City of Conyers-Rockdale County Workshop

Blueprints for Successful Communities – Spring 2003

BLUEPRINTS

FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

The Georgia Conservancy -- Blueprints Partners 2003

American Institute of Architects- Atlanta

American Council of Engineering Companies of Georgia

American Society of Landscape Architects, Georgia Chapter

Association County Commissioners of Georgia

The Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership

Institute of Transportation Engineers

Georgia Institute of Technology, College of Architecture

Georgia Municipal Association

Georgia Planning Association

Greater Atlanta Homebuilders Association

Homebuilders Association of Georgia

National Association of Industrial and Office Properties

Southface Energy Institute

Urban Land Institute- Atlanta District Council

City of Conyers-Rockdale County Workshop
Blueprints for Successful Communities

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Overview

Blueprints is an education and technical assistance program of The Georgia Conservancy designed to facilitate community-based planning across the state. The program is committed to achieving successful communities by creating sound conservation and growth strategies, and building consensus for action.

Georgia is home to an abundance of natural and cultural resources. Our development patterns over the last 50 years present a very real threat to these resources and to quality of life as a whole. Sprawling, decentralized development, where people must depend on automobiles, is expensive for local governments to serve and has a staggering effect on the environment. Vehicle emissions create toxic air pollution. Stormwater runoff from asphalt poisons rivers and streams. Thousands of acres of farms, woodlands, and open space are lost to wasteful, non-sustainable forms of development.

The Georgia Conservancy partnered with the Urban Land Institute and the Greater Atlanta Homebuilders in 1995 to host its first Blueprints for Successful Communities Symposium. Currently the Conservancy maintains an active partnership with fifteen organizations. These diverse organizations and their members provide a great deal of understanding and expertise in the relationships that exist between land use, public infrastructure, economic growth, and environmental quality.

Prior to the Conyers-Rockdale effort Blueprints has addressed multi-jurisdictional watershed planning, heritage corridor preservation, location of commuter rail stations, inner city neighborhood issues, and other planning opportunities all through a collaborative planning process.

Blueprints Principles

- *Maintain and enhance quality of life for residents of the community*
- *Employ regional strategies for transportation, land use, and economic growth*
- *Consider the effect of the built environment on the natural environment as well as history and culture*
- *Employ efficient land uses*

Why Blueprints Conyers-Rockdale?

Rockdale County and the county seat, Conyers, are located in the Metropolitan Atlanta region, the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country. Recent population estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that two counties bordering Rockdale County (Henry and Newton) were among the ten fastest growing counties in the entire country – measured as change in projected population from 2001 to 2002.

The performance of the housing market in Rockdale County in 2002 indicates that it too is experiencing significant growth. Not only did Rockdale County have the largest percentage growth in new housing sales in 2002, it was also one of only two counties in the Atlanta region to have a positive increase in existing home sales. This certainly suggests that the county is positioned to attract continued growth in the future.

Unmanaged growth, however, may become a fiscal burden on local governments, rather than producing the fiscal benefits that often are presumed to be associated with growth. Already in 2003 Rockdale County has adopted a temporary moratorium on certain types of residential development to allow for officials and staff to identify areas that are appropriate for various residential densities. The County will identify areas where higher density residential development is appropriate in terms of fitting in with adjacent uses. The County has also adopted an "interim development controls" as a result of another planning initiative that will limit permitting in the Salem Road corridor. While the controls are in effect, the County and consultants will develop permanent controls that will better serve the corridor.

The Conyers/Rockdale Blueprints process began when a citizen member of CR-Pride contacted the Georgia Conservancy to ask for assistance with growth management planning across the county. TGC staff made a presentation to the CR-Pride board and several elected officials from both the county and the city, along with staff and volunteers. It was agreed that there should be further discussion of what projects would best be assisted through Blueprints. In a follow up meeting this most pressing issue emerged -- the abandonment of commercial areas, and the subsequent spread of new commercial development further from existing infrastructure of roads and utilities. TGC staff and Georgia Tech faculty toured the SR 20/138 corridor, and all agreed that a target area within the corridor could be selected.

The Conyers-Rockdale Blueprints effort is focused on an area that should be attractive for future growth and redevelopment, while also limiting infrastructure investments necessary to support development. CR-Pride, elected officials, as well as City and County staff recognized that the SR 20/138 corridor and adjacent greenfield areas provide an area where growth should be encouraged. Other portions of the County are currently under development pressure but may require more extensive infrastructure investments. The area of interest in the Blueprints process is likely more equipped to handle future growth in that it has existing infrastructure capacity. The area is however infrastructure-challenged in terms of roadway demand along segments of SR 20/138, as well as issues associated with the I-20 interchange. Any effort to mitigate the impacts of growth in the corridor would likely require adding capacity to the overall network, exploring non-automotive options, and managing demand through land use planning and design. Additionally, Rockdale County was recently awarded a $1 million direct appropriation from Congress to address beautification and economic revitalization issues in the SR 138 corridor.

Three community design workshops were a part of the Conyers-Rockdale Blueprints. Each were designed to reach consensus about corridor redevelopment issues by focusing on 'greyfield' and 'greenfield' areas (see definitions on page 4).

Community Design Workshops

A primary component of the Blueprints process is the community design workshop. These workshops allow participants to discuss pertinent issues in the area of concern, as well as possible solutions and strategies. The diverse nature of the Steering Committee that guides the overall process and directly participates in the workshops produces results that are sensitive to competing interests and represent a common vision for the area. This document reflects the outcomes of the three workshops that were a part of the Conyers-Rockdale Blueprints effort. A list of Steering Committee members is included at the end of the report.

Photos from workshop

What is a 'greyfield'?

The U.S. EPA defines greyfields as 'abandoned, obsolete, or underutilized properties such as regional shopping malls or strip retail developments'.

As may be gleaned from the above definition, the term greyfield is typically applied to individual properties that may no longer be economically viable. Public policy concerns associated with greyfields include a loss of tax base, declining community aesthetics, inefficient uses of existing infrastructure, and loss of open space. The appearance of a collection of greyfield sites may suggest any number of larger issues including: new competition from other retail centers, changing preferences in retail formats and products, declining access to the area, shifts in the demographic makeup of the area that supports retail development, or other significant shifts in buying power, capital investments, etc.

The SR 20/138 corridor south of Interstate 20 has to this point avoided some of the more damaging outcomes associated with greyfields, but City and County staff and elected officials did recognize that the area was showing symptoms of decline. Vacancy remains low, but large retailers are moving out, or strongly considering doing so. New retail development continues to move south down the corridor, but little reinvestment is occurring closer to the I-20 interchange. Addressing the apparent decline now rather than later may minimize the amount of public investment that would be required in any redevelopment effort, and also do so prior to a significant decrease in tax revenue generated in the greyfield area.

Many communities, particularly in suburban cities and counties, in Georgia may be facing similar situations. The Georgia Conservancy is hopeful that the recommended solutions developed by the steering committee of the Blueprints – Conyers / Rockdale may be appropriate and useful to not only the City of Conyers and Rockdale County, but also to other jurisdictions that may wish to address similar situations.

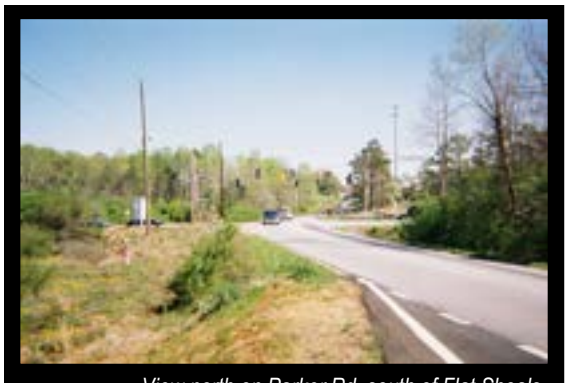
Retail & Commercial Development along SR 20/138

What is a 'greenfield'?

