



# Open Letter Regarding 2026-4652-ZC and Any Successor Conditional Use Permit

## Proposed Dirt Pit / Commercial Excavation in the Waldheim/Bush Area of St. Tammany Parish

To Councilwoman Cheryl Tanner, Director Ross Liner, Parish President Mike Cooper, the St. Tammany Parish Planning and Zoning Commission, and affected residents of Waldheim, Bush, and surrounding rural communities:

Residents for Rural Integrity writes with continued and heightened concern regarding zoning case **2026-4652-ZC**, originally noticed as a request to rezone approximately **53 acres** in rural St. Tammany Parish from **L-1 Large Lot Residential District, RO Rural Overlay, and MHO Manufactured Housing Overlay** to **I-1 Light Industrial and Warehouse District**.

According to the parish agenda, the affected tract is located on the **west side of Ben Williams Road, north of LA Highway 21, and south of Hidden Valley Road, in Ward 5, District 6**. The site is also at or near **30°33'54.9"N, 90°00'35.2"W**, approximately **30.565250, -90.009778** in decimal format.

This area may be identified by a Bush mailing address, but residents also know it as part of the Waldheim-area rural community. Either way, this is not an industrial corridor. This is rural residential land where families already live, where residents rely on private wells, where roads were not built around repeated heavy industrial truck traffic, and where the Rural Overlay exists for a reason.

At the June 2 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, the applicant's representative clarified on the record that the intended use is not a warehouse, light manufacturing facility, or ordinary light-industrial use. The stated purpose is to operate a **dirt pit**, also described as **commercial**

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**excavation**, involving removal of dirt from the site, trucking that material elsewhere, and backfilling with dirt, tree material, and green natural material.

That clarification does not reduce the concern.

It confirms it.

This is no longer a question about vague industrial zoning. It is now a confirmed proposal for a dirt pit / commercial excavation operation behind rural homes.

We respectfully oppose this proposal, whether it returns as an I-1 rezoning, a conditional use permit, a commercial excavation request, or any other successor application for the same tract.

Nothing in this letter should be read as acceptance of a “conditional” version of this project. Likewise, the requests for studies, disclosures, plans, reviews, and public engagement contained in this letter are not conditions under which Residents for Rural Integrity would support the project. They represent minimum transparency and due diligence measures that should be required if the Parish elects to continue evaluating the application.

Residents for Rural Integrity is not asserting that every potential impact discussed in this letter will occur. Rather, residents are asserting that the Parish and the applicant have not yet provided sufficient information to determine whether the proposed use is compatible with surrounding homes, private wells, rural infrastructure, and the goals of the Rural Overlay.

## **A conditional use permit is not a community compromise**

At the June 2 meeting, the applicant’s representative stated that the original I-1 rezoning request may be converted into a **conditional use permit** request.

Under the St. Tammany Parish Unified Development Code, a conditional use is a use marked as “**C**” and subject to approval of the Planning and Zoning Commission. In plain language, that means the use is not simply a matter of right. It requires review, public consideration, and approval under the parish process.



A conditional use permit is a legal approval mechanism.

It is not proof that the use is compatible.

It is not a guarantee that residents will be protected.

It is not a substitute for groundwater review, private-well protection, traffic review, drainage review, environmental permit disclosure, or public trust.

The fact that a dirt pit may now be pursued through a conditional-use process does not make the dirt pit acceptable to the homeowners who would live beside it.

Residents are not asking simply for additional conditions. Residents are questioning whether a commercial excavation operation is compatible with this location at all.

The issue is not whether the proposal is pursued through rezoning or a conditional use permit. The issue is whether the applicant can demonstrate that a 53-acre commercial excavation operation is compatible with the purpose of the Rural Overlay, surrounding residential properties, existing infrastructure, and the long-term vision for this area. The burden remains on the applicant to demonstrate that compatibility.

## **The original I-1 request was too broad, and the conditional-use pivot does not solve the core problem**

The original request sought **I-1 Light Industrial and Warehouse District** zoning. At the meeting, the applicant's representative stated that the applicant did not need or seek broad industrial zoning and acknowledged that industrial zoning could allow a variety of uses that would be objectionable even to the applicant.

That statement matters.

It confirms the central concern raised by residents: the original request was too broad for this rural residential area.



But converting the request from I-1 zoning to a conditional use permit does not eliminate the underlying impact. The impact is not only the zoning label. The impact is the proposed use: a dirt pit / commercial excavation operation on a 53-acre rural tract near existing homes, private wells, rural roads, and the Rural Overlay.

