

Land Use Draft

CHAPTER 4
LAND USE ELEMENT

DRAFT

Purpose and Intent

The Land Use Element guides the location, type, intensity, and character of development in unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah through the update period.

This element:

- Establishes a vision for the region's physical development emphasizing compact, connected, walkable communities concentrated in strategic nodes and corridors;
- Implements the Strategic Nodes and Corridors framework as the region's primary growth management strategy, identifying suitable locations for residential, employment, commercial, institutional, parks, and public uses based on infrastructure capacity, transportation connectivity, environmental constraints, compatibility, and coastal hazard risk;
- Coordinates land use decisions with the Transportation Element, Economic Development Element, Housing Element, and Hazard Mitigation Plan;
- Protects and preserves the region's natural systems, historic character, cultural resources, and environmental quality;
- Promotes equitable access to employment, services, housing, and community assets across all neighborhoods and socio-economic groups;

Chatham County is a unique coastal community in Georgia, with a range of land uses from environmentally sensitive and natural areas to highly developed, mixed-use urban areas. In both the City of Savannah and the County, this diversity requires character-based land use categories, consistent with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs approach (DCA).

This element includes a Character Area Map (CAM) and Future Land Use Map (FLUM), which work together to create a cohesive countywide guide for future growth and development. In addition to these components, this element includes a summary of physical context, regional growth, existing land uses, and historical development patterns, as well as an overview of issues and opportunities for Chatham County and the City of Savannah.

The land use information, recommendations, and strategies contained in this element are intended to provide guidance for the location and intensity of land uses to support Chatham County and the City of Savannah in future land use policy decisions.

Relationship of Planning Implementation Tools

To understand how the Comprehensive Plan guides growth, it is essential to distinguish between the three primary regulatory tools used in Chatham County and Savannah. They function as a hierarchy from "Vision" to "Law."

Character Area Map (CAM) – The Vision

- Describes the desired "look and feel" of a geographic area.
- It establishes the intent for design, streetscapes, and community identity. It does not set legal density limits but guides the application of the Future Land Use Map.

Future Land Use Map (FLUM) – The Policy

- A legally adopted map that designates specific land use categories.
- This is the primary decision-making tool for determination of rezoning cases. If a property owner requests a zoning change, the request must be consistent with the FLUM category assigned to that parcel.

Zoning Ordinance – The Law

- The legally binding code that governs specific parcel development.
- Dictates strict requirements such as building height, setbacks (distance from the street), permitted uses (e.g., retail vs. industrial), and parking requirements.
- The CAM guides the FLUM; the FLUM dictates whether a Zoning Map Amendment is valid.

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update continues the application of Character Area designations begun with Plan 2040. All lands within the jurisdictions are classified in accordance with an ideal character that guides use intensity and the nature of development therein.

Historical and Regional Context

The Coastal Context and Environmental Constraints

The Savannah–Chatham region occupies a coastal landscape characterized by:

- Barrier islands and tidal marshes (Tybee Island, Wassaw Island, extensive salt and brackish marshes)
- Low-lying alluvial floodplains (Savannah River, Ogeechee River, Vernon River systems)
- Sea level rise and coastal hazard vulnerability (estimated 0.87 feet by 2050, 4+ feet by 2100 under intermediate scenarios; high risk from tropical cyclones, storm surge, and chronic tidal flooding).
- Wetlands and forested systems providing critical ecosystem services, habitat, and natural hazard buffering
- Limited upland available for development once wetlands, floodplains, and hazard-prone coastal areas are excluded

This coastal context profoundly shapes the Land Use Element. Greenfield development into low-lying areas has potential to exacerbate flood exposure, increase future disaster prevention expenditures, and constrain natural systems. Concentrating growth in strategic nodes in higher-elevation, better-connected interior areas is both economically sound and environmentally sensitive.

Municipalities In Chatham County

There are eight municipalities incorporated within Chatham County: Savannah, Thunderbolt Town, Vernonburg Town, Tybee Island, Pooler, Garden City, Port Wentworth, and Bloomingdale.

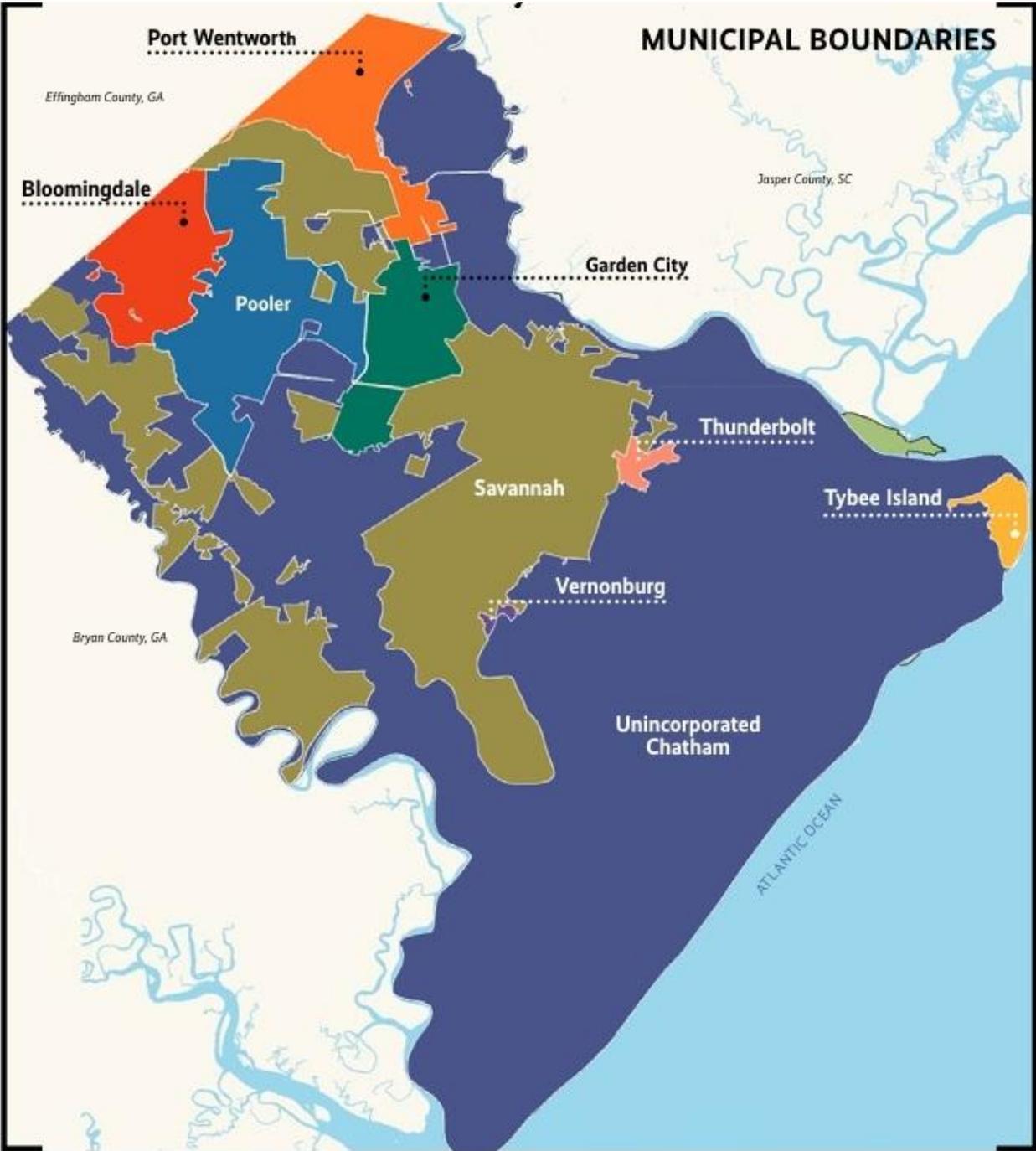


Exhibit 4.1 – Municipal Boundaries

Historical Development Patterns

The built environment of the City of Savannah is defined by distinct eras of planning philosophy, resulting in a structural split that underlies current infrastructure challenges. The first: compact, walkable, and grid-based; the second is dispersed, and auto-oriented.

The Original Grid (1733–1945)

The Oglethorpe Plan, with its redundant grid, integrated public squares, and mix of uses, established a model of density and connectivity that remains a standard for resilient urbanism. In this pattern, density was an organic component of viability. The connectivity of the grid dispersed traffic, which for many years was animal powered transport, allowing substantial volumes of movement without the need for high-capacity thoroughfares. This historic core remains the most fiscally productive land in Chatham County per acre.

This era produced a compact, walkable city where commerce, civic institutions, open space, and housing coexisted within a tight geographic footprint. The legacy of this era is a land use pattern that is highly efficient, utilizing relatively little land to support a significant population and tax base.

Suburban Expansion (1945–2020)

Following World War II, the region shifted toward an auto-centric development model. The post-war era introduced an auto-oriented expansion characterized by separated land uses, large residential lots, cul-de-sacs, and a reliance on a hierarchy of roadways. This pattern funnels traffic from residential subdivisions onto a few major corridors, including but not all inclusive: Abercorn Street (Highway 204); Habersham Street; Skidaway Road; White Bluff Road; and Waters Avenue; as well as I-16, Truman Parkway, Ogeechee Road and GA 21.

Unincorporated areas east of Savannah were developed and annexed into the City. As land became physically constrained, a significant share of the area's growth occurred in western Unincorporated County, and the municipalities of Bloomingdale, Pooler, Garden City and Port Wentworth, resulting in annexation of County land. While this model provided rapid expansion of affordable housing and space for a growing population, it created a dependency on arterial roadways and extended infrastructure lines that are costly to maintain and may have reached their capacity to support the spreading growth patterns.

The Present (2020 - Present)

The period from 2020 to present has been more defined by the regionalization of industry. The economic identity of Chatham County has shifted from a destination for freight transit to a hub for freight production and storage. A vast amount of greenfield land has been consumed in the building of logistics facilities reserved for expansion of future commerce. Although currently the vacancy rate is high, this trend is impacting residents' quality of life, particularly from a circulation perspective. The challenge is to simultaneously manage the City of Savannah with its efficient urban grid, suburban growth patterns and industrial intensification. The strategy moving forward is to improve the suburban model, by introducing connectivity and nodes of density to strengthen the urban fabric.

Existing Land Use Distribution

Figure 4.1 presents existing land use distribution in Unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah. The character of each of these areas varies greatly as a result of distinctly different land use patterns, which have remained essentially the same since Plan 2040.

The City of Savannah is highly urbanized with large areas of mixed-use development. The City is chiefly growing through annexation. However, urban neighborhoods that have declined in population, former industrial lands, and vacant or under-performing commercial centers represent opportunities for internal growth in the form of infill and adaptive reuse development, thereby conserving undeveloped natural areas. To the east, Unincorporated Chatham County is developed at low densities and its character is strongly influenced by its setting amid marshes and tidal creeks. To the west, the County has a higher proportion of undeveloped area; however, as the City of Savannah and unincorporated eastern Chatham have built out, the western portion of Chatham County is emerging as a high growth area.

Existing Land Use - Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah		
Category	% of Area	Primary Characteristics
Residential (all types)	28%	Single-family (60%), multifamily (15%), mobile/other (25%)
Commercial (all types)	8%	Regional centers (50%), neighborhood (30%), office (20%)
Industrial (all types)	6%	Warehousing/distribution (70%), heavy industrial (20%), light industrial (10%)
Parks, Recreation, Open Space	4%	Public parks, golf courses, greenways
Institutional (Government, Education, Health)	4%	Schools, universities, hospitals, government offices
Transportation, Utilities	3%	Roads, rail, utility corridors, parking
Vacant/Underutilized	5%	Vacant lots, surface parking, abandoned buildings
Agricultural/Rural	18%	Farmland, forestry, rural residential
Water/Wetlands/Conservation	24%	Marshes, floodplains, conservation areas
Source: SAGIS		

Figure 4.1 Existing Land Use Classifications

Challenges of the Built and Future Urban Environment

The 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) projects significant population and employment growth associated with the regional industrial corridor. This also increases housing demand, much of which falls in the mid to lower income tiers, furthering the affordable housing shortfall.

As the primary service, cultural, and healthcare hub of the region, Savannah absorbs most of the workforce housing demand generated by industrial projects located in neighboring jurisdictions (Bryan, Effingham, Bulloch). The daily impacts show up on Savannah's arterials and in Savannah's neighborhoods. Consequently, land use decisions made within the municipal limits of Savannah have secondary effects on regional freight mobility and commuter traffic. Without adequate workforce housing near employment centers, the labor shed umbrella gets pushed further out, increasing reliance on our regional arterials.

The Land Use Element must be viewed, from one perspective, as an economic development tool to align zoning to allow for workforce housing density, while protecting the viability of the regional labor market and circulation system.

