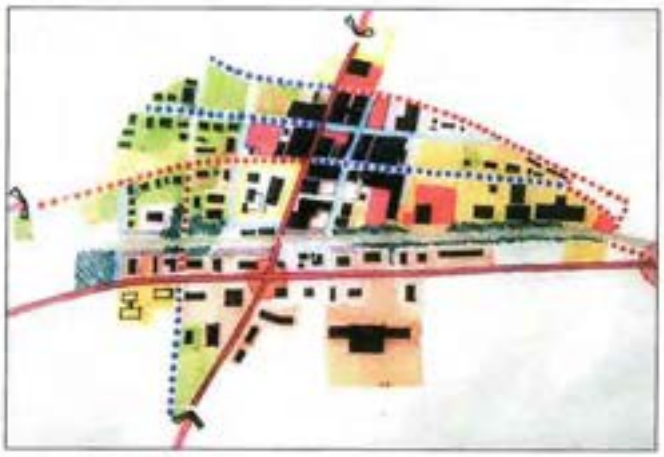
Workshop 6

University Parkway & Atlanta - Athens Rail Corridor

Barrow County Oconee County

Blueprints for Successful Communities

THE GEORGIA CONSERVANCY'S BLUEPRINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES



Blueprints for Successful Communities Partners

The Georgia Conservancy
Urban Land Institute
Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association
American Institute of Architects
American Society of Landscape Architects
Institute of Transportation Engineers
Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation
Consulting Engineers Council
Georgia Planning Association
National Association of Industrial and Office Properties
Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership

University Parkway & Atlanta - Athens Rail Corridor

Community Design Workshop

- *Barrow County*
- *Oconee County*

Results of a community design workshop for Barrow and Oconee Counties, Georgia

March 2001

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THE GEORGIA CONSERVANCY'S BLUEPRINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

A component of the Blueprints for Successful Communities Initiative of The Georgia Conservancy in partnership with:

- **The Interprofessional Community Design Collaborative and**
- **The Georgia Tech Urban Design Workshop**

Hosted by:

- **University Parkway Alliance**
- **Georgia Rail Passenger Authority**

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Winder Depot

About this report

Since beginning the Blueprints for Successful Communities Community Design Workshop process in 1995, The Georgia Conservancy, Georgia Tech, and the Interprofessional Community Design Collaborative have worked with five communities. In 1999, at the request of the University Parkway Alliance, we initiated the first regional project in the Blueprints workshop series: the transportation corridor, road and rail, between Atlanta and Athens. This corridor runs through six counties and more than a dozen towns. Due to the size of the area, the Blueprints workshop process was split into two phases. Phase One was conducted from September to December 1999 and covered Barrow and Oconee counties, the eastern or outer segment of the corridor. This report documents Phase One. Phase Two will focus on Gwinnett County and ensure that the "edge" counties and cities—Athens-Clarke County, Dekalb County, and the City of Atlanta—are also included in the project via the Regional Steering Committee.

The Blueprints Initiative

Renowned planner Jan Gehl once compared cities to all-night house parties, saying, "Cities, like parties, come in three versions. Some you don't go to unless you have to; some you leave as soon as you can; and others you go and stay for much longer than you planned." When cities, towns and neighborhoods become lost in the morass of sprawl development they begin to feel like places you want to leave as soon as you can.

There is a growing consensus among members of the environmental and business communities that the current trend of low-density, decentralized, automobile-dependent development so common in this country for the past 50 years is a major threat to quality of life. Not only is it expensive for local governments to serve, but the impact that this urban form has on the environment is staggering. Automobile emissions create toxic air pollution. Storm water surging across miles of asphalt poisons rivers and streams. Thousands of acres of farms, woodlands and open space are lost to strip malls and parking lots.

In Georgia, a diverse group of people including homebuilders, architects, planners, developers, environmentalists, and neighborhood leaders are among a growing number who are beginning to understand the link between the health of our environment, our economic stability and the way we use land. In 1995, The Georgia Conservancy convened such a group of people to foster public awareness about better ways to grow communities. A coalition was formed called Blueprints for Successful Communities.

The Partners have been instrumental in raising public awareness in Georgia and in the Atlanta region specifically about alternative land use and transportation strategies that are good for the environment and good for the economy. There are two Blueprints program elements: educational conferences and community design workshops.

Through the workshops, communities participate in the design of their own neighborhood, and are able to create a model to guide the future of their community. This model will hopefully lead to a community designed for people, where walking to the corner store is commonplace, where tree-lined streets and bike paths are the norm, and where traffic congestion and air pollution are minimal.

The workshop activities and recommendations are based on a set of principles developed by the Blueprints Partners.

Blueprints Principles

Successful Communities:

- work together to produce a high quality of life that they want to sustain
- work to create regional strategies for transportation, land use and economic growth
- understand that sustainable community design is based on the effect of the built environment on the natural environment, aesthetics, scale, history and culture
- promote efficient use of existing infrastructure, energy, water and land
- incorporate compact integrated land uses which bring people closer to work, to school and shopping and safeguard undeveloped lands for agriculture, greenspace and recreation
- are designed to be safe, healthy, economically strong, environmentally sound and inclusive

The Importance of Regional Planning

No county or city by itself can make a dent in an air quality problem or plan for a watershed's integrity. The shared vision for a greenway along a river from the mountains to the piedmont is bigger than even existing groupings of counties can encompass. Ecosystems know nothing of political boundaries or social units. Across Georgia there is now growing consensus that solutions must be found across local boundaries to protect natural systems and the state's quality of life.

Regional strategies for transportation, land use and ecomnomic growth offer not only a more sensitive approach to natural resources, but also a more efficient and effective use of governmment funds. This Blueprints Community Design Workshop for the University Parkway / Atlanta-to-Athens Rail Corridor begins a process of planning at the regional level which takes into account all of these advantages.

THE ATLANTA / ATHENS RAIL CORRIDOR

The corridor stretching from downtown Atlanta to Athens has for some time been one of the region's highest growth areas. The corridor faces even more accelerated growth with the addition of two major transportation improvements.

- The recently completed University Parkway (Ga. 316), linking I-85 to Athens.

- The proposed first phase Commuter Rail corridor following the existing CSX rail line and paralleling the Parkway. With the region's air quality problems and the creation of the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, this rail line becomes a high priority project in the region.

The presence of these transportation projects creates an urgent need to determine if there is a better way to manage growth in the area in such a way as to reduce traffic, improve air quality, protect environmentally sensitive areas, create efficient infrastructure systems, and in general, create more livable communities. At the same time, this urgent need becomes a unique opportunity to point the way to a more sustainable future for the Atlanta region.

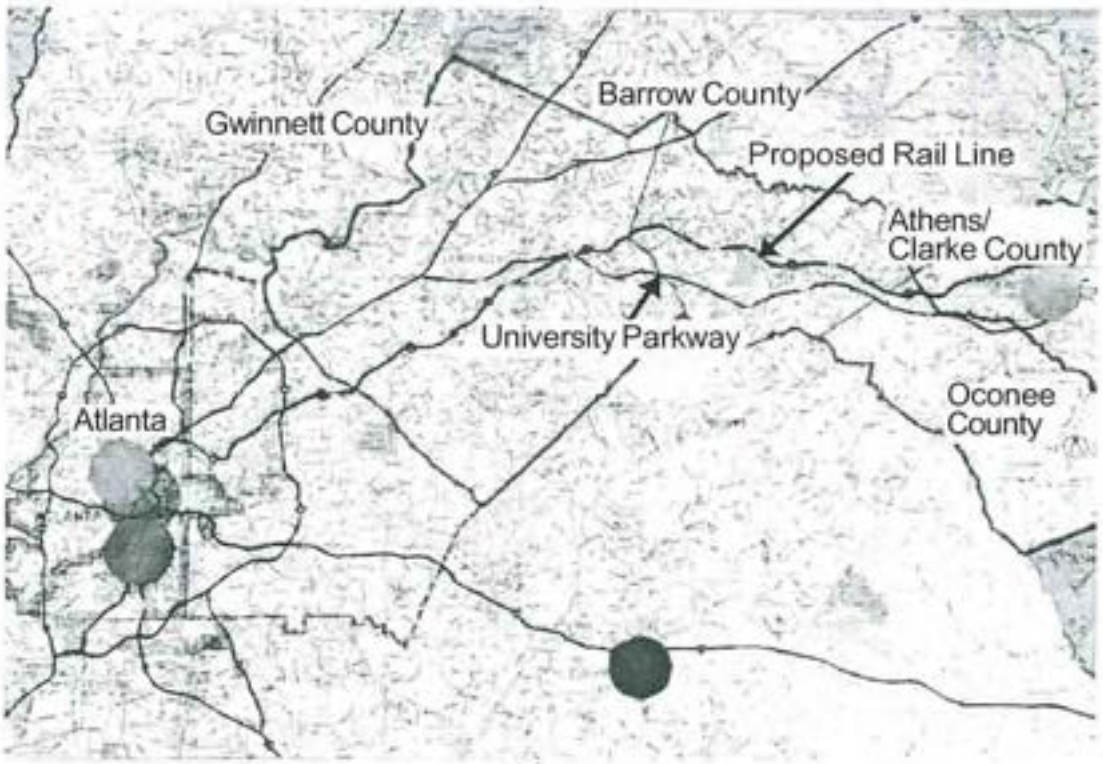
To address the challenge of this corridor, two separate planning workshop processes are being undertaken:

- The "outer" (eastern) half of the corridor, characterized by historic small towns and rural areas, both now under intense development pressure (Barrow and Oconee County terminating in Athens-Clarke County.)

- The "inner" (western) half of the corridor, characterized by urbanization and existing low-density suburban development (in Atlanta and Dekalb and Gwinnett counties.)

This study presents the findings of the workshop addressing the "outer" half of the corridor. Two specific questions for this section of the corridor are:

1. Can the Commuter Rail and Parkway be catalysts to help shape a more sustainable development pattern while protecting the historic towns along the rail line?
2. Can economic development opportunities created by the Commuter Rail and Parkway be harnessed to improve the jobs/housing balance in these typically bedroom counties, improving both job opportunities and additional tax base for the county's economies?



ASSETS AND ISSUES

A Steering Committee made up of local community members was asked to describe their community's assets, as well as the challenges they face.

Barrow County

ASSETS

- The people
- Small town charm
- Close to Atlanta and Athens - good direct path to both
- Open minded about the future
- The rail line
- All roads in the county lead to Winder
- Rolling hills, natural features
- Good amount of industry - good balance of labor
- Airport
- Good quality of life - separate from Atlanta
- Fort Yargo State Park - water recreation - available to handicapped
- Good qualtiy of schools
- Family farms
- Higher education facility

ISSUES

- What we don't want to be - determine level of industrial development and where it should be
- Work force is leaving to work
- Work force qualifications
- School size
- Balance of services for people who have been here vs. people who have recently relocated
- Find unique quality
- Must address density
- Not enough sidewalks
- Agri-business is threatened - cost per acre, chicken houses next to subdivisions, EPD regulations, cattle in streams, pressure to develop
- Watershed - quality of drinking water
- Mixed thoughts regarding greenspace
- Can we be what we want to be?
- Inequities in the tax base
- 8 miles to largest mall in the Southeast - shoppers leave the county to shop
- DOT - roads, use of land
- Bypass/rail/airport - how to relate systems? How to plan for development and greenspace in that corridor
- 1 acre residential lots take away more farmland
- Need adequate sewer services
- Where to put different types and sizes of residential development
- "Illusion" that you are moving into a rural area, but it starts developing

Oconee County

ASSET

- Large tracts of residential land, open space, rural setting

ISSUES

- How to protect these assets without taking property rights
- Increase in land prices
- Concern for future of agriculture- "hobby farms" taking over, more horse farms

ASSET

- Convenient access to urban centers

ASSET

- "Neighborliness" - sense of community

ISSUES

- How to keep sense of community & clean community
- How to keep sense of community with more people and large lots separating them

ASSET

- Low crime rate

ISSUES

- Increase in population will have an effect
- University Parkway
- Commercial Development

ASSET

- Good school system

ISSUES

- Larger schools, classes
- Qualified instructors
- Maintaining strong leadership
- Financial burden