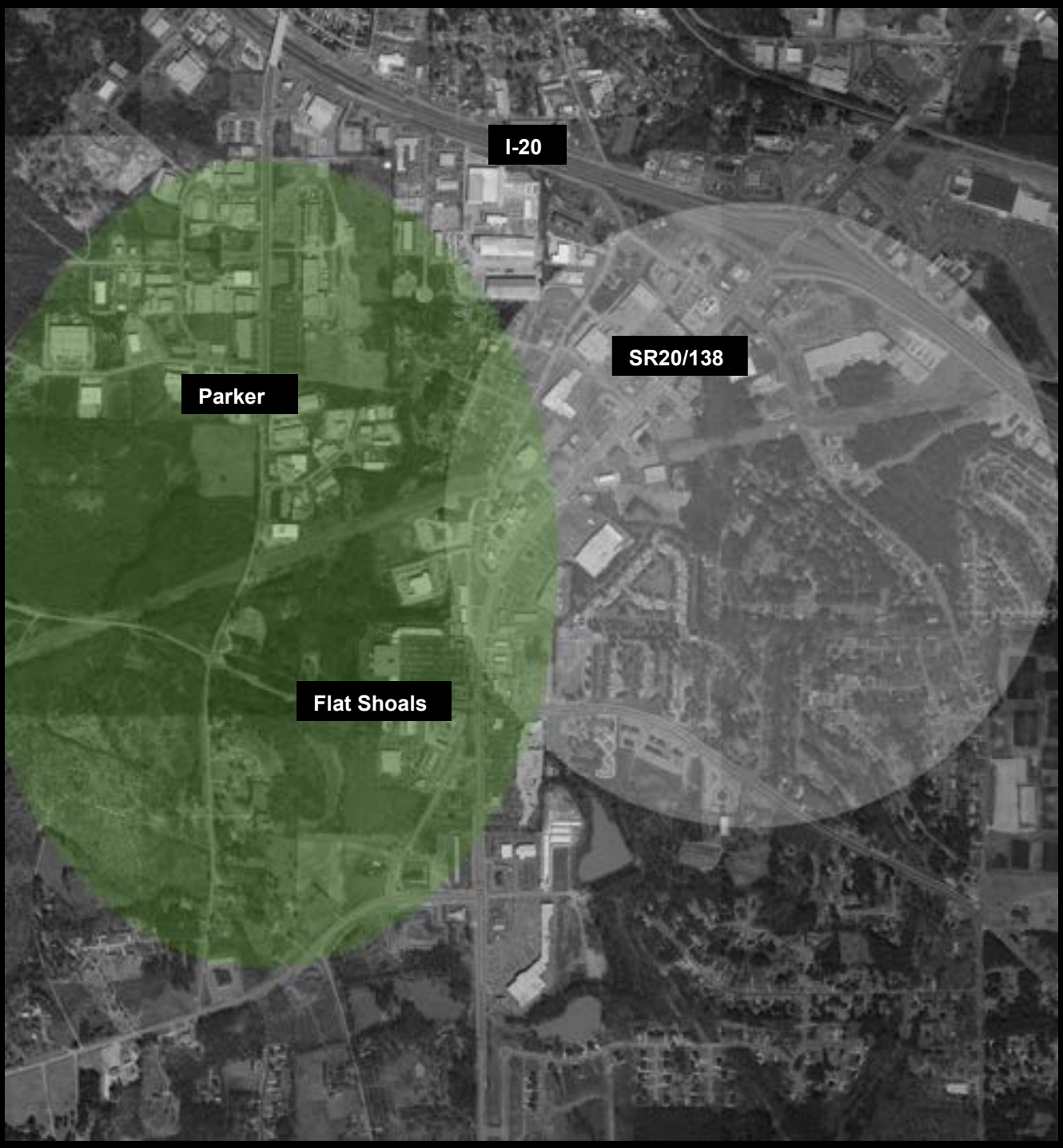
Greenfields are areas of land that have not previously been developed, such as woodlands, farmlands, or fields that are typically on the urban fringe. Many businesses and industries prefer developing greenfields to avoid the complications involved with redeveloping currently built-up areas. Continual development of greenfield sites leads to a loss of open space and also may prove difficult to sustain in terms of adequately providing public services.

The Greenfield Site

The Conyers – Rockdale Blueprints effort was designed to address development options at a greenfield site that includes the immediate area surrounding the intersection of Flat Shoals Road and Parker Road, to the east of the SR 20/138 corridor. While the greenfield site is adjacent to the much traveled retail corridor it is at this point largely undeveloped – some properties would more accurately be considered greenfield sites because they have yet to be developed, other properties have minimal existing residential development. Rockdale County is currently planning to widen Parker Road so that it can better serve local traffic traveling across Interstate 20 (Parker Road transverses the interstate). Addressing the greenfield site in addition to the greyfield area is critically important to the success of any effort to revitalize the greyfield area. Improving on the character of the developments that occur at the greenfield site will hopefully reverberate throughout the area, particularly in terms of future greyfield redevelopment in the SR 20/138 corridor.



View north on Parker Rd. south of Flat Shoals



Aerial Map Highlighting Greenfield and Greyfield Study Area

Context

In order to offer future suggestions on land use in the target area, Blueprints first looked at current conditions of housing, retail, and other connected issues. The realities of the larger context area were considered in developing more specific recommendations for the greenfield and greyfield sites.

Housing

Census 2000 information was collected and analyzed for the City of Conyers and two census tracts in the vicinity of the study area (603.05 and 603.07). Tract 603.05 is located north of I-20, and Tract 603.07 is located south of the interstate.

In 2000 the City of Conyers had a higher percentage of multi-family housing than the two census tracts that approximate the study area. In Conyers, multi-family housing has increased from approximately one-third of the housing stock in 1980, to more than half by 2000. The proportion of multi-family housing is greatest in the census tract north of I-20, the target area is located to the south of I-20.

Home ownership increased in the two tracts from 1990 to 2000, but is still considerably higher in census tract below I-20 where most (70%) housing units were owner occupied in 2000. The tract below I-20 was more evenly distributed with a slight majority of homes as rentals (53.0%). The overall share of owner-occupied housing shrunk over the twenty-year period from 1980 to 2000 (to 38%) in the City of Conyers.

There is a clear divide in housing values, as the area north of I-20 contains homes valued at half of those homes that are below I-20. Both tracts however, have median housing values higher than those found in the City of Conyers.

Home sales information for 2002 indicate that the housing market in Rockdale County remains strong. Rockdale County is showing significant growth in both existing and new home sales.

2002 Median Sales Price Existing Homes	
DeKalb County	$161,550
Gwinnett County	$176,200
Henry County	$152,600
Newton County	$127,500
Rockdale County	**$169,900**
Walton County	$145,450

Retail

There is nearly 1.5 million square feet of retail space in more than ten retail centers along the SR 20/138 corridor, both north and south of Interstate 20. Two major regional centers north of the interstate account for well over half of the total retail space in the area. The typical center south of I-20 is a neighborhood center with an average asking rent of $12 per square foot.

The typical retail center in the Conyers-Rockdale trade area lacks, based on consumer expenditures of 2% (versus 4% and 5% for Stonecrest and the Atlanta MSA, respectively), their fair share of apparel and accessory stores.

Based upon a three-mile radius, retail "ring" study, expenditures on department store goods in the Conyers-Rockdale trade area are significantly less than the expenditures for the same goods in the Stonecrest trade area, while residents of both the Stonecrest and Conyers-Rockdale trade areas (5%) spend more than Atlanta MSA residents (4%) in drug or proprietary stores.

Residents of the Conyers-Rockdale trade area (within five miles of the SR 20/138 and I-20 interchange) spend less of their incomes (80%) on consumer goods, in proportion to residents of the adjacent Stonecrest area (97%) as well as those of the entire Atlanta MSA (101%).

2002 Retail Sales		
Total Retail Sales	**Conyers / Rockdale Area**	**Stonecrest Area**
3-Mile	$417,108,171	$215,934,404
5-Mile	$822,864,529	$955,444,217
Apparel Sales		
5-Mile	$18,430,594	$42,994,977

At the five-mile radius for Stonecrest the total retail sales figures and the apparel sales figures are significantly larger than the corresponding figures for the Conyers-Rockdale trade area. This is significant because the apparel sales for the two areas are similar at the three-mile radius, and the total expenditures for Conyers is actually than for Stonecrest area. This could indicate that residents within the three-mile ring are more inclined to shop in town or, in this case, at the SR 20/138 Corridor. Residents outside of this ring appear to be more inclined to shop at Stonecrest, since there is no distance advantage in shopping along SR 20/138.

Transportation

Traffic congestion in the SR 20/138 corridor has become a primary issue of concern. The interface of the corridor with Interstate 20 has become especially problematic. While high traffic counts serve to support retail development in the corridor, they also impair mobility. The concentration of retail establishments along the corridor has in itself resulted in mobility challenges.

View east on Flat Shoals, west of SR 20/138 intersection

Average daily traffic counts between 1999 and 2002 on SR 20/138 proximal to the I-20 interchange are significantly higher than at the other three interchanges in the county. The average daily traffic counts over the four-year period were over 44,000 south of the interchange and 32,000 north of the interchange. The count for SR 20/138 south of I-20 is the highest in the county for any roadway segment other than I-20.

Several major transportation infrastructure investments are scheduled (Programmed and Funded) or under consideration (Programmed) in the area to alleviate congestion and provide for greater east-west connectivity for the area south of I-20. Improvements include:

- Old Salem Rd Connector (Programmed and Funded)
- Parker Rd Phase II (Programmed and Funded)
- Parker Rd Phase III (Programmed and Funded)
- Lakefield Ct Extension (Programmed)
- East Freeway Extension (Programmed)
- Reconstruction 138/I-20 bridge RTP (Programmed)
- Old Salem Rd (Programmed)

SR 20/138 serves as the primary roadway corridor in the study area. The road is currently a six-lane divided arterial highway and provides access to Newton and Henry Counties to the south and Gwinnett County to the north. Old Salem Road, Old McDonough, Iris Drive, Flat Shoals Road, and Parker Road serve as urban collectors. The area also includes local roads that serve primarily residential development, as well as some commercial areas.

Non-automotive transportation facilities are limited. Sidewalks are provided on a limited number of roadways. Additionally, the location of sidewalks directly adjacent to the roadway and the speed of traffic result in an uninviting pedestrian environment.

