Toccoa and Stephens County Workshop Report

Blueprints for Successful Communities

Fall 2006

Georgia CONSERVANCY

Georgia Conservancy -- Blueprints Partners

American Institute of Architects—Atlanta
American Council of Engineering Companies of Georgia
American Society of Landscape Architects—Georgia Chapter
Association County Commissioners of Georgia
Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership
Institute of Transportation Engineers
Georgia Institute of Technology—College of Architecture
Georgia Municipal Association
Georgia Planning Association
Greater Atlanta Homebuilders of Georgia
Homebuilders Association of Georgia
National Association of Industrial and Office Properties
Southface Energy Institute
Urban Land Institute—Atlanta District Council

Funding Provided By:

Georgia Forestry Commission

Workshop Sponsors:

City of Toccoa

Stephens County

Building a Foundation for Blueprints Campaign

Blueprints Community Investors
The Rich Foundation, Inc.
Sara Jackson Hertwig

Blueprints Community Advocates
AGL Resources
J. W. and Ethel I. Woodruff Foundation
Florence C. & Harry L. English Memorial Fund
John and Mary Franklin Foundation
Synovus
UPS

Blueprints Community Friends
The Livingston Foundation
Richport Properties

Blueprints Community Supporters
Atlanta Regional Commission
Ed Ellis
Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Growth Management Leadership Alliance
Stephen H. Macauley
Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce
Miller Brewing Company
The Pacific Group
Serenbe

Blueprints Toccoa and Stephens County

Table of Contents

Overview 1

What is Blueprints For Successful Communities?
Why Blueprints Toccoa and Stephens County?

The Baseline 2

Toccoa and Stephens County in Context
Toccoa and Stephens County Existing Conditions

The Workshop 16

Toccoa and Stephens County Assets and Challenges
Toccoa and Stephens County Workshop Vision
Toccoa and Stephens County Key Issues

The Recommendations 22

Toccoa and Stephens County Strategies
Planning by Character Area
Implementation Checklist

Appendix 30

Additional Information on the Strategies

Participants 39

BLUEPRINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

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 fourteen 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 Toccoa and Stephens County workshop, 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 Toccoa/Stephens County?

In the fall of 2006, The Georgia Conservancy, working in partnership with Georgia Tech, provided Blueprints for Successful Communities technical assistance to the City of Toccoa and Stephens County as they face opportunities, issues, and challenges related to land use, planning, and development.

Blueprints Toccoa/Stephens County is the result of a unique partnership between the City of Toccoa, the Georgia Forestry Commission, and Stephens County. The City of Toccoa received a 2006 Georgia Urban and Community Forestry Grant to bring Blueprints to the community. The workshop kicked-off in August 2006 with a study area tour and a stop at the world famous “BBQ Shack.”

The Baseline: Toccoa and Stephens County in Context

Stephens County

Map of Georgia highlighting Stephens County in black

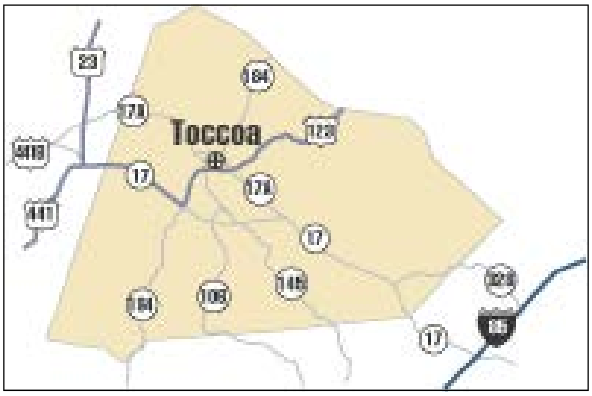
Stephens County was created in 1905 from parts of Franklin and Habersham counties. The county is named for Alexander Stephens, who served as vice-president of the Confederacy and governor of Georgia. Stephens County covers approximately 180 square miles.

The county's first inhabitants were an Indian tribe known as the "Mound Builders." The tribe thrived in Toccoa, at the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. The Mound Builders were followed by the Cherokee tribe who, legend says, named the area "Toccoah," meaning "beautiful."

Institutes of higher education in Stephens County include Toccoa Falls College and North Georgia Technical College.

Stephens County is characterized by its bucolic setting and spectacular natural wonders. Located on the campus of the college named for them, Toccoa Falls, which plunge 186 feet, are 16 feet higher than Niagara Falls. The Chattahoochee National Forest, Blue Ridge Mountains, Tugaloo State Park, Lake Hartwell and Yonah Lake beckon to outdoor sports enthusiasts. Incorporated cities in Stephens County include Avalon, Martin, and Toccoa.

The City of Toccoa



The City of Toccoa originated in 1874 and can be traced back to the development of a coaling station for the Atlanta to Charlotte Railroad after the Civil War.

Toccoa was home to Paul Anderson, the *Guinness Book of World Records'* "Strongest Man." Anderson was the 1956 Olympic Gold Medalist in super heavy weight weightlifting.

In the Fall of 2006, Toccoa was named a Georgia "Signature Community" by the Department of Community Affairs. Designated Signature Communities receive customized technical assistance, access to the Signature Community grant program, assistance with identifying additional support sources, and statewide recognition for community achievement. The program is both an incentive and a reward for communities that are improving local quality of life through effective planning, implementation, and taking a comprehensive approach to addressing community improvement issues. The Blueprints for Successful Communities workshop is an excellent compliment to Toccoa and Stephens County's ongoing efforts for community improvement and local quality of life.

The Toccoa/Stephens County Blueprints class and local sponsors Connie Tabor, City of Toccoa; and Ken Masten, Georgia Forestry Commission

Toccoa and Stephens County Existing Conditions

Land Use Inventory:

Land use issues for Toccoa and Stephens County were identified by analyzing the land use data contained in the *Comprehensive Plan for Stephens County and the Cities of Toccoa, Avalon, and Martin*, prepared by the Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center in 2004, and synthesizing that data with assets and challenges identified by local stakeholders.

Unincorporated Stephens County currently has a varied distribution of land uses: 44% residential, 13% agricultural, and 12% conservation land (defined in the plan as wildlife areas, parks, etc.). Only one percent of county land is commercial, and it is concentrated along a few transportation corridors, most notably Big A Road. The western 22% of the county is forest land, managed by the United States Forest Service (see page 5).

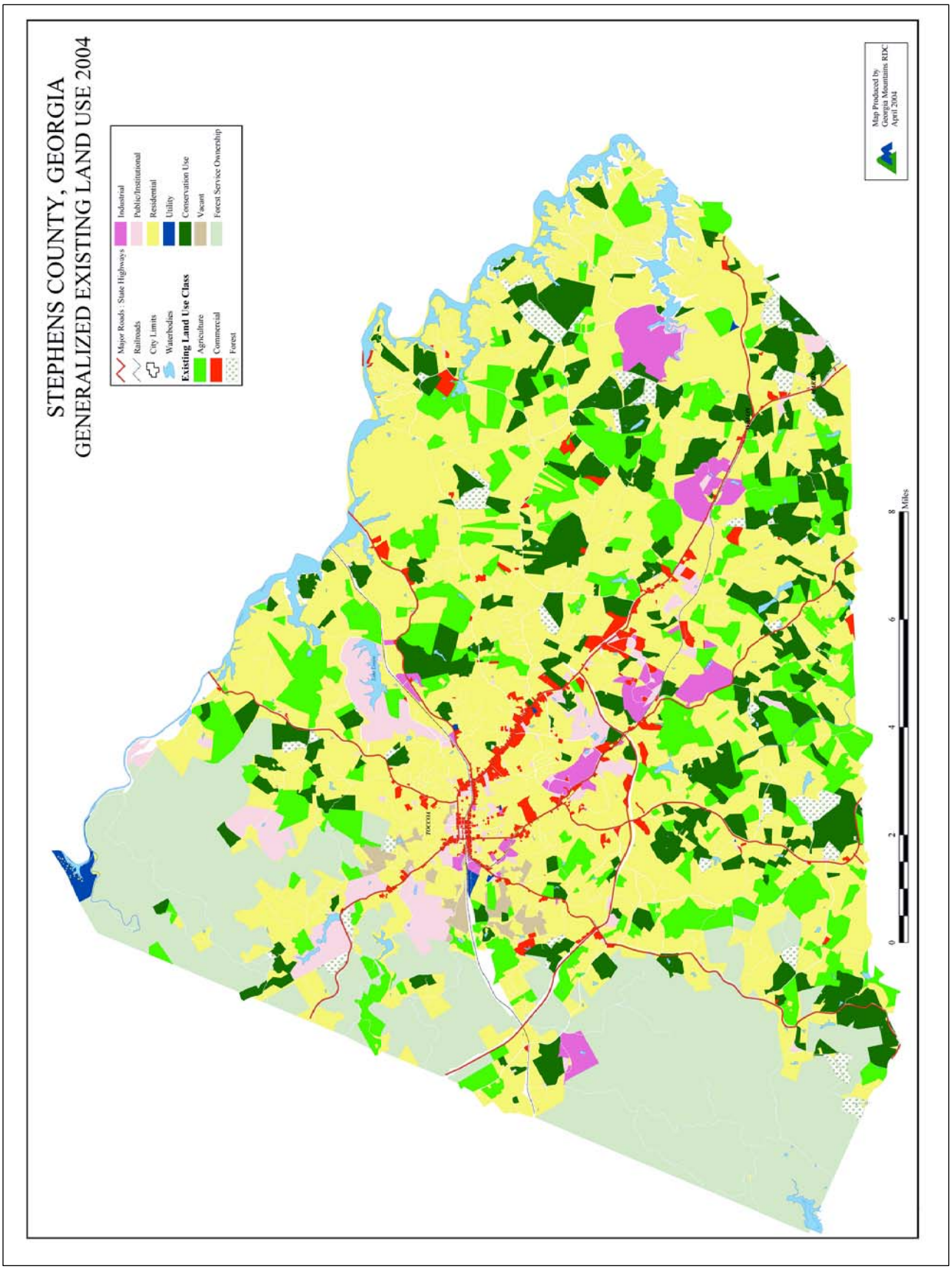
The City of Toccoa has a different distribution of land uses. Seventy-two percent of the city is residential, with agricultural, commercial, and public land constituting 6%, 7%, and 8%, respectively, of the city's land. With 2% of the city's land designated industrial and vacant, there are opportunities for infill and redevelopment.

The land use breakdown in Stephens County is not projected to change significantly through 2025 (see page 6). For example, total agriculture and recreational land, 25% of the county's land in 2004, is projected to comprise 24% of county land in 2025. This 1% drop is attributable to the expected conversion to residential or commercial use of about 1,400 agricultural acres.

Land use projections for the City of Toccoa are also not projected to change much over the next 20 years (see page 6). One of the few land uses projected to change is vacant land, expected to drop from 2% in 2004 to 1% in 2025 as infill and redevelopment occurs.

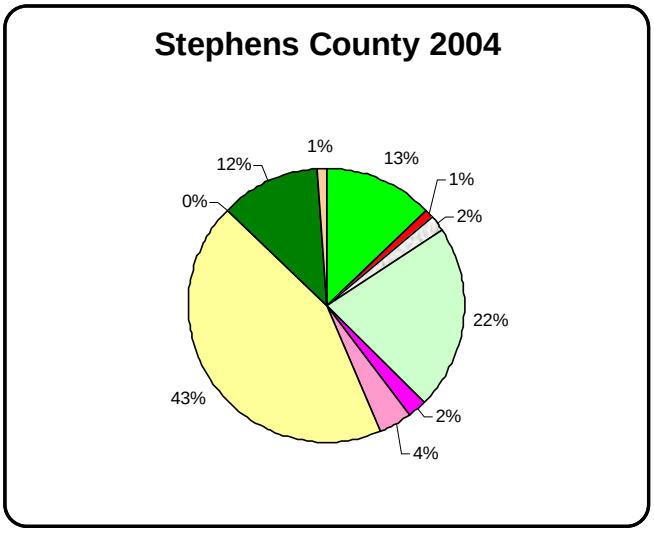
Unlike some counties in Georgia, where significant land use changes are occurring, Toccoa and Stephens County leaders have an opportunity to lay the groundwork for managing change without feeling the pressure of unchecked development.