Positive Existing Patterns:

- Historic downtown and riverfront mixed-use development with walkability, density, and cultural vitality
- Established neighborhoods (Victory Drive, Waters Avenue, mid-town, West Savannah) with human-scale blocks, mixed housing, and local retail
- Port and logistics infrastructure supporting regional trade and employment
- Robust system of parks and open spaces, from urban parks (Forsyth, Daffin, Bonaventure) to regional trails and conservation areas
- Diverse institutional anchors (universities, hospitals, government) distributed throughout the region

Challenging Existing Patterns:

- Dispersed, low-density suburban expansion at the urban fringe consuming agricultural land and natural areas, diminished rural character
- Auto-oriented commercial corridors (Abercorn, DeRenne, Victory, Waters) with frontage roads, large parking lots, and fragmented parcels
- Downtown and inner-city disinvestment with vacant buildings, underutilized properties, and limited housing options
- Racial and class segregation persisting from historical policies; disparities in investment, services, and opportunity
- Industrial–residential conflicts in Environmental Justice communities adjacent to the Port of Savannah, warehousing, and heavy industry
- Limited transit connectivity; high car dependency despite density in urban core
- Past unsystematic governance across multiple jurisdictions limiting coordinated land use and infrastructure planning

Employment Centers and Drivers of Economic Development

While traditional sectors such as tourism, healthcare, and retail remain vital, future land use patterns are increasingly defined by the logistics landscape; a structural economic shift driven by the continued dominance of the Port of Savannah and the regionalization of industry associated with the Hyundai Metaplant.

Employment centers are no longer viewed in isolation but are integrated into the *Strategic Nodes and Corridors* framework. These areas are identified as "Employment/Freight Nodes" and "Regional Mixed-Use Nodes" based on their concentration of jobs, industrial output, and role within the regional labor shed. These nodes are critical not only for their economic output but for their profound pressure on the region's land supply, transportation networks, and housing stock, requiring coordination to manage the friction between industrial traffic and neighborhood safety.

Major Employment Centers		
Major Employment Sector (Proportion of MSA Employment)	Major Employers Chatham County Exclusively	Description of Activity
Logistics, Warehousing, Retail Trade, Transportation & Utilities 24.20%	Georgia Ports Authority	Seaport terminal operations; largest single-terminal container facility in North America.
	Target Distribution Center	Import warehousing and regional retail distribution.
	Walmart Distribution Center	Regional distribution hub for retail goods.
	Colonial Group, Inc.	Diversified energy, chemicals, and logistics; headquarters operations.
	Dollar Tree Distribution	Large-scale retail distribution logistics.
Education & Health Services Medicine, Higher Ed 13.90%	Memorial Health (HCA)	Region's largest private employer; Level 1 Trauma Center & Teaching Hospital.
	St. Joseph's / Candler	Health system specializing in cardiac, cancer, and outpatient services.
	Savannah-Chatham Co. Public Schools	Public K-12 education system (Largest county-wide employer).
	SCAD (Savannah College of Art & Design)	Private university for creative careers; major real estate holder.
Leisure & Hospitality Tourism, Dining, Accommodations 14.1%	The Landings Club	Private luxury golf and country club community operations.
	Various Hotel Groups	(Marriott, Westin, etc.) Supporting 17.3+ million visitors annually.

Major Employment Sector (Proportion of MSA Employment)	Major Employers Chatham County Exclusively	Description of Activity
Manufacturing Aerospace, Industrial 12.30%	Gulfstream Aerospace	Jet aircraft manufacturing, R&D, and maintenance (Largest employer).
	JCB North America	Manufacture of construction and agricultural heavy equipment (HQ).
	International Paper	Paper products, linerboard, and pulp production.
	Mitsubishi Power Americas	Manufacture of gas turbines and power generation equipment.
	Derst Baking Company	Large-scale commercial bakery (Nature's Own, Sunbeam).
Government Federal, Local, Defense 12.50%	Hunter Army Airfield	Military airfield, training, and logistics support (Part of Ft. Stewart complex).
	City of Savannah	Municipal services, police, fire, water, and administration.
	Chatham County Government	County administration, sheriff, courts, and engineering.

Figure 4.2 – Major Employment Centers

Managing Growth

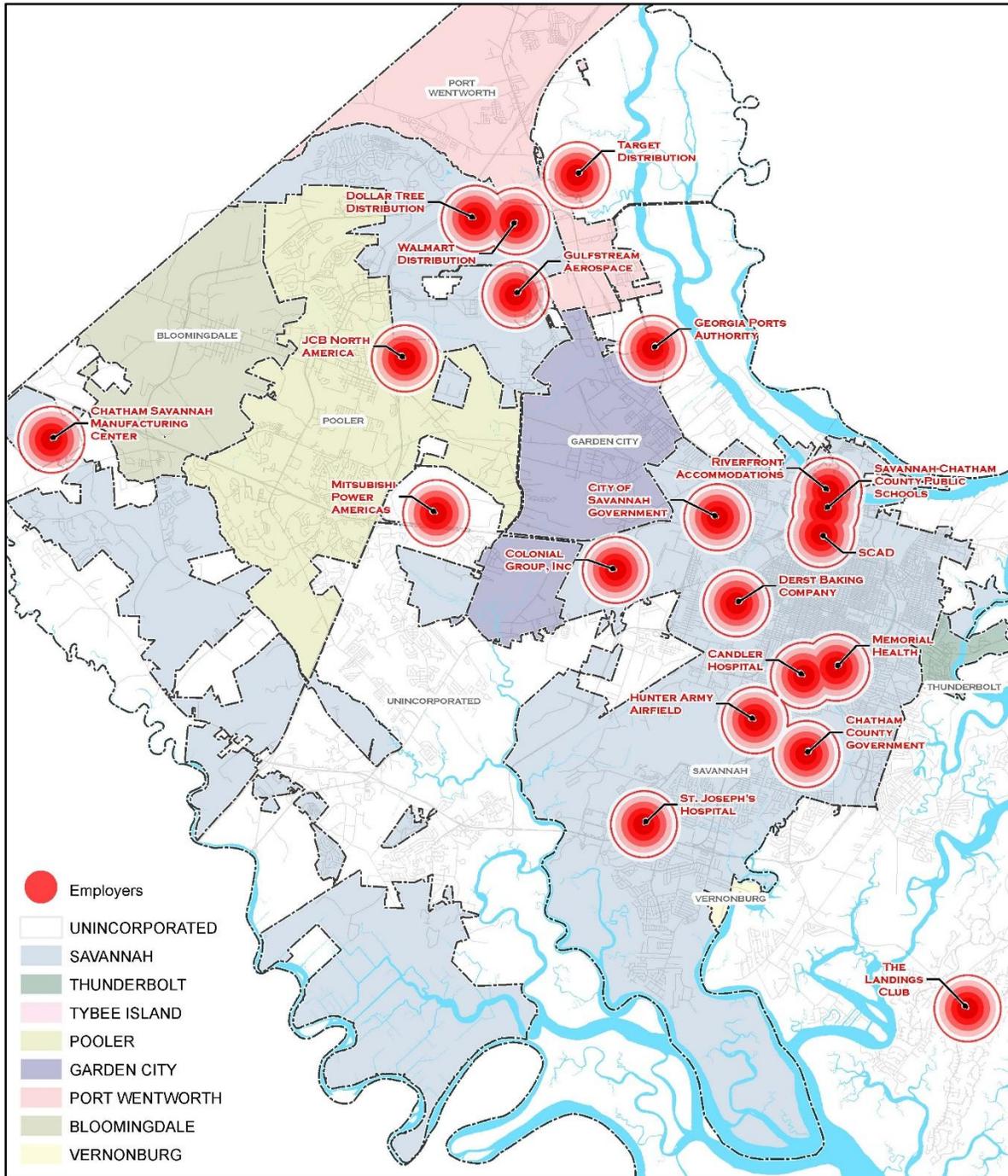
Unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah will accommodate substantial population and employment growth through the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update period. Without guiding principles, growth tends to extend outward as low-density, auto-oriented development, converting greenfields, adding pressure on infrastructure and community services, and intensifying fiscal, environmental, and coastal hazard risks.

Suburban Growth Issues

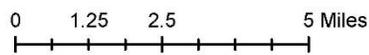
The strategic nodes and corridors approach responds to specific costs and risks associated with historic outward expansion growth trends in a coastal metropolitan county:

1. **Fiscal and infrastructure costs:** Low-density development requires more lane-miles, utilities, stormwater facilities, and emergency service coverage per resident. Over time, this produces higher operations and maintenance costs per unit of tax base and increases long-term liabilities for local governments.
2. **Congestion and freight conflicts:** Job growth in freight-intensive nodes (ports, logistics, manufacturing, warehousing) has outpaced housing production, requiring more workers to commute longer distances on regional corridors such as I-16, I-95, SR 21, SR 204, and US 80. This compounds congestion, increases truck–passenger conflicts, and undermines reliability for goods movement.
3. **Housing affordability and workforce access:** The Coastal Regional Housing Report documents rising housing costs, high renter cost burden, and limited availability of homes affordable at 80% of Area Median Income (AMI) across Chatham County and the City of Savannah, despite relatively strong regional incomes and a diverse housing stock.

Expansion pushes new workforce housing farther from job centers and transit, raising total transportation and housing costs.



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Exhibit 4.4 – Savannah-Chatham County: Employment Centers

4. **Coastal hazard and climate risk:** The Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies flood, tropical cyclones, sea level rise, and erosion as high-priority hazards. Sea level at Fort Pulaski is rising at approximately 3.66 mm/year, with an estimated 0.87 feet of rise by 2050 and at least 4 feet by 2100 under intermediate scenarios. Large areas of the barrier islands, marshes, and low-lying coastal tracts are vulnerable to chronic tidal flooding, storm surge, and long-term inundation. Spreading new development into these areas increases future disaster exposure and recovery costs.
5. **Loss of natural systems and rural character:** Continued loss of forest and wetland acreage and increases in high-intensity development in Chatham County further erodes natural buffers, marsh migration corridors, and rural vistas.

The Strategic Nodes and Corridors framework directly addresses these concerns by concentrating growth where infrastructure, transit, and hazard conditions can support it, while preserving environmentally sensitive and hazardous coastal lands for conservation, recreation, and lower-intensity uses.

Strategic Nodes and Corridors

The Strategic Nodes and Corridors framework is the Savannah and Chatham County's primary growth management strategy for the 2050 planning horizon. It focuses most new development, redevelopment, and infrastructure investment into:

- **Strategic Nodes** – a limited set of high-intensity, mixed-use centers and critical employment hubs; and
- **Strategic Corridors** – higher-order streets and highways that connect these nodes to each other and to the wider region.

This framework:

- Implements the "Strong Corridors" approach from *Plan 2040* and subsequent housing and freight planning efforts, which call for compact, walkable development along major transportation corridors and key nodes rather than continued outward sprawl.
- Aligns future land use, zoning, and capital projects with the multimodal investments identified in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and the CORE MPO Regional Freight Transportation Plan Update.
- Directs workforce housing and mixed-use infill to locations with adequate street and transit capacity, while maintaining buffers and separations from heavy industrial and high-risk coastal hazard areas.

In practice, this means that walkable mixed-use nodes along well-connected corridors become the default pattern for new greenfield planned developments and infill in traditional neighborhoods. While dispersed, low-density expansion at the fringe is discouraged.