Sidewalk on SR 20/138

Other Study Area Issues

At the initial meeting of the Steering Committee other issues were identified in the study area including land use issues and other issues that should be considered in moving forward with the Blueprints effort. These other issues include:

- Mixing of uses as a potential solution
- Land use solutions can also address mobility concerns and issues
- Including pending developments (e.g. wetlands plan and village commercial area at Flat Shoals and Parker Rd.)
- Increasing connections between developing areas (greenfield) and previously developed areas (greyfield)
- Some sites may be difficult to develop because of geologic issues (rock)
- Regional air quality situation may impact road expansion
- Is Rockdale 'too suburban' for mixed-use and higher density development?
- How can the needs of the future be implemented now?

All of the above issues were identified prior to beginning the community design workshops. These sets of issues were used to design the workshops themselves as well as providing background information to the stakeholders and to Georgia Conservancy and Georgia Tech staff.

The City of Conyers, Rockdale County, and CR-Pride are working together to address community aesthetics throughout the city and county. The SR 20/138 corridor is of critical importance to this effort.

The City of Conyers and Rockdale County are also currently devoting significant resources to several major planning initiatives. In addition to the Blueprints process the city and county are consulting with URS Corporation to do a complete update of their comprehensive transportation plan, last done in 1988. The final plan will result in a new emphasis on creating and sustaining pedestrian mobility and connectivity. Additionally, the County had contracted with Jordan, Jones, and Goulding to completely revise existing land use and development ordinances and regulations. This process has also included, and will continue to include, substantial public involvement.

Addressing the infrastructure demands in areas such as the SR 20/138 corridor will require significant partnering between the public and private sectors. Updating and expanding road infrastructure, in particular, will require innovative planning and financing. The County must simultaneously address infrastructure needs in developing and already developed areas, such as the SR 20/138 corridor, which given the traditional means of financing such projects may prove to be very difficult. Innovative financing techniques, such as partnering with the private sector may allow for the needs of existing areas to be addressed in a more timely and robust manner.

Site Analysis

Environment

The land forms in the area indicates that the I-20 and SR 20/138 corridors are built along ridge lines, resulting in higher and dryer land being used for primarily commercial uses, and following typical historical development patterns. However, the land falls away on either side of the SR 20/138 corridor along stream valleys, some of which have significant slopes and mature tree cover. This is particularly true of the area in the area of the Flat Shoals and Parker Road intersection, where numerous rock outcroppings, typical of this quadrant of Rockdale County, also can be found. These features partially explain why this area, constituting most of the study area greenfield site, remains sparsely developed.

Land Use

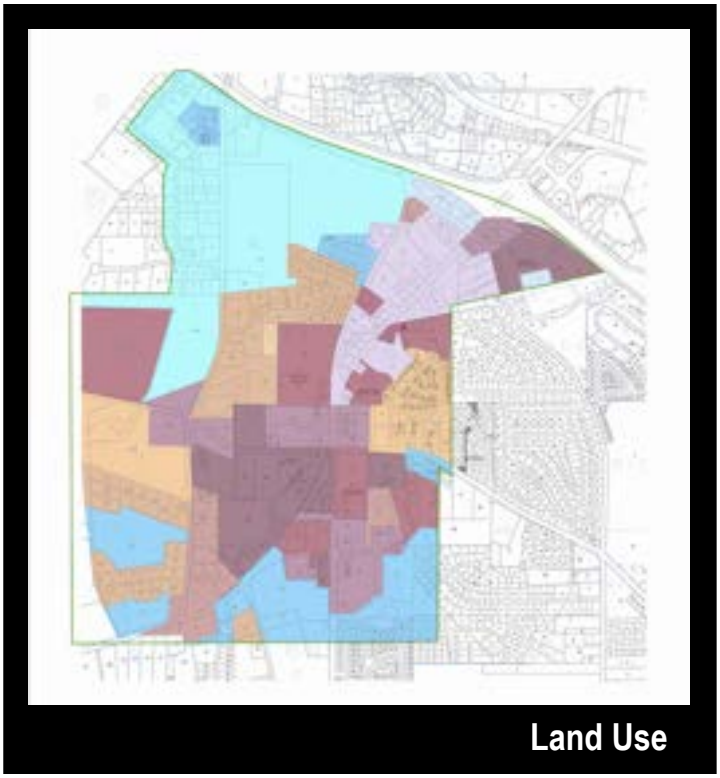
Land uses in the study area reveal the historic commercial, office and industrial development along the I-20 corridor and the corresponding commercial retail development of the SR 20/138 corridor, which has an access point to I-20. There is scattered residential development in the study area at variable densities, some of which is under constant pressure from commercial development. Further to the south of the study area is newer single-family subdivision type development, which is typical of south Rockdale County.

Environment

Water

Slope > 10%

Tree Cover



Land Use

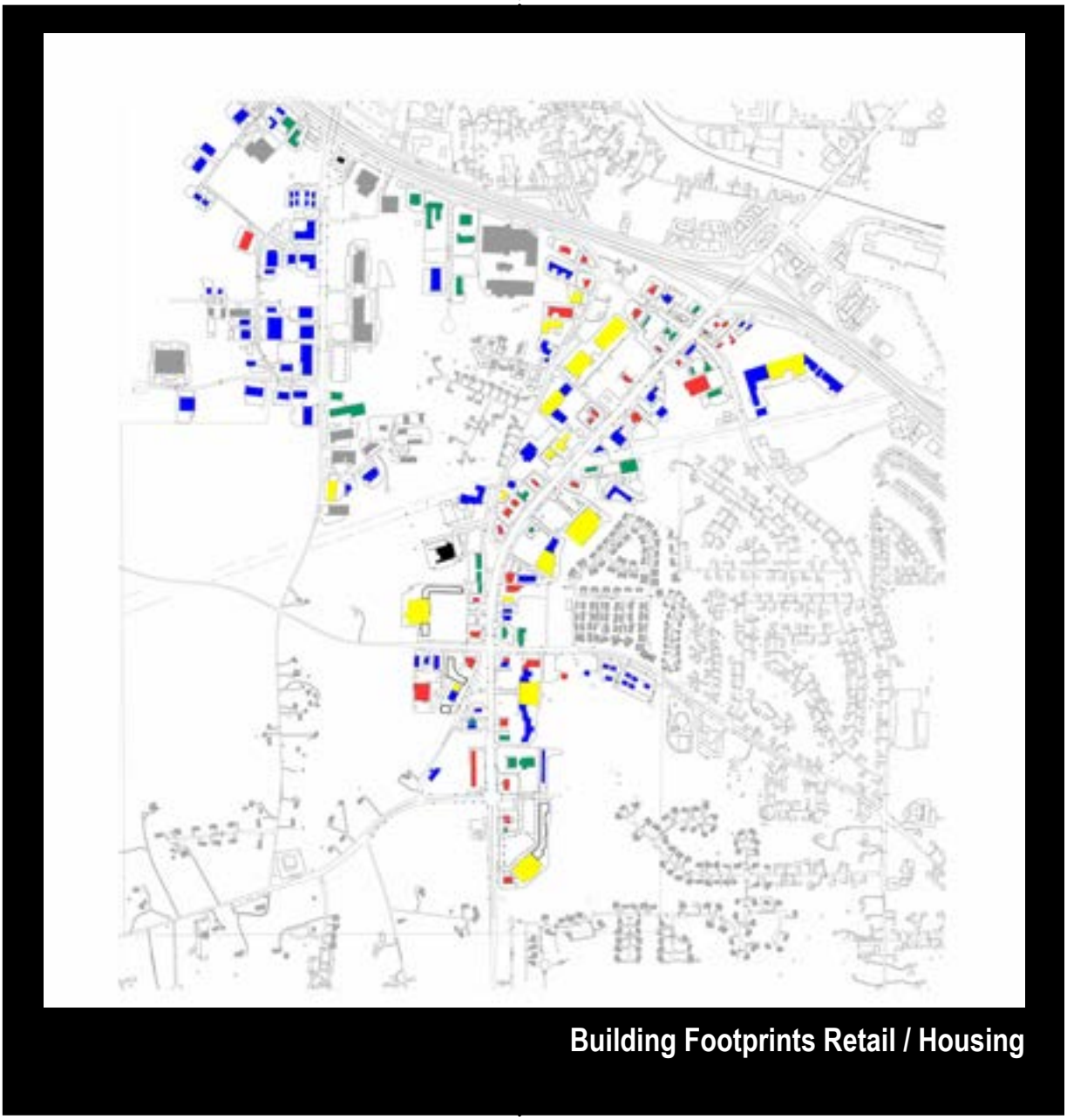
Business / Commercial

Office / Industrial / Manufacturing

Residential

Building Use

A detailed windshield survey was made of the study area to determine the type and condition of non-residential development in the study area. This survey revealed that less than half of this development is actually made up of conventional retail establishments with the majority made up of a variety of service establishments, light industrial and office uses. The physical condition of these structures varies a great deal with less deterioration evident as one moves south along the Ga 138 corridor, corresponding generally to the age of the various retail centers in this corridor.



Building Footprints Retail / Housing

Non-Retail Commercial / Residential
Restaurant / Entertainment
Retail
Service
Auto

Context Themes and Issues

The first of three community design workshops was held on March 13, 2003. The purpose of the workshop was to focus on the context area – the larger area of interest that includes greenfield sites, and much of the GA 20/138 commercial corridor south of I-20. Devoting a workshop to this larger area was critical to understanding the opportunities and constraints that impact more specific site development options.

