

PLANNING REPORT

Planning and Zoning Commission

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Germain Honda Dublin Expansion 26-008 INF

www.dublinohiousa.gov/PZC/26-008

Case Summary

Address	6715, 6755, and 6685 Sawmill Road
Proposal	Expansion of the existing Germain Honda Campus from 12.77 acres to 14.84 acres, with new structures and site improvements
Request	Review and non-binding feedback of an Informal Request under the provisions of Zoning Code Section 153.066
Zoning	BSD-SCN, Bridge Street District – Sawmill Center Neighborhood
Planning Recommendation	<u>Consideration of the Discussion Questions</u>
Next Steps	Upon receiving feedback from the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC), the applicant may incorporate the feedback and submit for a Concept Plan (CP)
Applicant	Dave Kaldy, archall
Case Manager	Sarah Tresouthick Holt, AICP, ASLA, Senior Planner (614) 410-4662 sholt@dublin.oh.us



Community Planning and Development



5200 Emerald Parkway
Dublin, Ohio 43017



614.410.4600
dublinohiousa.gov

Sustainable | Connected | Resilient

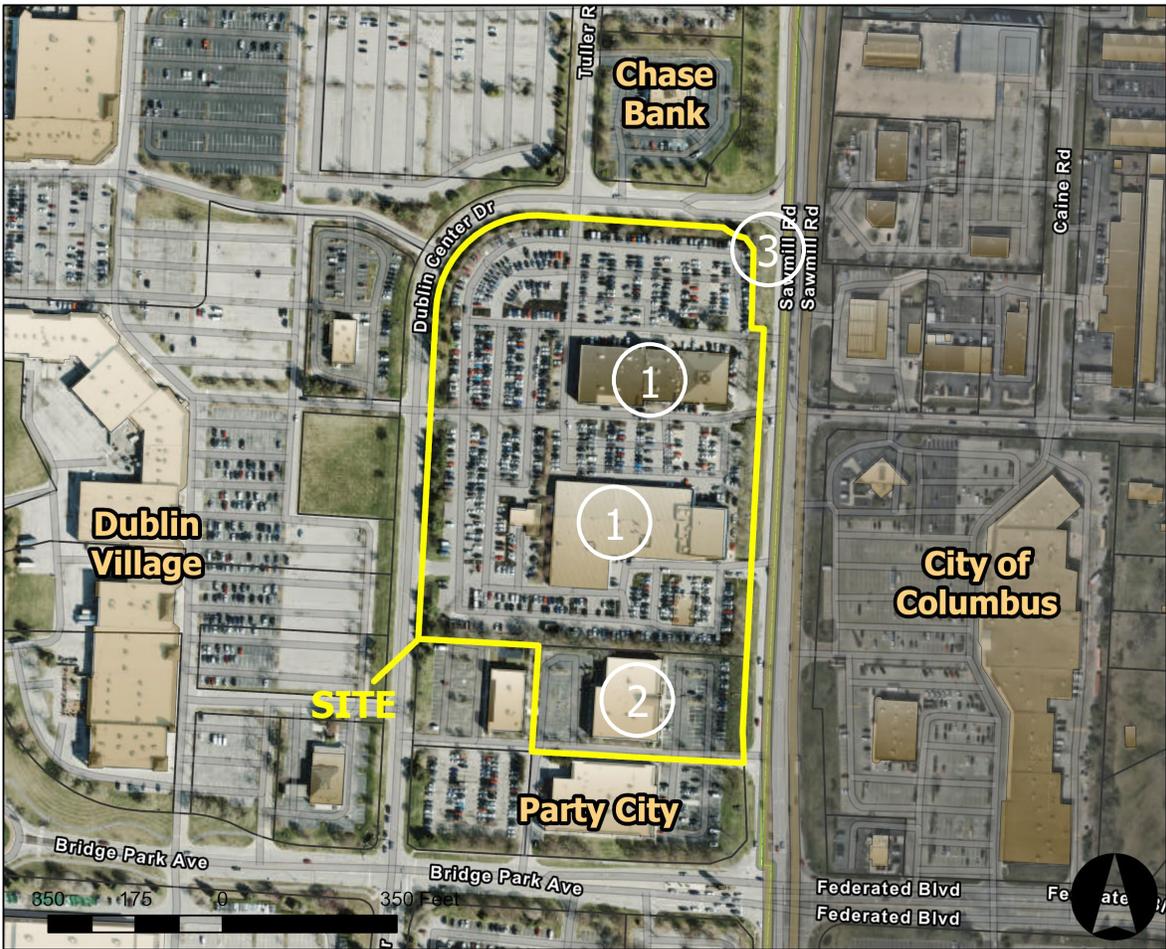
Site Location Map

26-008INF - Germain Honda Dublin Expansion



Site Features

- 1 Existing buildings to be demolished
- 2 Rite Rug site
- 3 COTA bus stop

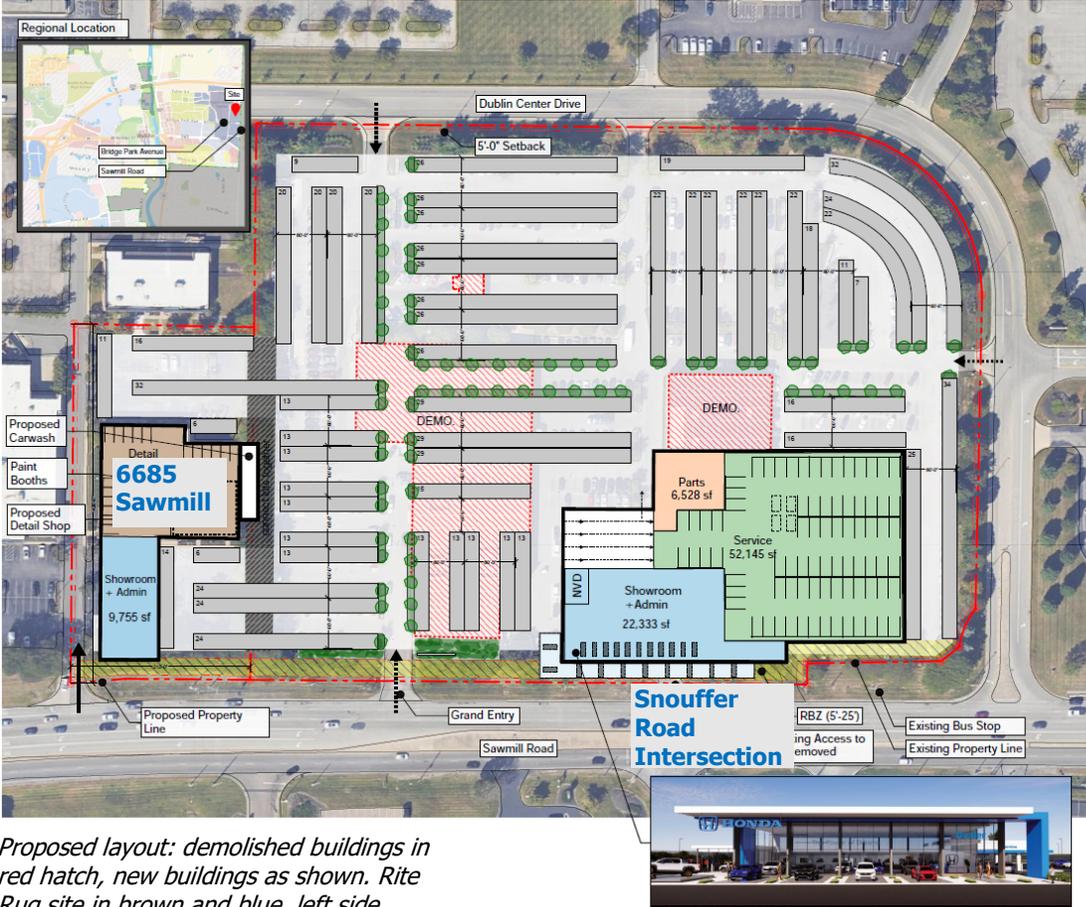


1. Request and Process

Request

The applicant requests review and feedback for:

- An expansion of the existing use to allow consolidation of needed activities into one location, rather than dispersal over a larger area
- A new showroom/service building along Sawmill Road, with demolition of existing structures
- Conversion of the existing Rite Rug property (6685 Sawmill) to a showroom, administration, and detail/body work structure.
- Applicant notes that Honda branding would be required for the portions of buildings nearest Sawmill Road, and that rear portions of the buildings would meet Bridge Street District (BSD) standards
- Open space and pedestrian-friendly opportunities are anticipated throughout the campus



Proposed layout: demolished buildings in red hatch, new buildings as shown. Rite Rug site in brown and blue, left side.



