
Application Z25-000014

Staff Contact:	Mehdi J. Benkhatar, AICP
Staff Phone Number:	352-374-5249 ext. 5261
PC Hearing Date:	September 10, 2025
BoCC Hearing Date:	TBD
Requested Action	A request for a special exception for a major utility (vehicle staging area for disaster response)
Property Owner:	Clay Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Applicant/Agent:	Tara Howell of JBPro, Inc.
Property Description	Address: 11530 NW 39th Ave. Parcel Numbers: 04193-004-007 Section/Township/Range: 24/09/18 Land Use: Low Density Residential (1 to 4 dwelling units/acre) Zoning: RE-1 Acreage: 7.98 +/-
Previous Requests:	None
Violation History:	None
Project Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submitted: May 29, 2025• Staff Report Distributed: September 3, 2025• Planning Commission Hearing: September 10, 2025
Staff Recommendation:	Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend that the Board of County Commissioners approve Z25-000014 , with the conditions and bases as listed in the staff report.

Background

This application is a request for a special exception for a major utility use on parcel 04193-004-007. If approved, it would allow Clay Electric Cooperative to have a staging area for service vehicles during disaster events. The staging area would facilitate efficient disaster response with the coordination of utility vehicles, trailers and temporary supporting facilities being placed in this “hub” and ready to deploy after natural disasters hit Alachua County and other surrounding counties. The site is located in between two parcels belonging to Clay Electric: the first is its existing office fronting NW 39th Ave.; the other is a parcel located to the north of the site with a communications tower. These parcels were previously approved for a major utility use with another special exception for Clay Electric.



Figure 1: Aerial image of site

Site description

The site consists of a parcel totaling approximately 7.98 acres located at 11530 NW 39th Ave., in the northwestern part of Alachua County, about 1 mile west from the Interstate 75 interchange. The site has a future land use designation of Low Density Residential (1 to 4 dwelling units/acre) and RE-1 residential zoning. It is an undeveloped, heavily wooded parcel with a portion of the eastern half lying within a flood zone (FEMA flood zone "A"). There are no wetlands on the site. The Urban Cluster boundary lies at the northern boundary of the site.

To the north of the site is a parcel owned by Clay Electric that has a 285' communications tower that was approved with a prior special exception for Clay Electric (ZOX-02-07). This parcel has Rural/Ag future land use designation and Agriculture zoning.

To the south of the site is a parcel also owned by Clay Electric that has its office and storage yard. This office was approved as part of the 2007 special exception. The parcel to the south has Low Density Residential (1 to 4 dwelling units/acre) future land use designation and R-1aa residential zoning.

To the east of the site is a 2-acre parcel with a single-family residence. This parcel has Low Density Residential (1 to 4 dwelling units/acre) future land use designation and RE-1 residential zoning. Also to the east is the Greenhouse church with a split future land use designation of Rural/Ag (for the church which lies outside of the Urban Cluster) and Low Density Residential (1 to 4 dwelling units/acre) (for the portion that lies within the Urban Cluster). The church has Planned Development (PD) zoning.

To the west of the site, across a Gainesville Regional Utility power line, is Saint Francis Catholic Academy, a private high school. The school has Institutional future land use designation and Planned Development (PD) zoning.