ASSET

- Clean water / air - lack of litter

ISSUES

- Run-off from development
- Increased population and congestion

ASSET

- Excellent real estate market

ISSUES

- Maintaining assets that drive the market
- Want to see commercial development

KEY ISSUES

Land Use

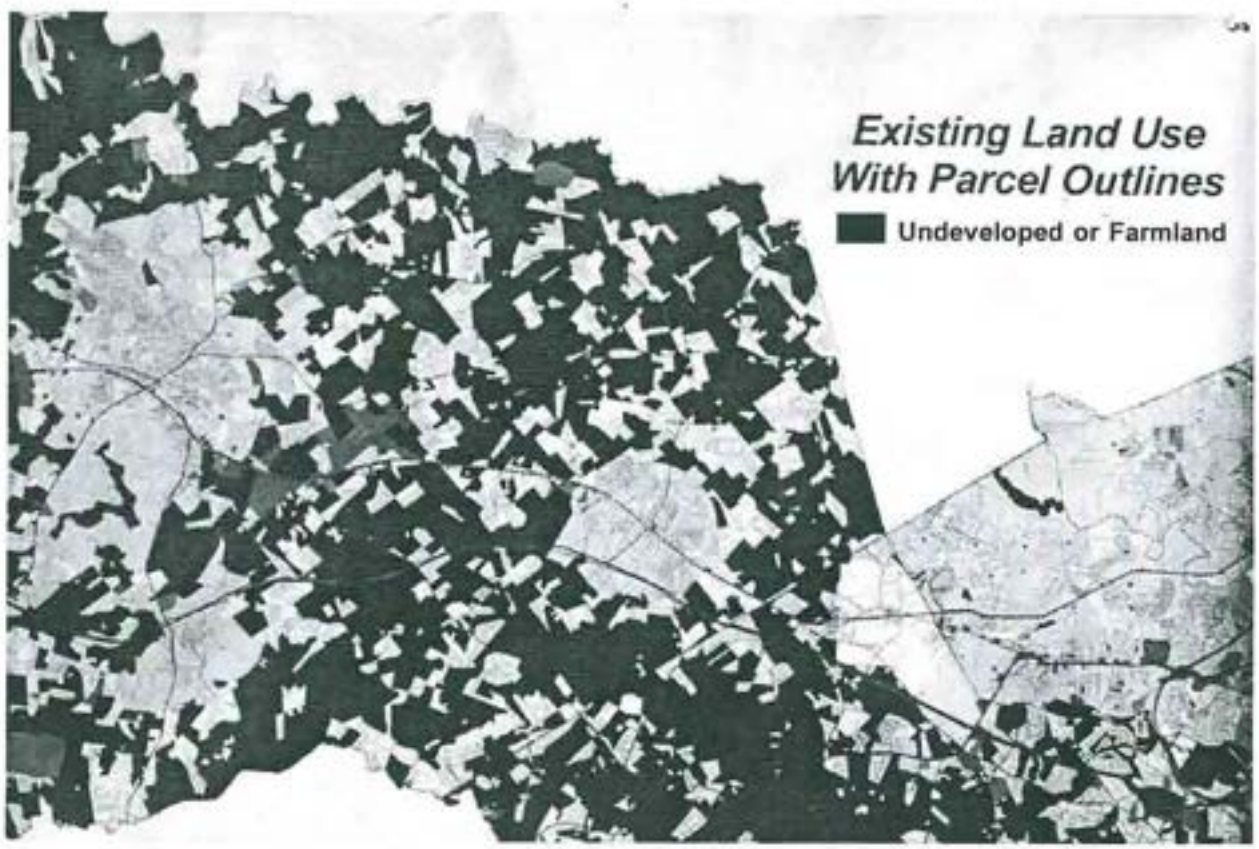
Key issues in land use, transportation, natural resources, and growth are taken from the Briefing Book I document, which summarizes information from the comprehensive plans and the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority Draft Major Investment Study (MIS) (1999).

Barrow County

- Residential development patterns—largely single-family houses on one or more acres scattered throughout the county—do not reflect the local concerns regarding use of areas with existing water and sewer service.
- The formulation of the future land use map reflects an interest in continued growth *throughout* the county. However, development will be limited to areas that already have water and sewer service.
- Since no significant expansion of infrastructure is currently planned over the next twenty years, high-density development outside sewer service areas will be limited, with most development occurring on 1 to 5 acre lots.

Oconee County

- In the face of rapid population growth, County officials have made it a policy to limit development primarily to the northern third of the county, in an attempt to maintain the rural character of the southern portions. The policy will also limit the expansion of water, sewer, and other costly infrastructure.
- The character of the University Parkway corridor is expected to shift from primarily rural to a center of commercial activity.
- The most significant land use change will be the addition of over 8,000 acres of residential development over a twenty-year period. Most of this will consist of low-density residential areas, with lots of one or more acres without sewerage treatment facilities.



Land Use

KEY ISSUES

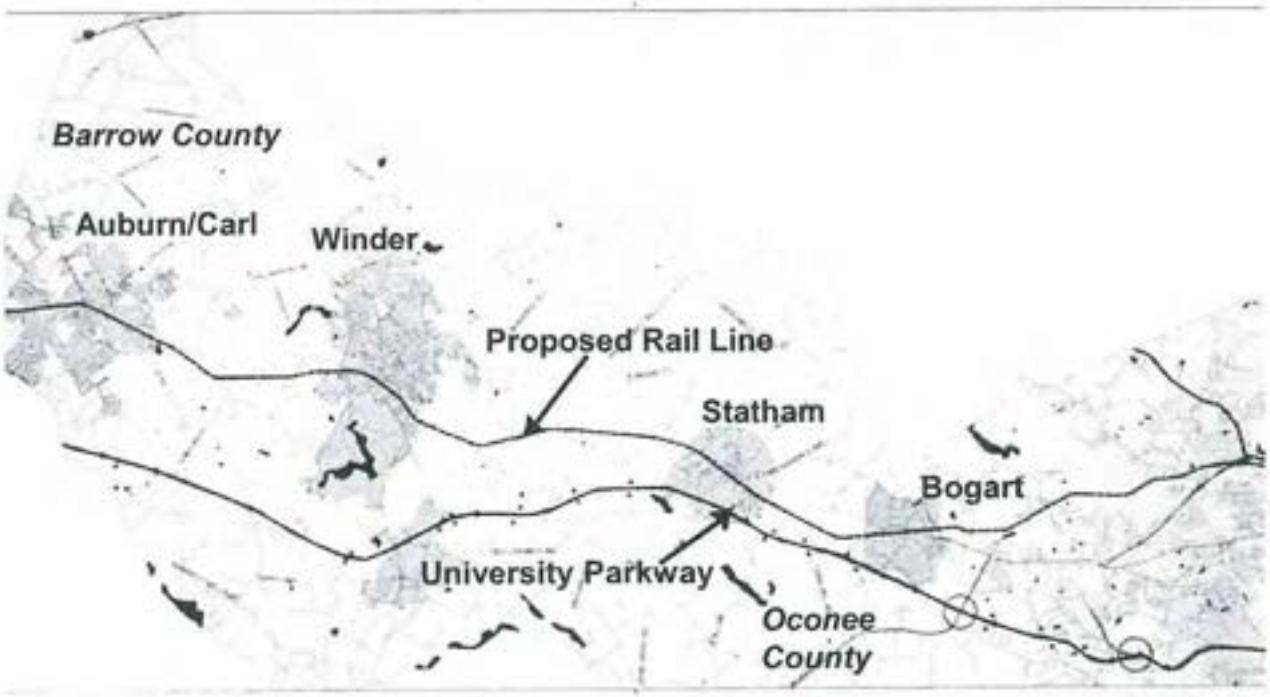
Zoning

Ideally, new stations would serve as new nodes of development for communities along the rail corridor. Plans should treat the station and its surrounds as a center of related activities, subjecting the area to a special set of guidelines and controls to accommodate the necessary densities and land uses that a successful transit facility requires.

The City of Winder zoning ordinance was analyzed for compatibility with requirements for transit-oriented developments (TODs) and train stations. Similar circumstances occur in other cities as well.

- Current development codes in Winder do not accommodate transit stations as a potential use. Communities may need to create a new category or overlay district to handle this special condition.
- Current development codes restrict mixed land uses that work well in TODs. There are no overlay zones or planned unit development districts, which a TOD or station area development requires.
- The maximum dwelling unit density allowed by Winder's zoning ordinance will not allow the amount of residential, retail, or employment activity needed to create a TOD.

Strip Commercial in Winder



Study Corridor

KEY ISSUES

Transportation

- The Athens-to-Atlanta rail line is one of twelve lines in a proposed statewide commuter rail system, with Atlanta as the hub. The Athens, Senoia and Bremen lines are proposed as the first phase of the project.
- The proposed Athens commuter rail line will run on current right-of-way owned by CSX. Currently, CSX runs approximately 25 freight trains per day on this track. CSX must agree to share its right-of-way before construction of stations can proceed.
- Based on the on-going Athens Corridor Alternatives Analysis, the initial rail service alternative on the existing freight line from Athens would begin with one train inbound to Atlanta in the morning with a total of three trains from Cedars Road in Dacula. The reverse would be true for the evening return trips. A bus would make a mid-day and a late evening round-trip to Athens, stopping at all stations. In later years there would be two trains running between Athens and Cedars Road and six to seven trains between Cedars Road and Atlanta. The train is a diesel-powered locomotive with bi-level coaches that seat some 140 passengers each.
- Rail stations will be simple, open-air platforms. Parking is an issue since, even with transit oriented development in the immediate area, most riders will drive to the station. Parking and ridership projections are shown below.
- Heavy peak-hour traffic congestion currently occurs on I-85, US 29, US 78, and University Parkway.
- As currently projected, commuter rail will not significantly reduce traffic congestion or the number of vehicle trips along the corridor, and ridership numbers are not projected to be of a magnitude that would provide substantial farebox recovery. However, rail provides a transportation alternative for residents of the corridor.
- In addition to constructing commuter rail, DOT plans to upgrade University Parkway to a limited-access freeway. This would close off many existing intersections, replacing them with a smaller number of interstate-type exit ramps or bridges without exits.

Athens-Atlanta Commuter Rail
Projected Ridership, 2010*

Station	Peak Period Inbound Boardings
Athens MMTC	100
Bogart	300
Winder	500
Cedars Road	700
Lawrenceville	1,000
Ronald Reagan Pkwy.	1,500
Lilburn	1,400
Tucker	700
Emory	100
Atlanta MMPT	-
Daily One-way Patronage	6,300
Total Daily Patronage	12,600

*Source: "Alternative 2: Commuter Rail Using Existing Freight Rail Corridor. Alternatives Screening Report," Georgia Rail Consultants, December 2000.

KEY ISSUES

Natural Resources

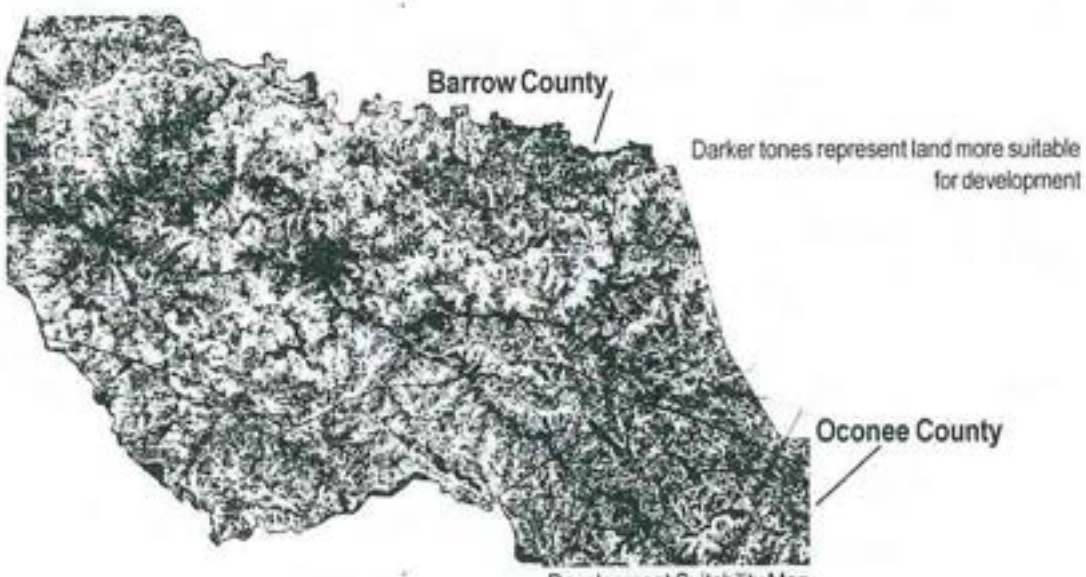
Both counties' Comprehensive Plans support stricter environmental regulations than currently exist. If the plans are followed, both counties should be able to meet Governor Barnes' proposed open space preservation requirement of 20 percent of total land area.

