

Land Use

The plan for Savannah devised by James Edward Oglethorpe and close associates was both a town plan and a regional plan. It encompassed a 70 square mile area that extended ten miles east to west and seven miles southward from the town. The plan may have been drawn up in London to extend 14 miles from east to west, but was interrupted by low topography. The 1735 map shown below is the only existing documentation showing the full extent of the 70 square mile grid laid out by Oglethorpe.



Oglethorpe selected the site for the town in January, 1733 as the first group of colonists awaited word nearby in Beaufort, South Carolina. The colonists were brought to the site in February, 1733. By the end of the year fortifications were in place and 50 houses had been built. The population of Savannah stood at 259 persons, with another 200

strategically located in outlying areas.

The Oglethorpe Plan, as it has come to be called, consisted of four components: a square mile area laid out for the town and commons; a three square mile area on either side of the town laid out for five-acre garden lots; a 24

square mile area beyond the town and gardens laid out for larger 45-acres farm lots; and a 42 square mile area beyond the farm lots laid out for villages, each to occupy a square mile.

Physical constraints such as wetlands and soil conditions prevented the plan from being built out as a perfect grid of square mile units.

Nevertheless, the grid system put in place in 1733 remains etched on the landscape, over the centuries having influenced development patterns and the network of roads and other infrastructure in Savannah and Chatham County.

5.1 Introduction

The Land Use Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan provides a history of the development of Savannah and Chatham County, as well as existing and future development patterns. Unique attributes in both the City and the County require land use categories with character-based categories, consistent with the approach encouraged by the Department of Community Affairs (Minimum Standards that became effective in May, 2005). One of those unique attributes is the extensive area within the City of Savannah that sustains a fine-grained mixed use development pattern. A second unique attribute is the extensive estuarine lowland area that is both environmentally sensitive and vulnerable to storm surge and flooding. Each of these areas required careful assessment and planning to protect physical and environmental resources and chart future growth and stewardship.

5.2 Regional Development

5.2.1 Physical Context

Chatham County is the northernmost county on the Georgia Coast, bounded by the Savannah and Ogeechee rivers. Much of Chatham County is comprised of open water, tidal creeks, or estuarine marsh. Early development was sited on coastal ridges and bluffs. More recent development, however, has occurred on barrier islands, back barrier islands, and lowlands vulnerable to flooding, including hurricane inundation.

Chatham County is comprised of 522 square miles of land, marsh and water. Table 5.1 contains detailed information on land use in Chatham County.¹ Much of the remaining undeveloped land is poorly drained and not suitable for on-lot wastewater disposal. Expansion of private or public water and sewer service would increase development potential in such areas.

Upland areas are interspersed with forested and vegetated isolated wetlands which are not currently protected and frequently filled for development.

5.2.2 Regional Growth

Chatham County is the most urbanized and populous county in the 200-mile coastal area between Charleston, South Carolina and Jacksonville, Florida. It serves as an economic, cultural, and governmental hub, as well as an international focal point for trade, for a six county, bi-state region.

The region has seen a high rate of growth over the past 20 years and is expected to continue at or above this level slightly as the attractiveness of the region to retirees and second home residents increases. Economic growth in the region is also expected to remain strong, supporting forecasts for continued population growth at or above the current level.

¹ The calculation of remaining developable land was obtained through GIS analysis, which identified uplands areas without existing development, roads, airports, canals, golf courses, dedicated lands and other limitations on future development.

Chatham County is the most populous region in the Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) which also includes Effingham and Bryan Counties. Chatham is also the largest county in the Savannah Combined Statistical Area (CSA), which includes Liberty, Long and Bulloch Counties. The US Census Bureau defines the boundaries of these areas. The population of the MSA has grown substantially since 1970, and projections show continued growth into future decades.

Within Chatham County, high growth rates were experienced during the 1980s and 1990s in unincorporated areas to the east of Savannah. As those areas approached build-out, growth moved to the western areas of the county. Unincorporated Chatham County and the municipalities of Bloomingdale, Garden City, Pooler, and Port Wentworth experienced an increasing share of area growth. The City of Savannah, with its capacity to supply drinking water, annexed nearly 8,000 acres of unincorporated west Chatham County in 2004 and 2005.

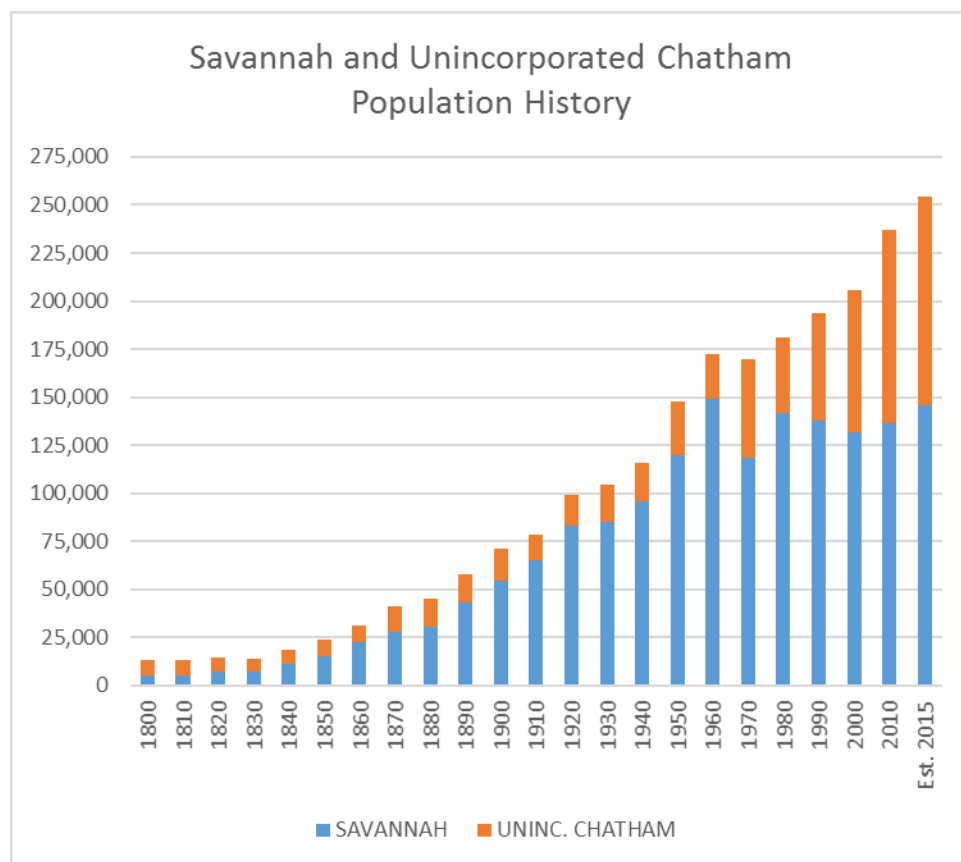


Figure 5.1: Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham Population History

The City of Savannah has preserved the role of its vibrant downtown as the nucleus of regional activity. The city's historic downtown and urban neighborhoods are an exceptional example of colonial-era town planning that survived the centuries and thrives today. For that reason, downtown Savannah maintains a high quality pedestrian environment

Areas lying to the east of the city are extensively developed, and further development is limited by physical as well as zoning constraints. Areas lying to the west of the city are

largely vestiges of farms and large-scale silviculture and are currently undergoing rapid development.

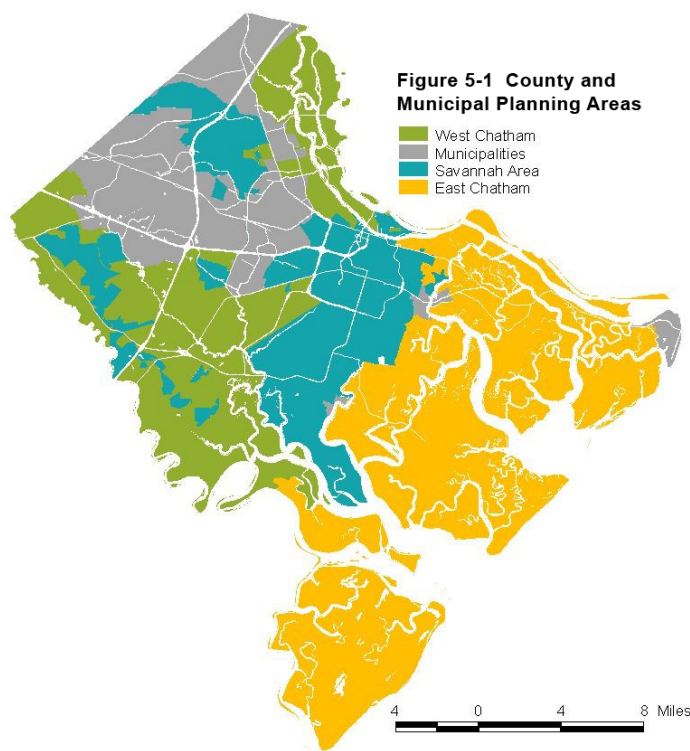
Transportation facilities strongly influence growth and land use patterns in the county. These facilities include the Port of Savannah, Savannah International Airport, road and rail networks serving extensive industrial districts associated with airport and seaport functions, Hunter Army Airfield, Interstates I-16 and I-95, and the Truman Parkway.