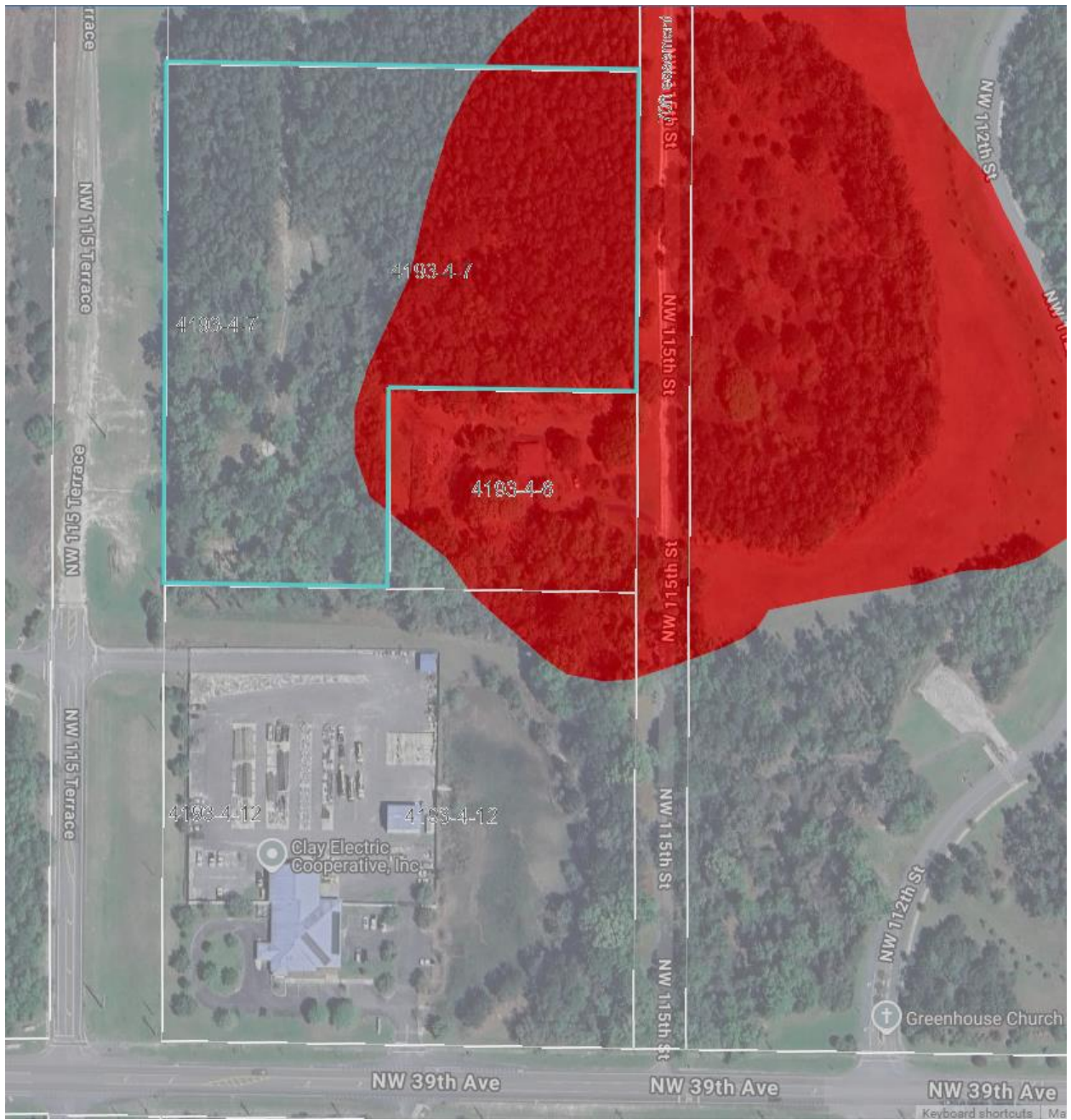


Figure 4: Flood Zone Map, red = "A" zone

Consistency with Comprehensive Plan

Levels of Service

The Alachua County Comprehensive Plan Capital Improvement Element requires that the public facilities and services needed to support development be available concurrent with the impacts of development and that issuance of a Certificate of Level of Service Compliance (CLSC) be a condition of all final development orders. 'Concurrent' shall mean that all adopted levels of service (LOS) standards shall be maintained or achieved within a specified timeframe. Per **Policy 1.2.4 and Policy 1.2.5 of the Capital Improvements Element** of the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan, LOS standards have been adopted for various types of public facilities.

Traffic

The site will only be used during disaster events. Development on the subject property will mitigate its impacts through the mobility fee program. Any necessary operational improvements will be analyzed during development plan review.

Water and Sewer

Policy 1.2.4 (d) of the Capital Improvements Element describes the minimum Level of Service standards for potable water and sewer. These are summarized in the following table:

	Peak Residential & Non Residential	Pressure	Storage Capacity
Potable Water	200 gallons/day/du	40 p.s.i.	½ peak day volume
Sanitary Sewer	106 gallons/day/du	N/A	N/A

The site is inside the Urban Cluster and can be served by centralized water and wastewater. The proposed special exception will not impact the water and sewer levels of service. No permanent structures are being proposed.

Drainage

Policy 1.2.4 of the Capital Improvements Element states that the minimum drainage LOS standard for non-residential development requires a floor elevation of one (1) foot above the 100-year/critical duration storm elevation or flood resistant construction. Development on this site would be required to meet this standard.

Emergency Services

Policy 1.2.5 (a) of the Capital Improvements Element states that the LOS standard for fire services in the Urban Cluster is as follows:

- In the Urban Cluster, initial unit response LOS guideline is within 6 minutes travel time for 80% of all emergency responses within a 12 month period.
- 100% of development shall provide water supply served by hydrants.

All development would be required to meet these standards at the time of development plan approval.