Process

The Informal Review is an optional step in the development process as outlined below:

1. *Informal Review (INF) – PZC Consideration (non-binding feedback)*
2. *Concept Plan (CP) – PZC Consideration (non-binding feedback)*
3. *Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) – PZC Determination*
4. *Final Development Plan (FDP) - PZC Determination*

The INF provides the PZC with the opportunity to provide non-binding feedback on a development concept at the earliest stage of a project. Following the INF, the applicant may incorporate the feedback and submit a CP for the Commission's review and feedback. PDP and FDP (final step) follow that.

2. Background

Site Summary

The ±12.77-acre existing (14.84-acre proposed) site has frontage on two public streets: Sawmill Road on the east, and Dublin Center Drive to the north and west. The additional acreage for the proposed expansion of the use at the Rite Rug site is directly to the south. Three curb cuts exist along Sawmill: two for Germain, and a shared private through-access drive for Rite Rug and parcels to the south and west. Four curb cuts exist on Dublin Center Drive: one on the north and two on the west for Germain, and the same shared through-access west of the Rite Rug site. Vehicular-related uses surround the site, many with large parking lots. No pedestrian or bike facilities currently exist.

History

September 2001 — Case 01-051CDD

PZC approved with conditions a Corridor Development District application (no longer an application type) for renovation and expansion of the previous Immke Honda dealership on 12 acres on 3 parcels, with four buildings. Site took over existing Cadillac and Oldsmobile buildings.

April 25, 2012: Effective date of Bridge Street District Code

Via Ordinance 7-12. Original language re: Expansion of Uses is fundamentally the same as today, including three current standards referenced in Section 4 below. Original Code listed vehicular sales, rental, and repair as Conditional Use in the Sawmill Center Neighborhood, same as today's Code.

June 2018 – Case 18-042MPR

Administrative Review Team (ART) approved Minor Project for Germain Honda, Phase I, for demolition of building and increase in parking. Walkability and landscaping were discussed. *Permits were approved and construction completed.*

August 2019 – Case 19-063MPR

ART approved Minor Project for Germain Honda, Phase II, to modify access, landscaping, and dumpster enclosure. Parking increased via a Parking Plan to accommodate 1000+ vehicles. Tree removal and fees-in-lieu for replacement discussed. New site lighting added. Departures for interior landscaping (parking spaces without landscape islands) approved. *Permits were approved and construction completed.*

Phase III improvements were interior-only and did not require approval by PZC/ART. Permits were approved and construction completed.

July 2020 – Case 20-102CP

PZC approved a Concept Plan (CP) with conditions for building renovations, parking and sign modifications, and site improvements for Germain Honda Phase IV. Tree preservation, walkability, signage, and inventory visibility were discussed. The Commission prioritized landscaping and connectivity along the site's perimeter.

January 2021 – Case 20-184PDP

PZC approved a Preliminary Development Plan with conditions as the next step for the previous case, Germain Honda Phase IV. Discussion regarding compliance with BSD parking locations, inclusion of retail uses, tree preservation, and the amount of signage. The long-term BSD plan was discussed, and the proposal was acknowledged for its Sawmill frontage design. Need for pedestrian connections discussed. Applicant representatives acknowledged future street/sidewalk configurations and suggested that the sidewalk around the curve of Dublin Center Drive occur when the surrounding street development advances.

May 2021 – Case 21-031FDP

PZC approved a Final Development Plan with conditions FDP for Phase IV: minor exterior and site modifications, including lighting. The general building layout was not substantially changed, so the Code requirements were deemed met. Master Sign Plan to be scheduled in the future. Sidewalk connections were made around the site, excluding the curved section along Dublin Center Drive, which is to be prioritized during future redevelopment, according to the BSD Code. Snuffer intersection is used as the main entry point. Waivers granted for the installation of perimeter pedestrian facilities and the used car building setback. See attached site layout.
This plan was not constructed and has now expired.