5.3 Existing Land Use

The Chatham County Existing Land Use Map is based on recent County tax records. Where multiple uses are found on a single parcel, the dominant land use has been mapped. Conventional land use categories are used to describe existing land use patterns, whereas a character-based classification system is used in discussing and planning future land use. Table 5.2 compares land use in unincorporated Chatham County, the City of Savannah, and the seven other municipalities in aggregate.² The character of each of these areas varies greatly as a result of the distinctly different land use patterns.

The City of Savannah is highly urbanized with exceptionally large areas of mixed use development. Except for the western airport area, the city is largely built-out and growing chiefly through annexation. However, urban neighborhoods that have declined in population and former industrial lands represent an opportunity for internal growth in the form of infill redevelopment.

The other seven municipalities in Chatham County maintain separate planning programs, however the Existing Land Use map shows land use in those areas based on County Tax Assessor property records. Table 5.1 provides a comparison of agricultural and other developable acreage. Nearly all of the development potential lies in the three westernmost municipalities of Bloomingdale, Pooler, and Port Wentworth.



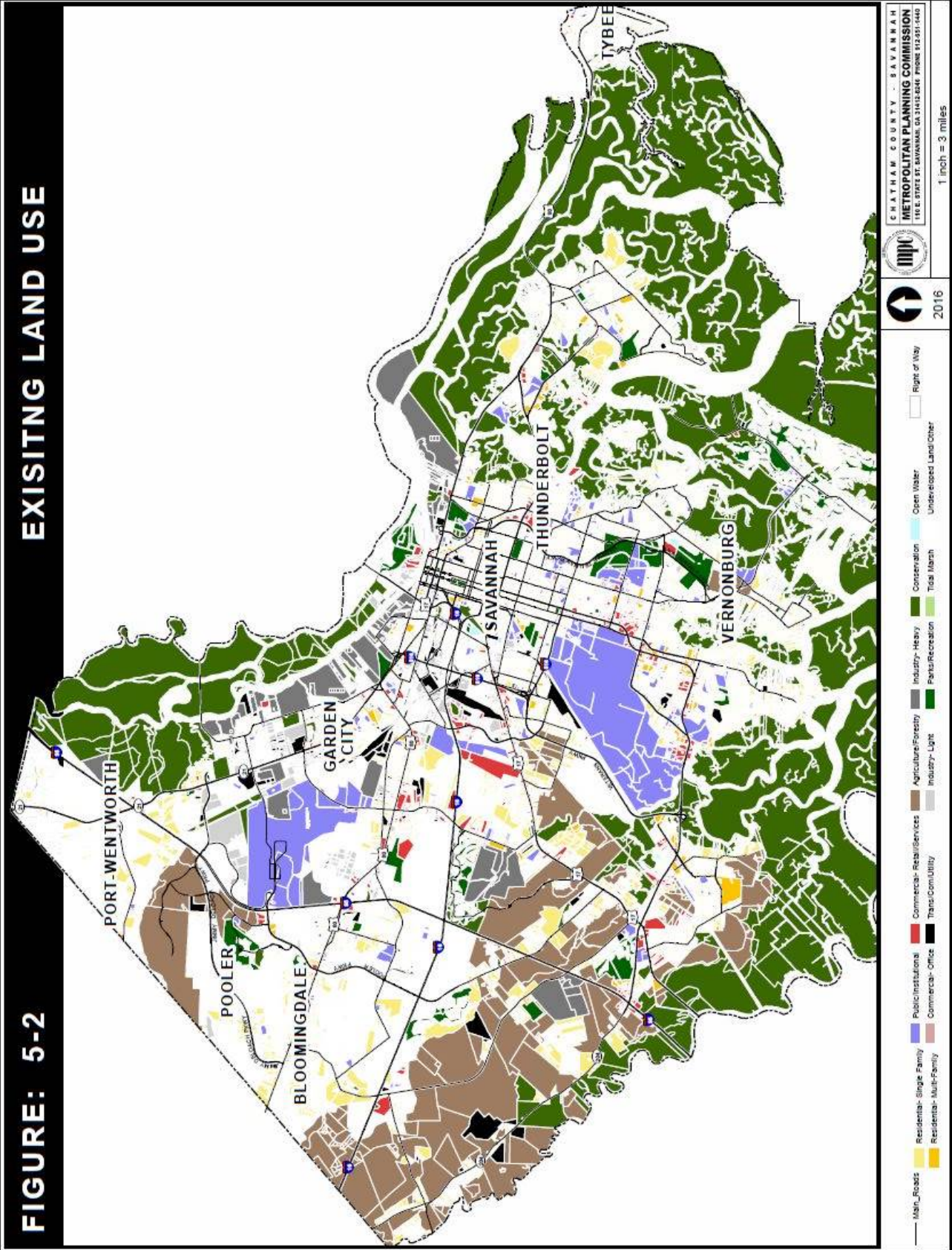
² The Chatham County – Savannah Comprehensive Plan is prepared by the Metropolitan Planning Commission for the unincorporated area of the county and the City of Savannah. The seven municipalities each prepare separate comprehensive plans. For more information on this see Chapter 1, Introduction.

East Chatham is developed at low densities and its character is strongly influenced by its setting amid marshes and tidal creeks.³ West Chatham contains a high proportion of agricultural, forested, and otherwise undeveloped area. As the City of Savannah and unincorporated East Chatham have built out, West Chatham has emerged as a high growth area.

³ This contributes to what some residents refer to as a “semi-rural character” (see the *Islands Area Community Plan* and the *Southeast Chatham County Community Plan*).

FIGURE: 5-2

EXISTING LAND USE



LAND USE								
	Chatham County (Unincorporated) Acres		Savannah Acres		Other Municipalities ⁴ _ Acres %		TOTAL (Whole County) Acres	
<i>Residential-Single Family</i>	22,167	49%	10,836	24%	12,417	27%	45,420	10%
<i>Residential-Multi-Family</i>	474	26%	762	42%	575	32%	1,811	.3%
<i>Public/Institutional</i>	1,519	15%	7,078	69%	1,600	16%	10,197	2%
<i>Commercial-Office</i>	3,353	14%	12,587	54%	7,611	32%	23,551	5%
<i>Commercial-Retail</i>	1,335	29%	1,483	32%	1,797	39%	4,615	1%
<i>Trans/Com/Utilities</i>	727	32%	759	34%	759	34%	2,245	.4%
<i>Agriculture/Forestry</i>	21,241	85%	3,746	15%	unknown	-	24,987	5%
<i>Industry-Light</i>	7,315	40%	5,017	28%	5,904	32%	18,236	4%
<i>Industry-Heavy</i>	224	18%	829	68%	176	14%	1,229	.2%
<i>Recreation-Active</i>	498	55%	89	10%	311	35%	898	.1%
<i>Greenspace</i>	188	25%	527	70%	43	5%	758	.1%
<i>Right-of-Way</i>	3,760	24%	7,152	45%	4,926	31%	15,838	3%
<i>Tidal Marsh</i>	85,666	93%	5,824	6%	1,216	1%	92,706	20%
<i>Open Water</i>	47,523	94%	2,505	5%	420	1%	50,448	11%
<i>Undeveloped Land/Other</i>	112,530	63%	34,881	19%	33,137	18%	180,548	38%
TOTAL	308,520		94,075		70,892		473,487	

Table 5.1: Land Use Acres and Percentages in Chatham County

⁴ This Comprehensive Plan covers unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah. The seven other municipalities maintain separate planning programs.

5.4 Historical Development Patterns

The city's original development patterns, established by James Oglethorpe in 1733, have been remarkably resilient and adaptable. For that reason, Savannah enjoys international recognition as a planned city with an enduring legacy. This section describes the Planned Town era established by Oglethorpe and four subsequent eras that further shaped Savannah and Chatham County by reinforcing, redefining, or replacing the Oglethorpe Plan.

5.4.1 The Planned Town Era (1733-1869)

James Edward Oglethorpe (1696-1785) and close associates devised a plan for Savannah and the Georgia Colony that was meant to address deep-rooted social and economic ills of England in the early 1700s. The Oglethorpe Plan proved to be forward thinking for its time and far reaching in its impact.

As a Member of Parliament, Oglethorpe was a reformer who sought relief for imprisoned debtors, unemployed people, and the masses living in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions. After successfully advocating legal reforms to address these problems, he turned his attention to developing the new Georgia Colony, named for King George II, as a model society built on principles of “Agrarian Equality.” The new colony would be free of slavery and the greed associated with it; it would accept religious dissenters; it would provide gardens and farm plots for its citizens to feed themselves and earn a living; it would be free of vice and illness arising from consumption of rum; and it would be physically designed to prevent the overcrowded, unsanitary conditions found in London.