Solid Waste

Policy 1.2.4 (b) of the Capital Improvements Element states that the minimum level of service standard for solid waste disposal used for determining the availability of disposal capacity to accommodate demand generated by existing and new development, at a minimum, shall be 0.8 tons per person per year. LOS standards for solid waste will not be exceeded by this request.

Schools

The proposed special exception does not authorize additional residential units and would not impact the level of service for public schools.

Recreation

The proposed special exception does not authorize additional residential units and would not impact the level of service for recreation.

Policy 7.1.2 of the Future Land Use Element

Policy 7.1.2 of the Future Land Use Element states that:

Proposed changes in the zoning map shall consider:

- a. consistency with the goals, objectives, policies and adopted maps of the Comprehensive Plan*

The proposed special exception, as conditioned, is consistent with the goals, objectives, policies and adopted maps of the Comprehensive Plan. The site has a future land use designation of Low Density Residential (1 to 4 units/acre) and is in the RE-1 residential zoning district. Public utilities are considered as an institutional use by the Comprehensive Plan and are allowed in all land use categories (Policy 5.5.1(a), Future Land Use Element) by means of a special exception.

- b. the availability and capacity of public facilities required to serve the development. When considering a rezoning, this includes availability and capacity of existing public facilities and timing of future facilities based on capital plans. Specific determinations for any exceptions to the requirement to connect to a centralized potable water and sanitary sewer system will be made at the stage of development plan review, as detailed in Policy 2.1 of the Potable Water and Sanitary Sewer Element.*

The site is located inside the Urban Cluster and has access to centralized potable water and sanitary sewer systems. The proposed special exception does not authorize any new residential units and will not have an impact on public school or recreation levels of service. The special exception will not negatively impact the traffic level of service. The site is located on a major arterial road (NW 39th Ave.) and is located near Interstate 75, which will facilitate the arrival and deployment of service vehicles (including those that may be arriving from outside of Alachua County) in time of need. Any development on the subject property will mitigate its impacts through the mobility fee program.

- c. the relationship of the proposed development to existing development in the vicinity and considerations relating to environmental justice and redevelopment opportunities.*

Existing development in the vicinity of the site consists of the existing Clay Electric office and communications tower, the Saint Francis Catholic Academy, the Greenhouse church and a single-family residence. The special exception allows for an area where a disaster response team can set up service vehicles and related support facilities for rapid deployment. The use is intermittent in nature as it will only be used when disasters occur. Major utilities are required to have a high density landscaping buffer with minimum widths of 150'/75', or have alternative buffers, as approved by the Board of County Commissioners, pursuant to Sec. 404.48.5 of the Unified Land Development Code (ULDC). Staff has recommended high-density buffers of 75' on all parcel boundaries, balancing the integration of this use with the surrounding community with the recognition that this use will only occur sporadically and temporarily. This buffer will mitigate impacts to adjacent property owners.

Staff has not identified any issues related to environmental justice or opportunities for redevelopment that would result from the approval of this special exception.

- d. those factors identified by law, including that as a general matter an applicant is not entitled to a particular density or intensity within the range of densities and intensities permitted by the Comprehensive Plan, given due consideration of legitimate public purposes relating to health, safety, and welfare.*

This special exception request does not have a particular density or intensity associated with it. The special exception allows Clay Electric to provide a staging area for vehicles, trailers, and other supporting facilities in preparation and response to disasters that cause major power outages. The special exception conditions as proposed by staff have been made in consideration of legitimate public purposes relating to health, safety and welfare.

Policy 3.4.1 of the Conservation and Open Space Element

Policy 3.4.1 of the Conservation and Open Space Element states that:

All applications for land use change, zoning change and development approval shall be required to submit an inventory of natural resource information.

(a) The inventory shall include site specific identification, mapping, and analysis of each natural resource or natural resource characteristic present on or adjacent to the site.

(b) The inventory shall be prepared by person(s) qualified in the appropriate fields of study, and conducted according to professionally accepted standards.

(c) The County shall provide a natural resources checklist to each applicant identifying natural resources that must be analyzed.

(d) The analysis shall consist of a resources management plan that includes the following:

(1) an assessment of the existing quality and characteristics of each natural resource,

(2) an evaluation of the impact of the proposed land use change, zoning change, or development on the resource, with consideration of the indicators in Policy 2.1.2,

(3) a discussion of the proposed measures to protect or mitigate the impacts on the resource, and

(4) a maintenance and monitoring plan.

(e) In the land use and zoning context, the County shall use this information to determine whether the requested change is consistent with protection of natural resources. In the development review context, the County shall use this information to determine appropriate site designs and strategies that maintain and protect the character and amenities of the natural environment on the site during construction and after development.