Barrow County

- Prime agricultural lands located in or near municipalities are largely developed, while those located in unincorporated areas are mostly undeveloped. The Comprehensive Plan supports protection of agricultural land through various techniques.
- The Plan recommends that each municipal government adopt a tree ordinance to protect this resource from development pressure.
- Barrow County residents have begun to express concerns over watershed protection. The Plan supports watershed protection mechanisms beyond those required by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
- Groundwater is a significant water source for much of Barrow County. However, the County has not adopted DNR Recharge Protection Criteria. The Plan recognizes that adoption of such measures is necessary for protection of water resources.

Oconee County

- The Oconee County Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of its prime agricultural soils, which are predominantly located in the southern portion of the county. The Plan targets the northern third of the county for future development, and limits development densities in the southern portion.
- The Plan relies on land use policies, property covenant agreements, canopy tree preservation, and commercial zoning ordinance requirements for tree protection. These measures are currently under review to ensure their sufficiency.
- Oconee has no large or small water supply watersheds. The Plan outlines protection measures for groundwater recharge areas, but no protection ordinance has been adopted. However, the County has adopted a wellhead protection program.
- Oconee's water supply system is inadequate to meet demands beyond the next few years. The County is currently exploring several alternatives for future water and sewer infrastructure.
- Oconee County residents have recently begun to promote the establishment of greenways, as well as protection of river corridors.



Development Suitability Map

KEY ISSUES

Growth and the Market

The Workshop gathered demographic data and conducted informal interviews with local officials and real estate brokers in order to present current and future demographic, economic, and real estate market conditions in the counties and cities located in the University Parkway corridor.

Demographics

- Baseline population projections come from the Comprehensive Plans for Barrow and Oconee Counties. The plans project 72,000 Barrow County residents in 2015, and 10,700 residents for the Bogart census tract.

- Barrow County experienced strong economic growth over the last decade compared with other counties in the region. This economic growth is projected to continue at a strong pace through the next two decades, but will depend heavily on developments in neighboring counties.

- Oconee County's economy has grown in many areas during the 1990s, partly due to development trends in surrounding counties and the opening of the University Parkway. These two factors will play a major role in the county's future development as well.

- 49 percent of all workers living in Barrow County also work in the county. About half of those working outside the county work in Gwinnett County. 75 percent of Oconee County residents travel outside the county to work, mostly in Athens/Clarke County.

- Household incomes for both counties have risen in the last decade, and are projected to continue this trend.

- According to employment forecasts by Woods & Poole Economics, Inc., Barrow County will have 18,000 jobs in 2015, and Oconee will have 13,700. These figures represent five-year average growth rates of 10 percent for Barrow, and 27 percent for Oconee.

- A Major Investment Study (MIS) conducted by Parsons Brinkerhoff reports that the counties along the corridor currently have an imbalance in the ratio of the number of jobs to the number of households. According to the MIS, neither Barrow nor Oconee is projected to add jobs at a faster rate than population between now and the year 2010. Thus, the jobs-housing imbalance will be maintained at the current rate, assuming no commuter rail or significant incentives or policy changes.

Market conditions

- The single-family housing market—not commercial or multi-family—is driving growth in the University Parkway corridor.

- The real estate boom is occurring primarily outside incorporated areas.

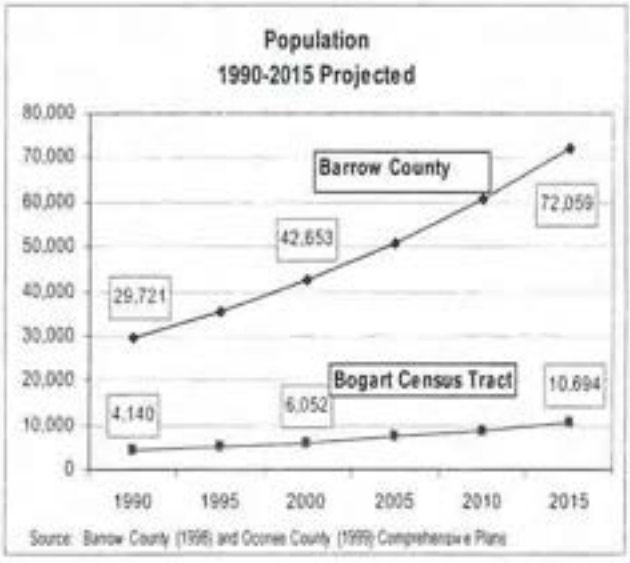
Possible Impacts of Commuter Rail

(determined from local interviews)

- The strong growth rates both counties are experiencing will likely continue regardless of the existence of commuter rail. However, the presence of rail could have an impact on the shape of future development.

- If rail stations are located in existing towns, several interview respondents agree that these stations will have a significant positive impact on housing values and increased infill development and density in station areas.

- A sharp increase in the station area real estate markets has the potential to shift the focus of both residential and commercial development from unincorporated areas to the existing towns, thus altering the current shape of development in the corridor.



GROWTH SCENARIOS

Four Ways of Looking at Development

As a way of understanding the results of various public policies and investments on the amount and configuration of growth in the corridor, four "what if" scenarios, each based on a different attitude toward growth, were tested and illustrated. Detailed results of the analysis of scenarios and illustrative site plans of the rail station areas for each scenario are presented in the technical appendix of this report. A summary of the results is illustrated in the adjacent diagrams:

Scenario A. Growth in Towns
This scenario concerns itself primarily with containing most of the incoming people and jobs within the boundaries of the six incorporated towns in the corridor, primarily to take advantage of the existing infrastructure. They are Auburn, Carl, Winder, Statham, Bogart and Bethlehem.

Scenario B. Greenfield Development
Greenfields are the farms and undeveloped lands that are typified by large tracts of open land. These parcels offer an area to concentrate growth and to locate a station separate from the towns.

Scenario C. Balanced Growth between the Corridors
With the railroad as the historic lifeline for this region and the University Parkway as a new impetus for development, this scenario looks into maintaining a healthy relationship between the two by concentrating a majority of new growth within their bounds. A new road in this zone would help to accommodate east-west traffic flows.

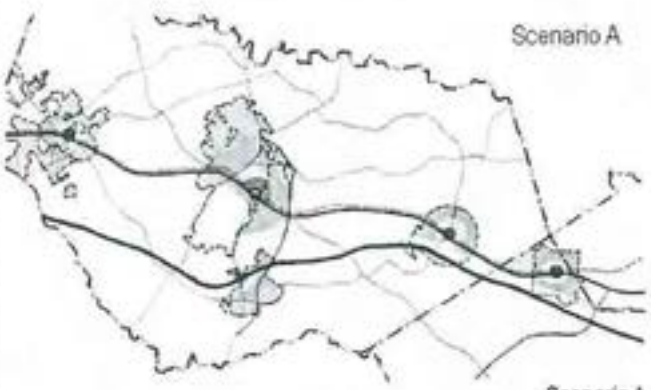
Scenario D. University Parkway
Incorporating a rail line with the Parkway was considered for two reasons: to allow the rail corridor and the towns to remain as they are in order to protect the historic and rural settings that they offer, and to study the Parkway corridor in detail as a proponent of growth, particularly in regards to a proposed linear research park. This scenario also allows the possibility for using buses in place of rail for commuting purposes.

Map Legend:

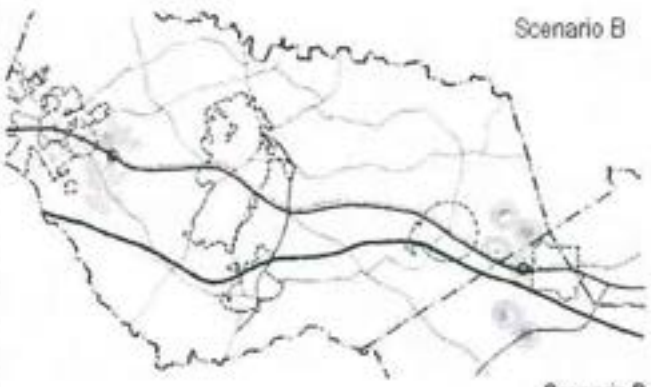
Residential
0 - 0.5 dwelling units / acre
0.5 - 5 dwelling units / acre
5 - 10 dwelling units / acre
10 - 15 dwelling units / acre

Parks/Preservation
Open Space
Retail
Employment

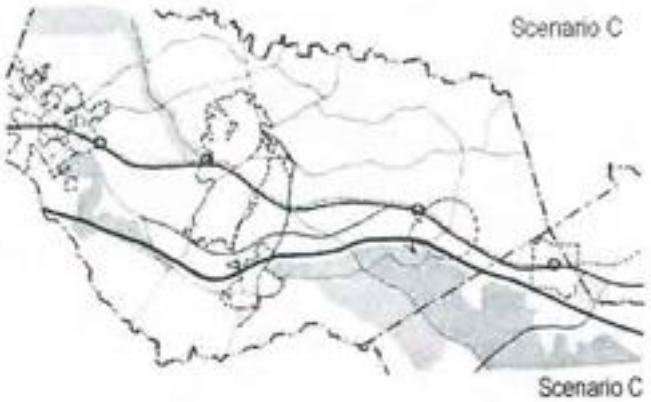
Towns
Train Stations



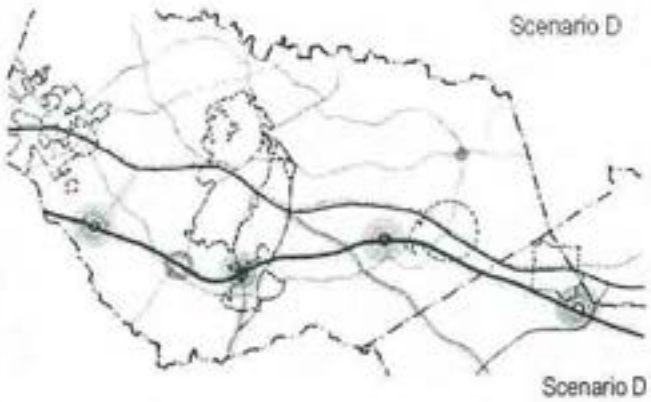
Scenario A



Scenario B



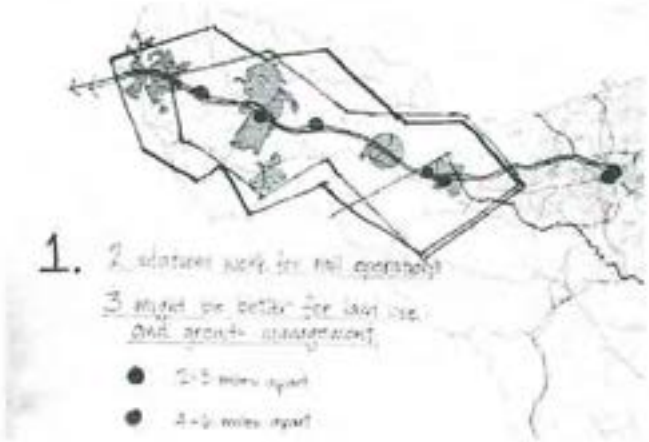
Scenario C



Scenario D

FINDINGS

The following general findings were made after identification of key issues and analysis of the four development scenarios. They formed the point of departure for the weekend workshop.



