

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUBJECT: Conditional Use Application CU-24-07 – Kennel and Dog Training Facility with Breeding

DATE: August 8, 2025

☒ **RECOMMENDATION**

☐ **POLICY DISCUSSION**

BUDGET INFORMATION: N/A

☐ **STATUS REPORT**

ANNUAL-

☐ **OTHER**

CAPITAL-

COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED ON: August 18, 2025

PURPOSE: Make a recommendation to the Board regarding revocation of Conditional Use 24-07: Celeste Wood is was granted a conditional use for a kennel and dog training facility with breeding at 786 Stonepile Road, map parcel 065 155A, in the LI, Low Intensity District. The applicant has failed to meet the conditions.

BACKGROUND / HISTORY:

1. The applicant was given approval for a conditional use to operate a kennel and dog training facility with breeding at 786 Stonepile Road on July 15, 2024.
 2. A condition imposed by the Board of Commissioners stated a building must be constructed to house the animals within twelve (12) months of approval. The building was not constructed.
 3. In addition, staff has learned from Animal Control that the applicant, Celeste Wood, has had her state breeders license revoked by the Georgia Department of Agriculture and has failed to renew her Habersham County business license.
 4. For these reasons, staff recommends revoking CU-24-07.
-
-

FACTS AND ISSUES: Staff forwards this recommendation of revoking CU-24-07 for failing to meet the conditions approved by the Board of Commissioners.

OPTIONS: The Board of Commissioners could act on this application as follows:

1. Approval of the request as recommended by staff;
 2. Denial of the request as submitted; or
 3. Commission defined alternative.
-
-

RECOMMENDED SAMPLE MOTION: I motion to revoke CU-24-07.

DEPARTMENT:

Prepared by: Mike Beecham

Director _____

**ADMINISTRATIVE
COMMENTS:** _____

DATE: _____
County Manager

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
6:00 P.M., MONDAY, JULY 15, 2024
HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM
295 LLEWELLYN ST, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523**

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, July 15, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse located at 295 Llewellyn St, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present was Chairman Ty Akins, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Bruce Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Meador, Commissioner Jimmy Tench, County Manager Alicia Vaughn, County Attorney Donnie Hunt, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

Chairman Akins called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioner Tench lead the invocation.

Commissioner Palmer the pledge of allegiance.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Commissioner Harkness inquired as to the correctness of item "e. Consider/Approve June 24, 2024 Called Meeting Minutes" and item "f. Consider/Approve June 26, 2024 Called Meeting Minutes". He wanted to check to make sure that the meeting dates and types were correct. County Clerk Brandalin Carnes informed Commissioner Harkness that the dates were correct and went on to explain that the June 24th meeting was for the second budget hearing and the June 26th meeting was held for the purpose of a continuing budget resolution as a result of the FY 2025 budget not being approved at the June 24th meeting. She informed him that both meeting types were called meetings.

Commissioner Harkness requested the removal of item "b. Recognition: Helen Barrett" from the presentations/announcements portion of the agenda, stating that Ms. Barrett is unable to attend tonight's meeting and that she will be recognized at a future Commission meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Palmer, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the agenda with the aforementioned change.

PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- a. Employee Spotlight:
 - 1. Todd Roper
 - 2. Rodney Landivar
 - 3. Jacob Palmer

- b. ~~Citizen Recognition: Helen Barrett~~ – This item was removed during the adoption of the agenda.

Chairman Akins informed those present that Commissioner Palmer would not be able to attend the Commission meeting next month on August 19th as he has been asked by the Association of County and City Governments (ACCG) to serve on a committee that will be reviewing the curriculum for

their County Commissioner Certification program. Commissioner Palmer has taken most of the courses that are offered by ACCG and will be able to provide valuable insight from the participant's side. These classes are extremely valuable to both new and tenured Commissioners as they go over many topics that are essential to running a county government. Chairman Akins stated that the Commission is proud that Commissioner Palmer has been asked to participate in this endeavor, as the classes are very helpful.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

- a. CU-24-07: Applicant Celeste Wood Seeking Conditional Use for Kennel and Dog Training/Breeding Facility on 1.5 Acres Located at 786 Stonepile Road (Parcel 065 155A) in the LI, Low Intensity District.