Even though the Georgia Colony sought to ban slavery within its territory, Oglethorpe was able to marshal support for the colony from Carolina plantation owners and English merchants who benefited from the lucrative plantation system. While these interests would have preferred to expand the plantation system into the new colony, they needed Oglethorpe's energy and leadership to create a buffer colony protecting them from the Spanish in Florida and the French to the west.

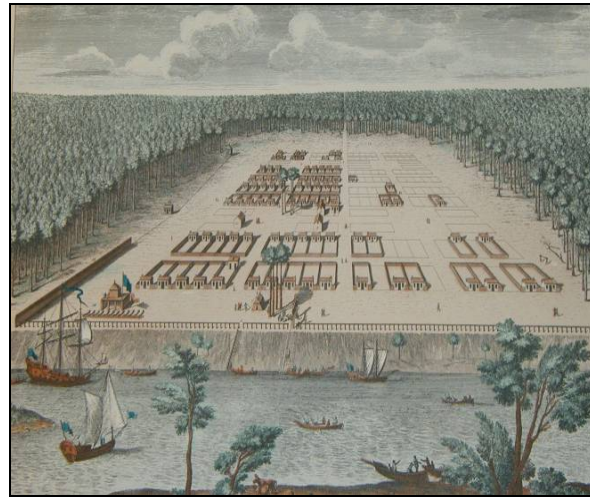


Figure 5.3. Peter Gordon's 1734 Map

Walkable Communities

Town planners have found that people are willing to walk a quarter to a half a mile from home to a variety of destinations in a safe pedestrian environment. Modern downtown Savannah, which has walking distances within that range, is recognized as a model walkable community. Growth of colonial Savannah was limited to an area of less than one square mile because people walked to most destinations. The farthest walking distance in the city remained less than one mile until streetcars provided greater mobility.

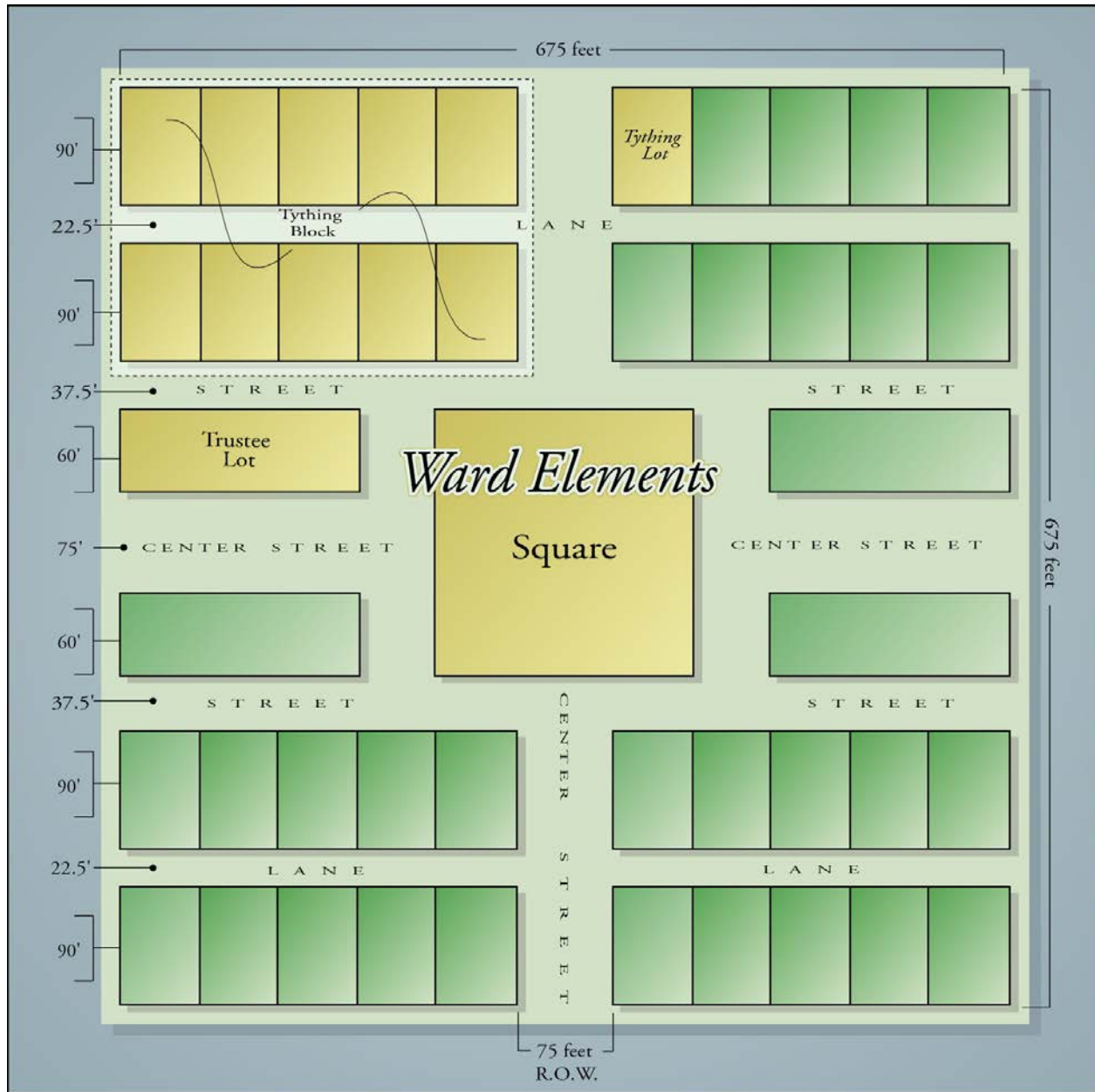


Figure 5.4 Ward Structure in the Oglethorpe Plan

The first six wards in Savannah were laid out by Oglethorpe. Each was identical, except for Johnson Square in Darby Ward, which was wider than the others by 120 feet. Eighteen additional wards were developed in Savannah following the Oglethorpe model with minor variations. Today, 21 wards remain substantially intact.

Oglethorpe's model colony was founded in Savannah on February 12, 1733, when he arrived at the high bluff on the Savannah River, 18 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean, with 114 settlers. He immediately negotiated a right to develop the new town of Savannah and surrounding region with Tomochichi, chief of the nearby Creek village. A year later the town had developed its first four wards and was operating both socially and economically in accordance with Oglethorpe's plan. Peter Gordon, the colony's magistrate, reported to the Trustees on the status of development of Savannah as of March 29, 1734 with the drawing in Figure 5.3, which showed the layout of the first four wards. Oglethorpe eventually laid out a total of six wards, which established the model that directed growth for well over a century.

The physical plan for Savannah synthesized by Oglethorpe and the Trustees consisted of a complex hierarchy of elements, illustrated in Figure 5.4: wards, consisting of 10 lots, four tythings, four trust lots, and a central square; the town, consisting of wards and a town common; gardens, arrayed within a grid on either side of the town; farms, arrayed in square mile units dedicated to each tything in town; villages, each a uniform square mile in size; and 500 acre land grants beyond the villages. Each of these elements was meticulously formulated to be the physical infrastructure for the Trustees' system of Agrarian Equality.

By 1856, Savannah had grown to 24 wards, the ultimate number laid out in accordance with the Oglethorpe Plan. Wards retained the basic configuration established by Oglethorpe in the first six wards, consistently organized with central squares, trust lots, and tithing lots. By providing within each 10.5 acre ward a 1.7 acre civic square, approached at the center by wide streets, the effect was to create a compact yet uncrowded town.⁴

Walkability within the town was essential in an era when most households traveled to every destination on foot. Residents of Savannah during this time walked to obtain goods and services, walked to work, and walked to see friends and family. Even wealthier households owning horses and carriages found it more convenient to take most trips on foot.

Because people walked to most destinations, the town ceased to expand when it reached a size of about one square mile. It then grew inward through subdivision of lots. The original 60-foot tything lots were subdivided into 20 and 30-foot lots, which became the norm by the end of the era.

Trade in heavy goods during the colonial period was primarily water-borne, and thus larger cities were situated at or close to points where rivers met natural harbors. Most crops were brought to market on rafts and barges and either sold for local consumption or shipped elsewhere on sailing vessels. The infrastructure created by trade also supported inter-city travel, and more people traveled by sea or on rivers than on land for non-local trips until the mid-1800s.

For these reasons, cities were compact focal points for trade, local commerce, and other human activity. The Oglethorpe Plan served the needs of this era extremely well. It was

⁴ Squares within the original six wards were 315 feet east to west and 240 feet north to south, except for Johnson Square, which was 435 feet east to west. These dimensions do not include street right-of-way, which later became more prominent.

not until railroads and streetcars became prominent modes of transportation that new growth patterns emerged.

5.4.2 The Streetcar Era (1869-1920)

Savannah's Streetcar Era began in 1869 when the Savannah, Skidaway, and Seaboard Railway Company established steam rail service to Thunderbolt, Isle of Hope, and other communities. Later that year the railroad began operating horse drawn streetcars within the city.