Stakeholders were divided into three groups, and workshop exercises were conducted at three issue tables, with each group visiting each issue table. The issue tables were: Mobility & Connectivity, Residential Environments, and Commercial Environments. Discussions at each table were productive and provided a great deal of insight into the issues that exist in the larger context area. Below are themes that emerged at the workshop, as well as examples of specific issues that stakeholders identified.

1. Access Problems and Solutions

- Congestion prevalent throughout the corridor
- SR 20/138 and I-20 interchange is severely congested
- Limited non-automotive access
- Pedestrians don't feel safe
- Create more walkable areas in appropriate places
- Need more connections
- Pipeline could provide connections
- Area needs to be more attractive
- Plenty of parking
- Drivers use 'cut-throughs' in parking lots

2. Maintain and Improve the Commercial Corridor

- SR 20/138 corridor has a wide array of commercial/retail establishments
- Area needs more upscale retail and services
- Quality of development improves as you head south
- The context area may support other types of commercial development, e.g. 'neighborhood commercial'
- Commercial areas need to be more attractive
- Need better access between retail centers
- Need better pedestrian areas/facilities
- Less congestion would make shopping more convenient

Cut-through near Post Office

Out parcel on Kroger Shopping Center Site

3. Desirability and Destinations

- Area may support residential development if it become more desirable
- Need more recreational opportunities
- Need more greenspace
- Need more connectivity for all modes of travel
- Parker Road Recreational Facility (formerly Maxell site) will become a destination
- Commercial and retail areas are destinations
- It's unknown how far existing and new residents will walk, but pedestrian environments should be encouraged through the design of new development and redevelopment

Sidewalk on SR 20/128

4. Appropriate Developments in Appropriate Areas

- Public would need to be made aware of the need for greater density
- Increased density may not be accepted by everyone
- There are locations in the context area where increased density could be accepted
- Higher density residential developments should include amenities
- People may not accept apartments
- Mixed use developments would be possible in certain areas
- Mixed use should serve as transition between commercial uses and single family residential areas

5. Salem Gate Shopping Center

- Redevelopment likely to happen
- Redeveloped site could include residential, commercial, and office
- Roadway and interchange improvements in the area could change its character dramatically
- Supporting pedestrian environment may be difficult

Context Area Outcomes

The previous set of themes and issues were a primary outcome of the first community design workshop. Issues and ideas include constraints, opportunities, observations, stakeholder concerns, possible solutions, etc. Conservancy staff and Georgia Tech compiled and reviewed this comprehensive set of issues and ideas and developed three critical components necessary to develop a Strategies Diagram (page 15). The Strategies Diagram should generally reflect the geographic areas where appropriate strategies should be considered as defined by the Steering Committee

As stated earlier, the Steering Committee identified with a great deal of consistency many issues that are facing the area. A set of larger themes emerged. For example, each issue table at the workshop had discussions of the Salem Gate shopping center located in the northeast corner of the context area. Stakeholders universally felt that this older retail center was ripe for redevelopment.

The themes developed from stakeholder input during the workshop were then converted to overarching goals that were intended to be applicable not only in the context area that was part of the Blueprints effort, but also throughout the county where conditions may be similar to those in the context area. The following six goals were developed and presented at the second stakeholder meeting that followed the first community design workshop.

- Build and maintain a transportation network that is multi-modal, efficient, reliable, aesthetically pleasing, and includes numerous connections.
- Prioritize and leverage infrastructure and community investments to improve quality of life.
- Intense uses of land should be located in appropriate areas.
- Ensure that communities are desirable for all users with attention to greenspace, scale, design, and variety of uses.
- Infill and redevelopment opportunities should be identified and explored.
- Create commercial environments that are safe, diverse, accessible, and accommodating.

Photos from workshop

Finally, ten strategies were developed that were informed by the input from the stakeholders during the first design workshop. The strategies were intended to reflect the issues, concerns, and solutions raised at by stakeholders at the first meeting, and would also serve as potential policies and actions that could be encouraged in the area. These strategies were then 'tested' at the final two workshops to gauge their impact on the area.

The steering committee met between the first and second design workshops to review the issues, themes, goals, and strategies that surfaced at the first design workshop.

Photos from workshops

A. Land Use / Development / Redevelopment

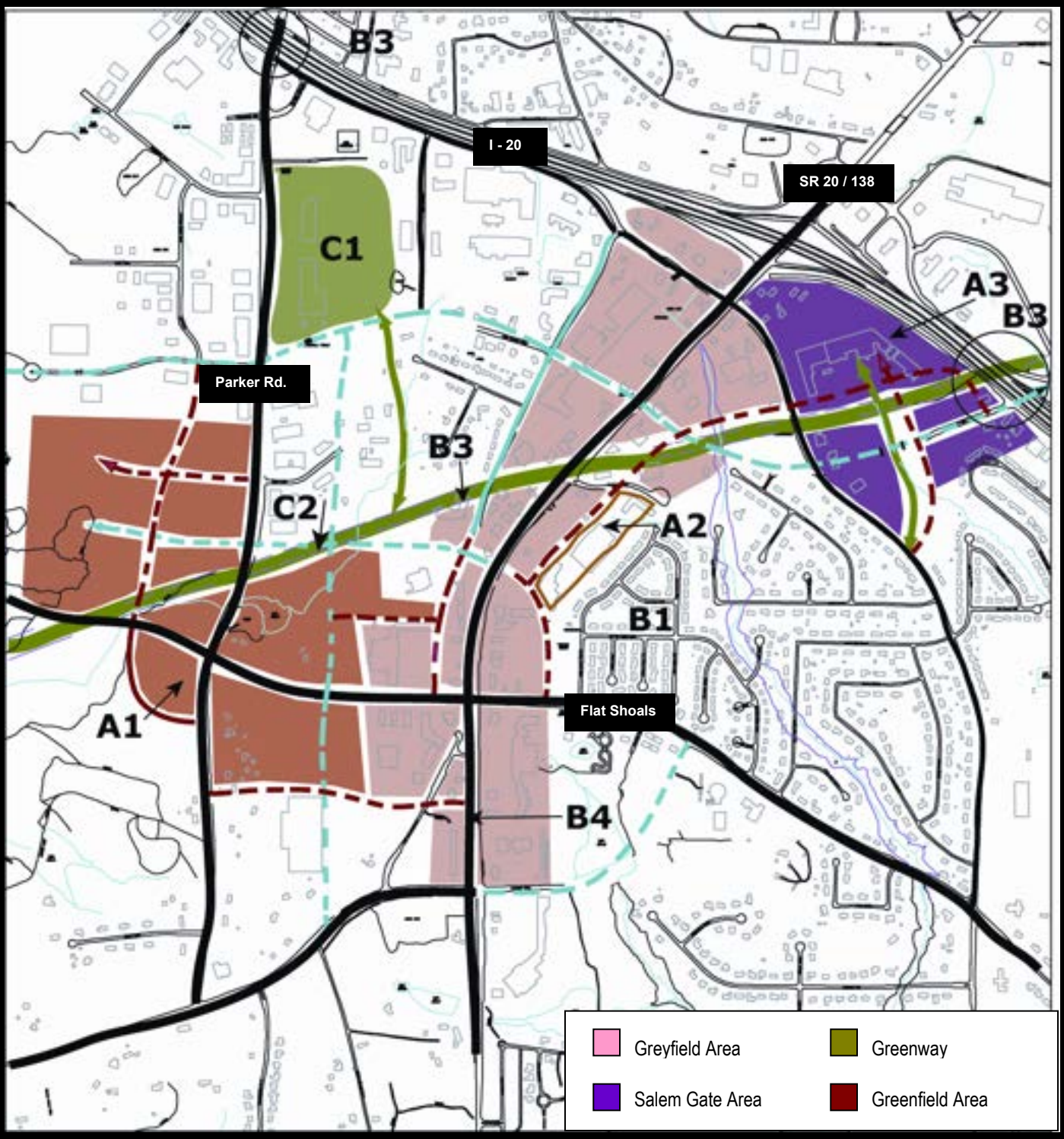
1. Pursue mixed use new development of greenfield sites with emphasis on residential development with a variety of products and prices. Include community oriented commercial uses in the Flat Shoals/Parker Rd intersection area, including a "town square" type park and gathering area.
2. Pursue upgrade, infill, and limited redevelopment of the SR 20/138 corridor, including on-site storm water facilities that could be replaced by a regional storm water facility.
3. Pursue mixed use redevelopment of Salem Gate with emphasis on regional commercial and office uses with some higher density residential development.

B. Mobility and Connectivity

1. Create a "grid" of secondary and tertiary connections in the area to alleviate congestion on arterials and create slower and more walkable community oriented corridors, particularly Ga. 138. Explore "through parking lot connections" as a possible solution.
2. Pursue use of pipeline easement as a spine of alternative modes of connectivity (open space, walking, bike, etc).
3. Explore better access to and from, as well as across, I – 20, to improve circulation in the area for community residents (such as the proposed Old Salem non access bridge over I – 20)
4. Pursue improvements to access conditions on all commercial corridors for both vehicles and pedestrians (such as reduced curb cuts, improved signals and signage, etc,).