Planning Director Mike Beecham addressed the Commission. Applicant Celeste Wood is seeking a conditional use for a kennel and dog training facility with breeding on a 1.5-acre parcel (065 155A) located at 786 Stonepile Road in the LI, Low Intensity District. Ms. Wood's property is surrounded by a 33-acre parcel of vacant conservation land that is owned by her family. Ms. Wood currently owns nine (9) dogs, but she wishes to increase this number to twenty (20) dogs and eventually construct a 2400 sq ft building to house the animals. She would have to breed and sell several dogs to be able to afford to pay for this building, so the animals would be kept in outdoor enclosures with individual dog houses for the foreseeable future. Her intent is to breed and sell pure breed German Shepherds. She has stated that she has the appropriate Georgia Department of Agriculture licenses needed to breed and sell the animals. Planning Department staff became aware of the request when the applicant wanted to upgrade her existing mobile and pet grooming business license to include the training, kennel and breeding. This is what initiated the public hearing process. The County has received several complaints about barking on the property.

Mr. Beecham asked the Commission if they had any questions regarding the conditional use application?

Commissioner Palmer asked how long Ms. Wood has been participating in these activities on her property? Mr. Beecham stated that there are nine dogs currently located on the property, but to the best of his knowledge these are Ms. Woods' personal dogs. He informed the Commission that Habersham County does not have an ordinance limiting the number of personal animals someone can have on their property. Ms. Woods seeking a business license is what triggered the need for a conditional use application.

County Attorney Hunt asked the applicant if she would like to speak on behalf of her application?

Ms. Wood feels that she has been misunderstood by some, as she does not want to increase the number of dogs she owns to twenty (20), she wishes to have the ability to house up to twenty (20) dogs which would include dogs that she is boarding for other people. She would like to correct what she feels were some discrepancies from the Planning Commission meeting. It was brought up at this meeting that Animal Control was called to her property several times for barking complaints. This is true, however at the time the complaints occurred they had several hunting dogs of their own and were also temporarily having to house both her sons hunting dogs as well. Hound hunting is an important part of her husband's heritage, and they had owned hunting dogs years before the neighbors started complaining. They have lived on the property for twenty-two years and have had

anywhere between 15-20 hunting dogs. When they saw the barking was causing so much disruption, they complied with animal control and started finding housing for the dogs and now they no longer have any of them, so the source of the barking is gone. It was also incorrectly stated that Georgia Department of Agriculture inspector came out several times while she was trying to acquire her kennel license and she failed their inspection each time. This is not true, as she had only requested the inspector to come to her home one time before and the inspector did not fail her, but rather informed her that she needed to clean up the property from where her son had gutted a truck to make it more presentable if she was going to have a business. She complied with this request and the inspector returned in June and she passed the inspection for both her kennel license and her pet dealer license. Ms. Wood stated that she loves dogs, and that German Shepherds are her passion. She is a certified dog trainer and has obtained several certifications through the American Kennel Club. Her German Shepherds are all imported, champion bred and cost her between \$3500-\$4500. They are all registered and have undergone genetic and health testing. To prevent any disturbances to her neighbors, she has relocated the kennel on her property, rearranged dogs within the kennels, put bark collards on the dogs and added shade cloth to the back of the kennel. She is looking into putting up a privacy fence to put a barrier between herself and the neighbors. Her goal is to acquire this business license to be able to breed and sell her quality German Shepherds and conduct training sessions at her home, where all her equipment is located. She currently has a 17x9 foot room in her home she can use for training sessions, however she intends to build an indoor/outdoor kennel with climate-controlled living quarters for the dogs that includes an indoor training area for her to work in. Any puppies she sells will come with folder that has several health guarantees/records, genetic information and a contract which includes a provision stating that if the purchaser ends up not being able to keep the puppy that she will take it back and rehome it herself, so it stays out of the animal shelter.

County Attorney Donnie Hunt asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak in favor of the application.