The parish should not treat this as a paperwork correction.

A dirt pit is still a dirt pit.

Commercial excavation is still commercial excavation.

Heavy trucks, digging, backfilling, drainage changes, dust, noise, and unanswered questions regarding potential impacts to groundwater and private wells do not disappear because the application changes form.

## **The rural overlay should mean something**

The affected property is currently tied to large-lot residential zoning, the Rural Overlay, and the Manufactured Housing Overlay. Nearby residents bought and built in this area because it is rural, quiet, residential, and removed from industrial activity.

The Rural Overlay exists to protect rural land-use expectations. It recognizes that rural communities are different from industrial corridors. Rural residents rely on different roads, different drainage, private wells, larger lots, open land, and a different quality of life.

A 53-acre dirt pit / commercial excavation operation is not compatible with that expectation simply because the applicant seeks permission.

Waldheim, Bush, Talisheek, and surrounding rural communities are not opposed to responsible land use. But responsible land use must be compatible with the land, the roads, the wells, the drainage, and the people already there.

A rural area should not have to become an industrial corridor one approval at a time.



Residents are also concerned about the precedent that approval of this application could create. If a commercial excavation operation is found compatible with this Rural Overlay area, residents deserve to understand what standards will be applied to future applications proposing similar uses in other rural communities.

Therefore, residents also respectfully ask the Parish to explain how the proposed use aligns with the goals and vision of the New Directions 2040 Comprehensive Plan, including the preservation of rural character and protection of existing rural communities. While the Comprehensive Plan may not specifically address commercial excavation operations, the Parish should clearly identify the specific goals, policies, and objectives that support that conclusion.

## **Affected homeowners are not abstract names in a file**

One directly affected homeowner is a **100 percent disabled veteran** who purchased a rural home for peace, solitude, and stability. That concern should not be treated as an inconvenience to a development file. It is the human reality of this decision.

A disabled veteran who bought into a rural residential area for quiet should not have to face the possibility of years of excavation, heavy equipment, land clearing, truck traffic, dust, noise, backfilling, and unanswered questions regarding groundwater and private-well protection because a dirt-pit request appeared in the zoning process.

Other nearby homeowners have also stated that their properties abut or sit near the proposed site. They came to the June 2 meeting prepared to ask questions. Because the applicant requested postponement, the discussion was limited mostly to whether the matter should be postponed, not the full merits of the proposal.

Many affected homeowners have invested substantial personal savings in their properties and deserve to understand whether the Parish has evaluated the potential impact that a 53-acre commercial excavation operation may have on nearby residential property values. While property values should not be the sole factor in land-use decisions, they are a legitimate concern for families whose homes represent their largest financial investment.

Those homeowners still deserve answers.



They also deserve to be heard before any revised conditional-use or commercial-excavation request advances.

## **Groundwater and private wells are central concerns, not side issues**

Residents in this area rely heavily on private wells. That makes any proposal involving excavation, dirt removal, backfilling, tree material, green material, stormwater movement, or heavy land disturbance especially serious.

Louisiana sand-and-gravel guidance recognizes that groundwater quality matters because a large share of Louisiana residents rely on groundwater for drinking water. That same guidance warns that mining of a potable aquifer can negatively affect the yield of a potable well and recommends checking registered public and private drinking-water wells near proposed sand-and-gravel operations.

That is not speculation.

That is exactly the kind of due diligence this parish should require before even considering approval.

Before any further hearing or vote, the applicant should be required to disclose:

- the proposed maximum excavation depth;
- the depth to groundwater;
- the aquifer or water-bearing zones serving nearby wells;
- the locations and depths of nearby private wells;
- whether any registered or unregistered wells exist within 100 feet, 500 feet, and 1,000 feet of the proposed excavation area;
- whether the excavation could intersect or affect groundwater;
- whether artesian conditions are possible;
- whether dewatering, pit water, stormwater, or process water will require state or federal permits;



- what monitoring will occur before, during, and after operation.

The UDC requires a commercial-excavation site plan to show the depth and slopes of excavation, with depth measurements at different intervals around the excavation. Residents should not have to guess how deep a pit behind their homes may be.

## **Nearby wells need more than promises**

Residents should not be forced to wait until a well fails, turns cloudy, loses pressure, or shows contamination before the parish asks who is responsible.

