
Chapter 9: Future Land Use

The Future Land Use element of the Comprehensive Plan incorporates all of the goals and recommendations of the previous elements to try and determine suitable locations for future developments. The Future Land Use map is based on an inventory of existing land uses depicting current development trends within the county. Future population demands are considered along with the physical infrastructures required to sustain those populations. An extensive public review process was used to conceptualize all of the aforementioned variables to try and determine the most suitable locations for future land uses.

The map is a conceptual figure that depicts proposed land use patterns for the county and its municipalities. The different areas on the map were delineated using property lines as boundaries, so it is clear which land uses are appropriate for which properties.

9.1 Future Land Use

County residents expressed the desire to define density parameters for subdivision developments. The previous plan used medium (less than 5 acres per dwelling unit) and low density (greater than 5 acres per dwelling unit) categories to describe subdivision developments. This plan recommends that a high-density zone be created along with medium and low-density designations to define allowable densities for subdivision development. The density parameters relate specifically to subdivision developments and do not apply to single parcel splits within rural residential areas. The borders listed below are approximate, as the map's actual borders follow property lines.

High Density Area

In order to maintain the county's distinct "Town and Country" feel, future growth in Madison County should be concentrated around the cities of Hull, Danielsville, Colbert, Comer and Ila. The city of Hull is surrounded by the largest high density growth area, a result of its proximity to the City of Athens and to Highways 72, 29 and 106. Smaller high density areas exist within a half mile of the other cities mentioned above, though because these areas can contain land that is naturally or culturally sensitive, some of that land can only be developed as conservation subdivisions, or by following the rules of an overlay district in the case of Colbert. The perimeter of the main high-density area surrounding Hull follows Hellican Springs Road from the Clarke County line north to Highway 106. Cross Highway 106 and follow Biger Creek east to McClellan Road. Follow McClellan Road south to Highway 72, and follow Shoal Creek Road to the county line.

Inside the high density areas, if a development is served by a public water system, the smallest lot that will be allowed is $\frac{3}{4}$ acre. If a development is served by a shared water system, the smallest lot allowed will be 51,000 square feet. If the lot is served by a private well, the smallest lot allowed will be 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres. The only exception to the above limits will be when a developer opts to build a conservation subdivision served by public water, or when building in the Colbert Overlay District. The County's conservation subdivision program and the Colbert Overlay District are outlined later in this document.

At the present time, the County does not operate a public sewer system. If public sewer becomes available for residential development, these minimum lot sizes will need to be updated to reflect the fact that not all lots will need to accommodate an on-site sewage treatment system.

This plan recommends establishing an impact fee program to help provide for the infrastructural improvements that this high density development will require.

Medium Density Area

The medium-density area is bounded by Nowhere Road from the Clarke County line north to Martin Griffeth Road. Follow Martin Griffeth Road east to the Neese - Commerce Road and south to Highway 106. Follow Adams-Duncan Road east to the Brush Creek Bridge, then follow Brush Creek to the Old Kincaid Road. Follow the Old Kincaid Road to Colbert Danielsville Rd. and end at the Colbert Overlay District's border, roughly ½ mile outside Colbert's City Limits. A second medium density growth area to the northwest of Comer encompasses the parcels that fall within the triangle formed by Highway 98, Highway 172, and the South Fork of the Broad River. The growth area also includes the parcels that border Highways 98 and 172 on the outside perimeter of that triangle, though it does not include any parcels in the PRC land outside of the triangle.

In the medium density area, two acre lots are the smallest appropriate, regardless of water source. As with the High Density Area, conservation subdivisions may be built in this area, and the terms for conservation subdivisions will be explained later in this section. The purpose of the medium density area is to provide residents with a place where they can live on larger tracts of land without moving into the county's surrounding countryside.

Rural/ Agricultural Area

Any subdivision development occurring outside of these designated zones must be developed at low-density, defined as 5 acres per dwelling unit. The Agricultural land use designation, on the Future Land Use Map, implies that all subdivision development within agricultural areas be developed as low-density residential. Conservation subdivisions may be built in the Rural/ Agricultural Area of the county.

