

Georgia Department of Community Affairs
State Planning Recommendations

RECOMMENDED CHARACTER AREAS

The use of character areas in planning acknowledges the visual and functional differences of varying neighborhoods and allows for more intentional guidance of future development through adequate and specific planning and implementation. These recommended character areas can be used to define areas that (1) presently have unique or special characteristics that need to be preserved; (2) have potential to evolve into unique areas; or (3) require special attention due to unique development issues. These recommendations cover the present and desired character of your community. As these are recommendations, you can create additional character areas or modify these to fit your community vision.

Character Area	Description/Location	Development Strategy
Conservation Area, Greenspace	Undeveloped, natural lands with significant natural features including views, coast, steep slopes, flood plains, wetlands, watersheds, wildlife management areas and other environmentally sensitive areas not suitable for development of any kind.	Maintain natural, rural character by not allowing any new development and promoting use of conservation easements. Widen roadways in these areas only when absolutely necessary and carefully design the roadway alterations to minimize visual impact. Promote these areas as passive-use tourism and recreation destinations.
Linear Greenspace, Trails & Pedestrian/Bikeways	Area of protected open space that follows natural and manmade linear features for recreation, transportation and conservation purposes and links ecological, cultural and recreational amenities.	Link greenspaces into a pleasant network of greenways, set aside for pedestrian and bicycle connections between schools, churches, recreation areas, city centers, residential neighborhoods and commercial areas. These greenways can provide safe, efficient pedestrian linkages and at the same time give users an opportunity to enjoy the natural environment. Properly designed greenways can serve as an alternative transportation network, accommodating commuting to work or shopping as well as recreational biking, skateboarding, walking and jogging.

Agricultural Area	Lands in open or cultivated state or sparsely settled, including woodlands and farm lands.	Maintain rural character by strictly limiting new development and protecting farmland and open space. Protect farmland and open space by maintaining large lot sizes (at least 10 acres) and promoting use of conservation easements by land owners. Residential subdivisions should be severely limited, but if minor exceptions are made, they should be required to follow a rural cluster zoning or conservation subdivision design. Any new development should be required to use compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional rural character, and should not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture. Widen roadways only when absolutely necessary and carefully design the roadway alterations to minimize visual impact. Promote these areas as passive-use tourism and recreation destinations.
Rural Residential Area	Rural, undeveloped land likely to face development pressures for lower density (one unit per two+ acres) residential development. Typically will have low pedestrian orientation and access, very large lots, open space, pastoral views and high degree of building separation.	Maintain rural atmosphere while accommodating new residential development as rural cluster or conservation subdivision design that incorporate significant amounts of open space. Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional rural character, and should not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture. Wherever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes.
Rural Village	Commercial activity area located at a highway intersection. Typically automobile focused, but with care can be designed for greater pedestrian orientation and access, more character with attractive clustering of buildings within the center, leaving open space surrounding the center. There is a mixture of uses to serve highway passers-by, rural and agricultural areas.	Maintain rural atmosphere while accommodating retail and commercial uses within village center with attractive character and a clear boundary a. Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional rural character, and do not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture. Wherever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes.