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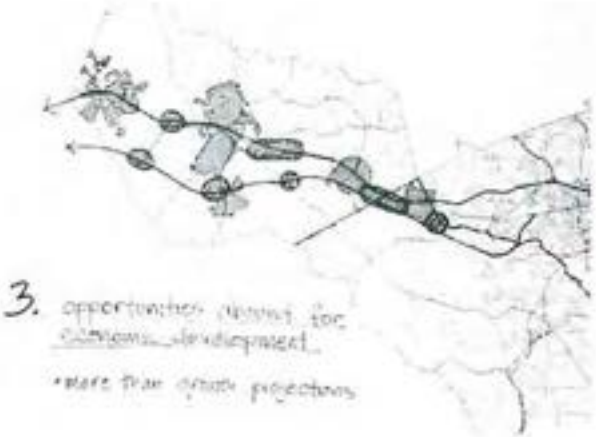

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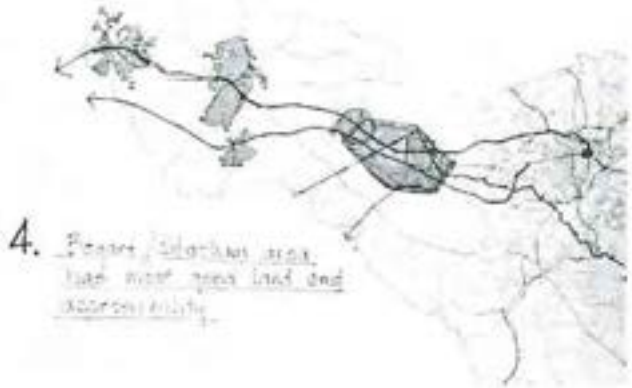

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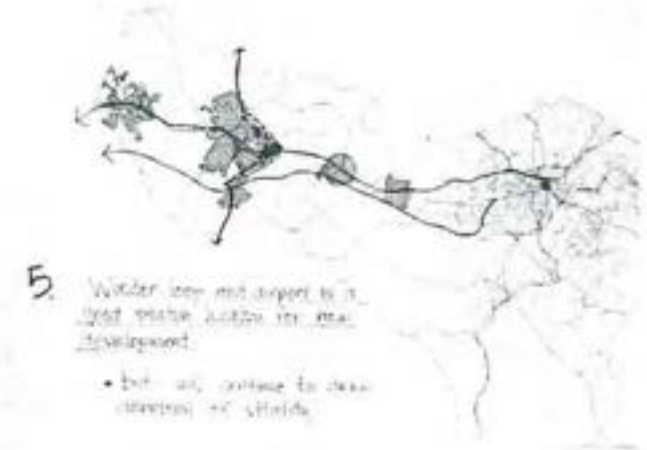

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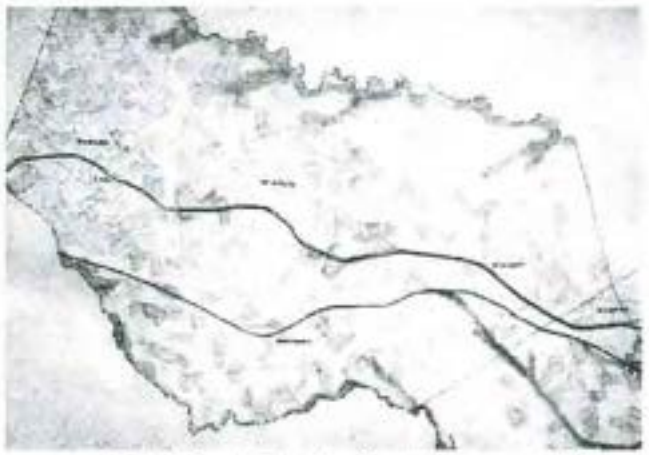


Future Sprawl without any Growth Management Strategy

CORRIDOR GROWTH FRAMEWORK

Land Use

The weekend workshop made recommendations in three areas: 1) a growth framework plan for the corridor as a whole, focusing on issues of land use, transportation, and open space, 2) the Winder commuter rail station area, and 3) The Bogart commuter rail station area.

Land Use and Infrastructure

The analysis of growth data and the corridor goals adopted by the workshop suggests an overall framework plan for managing growth in the corridor. The general strategy for both Barrow and Oconee county divides each county into two zones.

- A Growth Management Zone, where more growth is likely to occur.
- A rural zone, less likely to attract significant growth, with more agricultural land, environmentally sensitive areas, and large lot (with septic tank) development.

In Barrow County, the Growth Management Zone occurs along the double corridor of the commuter rail line plus the University Parkway for the length of the county while in Oconee County the Growth Management Zone occurs in the northeastern third of the county (above US 78) and along the northern border with Clarke County.

Development Patterns

The fundamental conclusion is that while growth might be somewhat more attracted to the growth zone than elsewhere, the current pressure for large lot sprawl is occurring in all areas of both counties. The guiding principle for a Corridor Framework Plan, therefore, is that the Growth Management Zone must contain new public improvements, regulatory measures and development incentives to create sustainable growth patterns and minimize adverse development impacts.

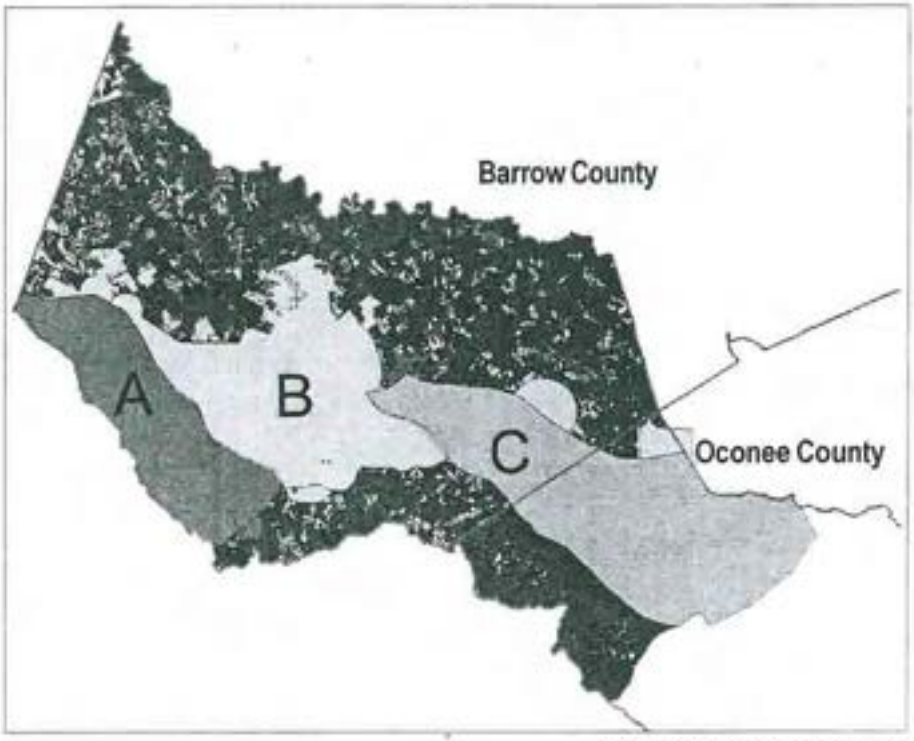
Managing growth in this zone is driven by three main issues:

- Accessibility: Both the University Parkway and the proposed rail line bring concentrated accessibility to the corridor which creates a demand for varying development densities as well as pressure to improve the existing road network.
- Development Suitability: The growth corridor has the most flat and dry land in either county (consistent historically with rail corridors along prominent ridges). While this provides the best development suitability in the area it also creates intense pressure on the zone's many small drainage ways, tree cover, and aquifer recharge areas.
- Infrastructure: If the Growth Management Zone is to sustain even low to moderate densities (2-5 units/acre), additional infrastructure, particularly sewer, will be required. Use of existing infrastructure systems should be employed wherever feasible. Three distinct infrastructure sub zones are proposed and could be phased (see top figure, opposite page)
  - A. In eastern Barrow County, a zone built around the upgrading of the existing Statham Wastewater Treatment Plant.
  - B. In central Barrow county, a subzone built around upgrading existing facilities in Winder.
  - C. A newly sewered Barber Creek basin which would serve the area south of Statham and Bogart. This facility would serve both Barrow and Oconee Counties, perhaps suggesting joint county development and management.

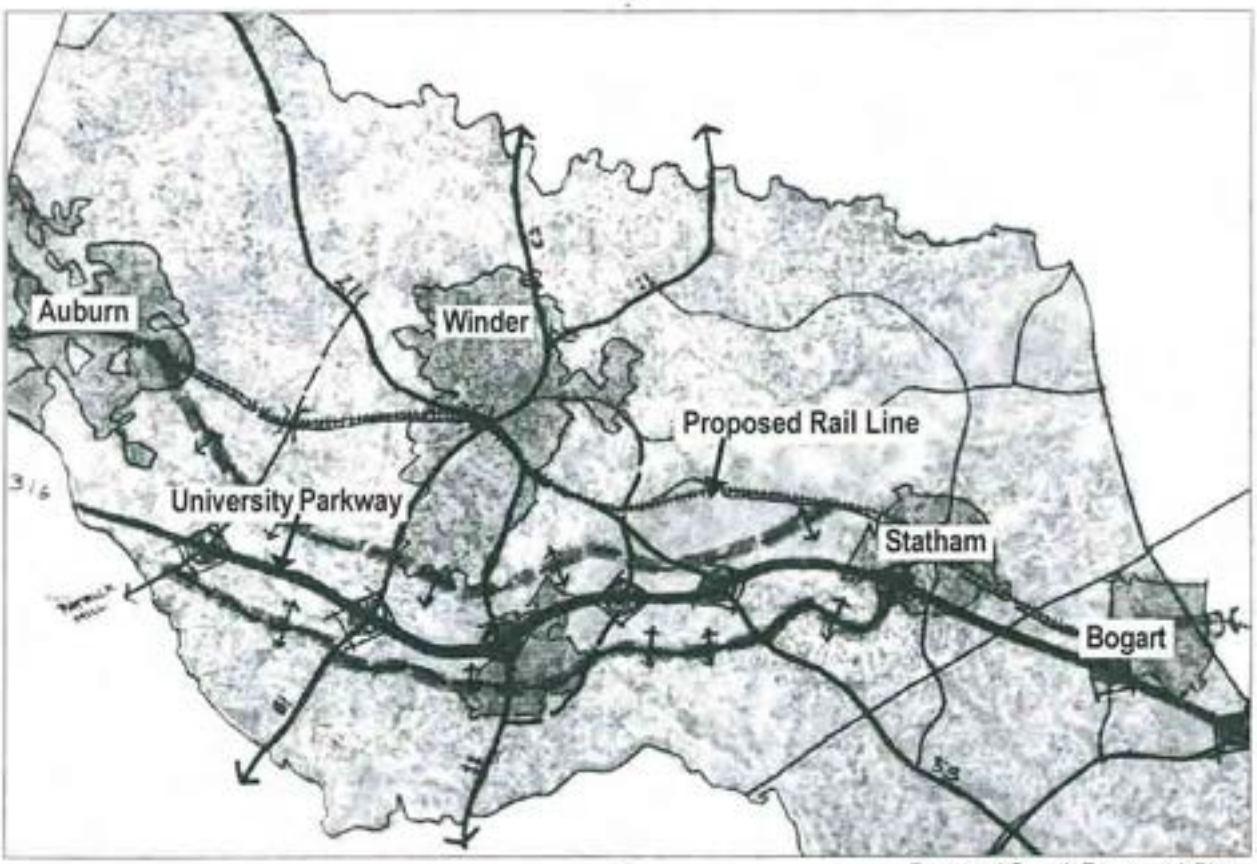
Development and Land Use Mix

While market forces will ultimately govern the rate and type of development, managing growth zones in both counties will also allow public policy to influence the mix of uses in order to create a more sustainable economic base based on two of the workshop goals:

- A desirable jobs/housing balance in each county keeping more employment in each county and creating a tax base which can fund growth management strategies.
- A variety of market housing opportunities (sizes, densities, prices) to serve a broadening population diversity.



Proposed Sewer Service Areas



Proposed Growth Framework Plan -
Transportation and Natural Features

CORRIDOR GROWTH FRAMEWORK

Transportation

Among the several reasons the Atlanta/Athens Corridor is the highest growth corridor in the region, transportation is perhaps the most important. This will only increase in impact as the corridor responds to four recent or soon to be developed transportation improvements, creating an even higher degree of accessibility.

- The University Parkway, which is continuously being upgraded to a full limited access facility.
- The proposed Commuter Rail corridor and associated road improvements to improve access to rail stations.
- Construction of the controversial Northern Arc of the outer perimeter connecting to the University Parkway just east of the Barrow County line at Dacula in Gwinnett County.
- The proposed north-south Winder bypass.

This increased accessibility demands transportation planning in the corridor at a level of detail not now existing, including:

- First and foremost, that transportation and land use should be considered together in any future comprehensive planning activity.
- All proposed improvements in Barrow and Oconee counties should be tested and understood in the context of the regional transportation system.
- Alternative ways be pursued to help pay for transportation, in particular, having private development that benefits directly from public transportation investments pay a fair share of the costs (such as impact fees).

