-existent and two were clearly features (shown as red and green triangles in Figure 7). The westernmost of the two features was field verified as a sinkhole. The status of the eastern feature warranted further investigation by a geotechnical specialist.

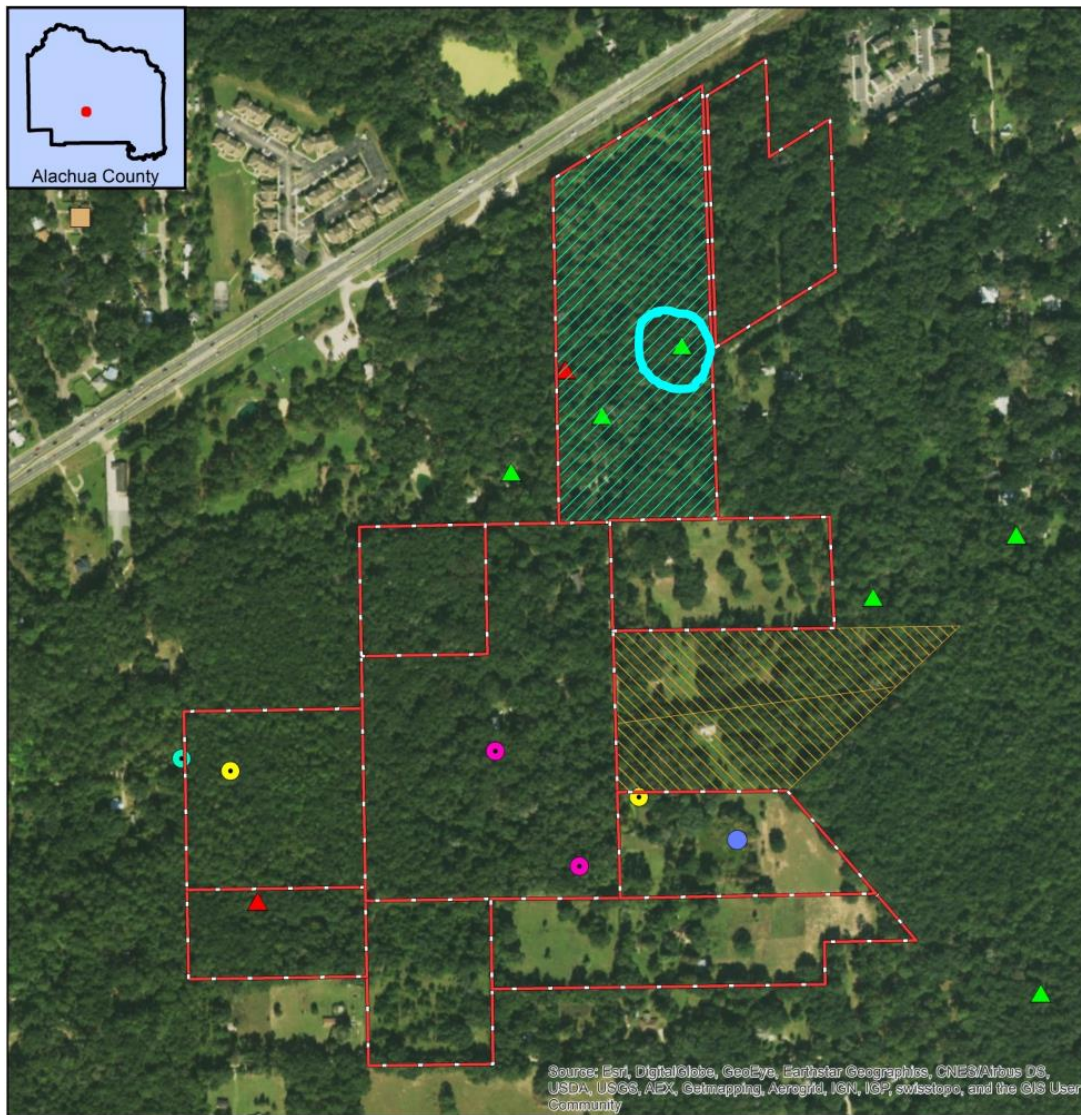


Figure 7: Potential Sinkhole Features (circle shows non-significant feature)

A report submitted on 4/16/2018 by GSE Engineering & Consulting, Inc. on behalf of the property owner, the Dautel Group, detailed several characteristics of the feature in question. Visual inspection of the asymmetrical and undulating topography, tree growth on slopes and mid-feature, as well as no exposed limestone on slope banks provided enough evidence to confirm that the second feature is not a sinkhole or a “significant geological feature” to be avoided. The proposed Design Plat includes a minimum thirty-five foot and more than fifty feet on average buffer surrounding the confirmed sinkhole (Fig 8) as required by LDC Sec. 30-8.13.

site habitat set-aside has been specifically identified in the design nor have any alternative plans for protection or relocation been submitted. C of G staff is amenable to coordinating with the applicant and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for alternative mitigation strategies.



Figure 9: Gopher Tortoise Burrow and Sandhill Cranes

Archeological Resources

Included with the application package is a letter from the Florida Division of Historical Resources. This letter indicates that a Phase I archaeological assessment had been conducted by Archaeological and Historical Conservancy, Inc. (AHCI) as due diligence prior to development. This Phase I evaluation identified a “large prehistoric scatter” ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). However, two other locations were shown to have “intact subsurface deposits” and could be potentially eligible for listing. For privacy and security reasons specific locations of deposits have not been included in the application materials or reports. State Statute, the C of G Comprehensive Plan, and the LDC require avoidance of archeological resources and in the event avoidance is not possible or desirable, further analysis is required in the form of a Phase II assessment and possibly a Phase III archeological excavation and analysis of the resources present.

On 4/18/2018 C of G staff met on site with the representatives from the Dautel Group and archeologists with AHCI to observe the initiation of a Phase II assessment. Shortly into the first shovel test hole, roughly two to three feet below the surface of the soil, several shards of prehistoric pottery were discovered. Continued digging revealed multiple layers of varying types of pottery. C of G staff is awaiting a full Phase II report to be submitted by the applicant with details on the ultimate findings however, early indications on site were that a Phase III assessment would likely be required for any development activities to proceed. Unless the applicant desires to avoid the prehistoric deposits altogether these findings will not affect the layout of the Design Plat and do not in of themselves prevent approval at the Design Plat stage.

Summary

While there remains outstanding resource conservation items to address in the overall process there are either design or procedural options for moving forward in each case. Some remaining items for discussion are as follows:

- Removal of the existing road that divides the central cypress wetland should be explored to enhance ecological connectivity.

- Increased ecological connectivity eastward to the Bear Hammock Strategic Ecosystem is preferred and encouraged. Proposed stormwater is acceptable under Code however some other form of planted or open space is more desirable and could provide on-site habitat set-aside.
- Avoidance or management of existing Gopher Tortoise population will need to be addressed prior to development. Alternative strategies supported by the FFWCC are acceptable.
- Thorough and adequate subsurface analysis near the area of the non-significant geologic feature should be conducted prior to development to further clarify the status of the feature and its stability.

As these items are largely optional or can be addressed several ways, they should not prevent the Design Plat approval process from proceeding. In general, the proposed Design Plat addresses the requirements of the City of Gainesville Comprehensive Plan and the LDC and is compliant with the provisions concerning resource and environmental conservation.

Respectfully,

Forrest Eddleton, Planner/Interim Environmental Coordinator
Department of Doing – Planning Division