The city's Victorian District was the first area that grew rapidly as a result of new accessibility created by streetcars. Initially it was a transitional area with growth patterns closely resembling those of the Town Plan. Later development produced larger lots with more yard area. Commercial uses were located on corner lots adjacent to residential blocks.

Dr. James J. Waring (1829-1888) pioneered the expansion of the city limits to encompass the first Streetcar Suburbs. In 1866, he acquired and developed a tract on the southern perimeter of the city, which became Waring Ward in 1870 when it was annexed into the city.⁵ Waring continued the street grid pattern consistent with the Town Plan. However, he departed from the lot development pattern by requiring 20 foot setbacks for new construction.⁶

In 1890, electric streetcars were put in service and soon had an enormous impact on the growth of the city. Steam powered trains had already stimulated growth in outlying communities. The electric streetcars stimulated growth in areas adjacent to the city, which resulted in rapid expansion of the city limits. The population of the city increased by 93 percent between 1890 and 1920, the streetcar heyday, while the population of the entire county increased by 73 percent.

As streetcar lines expanded, so did the city. The current Thomas Square Streetcar Historic District, immediately south of the Victorian District developed between 1890 and 1920. Development patterns changed even more during this period. Lot sizes increased to an average of nearly 4,000 square feet, double the size of those in the National Landmark District. The ward structure changed to one comprised solely of rectangular blocks.

The streetcar suburbs became the city's "first ring" suburbs—the first concentric ring of growth to form around the original town that had remained much the same size for a century and a half. The second ring resulted from the introduction of the automobile in the early twentieth century.

5.4.3 Early Automobile Era (1920-1946)

While automobiles were introduced late in the nineteenth century, their impact on development patterns was not felt until the 1920s. By the 1920s families across the country were purchasing automobiles.

⁵ Reiter, Beth L., Victorian District Building Survey and Evaluation, prepared for The City of Savannah, September 1980, p. 6.

⁶ Reiter, Beth L., p. 7.

Greater mobility offered by the automobile stimulated a second ring of suburban growth, which again resulted in larger lots averaging 6000 square feet. Houses sat farther back on their lots, and garages and carports were common features. Multi-family uses were integrated into neighborhoods, but less frequently than in the downtown district. Residential areas also contained less commercial development as automobile owners drove greater distances for goods and services. The inseparability of households and automobiles provided developers with far more opportunities to develop beyond the urban fringe.

5.4.4 Modern Automobile Era (1946-Present)

In 1946 automobile dependence was commonplace for travel to work, accessing goods and services, and visiting friends and relatives. With the war over, family formation occurred rapidly and gave rise to the Baby Boom, which demographers define as beginning in 1946.

Post World War II prosperity spurred a second great economic expansion much like that of the 1920s. However, several factors combined to produce a much greater geographic expansion of American cities. Two factors most often cited are low interest loan guarantees by the Federal Housing Administration and increased funding of suburban road construction by the Federal Highway Administration.

Suburbs formed rapidly, subdivision after subdivision, giving rise to new demand for commercial districts. New development patterns differed greatly from those of earlier eras. Lots again increased in size, averaging near 10,000 square feet. Subdivisions, having replaced wards as a unit of growth, were larger in area and uniformly residential, almost always single family detached homes. Commercial districts were also larger and distinctly separate from residential areas.

5.4.5 Amenity Community Era (Present-Future)

A new era of reduced automobile dependence and increasing mobility options is slowly emerging and producing alternative forms of development, including neo-traditional development, conservation subdivisions, high-amenity communities, and town centers. Combinations and reformulations of these types of development will likely create new land use patterns distinctly different from earlier suburban patterns. Decreased dependence on the automobile is a characteristic of each of these new forms of development. While the change is modest at present, it has the potential to expand as consumers are presented with more options for walking, bicycling, and transit as well as shorter automobile trips to obtain goods and services.

While quality schools and personal safety considerations remain strong market forces, market studies reveal that buyer sophistication is increasing. Many home buyers are seeking “quality of life” enhancements including a sense of community, recreational amenities and greenspace, better access to goods and services, reduced commute times to work, multiple housing options within a community (to trade up or house a parent nearby), and smaller yards (especially for single parent households and aging baby boomers).

Enhancements such as these often require smaller developers to build for specific market segments, while larger developers are producing planned communities with a wider variety of elements. The result is often a larger scale of planned development, greater coordination

among developers to integrate their products, more planned commercial development tied to specific residential projects, increased development near Interstate and other freeway interchanges, and greater orientation to amenities.

There are potential benefits to these trends, including reduced traffic (and therefore less congestion and pollution) as residents are able to walk, bicycle, or use transit to reach more destinations. A potential concern with such communities is increasing income segregation and social insularity resulting from physical separation or gates.

These new development alternatives are not currently recognized in the Chatham County and City of Savannah zoning ordinances. Subsequent sections in part address the need for a modernized zoning ordinance that encourages new, beneficial development.