The applicant submitted an environmental resource assessment report and checklist of natural resources present on site as part of this special exception application. The report and checklist were prepared and signed by a qualified professional. County Environmental Protection Department (EPD) staff finds the proposed special exception consistent with the protection of natural resources.

Unified Land Development Code (ULDC) Consistency

Sec. 402.113. – Special exception criteria for approval.

The board of county commissioners shall, as part of a decision to approve an application for special exception, make a finding that an application complies with both the general criteria and the review factors listed below.

(a) The proposed use is consistent with the comprehensive plan and ULDC;

The proposed use is consistent with the comprehensive plan and ULDC. Institutional uses are allowed in all land use categories. Major utilities are allowed in the RE-1 zoning district by means of a special exception.

(b) The proposed use is compatible with the existing land use pattern and future uses designated by the comprehensive plan;

The existing land use pattern consists of existing Clay Electric facilities and other institutional uses (church, high school) nearby on NW 39th Ave. There is also a single-family residence adjacent. The site is located at the edge of the Urban Cluster, on a parcel with Low Density Residential (1 to 4 units/acre) future land use designation. As previously mentioned, the Comprehensive Plan provides for public utilities (considered as institutional uses) to be located in all land use categories. Therefore, the proposed use is consistent with this criterion.

(c) The proposed use shall not adversely affect the health, safety, and welfare of the public; and

As conditioned, the proposed use of a vehicle staging area for a major utility (Clay Electric) will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of the public. As shown on the special exception master plan buffers will be required to reduce adverse visual impacts. The proposed use will be limited in operation, being activated only when disaster events occur and is intended to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public by helping to restore critical energy infrastructure.

(d) Satisfactory provisions and arrangements have been made concerning the following matters, where applicable:

(1) Ingress and egress to the property and proposed structures thereon with particular reference to automotive, bicycle, and pedestrian safety and convenience, traffic flow and control and access in case of fire or catastrophe;

The proposed major utility staging area would have ingress and egress from the existing Clay Electric office parcel to the south. This site will not be open to the public.

(2) Off-street parking and loading areas where required, with particular attention to item (1) above;

Adequate space exists for off-street parking and loading areas if the special exception is approved. The exact location and number of parking spaces would be determined as part of the development plan review process.

(3) The noise, glare or odor effects of the special exception on surrounding properties;

Staff has proposed a condition to orient temporary lighting in such a way to minimize impacts to surrounding parcels. Possible noise impacts (such as noise from generators running) will be required to comply with the noise code.

(4) Refuse and service areas, with particular reference to location, screening and items (1) and (2);

Adequate space exists on site for refuse and services areas associated with this use. The exact location of these areas will be determined as part of the development plan review process.

(5) Utilities, with reference to location and availability;

The site is located within the Urban Cluster boundary line and is able to connect to centralized water and sewer lines. The site is adjacent to the Clay Electric Cooperative office, is located on a major arterial road (NW 39th Ave.) and is near Interstate 75.

(6) Screening and buffering with reference to type, dimensions and character;

As shown on the special exception master plan, a high-density landscaping buffer will be required around the perimeter of the site.

(7) Signs, if any, and proposed exterior lighting with reference to glare, traffic safety and compatibility with surrounding properties;

The major utility staging area will not be open to the public and will not have signage. The site will not be lit when the staging area is not activated. While activated, lighting will be oriented away from surrounding parcels.

Staff does not anticipate any glare, traffic safety or compatibility issues for surrounding properties related to exterior lighting.

(8) Required yards and other greenspace;

The proposed major utility use will be required to meet the setback requirements of the RE-1 zoning district. Open space is not required for this use.

(9) General compatibility with surrounding properties; and

“Compatibility” is defined in the Community Planning Act (F.S. 163.3164) as “a condition in which land uses or conditions can coexist in relative proximity to each other in a stable fashion over time such that no use or condition is unduly negatively impacted directly or indirectly by another use or condition”. The proposed service vehicle staging area in support of the Clay Electric major utility use is generally compatible with surrounding properties. The site is located in between parcels that are currently operated by Clay Electric, so the site can make use of existing infrastructure. The proposed use is intermittent in nature, only being active during natural disaster events. No permanent structures have been proposed for this use.

(10) Any special requirements set forth in this ULDC for the particular use involved.

The ULDC specifies that major utilities shall provide a high density buffer with vegetation, unless otherwise approved by the Board of County Commissioners in the special exception conditions. Staff has proposed a condition that would require this minimum buffer width to surround the parcel.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend that the Board of County Commissioners **approve Z25-000014**, with the conditions and bases as listed in the staff report.

