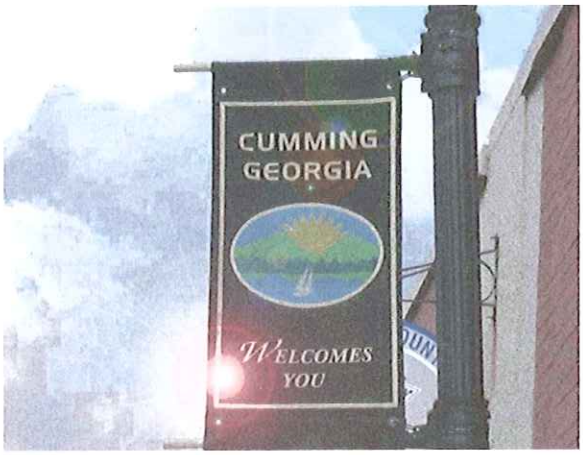
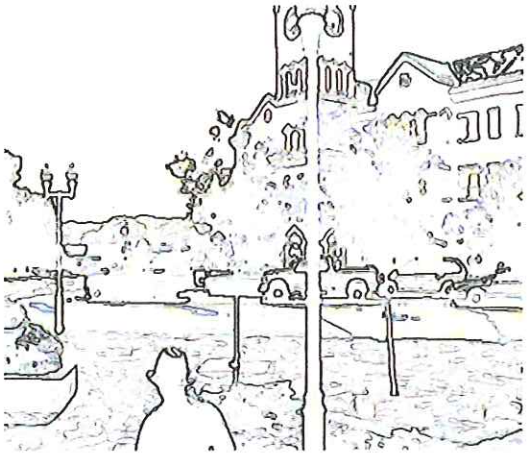
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

CITY OF CUMMING, GEORGIA

July 2011





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CHAPTER 1
ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In 1999 the Board of the Department of Community Affairs adopted the Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) as a statement of the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve its unique cultural, natural and historic resources while looking to the future and developing to its fullest potential. The Office of Planning and Quality Growth in turn created an assessment tool meant to give communities an idea of how it is progressing toward reaching these objectives set by the Department. The assessment is much like a demographic analysis or a land use map, showing a community that "you are here."

This QCO assessment for the City of Cumming draws on the specific questions provided in DCA's assessment tool, but it does not present the assessment in a checklist form, with yes or no answers. Also, some of the parameters for assessment are organized differently from that provided in the DCA assessment tool.

OPEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

"Environmental Protection Objective: Air quality and environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development. Environmentally sensitive areas deserve 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 should be preserved."

"Open Space Preservation Objective: New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors."

Summary

Cumming is in compliance with these Quality Community Objectives, as Table 1 indicates. The paragraphs which follow describe the extent to which the city complies with the various considerations suggested in the QCO assessment tool.

Greenspace Plan

Forsyth County adopted a Greenspace Plan in the year 2000 and has incorporated it into its current comprehensive plan (see Appendix B). Preparation of countywide greenspace plans required a goal of maintaining 20 percent or more of the total land area in the county as protected open space. The plan recognized that the county was well short of that and unlikely to attain an additional 45 square miles of greenspace. The countywide greenspace plan did not envision acquiring any land within the city limits of Cumming, the county's only municipality. However, just to the northwest of Cumming lies Sawnee Mountain, at an elevation of approximately 1,960

feet, also referred to as Sawnee Mountain Ridge, and that area forms a key target for greenspace acquisition strategies.

Table 1
Summary Assessment: Environmental Protection and Open Space QCOs

QCO Considerations	Degree of Compliance	References/Notes/Comments
Greenspace Plan	Compliant	Via countywide greenspace plan
Active Greenspace Preservation	Partially compliant	City has focused on more active recreation activities (e.g., Mary Alice Park, but which includes passive lands)
Set-asides in New Development	Fully compliant	Zoning ordinance provisions for minimum landscaped open space. See also conservation subdivisions, Sec. 1809
Cooperation with State or National Land Conservation Programs	Compliant	No such programs apply within Cumming except for federal NRCS and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Conservation Subdivision Ordinance	Fully compliant	Zoning Ordinance Article XVIII
Comprehensive Natural Resources Inventory	Fully compliant	Chapter 5 comprehensive plan
"Part V" Environmental Ordinances	Fully compliant	Zoning ordinance Articles X, XI, XII
Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Natural Resources	Compliant; improvement suggested	Flood plain and soil erosion ordinances; suggestions for additional code provisions for steeply sloping lands
Tree Preservation and Tree-Replanting Ordinances	Partially compliant	Landscape plan required, zoning ordinance; stronger tree protection and replanting requirements not supported locally
Stormwater Best Management Practices for all New Development	Fully compliant	Stormwater ordinance adopted 2005 in compliance with Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District requirements

Sawnee Mountain consists of 1,166 acres of undeveloped land. On July 20, 2000, the county formally acquired a portion (174.1) acres of the Sawnee Mountain property. The countywide greenspace plan envisions that the Sawnee Mountain conservation zone will be expanded to include the entire mountain, with eventual development of portions of it as a passive use recreation area, containing trails and interpretive areas. As of 2000, Forsyth County had set aside four million dollars for purchase of Sawnee Mountain Ridge properties. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sites around Lake Lanier were also assumed in the countywide greenspace plan to comprise 16 percent (4,722 acres), a large amount, of the total county protected greenspace.