<p>Suburban Area (developing)</p>	<p>Area where pressures for the typical types of suburban residential subdivision development are greatest (due to availability of water and sewer service). Without intervention, this area is likely to evolve with low pedestrian orientation, little or no transit, high open space, high to moderate degree of building separation, predominantly residential with scattered civic buildings and varied street patterns, often curvilinear.</p>	<p>Promote moderate density, traditional neighborhood development (TND) style residential subdivisions. New development should be a master-planned with mixed-uses, blending residential development with schools, parks, recreation, retail businesses and services, linked in a compact pattern that encourages walking and minimizes the need for auto trips within the subdivision. There should be strong connectivity and continuity between each master planned development. There should be good vehicular and pedestrian/bike connections to retail/commercial services as well as internal street connectivity, connectivity to adjacent properties/subdivisions, and multiple site access points. Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional character, and do not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture. Wherever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes. Promote street design that fosters traffic calming such as narrower residential streets, on-street parking, and addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.</p>
<p>Suburban Areas (built out)</p>	<p>Area where typical types of suburban residential subdivision development have occurred. Characterized by low pedestrian orientation, little or no transit, high open space, high to moderate degree of building separation, predominantly residential with scattered civic buildings and varied street patterns, often curvilinear.</p>	<p>Foster retrofitting of these areas to better conform with traditional neighborhood development (TND) principles. This includes creating neighborhood focal points by locating schools, community centers, or well-designed small commercial activity centers at suitable locations within walking distance of residences. Add traffic calming improvements, sidewalks, and increased street interconnections to improve walk-ability within existing neighborhoods. Permit accessory housing units, or new well-designed, small-scale infill multifamily residences to increase neighborhood density and income diversity.</p>
<p>Traditional Neighborhood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Stable Neighborhood ▫ Declining Neighborhood ▫ Neighborhood Redevelopment Area 	<p>Residential area in older part of the community, typically developed prior to WWII. Characteristics include high pedestrian orientation, , sidewalks, street trees, and street furniture; on-street parking; small, regular lots; limited open space; buildings close to or at the front property line; predominance of alleys; low degree of building separation; neighborhood-scale businesses scattered throughout the area.</p>	<p>Already exhibiting many of the characteristics of traditional neighborhood development (TND), these older neighborhoods should be encouraged to maintain their original character, with only compatible infill development permitted. There are three types of traditional neighborhoods that each call for their own redevelopment strategies: stable, declining, and redevelopment.</p>

<p>▫ Stable Neighborhood</p>	<p>A neighborhood having relatively well-maintained housing, possess a distinct identity through architectural style, lot and street design, and has higher rates of home-ownership. Location near declining areas of town may also cause this neighborhood to decline over time.</p>	<p>Focus on reinforcing stability by encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties. Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. The neighborhood should, however, also include well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents. Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided to encourage these residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area.</p>
<p>▫ Declining neighborhood</p>	<p>An area that has most of its original housing stock in place, but housing conditions are worsening due to low rates of homeownership and neglect of property maintenance. There may be a lack of neighborhood identity and gradual invasion of different type and intensity of use that may not be compatible with the neighborhood residential use.</p>	<p>Focus on strategic public investments to improve conditions, appropriate infill development on scattered vacant sites, and encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties. Public assistance and investment should be focused where needed to ensure that the neighborhood becomes more stable, mixed-income community with a larger percentage of owner-occupied housing. Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. The neighborhood should, however, also include well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents.</p>
<p>▫ Neighborhood Redevelopment Area</p>	<p>A neighborhood that has declined sufficiently that housing conditions are bad, there may be large areas of vacant land or deteriorating, unoccupied structures.</p>	<p>The redevelopment strategy for the area should focus on preserving and rehabilitating what remains of the original housing stock, while rebuilding, on the remaining land, a new, attractive neighborhood following the principles of traditional neighborhood development. The neighborhood should include a well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents. Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided to encourage residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area. New streets should be connected (i.e. minimize or prohibit cul-de-sacs) to disperse traffic, shorten walking/biking trips. Design features that encourage safe, accessible streets should be employed – such as, narrower streets, on-street parking, sidewalks, street trees, and landscaped raised medians for minor collectors and wider streets.</p>

<p>Neighborhood Centers</p>	<p>A neighborhood focal point with a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses easily accessible by pedestrians.</p>	<p>Each Neighborhood Center should include a mix of retail, services, and offices to serve neighborhood residents day-to-day needs. Residential development should reinforce the center through locating higher density housing options adjacent to the center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments and condominiums. Design for each Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. Include direct connections to the greenspace and trail networks. Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to other neighborhood amenities, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, parks, schools, etc.</p>
<p>Town Centers</p>	<p>A focal point for several neighborhoods that has a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses easily accessible by pedestrians.</p>	<p>Each Town Center should include a relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area. Residential development should reinforce the town center through locating higher density housing options adjacent to the center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments and condominiums. Design for each Town Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. Include direct connections to the greenspace and trail networks. Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, schools, etc.</p>
<p>Downtown</p>	<p>The traditional central business district and immediately surrounding commercial, industrial, or mixed-use areas.</p>	<p>Downtown should include relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area. Residential development should reinforce the traditional town center through a combination of rehabilitation of historic buildings in the downtown area and compatible new infill development targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, and condominiums. Design should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, schools, etc. New residential and commercial development</p>