Recommendations

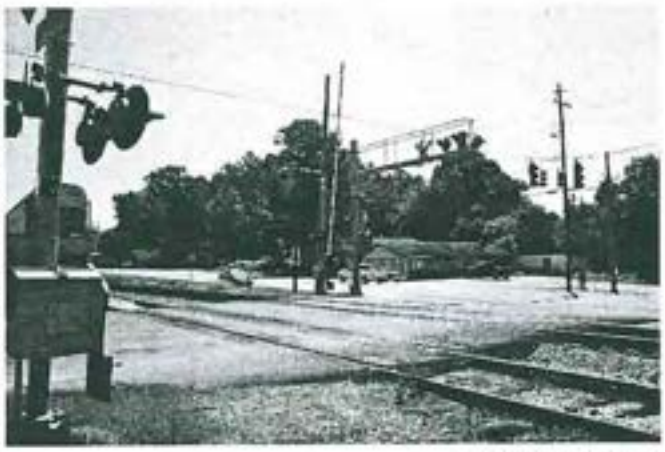
Specific transportation recommendations stemming from the workshop include:

- Two Commuter Rail Stations should be adequate to serve Barrow and Oconee counties in the foreseeable future (the Winder area and the Bogart area, as proposed in the Major Investment Study) but additional station sites should be studied and designated for the future, if necessary.
- While the data and the workshops participants clearly favored the rail line following the existing CSX rail corridor, the alternative of locating rail along the University Parkway corridor should continue to be studied as a possible alternate.
- The transportation impacts of the rail line and associated development should be carefully considered, specifically including:
  - Relationship of station to access roads and links to access conditions on the Parkway.
  - Possibly additional grade separated crossings of the CSX right of way.
  - Traffic impacts in existing towns and on county feeder roads, to insure adequate capacity.
- Safety issues should be considered in all planning and design decisions such as:
  - Rail crossings
  - Emergency response times
- Bicycle and pedestrian demand should be considered in all planning as legitimate transportation modes, particularly with respect to rail station areas.
- The importance of vehicular and rail access to the Winder Airport and its relationship to economic development should be more carefully assessed.

Design Features

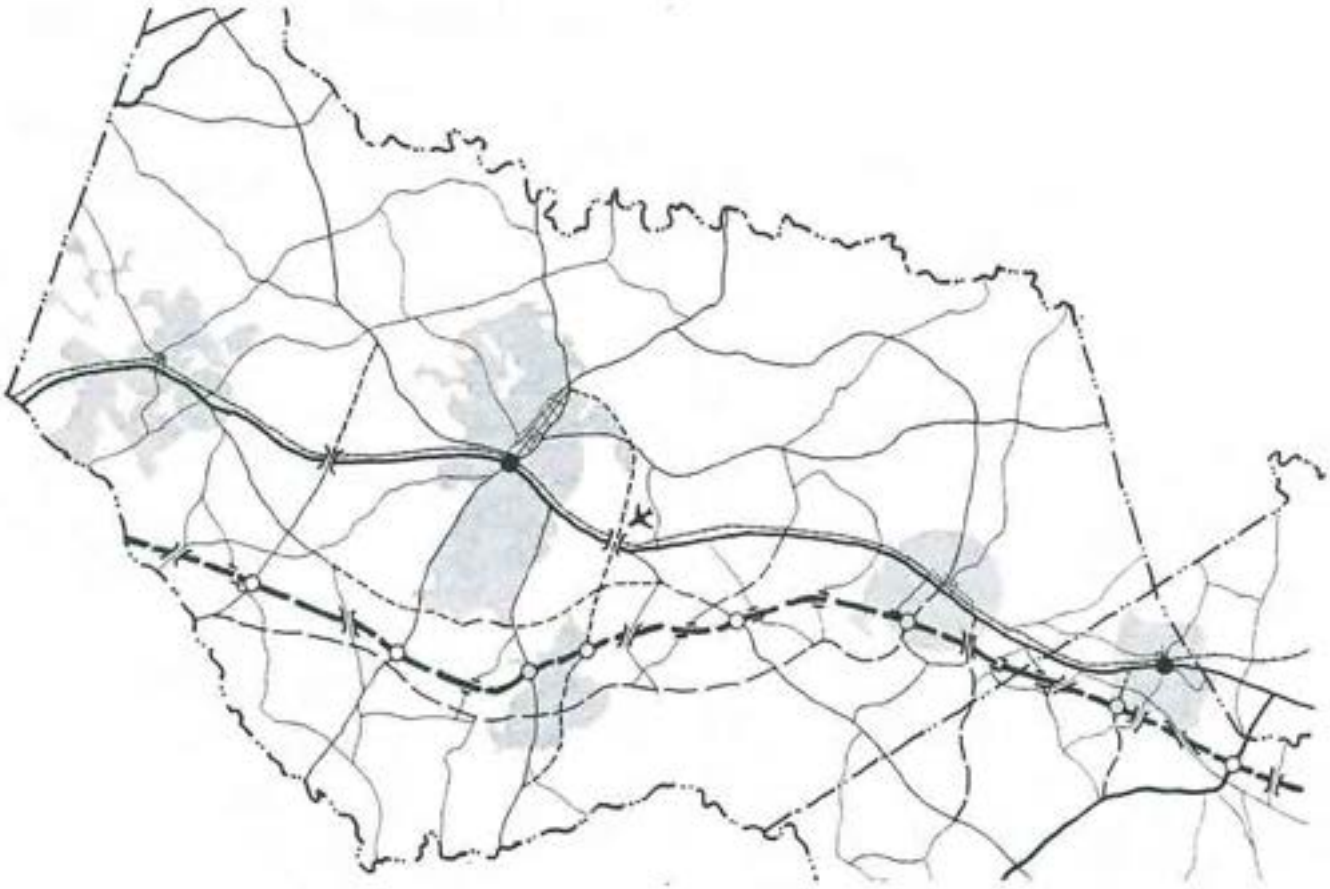
The workshop identified specific design features to support the proposed Corridor Framework Plan:

- Two improved local roads running the length of the corridor, one on each side of the Parkway, to help stimulate and locate development in the growth zone. These roads would, for the most part, follow existing rights-of-way.
- Several new road connections to facilitate access to rail stations, relieve congestion in existing towns, especially Winder, and address underserved north-south movement demand in general throughout the corridor.

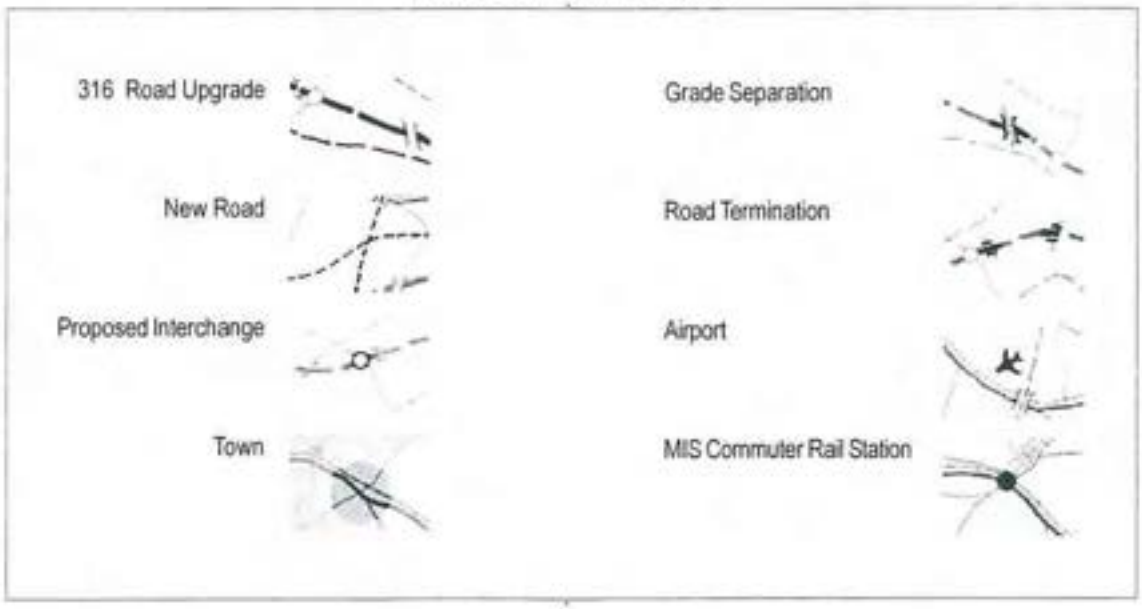


Typical Rail Crossing

Transportation Recommendations



Transportation Map Legend



CORRIDOR GROWTH FRAMEWORK

Open Space and the Environment

The workshop developed a system of values associated with the protection of open space. These values, shown in the diagram below, are centered on four main issues:

- Preservation of Farmland: Both counties acknowledge that serious agribusiness is fast disappearing form the corridor due to both development pressure and economic pressures on farming. However, both counties also expressed a desire to maintain the "agricultural landscape" wherever possible.

- Environmental Protection: The need to protect watersheds, aquifer recharge areas and major areas of tree cover and wildlife habitat.

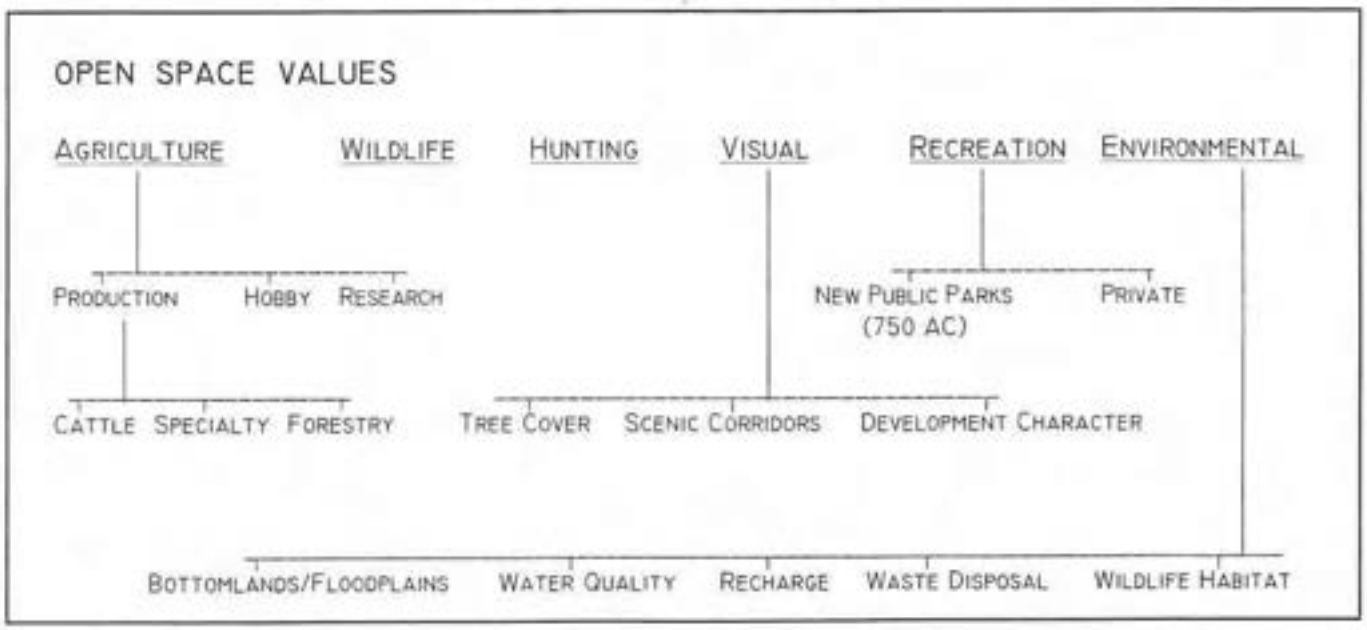
- Recreation: Active and passive recreation opportunities in an area that increasingly will be underserved due to regional growth.

- Visual Corridors: An expressed desire to maintain a "Parkway character" to the University Parkway, a "historic character" to the US 29 rail corridor, and the "pastoral character" of both counties wherever possible.

Addressing these areas of demand while encouraging most new growth into the proposed Growth Management Zone creates the opportunity to preserve open space in the two counties even in excess of the newly suggested set-aside of 20% of each county by the Governor's Open Space Task Force. These opportunities are reinforced by the fact that most of the environmentally sensitive areas fall outside of the proposed Growth Management Zones.

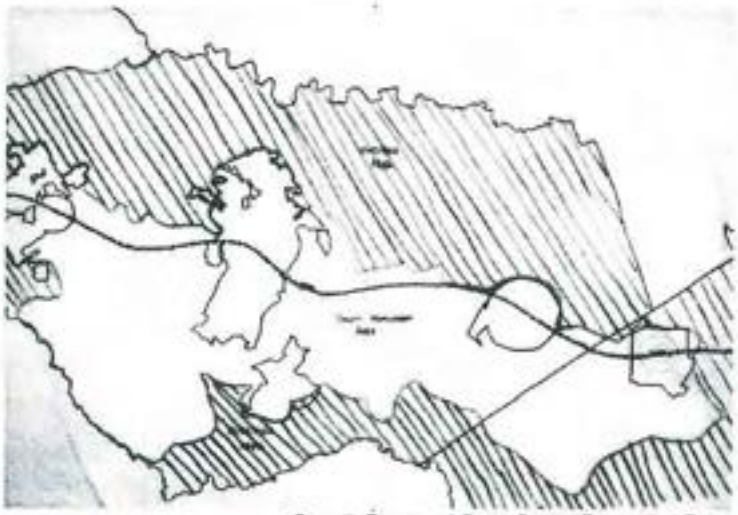
The more difficult issue is to determine feasible ways of achieving this level of open space preservation. With ever limited public sources of funds for acquisition and development, much of this preservation will occur on privately owned property through a variety of tools, such as:

- Voluntary set asides with possible tax abatement.
- Conservation easements (purchased or donated).
- Flexible "cluster" zoning for estate lot developments.
- A public or private land trust with corporate and private donations.
- Adequate development controls in Growth Management Zones to preserve and link open space opportunities.
- Ample University Parkway buffer zones tied to research park development guidelines.
- Development Impact Fees dedicated to acquisition and development of recreation and open space areas.