Active Greenspace Preservation

There are no active efforts on the part of the City of Cumming to acquire permanently protected green space. However, see the discussion below about the City of Cumming's involvement in further development of Mary Alice Park, a Lake Lanier recreation site owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers but now under a long-term lease by the city.

Set-asides in New Development

Minimum landscaped open space (percent of total land area) is required for several (all non-single-family) zoning districts in the City of Cumming. The minimum percentages range from a low of 10 percent in manufacturing zoning districts to 35 percent in the Office-Commercial Multi-Story zoning district. The Cumming zoning ordinance defines "landscaped open space" as "that portion or portions of a given lot, not covered by buildings, pavement, parking, access and service areas, set aside and maintained as a buffer, landscape strip or other approved open area." Also, within conservation subdivisions, open space refers to "the portion of the conservation subdivision that has been set aside for permanent protection," and each conservation subdivision must provide at least 40 percent of the gross land area of the subdivision as restricted open space (Section 1809.1 zoning ordinance).

Cooperation with State or National Land Conservation Programs

There are no known national or state programs actively occurring within the city or at its fringes with regard to land conservation. However, as noted in other sections of this assessment, Forsyth County intends to continue acquiring conservation land northwest of the city at Sawnee Mountain Ridge. Also, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service) works with residents to encourage the wise use of our natural resources on both agricultural and non-agricultural land.

Also, the shorelines of Lake Lanier are under federal control (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Cumming is engaged in the operation and development of the Mary Alice Park site under a long-term lease. There are national and private efforts to further protect the Chattahoochee River corridor below Lake Lanier (i.e., the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area and acquisition efforts by the Trust for Public Land). The City of Cumming is not directly involved in these efforts since its geography does not coincide with the Chattahoochee River.

Mary Alice Park has been leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by the City of Cumming and is an operational city park.

Conservation Subdivision Ordinance

In May 2005, the City of Cumming amended its 2003 zoning ordinance to adopt a new Article XVIII, "conservation subdivisions." Cumming is therefore in compliance with the mandate of the North Georgia Water Planning District that local governments adopt and provide for conservation subdivisions. In many developed parts of metropolitan Atlanta, there are relatively few opportunities for conservation subdivision principles to be applied. However, there appear to be significant opportunities remaining for conservation subdivisions to be developed in parts of Cumming. At issue is whether the conservation subdivision option will be chosen by area

subdividers, or whether it will remain largely unused and inapplicable in Cumming. Policy changes encouraging conservation subdivisions may not be enough, and the city might consider stronger code requirements that force land developers to consider more seriously the conservation subdivision principles.

Comprehensive Natural Resources Inventory

Cumming's comprehensive plan, adopted in 2004, provides a comprehensive inventory of natural resources (see Chapter 5). That chapter maps and describes all major natural resources in the city, including wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, water supply watersheds, flood plains, slopes of 20 percent or more, and soils and their limitations on development. Therefore, Cumming is considered compliant with this strategy to promote the environmental protection objective.

"Part V" Environmental Ordinance Adoption and Enforcement

As a part of the revised zoning ordinance in 2003, Cumming adopted the environmental planning criteria adopted in 1990 pursuant to the Georgia Planning Act of 1989. Article X covers groundwater recharge areas, Article XI provides regulations for the Big Creek Water Supply Watershed, and Article XII provides regulations for wetlands. The regulations are enforced by the Director of Planning and Zoning as a part of the zoning ordinance. Therefore, Cumming is in compliance with this program which implements the environmental protection objective.

However, the issue has historically been and remains more complex with regard to protection of the Big Creek ("small") water supply watershed. The majority of land in the city limits of Cumming lies within the watershed of Big Creek, which is a water supply in the City of Roswell which has a water intake above the Chattahoochee River, several miles (outside a seven mile radius) downstream of Cumming. As alluded to above, Cumming has adopted the Environmental Planning Criteria for water supply watersheds (DNR Rule 391-3-16-01), as applicable to the Big Creek watershed, per Article XI of the zoning ordinance.