Typology and Identification of Strategic Nodes and Corridors

For the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update, strategic nodes and corridors are organized into a clear typology to guide future land use, zoning, and capital programming. The following nested table structure organizes the strategic growth framework for the 2050 planning horizon, progressing from general classification to specific location identification and policy descriptors:

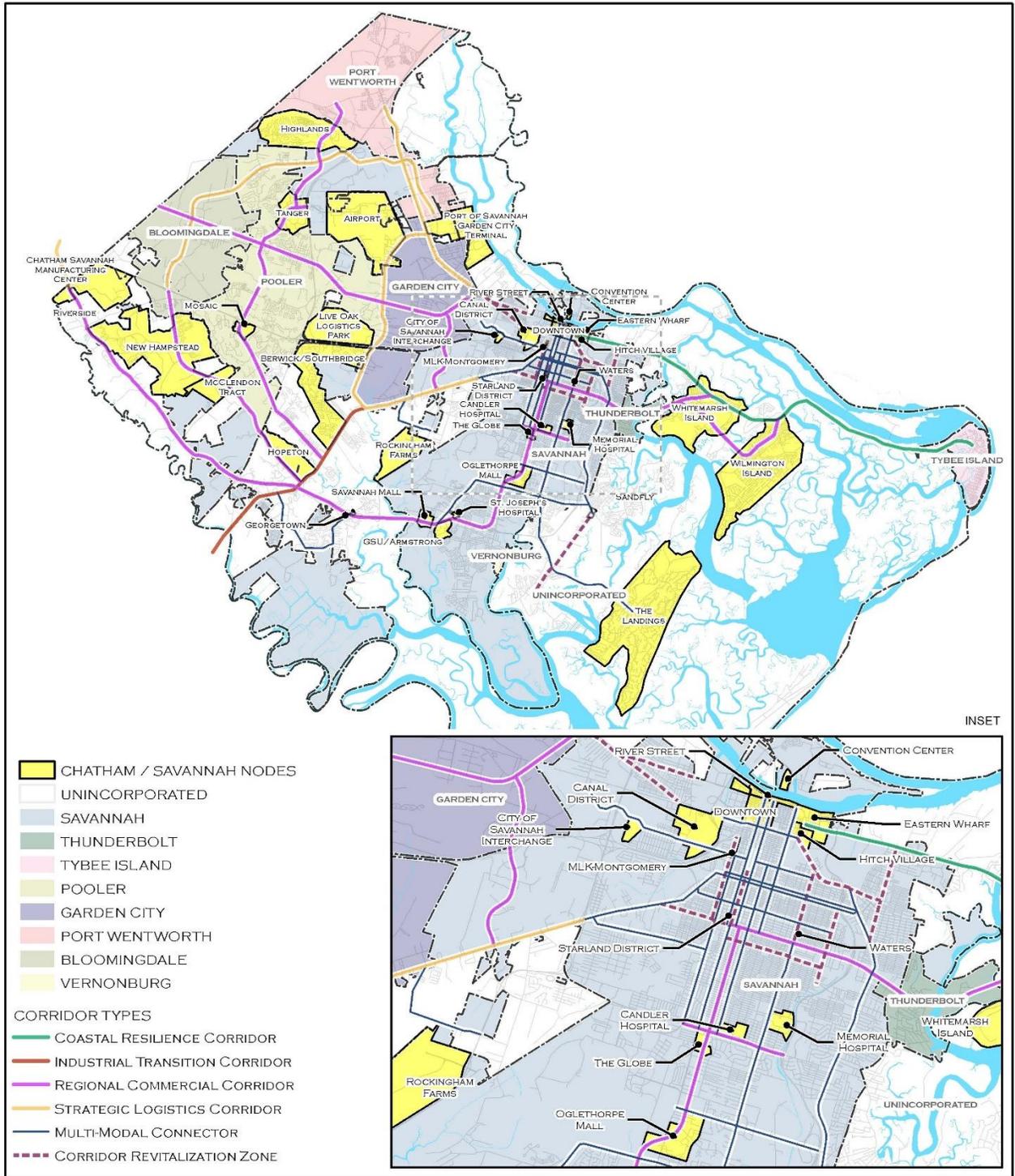
Strategic Nodes and Corridors			
	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors
Strategic Nodes	Regional Mixed-Use Nodes		Historic preservation /coastal hazard resilience
	High-intensity, transit - supportive centers combining employment, higher-density housing (including workforce housing), retail, institutional uses, and civic spaces. Logical locations for mid- and high-rise development under appropriate zoning	Downtown Savannah / Eastern Wharf	Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Workforce housing Tourism anchor with 18,767+ hotel rooms
		Canal District	Workforce housing Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Emerging node with arena anchor Resilient design / floodplain management
		Oglethorpe Mall / Southside Regional Center	Workforce housing Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets First-last mile connectivity to job centers Auto-oriented retrofit toward walkable mixed-use
		Savannah Mall – GSU Armstrong / Southside Medical– University Node	Workforce housing (healthcare/education workers) First-last mile connectivity to job centers Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Campus-adjacent mixed-use neighborhoods
		Community Mixed-Use Nodes	
	Medium-scale centers serving clusters of neighborhoods with a mix of commercial, institutional, and medium-density housing, typically at key intersections along strategic corridors.	West Savannah / MLK– Montgomery Node	Equitable development / community benefit agreements Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Cultural heritage preservation

	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors	
Strategic Nodes	Employment / Freight Nodes	Port of Savannah / Garden City Terminal–Ocean Terminal	Environmental justice / buffering protections	
	Concentrations of port, industrial, logistics, warehousing, and advanced manufacturing activity, often anchored by interstate and freight rail access. Primarily employment-focused with tight controls on residential encroachment.		Rockingham Farms	Freight capacity / grade separation priority Limited residential with substantial buffering required 561,000 regional jobs supported
				First-last mile connectivity to job centers Residential incompatibility without robust buffering Transition to employment-dense industrial uses encouraged Air quality / noise protections required
	Savannah Chatham Manufacturing Center / Old River Road Node	Limited residential only with industrial impact mitigation Advanced manufacturing preservation Freight network access (I-16, I-95) Transportation capacity coordination		
		Emerging Greenfield Nodes	Workforce housing (diverse types beyond single-family)	
	Large, master-planned areas at the urban edge with zoning and infrastructure potential to evolve into complete, mixed-use communities with internal street networks and diverse housing types.	Highlands / I-95 – Jimmy DeLoach Node		Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets (internal networks) First-last mile connectivity to job centers Buffering from logistics/warehouse districts
		New Hampstead		Workforce housing priority Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets / greenway systems Walkable blocks and mixed-use centers Infrastructure capacity coordination
Strategic Corridors	Regional Mixed-Use Corridors	Abercorn Street / SR 204	Auto-oriented strip conversion to walkable centers Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets retrofit Workforce housing infill Transit-ready (high frequency)	
	High-capacity arterials with significant transit potential and redevelopment opportunities, where corridor-scale mixed-use intensification and complete streets retrofits are prioritized.		DeRenne Avenue	Workforce housing (medium-intensity mixed-use) Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Transit / bike / pedestrian access Institutional corridor support

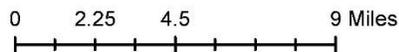
Strategic Nodes and Corridors			
	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors
Strategic Corridors		MLK Jr Boulevard / Montgomery Street	Workforce housing with equitable development strategies Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Transit-ready, walkable urban format Adaptive reuse / anti-displacement tools
		Bull Street	Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Historic mixed-use corridor preservation Incremental infill with pedestrian priority Traditional urban form reinforcement
		Victory Drive (US 80 urban segment)	Workforce housing (corridor housing emphasis) Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets retrofit Small-scale centers at key intersections Mixed-use redevelopment
	Freight and Employment Corridors		Freight capacity/safety/access management priority First-last mile connectivity to job centers Limited residential or substantial buffering required Environmental justice/air quality protections
	Corridors that primarily move goods and connect major employment/ freight nodes to I-16, I-95, the port, and the airport. Require freight compatible design, intersection improvements, and careful management of sensitive uses	SR 21 / Jimmy DeLoach Corridor	
		Ogeechee Road / US 17	Context-sensitive mixed-use in appropriate segments Industrial-residential separation maintained Legacy industrial cluster respect Southwest growth corridor
		Quacco Road Fort Argyle Road (SR 204 West) New Hampstead Approaches	Workforce housing aligned with nodes Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Walkable mixed-use center emphasis Infrastructure capacity before build-out

Strategic Nodes and Corridors			
	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors
Strategic Corridors	Coastal Corridors	President Street / Islands Expressway	Environmentally sensitive (flood/storm surge risk)
	Regional gateways and evacuation routes in coastal hazard zones requiring special resilience considerations and development limitations.		Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Resilient building forms (elevated) Transit links with limited greenfield expansion
		US 80 (Tybee corridor)	Environmentally sensitive (coastal hazard/evacuation route) Development limitations in highest-risk segments Resilient infill focus in existing communities Dual-purpose evacuation/access corridor
	Neighborhood Connectors and Retrofits	Waters Avenue	Workforce housing (missing middle) Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets
	Corridors connecting neighborhoods to strategic nodes and corridors, often targeted for "suburban retrofit," missing-middle infill, and pedestrian/bicycle enhancements.	Augusta Avenue	Suburban retrofit priorities Neighborhood-scale mixed-use Workforce housing (missing-middle) Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Suburban retrofit priorities Neighborhood-scale mixed-use
<p>Table Notes and Implementation Guidance: <i>Workforce Housing:</i> Locations prioritized for housing affordable to households earning 80–120% Area Median Income (AMI) <i>Pedestrian Connectivity/Complete Streets:</i> Areas requiring or incentivized for continuous sidewalks, safe crossings, multimodal facilities, and walkable block patterns <i>First-Last Mile Connectivity to Job Centers:</i> Locations requiring enhanced transit, bicycle, and pedestrian links between residential areas and major employment concentrations <i>Environmentally Sensitive:</i> Areas subject to coastal hazards (flood, storm surge, sea level rise), wetlands, or other environmental constraints requiring special design standards</p>			

Figure 4.3 – Savannah-Chatham County: Strategic Nodes and Corridors



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Date: 3/18/2025



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Exhibit 4.5 – Savannah-Chatham County: Strategic Nodes and Corridors Map

Character Areas

The Character Area Map (CAM) identifies the land use character vision for Chatham County. The CAM is intended to work in coordination with the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) to establish a cohesive, countywide framework that guides responsible growth, reinvestment, and conservation over the next twenty years, with particular emphasis on development patterns influenced by major transportation corridors.

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update builds upon the Character Area framework established in Plan 2040 by refining how land use character is described and applied across the county. While the CAM does not assign specific land use classifications or zoning, it provides policy guidance regarding the form, intensity, and organization of development, especially in areas shaped by existing and emerging corridor conditions. When considered together, the CAM and FLUM support informed decision making related to land development inquiries and long-term planning initiatives.

The CAM is not intended to deviate from the adopted land use goals of other municipalities within Chatham County that maintain separate planning programs. Rather, this countywide framework seeks to support municipal objectives while recognizing that land use patterns, infrastructure investments, and environmental systems extend across jurisdictional boundaries. The CAM therefore emphasizes alignment along shared corridors and edges, while focusing more directly on areas within unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah.

Character Areas are designed to capture the diversity of development patterns found throughout Chatham County and to expand upon the single use land categorization represented on the FLUM. Rather than identifying individual land uses, Character Areas describe places that may contain a mix of uses but share common defining characteristics such as development intensity, transportation orientation, parcel structure, and access to infrastructure or environmental resources. This approach is particularly important in corridor contexts, where land use character often evolves incrementally in response to mobility, access, and reinvestment pressures.

As corridor-based growth continues to shape development patterns across the county, some locations within broader Character Areas may experience distinct redevelopment pressures or opportunities that warrant more refined guidance. In these cases, Sub Areas are used to recognize locations where corridor conditions, parcel size, or infrastructure capacity support a different long-term evolution than surrounding areas. Sub Areas do not replace the underlying Character Area designation, nor do they establish new regulatory requirements. Instead, they provide additional policy direction to guide reinvestment and change in a manner consistent with the County's corridor focused growth strategy.

There are four primary Character Area categories, each with delineated land use designations. These are described on the following pages:

- Environmentally Sensitive
- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

Development Factors

Character Areas are defined through a consistent set of Development Factors that reflect existing conditions and anticipated growth trends. These factors provide a framework for evaluating compatibility and appropriateness of future land use decisions, particularly in relation to transportation corridors and supporting infrastructure. The Development Factors used to describe each Character Area include:

- Primary and secondary uses
- Typical density ranges
- Transportation orientation and roadway classification
- Parking and utility characteristics
- Open space and environmental features