Before any approval is considered, the applicant should be required to provide a written private-well protection plan. That plan should include:

1. Baseline testing of nearby private wells before any land clearing, excavation, hauling, filling, or operation begins.
2. Baseline water-level and flow documentation so later changes can be compared against pre-project conditions.
3. Testing for turbidity, sediment, bacteria, metals, and other water-quality markers relevant to the proposed operation.
4. Ongoing monitoring during operations and after major site changes.
5. A clear complaint and inspection process for affected residents.
6. Immediate temporary water supply if a nearby well becomes unusable, contaminated, cloudy, loses pressure, or otherwise appears affected.
7. A binding obligation to repair, replace, deepen, treat, or otherwise restore affected wells if impacts are reasonably connected to the operation.
8. Financial assurance through a bond, escrow, insurance policy, or other enforceable mechanism sufficient to pay for well testing, emergency water supply, well repair, well replacement, water treatment, road damage, drainage repair, environmental cleanup, and site restoration. The amount should be determined before approval and should remain sufficient throughout the life of the operation.

If this project cannot carry the real cost of protecting surrounding homes, wells, roads, drainage, and rural quality of life, then the project is not compatible with this location.



The burden should not be shifted onto homeowners.

## **Backfill and “green material” require clear, enforceable limits**

At the June 2 meeting, the applicant’s representative stated that the pit would be backfilled with dirt materials, tree materials, and green natural materials, and that it would not be used for storage of C&D materials or other materials in the excavated hole.

That statement must be made enforceable.

Before any approval is considered, the parish should require a binding written list of allowed and prohibited materials.

The approval should expressly prohibit construction and demolition debris, household waste, commercial waste, treated wood, tires, petroleum-contaminated material, hazardous material, unpermitted solid waste, and any other material not specifically approved in writing.

The parish should also require an enforceable explanation of what “green material” means.

Will it be stored?

Will it be ground?

Will it be chipped?

Will it be buried?

Will it be burned?

Will it be composted?

Will it be hauled in from off-site?



How will it be inspected?

Who verifies what enters the site?

Who enforces the limits?

Those questions matter because the difference between “clean backfill” and a nuisance or disposal operation is enforcement.

## **Drainage and stormwater cannot be handled later**

Commercial excavation has the potential to alter site grades, surface-water movement, and drainage patterns, making drainage and stormwater evaluation essential.

Louisiana sand-and-gravel guidance recognizes the importance of understanding site drainage, surface-water movement, groundwater conditions, erosion control, sediment control, haul-road construction, and stormwater management. These are not minor details to be left until after approval.

Before any hearing or vote, the applicant should provide:

- a drainage plan showing water moving onto and off the site;
- a stormwater plan;
- sediment controls;
- runoff routes;
- receiving ditches, streams, canals, wetlands, or neighboring properties;
- inspection procedures;
- stabilization plans;
- site-restoration plans;
- disclosure of any LDEQ, LPDES, SWPPP, wetlands, or U.S. Army Corps requirements.

The parish should not allow rural homeowners to become the test case for whether these controls work after the damage is done.

## Traffic and road burden remain major concerns

The proposed use is not passive.

The applicant's representative stated that dirt would be removed from the site and trucked to road, building, and other sites in the parish or region. That means truck traffic is part of the business model.

Residents have already raised serious concerns about Ben Williams Road, LA Highway 21, Hidden Valley Road, Highway 40, and surrounding rural routes.

Heavy truck traffic can contribute to road wear, safety concerns, noise, dust, and increased infrastructure burdens, which should be evaluated before any approval.

Before any approval is considered, the parish should require a full traffic-impact review addressing:

- proposed truck routes;
- daily truck counts;
- loaded and unloaded truck weights;
- hours of operation;
- turning movements;
- sight distances;
- road widths and shoulder conditions;
- culverts and drainage crossings;
- school-bus conflicts;
- emergency access;
- dust and mud tracked onto public roads;
- cumulative burden from other existing pit or hauling activity in the area;
- road bond requirements;
- who pays for road damage.

The UDC itself recognizes that road bond requirements may apply to commercial excavation if required by Public Works. That question should be answered before approval, not after.



## **A community meeting should be required before any vote**

At the June 2 meeting, the applicant requested postponement. Residents who came prepared to speak were limited mostly to whether the case should be postponed, not the full merits of the dirt pit.

Commissioner Martino asked whether the applicant would be open to a community meeting because residents had questions. The applicant's representative stated that the applicant preferred to complete and file the site plan first, then determine whether a community meeting was needed.

The site plan should be filed.

Then a community meeting should be held.