Conservation Subdivisions

Conservation subdivisions have become an important part of Madison County's approach to encouraging quality development. A conservation subdivision is a type of development that protects and preserves open space, wetlands, streams and rivers, forests, pastures, farmland, historic features and other natural or environmentally sensitive areas. This plan recommends that conservation subdivisions continue to be used as a way of protecting the county's rural characteristics while accommodating future growth. The county currently uses a Gross Parcel Area approach to determining lot yield. This means that when determining the number of lots that may be built in conservation subdivisions, the developer divides the number of acres in the parent parcel by the number of acres per house required by the parcel's zoning classification. He may build the resulting number of houses on lots that are as small as one half acre each. Because it is a conservation subdivision, the developer must set aside at least 50% of the original parcel to be permanently protected by a conservation easement. For example, if a developer wanted to build a conservation subdivision on a 100 acre parcel that was zoned for Rural Residential (2

acres per house), he would divide 100 acres by 2 acres per house and get a lot yield of 50 lots. He must then design a subdivision that sets at least half of the original parent parcel (1/2 of 100 acres is 50 acres) aside as permanently protected open space. In order to provide design flexibility, the developer may use lots as small as half an acre to build the subdivision. Conservation subdivisions are appropriate in A2, RR, R1, R2, and R3 zones.

In the Rural/Agricultural area of the county, a landowner/developer may submit a request, conditioned on any development being done as a conservation subdivision, to rezone to a more intensive classification so as to increase the lot yield. Requests may be made to rezone A1 or A2 land, which requires a 1 lot per 5 acres yield, to RR, which would permit 1 lot per 2 acres. The request may be considered in compliance with the intent of the Future Land Use Element of the comprehensive plan if the rezone is conditional upon the development being carried out as a conservation subdivision, and if the requested intensity is equivalent to 1 lot per 2 or more acres. Such rezone requests will be considered applying the same criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance for all other rezoning applications.

In addition to the conservation subdivision, this plan recommends that the county develop other approaches to encouraging innovative site design that would result in the best possible location and building arrangements for the county's future developments.

Parks, Recreation, Conservation and Agriculture (PRCA)

This plan recommends combining the old Parks, Recreation, Conservation area with the area formerly known as the Transitional Greenbelt. The purpose of this area is to provide recognition and protection to the County's most significant or environmentally sensitive areas. Within this area, a conservation subdivision is mandatory in order to build a residential development. Any PRCA land that falls within the High or Medium Density growth areas may use the density allowed in that district to determine the number of lots that may be built on the property, but it must still be developed as a conservation subdivision. As a guide for future expansion of the PRCA areas, the County should explore the idea of creating a "Greenprints" map, which would identify areas other than the major river corridors that merit special protection.

Commercial, Industrial Areas

The area near the intersection of Highway 29 and Fortson Store Rd. has fast become one of the county's major commercial areas. Because of its location at the center of the main high density growth area, the Dogsboro intersection should continue to serve the county by providing an appropriate location for high volume, highway business development. Other areas of the county will also need access to commercial space, though those other areas will usually be more suited to general business needs than highway business needs.

This plan recommends creating commercial nodes around intersections of state highways with other major roads. This policy should encourage the development of specific, identifiable commercial areas, rather than the creation of a commercial strip. Examples of this type of node include the area that surrounds the intersection of Highway 29 and Diamond Hill Neese Rd., the intersection of Highway 29 and Colbert Grove Church Rd., and the intersection of Highways 172 and 98, south of the intersection. These are not the only intersections that meet these criteria

and, there may be other locations throughout the county that are appropriate for small scale commercial development based on this idea.