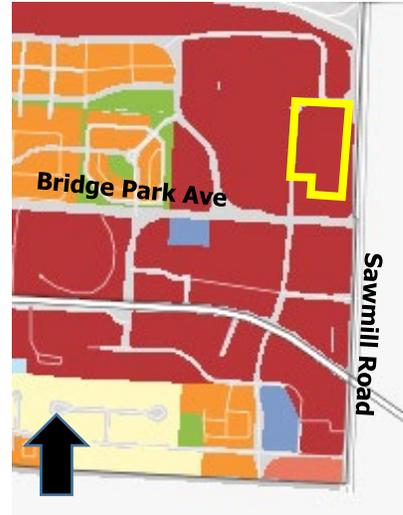
3. City Plans and Policies

Envision Dublin Community Plan

The Community Plan is a key policy document that guides decision-making regarding the future of Dublin's natural and built environment. It assists in evaluating development proposals and helps ensure that proposed development supports the community's long-term objectives.

Future Land Use

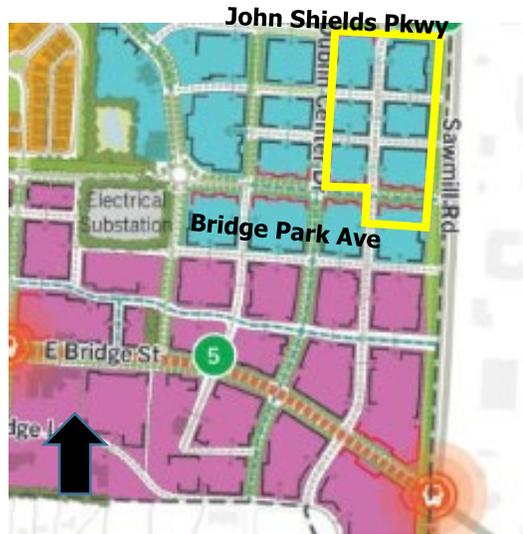
The Future Land Use (FLU) designation for this site is Mixed Use Urban, which is intended to incorporate a strong mix of uses in an active, highly walkable environment. The principal uses include commercial, office, hospitality, multi-family residential, and eating and drinking. Supporting uses include civic, parks, and open space. Building height ranges from 3 to 6 stories, but taller structures may be appropriate in key locations. Vertical and horizontal mixed-use is envisioned in this district with ground-floor activation and entrances oriented toward the street. Urban open space concepts, including plazas, pocket parks and public squares, are envisioned, while green space is de-emphasized. A dense, gridded street network is expected, with building walls along wide sidewalks, as well as patios and seating areas.



Bridge Street District Special Area Plan

While the FLU plan ensures compatible and coordinated growth throughout Dublin, in key areas of the City where substantial development or redevelopment activity is likely, Special Area Plans (SAP) provide an illustrative framework for additional development design guidance. The plans are general guides and are not necessarily to be interpreted or applied literally. The subject site is located within the Sawmill Center Neighborhood of the BSD SAP. The plan notes that the area is a prime location for a major walkable mixed-use district, where success depends on adequate density to support such activity. Small-floorplate, multi-tenant office buildings, combined with multi-family, are goals. Higher density would also support structured parking, an essential ingredient to a walkable district. The SAP specifically says, "Density and walkability are the foundations of the market opportunity in this district; without them, the market will only support the lower-value, auto-oriented development pattern that exists – and has struggled to remain economically viable – today."

Future Land Use



Special Area Plan

Bridge Street District

The Bridge Street District (BSD) Code establishes Neighborhood Districts in which special attention to the location and character of buildings, streets, and open spaces is important to fulfilling the objectives identified in the BSD SAP within the Community Plan. Each neighborhood anticipates the conceptual layout of critical elements, including street connections, open spaces, and gateways.

Neighborhood Standards

The site is zoned BSD-SCN, Sawmill Center Neighborhood District. This district applies to most of the commercial areas at the east end of the BSD. The standards of the BSD SCN create an active, walkable destination by integrating a strong mix of uses. Development within this district relies on the provision of physical and visual connections through improved access and enhanced visibility from Sawmill Road, as well as links to adjacent neighborhoods and open spaces. The district is subject to specific neighborhood standards defined in the Code, allowing a wide variety of building types and permitted uses, and establishing open space patterns and location requirements for building types.