C. Open Space and Community Facilities

1. Support development of Maxell site for open space and community uses with safe and walkable connections to all adjacent neighborhoods.
2. Support use of pipeline easement as an open space connector to the area's open spaces and community facilities, both existing and proposed.
3. Pursue site selection and development of new elementary school for the community that is well connected to all neighborhoods.



Workshop Outcome: Strategies Diagram

Framework Plan

The framework plan serves as the conceptual foundation for the more detailed site specific strategies. Major ideas are conveyed in a graphic that responds to the issues, themes, goals and strategies. Essentially, the framework plan is a diagram that continued to evolve throughout the planning process, and serves as the lynchpin for future workshops and recommendations. The framework plans were largely created and refined during the second community design workshop.

Priority Strategies

The first step in developing framework plans was to prioritize strategies. The steering committee identified their five highest priorities through a voting process prior to the second and third design workshops. Strategies that were considered most important were:

1. **Creating a 'grid' of streets to increase connectivity.**
2. **Exploring the use of the pipeline easement as a connector (alternative modes and open space).**
3. **Addressing access issues associated with connecting to or traversing I-20 and along commercial corridors (all modes).**
4. **Exploring infill and mixed-use development options in respective greyfield and greenfield locations.**
5. **Supporting the use of the Maxell site as a community facility with multiple connections to the surrounding area.**

Public Investments
– Framework for Future Development

Framework plans for both the greenfield and greyfield areas can conceptually be understood as an itemized list of public investments that will support the future private development that local stakeholders want to see in the community. Throughout the Blueprints process the Steering Committee has identified both issues and potential solutions in the study area. The Framework Plans visually display specific projects and ideas brought by stakeholders through the 'lens' of the highest strategic priorities.

Creating a grid of streets in the study area was considered a top priority. Stakeholders have become frustrated with congestion and the difficulties of making local trips in the area. Moving toward a grid rather than relying primarily on arterials should result in a more complete network of streets allowing for more travel options. Additionally, the grid may serve as a necessary pre-condition to supporting mixed-use development and redevelopment.

Overlaying a grid on the area was done by including roadway projects currently being considered in the area, developing new road projects through the extension of existing streets as well as identifying new connections between existing facilities, and exploring the use of existing surface parking lots as roadway facilities.

Early in the Blueprints process stakeholders suggested the existence of a 'cut-through culture' along the SR 20/138. Drivers will often navigate through parking lots to avoid congested roadways creating de facto streets. The Steering Committee agreed that it would be possible to create a more formalized set of parking lot streets that would allow for a better network of streets in the area.

Local trips have also been negatively impacted by the current design of the I-20 and SR 20/138 interchange. Traversing the interstate has become especially problematic and the Steering Committee supported other infrastructure investments to provide other routes across the interstate. Several stakeholders mentioned that they use Parker Road to traverse the interstate rather than SR 20/138 due to the congested SR 20/138 and I-20 interchange.

Throughout the Blueprints process the natural gas pipeline that bisects the study area has presented itself as an intriguing opportunity and special challenge due to the development constraints within the 150' easement. Stakeholders supported this easement as both an open space connector, and as a space that could be devoted to non-automotive circulation. In the past Rockdale County has explored the possibility of using TEA-21 funds to develop a Greenway Trail utilizing the easement, but was unable to provide a local match to move forward with the project.

The Parker Road Recreational Facility (formerly Maxell site) in the study area also received a great deal of attention. Stakeholders envision this facility as something that could encourage walking and bicycling in the area, and as a precursor, facilities for these modes should be maintained and enhanced. Additionally, the Parker Road site should be considered a destination when considering roadway, pedestrian, and open space connections. Therefore, the Strategic Diagram illustrates both vehicular and greenway/pedestrian connections to the recreational facility.

Development of the framework plans also included a preliminary investigation as to where mixed-use and infill developments should be encouraged in both the greenfield and greyfield areas. Stakeholders identified these areas as a means to understand the types of infrastructure that would be needed to support these types of development (e.g. additional roadway connections, non-automotive circulation, etc.).

The final workshop addressed development options in the study area in more detail. The outcomes of that workshop and subsequent analysis are presented later in the report.

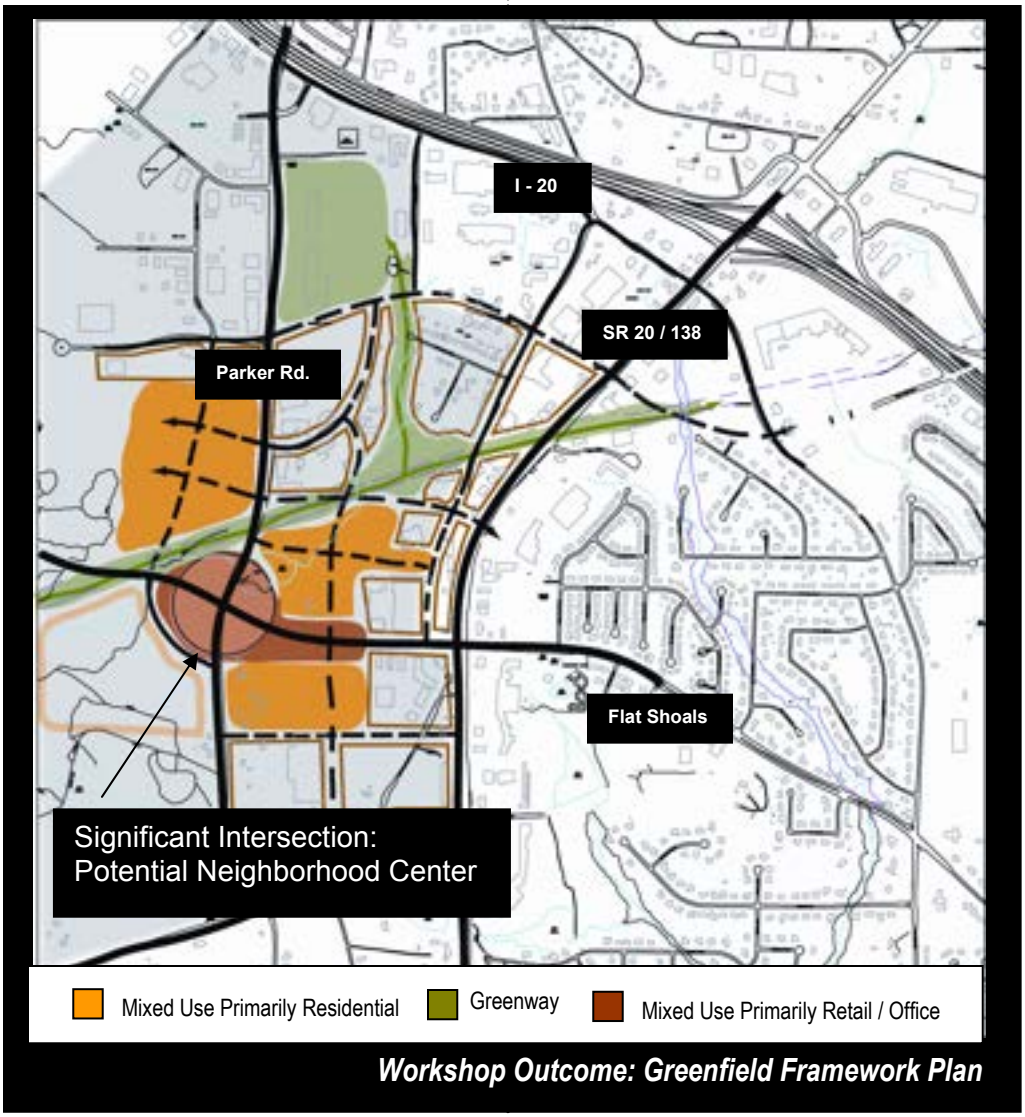
Former Maxell Site – New Recreational Facility

Greenfield Framework Plan

The Steering Committee identified the intersection of Flat Shoals Road and Parker Road as an area of particular significance. The area around the intersection should serve as new neighborhood center, and should be an area for significant public and private investment. The Framework Plan for the greenfield area also stresses the importance of connections to existing and developing destinations (recreation facility and redeveloped greyfield area). The Plan details several new roadway connections, for both north-south and east-west travel. New roadways include new roads, and formalizing the existing 'cut-throughs' used by residents. The Steering Committee emphasized that new roadways in the area should serve all modes of travel (e.g. bike and pedestrian). The County intends to implement Context Sensitive Design principles where appropriate. Such principles would include an active public involvement process to ensure that roadway facilities meet the needs of all users and is in harmony with the community.

The Plan also illustrates non-automotive connectivity utilizing the existing pipeline easement, as well as a new exclusive connection from the pipeline easement to the new recreational facility.

The Steering Committee focused mixed-use development in the vicinity of the Parker and Flat Shoal intersection, as well as along Flat Shoals between the intersection and existing development to the east. These developments could include retail, office, or residential uses. The Framework Plan devotes the remainder of the area to greenspace along the pipeline easement, a green connection to recreational facility, the former Maxell site as an area for recreational/civic activities, and residential beyond the intersection.