The Highway 72 corridor also serves as a major industrial and commercial area for the county because of the access provided by the highway and the presence of the rail line. This should continue to be the case once the road has been widened to 4 lanes. The Highway 72 corridor is an appropriate location for industrial uses that do not produce objectionable amounts of noise, odors, fumes or other potential hazards, and do not to pose a health threat to those who live nearby. In addition to the Madico Industrial Park, this plan recommends establishing an area appropriate for heavy industrial uses on several parcels to the east of the City of Carlton, on the rail line heading towards Elbert County. These parcels have been chosen because of their distance from large urban areas, the presence of a rail spur, and easy access to both the current and future Highway 72 corridors.

Other appropriate locations for commercial development may be found on major highways as they lead into or out of the cities. In the future, the county should explore other ways to accommodate demand for small scale, locally-oriented businesses in locations other than the major commercial corridors identified by the Future Land Use Map, but it should do so in a way that minimizes the impact on existing land uses.

Design Guidelines near Cities

This plan recommends establishing an overlay district for the developable area around the City of Colbert. This overlay district would require that new development taking place within the district's boundaries take place at 1 acre density, as proscribed by the City of Colbert's zoning ordinance, and that it follow a gridded pattern of development, using extensions of existing streets when possible. If the other cities express interest in the concept of design guidelines, the county should work with them to establish overlay districts appropriate for each interested city. The results will vary from city to city, but the county should explore this idea to make sure that new development is compatible with the county's historic development patterns.

Pipeline Buffers

This plan also recommends establishing a 1000 foot buffer along each side of all three of the pipelines that run through the county. Within this buffer, no major subdivision developments, as defined in the Madison County Subdivision Regulations, will be permitted unless one of the following two conditions is met:

1. The development is served by the public water system; or
2. Monitoring wells drilled on the property prior to preliminary plat approval show no contamination of the site by liquid petroleum or natural gas products. This recommendation would require working with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division and other authorities to determine an appropriate testing methodology for identifying possible petroleum contamination in the drinking water.

Stream Buffers

In addition to the policies outlined above, this plan recommends requiring a 50 foot no-build buffer along all streams in the county. Exceptions to this buffer would include the Broad River, which is already protected by a 100 foot buffer, and the South Fork of the Broad River, which

this plan recommends protecting with the same type of 100 foot buffer that currently protects the Broad River. This new 50 foot buffer on streams will provide more space for trees, shrubs and grasses to filter sediment and pollutants from stormwater before the water gets to the stream. By requiring this extra buffer on the streams and creeks that feed into the Broad, the county will be taking an extra step to protect that river corridor. The county should adopt a riparian buffer ordinance to explain the details of how this policy would work. When that ordinance is drafted, it should make clear that the adoption of this policy will not affect the ability of land within the buffer area to be bought or sold to private individuals. It should also include provisions to accommodate existing parcels of land that this buffer would otherwise make unusable. This policy is included in the Future Land Use Element because healthy streams and rivers play an important part in maintaining the rural quality of life that Madison County residents want to protect for the future.

Madison County Development Standards Program

This plan recommends implementation of the Madison County Development Standards program, which would encourage new development to add to the local quality of life by meeting goals established in this and other sections of the comprehensive plan. The Development Standards program would essentially be a list of requirements, and each requirement would have a point value associated with it. A developer would be free to choose which of those requirements he wanted to use in the development, as long as the point total for the requirements that he chooses added up to a certain minimum score. The requirements would include features such as open space in the development, sidewalks, street trees, proximity to other residential development, reforestation, and other features that would add to the quality of the development.

This plan recommends adding this program to the Madison County Subdivision Regulations. Citizen advisory committee members have firmly expressed the desire to maintain the existing rural qualities associated with living in Madison County. It is felt that growth should be confined to the designated zones and that development should be limited in the agricultural areas. The underlying theme throughout the entire planning process is to preserve the existing rural qualities of the county. All land use decisions should reflect this goal and ensure that future development does not occur at the expense of the quality of life for Madison County residents.