Elevation

Stream beds in Study Area



Growth Zone and Open Space Protection Zone

STATION AREAS
WINDER

Growth Alternatives

Winder, the county seat of Barrow County, has a population of 8,000. The proposed commuter rail line passes through the heart of downtown in a rail corridor with heavy freight traffic and only one grade separated rail crossing. The historic downtown, while experiencing deterioration in recent years, has recently seen some reinvestment in commercial and cultural properties. Winder, like the county's other towns, is not growing at near the rate of unincorporated areas of the county.

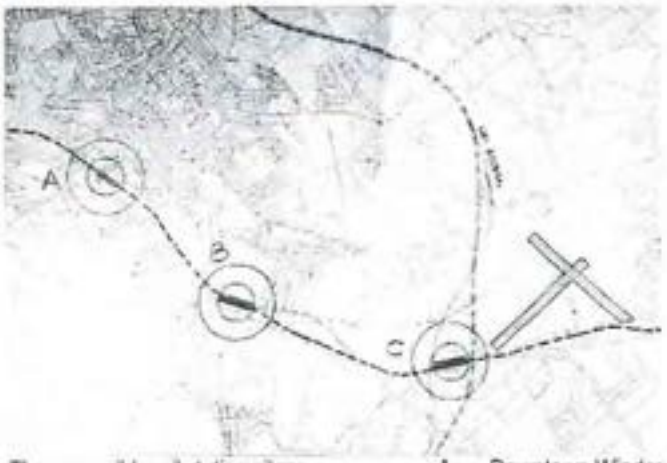
Three possible Commuter Rail Station sites were investigated for the Winder area:

- **Site A.** Located in the heart of downtown this station could be a vital part of downtown revitalization. Concern was expressed for congestion on the rail line, with additional intersection blockage time, and for additional traffic and parking that the rail station would generate.

- **Site B.** This station is located between downtown and the airport with easy access from Ga. Highway 11 and the proposed Winder loop. There is also adequate development opportunity in the immediate station area. Concern was expressed for the impact on the nearby historic hamlet of Russell.

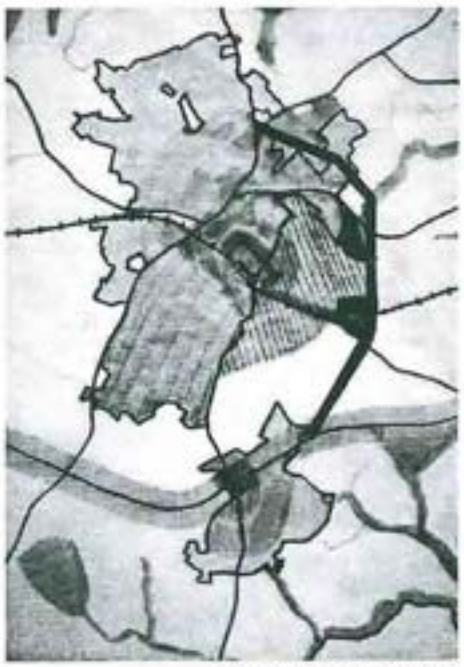
- **Site C**. This station is located near the Barrow county airport and the proposed Winder loop road, affording excellent automobile access with little impact. Significant development opportunity exists in the proposed station area, particularly for commercial development. Concern was expressed that development here could have a further deteriorating effect on downtown Winder.

Pros and cons were debated on each alternative with no clear preference stated at the end of the workshop, although the downtown site was the least preferred of the three.



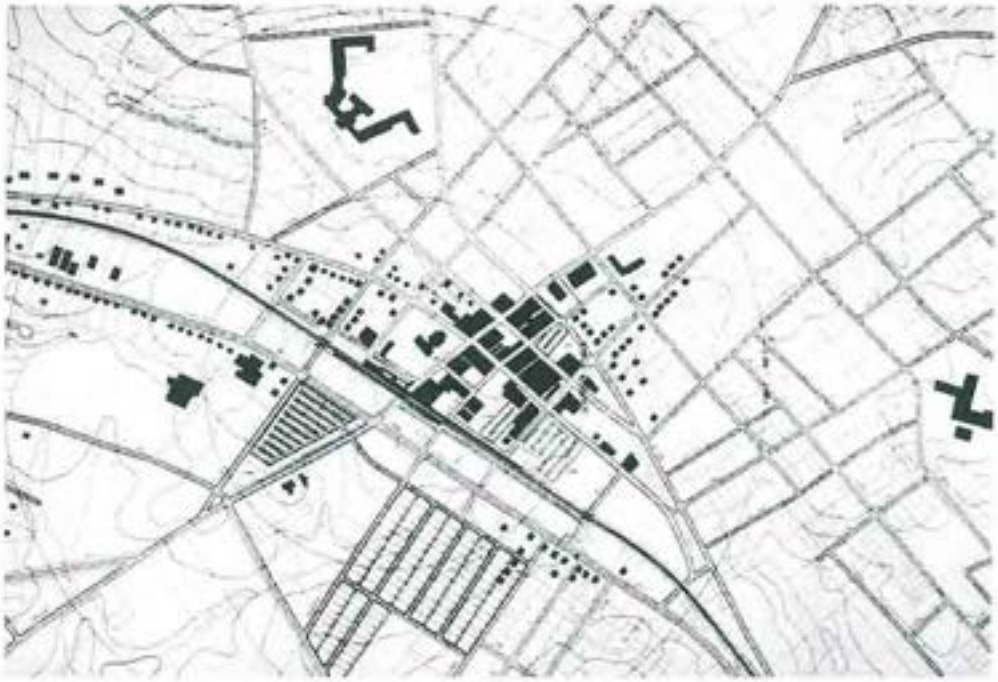
Three possible rail station sites:

A - Downtown Winder
B - Ga. Highway 11
C - Winder Airport



Proposed Winder Bypass

Downtown Winder



Winder Station Area Plan - Site A

Winder Station Area Plan - Site B

Winder Station Area Plan - Site C

STATION AREAS
WINDER

Downtown Revitalization

In the course of evaluating the proposed rail station site in downtown Winder, both before and during the workshop, several issues were raised relating to downtown revitalization opportunities whether or not the station is located there:

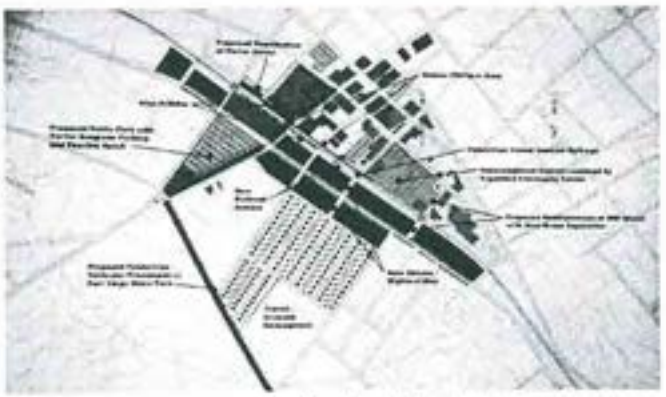
- Steps should be taken to ensure revitalization of the historic commercial core on the north side of the rail line. This would include public street and streetscape improvements, historic architectural guidelines, possible common parking facilities, and active marketing of vacant commercial structures.

- The highway corridor on the south side of the rail line is an area of transitional commercial strip development. A redevelopment plan, including residential infill development opportunities to the south, could significantly improve the City's tax base and lend stability to the commercial core.

- Improved access, including auto, bike and pedestrian modes, from the downtown area to nearby Fort Yargo State Park could also help to stabilize and enhance Winder's historic central core.

- The downtown could benefit from another grade separated rail crossing, perhaps on the east side of downtown. Steps should be taken to seek funding and planning for this crossing, possibly in conjunction with the construction of the commuter rail line.

Downtown Winder - treatment areas



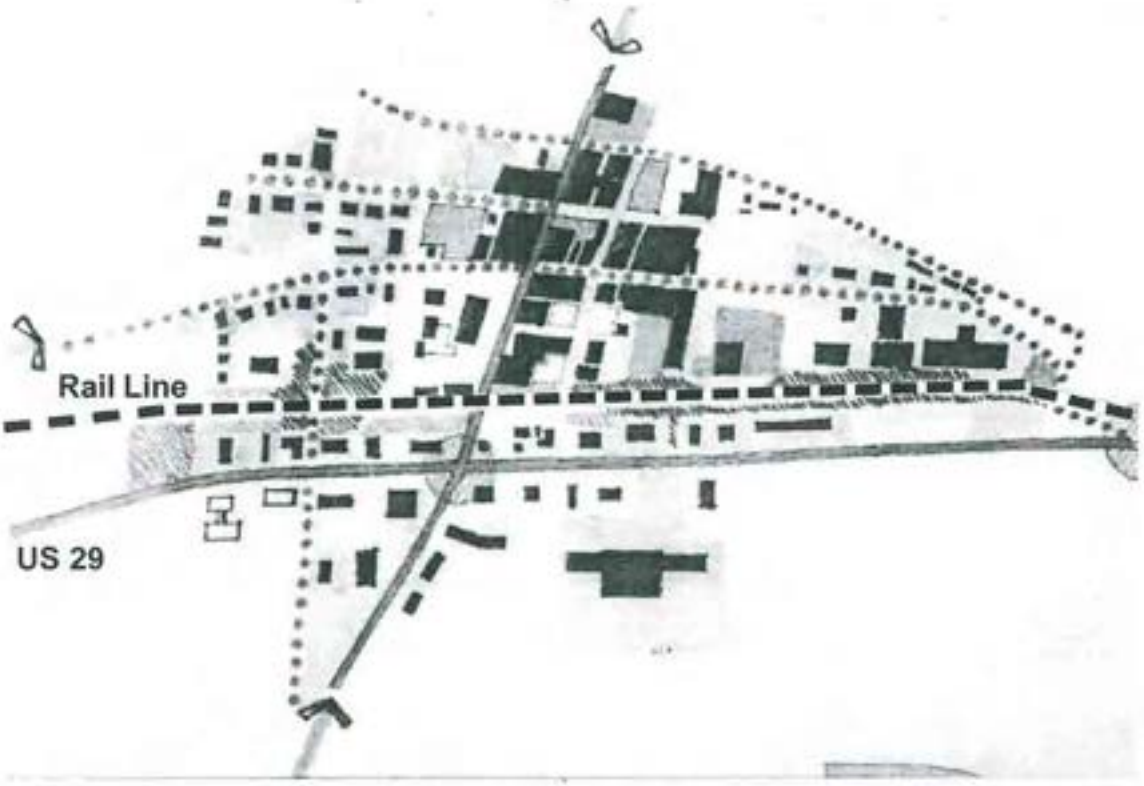
Downtown Winder -development zones

Commuter Rail Stations in Suburban Chicago with similar attributes:

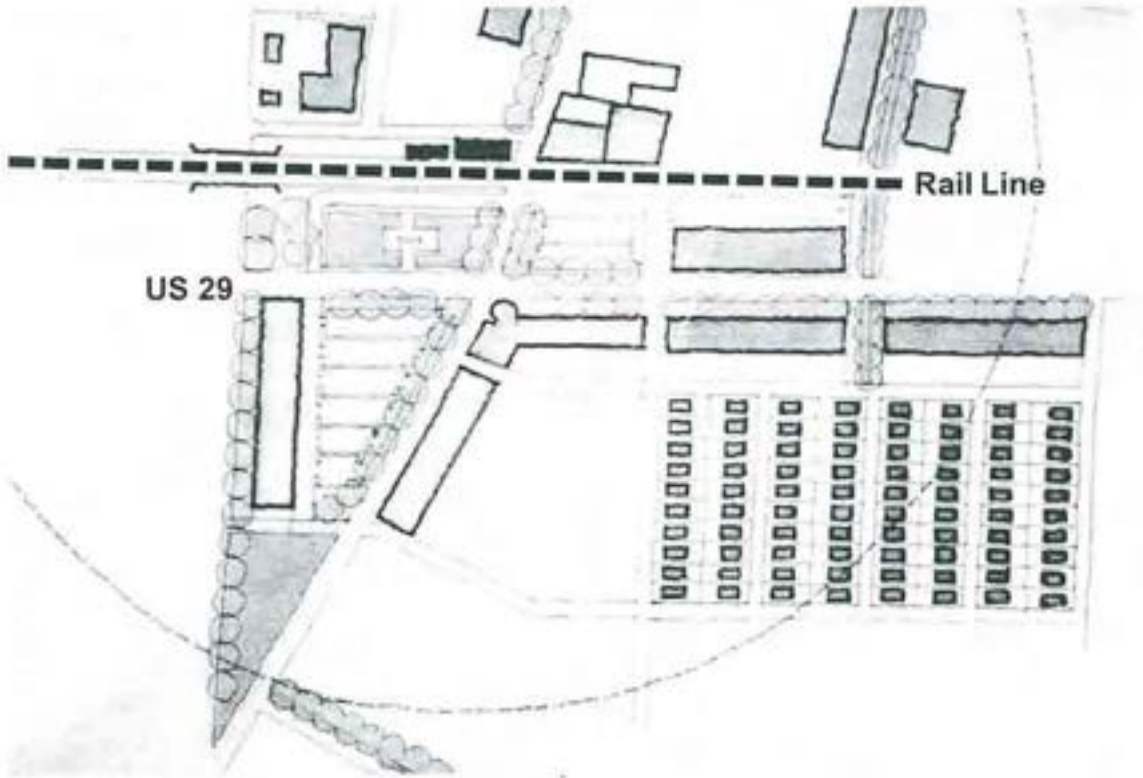
Lake Forest

Riverside

LaGrange



Downtown Winder - existing conditions



Downtown Winder - proposed parkway and infill development south of rail line

STATION AREAS
BOGART

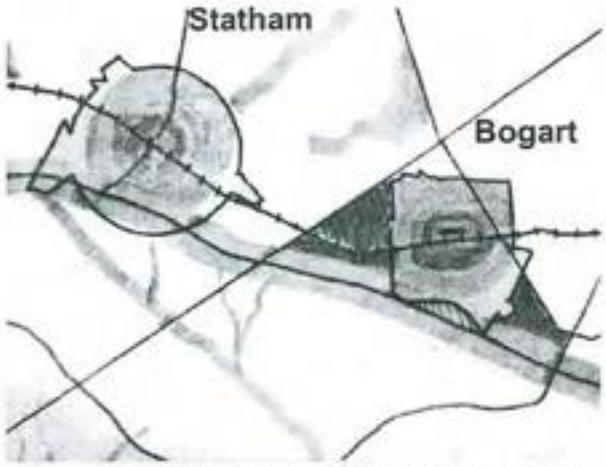
Basic Growth Strategies

Given the current conditions of this region, it appears that the probable outcome of the projected high levels of growth will be the sprawling conditions found flanking both ends of the corridor. To avoid such a result, several types of growth were looked at and their respective advantages and disadvantages compared. Each type represents a basic attitude toward growth management, looking in particular at the relation between commuter transit and the ensuing development.

Scenario A concerned itself mainly with keeping a majority of the growth within the upper corner of Oconee County above the parkway, containing the town limits of Bogart. It has the advantage of historical growth patterns and an available infrastructure. After all, these towns did develop around rail depots.

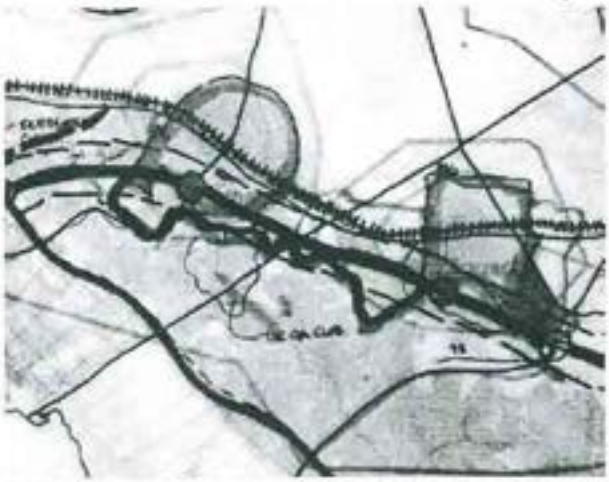
Scenario B looked at developing an array of nodes, where Bogart would be included as one, and that would all be linked by some new roads and/or form of transit. These nodes would be relatively dense in terms of their population to preserve rural land and to put commuters within walking distance of the transit system.

Scenario C began by concentrating all growth in between the corridors in the growth management zone based on the location of potential sewer sheds. One possible sewer shed in the Barber Creek basin would allow low to moderate population densities in a larger area south of the railroad.



Growth Strategy A: Development above the Parkway

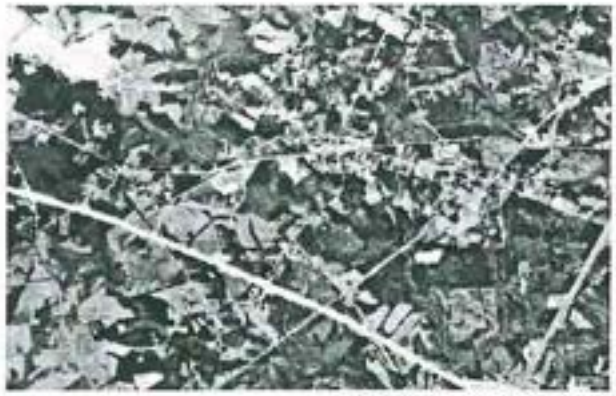
Growth Strategy B: Nodal development between Statham & Bogart


Growth Strategy C: Growth management zone in newly sewered area south of town

BOGART

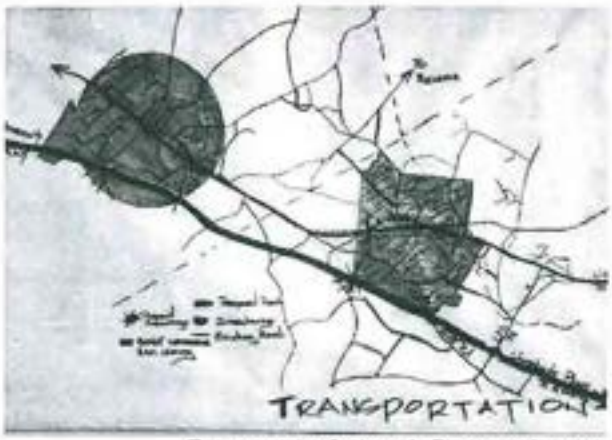
Growth Issues: Surrounding Areas

Located in the northern corner of Oconee County where the rail corridor and the University Parkway come within a moment's glance of one another, Bogart and its surroundings are witness to a number of growth pressures. Other than the presence of the two corridors, the approaching western edge of a growing Athens is just around the way as well as a linear research/office park proposed to frame the Parkway. All of these could mean a complete transformation of the rural area as it now exists, but given enough foresight they could be duly accommodated into an interconnected system in which everything is linked together.



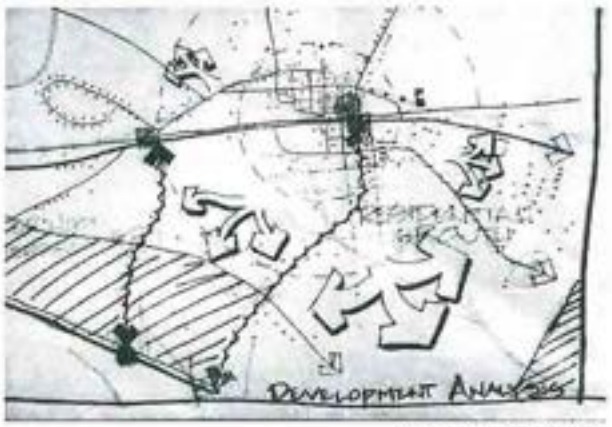
Aerial photograph of Bogart

Currently, two office parks are underway to the south of Bogart with "Gateway" to the west and the other to the east, the 1,000 acre "IBM site" flanked by US 78. At the Gateway project is a proposed Parkway interchange with a new segment of road that would connect to Whitehead Road and then continue to the Osceola Avenue rail crossing. This would offer a second means of entry to the commuter station downtown and help defray the traffic burden from Bronson Road. Design standards would be established for this new road and for an upgraded South Bronson Road to maintain the physical characteristics of the area. These roads would provide connection between the new pieces of development, the town and the rail station.



Transportation features in Bogart station area

As these and other commercial entities move in to the University Parkway corridor, an increased need arises for a sewer system to be put in. This sewer could be built to serve these new businesses and also to serve residential development at higher densities than are allowed with septic tanks. There was also some consideration in the workshop on the potential effect of the Jackson County reservoir on population growth, but it was determined that a zone designated for rural density development would be more appropriate for that area.



Redevelopment issues

STATION AREAS
BOGART

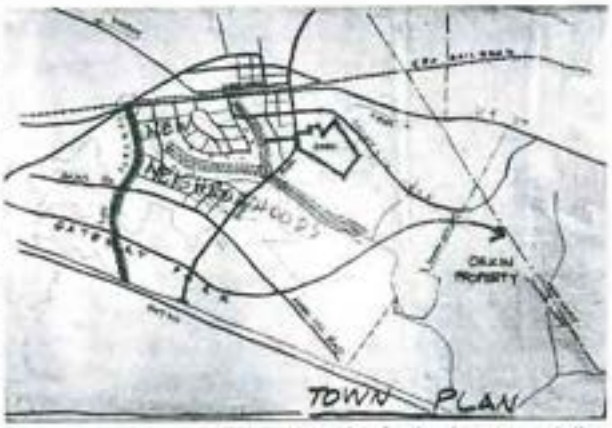
Downtown Revitalization

Two questions arise concerning the implementation of commuter rail: should the town be preserved as is--as a historic railroad town? Or should the introduction of a rail station be used to stimulate new economic activity in town? Two alternative station locations and their possible development areas are shown on the facing page, one in the center of downtown and the other at the west end of downtown. The latter might better serve Statham and new development between Bogart and Statham. However, in light of historical precedence, the low level of intrusion and the availability of infrastructure, it was decided that placing a station in the town seemed a better solution for serving the town as the town serves the region.

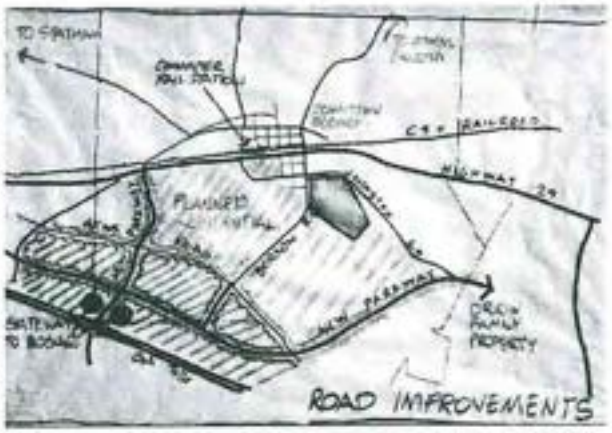
While the commuter station has a long platform, it can be a rather delicate construction that blends into the town while helping to frame a public space between it and the stores that now face the railroad. Parking demands can initially be met with little intrusion on the town if parking lots are kept to a small size and mixed in with other buildings and functions. Some provision for the future expansion of parking demands should be considered beforehand and the appropriate lands set aside. The projected traffic volumes appear not to overload the existing roads and would occur just before and just after peak hours. A concern here is to provide multiple routes to the station area and this would require upgrading of some of the current railroad crossings.

Along with the above, roads in between the corridors would be upgraded to ensure a multiplicity of travel routes and a cohesion between new and old developments. New local roads to accommodate east-west traffic need also to be considered so that adequate right-of-ways can be designated ahead of time and their streetscapes designed accordingly.