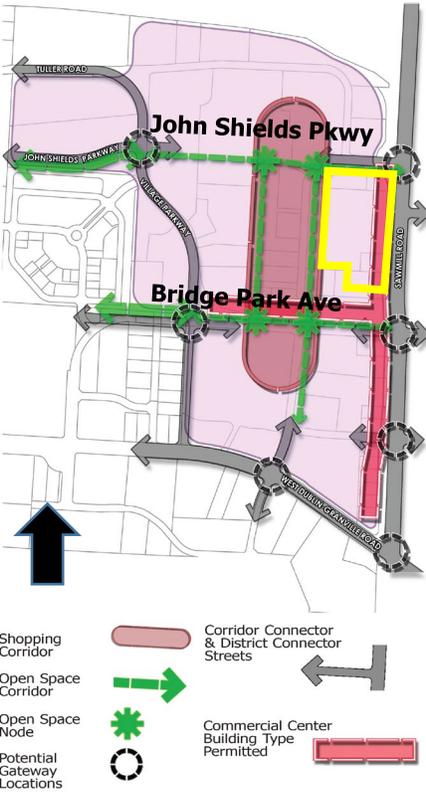
This location permits Commercial Center building types, in recognition of its location directly along Sawmill Road. These buildings are described as 1-3 Stories, as depicted in Code § 153.062(O)(7).

A Shopping Corridor is located west of this site and encompasses both sides of Dublin Center Drive. The intent is for continuous mixed-use street frontages with retail and restaurant uses at the ground floors, including well-defined pedestrian realms. Patios, pocket plazas, and spacious walkways are anticipated. Specific requirements for the Shopping Corridor are outlined in Code § 153.063(B)(5). Further, a potential Gateway is shown at the reconfigured intersection at John Shields Parkway and Sawmill Road.

Street Network, Lots, and Blocks

The Code also provides a hierarchy of requirements for establishing a gridded street network. The BSD Street Network Map, part of the Thoroughfare Plan and the Code, identifies three families of streets: 1) Corridor Connectors, 2) District Connectors, and 3) Neighborhood Streets. Several streets are also listed as Principal Frontage Streets (PFS), which carry additional requirements due to their importance.