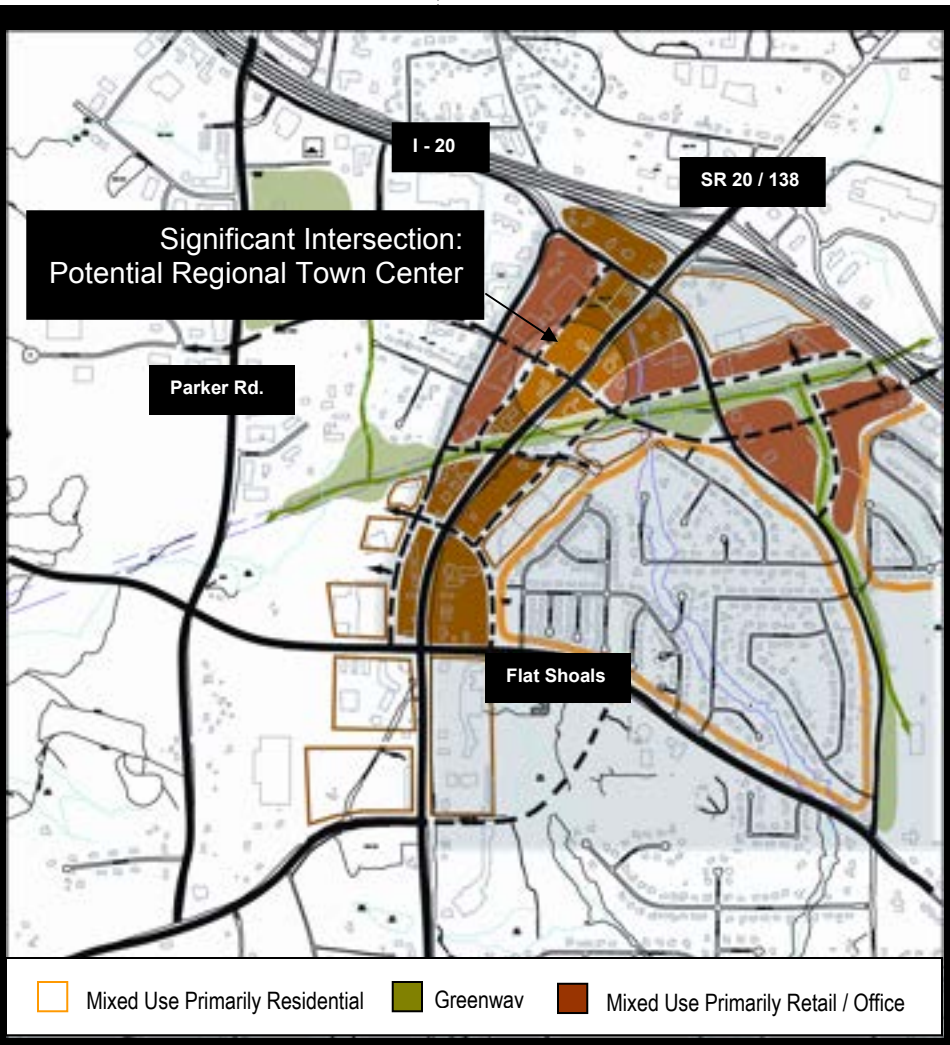


Workshop Outcome: Greenfield Framework Plan

Greyfield Framework Plan

Workshop participants addressing the greyfield area identified the future intersection of the proposed Old Salem Connector with SR 20/138 as a primary area of interest. While the Parker and Flat Shoals intersection was identified as a new neighborhood center for the greenfield site, the new intersection in the greyfield area is envisioned as more of a regional center. Direct access to and over I-20 creates the possibility that an area supporting regional retail and commercial services may develop. The Steering Committee recommended that the area proximal to the intersection support a variety of uses, with a focus on retail and office uses at the intersection, and mixed-use including residential in the vicinity. The Salem Gate area was also considered appropriate for retail, office, and residential uses.

As with the greenfield site, the Plan for the greyfield area includes several new roadway connections. The completion of the Old Salem Connector project was considered paramount to mobility issues in the area, and in the Framework Plan includes a non-access bridge traversing the interstate. Other connections included 'cut-throughs' to provide alternatives to SR 20/138, and additional connections between SR 20/138 and Old McDonough. The Framework Plan for the greyfield area includes a continuation of non-automotive facilities within the pipeline easement, including a shared connection with the Connector project over I-20. A new green/pedestrian connection from the Salem Gate area to existing recreation facilities at Old Salem and Flat Shoals is also included.



Workshop Outcome: Greyfield Framework Plan

Development Program

Through the workshop process the stakeholders developed an overall picture of types of development they would like to see throughout the study area. Preferences for development types included a variety of densities and uses, with such variations largely determined by location within the study area.

Program Overview

The Development Program was constructed based on the input of stakeholders during the final two workshops as to the types of development they desired, and the locations where various development types were appropriate. Below are the seven development types used to construct the development program. The development types allow for a consistency in describing similar development types that are desired throughout the study area.

Development Types

- Mixed Use -- Retail / Office: Ground floor retail with professional offices on second floor
- Mixed Use -- Retail / Residential: Ground floor retail with residential units on second floor
- Residential: 8+ units/acre
- Residential: 4 – 8 units/acre
- Residential: 0 – 4 units/acre
- Primarily Residential: Assumed to be single use residential but may support other uses
- Primarily Retail: Assumed to be One-story retail development but may support other uses

Amount of Development

Rather than prescribing a total amount of development (e.g. number of housing units, square footage of retail, etc.) based on development type, the development program aims to provide a range of development options based on two scenarios. The first scenario (Primarily Single Use) assumes typical suburban development characteristics of single use development continue in the study area. The second scenario involves significant mixing of uses, rather than single use development. To a great degree stakeholders reached consensus that mixed use development was desirable in the area. The mixed use scenario attempts to locate mixed use development at locations that were determined by the Steering Committee during the final workshop.

Actual property lines and current uses were not considered in creating the development program. In many respects the development program is the outcome of a series of 'what if' scenarios where the primary inputs are implementation of the framework plans and further input from the Steering Committee detailing the types of development they would like to see in the community. For example, both scenarios contain a total amount of retail development in the area – this is not new retail development but a total for the area. The study area currently included approximately 600,000 square feet of retail.

Study Area Development Program

The majority of the study area was considered in the development of the overall program. Some existing developed parcels were not considered, and therefore not included in the development program. The focus of the development program is the area near the intersection of Flat Shoals and Parker Road (Area A), land adjacent to the SR 20/138 corridor between Flat Shoals and I-20 (Area B), and the area around the Salem Gate shopping center (Area C).

Development Areas

Area A – Flat Shoals / Parker Road Intersection

This area, also known as the greenfield area, is largely undeveloped currently and is also proximal to the Maxell site which was considered a point of consideration in planning for future development. The programmed and funded widening and realignment of Parker Road will have a significant impact on the area. The Steering Committee considered the intersection of Parker and Flat Shoals, and the potential future development there, to be of particular significance.

Area B – SR 20/138 Corridor

This area covers much of what has been considered the greyfield area. The corridor is almost exclusively devoted to retail uses, with some diversity in the quality of the retail developments. There may be opportunities for new retail developments in the area, as well as replacing existing retail with new retail, or other uses. As has been stated previously the corridor is currently suffering from severe congestion which is certainly impacting mobility in the area, and is likely affecting the performance of retail establishments. Lack of access between developments, and the general appearance of the corridor and adjacent developments were also considered to be significant challenges.

Area C – Salem Gate

The Salem Gate shopping center remained a prominent topic for discussion at all of the workshops for a variety of reasons. The area considered in this portion of the development program includes the actual shopping center and surrounding properties. The Steering Committee felt that a redeveloped Salem Gate could greatly enhance the area.

Primarily Single Use Development

Housing
All areas were considered appropriate for residential uses. Housing was considered particularly appropriate for Area A. The northwest portion of Area A is exclusively lower density housing, likely single family detached – though not of the large lot variety. The Flat Shoals / Parker Road intersection was also considered appropriate for residential development to the rear of commercial development adjacent to Flat Shoals. The potential investment in the pipeline easement as an open space amenity would make the area more desirable for medium density residential development.

The Steering Committee identified the portion of Area B that fronts on to Old McDonough Highway as location for residential uses as well. This area is currently devoted to retail uses. Again, proximity to the pipeline easement and the former Maxell site make this area appropriate and desirable for residential uses. Area C also utilizes the pipeline easement and another open space connection to an existing recreation center to support residential development.

Retail
The central portion of the study area currently serves as a major retail corridor. In a single use development scenario this remains the case. The existing amount of retail uses in Areas B and C would remain largely the same, though the amount of land devoted to retail in Area B would be reduced. Conversion of oversupplied parking to other uses would allow for this reduction while maintaining overall retail square footage. Area A would absorb new retail developments along Flat Shoals Road to create a secondary retail corridor, and would also add retail uses adjacent to the existing Lowe's.
The single use scenario approximately doubles the amount of existing retail in the corridor. This is accomplished through converting greenfield sites to exclusively retail uses and assumptions that replacement retail would require less total land per square foot of retail area.

Office
The primarily single use scenario does not provide for any office uses in the area. Existing retail developments likely have some space dedicated to some type of office use, but in creating the development scenarios office uses were considered to be appropriate only as a component of mixed use development. The development scenarios appropriate uses in very general sense.