Mr. Harold Pope spoke in favor of the application. He stated that he lives in the area and that has passed by the applicant's property several days a week for the past three years that he has lived there. He feels that he has seen an improvement in the property and that the applicant has addressed many of the concerns that were brought up by the Planning Commission. Mr. Pope further stated that the property is in a rural area, and other than barking he doesn't see any harm that would come from her operating her business there.

Mr. Bobby Gibby spoke in favor of the application. Mr. Gibby is the father of the applicant. He knows personally how much effort his daughter has put into fitting into the community. He feels that the problems with the neighbor came from the hunting dogs that she previously owned. The dogs that his daughter owns now are high quality and trained German Shepherds that are not prone to barking.

No one else wished to speak in favor of the application after Mr. Gibby.

County Attorney Donnie Hunt invited those who wished to speak in opposition of the application to address the Commission.

Mr. Daniel Meyers spoke in opposition to the application. He has gone over to his neighbors home multiple times to complain about the barking dogs, and the last time he went they had around forty

dogs, with twenty inside the house and twenty outside the house. While it is an improvement that they are down to nine dogs, this can quickly turn into ninety once they start breeding them. He asked the Commission who they think is going to end up listening to all of them bark? When he had called Animal Control for the barking previously, he was told there was nothing they could do as the dogs had all their shots and paperwork. He was told that he would have to get video of the dogs barking, but he would have to physically go onto their property to do this. While he feels that the applicant putting up a privacy fence would be an improvement, he is concerned that the number of dogs is going to grow well beyond the twenty. He wants to know when they plan to build the kennel? He informed the Commission that he has put up with these barking dogs for years, and asked them what he was supposed to do, as he can't sell his house due to the fact anyone who comes to look at it is going to hear the dogs. He will admit the German Shepherds are not as noisy, but he is concerned that the noise will increase as the business grows with more animals.

No one else wished to speak in opposition to the application after Mr. Meyers.

Commissioner Akins stated that it looked as though this was a tough decision for the Planning Commission as well, as the vote to recommend denial was 3-2. He asked Mr. Beecham if the primary concern was the number of times Animal Control had been called? Mr. Beecham confirmed that the barking was the primary issue. The Planning Commission had asked if Ms. Wood could go ahead and initiate building her proposed 2400 square foot kennel and training structure. If she was able to do so he feels that they would have recommended approval with the condition of this building being completed, however the applicant stated she wasn't financially able to do so at this time.

Commissioner Palmer asked if there had been any complaints about the barking since the applicant got rid of her hunting dogs and switched to owning German Shepherds? Animal Control Director Madi Nix stated that most of the complainants have gotten frustrated and stopped calling as they don't feel like calling Animal Control is going to make a difference. Commissioner Palmer stated that his experience is that hound dogs tend to bark a lot more than German Shepherds.

Commissioner Harkness asked how the property is zoned? Mr. Beecham informed him it is zoned LI, Low Intensity. Commissioner Harkness asked Mr. Beecham to explain what Low Intensity means. Mr. Beecham stated that the county intends for LI, Low Intensity to be residential. Mr. Beecham informed him it was zoned LI, Low Intensity. Commissioner Harkness asked him to explain what this means. Mr. Beecham stated that the low intensity districts are composed primarily of single-family residential homes with a few small commercial uses if those businesses don't generate much traffic or noise that would disturb the neighborhood. Commissioner Harkness asked how the unified development code that is currently being worked on would treat the LI, Low Intensity usage? Mr. Beecham informed him that it would tighten up the ordinance so that the Planning Office would be able to automatically deny some of the requested usages up front without having to keep bringing so many conditional use applications in front of the Commission.

Commissioner Palmer stated that he realizes that the applicant was unable to construct the proposed building at this time, however he wanted to know if the Planning Commission had looked at the condition of a barrier fence? Mr. Beecham stated that they did not, but this is something the Commission could propose as a condition.

Commissioner Harkness stated that he was born and bred in Habersham County, and he understands people wanting the right to do as they please with the property they buy or inherit, however the problem is that as the county grows different property uses conflict with each other. He cited as an example that it would work out to have chicken farm built next to a subdivision. He expressed that the Commission must think of the county overlay and the greater good of the citizens when they make decisions regarding these conditional uses.