FIGURE 153.063-A. ILLUSTRATION OF SAWMILL CENTER DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS



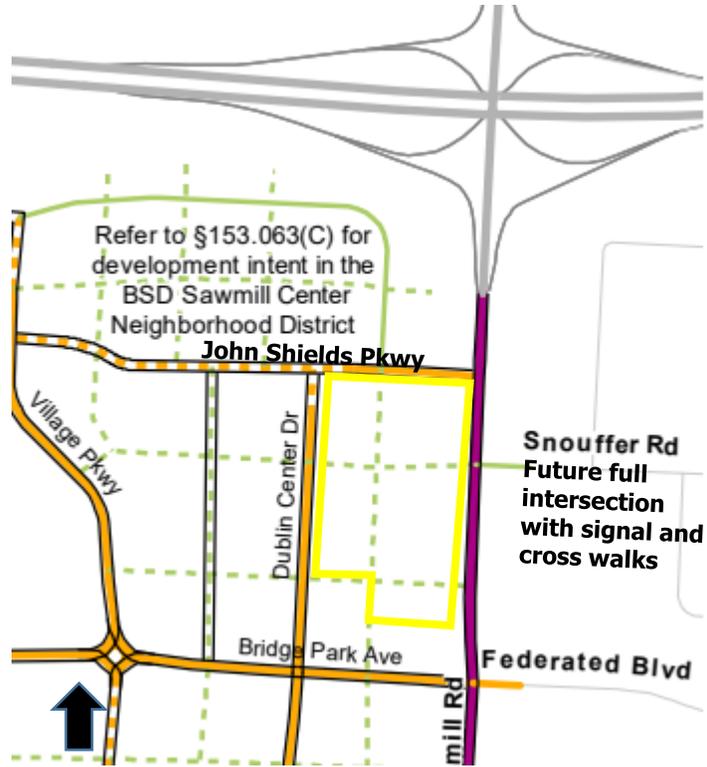
Neighborhood Map

The site has frontage on multiple streets: Sawmill Road, a Corridor Connector/PFS, and Dublin Center Drive, a District Connector/PFS. John Shields Parkway is also planned to be extended as a District Connector/PFS and to follow the current alignment of the east-west portion of Dublin Center Drive, connecting directly to Sawmill Road in the future. This will create a new intersection with the north-south portion of Dublin Center Drive at the site's northwest corner. The street network plan also shows future Neighborhood Streets (green dashes) through the site, both north-south and east-west.

Development along PFSs should include front-facing building façades and limited conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Street Network Map

Driveways are not permitted along a PFS without City evaluation and approval. Where lots have frontage along multiple PFSs, as in this case, Corridor Connector streets are to be prioritized to maintain PFS character, per Code § 153.061(D)(3)(c). This means that vehicular access is not permitted on this street if a suitable alternative can be provided. Two access points are currently shown off of Dublin Center Drive; however, the inclusion of the anticipated Neighborhood Street might better address access. Similarly, an access point ("grand entry") is shown on Sawmill, but may be better elsewhere: the signalized intersection at Snouffer Road should be extended to the west, as studied in collaboration with the City of Columbus in 2019.



4. Project

The project includes demolition of the two existing buildings, construction of a new rectangular building at the corner of Sawmill and the future John Shields Parkway, and additions onto the Rite Rug building to the south. Both buildings are shown to meet the Required Building Zone distances and to have a total street frontage of 45 percent when the site is examined as a whole. The larger building at the northeast corner will include a showroom, administrative offices, service bays, and parts. The southern building is proposed for an additional showroom and administration, a detail and body shop, and a car wash. The existing on-site bodywork will be moved from the center of the property to the new south building, with vehicle storage likely behind it. Overall, parking will be increased from approximately 920 spaces to 1070.

This existing use is permitted to remain as outlined in Code § 153.059(B)(5). Expansions of these uses are permitted when the standards of Code § 153.059(B)(5)(d) are found to be met by the Commission. These include:

- No substantial detrimental effect on adjacent uses or lots, nor the hindrance of adjacent lots to develop according to Code;
- Compliance with all parking, sign, and other regulations required by Code; and
- Compliance with any reasonable conditions to ensure no adjacent use or community will be harmed.

Further, the conversion of the Rite Rug site, currently retail, to vehicular sales, rental, and repair, would require a Conditional Use, as shown in Table 153.059. Conditional Uses require compliance with Code § 153.236, briefly:

- Harmonious with the Code and Community Plan;
- Compliant with development standards;
- Harmonious with the existing/intended character of the vicinity and not changing the essential character of the area;
- Not hazardous or have a negative impact on existing/future uses;
- Adequately served by public facilities;
- Not detrimental to the economic welfare of the City;
- Not detrimental to persons, property, or general welfare;
- Designed for adequate vehicular access;
- Not detrimental to property values; and
- Not impede normal/orderly development and improvement of the surrounding property for uses permitted in the district.

Regarding utilities, should the design progress, the applicant will need to work with the City to address sanitary sewer, water service, and stormwater connections for the site. More specifically, existing sanitary service may need to be redesigned for future conditions. Water service will be coordinated with the City of Columbus, and the currently shared service to the Dublin Food Pantry needs to be resolved, as noted below. Stormwater will need to be brought into compliance with current regulations, and discharge shall be coordinated with Columbus, since the flow is toward Sawmill Road.

5. Neighbor Concerns

There is a private Common Area Agreement between the current owner of the Rite Rug property and adjacent parcels. The Agreement is included in the packet for informational purposes: the City does not enforce these private agreements, yet the Commission should be aware of them. In the attached Agreement Exhibit, Parcel A is the newly relocated (2 years ago) Dublin Food Pantry, directly west of Parcel C, the Rite Rug property. The current owner of the Rite Rug parcel is a party to the Agreement.