Other Uses
A parcel of land located at the intersection of Parker Road and Flat Shoals Road (northwest corner) was identified as a potential civic use, and was not included in the Development Program.

Advantages

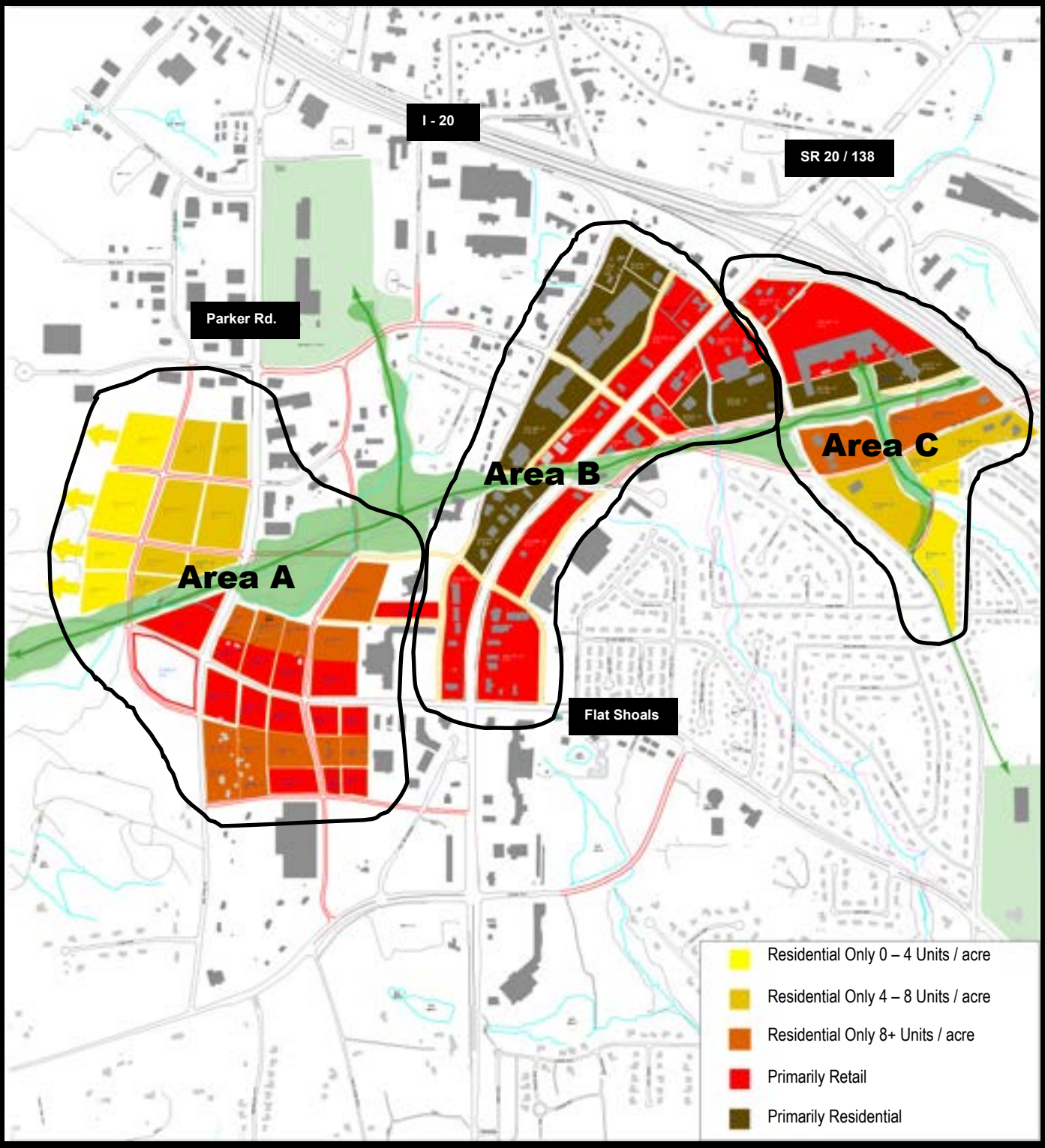
- Single use development is the status quo
- Financing development may be easier
- Change may be seen sooner
- Limited number of new housing units
- Supports more retail development than mixed use scenario
- Lower density overall

Disadvantages

- Area adjacent to Flat Shoals becomes exclusively retail
- More housing units may be required to strengthen the overall market for retail development
- May worsen existing problems: congestion, lack of access, poor pedestrian environment, etc.
- Fails to take full advantage of the potential redevelopment of Salem Gate
- Continues existing development patterns which have largely began lose their luster

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM -- Primarily Single Use

Area	Housing (Units)	Office (sqft)	Retail (sqft)	Total (sqft)
A	249	0	395,782	395,782
B	255	0	614,949	614,949
C	177	0	279,846	279,846
Total	682	40,977	1,290,577	1,331,554



Workshop Outcome: Primarily Single Use Development Plan

Primarily Mixed Use Development

Housing

As in the single use scenario the mixed use scenario includes residential uses in each of the three areas, however in the mixed use scenario twice as many housing units would be found in the study area. This is largely due to increased densities that may be required to support mixed use development, particularly in the sense of convincing lending institutions to back such development. Area A adds significant residential units in this scenario due to the location of mixed use development along Flat Shoals, rather than single use retail.

Retail

A mixed use scenario would result in less than a million square feet of retail in the areas considered, significantly less than in the single use scenario. Less retail is the result of development parcels supporting additional uses (residential and office) in addition to retail, constraining the amount of land available for retail. It is assumed that other uses will be above retail uses in two-story buildings. A mixed use scenario with only single story structures would eliminate even more retail space. Notably the types of retail might also change in this scenario. For example, in the single use scenario Area A could support 'big box' retailers, but the mixed use scenario would likely preclude such development, or at least minimize it.

Office

A primary difference between the two scenarios is the addition of a significant amount of office space in the mixed use scenario. Interstate access in the area does make it attractive to potential office (mixed use with office) development in additional to smaller professional offices that could be accommodated in Area A. Additionally, increasing the daytime population in the area may entice additional retail and commercial establishments to the area.

Other Uses

The same parcel identified previously is again reserved for civic uses and not included in the program. Increasing densities in the area would also allow for civic spaces to be created within development parcels.

Advantages

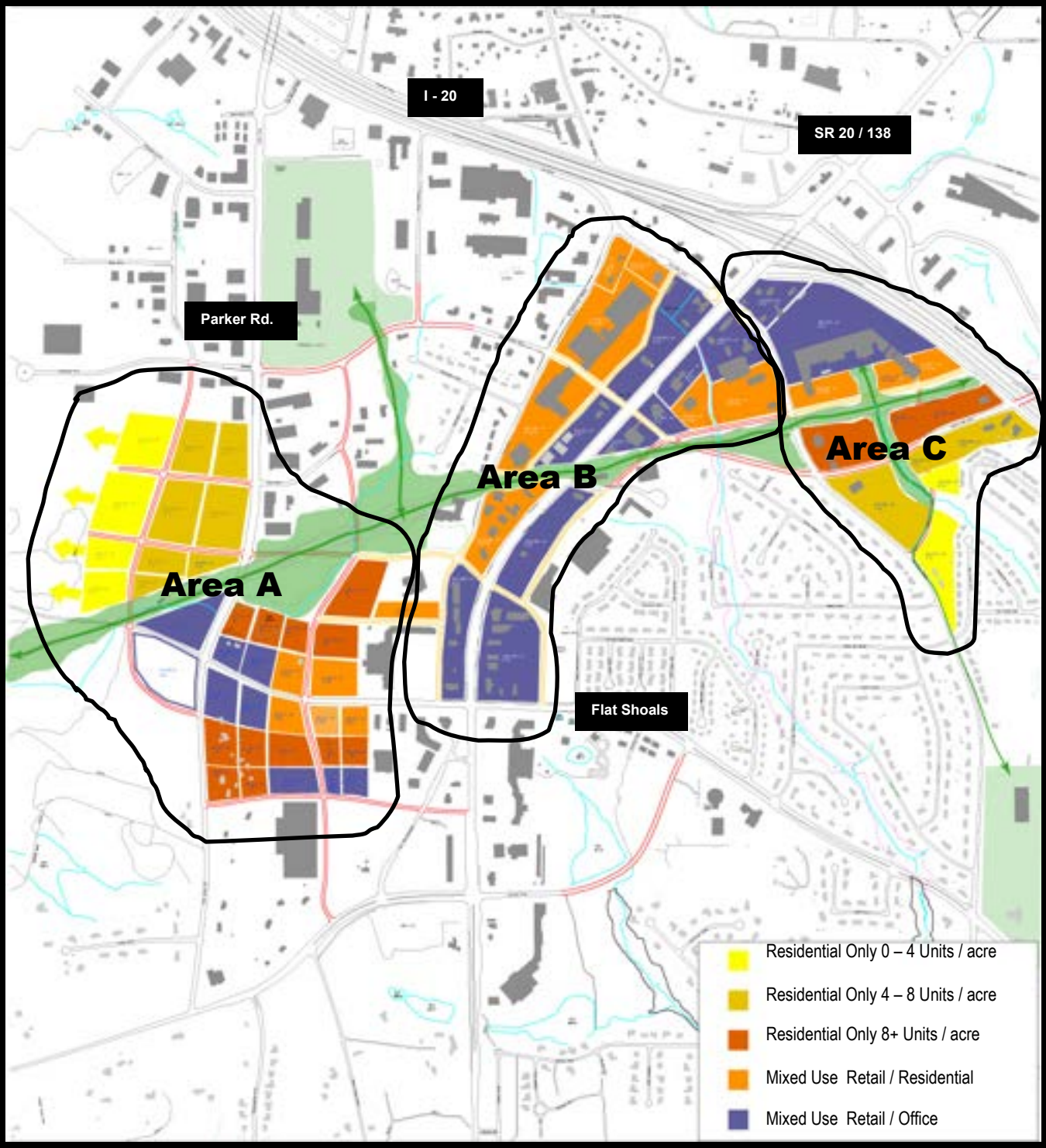
- Better use of existing infrastructure
- More people (residential units) would benefit from new public investments (e.g. pipeline, context sensitive roadways)
- Area would support a greater amount of total development
- May set the tone for future development to be mixed use (where appropriate)
- Would create a more walkable environment and provide non-driving trip options
- More amenities and public space
- Addition of office space would create a daytime population