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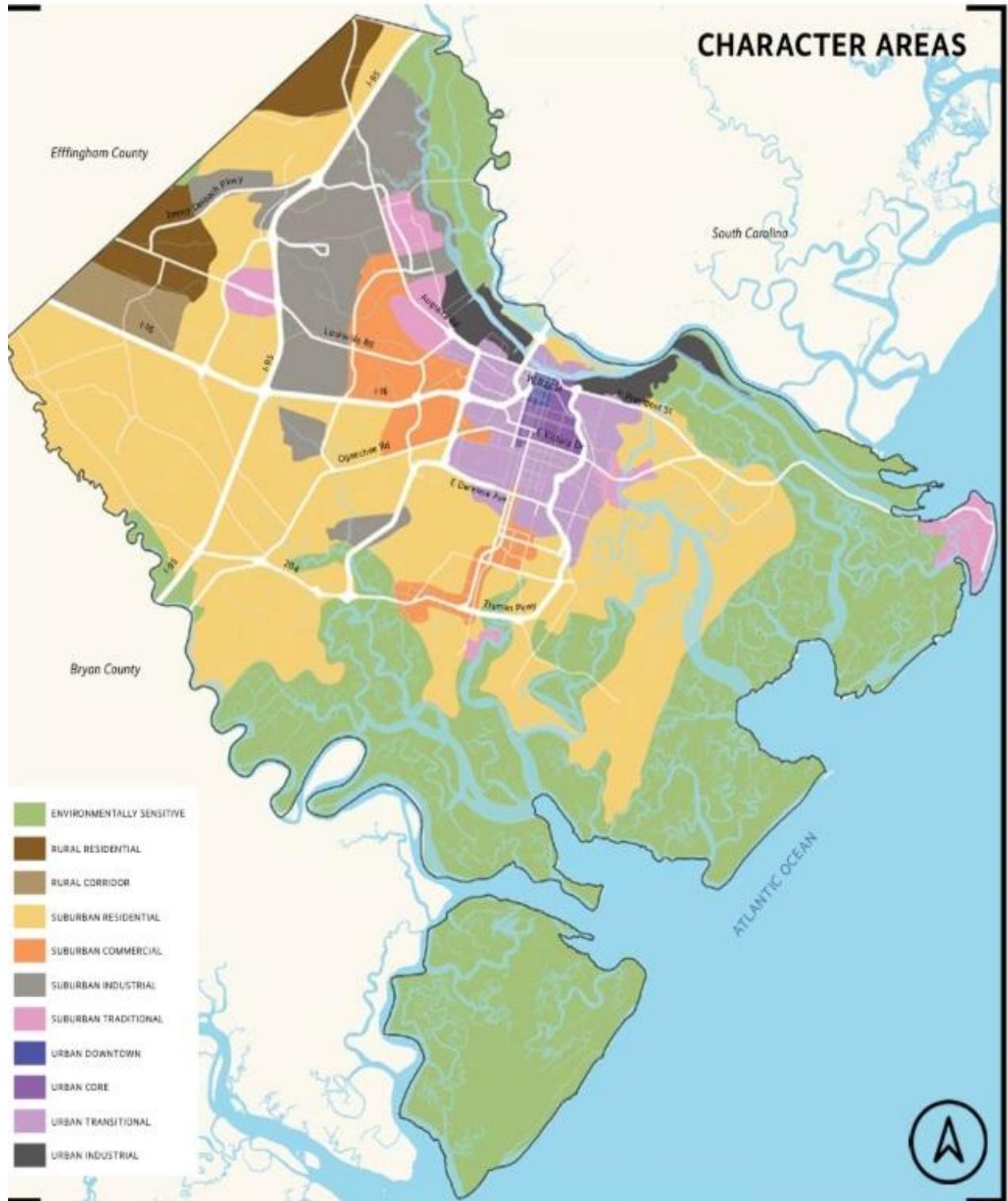


Exhibit 4.6 – Savannah-Chatham County: Character Areas

Character Area Categories

Environmentally Sensitive Character Area

Environmentally Sensitive character areas include lands designated for preservation or conservation, as well as areas containing natural features that are especially vulnerable to the impacts of development. These areas include rivers, wetlands, marshes, floodplains, and woodlands, along with sites protected at the local, state, or national level, such as Ossabaw Island, Wormsloe Historic Site, and Wassaw National Wildlife Refuge. Large portions of this character area are associated with major river systems, including the Moon, Ogeechee, Savannah, and Wilmington Rivers.



Exhibit 4.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Environmentally Sensitive Character Area

These areas are defined by natural systems that are integral to the county's environmental health and are highly sensitive to disturbance. Development within and adjacent to Environmentally Sensitive character areas can affect not only ecological resources, but also public safety and quality of life by exacerbating environmental hazards such as flooding, degraded water quality, temperature extremes, and extreme weather impacts. As a result, land use decisions in these areas should prioritize resource protection, resilience, and long-term environmental health.

While many parks and open spaces are located within Environmentally Sensitive character areas, not all open space or recreational lands fall exclusively within this designation. In some cases, open space and recreational lands are embedded within other Character Areas and serve complementary roles. Regardless of location, any development occurring within or near an Environmentally Sensitive character area should incorporate appropriate measures to protect natural systems, minimize disturbance, maintain landscape continuity, and reduce vulnerability to environmental risks.

Suburban Character Areas

Suburban character areas are generally lower density areas shaped by the prevalence and accommodation of the automobile. These areas typically feature separated land uses, with residential development distinct from commercial and industrial activity. Detached single family homes are common, along with smaller scale multifamily residential development. Commercial uses, including retail and office clusters, are often organized in centers or along major thoroughfares and highway interchanges, frequently in strip malls supported by surface parking.

Suburban character areas include many locations that are expected to experience continued population growth and redevelopment pressure, particularly along major transportation corridors. While established residential neighborhoods within suburban areas are generally expected to remain stable, commercial corridors and large format sites may evolve over time in response to changing market conditions, infrastructure investments, and mobility needs. Future development within suburban character areas should emphasize efficient use of existing infrastructure, improved connectivity along corridors, and thoughtful transitions between different land use intensities. The impact of logistics-based industry vehicular and rail traffic on residential neighborhoods and commuting have been identified in the Community Participation Program as a particularly negative circumstance to be considered in future land use decisions.

As suburban areas continue to mature, reinvestment opportunities are increasingly shaped by corridor conditions, parcel size, and access to regional transportation networks. Planning efforts in these areas should focus on enhancing the public realm where appropriate, improving multimodal circulation along major roadways, and guiding redevelopment in a manner that strengthens surrounding neighborhoods while maintaining the overall suburban context.

Suburban Residential

Suburban Residential character areas include low to medium density residential development that is primarily dependent on the automobile. These areas are typically characterized by detached and attached single family homes on individual lots, as well as residential subdivisions with relatively uniform housing types, lot sizes, and development patterns. In some locations, smaller scale multifamily development, such as garden apartments or townhomes, may also be present.

Local street networks within Suburban Residential areas often follow curvilinear patterns, with cul de sacs, limited connectivity, and sidewalks that may be intermittent or absent. These patterns reflect the era in which many suburban neighborhoods were developed and contribute to their distinct physical character. Suburban Residential areas frequently function as stable, long-established neighborhoods that provide a significant share of the County’s housing stock.

Where Suburban Residential areas are located adjacent to Suburban Commercial areas or major transportation corridors, future planning efforts should emphasize compatibility, buffering, and appropriate transitions in scale and intensity. To the extent feasible, neighborhoods should be designed or retrofitted to support internal connectivity, access to nearby services, and safe pedestrian and bicycle movement within the surrounding suburban context.

Suburban Residential - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Single family residential (detached and attached)
SECONDARY USES	Small scale multifamily residential, neighborhood serving commercial uses, civic and institutional facilities, neighborhood parks
DENSITY	Low to medium; 3 to 5 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile oriented; limited public transit access
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	Off street parking, private driveways, garages
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities; some individual or community utility systems
OPEN SPACE	Neighborhood parks, community and regional parks, greenspaces, waterways, golf courses

Figure 4.5 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Residential Development Factors

A range of housing options should continue to be supported within Suburban Residential character areas to respond to changing household needs, including multigenerational households, seniors, and individuals seeking alternatives to traditional single-family homes. Such housing diversity should be introduced in a manner that respects existing neighborhood character and infrastructure capacity.

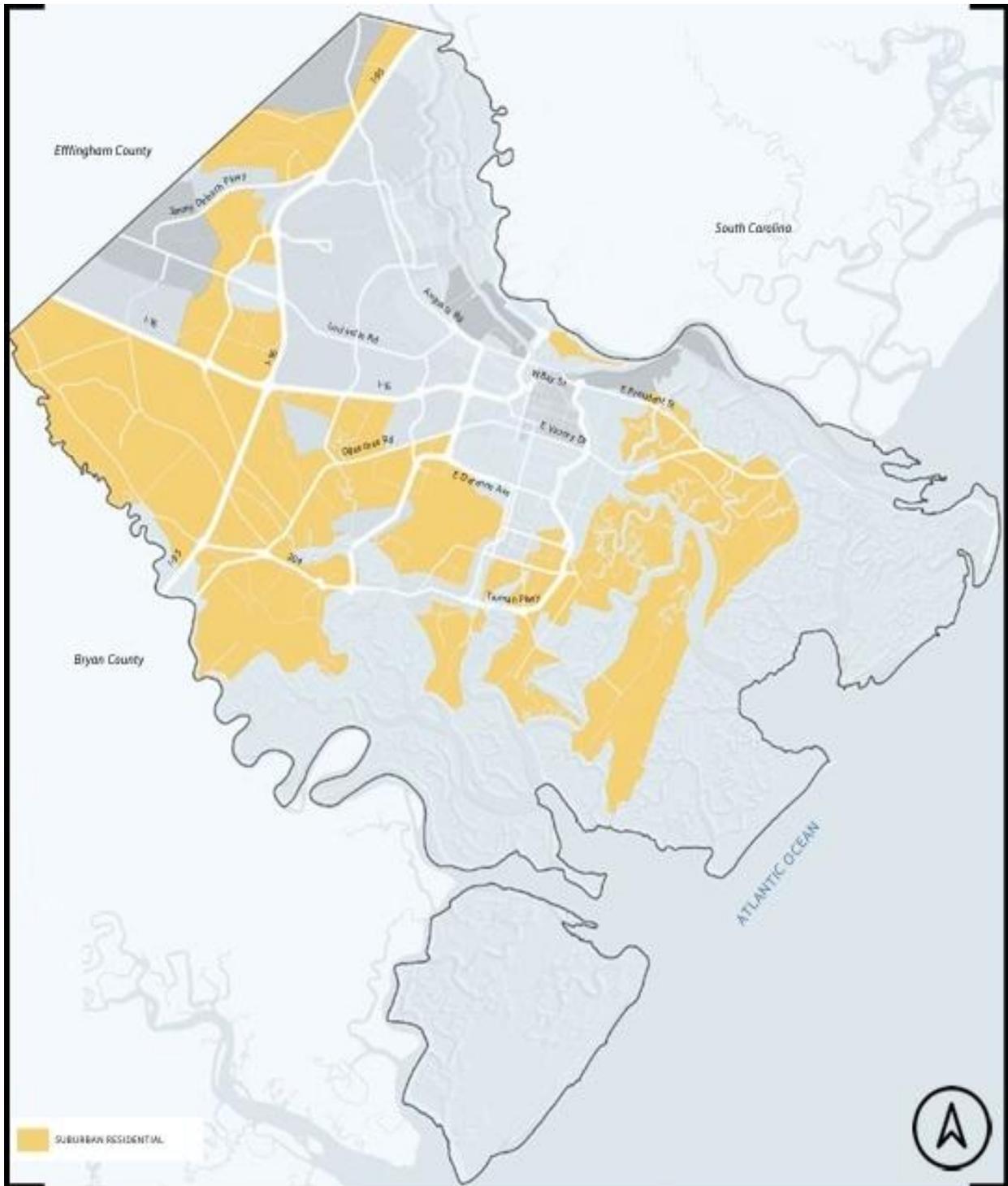


Exhibit 4.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Residential Character Area

Suburban Commercial

Suburban Commercial character areas are predominantly automobile oriented commercial districts that serve community and regional shopping and service needs. These areas are typically located along major transportation corridors and highways, including arterial roadways and interchanges such as Abercorn Street, U.S. 80, and Interstate 16. Development within this character area commonly includes shopping centers, malls, office buildings, and large format retail uses supported by surface parking and high visibility frontage.

Over time, many Suburban Commercial areas have experienced changing market conditions and evolving retail formats. As a result, some sites may undergo reinvestment or incremental change; however, most Suburban Commercial areas are expected to continue functioning primarily as single use commercial districts. Future development and reinvestment should prioritize efficient site layout, access management, internal circulation, and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

New and redeveloping commercial centers should emphasize site design strategies that reduce the visual and functional dominance of surface parking, improve circulation, and enhance the public realm. Approaches may include placing parking toward the interior of sites, improving pedestrian connections along corridor frontages, and incorporating landscape or civic elements where feasible.