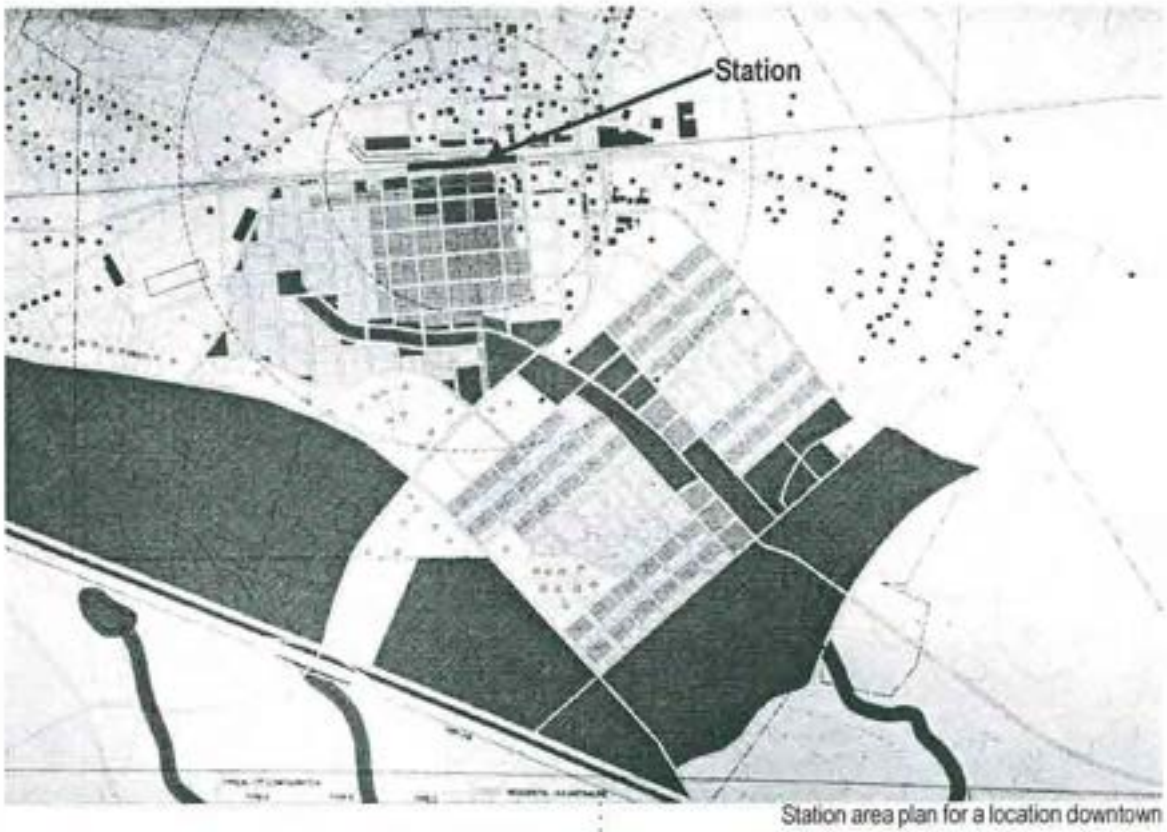
Downtown station location



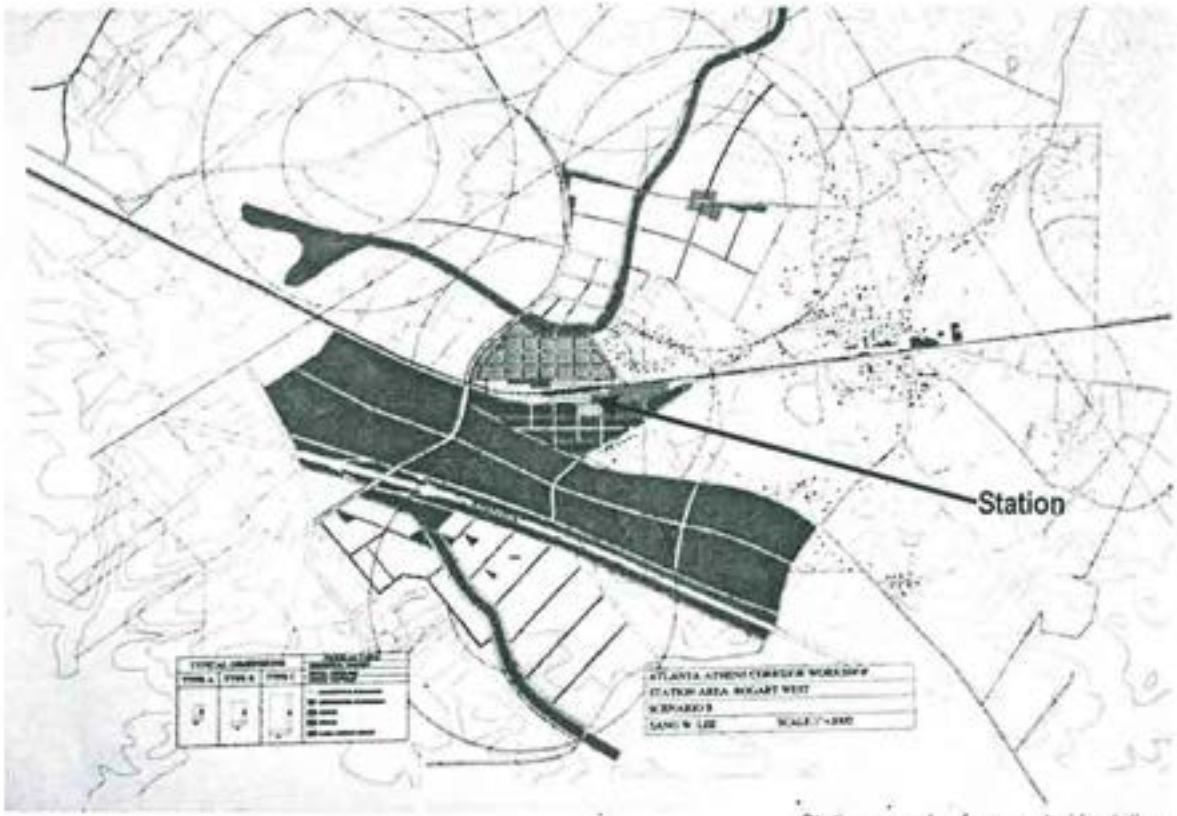
Future town plan for the downtown station



Road improvements to be implemented with a station downtown



Station area plan for a location downtown



Station area plan for a west-side station

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Barrow and Oconee Counties are experiencing explosive growth that will cause at least a doubling of the population in the next twenty years. This growth will continue to sprawl in large lot subdivisions and commercial strip developments without assertive and coordinated growth management by county and town governments.

2. Fortunately, the construction of the University Parkway and the proposed commuter rail line in areas of existing infrastructure and developable land provides a ready made framework for an exemplary corridor growth management plan. This plan has two key features:

    - Concentrating most development in the growth corridor at low to moderate densities will allow a large portion of the rest of both counties to remain in farmland and large rural lots, thus protecting environmentally sensitive areas.
    - The growth corridor also has substantial economic development potential for research, business and clean industry that will improve the jobs/housing balance and create a tax base that can support necessary growth management actions.

3. With good road and rail access already in the corridor, the judicious placement of new water and sewer lines becomes the critical infrastructure investment necessary to implement the growth management plan.

4. Detailed attention needs to be given to certain specific areas to achieve a high quality of development and avoid negative impacts. These are:

    - Commuter Rail Stations
    - University Parkway Interchange Points
    - Historic Town Centers

Typical historic housing stock in area

Downtown Winder

View along University Parkway

Typical View along U.S. 29 and Rail Line

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

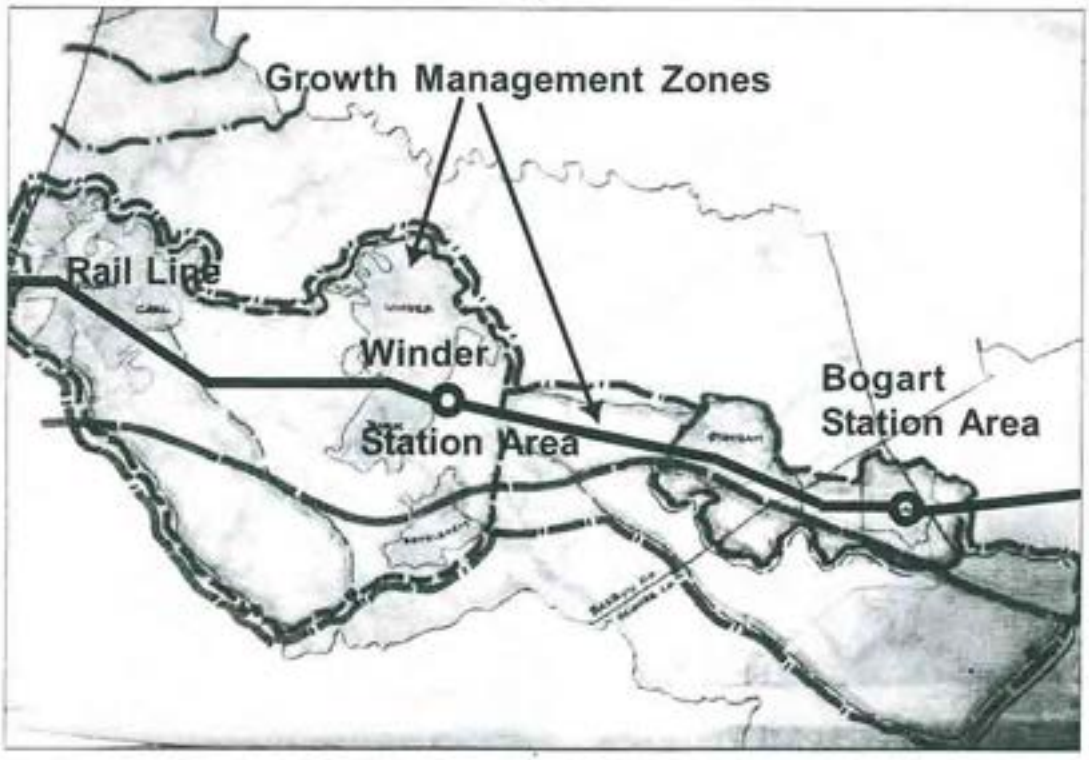
Implementation of the recommendations produced by the Workshop can be broken into four areas of immediate strategic actions:

1. Infrastructure – With the major transportation network in place, the water and sewer system becomes the major public investment tool to manage growth in the corridor. Simply put, the Growth Management Zone should have water and sewer to facilitate moderate density development and the rural zone should not. Creative financing and planning for these systems should be pursued as a matter of high priority, with development impact fees and/or tax increment financing as possible mechanisms.

2. Regulatory Environment – Land use, zoning, subdivision ordinances and other development guidelines are important tools to achieve desired patterns, densities and mixes of development. Creating separate ordinances for the Growth Management Zone and the Rural Zone will be necessary. These revisions can be pursued immediately.

3. Land Banking – With the market pressure that comes with increased accessibility, water and sewer, an entity may be needed to buy, hold and sell land to insure proper development and phasing. A Land Trust or Special Purpose Development Authority are possible tools for this purpose.

4. Station Areas – Development near the proposed Commuter Rail Stations constitutes a special case. Not only will more detailed development ordinances of guidelines be necessary but the creation of a special development entity may be required to act as master developer as well as to market and manage the development with a logical phasing strategy.



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Braj Hart
Vanessa Lampe
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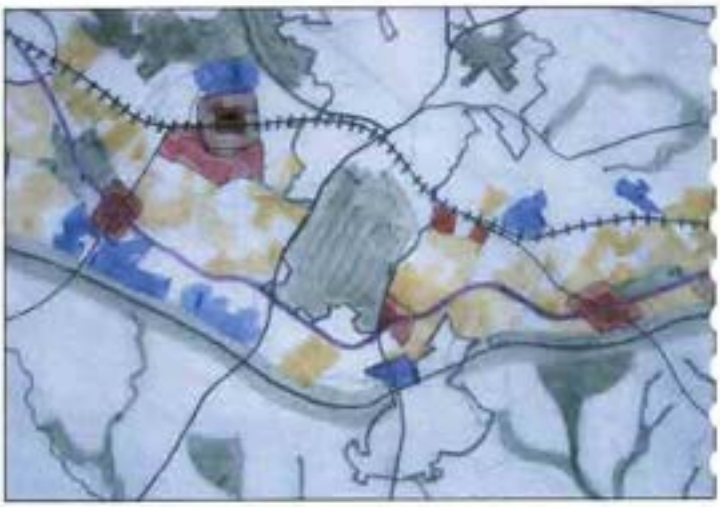
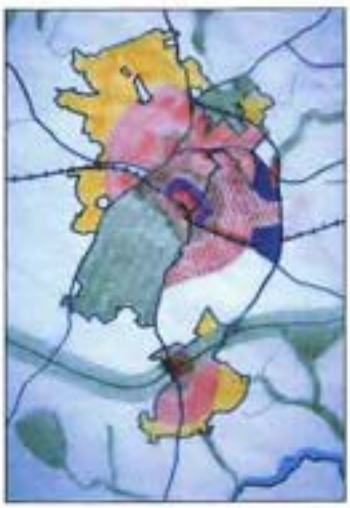
Workshop 6

University Parkway & Atlanta - Athens Rail Corridor

Barrow County

Occonee County





THE GEORGIA CONSERVANCY'S BLUEPRINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

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