Big Creek Small Water Supply Watershed

Those regulations establish 50 foot buffer requirements on both sides of streams and tributaries of Big Creek within the City of Cumming, as well as minimum 75-foot setback for septic tanks and septic tank drainfields from those streams and tributaries. In addition, the city's regulations (Article XI of the zoning ordinance) reference the state environmental planning criterion that the Big Creek small water supply watershed shall not exceed twenty five percent impervious. Since the mid 1990s, if not before, it was recognized that the Big Creek small water supply watershed was unlikely to meet the 25 percent maximum impervious surface coverage threshold established by the state. Reasons for not meeting that standard include extensive development existing in

Roswell and Alpharetta, and extensive non-residential development in all local jurisdictions upstream of the Roswell water intake.

It is important to underscore that the 25 percent maximum impervious surface standard is for the watershed as a whole, not for individual jurisdictions in the watershed. Obviously, such a requirement would have to be coordinated among all the local governments in the watershed. Trying to enforce that watershed rule would mean that localities that had experienced in later time periods (e.g., Forsyth County and the City of Cumming) would have to place severe limitations on impervious surface due to the extensive existing development that had already occurred (or had been approved) in lower parts of the watershed (e.g., Roswell and Alpharetta). That consideration led to equity concerns, that upstream local governments should not be held to a higher standard than what existed or took place in the more developed, downstream jurisdictions. Furthermore, the situation led to concerns about the confiscatory possibilities such development limitations would pose on private property rights in the watershed. The 25 percent impervious limit for small water supply watersheds has led some to interpret the rule erroneously to suggest that each jurisdiction should limit its portion of the watershed to 25 percent, when again the rule is applied on the basis of the entire watershed. And again, to apply it to each individual local government would raise serious equity considerations for upstream local governments.

Recognizing those concerns, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) conducted a study of the Big Creek water supply watershed in the mid-1990s in an effort to establish an alternative to the 25 percent impervious limitation. Generally, ARC sought to prepare a watershed protection plan and program that would meet the alternative criterion established in DNR Rule 391-3-16-01. Specifically, the state rule provides that "criteria different than those in (6) and (7) [minimum criteria for large and small water supply watersheds, respectively] may be presented to the Department of Natural Resources by all the local governments within a water supply watershed. The Department of Natural Resources may approve such criteria if the Department of Natural Resources deems them to provide an equivalent level of protection to the criteria of (6) and (7), and if they provide at least as much stream corridor buffer and set back area in the watershed as the criteria of (6) and (7)."

While the study by ARC resulted in a report and meetings among local governments in the Big Creek watershed, it does not appear that any alternative criteria were agreed to by the affected local governments and/or presented to DNR. The ARC study has been largely forgotten.

The issue of limiting impervious surface in the Big Creek watershed has recently been revived by a watchdog group, "Smart Growth Forsyth, Inc." According to a newspaper account, the group has called for a building moratorium in Forsyth County's portion of the watershed, contending that only 1,600 acres of some 32,000 acres in Forsyth County's share of the watershed remain usable for development.[1]

[1] Badertscher, Nancy. March 5, 2009. "Watchdog Group Urges Building Moratorium." *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Page c-3.

Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Natural Resources

There are three primary areas of concern with regard to environmentally sensitive lands in Cumming. The first is flood plains. Cumming has a flood damage prevention or floodplain management ordinance which was rewritten and readopted August 15, 2006 as Chapter 38 of the Cumming City Code.

Secondly, while most of the City of Cumming's topography does not pose significant limitations on development, there are some areas that are considered to have steep slopes (20 percent or more as defined in the adopted comprehensive plan. The City has not enacted regulations to deal specifically with properties that have steep slopes. One such area, as mapped in the comprehensive plan, is Bald Ridge, which parallels Georgia 400 on the west. There is a difference in elevation of at least 100 feet between the top of Bald Ridge and Georgia 400, thus posing some difficult topography to develop. There are also some steep ridge lines in western Cumming, where land descends steeply to Kelley Mill Creek and Sawnee Creek.

Generally, Cumming's land development and soil erosion are considered sufficient regulations to address steeply sloping lands. However, because these steep slopes present a greater potential for soil erosion and permanently visible land alterations upon development, some consideration should be given to more restrictions on the development of steep slopes. As noted in the comprehensive plan, these significantly sloping lands are among the last to be developed in the city, thereby potentially justifying more scrutiny in the land development process. One such policy existing in the comprehensive plan is to limit development to no higher than 25 feet above the ridgeline of Bald Ridge.