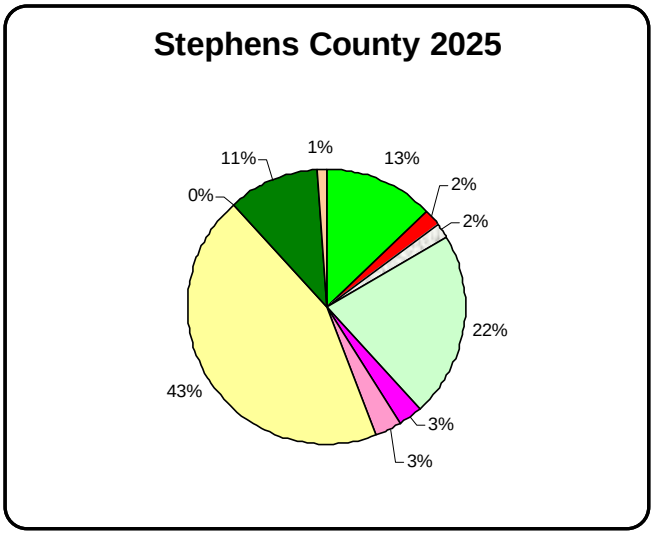
Some stakeholders did not concur with the unchanging land use projections in the comprehensive plan, believing that a trend of increased development in Stephens County since 2000 was not captured in the data.

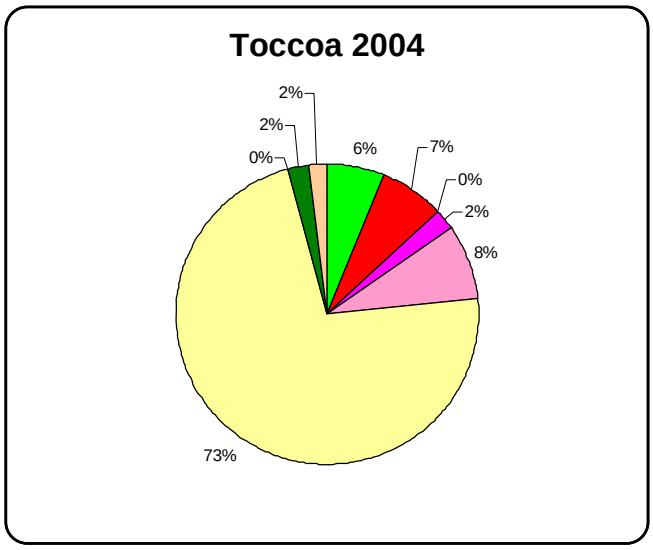


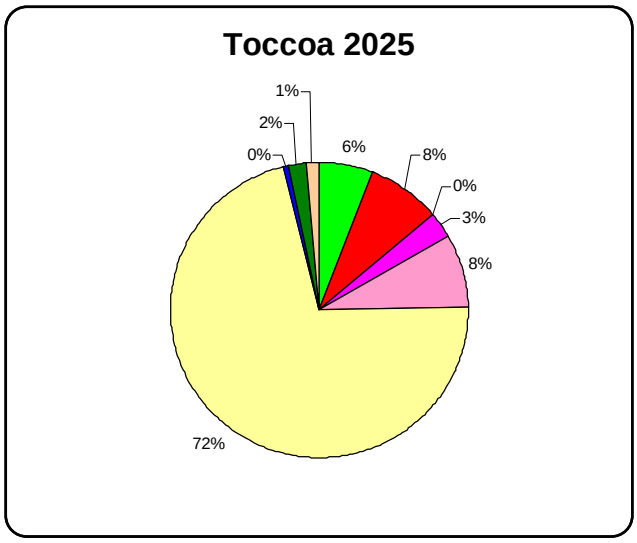
Stephens County Existing Land Use, 2004

According to the Toccoa and Stephens County Comprehensive Plan, the land use breakdown in both the City and the County is not expected to change significantly through 2025. The charts below show current and projected land use by percentage for Stephens County and the City of Toccoa. Agriculture, residential, and forest-related uses are anticipated to continue as the predominant land uses.









Agriculture		Forest		Industrial		Residential		Conservation	
Commercial		Forest Service Ownership		Public or Institutional		Transportation Communication Utility		Vacant	

The comprehensive plan identifies four land use goals for Toccoa and Stephens County:

Land Use Goal #1: **coordination across all levels of government in the county to address land use and development issues.** To support this coordination, the plan recommends the study and implementation of new ordinances to protect land and guide development.

Land Use Goal #2: **coordination of future land development with infrastructure improvements.** To achieve this, the plan recommends allowing all agencies to participate in the planning process to ensure that future growth is limited to existing areas with sufficient infrastructure.

Land Use Goal #3: **protection of Stephens County's environmental and historic resources.** To protect resources such as Stephens County's greenspaces and agricultural lands, the plan recommends developing county-wide land use management tools.

Land Use Goal #4: **encouragement of infill development and redevelopment of Toccoa's abandoned or unsightly industrial, commercial, and residential areas.** The comprehensive plan recommends the creation of a committee that works with property owners to develop a plan or program specifically to encourage infill development and redevelopment in Toccoa.

Toccoa and Stephens County stakeholders discuss local issues during a Blueprints workshop session at Toccoa Falls College

Transportation Inventory:

Transit

According to a planning analysis tool developed by GDOT, Stephens County has been classified as having "some potential opportunity" for transit Improvements. The results of this analysis show that the County has a higher percentage of persons aged 65 and over than other rural counties in Georgia and the average of all Georgia counties as a whole. The same is true of Stephens County's population living below poverty (see table 1). These figures indicate that the county may have a substantial number of people who are unable to drive or who do not own an automobile, making the provision of transit alternatives an important consideration. This was acknowledged by Blueprints stakeholders in their desire to be a "senior-friendly" community.

TABLE 1	Stephens County	All Rural Counties.	Rural Co. w/ Transit	All Georgia
% aged 65 and over	25.53	18.91	18.96	16.36
% below poverty level	16.32	13.91	14.46	12.54

Roads

Information compiled by the Georgia Mountains RDC based on data from GDOT suggests that most of the roads in the county are operating at Level of Service (LOS) "A." LOS is a measure of driving conditions in which A is considered the best (free flowing traffic) and F is the least favorable. However, the Comprehensive Plan has identified 26 roadways in need of improvement, with five listed as immediate. Most of these "failing" roads are within or near Toccoa.

- **Immediate (5)**: SR 17; SR 17 Alt; SR 63; SR 184; SR 365
- **Near term (5)**
- **Medium (3)**: LOS D in 10 yrs
- **Long term (13)**: Still at LOS D in 20 yrs

Ten projects have been listed in GDOT's State Transportation Improvement Program for the years 2007 - 2009. The map on page 9 shows projects in GDOT's Construction Work Program. It does not include transportation enhancement projects, signal, pavement marking, or maintenance projects.

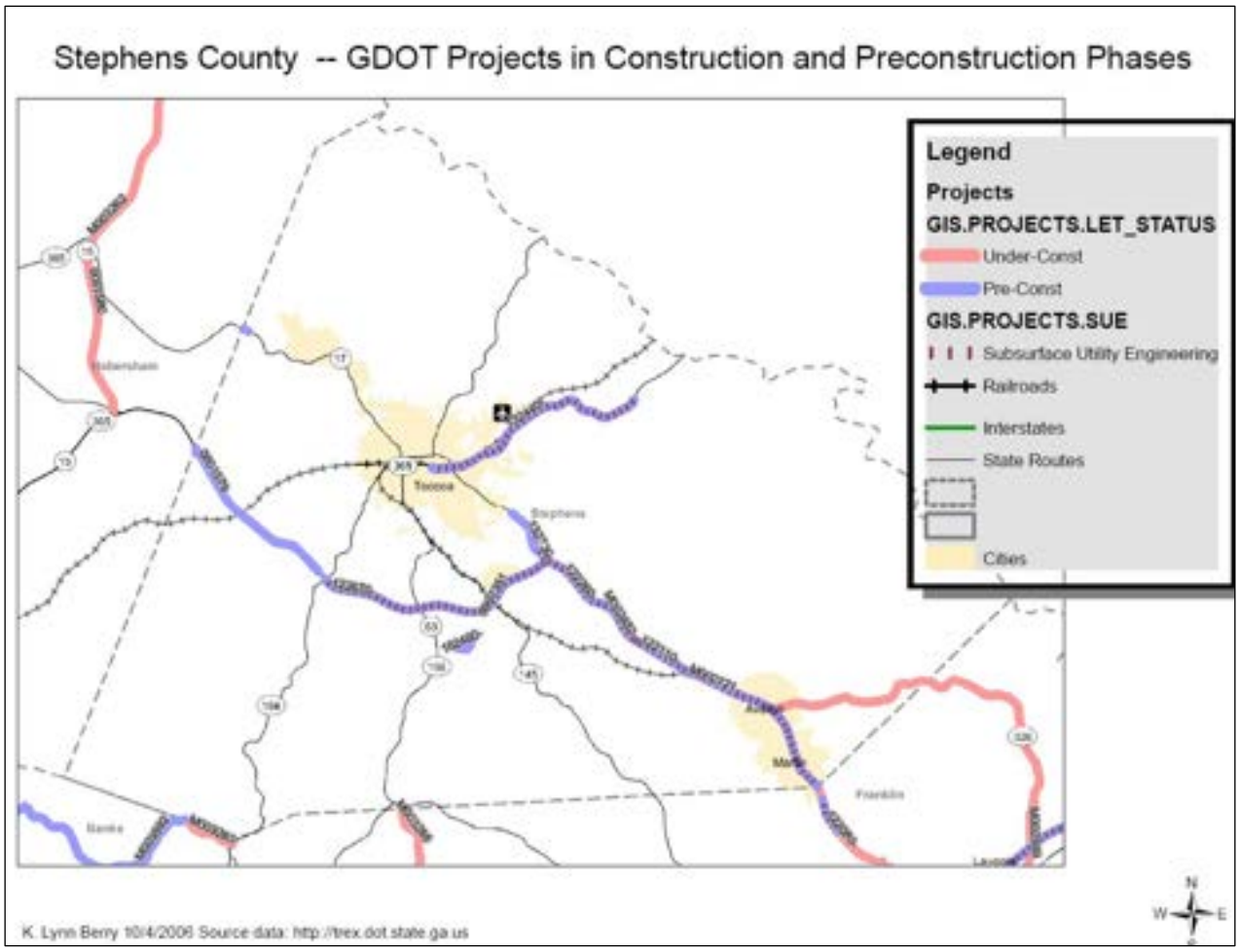
Although traffic congestion and safety were not high on the list of stakeholder issues, there is a growing concern about the "sprawling" nature of development along the principal road corridors, as well as the visual impacts of unregulated commercial development and "lack of character" in these areas.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Outside the City of Toccoa, sidewalk infrastructure is virtually nonexistent. There are currently no subdivision regulations requiring the inclusion of sidewalks. Likewise, there are limited bicycle facilities within the county. There is one State Bike Route -- Number 85, the Savannah River Run. The 2003 *Day-Wilburn Multi-modal Transportation Study* recommended that Toccoa and Stephens County complete a comprehensive pedestrian and bike plan. Stakeholders recognize the potential for recreational tourism, improved walkability, and quality of life improvements that come with improved bicycle and pedestrian amenities.

Other Transportation Assets

The County enjoys both freight rail and passenger rail services at higher levels than similar counties in the State, though full maximization of these resources are not yet realized. AMTRAK provides daily passenger rail service to/from Toccoa on the "Crescent" between New York and New Orleans, with one train in each direction along the Norfolk Southern Railway. The R.G. LeTourneau Airport, owned and operated by the Toccoa-Stephens County Airport Authority, recently expanded its runway to 5,000 feet.



Several Georgia Department of Transportation projects are in construction or preconstruction phase within Toccoa and Stephens County. Ten projects in all have been listed in GDOT's State Transportation Improvement Program for the year 2007 - 2009 and are shown on the map above. The map does not include transportation enhancement projects, signal, pavement marking, or maintenance projects.