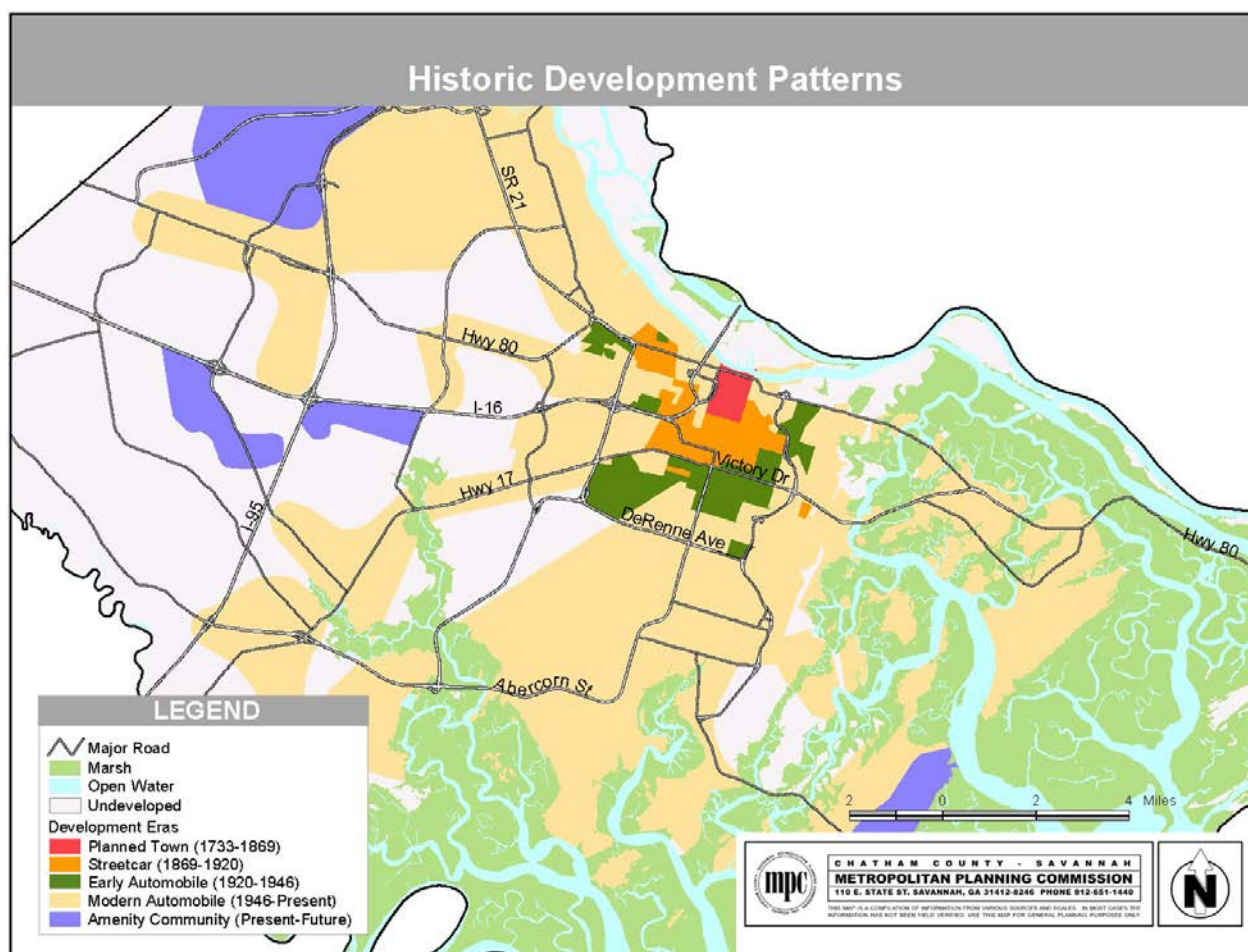


Figure 5.5: Historical Development Pattern

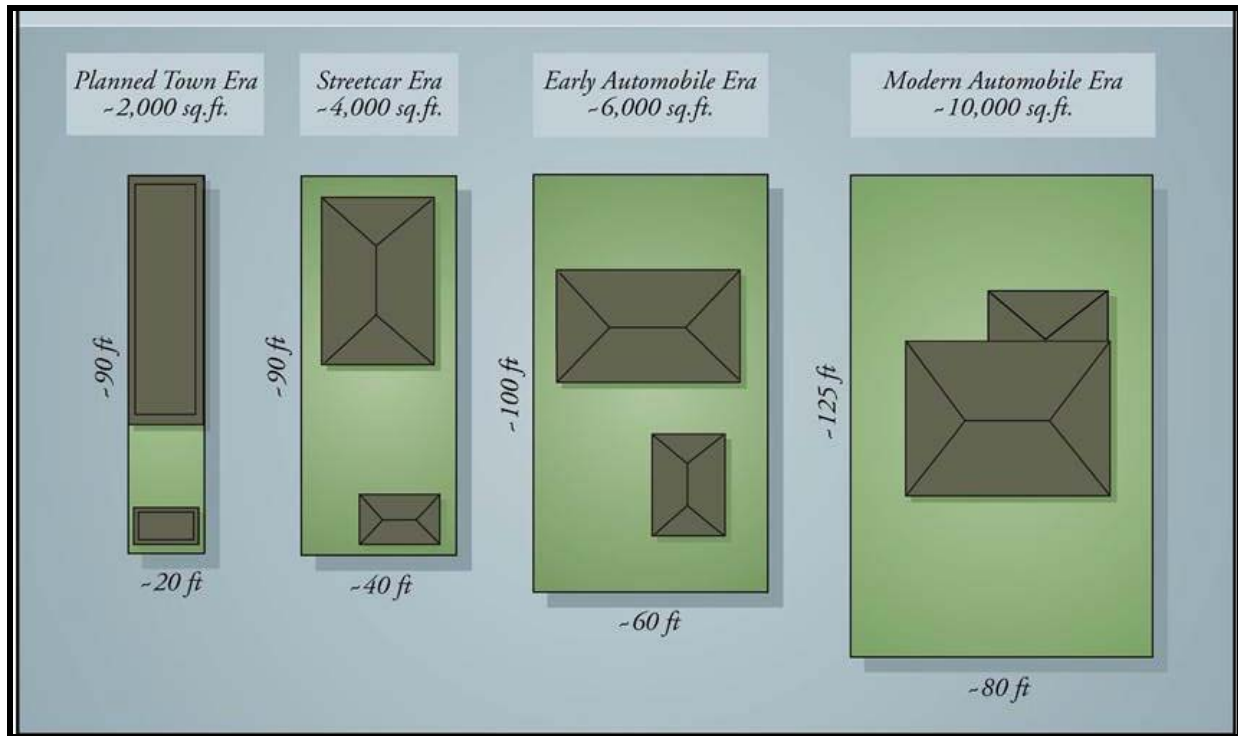


Figure 5.6: Changing Land Use Patterns, 1733-Present
Lot Size and Lot Coverage Characteristics

5.5 Future Land Use Patterns

The Comprehensive Plan sets the vision for the community and includes a Future Land Use Map (FLUM) with several land use categories that serves as a guide for zoning decisions in the community. The FLUM is a visual representation of the City's future development policy. Interpretation of the FLUM should be considered along with all zoning requests, local policy reviews, and conclusions when policy-makers consider land development questions or requests. The FLUM and its uses contained within, give direction for regulating development with the goal of furthering consistent character within each area as defined by a 'vision.'

The FLUM's use categories for the Chatham County and the city of Savannah are shown below in Table 5.2:

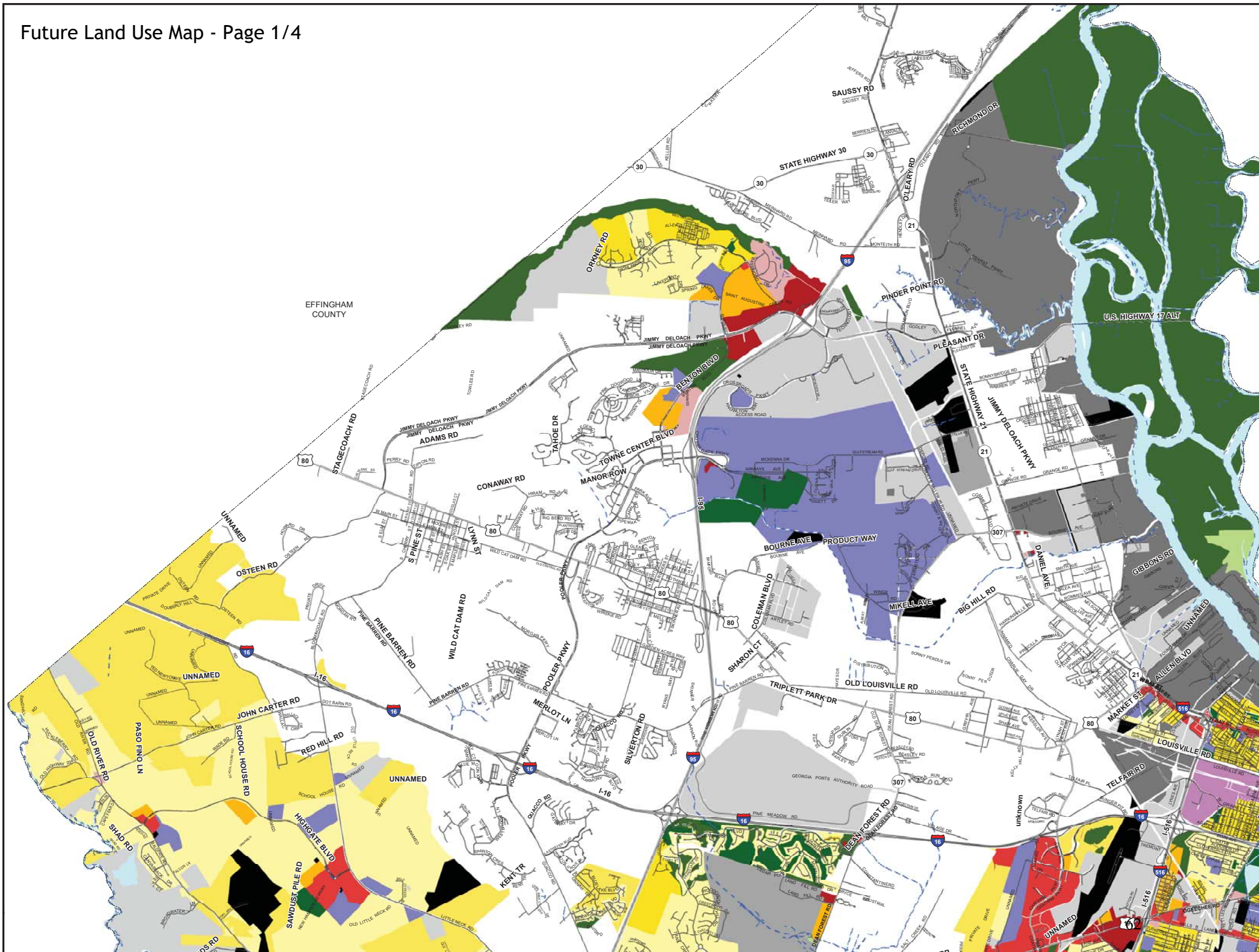
FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES	
FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORY	DEFINITION
Downtown	The traditional Central Business District, including retail, office, entertainment, institutional, civic, and residential uses that are integrated into the urban fabric.
Downtown Expansion	Areas in close proximity to the Central Business District that are identified for growth of retail, office, entertainment, institutional,