Suburban Commercial - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Regional Commercial, Neighborhood Commercial
SECONDARY USES	Small scale apartment buildings, single family residential, office, civic and institutional facilities
DENSITY	Low, 3 to 12 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile oriented
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials, expressways
PARKING	Off street, surface parking
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities, some individual and community utility systems
OPEN SPACE	Community and regional parks

Figure 4.6 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Commercial Development Factors

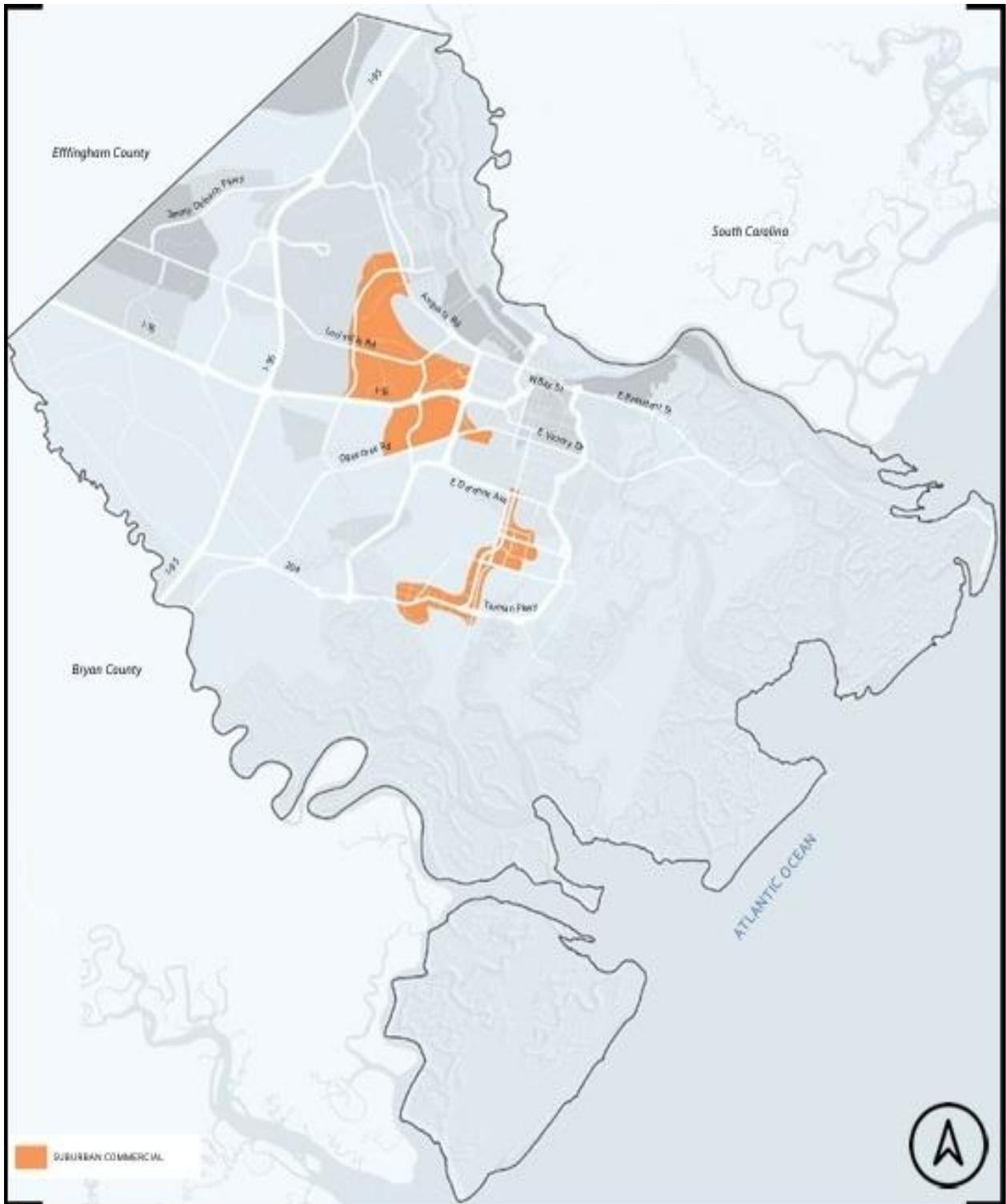


Exhibit 4.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Commercial Character Area

Suburban Commercial, Mixed Use Redevelopment Sub Area

Within the broader Suburban Commercial character area, select locations exhibit conditions that support long term transformation beyond conventional suburban commercial patterns. These areas are typically anchored by large regional shopping centers, major corridor intersections, or underutilized commercial parcels, and they possess the parcel size, infrastructure capacity, and corridor access necessary to accommodate more intensive redevelopment.

The Suburban Commercial, Mixed Use Redevelopment Sub Area identifies locations where a transition toward integrated, mixed use development is appropriate over time. Unlike other Suburban Commercial areas that are expected to remain primarily single use commercial districts, redevelopment within this sub area is envisioned to occur through suburban retrofit, including the introduction of residential, employment, and civic uses; improved internal street networks; shared or structured parking solutions; and enhanced pedestrian connectivity.

Suburban Commercial Mixed-Use Redevelopment Sub Area	
PRIMARY USES	Mixed use development including residential, commercial, office, entertainment, and civic uses
SECONDARY USES	Structured parking, hotels, mid scale apartment buildings, public spaces, green infrastructure
DENSITY	Redevelopment range, 20 to 35 units per acre, higher intensity may be considered through planned redevelopment
TRANSPORTATION	Multimodal oriented, improved pedestrian circulation, enhanced access to transit and corridors
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials, expressways, introduction of new internal streets and block structure
PARKING	Combination of structured parking, shared parking, and limited surface parking
UTILITIES	Fully supported by municipal utilities, capacity planning may be needed for intensified mixed use development
OPEN SPACE	Public plazas, pocket parks, greenways, enhanced streetscapes, and integrated civic space

Figure 4.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Commercial Mixed-Use Redevelopment Sub-Area

This sub area does not replace the underlying Suburban Commercial character area, nor does it establish new regulatory requirements. Instead, it provides refined policy guidance for locations where redevelopment can support more efficient land use, improved corridor function, and the absorption of growth in a manner that maintains appropriate transitions to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Suburban Industrial

Suburban Industrial character areas are defined by large footprint buildings and employment focused uses that require substantial land area, regional access, and separation from residential neighborhoods. These areas typically accommodate warehousing, light industrial, manufacturing, logistics, office support functions, and specialized uses such as Airport related facilities or landfills.

A significant portion of the Suburban Industrial character area is located along major regional transportation corridors, including areas between Interstate 95 and Dean Forest Road and extending northward toward the Savannah River. These locations benefit from direct access to interstate highways, freight networks, and Port and Airport related infrastructure, reinforcing their role within the regional economy.

Suburban Industrial - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Warehousing, light industrial, manufacturing, logistics, distribution, landfill
SECONDARY USES	Office support uses, aviation related facilities, ancillary commercial uses serving industrial operations
DENSITY	Not applicable; large footprint, employment focused development
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile and freight oriented; limited public transit
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials, expressways
PARKING	Off street, surface parking; service and loading areas
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities and private utility systems
OPEN SPACE	Undeveloped greenspace, buffers, stormwater areas, waterways

Figure 4.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Industrial Development Factors

Given the scale and intensity of development within Suburban Industrial areas, site design and landscaping play an important role in minimizing impacts on adjacent properties and public rights of way. Landscaping, buffering, and building orientation should be used to screen service areas, loading docks, and large parking fields, particularly where industrial uses are located near residential or commercial areas.

Suburban Industrial areas often function as major employment centers within the County. As such, future planning efforts should consider opportunities to improve transportation connectivity for employees where feasible, while maintaining the operational needs and economic function of industrial uses.

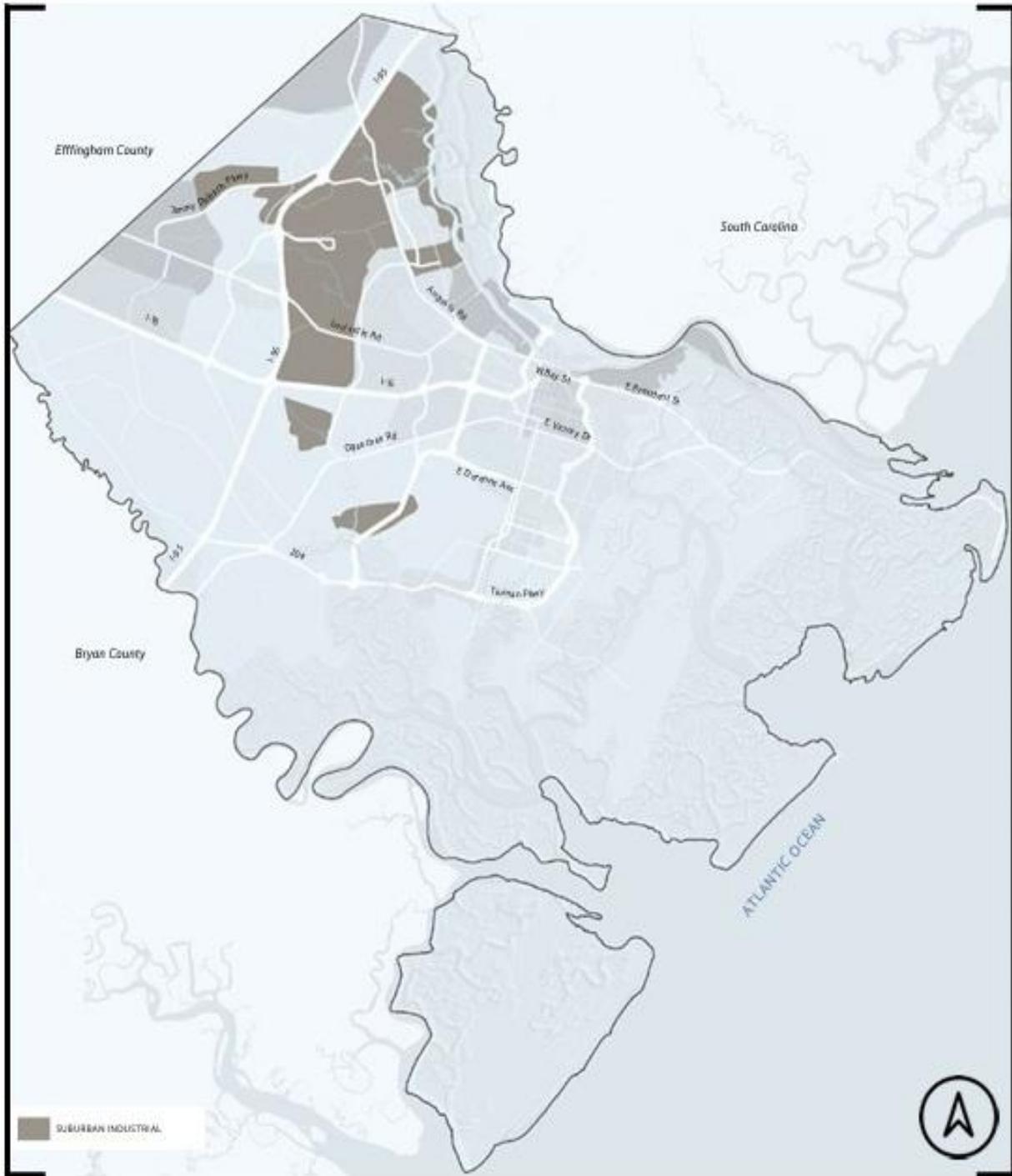


Exhibit 4.10 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Industrial Character Area

Suburban Traditional

Suburban Traditional character areas include established neighborhoods that reflect a more urban pattern of development within a suburban context. These areas are typically characterized by gridded or semi gridded street networks, interconnected blocks, sidewalks, and buildings oriented toward the street. Development patterns in these areas predate many post war suburban subdivisions and reflect early to mid-twentieth century neighborhood forms.

Housing within Suburban Traditional areas is primarily composed of single-family homes, both detached and attached, with some blocks including small scale apartment buildings, duplexes, or townhouses. The existing housing stock, particularly older homes and historic structures, contributes significantly to neighborhood character and should be preserved, rehabilitated, and sensitively improved over time.

Opportunities for infill and redevelopment may exist on underutilized or vacant sites within Suburban Traditional areas. Such development should be compatible in scale, massing, and character with surrounding buildings, and should reinforce established street patterns, pedestrian orientation, and neighborhood scale.

Suburban Traditional - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Single family residential, detached and attached
SECONDARY USES	Small scale multifamily residential, neighborhood serving commercial and office uses, civic and institutional facilities
DENSITY	Low to medium; 6 to 20 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile oriented with strong pedestrian connectivity; limited public transit
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors
PARKING	On street and off-street parking, private driveways, garages
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Neighborhood parks, city parks, beaches, waterways

Figure 4.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Traditional Development Factors

A broader range of housing options, including accessory dwelling units, may be appropriate within Suburban Traditional areas to accommodate multigenerational households, seniors, small families, and changing housing needs, provided these additions respect existing neighborhood form and infrastructure capacity.