Economic Development Inventory:

Toccoa and Stephens County are currently undergoing an "economic identity crisis" as the base of their economy shifts from an overwhelming dependence on the manufacturing sector to a mix of sectors. This change in economic identity has been occurring since the early 1980s, presenting many challenges to the community. At the same time, the community has a broad range of assets that are not fully explored and may hold the answers to Toccoa's and Stephens County's economic future.

The economic tale of Toccoa/Stephens County reached a significant milestone in 2001. In 1999, the top three employers in the county were Manufacturing, but by 2001, those employers had been surpassed by Service Industry employers. Other existing sectors in the community appear to be maintaining themselves. According to the most recent Farmgate report, the number of farmers and farms has declined slightly (less than 0.22% of total employment), while Agriculture services jobs have increased slightly (it is important to note that underreporting in this sector may prevent an accurate portrayal).

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, in 2004, Stephens County had a 6% unemployment rate, compared to 4.6% for the state of Georgia and 5.5% for the U.S. Additionally, the per capita income level of Stephens County lags behind the state level significantly. A snapshot of the community reveals an under-skilled workforce.

The Toccoa/Stephens County population faces a number of challenges in terms of workforce. Between 1996 and 2000, the average high school drop-out rate was 7.6%, while the same rate for the state of Georgia was 6.8%. Almost 29% of the adult population in Stephens County does not have a high school diploma. Furthermore, 15.1% of Stephens County's population lives below the poverty level (the Georgia average is 13.3%).

Top Employers 1999:
- *Coats American Inc.*
- *Miliken & Co.*
- *Patterson Pump Co.*

Top Employers 2001:
- *School System*
- *Hospital*
- *Miliken & Co.*

Manufacturing

In 1980, manufacturing comprised 42.5% of the total number of jobs in Toccoa/Stephens County. By 2000, Manufacturing accounted for 27.5% of the jobs—a substantial decline.

Manufacturing is no longer the main employment sector in Stephens County, a change in economy that demands specific attention. New sectors are required to replace the jobs no longer captured by Manufacturing and new skills are needed to prepare the workforce for these non-manufacturing jobs. It is recommended that the emerging economic identity of Toccoa/Stephens County becomes more diversified, increasing resilience, when and if, specific sectors decline.

Tourism

One strong candidate to help supplement the economy in the wake of the manufacturing decline is Tourism. Stephens County has significant amenities in this area, including historic and natural resources, access to AMTRAK, and a number of camp and

conference centers already attracting visitors from around the state.

Although the resources are available, there has not been a strategic tourism initiative to capitalize upon the tourism market. Some recommendations include:

- improving the availability and access to quality lodging;
- creating a sense of destination for visitors upon arrival;
- creating a cohesive community identity;
- improving communication between the community and potential visitors and between community agencies.

To effectively market tourism, there needs to be a cohesive and collaborative effort among the Stephens County Development Authority, the City of Toccoa, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Population and Housing Inventory:

Stephens County and Toccoa population and housing issues presented here have largely been adapted from the current Stephens County Comprehensive Plan. The four key issues discussed are based upon the assets and challenges that were identified during the initial Blueprints stakeholder meeting in Stephens County.

Population

The populations of Stephens County and Toccoa are both projected to grow, though slower than the average for the State of Georgia. The population is also projected to become significantly older, with nearly 26% of the population over age 65 in 2025, compared to 16.5% in 2000. Despite the changes in population and age, the racial makeup of Stephens County and Toccoa will remain fairly stable, with about 85.7% of the county being white, 12% black, and 1% Hispanic, although the Hispanic population is growing. The City of Toccoa has a higher portion of black and Hispanic residents, with nearly 22% black and 1.5% Hispanic.

Education and income levels in Toccoa and Stephens County are increasing, although they still lag behind those of the State. Over 71% of county residents have a high school diploma, while Toccoa's rate is 69.2%. Fourteen percent of the county and 16.5% of Toccoa residents have four or more years of college, compared to 24.3% of Georgia's population. The per capita incomes of Stephens County and Toccoa increased at a similar rate to that of Georgia from 1990 to 2000, though both are still significantly lower than the state. The poverty level is 21.6% in Toccoa, 14.6% in Stephens County, and 13% for Georgia. Additionally, 26.2% of the children in the community live below the poverty level, compared to 19.9% nationally.

Housing

Stephens County and Toccoa have an aging housing stock, little new construction, and a high percentage of manufactured housing. Nearly 70% of Toccoa's housing stock is between 21 and 70 years old, although only 4% is more than 60 years old. Despite the aging housing stock, few residents live in substandard housing and the County has less overcrowding than Georgia.

From 1990 to 2000 there was a 13.6% increase in housing units in Toccoa. The decade of the 1990s saw an increase in single-family housing, but a decrease in owner-occupied housing in Toccoa and Stephens County. Stephens County has a higher percent of manufactured housing than both the Georgia Mountain Region and the State of Georgia, with 24.3% of its housing as manufactured homes.

Stephens County Census Quick Facts Regional Comparison

County or State Name	**Stephens**	Habersham	Hart	Franklin	Banks	Rabun	Georgia
Population, 2005 estimate	25,060	39,603	24,036	21,590	16,055	16,087	9,072,576
Population, 2000	25,435	35,902	22,997	20,285	14,422	15,050	8,186,453
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2004	23.6%	23.2%	23.4%	23.6%	25.4%	21.6%	26.4%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2004	16.1%	14.1%	17.1%	15.6%	10.5%	18.7%	9.6%
White persons, percent, 2004 (a)	86.1%	91.8%	80.0%	89.7%	95.1%	97.3%	66.4%
Black persons, percent, 2004 (a)	12.1%	4.6%	18.8%	8.9%	3.3%	1.1%	29.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2004 (a	0.3%	0.6%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%
Asian persons, percent, 2004 (a)	0.6%	2.1%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	0.4%	2.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent, 2004 (a	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2004	0.8%	0.8%	0.4%	0.7%	0.4%	0.6%	1.0%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2004 (b)	1.5%	9.8%	1.2%	1.3%	4.8%	6.8%	6.8%
White persons, not Hispanic, percent, 2004	84.8%	82.9%	78.9%	88.6%	90.5%	90.8%	60.2%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2000	1.4%	7.8%	1.3%	1.2%	2.1%	4.1%	7.1%
Language other than English spoken at home,2000	3.5%	11.7%	2.6%	2.4%	3.7%	7.2%	9.9%
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2000	71.1%	70.9%	71.1%	67.0%	65.4%	75.4%	78.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+, 2000	14.1%	15.8%	13.5%	10.3%	8.6%	17.6%	24.3%
Persons with a disability, age 5+, 2000	5,589	7,548	5,099	4,873	3,028	3,453	1,456,812
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2000	20.7	23.8	20.7	25.7	30.1	24.1	27.7
Housing units, 2004	12,116	16,374	11,499	9,548	6,342	11,555	3,672,677
Homeownership rate, 2000	72.7%	76.2%	80.8%	79.3%	80.9%	79.5%	67.5%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2000	9.7%	6.9%	4.5%	5.6%	1.9%	7.1%	20.8%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2000	$80,900	$99,700	$89,900	$84,600	$92,400	$112,400	$111,200
Households, 2000	9,951	13,259	9,106	7,888	5,364	6,279	3,006,369
Persons per household, 2000	2.46	2.57	2.47	2.5	2.69	2.35	2.65
Per capita money income, 1999	$15,529	$17,706	$16,714	$15,767	$17,424	$20,608	$21,154
Median household income, 2003	$30,973	$36,841	$32,684	$33,207	$39,998	$34,001	$42,421
Persons below poverty, percent, 2003	15.6%	12.1%	14.1%	14.6%	12.3%	12.1%	13.3%
Housing units authorized by building permits, 2004	85	441	165	23	139	414	108,356
Federal spending, 2004 ($1000)	160,924	170,576	131,059	128,205	52,837	104,433	55,152,911
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	179	278	232	263	234	371	57,906
Persons per square mile, 2000	141.9	129.1	99	77	61.7	40.6	141.4

Source: US Census Bureau State and County Quick Facts

Natural Resource Inventory:

The Comprehensive Plan for Toccoa and Stephens County identifies three main objectives for natural resource protection. Combining these objectives with issues raised by Blueprints participants provides insight on key issues facing Stephens County in the immediate future.

Objectives 1 and 2: Identify and recognize the natural resources that make Stephens County unique, and increase public awareness and use of these resources. The county has a number of natural destinations such as Currahee Mountain, the tallest point in the county and an important historical and cultural site as well as Toccoa Falls, natural falls that drop 16 feet farther than the falls at Niagara. In addition, the Tugaloo River ecosystem is known for its vibrant biological diversity. Stephens County is home to the Chattahoochee National Forest, a federally managed forest located on the western side of the county.

Significant data on the county's land and water resources is yet to be documented in a readily accessible format. Specifically, the 2002 Toccoa and Stephens County Comprehensive Plan notes that much of the county's soil and timber data is not yet available in electronic form.

Objective 3: To protect and conserve the natural resources which are deemed significant. Stephens County is home to a wealth of natural resources, rolling topography and a variety of scenic assets. Located adjacent to the Tugaloo River and Lake Hartwell, Stephens has a large supply of clean water. Given the rapidly growing demand for water in the region, water resources are growing both in value and in demand.

Forest land and tree canopy are significant features within Stephens County, making up approximately 25% of the land area, with additional forested land held in "conservation" use within Toccoa and Stephens County.

The Toccoa/Stephens County region faces a number of challenges in addressing natural resource protection. With no defined land use guidelines, it is difficult to establish a framework for protection and conservation of specific resources.

Some Blueprints participants raised concern about new development damaging the "rural character" of the county. Protection and conservation of natural resources is a significant factor in maintaining a community's rural character. In addition, participants noted that many Toccoa and Stephens County residents are unaware of the area's resources and their ecological, recreational, and economic benefits to the community.

Toccoa Falls

Historic Resources and Urban Design Inventory:

Stephens County and Toccoa are rich in historic resources. A study that was funded as part of the "Georgia's Living Places" project conducted in 1989 and 1990 in association with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Division identified more than 1,100 historic buildings and places, about half of which were located within the Toccoa city limits. The location of these historic sites is shown on the map on page 15.

Only nine of the sites identified in the study are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and many of the most historically significant places are among those not listed.