9.2 Needs/ Policies/ Implementation

Needs

- Clearly define what areas suitable for high density development, and what areas are not.
- Clearly define the allowable minimum lot sizes for each density district.
- Limit the type of development that can take place in agricultural areas to preserve the rural character of the county
- Enforce conservation subdivision regulations in areas adjacent to key natural resources to ensure that adequate greenspace is preserved.
- Encourage the use of the Dogsboro area and the Highway 72 corridor for major commercial development, while allowing the creation of smaller commercial nodes near the intersection of major transportation routes.
- The designation of Highway 72 as a light industrial/ commercial corridor is an attempt to take advantage of the existing transportation infrastructure (future four lane highway

and existing rail corridor). Business/commercial parks should be constructed along this corridor to cluster commercial nodes. This will help to avoid strip development along the highway and decrease the amount of roadway construction required.

- Strictly enforce existing ordinances to ensure that all development regulations are adhered to.
- Add lighting ordinances for all jurisdictions.
- In order to allow farmers to continue agricultural practices, land must be assessed and taxed at its lowest use to maintain an affordable property tax rate for local farmers.
- Minimize potential for adverse health risks around pipelines and industrial uses.
- Improve quality of water entering creeks and streams in the county.
- Raise the minimum standards for development quality in the county.
- Minimize conflicts between agricultural and residential land uses.
- Keep county regulations current to allow for new trends in housing market and to protect historic neighborhoods.

Policies

- Clearly define density boundaries to direct future growth.
- All new development must be compatible with surrounding land uses.
- Promote residential growth in the designated high and medium density districts, and in the cities to take advantage of existing infrastructure.
- Regulate rural residential growth.
- Limit development occurring within the PRCA zone. Require conservation subdivisions within PRCA areas. Expand PRCA areas to include other significant lands/resources.
- Utilize a tree buffer along Highway 72 to maintain the existing viewshed.
- Continue using zoning ordinance to ensure compatible development.
- Assess agricultural land at its productive agricultural use, not at its potential development use.
- Promote the use of restrictive covenants to agricultural land owners to allow the taxation of ag land at its productive agricultural use.
- Require developers to show that drinking water quality will not be compromised by presence of petroleum or natural gas pipelines nearby, do not allow high or medium density development to take place on land adjacent to heavy industrial property, or show that adjacent industrial activity will have no adverse health effects to potential residents.
- Improve filtration of rainwater before it reaches streams and creeks.
- Incorporate minimum development standards into development approval process.
- Minimize opportunities for high and medium density residential and agricultural land uses to conflict with one and other.
- Find way to allow mixed use developments at appropriate areas in county.
- Find way to emphasize appropriate development patterns in historically significant areas.

Implementation

- Identify suitable locations for business/commercial parks along Highway 72.
- Update zoning ordinance to include lighting regulations.

- Initiate an Impact Fees program as a way to fund sewer and other projects in high and medium density areas, thereby making those areas more attractive for development than the county's rural areas.
- Explore Transferable Development Rights program and other methods for protecting the county's agricultural lands and rural landscape.
- Create a 1000 foot buffer along petroleum and natural gas pipelines which would require developers to use either county water or drill monitoring wells to prove quality of drinking water prior to preliminary plat approval.
- Increase stream buffers from 25 feet to 50 feet.
- Implement the Madison County Development Standards program and incorporate it into the Subdivision Regulations.
- Develop a county Greenprints program to identify possible future PRCA area expansions.
- Find a large parcel of land capable of providing rail access for a major commercial or industrial operation.
- Explore possibility of adopting a Unified Land Development Code to make the County's land development regulations easier to understand, and to make it easier to adopt new ordinances as they become necessary.
- Work with IDA to develop an infrastructure plan that will serve the county's commercial, industrial and residential needs to be phased in over the coming years.
- Set aside funds for the purchase of green space in county, possibly along river corridors and near Watson Mill State Park.
- Prepare a timeline for sewer system implementation, and have that timeline ready before the end of 2007.
- Explore the possibility of undertaking a hydrology study to make sure that the county will have sufficient water resources to accommodate the projected residential and agricultural growth.