The City received an email from the Dublin Food Pantry, attached, and had a follow-up meeting with representatives. They shared several concerns about this proposal, including that they currently use the Rite Rug parking lot for volunteer parking and all deliveries, and that they share water service with Rite Rug. They fear that, with the proposed layout, their loading dock will not be accessible, they will lose their volunteer parking, and their overall business will not function well. The email indicates that the Pantry has met with Germain representatives and that Germain has acknowledged that it does not want to harm the Pantry. If the project

progresses, these concerns will have to be addressed between the two private parties. Currently, Columbus Water does not permit “sharing” of water service, which will require resolution between the parties should the Germain proposal proceed.

6. Questions for Discussion

The following discussion questions are intended to facilitate non-binding feedback from the Commission to the applicant. Staff asks the Commission to also provide feedback on other elements of the proposed development not framed with the questions below.

1) Is the Commission supportive of the proposed use based on the BSD expansion standards and Conditional Use requirements?

The Commission would have to find that two groups of standards are met for this project to move forward: the expansion of an existing use and a separate Conditional Use. The pertinent Code § 153.059 language for expansion of uses has remained consistent throughout the history of this Code. The PZC should also consider the intent language for the Sawmill Center Neighborhood and whether significant additional investment for this use is appropriate, given the mixed-use, walkable environment desired in the Bridge Street District. The Commission may also be mindful that previous renovations to existing buildings have been granted under this same Code. This is the first time the Commission has seen a comprehensive redevelopment of the site.

Contextually, the ZoneIn Columbus initiative, which would apply directly across Sawmill Road from this site, envisions mixed-use, walkable development and denser housing. The concept shifts away from auto-oriented development by infilling existing parking lots, thereby supporting future LinkUS Bus Rapid Transit along Sawmill Road. According to the ZoneIn Columbus website, the area directly east of this site is the Community Activity Center, intended for residential, retail, and service uses of 5-7 stories. No parking is permitted between the principal buildings and adjacent streets; up to 80% building coverage is permitted; and there does not appear to be a minimum building height. There are no time estimates for when this vision might be achieved.

These future visions should be balanced with Germain Honda’s history as an economic driver in Dublin. The applicant is aware of the requirements of the BSD and has stated in their narrative that they are ready to meet the District’s building location, open space, and architectural requirements, which would need to be fully addressed with future submissions. The Commission has previously acknowledged the difficulty in merging this specific use with the BSD vision and has allowed flexibility. The Dublin Food Pantry is also an important partner in the City, providing necessary services to those in need, and their operational concerns will need to be considered should the proposal progress.

Overall, staff sees reasonable opportunities for greater compatibility with the vision for the SCN; however, it would take some additional design. Topics for consideration include:

- Using garage structures and/or automated systems for most vehicle storage, thus removing most surface parking from the site. This is becoming more and more common for auto dealerships across the country, especially in high-density, high-land-cost areas. It keeps inventory out of weather, minimizes vandalism, and increases inventory capacity. This idea was shared with the applicant’s representative and was noted as a costly solution.

- Garage structures could be lined with other uses as anticipated in the Code, thus supporting the BSD intent along the west side of the site, transitioning from this use to the finer-grained Shopping Corridor as anticipated.
- Note that a Waiver would be required for additional parking, where up to 150% of the minimum required parking for the use is permitted in Table 153.065-A. Permitted are 242 spaces; shown are 1070, all surface. This could be offset with a design that best meets the Code.
- See further opportunities in discussions below, which could also help address the requirements for expanding an existing use and Conditional Use criteria.

2) Is the Commission supportive of the street network as shown, or how could the project be more responsive to the BSD Street Network map?

Additional right-of-way will be needed along Sawmill Road, and the City of Columbus's Multimodal Thoroughfare Plan will be used to define the required dedication, which varies from 160 to 220 feet. This will affect building layout, as the current plan shows the buildings at the Required Building Zone based on the existing right-of-way. Right-of-way for the streets in Dublin is to follow the Envision Dublin Multimodal Thoroughfare Plan and the BSD Street Network. The applicant is aware of this need.