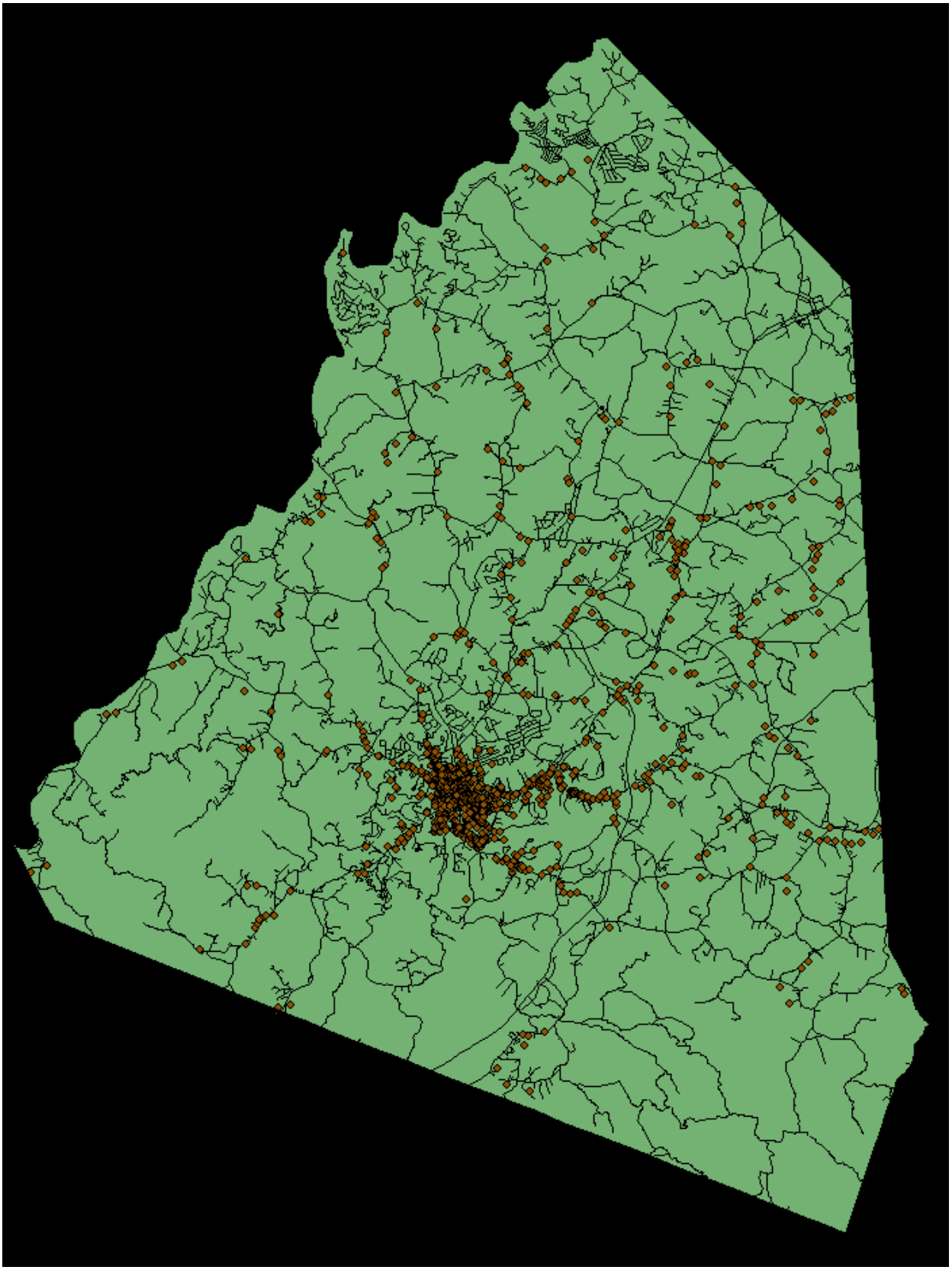
Among the most significant places in the county are:

- Old Estatoe Cherokee Indian Village
- Traveler's Rest
- Downtown Toccoa – residential, institutional, commercial, and industrial buildings
- Camp Toccoa
- Town of Martin – residential and commercial buildings
- Others – railroad trestle, dam, auditorium, and frontier settlements

Blueprints community stakeholders identified historic resources and the history of the county in general as local assets, but also identified several challenges related to historic preservation. Among them are:

- Protection of historic facilities
- Downtown redevelopment
- Housing – cost, variety, and age
- Competition for tourism/hotels
- Reuse of abandoned buildings
- Sprawl that lacks character
- More walkability

Historic home in the town of Martin



Distribution of Historic Sites in Stephens County

Toccoa and Stephens County Community Workshops

On September 19, 2006, the Georgia Conservancy, the City of Toccoa, and Stephens County hosted the first Steering Committee meeting for Blueprints Toccoa and Stephens County. The Steering Committee was an invited group of individuals that included residents, local business owners, local institutions, City, County, State, and government agency staff and elected officials.

Much of the meeting was spent in a facilitated discussion of the study area's assets and challenges that appear on the next two pages.

People Assets
- Concerned school system
- Involved community members
- Hard working employees
- Welcoming people
- Opportunity for community to shape itself
- Positive media coverage
- Strong leadership

People Challenges
- Adult education to enhance and protect assets- community attitude
- Attracting and educating good citizens/tenants
- Shortage of employment opportunities- commuting population
- Appealing to young professionals
- Limited housing opportunities
- Resistance to change
- Managing change
- State and local offices enabling vs. empowering
- School drop-out rate too high
- Ability to walk to services- not "senior friendly"
- Under-skilled labor force
- Not including minority communities

Place Assets
- Currahee Mountain
- Lake Hartwell
- Natural beauty
- Sense of community and place
- Historic and cultural facilities and locations
- Tree City USA
- Geographic location- climate, topography, close to other cities but not too close
- Balance of farm, forestry, industry
- Amenities for neighboring counties
- Pleasant living conditions
- Tugaloo Corridor
- Position on I-85
- Currahee Club
- National Forest

Place Challenges
- Protecting water supply
- Maintaining farming and forestry alongside business and residential growth
- Protection and enhancement of all assets during growth
- Unregulated land use
- Maintaining level of Lake Hartwell
- Downtown redevelopment
- Competition to be a destination
- Urban sprawl and lack of character defining elements
- Ability to walk to services- not "senior friendly"
- Abandoned buildings and brownfields

Potential and Capacity Assets
- Supply of water
- Hospital/medical facilities
- Level of intergovernmental cooperation
- Fiscally sound
- Future growth potential
- Balance of forestry, farm, industry
- Airport
- Amtrak
- Freight rail traffic
- Colleges
- Relative affordability compared to adjacent communities
- Development of Toccoa Falls Estates
- Camp Toccoa and Toccoa Falls
- Positive media coverage
- Recreation

Potential and Capacity Challenges

- Limited housing opportunities
- Maintenance of existing infrastructure
- Planning new infrastructure
- Abandoned buildings and brownfields
- Low land, home, rental prices
- Lack of hotel/bed and breakfast rooms
- Development of Toccoa Falls Estates
- Playing up assets and improving demographics

The Blueprints Toccoa/Stephens County Steering Committee, with the assistance of Georgia Conservancy staff, developed the following vision statement to guide the community planning process.

Blueprints Toccoa/Stephens County Vision

Toccoa and Stephens County will be a place where:

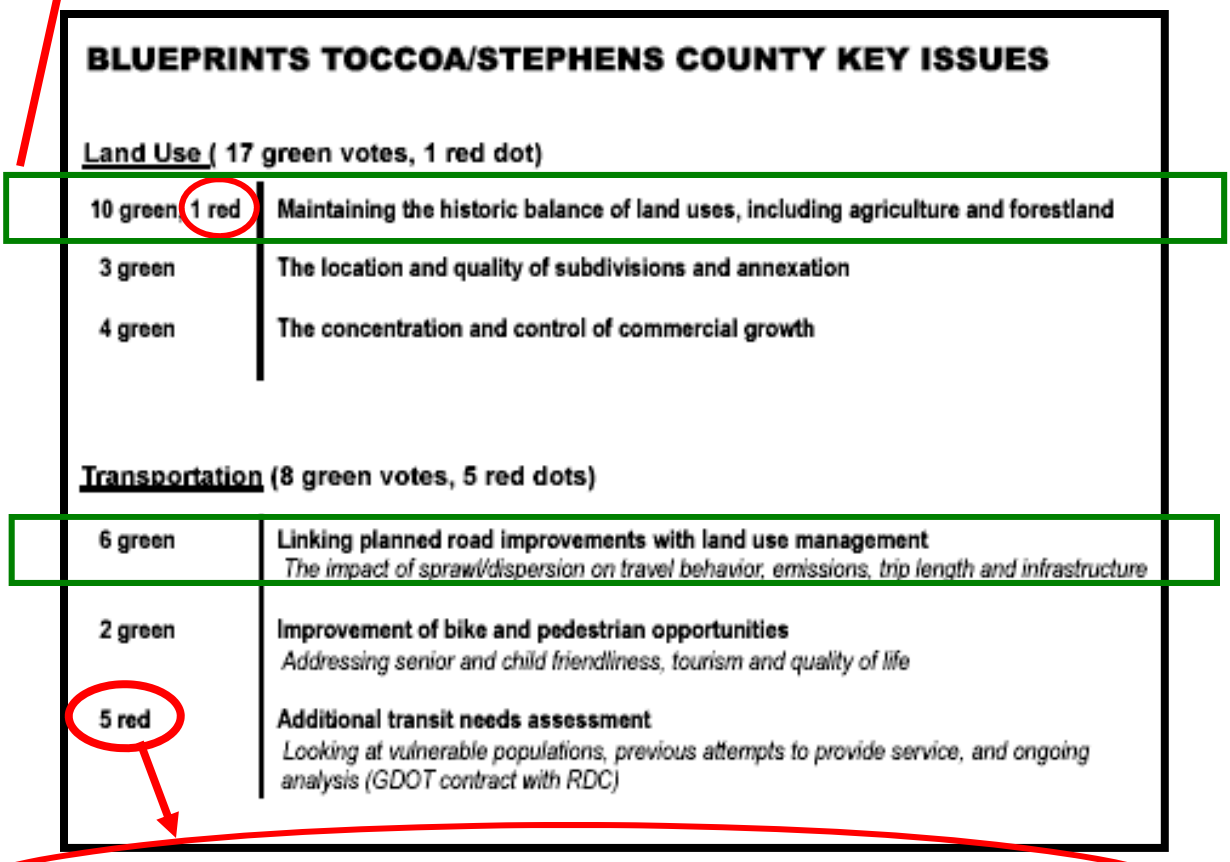
- Protection of water supply, natural, cultural, and historic resources are important in planning for the present and future;
- Diverse and compatible land uses range from agriculture, recreation, and forestry to commercial, residential, and industrial;
- Services, amenities, and infrastructure will be maintained, increased, and improved in order to support Toccoa's role as a regional hub;
- A variety of community design options for housing, mobility, services, and amenities will be used to attract new residents and to encourage existing residents to remain active in the community;
- Downtown commercial and industrial redevelopment, as well as new infill development, will be encouraged in order to discourage sprawl;
- Economic development opportunities will emerge from a network of community partnerships based on a coordinated plan including workforce education, innovative marketing, and sustainable use of community assets;
- Recreational opportunities will be part of both economic development and quality of life planning.

Key Issues: Ranking the issues

During the fall of 2006, the Toccoa/Stephens County Steering Committee participated in a series of meetings and workshops to identify key issues facing the community. The following list of key issues was developed during the October 2006 meeting and voted on during a November 2006 workshop.

The graphics on this and the following page are reproductions of the voting sheets from the November workshop. Each steering committee member was given green dots to place by the key issues of highest priority to them, and red dots to place by key issues they considered to be of lower priority.

Committee members felt that this key issue would be better phrased as follows :
Creating and maintaining diversity and compatibility of land uses ranging from agriculture, recreation, and forestry to commercial, residential, and industrial.



BLUEPRINTS TOCCOA/STEPHENS COUNTY KEY ISSUES

Land Use (17 green votes, 1 red dot)

10 green, 1 red	**Maintaining the historic balance of land uses, including agriculture and forestland**
3 green	**The location and quality of subdivisions and annexation**
4 green	**The concentration and control of commercial growth**

Transportation (8 green votes, 5 red dots)

6 green	**Linking planned road improvements with land use management** *The impact of sprawl/dispersion on travel behavior, emissions, trip length and infrastructure*
2 green	**Improvement of bike and pedestrian opportunities** *Addressing senior and child friendliness, tourism and quality of life*
5 red	**Additional transit needs assessment** *Looking at vulnerable populations, previous attempts to provide service, and ongoing analysis (GDOT contract with RDC)*

Committee members noted that the Regional Development Center will continue to study this issue and therefore it should not be a Blueprints workshop priority

BLUEPRINTS TOCCOA/STEPHENS COUNTY KEY ISSUES

Economic Development (24 green votes)

6 green	**Coordinated economic development plan including consistent marketing and communication** *Public and private partnerships working together, incentives for new and diverse businesses, mutual accountability, and more efficient services*
8 green	**Response to changing economic base and workforce conditions** *Including job based education and training*
10 green	**Additional downtown redevelopment** *Vacant land and buildings, brownfield redevelopment, empowerment and enterprise zone opportunities*

Population and Housing (20 green votes)

5 green	**Stephens County's aging population** *Attracting and keeping younger residents, and providing for a growing senior population*
5 green	**The County and City's aging housing stock** *Will likely need replacement and/or rehab in the future*
10 green	**The County's high percentage of mobile homes while lacking quality starter homes**
0 votes	**Rising owner occupied housing costs and renters remaining cost burdened**

BLUEPRINTS TOCCOA/STEPHENS COUNTY KEY ISSUES

Natural Resources (19 green votes)