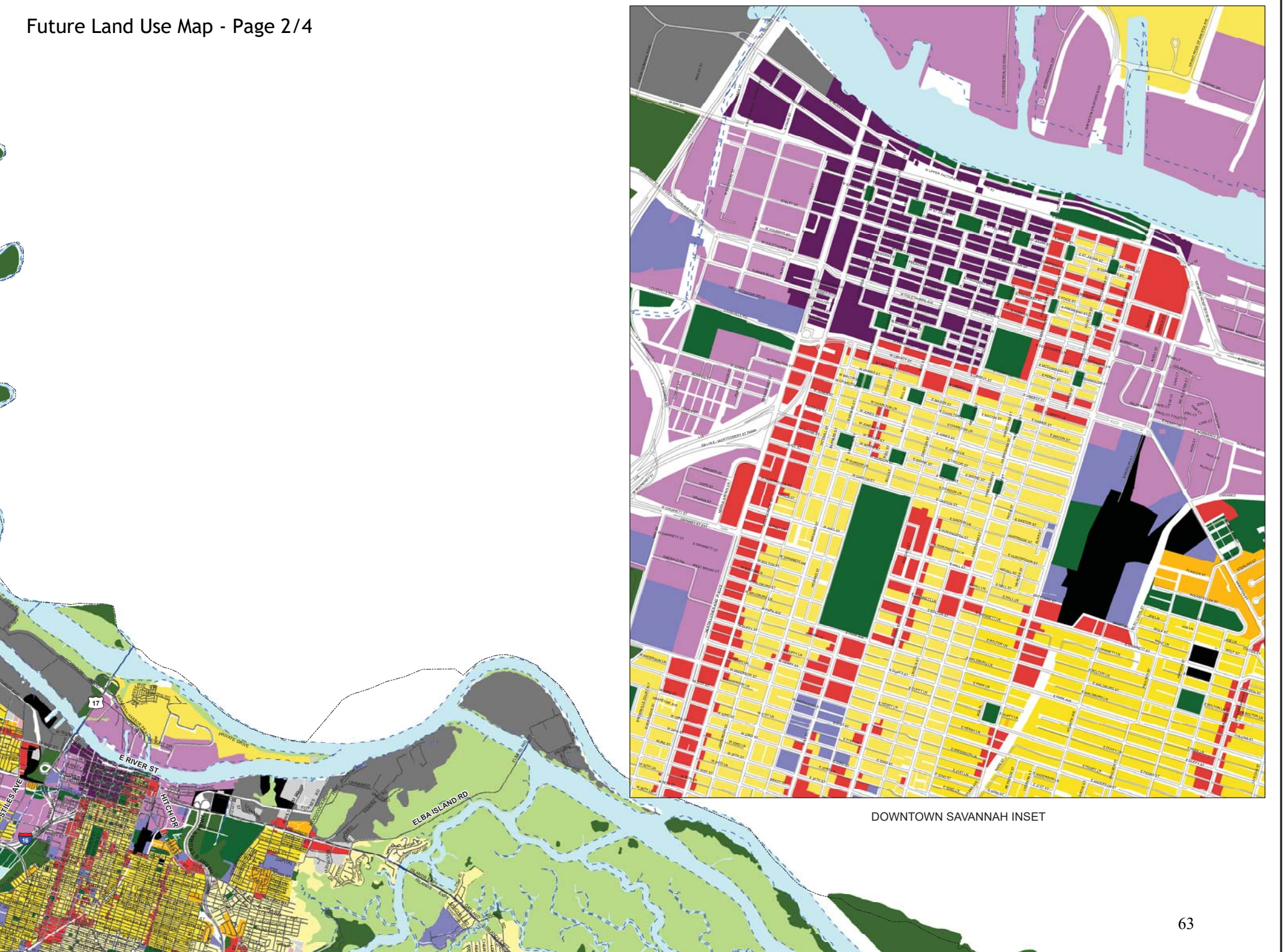
FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES	
FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORY	DEFINITION
	civic, and residential uses. This area is intended to be compatible and interconnected with the Downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods, while also accommodating new forms of urban development.
Traditional Commercial	Business areas in close proximity to downtown or in outlying historically settled areas having development patterns characteristic of the Planned Town, Streetcar, and Early Automobile eras. This category includes residential uses that are compatible with the character of adjacent neighborhoods.
Traditional Neighborhood	Residential areas in close proximity to downtown or in outlying historically settled areas having development patterns characteristic of the Planned Town, Streetcar, and Early Automobile eras. This category includes non-residential uses that are compatible with the residential character of neighborhoods.
Civic / Institutional	Areas identified as employment hubs that may consist of office buildings, medical offices, banks, hospitals, and ancillary commercial uses that support the office economy. These areas permit apartments to allow for housing opportunities within close proximity to employment.
Commercial – Neighborhood	Nodal and strip business areas that are within predominately residential areas and are developed at a scale and intensity compatible with adjacent residential uses.
Commercial – Suburban	Business areas supporting shopping centers and corridor commercial uses at a scale and intensity capable of serving regional markets.
Commercial – Regional	Business areas supporting most retail, service, office, and institutional uses. Large scale commercial uses such as shopping malls and lifestyle centers are appropriate.
Commercial – Marine	Land dedicated to marina operations including those ancillary uses that are both marine-related and an integral part of the marina complex.
Industry – Light	Areas supporting warehouses, wholesale facilities, and the manufacturing, assembly or production of parts and products, primarily from previously prepared materials, that may require intensive truck traffic and outdoor storage but that do not produce noise, odor, dust, or waterborne contaminants above ambient levels.
Industry – Heavy	Areas supporting uses that are involved in the large-scale production of finished or semi-finished products from raw materials and that may produce nose, odor, dust, and waterborne contaminants measurably above ambient levels.

FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES	
FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORY	DEFINITION
Residential – General	Areas with a wide range of residential uses including multi-family dwellings, attached dwellings, small lot single-family dwellings at densities greater than 10 units per gross acre.
Residential – Single Family	Areas identified for single-family detached residential dwellings at a density not to exceed eight (8) units per gross acre.
Residential – Suburban Single Family	Areas identified for single-family detached residential dwellings at a density not to exceed five (5) units per gross acre.
Planned Development	Master planned areas accommodating cluster development, neotraditional development, or mixed residential, commercial, or civic uses. Such developments are characterized by internal or external linkages among residential, commercial, institutional, or recreational use components. This category includes Amenity Communities, Village Centers, Town Centers, and existing Planned Unit Developments.
Planned Campus	Areas designated for research & development, educational, and business campuses, where landscaping, greenspace, open space, and open water area exceeds impervious area of structures and parking lots (other research and educational campuses may be classified as Office /Institutional).
Agriculture / Forestry	Areas principally used for farming, silviculture, dairy or livestock production, and resource extraction. This category also includes single family detached dwellings not to exceed one-half (0.5) unit per gross acre.
Transportation / Communication / Utility	Areas dedicated principally to railroad facilities, airports,—and similar uses that produce intensive or obtrusive activities that are not readily assimilated into other districts.
Parks / Recreation	Land dedicated to open space that is accessible to the public or land that is dedicated to sports, exercise, or other types of leisure activities.
Conservation	Land that is publicly or privately held and designated for preservation in a natural state or for use for passive recreation (e.g., fishing, hiking, camping). This category also includes all back barrier islands consisting of less than two acres of contiguous uplands.
Conservation – Residential	This category is for back barrier islands that are in private ownership and have uplands exceeding two acres on a contiguous land mass. Such areas shall observe conservation principles, but may be developed for residential use at low densities.
Tidal Marsh	Areas of estuarine influence that are inundated by tidal waters on

FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES	
FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORY	DEFINITION
	a daily basis and are characterized by spartina (cord grass) habitat.
Transition	Areas having established residential character that due to their location adjacent to shallow frontage lots along arterial streets are confronted with potential commercial intrusion. These properties may be assembled with frontage properties, however they shall only be used to meet the required developments standards such as, but not limited to, parking, greenspace, and buffers. Principle uses are prohibited within these areas.
LAND USE OVERLAY CATEGORIES	
Arterial Corridor Transition Overlay Area	Areas having established residential character that due to their arterial location are confronted with potential commercial intrusion. Within this overlay rezoning petitions may proceed where the combined lot width of property is equal to or greater than 175 feet along the arterial street.
Air Installation Compatibility Overlay Area	Areas adjacent to airport facilities that are within Clear Zones, Accident Potential Zones, and Noise Zones where day-night averages are greater than 65 decibels, or similar zones of influence. This designation shall be applied to areas with the flexibility to plan future development in a manner that will place compatible uses in appropriate locations and at appropriate densities (see Compatible Use Guidelines in Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield Joint Land Use Study).