Conditions

1. This special exception shall allow temporary staging of vehicles and supporting facilities for a major utility to prepare and respond to disaster events, as shown on the special exception master plan.

2. High density buffers shall be located along all boundaries of parcel 04193-004-007 with a minimum buffer width of 75’.
3. Temporary lighting shall be oriented to minimize impact on surrounding parcels. Any permanent lighting shall comply with Chapter 407, Article XIV “Outdoor Lighting” of the Unified Land Development Code.
4. Storage of any hazardous materials shall be coordinated with the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department.

Bases

1. **Policy 5.1.2(c) of the Future Land Use Element** considers public utilities to be institutional uses in Alachua County. The proposed special exception for a vehicle staging area is being requested to support a public utility (Clay Electric Cooperative) during disaster events. Policy 5.1.1 of the Future Land Use Element allows for institutional uses to be located in land uses other than Institutional.
2. **Policy 5.2.1 of the Future Land Use Element** states that the following criteria shall determine the appropriateness of potential institutional locations and uses requiring special use permits, and shall be demonstrated prior to establishing the institutional use:

(a) Optimum service area.

The proposed staging area location will optimize Clay Electric’s ability to serve customers when power is disrupted. This site is adjacent to an existing Clay Electric office and communications tower. The site’s proximity to Interstate 75 will facilitate other utility providers that have mutual aid agreements to access this site quickly and efficiently.

(b) Optimum operating size.

This special exception request will optimize its operating size while remaining compatible with existing uses surrounding the site.

(c) Access to clientele.

The proposed vehicle staging area is located near Interstate 75, adjacent to an existing Clay Electric office. This location will provide enhanced access for utility crew to serve clients more readily when service is interrupted to disaster events.

(d) Compatibility of the scale and intensity of the use in relationship to surrounding uses, taking into account impacts such as, noise, lighting, visual effect, traffic generation, odors.

The proposed staging area will have a limited impact on surrounding uses as the great majority of the time it will not be active. Only during disaster events where power outages require large-scale response efforts will this staging area be necessary. Staff has proposed conditions to ensure compatibility of the proposed use with surrounding uses when the staging area is activated.

(e) Nature of service provision.

The nature of the service provision for this use is on a temporary, as-needed basis. The staging area will primarily be used for utility providers to set up trucks, equipment and other supporting facilities to respond to power outages for the duration necessary.

(f) Needs of the clientele.

The proposed special exception will help to serve the needs of Clay Electric customers (and possibly others) whose power has been disrupted.

(g) Availability and adequacy of public infrastructure to serve the particular use.

The site is located on a major arterial road (NW 39th Ave.) approximately 1 mile west of Interstate 75. This available public road infrastructure helps to serve the intended use of the site as a staging area for utility vehicles and other supporting facilities during disaster events.

(h) Preservation and strengthening of community and neighborhood character through design and in accordance with Policy 5.2.2 of this Element.

Staff's proposed special exception conditions aim to preserve and strengthen the community and neighborhood character through design.

(i) Consistency with the goals, objectives, and policies of the Conservation and Open Space Element

Alachua County Environmental Protection Department staff have reviewed the environmental resource assessment checklist provided by the applicant and have

found the proposed special exception to be consistent with protection of natural resources, pursuant to **Conservation and Open Space Element Policy 3.4.1**.

3. **Policy 5.2.2 of the Future Land Use Element** requires Institutional facilities shall be designed and located for integration into the surrounding community. Staff has proposed a high-density buffer 75' in width to provide compatibility with the adjacent residential use and aid in the integration of this use with the surrounding community while also recognizing that this use will only occur sporadically and temporarily.
4. **Policy 5.5.1(a) of the Future Land Use Element** states "*Public utilities shall be permitted in all land use categories subject to appropriate locational criteria in the land development regulations*". The proposed vehicle staging area is related to a major utility (Clay Electric Cooperative) and will be located in the Low Density Residential land use category. As demonstrated with staff's review of this application and the special exception criteria for approval (Sec. 402.113 of ULDC), the proposed request is consistent with the locational criteria.
5. The proposed site is on a parcel owned by Clay Electric and adjacent to existing Clay Electric facilities (office and communication tower). It can make use of this existing infrastructure whenever activated. This will assist in facilitating the coordination of utility crew response.

Staff Comments

Department of Environmental Protection: None.

Department of Public Works: None.

Transportation: None.

Fire/Rescue: None.