8 green	**Land use management system that protects natural resources**
9 green	**Protection of water sources and supply system, and improvement of sewer system**
2 green	**Improved parks and recreation amenities** *Stronger use and design guidelines, improved promotion for citizens and visitors*

Historic Resources and Urban Design (10 green votes, 1 red dot)

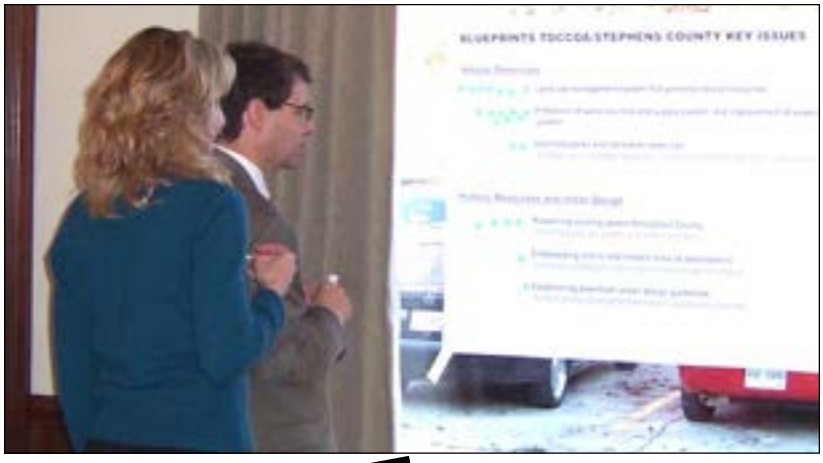
6 green	**Preserving existing assets throughout County** *Including buildings, places, and scenic corridors*
3 green	**Emphasizing scenic and historic sites as destinations** *Including marketing to visitors and increased jobs for citizens*
1 green, 1 red dot	**Establishing downtown urban design guidelines** *for both private development and public spaces and amenities*

Committee members noted that this process is underway and therefore should not be a Blueprints workshop priority

Key Issues : Discussing the priorities

During the November workshop meeting, several key issues were identified as priorities.

After ranking the issues, committee members discussed the issues and potential strategies for dealing with them. Following are summaries of those discussions.



"A land use management system for Toccoa and Stephens County should create and/or maintain diversity and compatibility of land uses ranging from agriculture and forestry to residential, commercial, and industrial."

Land Use and Transportation Discussion Summary:

- There is a need for land use management in some form across Toccoa and Stephens County.
- A land use management system for Toccoa and Stephens County should create and/or maintain diversity and compatibility of land uses ranging from agriculture, recreation, and forestry to residential, commercial, and industrial.
- Business leaders, developers, and realtors are current supporters of land use management.
- Traditional zoning will not work here, but character area planning might be a good start.
- Transit has not disappeared as an issue, but it is dead for now.
- We need education about farming as a land use.
- A large-scale education effort should be implemented regarding the benefits of land use management.

"Plan where and how redevelopment should occur and coordinate marketing and incentive programs "

Economic Development and Housing Discussion Summary:

- Coordinate marketing plans, including economic development and tourism.
- Redevelopment opportunities include industrial, mixed use, manufacturing, office, and residential. Plan where and how redevelopment should occur and coordinate marketing and incentive programs.
- Incentives are vital for clean up and development.
- The best approaches to mobile home alternatives are incentives, wage increases, and ordinances.
- We need a variety of options such as education and incentive programs for starter homes and home rehabilitation.

"Protecting water supply is directly linked to economic development."

Natural and Historic Resources Discussion Summary:

- Protecting the water supply is directly linked to economic development.
- Regulating to the right degree attracts people to the county by increasing land value and increasing investment in the county, but too much regulation could harm growth.
- Consider cattle farmers and options for stream buffers.
- Future developments should offer less parking and more green.
- What are the long-term costs of development vs. short-term profit?
- Minimum acreage for septic exists, but we need a long-term solution.
- There are more opportunities for education than for preservation of historic and natural resources.
- We should emphasize a marketing strategy to promote natural and cultural resources, but need a funding source.

Recommendations: Toccoa and Stephens County Strategies

Conceptual planning by "character area"
In order to think about how key issues apply to their own parts of the Toccoa and Stephens County community, steering committee members decided to work together over a series of maps in an exercise called "character area" planning (see Appendix, page 30).

Character areas are defined as specific geographic areas that have special characteristics, have potential to evolve into a unique area when provided specific guidance, or require special attention due to unique development issues. Planning through the identification of character areas is favored in rural counties because it provides an alternative to comprehensive county-wide zoning. Additionally, the identification of character areas is under the purview of local county stakeholders who have the best understanding of what gives specific areas their character. It should be noted that the State will incorporate character area planning in the next round of comprehensive plan updates.

A "character area" sketch for Stephens County
Although the participants worked as separate groups, their "character area" sketches for Stephens County were remarkably similar. The groups identified an urban core around Toccoa, an urban/suburban "service area", transportation corridors, and areas with character related to residential, agricultural, commercial, recreational, and forest-related uses. Areas suited for everything from eco-tourism to industrial redevelopment emerged from the exercise.

Stephens County character area workshop sketch

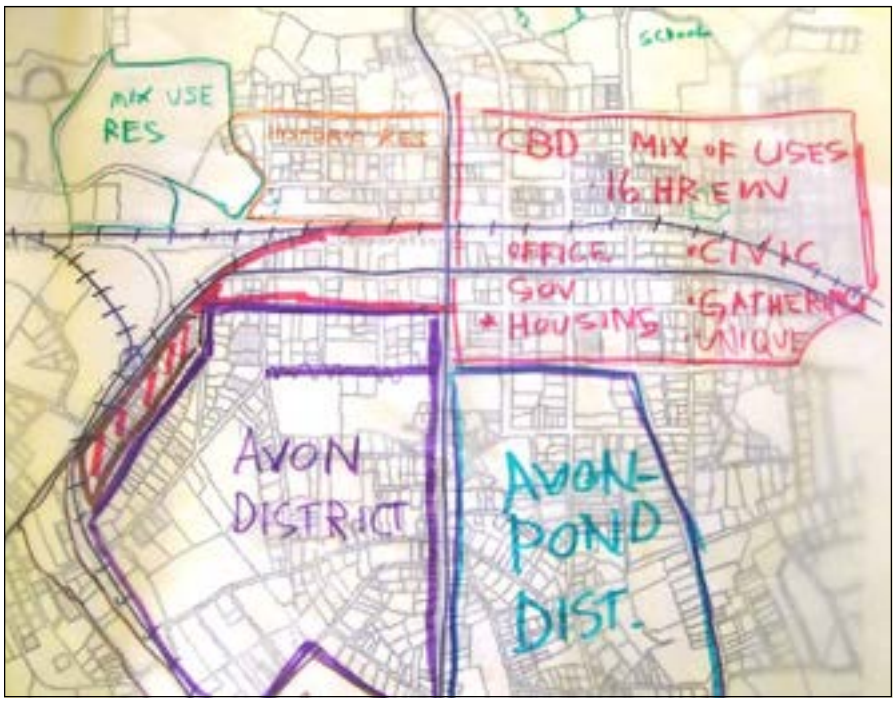
Discussion then centered around merging the maps and pinpointing which tools or next steps might apply to each "character area."

"Traditional zoning will not work here,
but character area planning might be a good place to start."

A "character area" sketch for the City of Toccoa

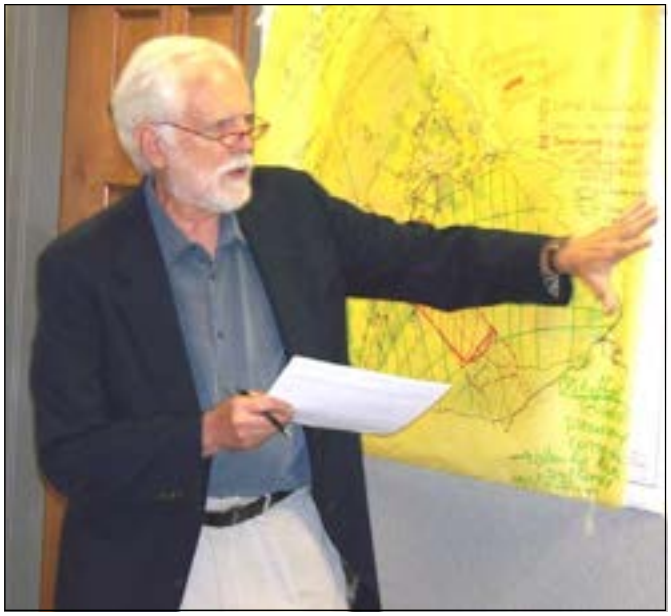
As was the case with the Stephens County sketches, the "character area" sketches for the City of Toccoa were remarkably similar.

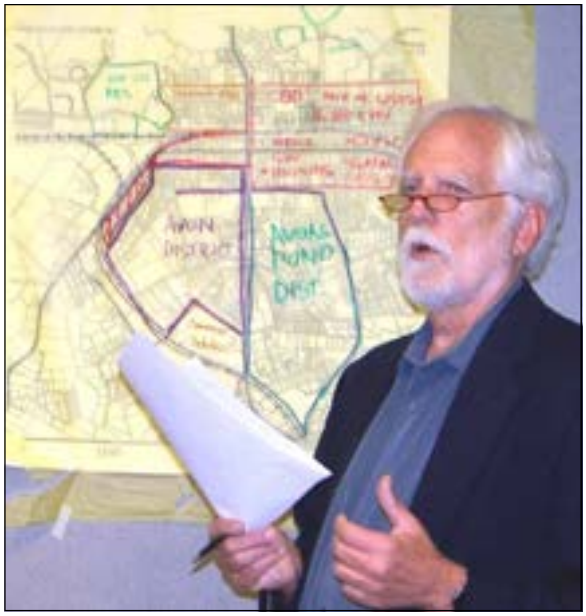
The groups identified a historic downtown core, areas of brownfield redevelopment and residential redevelopment potential, and areas for potential mixed-use development and redevelopment.