The street network is an essential means to achieve the BSD vision. The applicant is not currently showing any of the required future Neighborhood Streets that create the necessary fine-grained scale of the neighborhood and streetscape, nor the future Dublin Center Drive and John Shields Parkway intersection or the extension of a street at the signalized Sawmill Road and Snouffer Road intersection. The main access point to the campus is shown on Sawmill Road ("grand entry" on drawings), a PFS that generally restricts driveways and would require City Engineer approval. The anticipated Snouffer Road signalized intersection, the best location for a Sawmill Road connection, is prevented from completion by the currently proposed building location in the northeast corner of the site. Completion of this intersection will accommodate northbound left-turn movements and pedestrian crossings with crosswalks and signals, including across Sawmill Road, making this a high-priority location. This access point would not be a full movement intersection, because a center median would restrict east-west movements. The "grand entry" would not have full movements either for the same reason, and the northbound left would not be allowed.

Adherence to the BSD Street Network would result in blocks that could contain only parking. Both structured and surface parking are permitted in the SCN. However, surface parking is not permitted in locations required to be occupied by a principal structure, per Code § 153.065(B)(1)(b); this may prove a difficult hurdle, when combined with required street rights-of-way of 60'. Waivers could potentially be granted with appropriate site design offsets.

Finally, a new intersection configuration at the extension of John Shields Parkway and Dublin Center Drive is recommended, per the Envision Dublin Multimodal Thoroughfare Plan and BSD Street Network. The resulting 90-degree intersection could potentially open more land for the site. Improvements to the public infrastructure in and around the proposed site are typically the responsibility of the applicant. All required bike and pedestrian facilities will also be the responsibility of the applicant, although none are yet indicated on this plan.

3) Is the Commission supportive of the site layout as shown?

The new buildings appear to achieve the Code-required 45% Front Property Line Coverage for a Commercial Center, per §153.062(O)(7), when the site is considered as a whole. The location of the main building, however, prevents the completion of the Snouffer Road signalized intersection as previously noted. Staff has asked the applicant whether the proposed functions can be split into smaller, individual buildings that better support the BSD Street Network. The applicant's representative stated that this arrangement is not ideal but has been done on sites where the service location is remote. The proposed buildings also do not create the anticipated Shopping Corridor on Dublin Center Drive.

The corner of John Shields Parkway and Sawmill Road is highly visible and marks the first entry into Bridge Park, though it is restricted to right-in/right-out movements. Staff is concerned that the service portion of the building is shown at this pivotal location, which is identified as a potential Gateway in the SCN map. At a minimum, the showroom/administration building should be on this corner, with the service area hidden more toward the rear of the site or architecturally disguised farther south on Sawmill Road. A gateway feature/open space should be incorporated, with an opportunity to further enhance the existing COTA bus stop at this corner. Dublin, via Capital Improvement Plan funding, is making enhancements at this bus stop, including a shelter, bike racks, trash/recycle receptacles, and sidewalk connections along Sawmill Road. This concept was discussed with the applicant.

While very early in the development process, the proposed site plan does not include pedestrian facilities, and the overall layout is not conducive to pedestrian movement. This topic has been discussed during previous applications, with those improvements committed to later phases. Staff recommends that, with this redevelopment proposal and the necessary Conditional Use, greater progress needs to be made on this goal.

Other considerations include ensuring that car haulers are unloaded on-site, not on public rights-of-way. It is unclear where this might occur; however, the applicant understands this requirement. Both bike and EV parking are required, in accordance with the Code and recently adopted plans. The proposed car wash on the south side has an opening that faces Sawmill; how that would be screened is not yet clear.

4) Is the Commission supportive of the architectural design approach?

According to the applicant, the proposed buildings directly fronting onto Sawmill Road would meet the Honda branding requirements, which the applicant describes as sleek, modern, and with clean lines. The Honda blue, plus corporate signage, is also anticipated, as shown on page 2 of the submittal, although previous applications were approved with alternate silver. The applicant further states that the rear of the buildings could comply with BSD standards. The Commission should consider whether this is adequate, as these buildings do not front directly onto Dublin Center Drive.

Again, the use of structured parking could greatly help make the transition from corporate architecture to Bridge Street design. If the garages formed the west edge of the site, and contained liner uses facing west and wrapping around corners, the transition could be a successful compromise. These uses could also enhance the Germain customer experience

by providing activities and resources during wait times while aligning with the Shopping Corridor vision.

5) Any other considerations by the Commission.