Then the matter should be considered by the parish only after affected residents have had a meaningful opportunity to review the plan, ask questions, submit records, and organize a response.

A revised application should not be rushed back to the agenda before residents can see what is actually being proposed.

## **District 6 voters are watching closely**

District 6 residents are watching this process closely.

They are watching how the parish handles rural land.

They are watching how the parish treats private wells.

They are watching how the parish responds when homeowners ask direct questions.

They are watching whether rural residents are expected to carry the burden of a private dirt-pit operation.



They are also watching whether decisions are based on facts, transparency, and the long-term interests of the community.

We respect the formal zoning process. We also respect the need for public officials to remain fair and impartial. But impartiality does not require silence on transparency, infrastructure, groundwater, public notice, rural compatibility, or the protection of residents.

Public confidence is not protected by avoiding the hard questions.

It is protected by answering them.

## We are asking for specific action

Residents for Rural Integrity respectfully asks Councilwoman Tanner, Director Liner, Parish President Cooper, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and all relevant parish departments to take the following actions:

1. **Do not approve 2026-4652-ZC, any I-1 rezoning, any conditional use permit, or any successor commercial-excavation application for this tract.**
2. **Require the applicant to publicly confirm whether the I-1 rezoning request is being withdrawn, amended, replaced, or kept active.**
3. **Require the applicant to identify the exact UDC section authorizing the proposed conditional use permit and explain how a dirt pit / commercial excavation is compatible with L-1 Large Lot Residential zoning, the Rural Overlay, nearby homes, and private wells.**
4. **Require a complete site plan before any further hearing**, including excavation footprint, maximum excavation depth, slopes, buffers, access points, haul roads, drainage patterns, backfill areas, staging areas, and final restoration plan.
5. **Require the applicant to disclose the anticipated operational life of the excavation project**, including projected start date, estimated duration of excavation activities, expected completion date, and timeline for final site restoration and reclamation.
6. **Require a groundwater and private-well impact review** before any hearing or vote, including nearby well inventory, depth-to-groundwater analysis, aquifer information, and potential impacts to private wells.



7. **Require a private-well protection plan** including baseline testing, ongoing monitoring, emergency temporary water supply, a clear complaint process, and a binding obligation to repair, replace, deepen, treat, or otherwise restore wells affected by the operation.
8. **Require financial assurance** in the form of a bond, escrow, insurance policy, or other enforceable mechanism sufficient to cover well damage, emergency water supply, road damage, drainage impacts, environmental cleanup, enforcement costs, and site restoration, with the amount established before approval and maintained throughout the life of the operation.
9. **Require a traffic-impact study** for Ben Williams Road, LA Highway 21, Hidden Valley Road, Highway 40, and any other expected truck routes.
10. **Require a Public Works road-bond determination** before any approval.
11. **Require public disclosure of all intended permits** related to land clearing, excavation, fill, stormwater, wetlands, air quality, dust control, water discharge, solid waste, green material, backfill, and site restoration.
12. **Require enforceable material restrictions** expressly prohibiting C&D debris, household waste, commercial waste, treated wood, hazardous material, unpermitted solid waste, and any material not specifically approved in writing.
13. **Require a community meeting after the complete site plan is filed and before any vote is taken.**
14. **Hold the decision until affected residents receive meaningful answers**, not just notice of another hearing.

## **This is not opposition for opposition's sake**

We are not writing because we oppose every land-use request.

We are writing because this request asks rural residents to accept a dirt pit behind their homes.

We are writing because the original I-1 request was too broad.

We are writing because the conditional-use pivot does not make the proposed use acceptable.

We are writing because nearby homeowners should not be asked to carry the burden of groundwater risk, road damage, dust, noise, drainage changes, truck traffic, property-value

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uncertainty, and loss of rural peace so that a private commercial excavation operation can proceed.

The residents who live beside this property are not obstacles.

They are the households that will live with the consequences.

Their wells matter.

Their roads matter.

Their homes matter.

Their peace matters.

Their investment in rural life matters.

Their trust in parish government matters.

A 53-acre dirt pit / commercial excavation proposal in a rural residential area should not move forward on incomplete information, shifting application paths, or promises that cannot be enforced later.

Waldheim is not opposed to progress. Bush is not opposed to progress. Rural St. Tammany is not opposed to progress.

But this community is opposed to a dirt pit behind rural homes.

Respectfully,

**Residents for Rural Integrity**  
**Keep Bush Rural. Build Bush Strong.**