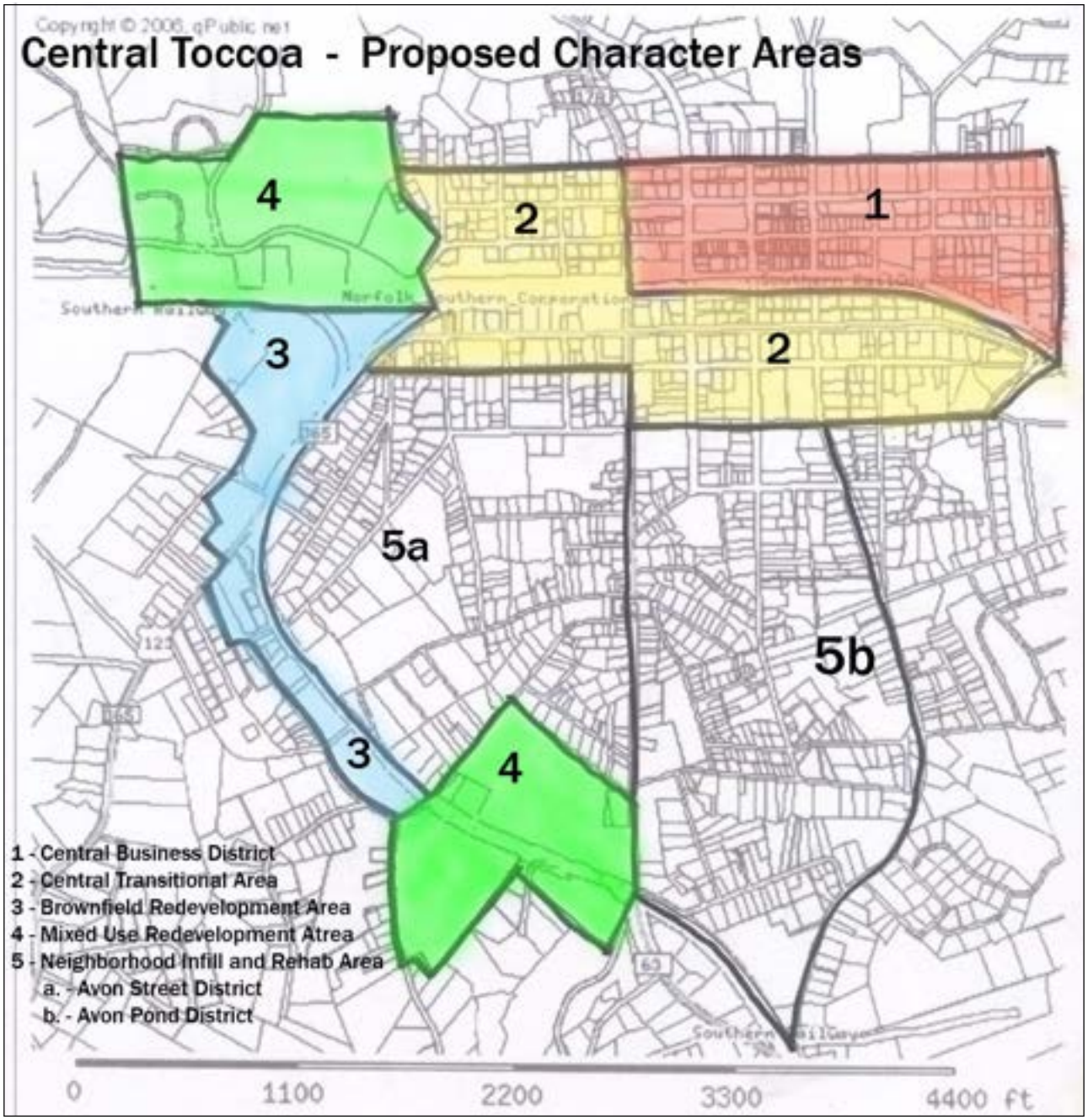
Toccoa character area workshop sketch

The maps and tables on the next four pages represent a "consensus summary" of the character area exercise that was prepared after the workshop by the Conservancy and then presented and agreed to by the stakeholders at the last meeting.





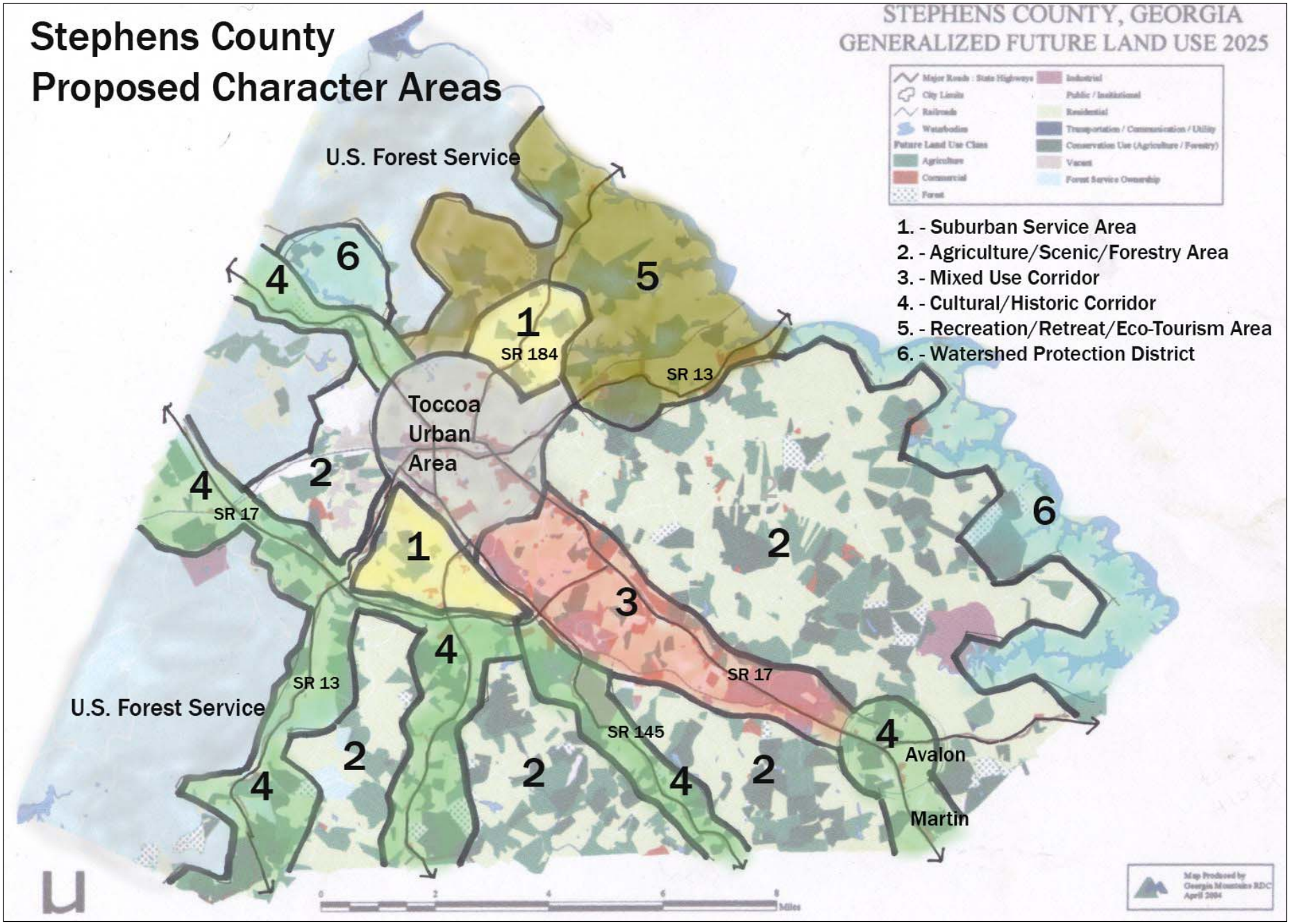
Georgia Tech Professor Randy Roark points out features of city and county character area sketches and discusses the results with Steering Committee members.


Copyright © 2006 qPublic.net
Central Toccoa - Proposed Character Areas
4
2
1
3
2
5a
5b
3
4
1 - Central Business District
2 - Central Transitional Area
3 - Brownfield Redevelopment Area
4 - Mixed Use Redevelopment Atrea
5 - Neighborhood Infill and Rehab Area
a. - Avon Street District
b. - Avon Pond District
0
1100
2200
3300
4400 ft

City of Toccoa
Potential Character Areas:

Character Area	Description	Potential Strategies for Next Steps
Central Transitional Area	Area of declining development south of Toccoa's CBD, currently a mix of commercial, heavy commercial, and aging residential along arterial road. Area has high vacancy rate and dilapidated building conditions. There is potential for streetscape improvements, higher density mixed use including residential, commercial, and retail along main corridor. There is potential for residential redevelopment, especially workforce and starter properties. Close proximity to CBD provides opportunity for connectivity and pedestrian amenities.	• Enterprise zoning • Workforce/Starter housing strategic plan • Updated development regulations • Business incubators • Transportation overlay districts • Community Improvement Districts • Streetscape improvements • Bike/Pedestrian transportation • Traditional neighborhood development ordinances
Brownfield Redevelopment Area	Vacant or under-utilized industrial areas (existing and potential brownfields) along the western rail corridor of Toccoa. There is the potential for redevelopment as a mix of industrial and commercial uses, with incentives for remediation and integration into the larger community.	• Enterprise zoning • Brownfield redevelopment incentives • Business incubators • Updated development regulations • Streetscape improvements
Mixed Use Redevelopment Area	Made up primarily of large, under-utilized land parcels within the proposed Enterprise Zone. The parcels may currently be industrial, wooded, abandoned, or low density residential. The potential for future mixed use development exists due in part to large lots and transportation connections. Many of the parcels border the railroad and the Avon Street residential district.	• Workforce and starter home strategic plan • Brownfield redevelopment
Neighborhood Infill and Rehabilitation Area	Consists of aging single family homes, some of which are dilapidated, and vacant lots. Significant potential for home rehabs and developing new housing stock exists. This area is located primarily in the Avon Street neighborhood and south of the Central Business District.	• Workforce and starter home strategic plan
Historic District/Urban Design Overlay Areas	Historically significant areas outside of existing historic districts, these areas could encompass industrial, commercial, or residential properties adjacent to downtown Toccoa (such as old mill housing). Guidelines for new and existing structures in each of these districts can be established as an overlay to the existing requirements in order to preserve their character.	• Historic district ordinance • Public/private space guidelines • Development guidelines

Stephens County
Proposed Character Areas



Stephens County
Potential Character Areas:

Character Area	Description	Potential Strategies for Next Steps
Suburban Service Area	Area outside city limits where development pressure for suburban subdivision development is high. Guidelines are needed to facilitate development in this location to preclude subdivision growth in conservation areas throughout the county. Design of future developments encouraged to connect with surrounding residential, commercial, recreation, and transportation facilities.	• City services will be provided and extended where necessary to fit this boundary • Encourage development of moderate density through lot size and design guidelines • Encourage master planning and provide planning support to maximize potential of future development to blend compatibly and connect with surrounding facilities
Agriculture/Scenic/ Forestry Area	Primarily agricultural or forestry lands not suitable for suburban development. This area is defined by a high degree of open space, scenic amenities, and/or environmentally sensitive territory. It may also include residential development of very low density.	• Restrict new development by requiring permits for proposed projects. • Promote the area as an ecotourism and recreation destination. • Pursue conservation easements in highly visible or sensitive portions of this area.
Mixed Use Corridor or District	Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of major roadways. May include a mix of retail, office, and other employment centers, as well as residential or institutional uses. Development controls or guidelines may be utilized to unify aesthetic treatments throughout the corridor, to require landscaping as well as signage and lighting standards, to provide for pedestrian and bicycle transportation and amenities, etc.	• Overlay Districts: A defined geographic area in which certain conditions on development apply. • Access Management: includes managing where and how approaches or signals are allowed, use of medians, the creation of turn lanes, etc • Community Improvement Districts (CIDs): created for financing a range of facilities and services in a clearly defined area, including transportation improvements and landscaping/aesthetic treatments. Bike/ped and transit opportunities. • Streetscape Improvements
Cultural/Historic/ Scenic Corridor or District	Areas of particular interest to the history and local culture of Stephens County, including buildings and sites, which may be grouped into districts or linear corridors. The focus is on preserving character, both for future residents and in order to attract visitors.	• Historic District Ordinance • Design Guidelines • Development Guidelines
Recreation/Retreat/ Eco-Tourism Conservation Area	Overlapping of public or private land, suitable for various types of recreation, with private lodging and conference facilities. Protection of the natural environment is important, but development that encourages tourism and connects to residential areas and other recreational amenities is welcome.	• Development guidelines • Stormwater management plan • Business incubators
Water Protection/ Watershed Conservation Area	The goal of this area is pollution prevention and water quality management for the county's water supply and that of Lake Hartwell.	• Hillside development ordinance • Septic system installation requirements • Development setbacks within certain proximity to streams • Residential overlay guidelines for designated areas
Historic District/ Urban Design Overlay Area	Outside of existing historic districts, this area could encompass industrial, commercial, or residential properties) and establish guidelines for new and existing structures in those districts in order to preserve their character.	• Historic district ordinance • Public/private space guidelines • Development guidelines

Implementation Checklist

The nature of the Toccoa/Stephens County study area and the key issues and potential next steps identified by the stakeholders suggest a series of strategies that can be pursued by steering committee members with assistance from local and state government agencies. These strategies are organized and discussed in greater detail on the following pages within the key issues areas.

Short-Term Strategies

- **Initiate and participate in the Stephens County Comprehensive Plan update:** The Georgia Department of Community Affairs serves as the regulating and approving body for all of Georgia's local government comprehensive plans.

  According to DCA, the plan update will proceed in three steps:
  - Community Assessment
  - Community Participation
  - Community Agenda

- **Initiate a coordinated economic development and marketing plan:** Decide where to encourage development and/or redevelopment related to:
  - Recreation
  - Tourism
  - Retail and Commercial
  - Industrial
  - Institutional (education and healthcare)

  Work through the Comprehensive Plan update to match land use tools to desired outcomes.