		should be concentrated in and around the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods on infill sites.
Regional Activity Center,	Concentration of regionally-marketed commercial and retail centers, office and employment areas, higher-education facilities, sports and recreational complexes. These areas are characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, and high transit use, including stops, shelters and transfer points; on-site parking; low degree of internal open space; high floor-area-ratio; large tracts of land, campus or unified development.	<p>Should include relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area. Also include a diverse mix of higher-density housing types, including multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, and condominiums, including affordable and workforce housing. Design should be very pedestrian oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Include direct connections to nearby networks of greenspace or trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreation purposes. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide bike lanes or wide curb lanes to encourage bicycling and provide additional safety, provide conveniently located, preferably sheltered, bicycle parking at retail and office destinations and in multi-family dwellings. <p>Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional character, and should not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture.</p> <p>Acceptable uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office, retail, and other typical commercial uses. • Higher density multi-family and condominium residential uses. • Major employers, such as educational institutions, industry, sports and recreational complexes, and back-office operations. • “Big box” retail should be limited to these areas, and designed to fit into mixed-use planned development with limited parking that is shared with surrounding uses. <p>Unacceptable uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warehousing or other operations requiring heavy truck traffic should not be permitted in these areas. • New billboards

<p>Corridor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ In-Town Corridor ▫ Gateway ▫ Scenic Corridor ▫ Major Highway Corridor 	<p>Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of designated high-volume transportation facility. Characteristics include orientation of buildings to highway; high transit, including stops and shelters; on-site parking; and large set-backs for buildings.</p>	<p>In order to encourage pedestrian activity that capitalizes on the existing neighborhood fabric in the older parts of the community a hierarchical or tiered approach to corridor design should be adopted. This approach should focus on pedestrian comfort, safety and convenience in areas near the community's center where smaller lots and greater proximity to a range of services exists. As corridors move farther from the center and parcel sizes and development patterns work against easy pedestrian circulation, the focus should shift to vehicular safety, corridor appearance and traffic speeds while still providing basic access and safety for pedestrians. Finally, on major thoroughfares that serve as gateways to the community, the focus should be limited to corridor appearance only – providing a high quality image of the community. Best practices for all types of corridors include: driveway consolidation and landscaped raised medians, bicycle accommodations, traffic calming, and a buffer for pedestrians.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ In-Town Corridor 	<p>Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a street or highway in town that is already or likely to experience uncontrolled strip development if growth is not properly managed.</p>	<p>Gradually convert corridor to attractive boulevard with signage guiding visitors to downtown and scenic areas around the community. The appearance of the corridor can immediately be improved through streetscaping enhancements (street lights, landscaping, etc.). In the longer term, enact design guidelines for new development, including minimal building setback requirements from the street, to ensure that the corridors become more attractive as properties develop or redevelop. Corridors leading to town centers or downtown, in particular, should be attractive, where development is carefully controlled (or redevelopment tools are used) to maintain or improve appearances. Reduce the role and impact of automobiles in the community by employing attractive traffic-calming measures along major roadways and exploring alternative solutions to parking congestion. Provide basic access for pedestrians and bicycles, consider vehicular safety measures including driveway consolidation and raised medians (which also improve safety for bike/pedestrians). Coordinate land uses and bike/pedestrian facilities with transit stops where applicable.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Gateway Corridors 	<p>Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community.</p>	<p>Focus upon appearance with appropriate signage, landscaping and other beautification measures. Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to clustered developments. Retrofit or mask existing strip development or other unsightly features as necessary.</p>