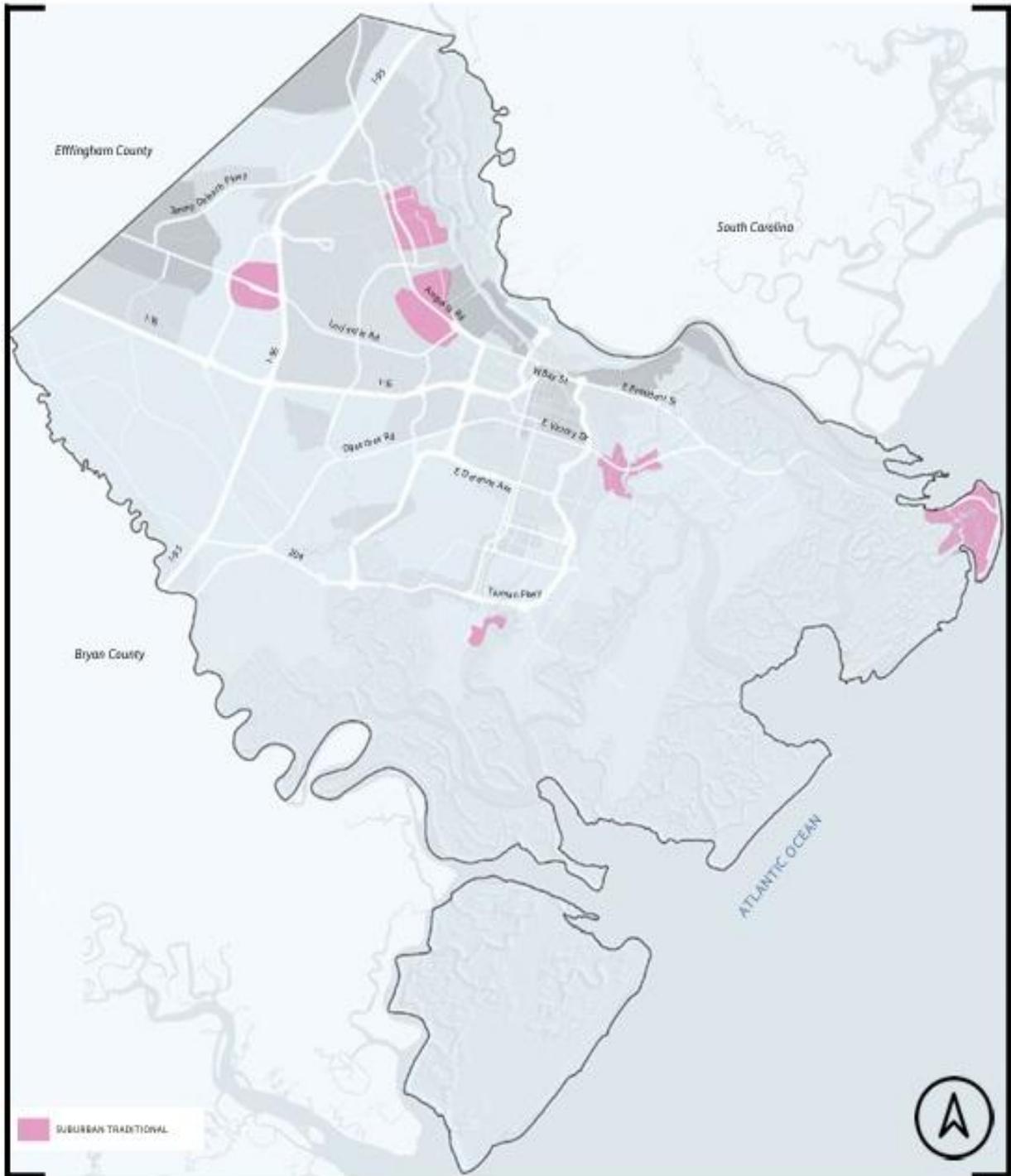


Exhibit 4.11 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Traditional Character Area

Urban Character Areas

Urban character areas are defined by higher density development patterns and a concentration of mixed residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial uses. These areas include the historic downtown core of Savannah, established urban neighborhoods, Port related industrial areas, and transitional areas toward the edges of the urban core.

Urban character areas are positioned to accommodate a significant share of projected population and employment growth due to their access to services, jobs, infrastructure, and regional transportation systems. The future of these areas is shaped by infill development, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment that builds upon existing urban form. In transitional urban areas, growth is expected to occur through incremental change that reinforces established patterns while supporting continued economic activity and residential diversity.

Portions of Urban Character areas may be located adjacent to or overlap with lands designated as Environmentally Sensitive, as described earlier in this chapter. In such locations, development should be guided by the environmental constraints, preservation priorities, and resilience considerations associated with those areas.

Urban Downtown

The Urban Downtown character area encompasses Savannah's historic core, including local and National Register Landmark Historic Districts. The City's original grid network, established through early planning efforts and reinforced over time, continues to define block structure, development patterns, and the organization of public space. This Character Area is defined by its compact form, walkable scale, and concentration of residential, commercial, civic, and cultural activity.

Urban Downtown is characterized by a diverse mix of uses and building types, including midrise mixed use buildings, historic single and multifamily residences, townhomes, rowhouses, and institutional structures. Fine grained parcels, consistent street walls, and a strong relationship between buildings and public spaces contribute to the distinctive urban form of the downtown area. Public squares, green spaces, waterfront areas, and civic spaces play a central role in shaping the public realm and reinforcing downtown's identity.

The Urban Downtown area supports multimodal transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and automobile movement, facilitated by an interconnected street grid. Due to its historic significance, established urban fabric, and regulatory framework, Urban Downtown operates within an intentionally constrained development context. While infill, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment opportunities may occur, the capacity for large scale or programmatically flexible development is inherently limited.

All development within the Urban Downtown character area is subject to applicable historic preservation ordinances and design review processes administered by the City of Savannah. These regulations ensure that reinvestment and change reinforce the historic, architectural, and spatial character of the downtown core while supporting continued vitality and use. Future development is expected to prioritize compatibility, context sensitive design, and the long-term stewardship of the historic urban environment.

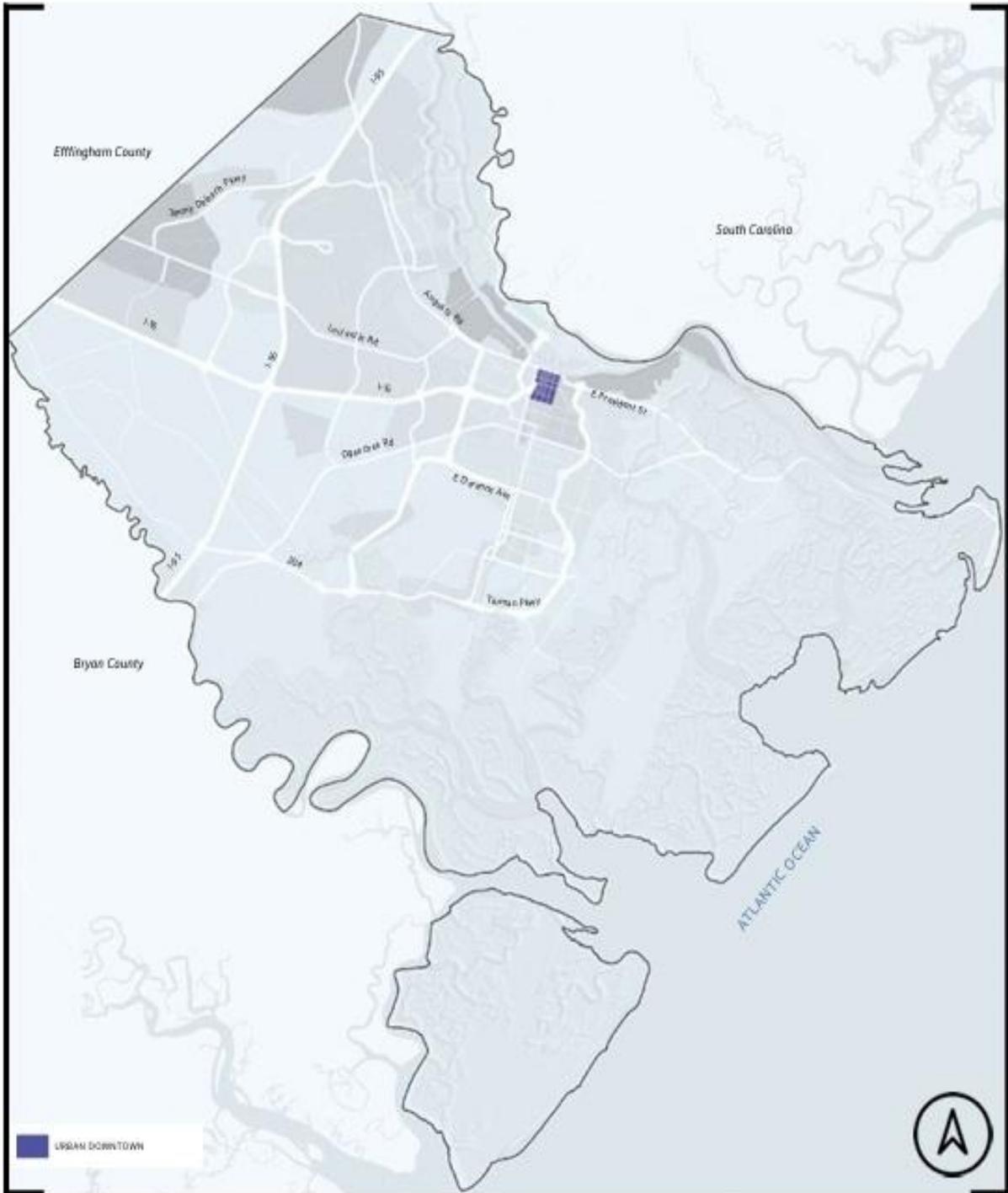


Exhibit 4.12 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Downtown Character Area

Urban Downtown - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Mixed use development, residential, commercial, civic and institutional uses, parks
SECONDARY USES	Office uses, parking structures, short term lodging and rentals where permitted
DENSITY	High, 20 to 40 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Interconnected street grid, multimodal transportation
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	On street parking, parking structures, limited private garages
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Municipal parks, public squares, waterfront areas, cemeteries, limited private open space

Figure 4.10 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Downtown Development Factors

Urban Core

The Urban Core character area includes Savannah’s local and National Register Victorian and Streetcar Historic Districts, as well as adjacent historic neighborhoods within the City. These areas represent a compact, walkable urban form that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and continues to define much of Savannah’s inner-city fabric.

Urban Core areas are characterized by a mix of detached and attached single family homes, mid-scale multifamily buildings, and small-scale neighborhood serving commercial uses. Street networks are typically well connected and supported by sidewalks, creating a strong pedestrian environment. Compared to the Urban Downtown character area, parcels are generally larger and building heights are lower, typically ranging from two to four stories, resulting in a more residentially scaled urban context.

Unlike the Urban Downtown, the Urban Core retains a greater capacity for infill and redevelopment. Future development in these areas should reinforce walkable densities, maintain compatibility with existing neighborhood character, and respect established patterns of massing, scale, and orientation. Infill and redevelopment should be designed to integrate seamlessly with surrounding buildings while supporting continued neighborhood vitality.

A range of housing options should be supported within the Urban Core to accommodate workers, students, seniors, small families, and multigenerational households. These additions should strengthen neighborhood stability, expand housing choice, and align with existing infrastructure capacity and historic context. The impact of short-term rental properties needs to be considered and monitored in this designation, which was an issue identified in the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey by the majority of residents.

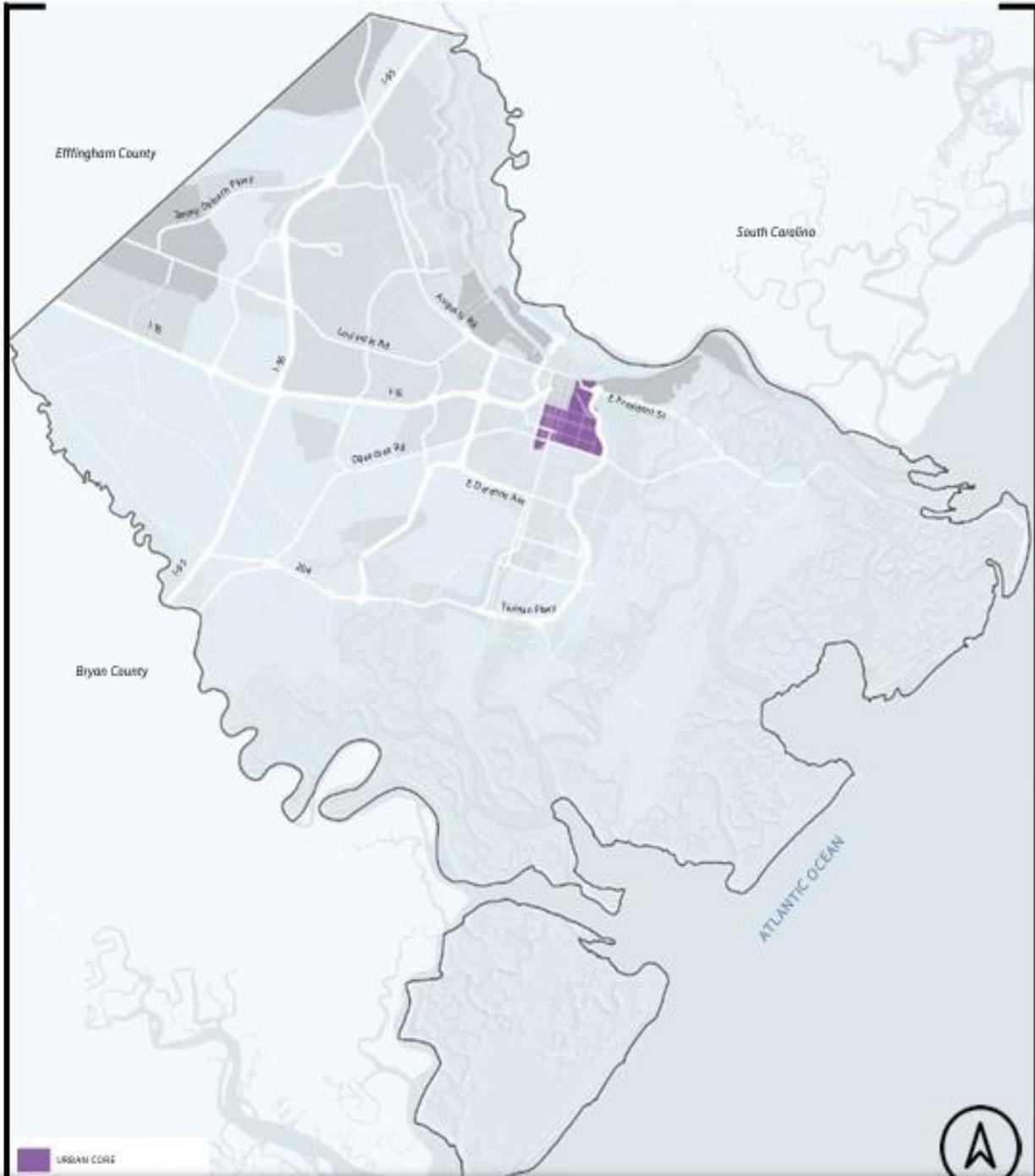


Exhibit 4.13 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Core Character Area