TABLE 5.2 FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES

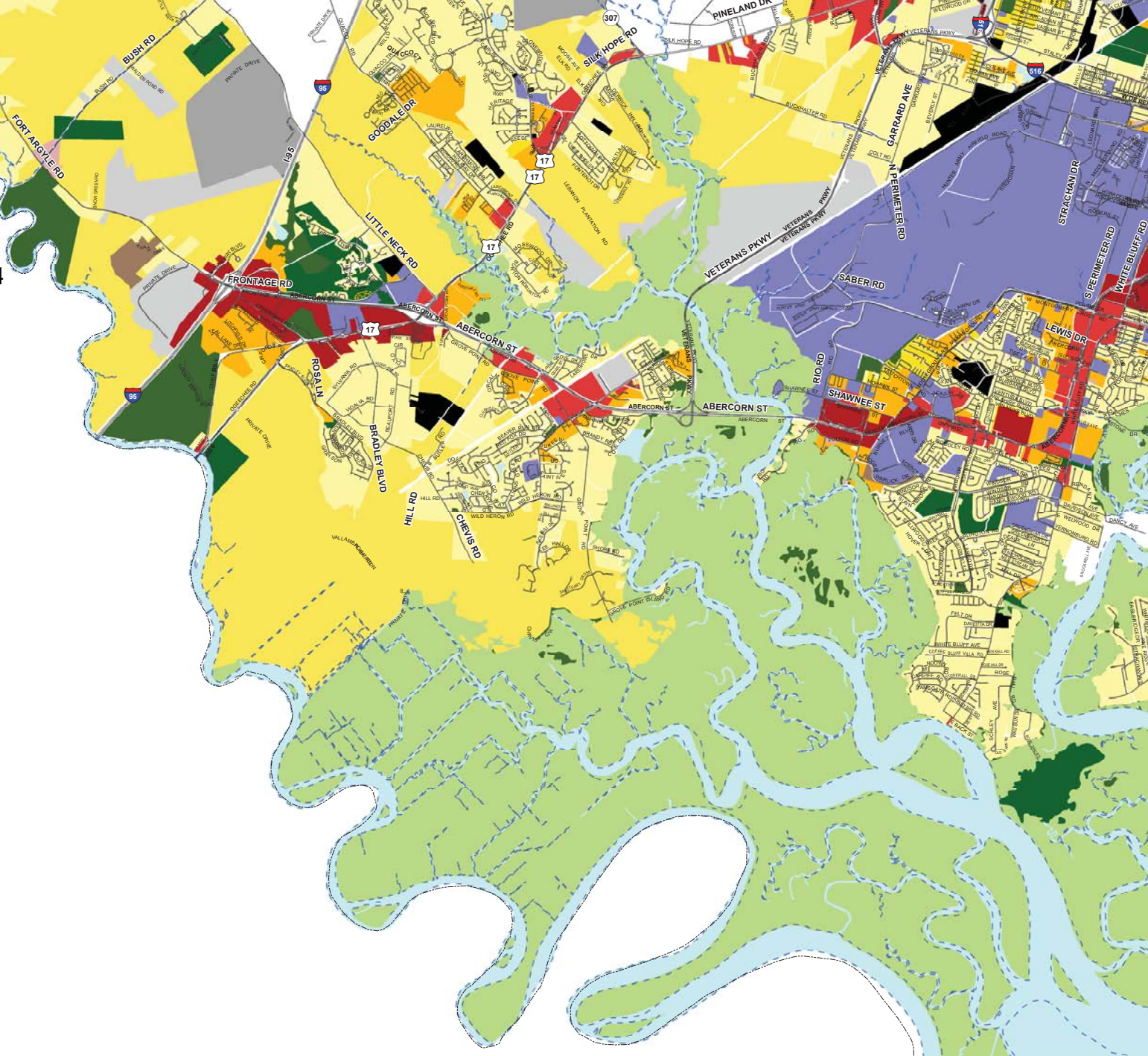




DOWNTOWN SAVANNAH INSET

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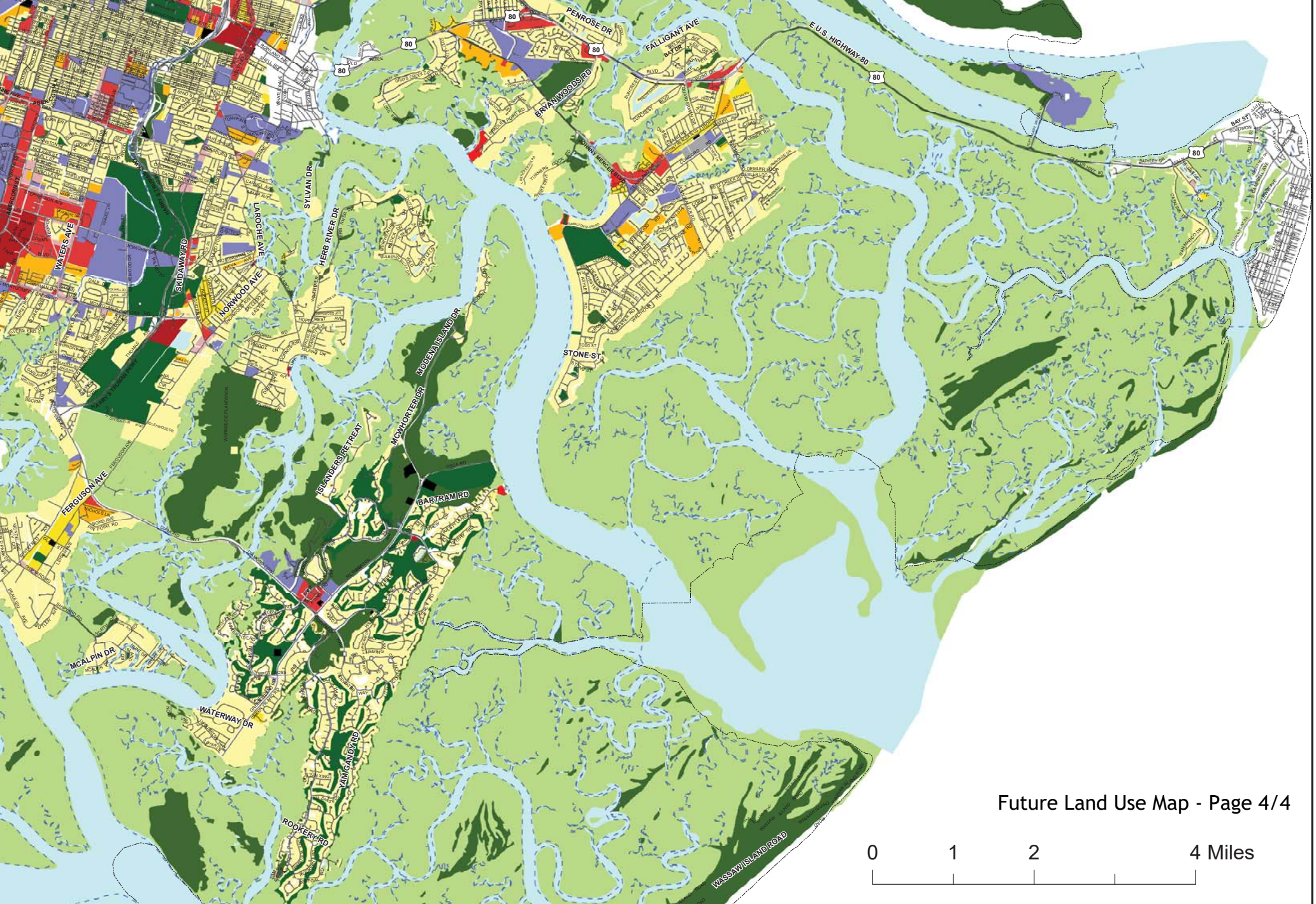
- Downtown
- Downtown- Expansion
- Traditional Commercial
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Commercial- Neighborhood
- Commercial- Suburban
- Commercial- Regional
- Commercial- Marine
- Residential- Suburban Single Family
- Residential- Single Family
- Residential- General
- Planned Development
- Planned Campus
- Agriculture/Forestry
- Industry- Light
- Industry- Heavy
- Civic/Institutional
- Transportation/Communication/Utilit
- Parks/Recreation
- Conservation
- Conservation- Residential
- Tidal Marsh
- Open Water
- Transition
- Surface Mine
- Landfill
- Right of Way
- AICO+Marsh
- AICO+Water
- AICO+Industry- Light
- AICO+Right of Way
- AICO+Suburban Single Family Residential



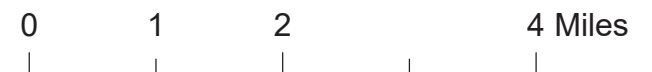
THIS MAP IS A COMPILATION OF INFORMATION FROM VARIOUS SOURCES AND SCALES. IN MOST CASES THE INFORMATION HAS NOT BEEN FIELD VERIFIED. USE THIS MAP FOR GENERAL PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY.



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FUTURE LAND USE MAP



CHATHAM COUNTY - SAVANNAH
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION
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5.6 Issues and Opportunities

This section identifies needs and challenges associated with growth and development in four geographic areas.

5.6.1 Downtown Savannah

Savannah's central business district and adjacent historic neighborhoods face several major challenges.

- *Suburban Intrusion.* Most development in modern America is suburban in character (e.g., large building envelopes, structures sited behind large parking lots, automobile-oriented access). The experience of most investors, developers, designers, and builders is with this form of development, which occurs throughout suburbia. Integrating compatible development into areas adjacent to downtown Savannah is more challenging and can add cost to a project. The return on the investment, however, should be greater than in a suburban setting.
- *Blight and Redevelopment.* The City of Savannah Neighborhood Planning and Community Development Department manages Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and other programs that address blight and redevelopment. City of Savannah Housing and Economic Development departments also concentrate resources in blighted areas. The CDBG Target Area encompasses most of the City's urban neighborhoods. Blighted areas and redevelopment initiatives to address blight are focused in this area. Brownfields and grayfields also represent forms of urban blight as well as opportunities for revitalization.
- *Reciprocity.* New development situated in close proximity to downtown Savannah and the National Landmark District derives enormous benefit from its location. Residential and commercial uses in particular benefit from the attractiveness of the district, its high volume tourism, regional centrality, and a high concentration of activities and events. Consequently, new development shall be expected to return value to downtown Savannah by enhancing its unique character and sense of place. New development should therefore participate in adding to the following: traditional street grid, general connectivity, river access, public realm, traditional aesthetics, traditional commercial siting, and to the long term viability of the downtown Savannah and the National Landmark District.
- *Brownfields.* Brownfields are vacant or underutilized industrial sites with environmental hazards or other site constraints that inhibit redevelopment. They are primarily located immediately to the east and west of downtown Savannah. However, scattered sites exist throughout Chatham County. Brownfield sites have not been thoroughly inventoried to date. Brownfields may represent a significant opportunity to expand the highly constrained downtown business district once they have been mapped and evaluated.
- *Grayfields.* Grayfields are vacant or under-performing commercial sites, typically shopping centers. They are typically automobile-oriented shopping centers and therefore most often located in second and third ring suburbs. Grayfield sites located in newer suburban areas are often "big box" retail stores vacated to occupy a

new property. Some of these sites may be held off the market to prevent competitors from moving in, potentially creating blight and contributing to urban sprawl.