Commissioner Akins informed everyone present that the Commission is having a review completed on all the current land uses in the county. They should see some comprehensive results in a few months. He realizes that there have been multiple problems, which have led to the County being overrun with conditional uses over the years. This is a burden on the code enforcement to keep up with as well.

Commissioner Palmer asked if, as part of the motion, the Commission could require the proposed building to be completed within a given time frame? County Attorney Hunt informed him that this is allowable, and that if the building is not completed in that time frame the business would need to be moved. Commissioner Palmer inquired if the other Commissioners felt like 24 months was an appropriate time frame to allow for the applicant to acquire financing for the building? Commissioner Akin stated that he felt that giving the applicant a year would be very lenient in consideration of the neighbors. Commissioner Palmer asked the applicant if she could construct the building within a year, and she stated she needs the training business to be able to generate the income needed to fund the building. Commissioner Palmer informed her he is trying to find middle ground to allow her to be able to operate her business and get the building constructed.

Motion by Commissioner Palmer, seconded by Commissioner Akin, to approve conditional use application CU-24-07 with the condition that the building has to be built within 12 months to continue the operation of the business. Motion carries (3-2) with Commissioner Mealor and Commissioner Tench dissenting.

Commissioner Harkness wanted to make it clear to the applicant aware that his vote to approve this conditional use was contingent on the building being constructed and that if this fails to occur the applicant will not be allowed to continue operation of the business.

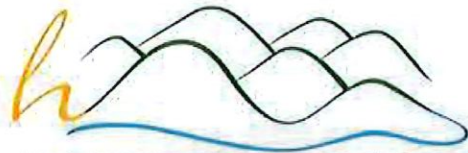
PUBLIC COMMENTS:

a. Harold Pope: FY 2025 Budget

Mr. Harold Pope state that he realizes that there has been debate about whether to give County employees should receive a raise of some form and how much. He knows that the costs of goods have gone up dramatically for everyone including County employees. He supports the Commission in moving forward with giving employees a 4% increase.

b. Heather Benton: Support for Recreation Department Gymnastics Program

Ms. Benton is aware of the difficult task that the Commission has in trying to reconcile a contentious budget. She understands that there are critical services that need to be funded and that the Commission is looking into making cuts. She has heard that one of the cuts that the Commission is considering is to the gymnastics budget, as they believe that this program could be



HABERSHAM COUNTY
GEORGIA | Est. 1818

HABERSHAM COUNTY

Planning & Development Department
130 Jacob's Way, Clarkesville, GA 30523
706-839-0140 www.habershamga.com

Habersham County Planning Commission Conditional Use Staff Report

APPLICATION NUMBER: CU-24-07

REQUESTED ACTION: Celeste Wood is seeking a Conditional Use to operate a dog kennel & training facility. The tract is further identified as Map 065 Parcel 155A consisting of 1.5 acres.

Synopsis: Initial inquiry regarding this was addressed when applicant came in to apply for a business license. Plans are to use this property for a dog kennel & training facility.

PETITIONER: Celeste Wood

PROPERTY OWNER: Blake Wood

EXISTING USE: Residential

PROPOSED USE: Dog kennel / training facility.

LOCATION: 786 Stonepile Rd.

PARCEL SIZE: 1.5 acre(s)

MAP#: 065 PARCEL(S)#: 155A

EXISTING & FUTURE LAND USE DISTRICT:

	Current Zoning District	2029 Future Land Use Designation
Parcel	LI	Rural
North	AGRI	Rural
East	AGRI	Rural
South	AGRI	Rural

MEETING DATES: Planning Commission: July 2, 2024

Board of Commissioners: July 15, 2024

PLANNING ANALYSIS:

1. The existing land uses and zoning classification of nearby property;

The current zoning classification of this parcel is LI- Low Intensity and the land use of this parcel is Rural. All adjoining parcels are zoned Agriculture.

2. The suitability of the subject property for the zoned purposes;

The property is designated as LI – Low Intensity. This district will provide and protect an environment suitable for single-family detached residential uses or individual lots, conventional subdivisions and master planned developments, together with such other accessory uses as may be necessary to and compatible with low density residential surroundings.