  Focus on marketing and communication inside and outside the community

- **Pursue and implement Enterprise Zone designation**

- **Pursue and implement streetscape and design guidelines for historic districts**

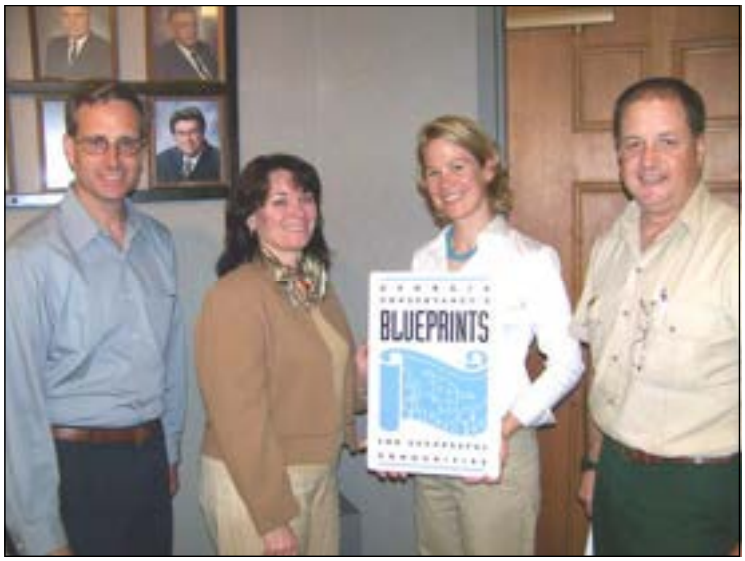
In addition to the immediate short-term actions listed above, it will take the long-term commitment and combined support from community members, partners, and funders to complete the following actions. The community will need to set priorities for implementing these mid-term and long-term actions.

Mid-Term Strategies

- Develop a Workforce and Starter Housing Strategic Plan
- Develop and implement a Brownfield Redevelopment Plan coordinated with the economic development and marketing plan
- Create districts to address specific issues such as Transportation Overlay Districts and Community Improvement Districts
- Adopt Overlay Districts in the county to guide and promote recreation and eco-tourism, forestry and agriculture, industrial and residential development
- Develop residential standards to safeguard water quality in Lake Hartwell, such as a hillside development ordinance and increased setbacks for residential development

Long-Term Strategies

- Consider instituting permit requirements for new development in sensitive areas of the water supply watershed
- Investigate a conservation easement program in highly visible or sensitive areas of the water supply watershed
- Consider a flexible stream buffer plan to protect both water quality and viability of agriculture and cattle farming



City of Toccoa representatives Billy Morse and Connie Tabor with Dorothy McDaniel of the Georgia Conservancy and Ken Masten of the Georgia Forestry Commission

Appendix

Potential Land Use Strategies:
Land Use Planning by Character Area

What it is:
Development patterns in any jurisdictions create individual areas that are unique in character. By identifying these "character areas" and implementing ordinances within them, a jurisdiction such as Stephens County can influence future development patterns

How it works:
The Georgia Department of Community Affairs defines a character area as a *specific geographic area* that:

- Has unique or special characteristics
- Has potential to evolve into a unique area when provided specific and intentional guidance; or
- Requires special attention due to unique development issues.

Planning through the identification of character areas is favored in rural counties because it provides an alternative to comprehensive county-wide zoning. Additionally, the identification of character areas is under the purview of local county stakeholders who have the best and highest understanding of what gives specific areas their character.

To identify character areas, local stakeholders examine a map of their jurisdiction and identify the various character areas that exist. Features such as site design characteristics, intensity of development, interactions among uses, environmental characteristics, or amount of open space might be used in selecting and naming character areas. Examples of character areas include: greenway corridors, agricultural areas, rural residential areas, urban service delivery areas, or historic/cultural areas. Once preliminary character areas have been identified, additional information such as history, statistical data, development forecasts, and a community vision are integrated in order to accurately label and plan for these areas. To formulate a community vision, a community asks itself questions like:

- What do we want our community to become?
- What future development do we want in our community?

Through activities such as design charrettes, focus groups, or scenario building, a coherent community vision is crafted for each character area. This community vision guides decision-making for each area. The final task is to implement the vision for each character area. To do this, specific objectives are identified and development recommendations, design guidelines, and regulations that achieve these objectives are formulated.

Where it is being used:
Some examples of controls in a scenic corridor character area:

- A development recommendation on a scenic corridor could provide incentives for property owners along the corridor to provide conservation easements to preserve and protect land.
- A design guideline for a scenic corridor could establish landscaping or tree requirements.
- A regulation on a scenic corridor could require a natural vegetation buffer of at least 50 feet in width along the scenic corridor.

Examples:

- Lumpkin County, GA
- White County, GA
- Franklin County, TN

More information can be found at the Georgia Department of Community Affairs website:
http://www.dca.state.ga.us/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/programs/smallareaplanning.asp

Potential Land Use Strategies:
Major Permit Requirements

What it is:

By requiring permits, a jurisdiction can regulate land use on a project-by-project or site-by-site basis by mandating an approval process for new projects where a site or plan exceeds established thresholds on locally critical criteria. By requiring county approval, new development could be built in a manner that meets local goals, such as maintaining a balance of land uses, preserving agricultural land, or concentrating growth along existing corridors.

For example, permitting could be used to require approval for a new development exceeding "*X*" square feet of planned commercial space. Alternatively, it could require approval for development on any site exceeding "*X"* acres.

This method is particularly good for a county with a desire to influence the location, intensity, and quality of specific types of new development. Additionally, this is a good option for a jurisdiction with limited enforcement capacity, as it narrows the number of projects that must be reviewed.

In Stephens County, permitting done on a project-by-project basis could provide county oversight for new commercial developments over a given size in order to maintain a locally-preferred aesthetic or scale.

Similarly, permitting done on a site-by-site basis could provide county oversight for what occurs on specific types of developable land, particularly agricultural, forest, and scenic land. By requiring new development to go through a permitting process based on the size or other characteristics of developable land, the county is able to influence new development and its impacts.

How it works:

1) Prepare a description of the "purpose and intent" of requiring permits.

2) Clearly describe the types of projects or sites that would require county approval. This section includes the specific thresholds on proposed project or site criteria that trigger the permit requirement.

3) Describe the permitting process and requirements.

4) Outline the criteria that will be used by decision-makers to approve or deny a permit. These could include criteria such as, "will not cause unreasonable highway congestion."

5) Describe the appeals process for a developer should a permit application be denied.

Other communities using these strategies:

- Level of Service Standards Control New Development in Montgomery County, Maryland

Bucks County, PA

Potential Transportation Strategies:
Corridor Development Controls

What it is:

There are four tools in this category:

Overlay Districts:
A defined geographic area in which certain conditions on development apply. An overlay can address such things as development locating in environmentally sensitive or historic areas; or a desire to correct adverse aesthetic impacts from sprawling and uncoordinated commercial, industrial or retail development along roadways including scenic byways.

Access Management:
According to the Georgia DOT, "Access management involves providing (or managing) access to land development while simultaneously preserving the flow of traffic on the surrounding road system in terms of safety, capacity, and speed." It can include techniques like managing where and how approaches or signals are allowed, use of medians, and the creation of turn lanes.

Community Improvement Districts (CIDs):
According to the Georgia DCA, a CID is "an organization, usually consisting of local businesses and other institutions, created for financing a range of facilities and services in a clearly defined area. CID's have the power to issue bonds and impose property taxes. A CID must be approved by the passage of a law in the Georgia Assembly, and approval also must be granted by the local government and 75% of the property owners in the proposed area."

Improving Street Connectivity:
Early patterns of road development in the US often included a grid of well connected paths and lanes. Later developers tended to create cul-de-sacs, loop roads that had the effect of closing in and isolating both residential subdivisions and office parks. Additionally, all traffic to and from the developments was dumped onto a few large arterials, leading to traffic congestion and bottlenecks at overtaxed intersections. Loops and cul-de-sacs also have the effect of discouraging pedestrians, because walking distances become long through the circuitous and unconnected roads. Many transportation planners believe that greater efficiency can be achieved by providing more connection and multiple paths of travel options. Community leaders also find additional benefits in creating a more walkable, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment.

Other communities using these strategies:

- Overlay Districts: Clarkesville

The City is addressing problems in the 441/197/17 corridor, which continues on through town to the square. They are creating a preservation corridor which includes strict sign ordinance, tree protection, as well as other ordinances for the protection of the rural character of the town. The overlay district includes five character areas, each of which is unique in its qualities/ characteristics and unique in the proposed guidelines/solutions. The character areas are: downtown commercial area, regular commercial area, greenspace area, redevelopment area, and residential area

- Access Management:

Recent access management projects in Georgia include Cherokee County: Bells Ferry Road Corridor; Gwinnett County/CID: Highway 78 Corridor; and the City of Covington: Highway 278 Corridor.

- Community Improvement District: Gwinnett County

The Highway 78 Community Improvement District (CID) is concerned with improving a 7-mile stretch of the highway, including transportation improvements (multi-modal, pedestrian), landscaping/aesthetic treatments along the corridor and generally marketing/improving the corridor's image.

- Street Connectivity: Flowery Branch

The City of Flowery Branch drafted an ordinance for a "traditional neighborhood development" (TND) overlay district in which maximum block lengths (800 ft) and widths will be imposed for new subdivisions. Mid-block alleys or pedestrian footpaths are permitted.

Potential Transportation Strategies:
Context Sensitive Solutions

What it is:

There are four tools in this category:.

"Right sizing" and "Road diets:" Revising street design requirements in local development regulations to tailor streets to the scale of the neighborhood and types of traffic they serve. Revisions may include reducing required street widths, requiring bicycle lanes, or adding on-street parking.

Bike/ped and transit opportunities: Paths and trails not only provide recreational and exercise benefits for joggers, bicyclists and/or pedestrians; they are increasingly serving a role as a transportation alternative for all. They can be especially important to seniors, children, and persons without automobiles.

Streetscape improvements: According to the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, "The character of a street or an area is much like the character of a person. The street and its building facades are the "face" presented to the public. Like the face of a person, it can be friendly or hostile; it can be welcoming or harsh. The character of the street and the building facades along it thus exert a strong influence over the atmosphere of the pedestrian environment making people feel either welcome or unwanted. Improvements may be related to streets and sidewalks, lighting, landscaping and street furniture, and/or other amenities.

Traffic calming: According to the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) "Traffic calming involves changes in street alignment, installation of barriers, and other physical measures to reduce traffic speeds and/or cut-through volumes, in the interest of street safety, livability, and other public purposes."

Other communities using these strategies:

- Fannin County/Blue Ridge:

The county is attempting to maintain the community's character by improving the pattern, design, and aesthetics, especially along the State Route 515 (Appalachian Development Highway) corridor. They are creating development regulations that will address concerns in the rapidly growing area near the highway.

- Whitfield County/Dalton:

Dalton is currently constructing the first phase of the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan. Other County and City studies include an Urban Redevelopment Plan and a Multi-Modal Transportation Structural Study.

- Clarksville:

Concerned with the preservation of greenspace, as well as local streams and rivers, Clarksville is creating a five mile loop around the city called The Greenway. The Greenway is also seen as providing an alternate transportation route

- Alpharetta, Roswell:

Traffic Calming programs.

- Jessup/Wayne County:

The McMillan Creek Greenway will provide a scenic recreational area, to encourage walking within the community, and to reduce pollution from runoff. Walking, jogging, bicycling, and roller-blading will be permitted along one side of the creek; equestrians may use a trail on the other side.

- Tyrone:

The town wants to tie all neighborhoods together in the city and to allow people to get from one neighborhood to another without getting in their car. They are constructing a 1.8 mile multi-use path (for walkers, bikers, joggers, and golf carts) along Castlewood Road behind the Tyrone Elementary School.

Potential Economic Development Strategies:
Enterprise Zone

What it is:
Areas within qualified communities are designated Enterprise Zones and afforded incentives to encourage development and economic growth.