Disadvantages

- Unknown whether additional density would be accepted
- Community involvement and education would have to be pursued and sustained
- Would likely take longer to develop/redevelop because of the complexities of financing mixed use
- Would require extensive city/county staff time to review mixed use developments
- Existing codes would have to be rewritten (underway)
- Other ordinances and regulations would likely need to be written and approved (e.g. design regulations)

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM – Primarily Mixed Use

Area	Housing (Units)	Office (sqft)	Retail (sqft)	Total (sqft)
A	724	89,449	211,084	300,532
B	319	306,118	561,084	867,202
C	360	149,251	192,139	341,390
Total	1,403	544,818	964,306	1,509,124



Workshop Outcome: Primarily Mixed Use Plan

Conclusions

In reality it is likely that neither the primarily single use, nor the primarily mixed use scenario will be realized in full, but rather elements of both. The Steering Committee was very supportive of shifting toward a finer grained mix of uses in the area. The area north of I-20 along the same corridor has added significant retail developments in past few years. It may be time to pursue different development patterns and types in the Conyers-Rockdale Blueprints study area to provide an alternative, as well as creating a community that better utilizes existing and planned public investments. Additionally, stakeholders were also supportive of an overall upgrade in the diversity and quality of retail in the corridor. This may best be achieved through creating mixed use developments that include both office and residential developments.

The Conyers-Rockdale workshops focused on larger issues in the community rather than specific site and urban design features. Moving forward with the vision of the stakeholders however, would require more specificity. If the mixed use scenario is pursued, as was supported by the Steering Committee, a significant effort should precede implementation to develop design standards and regulations. Desired design characteristics and performance should be developed in a collaborative effort with final regulations implementing the vision of the Steering Committee and addressing the larger issues identified in this process.

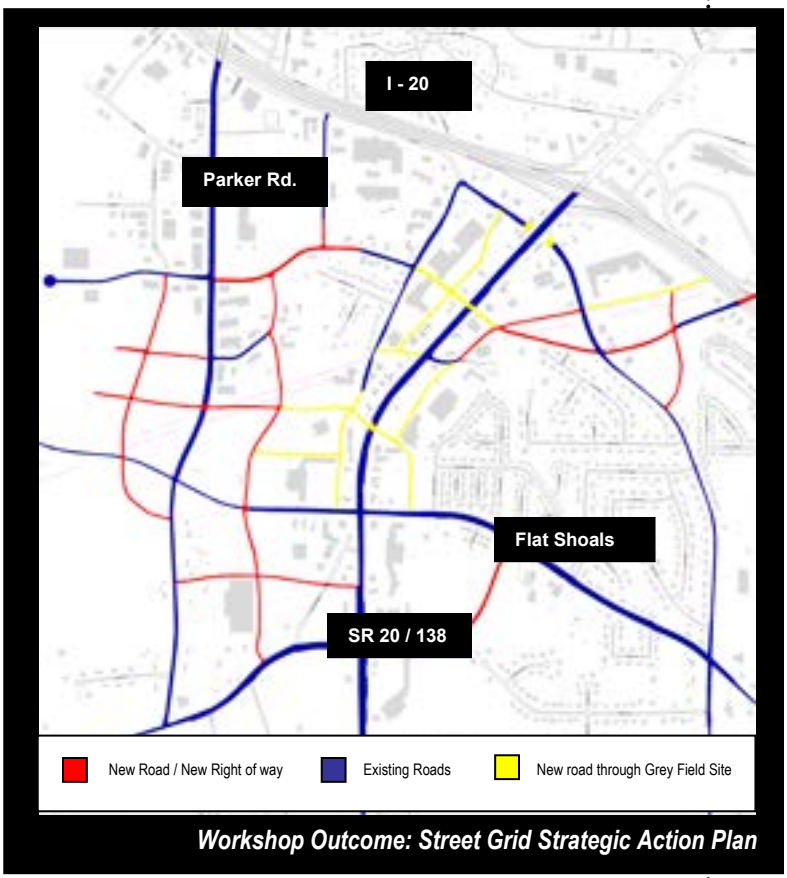
Organization

1. Empower an official city/county planning and development entity to oversee strategic actions. Ensure broad based composition of the membership, as with the stakeholder group. Utilize existing organizations where possible.

2. Each of the following implementation items should fall under the purview of a to be established subcommittee of the larger entity.

Implementation

3. Establish "Grid Subcommittee" to pursue implementation of the Street Grid Strategic Action Plan, to include at least the following steps.



Workshop Outcome: Street Grid Strategic Action Plan

- Initiate and fund a consultant study to establish feasibility, routes, and cost of the complete grid system in the study area, including right-of- way issues.
- Initiate and fund a follow-on consultant study, with appropriate design expertise, to create design standards, including pedestrian, signage and landscape amenities, which should include the proposed improvements to the primary arterials as well.
- Establish a working committee including merchants and property owners to implement the "cut-through" element of the grid, including a temporary "striping only" first phase that can be implemented immediately.
- Set a strategic agenda, which distinguishes between sections of the grid to be implemented through public capital improvements and sections to be implemented as part of private development or redevelopment projects. Begin pursuing approvals and funding sources for the former and negotiations with developers for the latter.

4. Establish an "Open Space Subcommittee" to pursue open space and greenway initiatives to include at least the following steps:

    - Re-open the process to develop a greenway on the pipeline easement with both the Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Corporation and potential funding sources.
    - Initiate and fund a design and planning study to more thoroughly analyze and locate potential other open space opportunities and to create a concept plan and budget for an open space system in the study area. The plan should recommend both parcels for public acquisition and parcels for developer commitment to open space "set-asides", including conservation easements where possible.

5. Establish "Greyfield Subcommittee" to pursue redevelopment opportunities to include at least the following steps:

    - Initiate and fund a consultant study to analyze in detail the conditions of retail development in the study corridor, including; current tenant, rent and vacancy structure and trends; a parking use, efficiency and inventory analysis; building conditions, including both structural and functional issues; and a marketing analysis to assess current and projected issues of supply and demand.
    - Begin assessment of the Salem Gate property to establish community objectives and concerns for the property, if any.

6. Establish "Planning and Zoning Subcommittee" to recommend regulatory options to facilitate implementation of all recommendations in the study area to include at least the following:

    - The feasibility of overlay zoning for some or all of the study area to add design standards to basic zoning requirements.
    - The feasibility of designation of the commercial area as a redevelopment zone with a legally sanctioned redevelopment plan.
    - The feasibility of tax increment financing or a special assessment district to help fund public improvements in the plan

7. Consider creating a non profit development corporation and/or Community Improvement District (CID) for the study area that could oversee the implementation of an agreed upon plan and pursue both public and private funding, including debt financing, for implementation of public elements of the plan and land banking of critical parcels. Also, consider establishing a marketing and promotional campaign for this initiative to build public support for these strategies (see New Town Macon, the Midtown Alliance, or Newton County Smart Growth as models).

Participants

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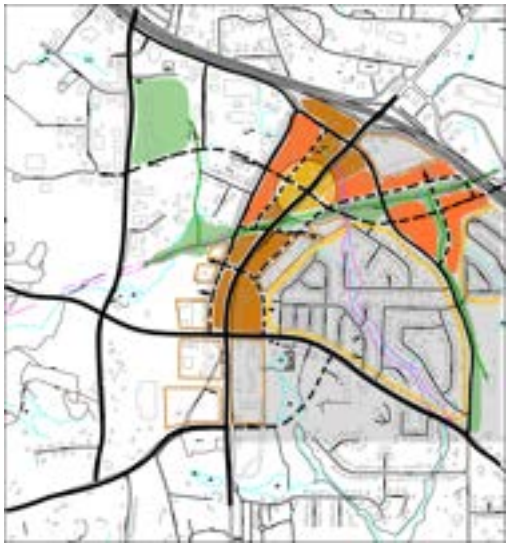

Blueprints Principles

- *Maintain and enhance quality of life for residents of the community*
- *Employ regional strategies for transportation, land use, and economic growth*
- *Consider the effect of the built environment on the natural environment as well as history and culture*
- *Employ efficient land uses*

BLUEPRINTS
FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

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