3. The extent to which the property values of the subject property are diminished by the particular zoning restrictions;

Property values are not diminished by the current zoning. It is the intent of the Conditional Use process to permit specific uses compatible with a residential area. The process will assist in determining the need for buffers, parking, hours of operation and other concerns that may be presented.

4. The extent to which the diminution of property values of the subject property promote the health, safety, morals or general welfare of the public;

Property values are not diminished by the current zoning.

5. The relative gain to the public, as compared to the hardship imposed upon the individual property owner;

A Dog Kennel & Training Facility should not be a hardship to the community if used within certain guidelines.

6. Whether the subject property has a reasonable economic use as currently zoned;

Property does have a reasonable economic use within the LI District.

7. Whether the proposed zoning will be a use that is suitable in view of the use and development of adjacent and nearby property;

The compatibility of the proposed use with adjacent properties is critical. Specific criteria will need to be addressed such as hours of operation, capacity, noise, sanitation, buffers, etc., to promote harmony and balance in an existing rural neighborhood.

8. Whether the proposed zoning will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property;

The existing land use patterns in the area is primarily rural. However, during certain times, an increase in traffic, noise, etc. may be an issue that needs to be addressed.

9. Whether the zoning proposal is in conformity with the policies and intent of the land use plan;

The Comprehensive Plan identifies this area as Rural. The scope of the proposed use will support compatibility and balance if certain criteria is met.

10. Whether the zoning proposal will result in a use which will or could cause an excessive or burdensome use of existing streets, transportation facilities, utilities, or schools;

The increase of noise and traffic could possibly be an issue to the neighborhood.

11. Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use and development of the property which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal;

The balance of the above mentioned issues at this location are essential to maintaining the integrity of the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed use may need to have restrictions placed upon it to support harmony and balance in this rural neighborhood.

Staff Recommendation:

The Conditional Use request is to allow the applicant to operate a Dog Kennel & Training Facility on their property. Whispering Wood's Kennel & Dog Training Facility is a family owned and operated business. Ms. Wood's is a certified dog trainer. She is also a certified AKC evaluator and judge. The vision of the applicant is to become a premier place for clients that are looking for their first or next German Shepherd. Plans are to breed quality German Shepherd puppies as well as offer multiple training options for all breeds and provide boarding. Currently the facility houses 9 German Shepherds, 8 of which were imported from Serbia. The training program offers multiple levels of puppy and dog training. Hours of operation may vary. The kennel will be open from 9am to 5pm. The dog training will be offered at different times depending on the need. Long term goals of the applicant are to expand the facility from a (9) run kennel to a (20) run enclosed canine barn. Staff feels that there are several issues that will need to be addressed if the Conditional Use is approved. Extra noise and traffic along with odor could pose some issues and be problematic to the community. Certain restrictions and conditions will need to be put in place to promote harmony and balance in this rural neighborhood. With all things considering, staff recommends denial of CU-24-07.

Staff recommends:

☐ Approve as Submitted
☒ Denial

☐ Approval with Conditions
☐ Table

Planning Commission recommends:

☐ Approve as Submitted
☒ Denial (7-2-24)