Urban Core - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Residential, including detached and attached single family and multifamily
SECONDARY USES	Neighborhood commercial, mixed use development, civic and institutional uses, short term lodging where permitted
DENSITY	Medium to high; 6 to 20 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Interconnected street grid; multimodal transportation
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	On street and off street parking; limited surface parking; private driveways
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Municipal parks, public squares, cemeteries, waterfront areas

Figure 4.11 – Urban Core Development Factors

Urban Transitional

Urban Transitional character areas represent locations where development patterns shift between the historic urban fabric of the Urban Core and the more automobile oriented environments of suburban areas. These areas are often located along major corridors or at the edges of established urban neighborhoods and include a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses.

Urban Transitional areas typically contain detached and attached single family homes, small to mid-scale multifamily development, and neighborhood or corridor oriented commercial uses. While automobile access remains important, many of these areas retain walkable characteristics, including connected street networks, sidewalks, access to parks, and proximity to urban amenities. This combination of features reflects their role as transitional environments that support both urban and suburban functions.

Redevelopment and infill opportunities are more prevalent in Urban Transitional areas than in the Urban Core. Future development should reinforce walkable densities, improve site design along corridors, and enhance compatibility between residential neighborhoods and adjacent commercial uses. Corridor-facing development should prioritize improved building orientation, pedestrian access, and streetscape enhancements while maintaining appropriate transitions in scale and intensity.

Urban Transitional areas play an important role in accommodating growth while relieving pressure on more constrained historic districts. Development within this character area should support housing diversity, neighborhood services, and incremental reinvestment that strengthens connections between urban neighborhoods and corridor based commercial activity.

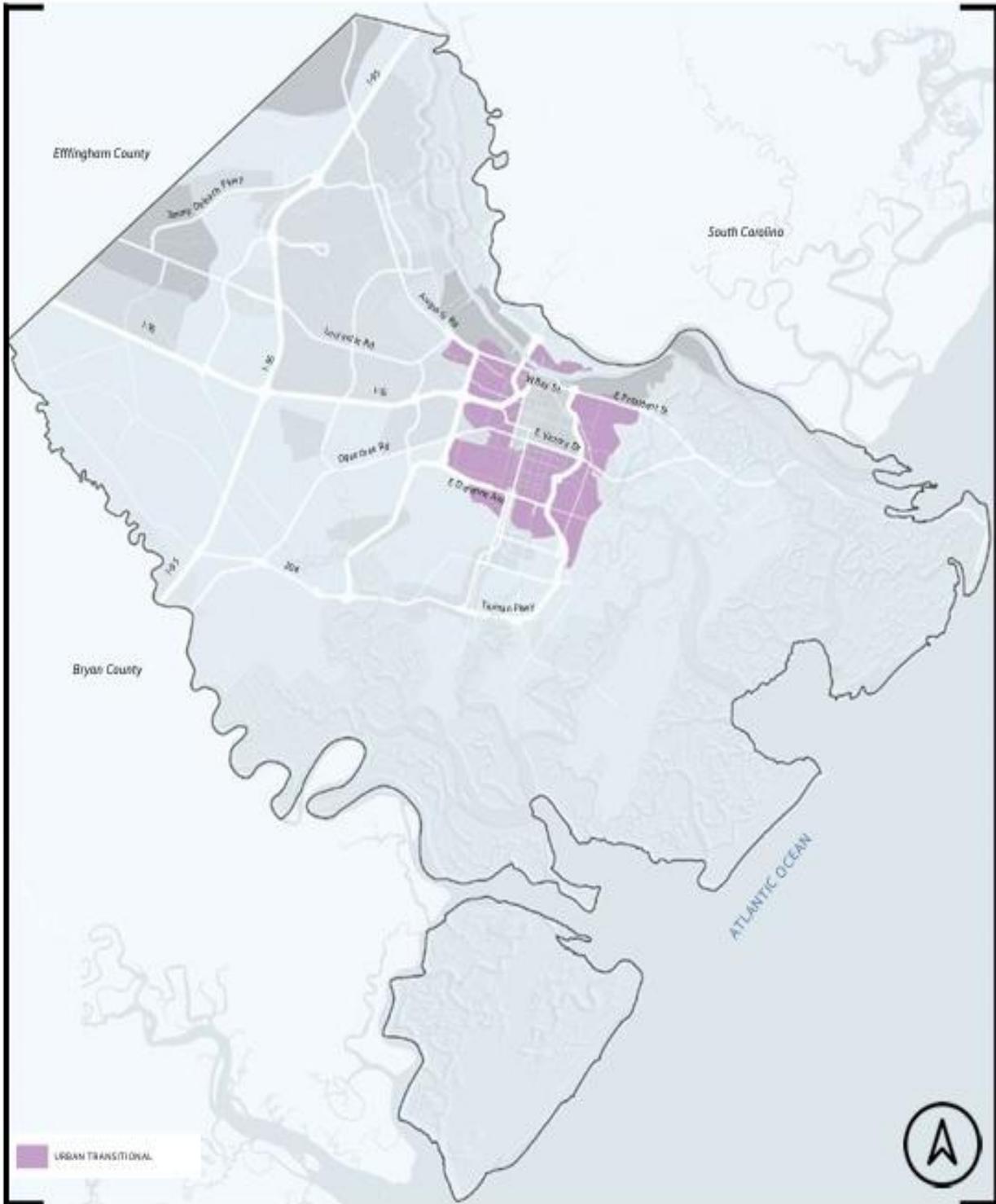


Exhibit 4.14 – Urban Transitional Character Area

Urban Transitional - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Residential, including attached and detached single family
SECONDARY USES	Multifamily residential, neighborhood and corridor commercial uses, civic and institutional facilities
DENSITY	Medium to high; 6 to 20 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Connected street network; automobile oriented with multimodal access
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	On street and off street parking; surface parking; private driveways
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Municipal parks, schools, community facilities, historic and civic open spaces

Figure 4.12 – Urban Transitional Development Factors

Urban Industrial

Urban Industrial character areas include locations near the Urban Downtown and Urban Core that accommodate higher intensity industrial and Port related uses essential to the regional economy. These areas support activities such as light and heavy manufacturing, warehousing, logistics, freight handling, and port operations. Due to the nature of these uses, development within Urban Industrial areas often generates noise, vibration, emissions, and heavy vehicle traffic that must be carefully managed on site.

Urban Industrial areas are typically directly connected to regional transportation infrastructure, including rail lines, waterways, and arterial roadways, and function as major employment centers within the County. While these areas are largely built out and expected to remain industrial in character, their proximity to urban neighborhoods and the downtown core requires careful attention to site design, buffering, and operational impacts.

Future planning efforts within Urban Industrial areas should prioritize measures that reduce conflicts with surrounding land uses while preserving industrial productivity. Landscaping, building orientation, screening of loading and service areas, and enhanced stormwater and environmental management practices should be used to improve site performance and visual quality along public rights of way and adjacent properties.

Given their role as significant employment hubs, Urban Industrial areas should also consider opportunities to improve workforce access where feasible, including transit connectivity and safe circulation for employees. These improvements should support access and efficiency without compromising the operational needs of industrial and Port related uses.

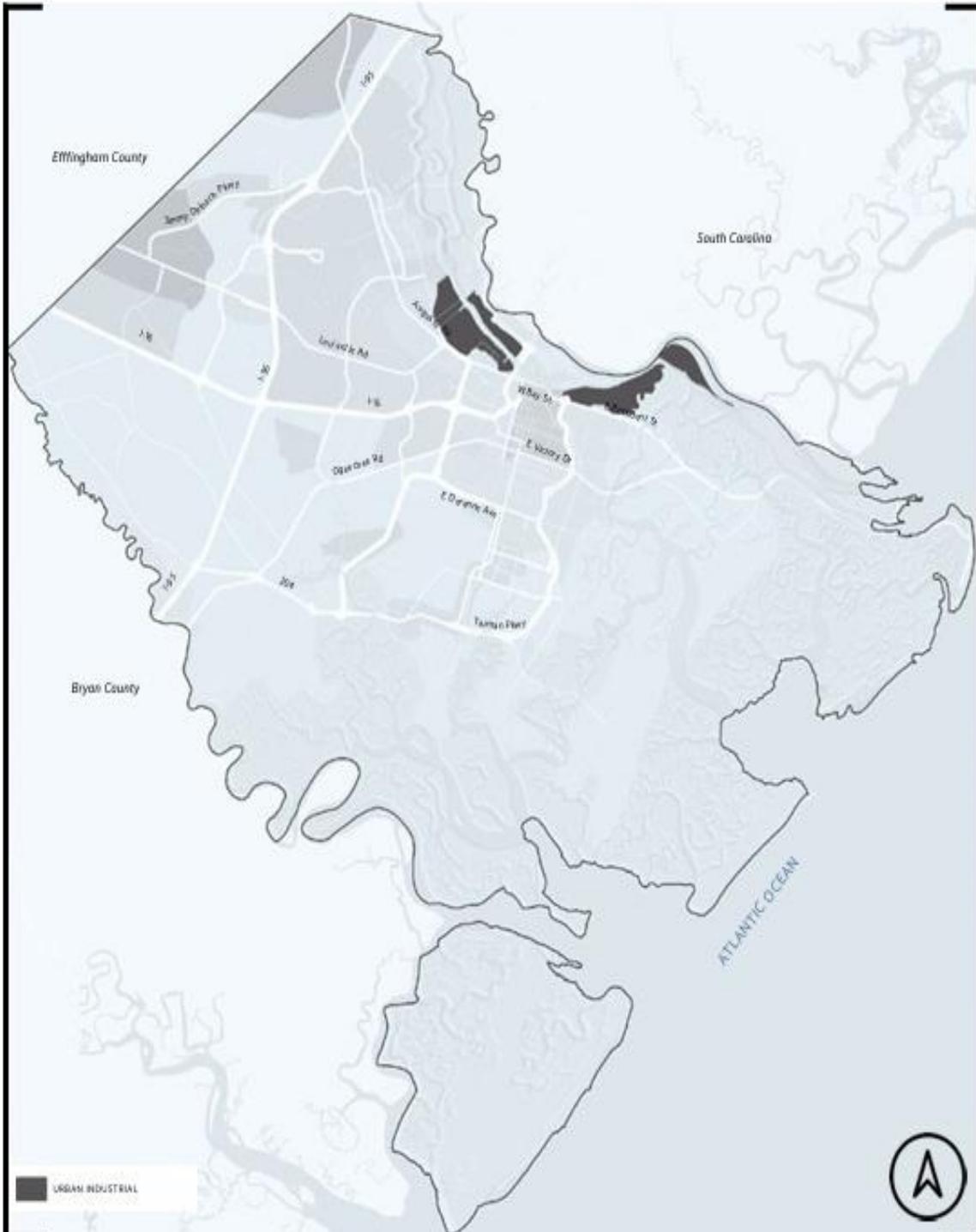


Exhibit 4.15 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Industrial Character Area

Urban Industrial - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Heavy and light manufacturing, warehousing, logistics, Port and freight related uses
SECONDARY USES	Limited commercial and office uses accessory to industrial operations
DENSITY	Not applicable; high intensity industrial development
TRANSPORTATION	Freight and automobile oriented; limited multimodal access
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Arterials, expressways, industrial access roads
PARKING	Surface parking, service and loading areas
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Minimal intentional open space; buffers, stormwater facilities, and environmental mitigation areas

Figure 4.13 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Industrial Development Factors

Rural Character

Rural Character areas include lands that maintain a predominantly rural setting and support low intensity development patterns compatible with agricultural landscapes, open space, and environmental systems. In some locations, Rural Character areas are influenced by proximity to regional transportation corridors, such as Interstate 16, which provide access to regional markets and employment centers while still traversing largely rural environments.