5.6.2 First and Second Ring Suburbs

Many neighborhoods in these areas contain unique land use patterns and exceptional architectural assets. However, they face two significant challenges.

- *Land Use/Zoning Mismatch.* When the City and County zoning ordinances were adopted, in 1960 and 1962 respectively, they contained an implicit strategy to promote suburban development. First and second ring suburbs were perceived as largely blighted and over-crowded. They were rezoned with larger lot sizes, reduced lot coverage, greater setbacks, and other suburban development characteristics in an effort to induce demolition, replatting, and redevelopment. This intentional mismatch of land use and zoning is inappropriate now that higher density urban neighborhoods enhance land values, reduce automobile traffic, and efficiently use land.

5.6.3 Ring: East Chatham County

East and West Chatham County have very different physical situations and growth characteristics. For that reason, separate discussions of the challenges facing these areas are provided.

The Islands and Southeast Chatham communities' concerns were addressed with community plans and zoning amendments approved in 2001 and 2003. The Environmental Overlay District, in particular, was designed to fit these marshside communities; however, the following challenges remain as issues within these communities:

- *Marsh Buffers and Setbacks.* The Environmental Overlay District increased marsh buffers and setbacks from 25 feet to 35 feet. Buffers are particularly difficult to regulate, and essentially depend on voluntary compliance by landowners. As a result, buffers are often not maintained and yards are extended to the edge of marsh. Pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers applied to yards without buffers result in marsh pollution. Lawns also increase the velocity of runoff, which adversely affects hydrologic regimes. Use of low impact development (LID) strategies coupled with perimeter conservation easements may offer more effective marsh protection.
- *Development on Marshfront and Waterways.* In recent years more development has been built along the marshfront and waterways; architectural styles have moved away from the traditional coastal aesthetic; and private boat storage and boat ramps have become more intrusive along the shoreline. The Environmental Overlay contains standards to prevent excessive building. These should be reviewed and, if necessary, replaced with more effective standards in light of new information regarding the effects of sea level rise.

5.6.4 Third Ring: West Chatham County

Rapid growth experienced in the Islands, Southeast Chatham, and southside communities has shifted to West Chatham County. For that reason, a separate plan for that area was prepared by the MPC in 2004. The plan was prepared in conjunction with the

Comprehensive Plan and is consistent with it. Two major land use challenges facing the area are outlined below:

- *Suburban Density Zoning.* The Rural Agricultural zoning district that encompasses most of West Chatham County was amended during a slower growth period to provide for residential development with 6,000 square foot lots (resulting in densities of five to six units per acre where there is public water and sewer). While this initially had a positive impact by creating opportunities for moderate cost housing, it may now have the effect of promoting “leap frog” urban sprawl as a result of current rapid growth.
- *Commercial Strip Development.* New roads and major improvements such as the widening of US 17 are creating pressure to commercialize most frontage lots where traffic volumes are high and increasing.

5.6.5 Fourth Ring: Amenity Communities

New greenfields development is changing in response to evolving market demands. Homebuyers are increasingly seeking community amenities including open space, sidewalks and trails, community centers for exercise and activities, and convenient access to goods and services. Emerging development patterns require new a reassessment of existing land use and zoning frameworks. Major challenges facing new development are described below:

- *Growth Policy Conflicts with Regulatory Framework.* The policies in the Comprehensive Plan encourage mixed use development, town centers, cluster and conservation design, and New Urban development options. The 1962 Chatham County Zoning Ordinance does not provide districts, uses, or development standards to encourage or even allow these forms of development. Consequently, such developments require complicated approvals involving patchwork zoning text amendments and variances.
- *Connectivity.* Because these developments are often a great distance from established commercial areas, they produce longer commutes to retail and employment centers. This spatial pattern worsens congestion, fuel consumption, water quality (affected by stormwater runoff), and air quality. Mitigation strategies include increasing external access points in new developments, increasing access to adjoining developments, and mixing land uses.

5.7 Assessment

This section identifies and discusses three quality growth strategies – consistency, mixed-use development, and enhancing the public realm – that are common denominators associated with the issues identified above.

5.7.1 Consistency

The 1960 City and 1962 County zoning ordinances are based on planning paradigms and public policy of the late 1950s. The policies of that era, however, were not incorporated into

a comprehensive plan or similar public document. Land use and development decisions were therefore often made in a policy vacuum.

The 1992 Vision 20/20 process was a positive step toward correcting this deficiency. The State-mandated City and County comprehensive plans, adopted the following year, also updated and formalized public policy. Additionally, both the Comprehensive Plan and Chatham County “Blueprint” have specific goals within their respective Quality of Life sections intended to “provide effective government services while ensuring that process and procedures are planned and executed with transparency”.

A weakness of the two policy documents is the absence of a requirement for consistency between policy and programs. Of particular relevance here is the lack of consistency between land use plans, on the one hand, and zoning on the other.

A requirement for consistency was included previously in earlier iterations of the Comprehensive Plan and is now enforced procedurally by requiring approval of a “plan amendment” prior to approval of a zoning map or text amendment that is inconsistent with the Land Use Plan. Thus, official public policy is reviewed prior to considering a zoning amendment that is inconsistent with public policy.

5.7.2 Mixed Use Development

Mixed use development is a growth strategy with roots in traditional development patterns. The success of mixed use development in Savannah, as well as its increasing popularity across the country, has led to greater interest in expanding its implementation in suburban areas of Chatham County, particularly in larger, planned developments.

Savannah is frequently cited as a model for mixed use development. Its success in preserving the National Landmark District and other historic districts is extraordinary, and it accounts for the attractiveness of the city to tourists, new residents, and investors. The fine-grained, mixed use development patterns in these areas have established the city as a vibrant urban center for business, entertainment, and cultural activities.

Mixed use development in a downtown environment, however, is fundamentally different from mixed use development in surrounding first ring neighborhoods and in suburban settings. Characteristics of land use patterns associated with downtown, and first, second, and third ring mixed use development is discussed throughout this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Zoning recommendations for mixed use development options should be compatible with these characteristics.

The importance of compatibility standards in mixed use districts is imperative. Single family, multi-family, professional offices, and neighborhood commercial uses can be mixed if appropriate size and appearance standards are in place. Medical and dental clinics can also be desirable in a mixed use neighborhood if located in nodes and corridors. More intensive commercial uses can be destructive to mixed use neighborhoods. Such uses include hotels, drive-through restaurants, shopping centers, malls, and automobile dealerships.

5.8 State Quality Community Objectives

The Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning require a review of Quality Community Objectives adopted by the Department of Community Affairs for consistency with local plans. Six objectives closely related to land use are identified and discussed:

- **Resource Management:** *Promote the efficient use of natural resources and identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas of the community. This may be achieved by promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy generation; encouraging green building construction and renovation; utilizing appropriate waste management techniques; fostering water conservation and reuse; or setting environmentally sensitive areas aside as green space or conservation reserves.* Through development practices, zoning ordinances and environmental compliance regulations, the air quality in the region and environmentally sensitive areas are protected from negative impacts of development. Environmentally sensitive areas throughout Chatham County have been identified and receive special protection, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area is preserved and protected.
- **Efficient Land Use:** *Maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the costly conversion of undeveloped land at the periphery of the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the traditional core of the community; designing new development to minimize the amount of land consumed; carefully planning expansion of public infrastructure; or maintaining open space in agricultural, forestry, or conservation uses.* From the urbanized area to the urban fringes, open space preservation continues to be a high priority in Chatham County and the City of Savannah. The Community Assessment establishes a basis for new zoning that will enhance the ability of local government to preserve open space.
- **Local Preparedness:** *Identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of future the community seeks to achieve. These prerequisites might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support or direct new growth; ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired; leadership and staff capable of responding to opportunities and managing new challenges; or undertaking an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness and response.* Chatham County is vulnerable to a variety of natural hazards, including hurricanes and coastal storms, severe thunderstorms and tornados, coastal and riverine erosion, and floods. In recognition of this vulnerability, Chatham County embarked on a planning process to develop a Disaster Redevelopment Plan (DRP) to help the county address the complications that can arise following a disaster as the community attempts to rebuild. By developing a DRP, Chatham County hopes to be better prepared for the tough long-term recovery and redevelopment period that could face the county following a major disaster.

- **Sense of Place:** *Protect and enhance the community's unique qualities. This may be achieved by maintaining the downtown as a focal point of the community; fostering compact, walkable, mixed-use development; protecting and revitalizing historic areas of the community; encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community; or protecting scenic and natural features that are important to defining the community's character.* Contemporary development is frequently at odds with historic development patterns. Building setbacks, parking configurations, and access controls, for example, produce forms of development that conflict with established development patterns from previous eras. The assessment in this document provides an initial basis for preparing for new growth while enhancing existing development patterns.