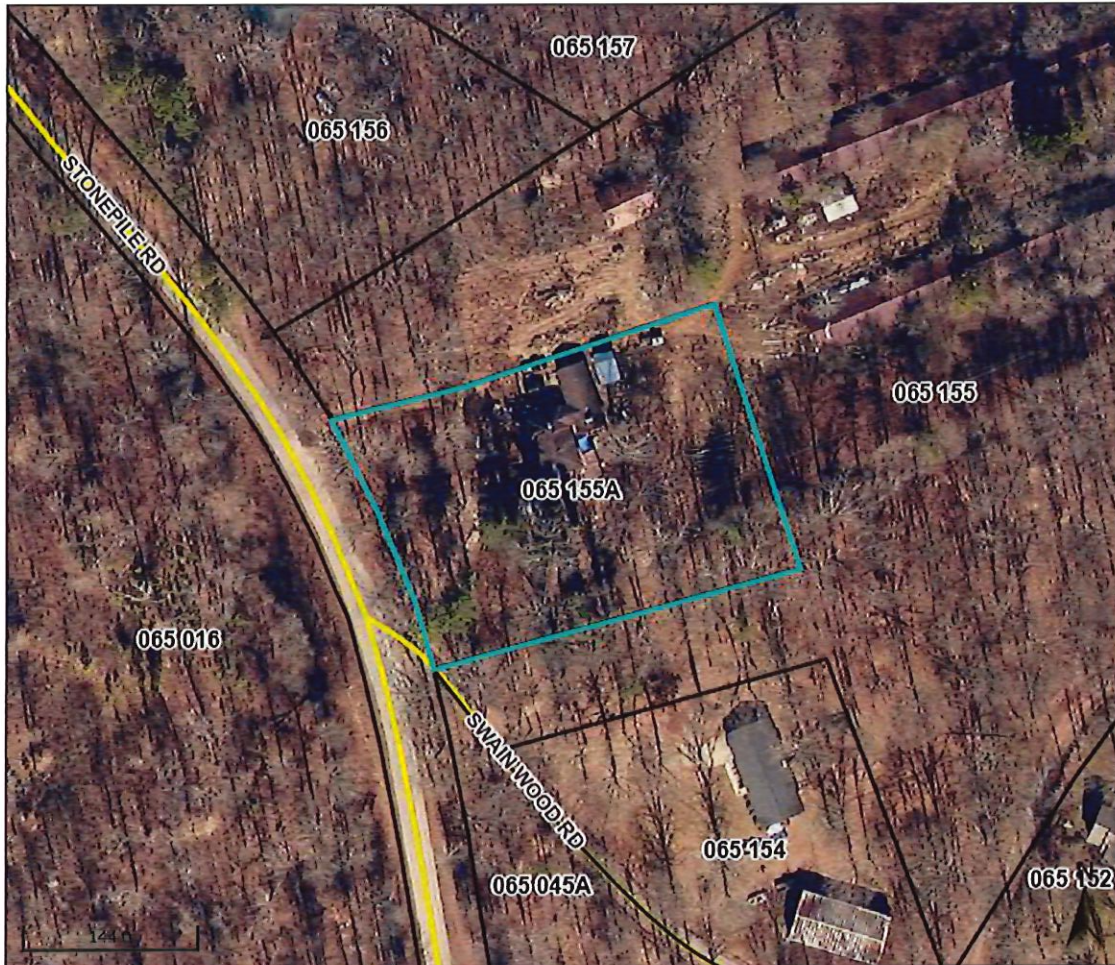
☐ Approval with Conditions
☐ Table

Board of Commissioners Decision:

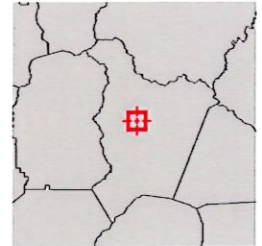
☐ Approve as Submitted
☐ Denial

☒ Approval with Conditions (7-15-24)
☐ Table

- Canine barn / building must be built within 12 months of approval which was 7-15-24



Overview



Legend

- Parcels
- Roads
- Flood Map

Parcel ID	065 155A	Alternate ID	3628801	Owner Address	WOOD BLAKE JONATHAN
Sec/Twp/Rng	n/a	Class	R		786 STONEPILE RD
Property Address	786 STONEPILE RD	Acreage	1.5		CLARKESVILLE GA 30523
	01				
District	01				
Brief Tax Description	11-87 PB 67-29 TR1 DB 1338-666				
	(Note: Not to be used on legal documents)				

Flood Map Disclaimer: The data shown is provided as a reference only and does not imply accuracy with regard to horizontal or vertical location. This data is not to be employed to determine any base flood elevations for National Flood Insurance.

FEMA provides access to the National Flood Hazard Layer (NFHL) through web mapping services. The NFHL is a computer database that contains FEMA's flood hazard map data. The simplest way for you to access the flood hazard data, including the NFHL, is through [FEMA's Map Service Center \(MSC\)](#). If you want to explore the current digital effective flood hazard data in a map, the best tool to use is the [NFHL Viewer](#). From the NFHL Viewer, you may view, download, and print flood maps for your location.

Date created: 6/24/2024

Last Data Uploaded: 6/23/2024 10:05:41 PM

Developed by Schneider
GEOSPATIAL