Development within Rural Character areas influenced by regional corridors may include low intensity employment and service uses that rely on highway access, such as light industrial, warehousing, and service-related activities. These uses should remain dispersed in nature, with large parcels, substantial setbacks, limited building coverage, and minimal pedestrian orientation. Development should not require the level of infrastructure, intensity, or land use mix found in suburban or urban character areas.

Rural Character– Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Light industrial, warehousing, logistics, service-related uses
SECONDARY USES	Limited office or support uses accessory to primary industrial activity
DENSITY	Not applicable; low intensity, large parcel development
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile and freight oriented; no planned public transit
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Interstate (I 16), local roads
PARKING	Surface parking and service areas
UTILITIES	Individual or limited community water and septic systems; extension of municipal utilities not anticipated
OPEN SPACE	Natural areas, buffers, undeveloped land, conservation lands

Figure 4.14 – Savannah-Chatham County: Rural Character Development Factors

Future Land Use Framework and Map

Future Land Use Categories/Designations

The Future Land Use framework organizes the Plan area into 10 primary categories:

1. **Downtown/Mixed-Use Urban Core:** Historic downtown and riverfront with high-intensity, vertically mixed-use development, civic uses, tourism, and cultural institutions
2. **Urban Mixed-Use Neighborhoods:** Established neighborhoods in urban core with mixed housing types, small-scale commercial, walkable blocks, and strong pedestrian character
3. **Suburban Mixed-Use Neighborhoods:** Suburban neighborhoods with medium-density residential, neighborhood-serving retail and services, and walkable centers
4. **Suburban Residential:** Lower-density single-family and duplex neighborhoods with suburban form; typically automobile-oriented
5. **Office and Institutional:** Professional offices, educational institutions, government facilities, healthcare facilities, and cultural institutions
6. **Commercial – Neighborhood:** Neighborhood-serving retail, restaurants, and services; typically single-story; automobile-oriented or mixed-use transitioning
7. **Commercial – Regional:** Regional shopping centers, automotive services, and entertainment; typically automobile-oriented with significant parking
8. **Industrial – Light:** Light manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, and distribution with minimal external impacts; transition to residential possible
9. **Industrial – Heavy:** Heavy manufacturing, port operations, logistics, hazardous materials handling; significant external impacts; limited residential compatibility
10. **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space:** Public parks, recreational facilities, trails, golf courses, and protected environmental areas
11. **Agricultural and Rural:** Farmland, forestry, large-lot rural residential, and conservation lands
12. **Conservation and Environmental Protection:** Wetlands, marshes, floodplains, maritime forests, and protected habitats with minimal development

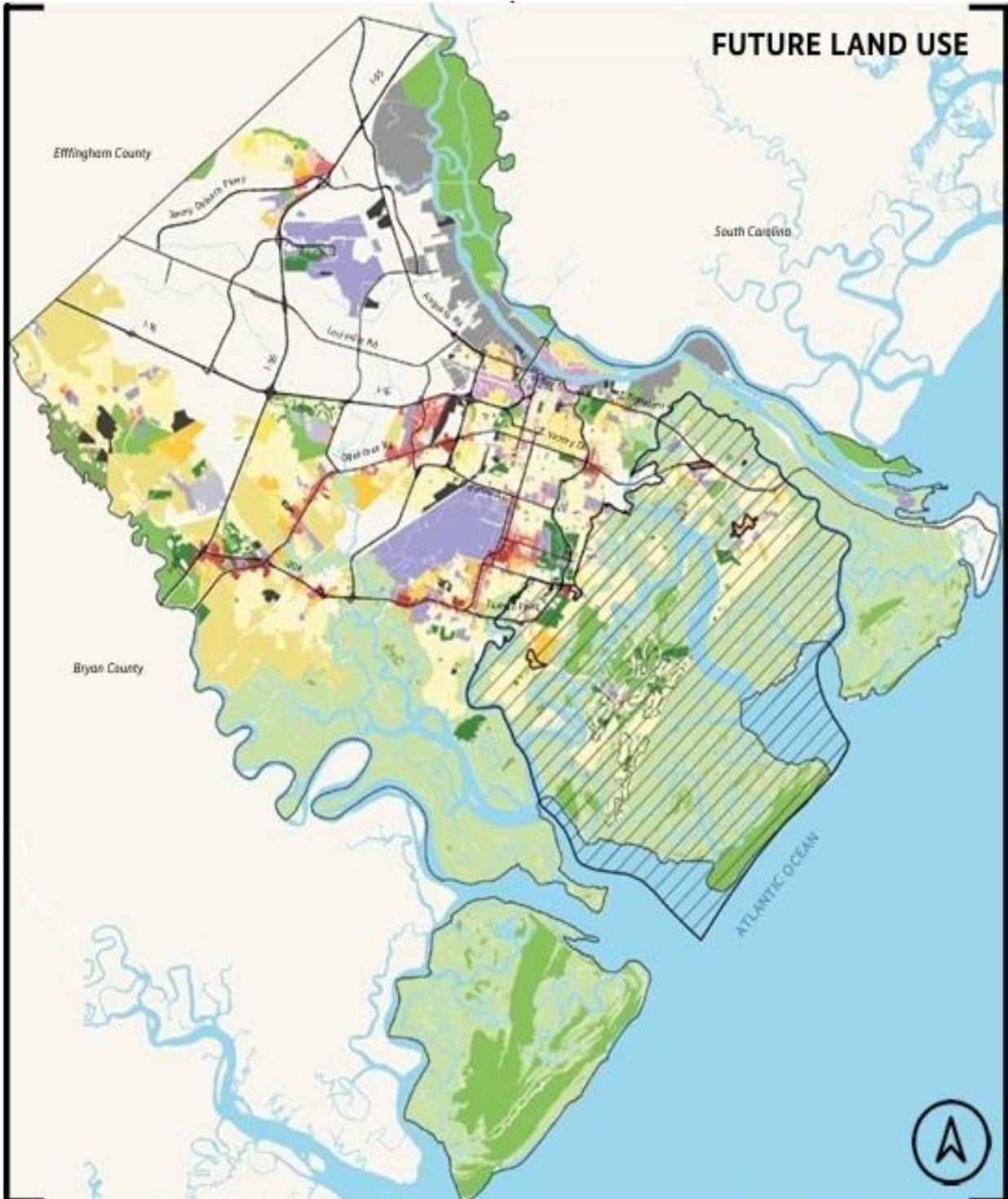


Exhibit 4.17 - Future Land Use Map

Issues and Opportunities

The Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update establishes a strategic, coordinated approach to growth that protects the region's economic vitality, environmental quality, and community character while accommodating projected population growth through a strategic Nodes and Corridors framework for growth management. This approach concentrates development where infrastructure, transit, and natural conditions support it, in strategic nodes with mixed uses and high density and in proximity to connected by walkable corridors. This supports preservation of rural, agricultural, environmental, and hazard-prone areas from sprawling development.

Successful implementation requires coordinated action across government, business, education, and community sectors, with explicit commitment to equitable development, environmental stewardship, economic resilience, and quality of life improvement. The policies and strategies outlined in this element provide the framework; consistent implementation through zoning text amendments, strategic capital investment, and public-private partnerships, however, will determine outcomes. The following critical issues may need careful attention and consideration:

Consistency

Intent: To address any inconsistency between the latest Chatham County Zoning Ordinance and the City of Savannah NewZO and the goals of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update. It emphasizes the need for continuous re-evaluation to ensure that land use policies align with equitable housing, promotion of compact growth, and natural resource preservation strategies, as well as streamlining review and processing procedures.

Gentrification

Intent: To acknowledge that rising property costs and investment in historic districts are displacing legacy businesses and long-term residents, particularly the elderly and people of color. It signals a need for policies that protect vulnerable residents and manage equitable relocation.

Redevelopment

Intent: To identify "Downtown Expansion" areas and other non-core locations as the primary targets for future sustainable growth. The intent is to prioritize Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and mixed-use strategies in these areas rather than continuing outward expansion.

Annexation

Intent: To highlight the absence of a comprehensive tracking or management system for municipal annexations. It calls for a coordinated "growth management plan" to prevent continued greenfield consumption and ensure that only infrastructure-ready areas are prioritized for future annexation.

Regional Coordination

Intent: To stress that issues like climate change, commuting, and the economy cross municipal boundaries and cannot be solved by individual jurisdictions. It argues that a "unified regional plan" is necessary to ensure the social and environmental welfare of the entire county.

Natural Resources

Intent: To emphasize that rapid development threatens the region's sensitive environment. The section is included to mandate proactive land use measures that increase resilience against flooding, sea level rise, and extreme weather events.

Preserving and Enhancing the Public Realm

Intent: To advocate for the protection of Savannah's unique historic plan (squares, parks) and to prevent the application of suburban codes that damage these assets. It aims to ensure that public spaces remain vibrant and welcoming for all residents and visitors.

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Land Use Goals and Strategies

The plan outlines five primary goals to guide future land use decisions:

Goal 1 - Establish growth policies for the City of Savannah to guide development and redevelopment in a responsible manner, encouraging compact/mixed-use development, walkable neighborhoods, increased connectivity, and open space preservation.

Creating an attractive and livable community requires the development of a comprehensive community vision as well as policies and regulations that will guide growth to occur in a manner that is consistent with that vision. Without appropriate policies and regulations in place, development and redevelopment will occur in a disjointed and incompatible manner to the detriment of the community's quality of life.

Objectives:

- Review zoning regulations and other ordinances to identify standards that do not support the community vision
- Assess the development review process to identify ways to expedite and/or reduce fees for infill and grayfield projects
- Incentivize projects that are located in areas with existing infrastructure and within close proximity to services, making greenfield development less attractive and economical
- Prioritize the preservation and enhancement of the existing public realm and encourage the incorporation of public realm spaces and elements in new developments
- Prioritize land acquisition for open space and conservation
- Decrease development pressures on environmentally sensitive lands

Goal 2 - Identify and prioritize future annexations that are regionally coordinated, and that promote responsible growth.

Coordination among municipalities within the region is crucial to plan for annexation and ensure growth occurs only in appropriate areas. These areas should have existing infrastructure to accommodate development that is compatible with the character of the surrounding area in both intensity and density. Proactively coordinating with the County to identify future annexation targets and agree upon responsible growth principles for those areas will result in an improved quality of life for all communities.

Objectives:

- Establish criteria for determining the appropriateness and readiness of development, including budgetary and other impacts
- Identify areas where future annexations would be appropriate and prioritize only those that promote responsible, compatible growth
- Develop protocol to analyze annexation requests to determine appropriateness of the annexation

Goal 3 - Utilize small area and corridor plans as a means to protect the character of existing areas and ensure new development is compatible.

Small Area and Corridor Plans are effective tools to provide more localized guidance for land use decision-making. They can be used to address current conditions and issues and ensure that future growth and development is consistent with existing development patterns and the character of the area. Such plans proactively address the needs of the community at a level of specificity that cannot be achieved through community-wide land use plans or zoning ordinances.

Objectives:

- Update existing small area plans and develop new small area plans as appropriate
- Develop criteria for identifying and prioritizing small area planning needs for areas where growth and development pressures are high
- Develop criteria for identifying and prioritizing corridor plans for areas where growth and development pressures are high or specialized protections are needed
- Identify corridors that could support TOD and create corridor plans to allow for and encourage TOD in an appropriate manner

Goal 4 - Continue to create innovative ways to connect people with places.

Land use and transportation policies and objectives are inevitably connected, and it is necessary to acknowledge and consider this relationship when making planning decisions in order to safeguard against unintended consequences. Transportation policies can undermine land use objectives and vice versa; it is necessary, therefore, to ensure that their respective efforts consider the impacts of one on the other to guarantee a positive outcome in both regards.

Objectives:

- Consider the impacts of all transportation decisions, strategies, and investments on surrounding existing land uses and the public realm, and potential deviations from land use objectives
- Encourage land use patterns that reduce distances between residences and services
- Increase opportunities for mass transit and other mobility options (walking, biking, etc.) through proper planning of the land use pattern

Goal 5 - Enhance the character and image of major corridors that implement the design and construction of safe, attractive, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.

Create a series of new and enhanced public spaces - including parks, plazas, green spaces, and pocket parks - throughout the City, and particularly in mixed-use areas, to improve the

experience for residents who gather and interact in these locations. Incorporate active programming and elements such as public art, trees and other plantings, seating, and water features to enhance the appeal of these spaces.

Objectives:

- Implement the design and construction of safe, attractive, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes that project a positive image while encouraging walking
- Incorporate distinctive pavement textures and colors in streetscape designs, particularly in areas with high levels of pedestrian and commercial activity
- Research and pursue opportunities to relocate overhead power lines underground, particularly on major commercial corridors

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