How it works:
Under the 1997 Georgia Enterprise Zone Employment Act and the State Enterprise Zone program, specific geographic areas within cities & counties are aided in rehabilitation of place and reinvestment of private business through use of the following incentives:

- Property tax exemption
- Abatement or reduction in occupation taxes, regulatory fees, building inspection fees, and other fees that would otherwise be imposed on qualifying business.

Other communities using these strategies:

- Augusta, GA

Laney Walker Enterprise Zone Tax Abatement Program
http://www.augustaga.gov/departments/housing_dev/lwez.asp

- Dooly & Crisp Counties, GA

Southwest Georgia United Empowerment Zone
http://www.ezec.gov/communit/swgeorgia.html

- Columbus , GA

http://www.columbusga.org/CommunityReinvestment/enterprise_zone.htm

Potential Economic Development Strategies:
Brownfield Redevelopment

What it is:
Sites considered brownfields (contaminated, and often underdeveloped or abandoned sites) are afforded incentives to encourage redevelopment through the Georgia Hazardous Site Reuse and Redevelopment Act and the 2003 Brownfield Tax Incentive Law.

How it works:
Under the 2003 Brownfield Tax Incentive Law, the following incentives are offered to prospective brownfield redevelopers:

- Liability Limitation
  The liability and cost of groundwater cleanup remains with the seller, not the buyer of the property. Additionally, the buyer is protected from 3rd party claims due to the contamination.
- Tax Incentives
  Preferential tax assessment is given to the property for 10 years or until EPD-certified site investigation and cleanup costs are recouped.

Additionally, the federal 2002 Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfield Revitalization Act authorizes up to $200 million in annual funding to support assessment, cleanup, loan funds, and job training for brownfield redevelopment.

Other communities using these strategies:

- Macon, GA- Brownfields Revitalization Project
- Atlanta, GA- Atlantic Steel site
- Florida- Baldwin Park redevelopment
- North Carolina- Brownfield remediation in Raleigh
- Louisiana – Baton Rouge Brownfields Program

Potential Housing Strategies:
Housing Strategic Plan

What it is:
A workforce and starter housing strategic plan that includes incentives and development guidelines.

How it works:
- Form a group of elected officials, business leaders, financial lenders, and citizens to study the workforce and starter home housing issue in Stephens County and Toccoa.
- Determine what the areas needs are.
- Develop possible ways the local government, businesses, and financial institutions can come together to address these needs through incentives to attract affordable housing developers, regulations, historic renovations, and Federal and State funding sources such as the USDA, HUD, and the DCA.

Where has it been used:
There are many examples of workforce and affordable housing development throughout Georgia. One prime example is Peachtree Villages in Jonesboro, which won a National Association of Homebuilders award in 2006.

http://www.dca.state.ga.us/toolkit/ProcessExamplesSearch.asp?GetExample=193

http://www.planning.org/features/2006/housingtop10.htm

Potential Housing Strategies:
Manufactured Housing Ordinance

What it is:
Manufactured home compatibility standards.

How it works:
A regulation that best fits the county's needs can be adopted in order to provide for increased architectural standards for manufactured housing and improved site requirements. The ordinance does not outlaw manufactured housing, but rather requires design and site improvements. Typical requirements of an ordinance would be slope requirements for the roof, foundation requirements, and site requirements for manufacture housing parks.

Other communities using these strategies:
Manufacture home compatibility standards have been enacted in a number of counties across Georgia, including Forsyth and Spalding Counties.

Examples of a manufactured housing ordinance can be found in the DCA's Alternatives to Conventional Zoning Model Code. The code includes three varying levels of requirements.

http://www.dca.state.ga.us/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/programs/modelcode.asp

Potential Environmental Resource Strategies:
Water Protection Areas

What it is:
Protection Areas establish defined regulations to protect areas that flow into important streams and reservoirs. These regulations create protections to limit the major degradations that affect stream quality such as sedimentation and non-point source pollution.

How it works:
The following are regulatory tools that create guidelines and percentage quotes for development and specific activities.

North Georgia Water Planning District Model Stream Buffer Protection Ordinance: This model ordinance provides a framework for local governments to develop buffer zones for streams, as well as the requirements that minimize land development within those buffers. It is the purpose of these buffer zone requirements to protect and stabilize stream banks, protect water quality and preserve aquatic and riparian habitat.

Maximum Impervious Surfaces Requirements: Many local governments require that impervious surfaces not exceed a certain maximum percentage, calculated on the basis of the lot size. These regulations usually only apply to residential lots. Limiting impervious surfaces is important in water supply watersheds and other environmentally sensitive areas, but it can also be used simply to reduce the strain on the stormwater management system.

Georgia DCA Model Hillside Development Ordinance: Standards for reasonable hillside use that complements the natural and visual character of the community, including requirements to prevent development that will erode hillsides, sedimentation of lower slopes, create potential for landslides, severe cutting of trees or the scarring of the landscape.

Other communities using these strategies:

The following are locations that have utilized the above tools.

- Gwinnett County/ Several other counties: After mandate from the North Georgia Metropolitan District, Gwinnett County and several others adopted variations on the North Georgia Water Planning District Model Ordinance.

- Pickens County: Joined with Lumpkin, Dawson, and Forsyth Counties to enact a set of design guidelines that helps limit impervious surfaces in new developments along the Etowah Basin.

- City of Blue Ridge Grading and Excavation Ordinance: In an effort to promote stronger standards for development on steep slopes the City of Blue Ridge, Georgia has put in place ordinances that regulate grading and excavating activities.

The following links hold the ordinances written in full:

Model Stormwater Management Ordinances from the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District
http://www.northgeorgiawater.com/html/86.htm

North Georgia Metropolitan Water Planning District Stream Buffer Ordinance
http://www.northgeorgiawater.com/files/MNGWPD_StreamBufferModOrd.pdf.

Etowah Basin Site Design Guidelines
http://www.etowahhcp.org/research/documents/bsd_guidelines_checklist.pdf

Georgia DCA Model Hillside Ordinances
http://www.dca.state.ga.us/intra_nonpub/Toolkit/ModelOrdinances/AltZ/2_7.pdf

Potential Environmental Resource Strategies:
County Wide Tools

What it is:
While specific locations warrant individualized protections, it is important to acknowledge that water systems draw from the entire flood plain. Therefore, it is appropriate to address the issue on a county-wide basis.

How it works:

The following regulatory tools would be appropriate for any activity that lies within the 100-year flood plain within county lines.

Atlanta Regional Commission Improved Stormwater Management Manual: An up-to-date comprehensive stormwater management technical manual that teaches effective best management practices.

Septic System Installation Requirements: Mandates minimum specifications for septic system installation and procedures for choosing the best location of the septic system. Proper sighting and installation is necessary for septic systems to function properly so that unacceptable environmental consequences are avoided.

Septic System Monitoring Requirements: A program of educating property owners and/or enforcing minimum requirements for the monitoring and maintenance of existing septic systems. This helps reduce the number of system failures and the unacceptable environmental consequences that result.

Other communities using these strategies:

- Gwinnett County Watershed Management Ordinance:

Gwinnett County conducted a Watershed Assessment to determine not only the condition of local streams, but also what factors were contributing to their impaired conditions. These were determined to be from stormwater runoff from developed and agricultural lands and from the clearing of riparian zones and stream bank vegetation.

- Gwinnett County Septic Survey:

The Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners recently hired an environmental company to identify areas of failing septic systems and determine remedies. Gwinnett County keeps accurate records using computers to track and catalog septic systems.

- Gwinnett County/ Douglas County Septic Maintenance Programs:

Gwinnett County has provided multiple resources to assist residents and business owners in maintaining their septic systems. The Douglasville-Douglas County Water and Sewer Authority can disconnect water to houses along the Dog River basin, a drinking water source, if septic tanks are not pumped every five years.

The following links hold the ordinances written in full:

Georgia ARC Stormwater Management Manual
http://www.georgiastormwater.com/
At the bottom of the website listed above a link brings up a detailed excel spreadsheet for assessing stormwater on a project by project basis, allowing for easy evaluation by city officials.

Georgia DCA Model Ordinance
http://www.dca.state.ga.us/toolkit/ToolDetail.asp?GetTool=48

Gwinnett County Online Education Program
http://www.co.gwinnett.ga.us

Potential Historic and Cultural Resource Strategies :
Historic District Design Guidelines

What it is:
Guidelines within a distoric district such as a downtown are passed as an ordinance and help preserve the appearance of historic homes and businesses.

How it works:
Guidelines prevent renovations that alter the character of historic buildings and ensure that signs and adjacent sidewalks are appropriate. They can also establish design requirements for new and infill construction that insure compatibility with the scale and character of the district

Other communities using these strategies:
Dahlonega, Georgia's historic district design guidelines were developed with the help of the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design and were passed in the form of a city ordinance that helps preserve the historic character of Dahlonega. The guidelines address driveways, fences, lighting, signage, doors, windows, renovations and additions, porches, and administrative aspects relating to the implementation of the guidelines.

The design guidelines for Dahlonega, along with the relevant ordinances, can be found on the website of the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design. Other similar guidelines for other Georgia towns are also included.
http://www.uga.edu/sed/facilities/owenslibrary/designguidelines/georgia.htm

Potential Historic and Cultural Resource Strategies :
Updated Development Regulations

What it is:
Development regulations passed in a city or county help ensure that new development, particularly commercial development, meets certain standards that a community determines.

How it works:
Regulations can help encourage trees in parking lots, a more traditional mix of uses, higher quality streets, and development that aesthetically conforms to the character of a community. Regulations typically apply to an entire city or county, but can be applied in specific areas such as downtowns.

Other communities using these strategies:
Blue Ridge, Georgia successfully implemented an improved set of development regulations that address several issues important to the community. Through public participation, four new ordinances were developed and passed to address grading and site preparation, landscaping, subdivisions, and mixed-use development. These ordinances improve the way development occurs on steep slopes and how trees are replaced, in addition to discouraging the sort of haphazard development that the community feared.

More information about the improved Blue Ridge development regulations is available on the Georgia Department of Community Affairs website as a part of their quality growth toolkit.
http://www.dca.state.ga.us/toolkit/ProcessExamplesSearch.asp?GetExample=443

Participants

Steering Committee Members

David Austin
Wendi Bailey
Russell Biggers
Gordon Broome
Keith Browne
Alan Burton
Jack Catlin
Andy Childs
Billy Chism
Steve Chitwood
Alan Coker
Forest Connelly
Roy Collier
David Cronic
Brown Dean
Larry Dodd
Christopher Epps
Joe Ferguson
Christopher Floyd
Don Foster
Ed Gambrell
Wayne Gardner
Gus Gonzales
Toby Goodlett
Mitch Griggs
Darrell Hampton
Dudley Hartell
Adam Hazell
Ginger Herring
Chad Herron
Representative Jeanette Jamieson
Dave Jenson
Don Keleman
Nic Lane
Robert Mahoney
Rob Mabry
Ken Masten
Myron McClain
Russell McMurray
Dale Meeks
Connie Moore
Ferrell Morgan
Billy Morse
Faris Mulkey
Ruth Nichols
Danny Otter
Brenda Carlan
Kathy Papa
Cam Parker
Andy Pavliscsak
Kenneth Peeples
Teri Pope
Don Pruitt
Diana Ramsey
Susan Reisch
Josh Schaefer
Greg Schultz
David Scott
Gary Steppe
Jack Stovall
Connie Tabor
John Taylor
Steve Tilley
Bob Troup
Benny Turner
Chris Whittley
Gary White

Georgia Tech City and Regional Planning

Randal Roark– Professor
Kris Anderson
K. Lynn Berry
Christian Gable
Woody Giles
Brittain Skinner
Matt Vivian

Blueprints Partners Professional

Brad Calvert

Blueprints Staff

Crystal Jackson Budd
Saskia Benjamin
Susan Kidd
Debbie Miness
Dorothy McDaniel

Traveler's Rest Historic Site

Funds for this project were provided by the Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program administered by the Georgia Forestry Commission.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-A, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

GEORGIA CONSERVANCY'S

BLUEPRINTS

FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

Georgia
CONSERVANCY

Georgia Conservancy
817 West Peachtree Street
Suite 200
Atlanta, Georgia 30308
404.876.2900
www.georgiaconservancy.org