<p>▫ Scenic Corridor</p>	<p>Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that has significant natural, historic, or cultural features, and scenic or pastoral views.</p>	<p>Establish guidelines on development to protect the characteristics deemed to have scenic value. Enact guidelines for new development that enhances the scenic value of the corridor and addresses landscaping and architectural design. Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to clustered developments. Provide pedestrian linkages to adjacent and nearby residential or commercial districts.</p>
<p>▫ Major Highway Corridor</p>	<p>Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of designated high-volume transportation facility, such as arterial roads and highways.</p>	<p>Maintain a natural vegetation buffer (at least 50 feet in width) along the corridor. All new development should be set-back behind this buffer, with access roads, shared driveways or inter-parcel road connections providing alternate access to these developments and reducing curb cuts and traffic on the main highway. Encourage landscaped, raised medians to provide vehicular safety, aesthetics, and also pedestrian crossing refuge. Provide pedestrian facilities behind drainage ditches or curb. Provide paved shoulders that can be used by bicycles or as emergency breakdown lanes. Coordinate land uses and bike/pedestrian facilities with transit stops, if applicable. Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to developments. Unacceptable uses: new billboards.</p>
<p>Commercial Redevelopment Area</p>	<p>Declining, unattractive, vacant or under-utilized strip shopping center. Characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic and transit if applicable; on-site parking; low degree of open space; moderate floor-area-ratios; large tracts of land, campus or unified development.</p>	<p>Older commercial center maybe retro-fitted to be more aesthetically appealing and, therefore, perhaps also more marketable to prospective tenants by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building new commercial structures at the street front, taking up a portion of the oversize parking lot and creating a shopping “square” around a smaller internal parking lot. ▪ Upgrading the appearance of existing older commercial buildings with façade improvement, new architectural elements, or awnings. ▪ Reconfiguring the parking lot and circulation routes for automobiles. ▪ Providing pedestrian and bicycling amenities, including covered walkways, benches, lighting and bike racks. ▪ Adding landscaping and other appearance enhancements, trees in parking lots to provide shade and help reduce storm water runoff.
<p>Employment Center, Office Park</p>	<p>Typically campus-style development characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, and transit if applicable; on-site parking; low degree of open space; moderate floor-area-ratio.</p>	<p>Focus upon encouraging pervious paving and screening of cars and other unattractive aspects of businesses as well as buffers to separate from adjacent uses. Encourage greater mix of uses (such as retail and services to serve office employees) to reduce automobile reliance/use on site.</p>

Light Industrial Area	Area used in low intensity manufacturing, wholesale trade, and distribution activities that do not generate excessive noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisance characteristics.	Develop or, where possible, retrofit as part of planned industrial park having adequate water, sewer, storm-water, and transportation infrastructure for all component uses at build-out. Incorporate landscaping and site design to soften or shield views of buildings and parking lots, loading docks, etc. Incorporate signage and lighting guidelines to enhance quality of development. Encourage greater mix of uses (such as retail and services to serve industry employees) to reduce automobile reliance/use on site.
Industrial Area	Land used in higher intensity manufacturing, assembly, processing activities where noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisance characteristics are not contained on-site.	Develop or, where possible, retrofit as part of planned industrial park having adequate water, sewer, storm-water, and transportation infrastructure for all component uses at build-out. Incorporate landscaping and site design to soften or shield views of buildings and parking lots, loading docs, etc. Incorporate signage and lighting guidelines to enhance quality image of development. Also incorporate measures to mitigate impacts of external impacts on the adjacent built or natural environments. Encourage greater mix of uses (such as retail and services to serve industry employees) to reduce reliance on automobiles on site.
Historic Area	Historic district or area containing features, landmarks, civic or cultural uses of historic interest. Characteristics may vary based on size, location and history of the community.	Protect historic properties from demolition and encourage rehabilitation with appropriate incentives, including National Register of Historic places designation, which enables eligibility for tax incentive programs. Historic properties should be maintained or rehabilitated/restored according to the Secretary of the Interior's <u>Standards for Rehabilitation</u> . New development in the area should be of scale and architectural design to fit well into the historic fabric of that area. Pedestrian access and open space should be provided to enhance citizen enjoyment of the area. Linkages to regional greenspace/trail system should be encouraged as well.
Other/Special	A district or area that presently does not fit or is not envisioned fitting into the above categories. It may, for instance, have singular characteristics such as hospital, airport, big box, etc. not likely to be replicated elsewhere within the community.	To be determined locally.