A third area of concern deals with what are termed "environmentally sensitive parcels" in the Cumming Zoning Ordinance. Section 719 of the Cumming Zoning Ordinance addresses Environmentally Sensitive Parcels, which are lands "that have been previously used as a landfill or are known to pose substantial public environmental concerns." Prior to development or redevelopment, such lands are required to be preceded by a land reuse study and environmental strategy which describe the suitability of the proposed building, structure, or use on the parcel given its prior use, the stability of the ground, and the potential risk to the proposed buildings or structures and any occupants of any proposed buildings or structures, or proposed use established, on the site. environmental strategy may be required to address toxins, methane gas, or any other environmental issues that are likely to occur or be present as a result of the prior use of said parcel. The environmental mitigation or remediation recommended by a qualified professional may be made a condition of any building permit on any of the environmental sensitive parcels.

Tree Preservation and Tree-Replanting Ordinances

Cumming's zoning ordinance regulates land development, and as noted elsewhere in this assessment, most zoning districts require a minimum amount of landscaped open space be provided as development occurs. Also, within office, commercial, institutional and industrial zoning districts, landscape strips are required along right-of-ways. Minimum landscaping requirements are enforced through the land disturbance and development permit processes, which must include a landscape plan in order to meet the minimum landscaped open space

requirements. The definition of "landscaping" specifically includes the preservation of existing vegetation, including trees. There are certain buffer requirements along riparian areas and between potentially incompatible zoning districts which undoubtedly result in the retention of existing trees. While these provisions are bound to result in some protection and preservation of existing trees and the planting of new ones within required landscape strips and landscaped open space areas, the existing regulations do not specifically require a minimum number of trees.

Stormwater Best Management Practices for all New Development

Mandates to implement best management practices (BMPs) (both structural and non-structural) are described in the city's stormwater permit. In May 2005, Cumming adopted a new stormwater management ordinance which meets the mandate of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District. Furthermore, in 2005, the city evaluated the organization and staffing in the Utilities Department with an eye toward full enforcement of stormwater best management practices. Therefore, Cumming is in full compliance with this consideration.

This photo, not from the City of Cumming, illustrates the potential degradation of water quality without enforcement of stormwater best management practices.

GROWTH PREPAREDNESS

"Growth Preparedness Objective: Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These may include housing and infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and telecommunications) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances to direct growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities."

Summary

Cumming is in compliance with this Quality Community Objective, as Table 2 indicates. The paragraphs which follow describe the extent to which the city complies with the various considerations suggested in the QCO assessment tool.

Growth Trends and Projections in Relation to Infrastructure

In order to assess this quality community objective, it is necessary to acknowledge and quantify recent development activities in the community and compare them with adopted growth projections (see population, housing and employment in the technical appendix).

Table 2
Summary Assessment: Growth Preparedness QCO

QCO Considerations	Degree of Compliance	References/Notes/Comments
Growth Trends and Projections	Fully Compliant	Updated as a part of this plan update
Population Projections for Infrastructure Decisions	Fully Compliant	City has and will update detailed projections for the water and sewer service area on which to base master water and sewer plans
Compatibility of Projections with School Board Projections	Not Applicable	Such projections are not readily available
Review of Zoning Code and Development Regulations	Fully Compliant	Comprehensively updated during the 2003-2005 time period; see recommendations for environmental protection and open space QCOs
Land Development Process	Partially compliant; improvements suggested	Recommendations are made to improve understanding of requirements
Capital Improvements Program	Fully Compliant	Updated as part of this planning process
Designated Areas for Growth	Fully Compliant	See revised future land use plan map and vacant areas shown on existing land use map

A comparison of the projections in 2005 and 2010 with recent population data of the U.S. Census Bureau reveals that Cumming's population has increased faster than what was anticipated in the comprehensive plan during the last five years. In fact, as of 2005, Cumming exceeded (by slightly more than 100 persons) the 2010 projections for the city's population made in the 2003 comprehensive plan. Similarly, Forsyth County exceeded the 2005 population estimate in the county and city comprehensive plans (which used the same projections) by about 7,000 persons. While the county's recent housing and population increases have exceeded projections, the recent economic recession (2008-2010) has slowed that pace of growth and it is possible Forsyth County will not sustain its past population and housing growth trends due to overbuilding and anticipated market saturation time frames. It is also instructive to note that Forsyth County's longer term population of 227,000 persons in the year 2025 may not require revision.

The majority of Cumming's population increase of about 800 people, from 2003 to 2007, is attributed to housing construction in just three developments. During that time period or shortly thereafter, Cumming added about 190 townhouses in one project off Castleberry Road, 20 single-family detached homes north of Kelly Mill Road, and 160 units in a townhouse project off Veterans Memorial Parkway at Atlanta Road (SR 9). These three developments constituted virtually all of the total population gain during the time period.

These findings regarding the city's population growth exceeding projections are all the more reason why Cumming's existing land use inventory should be updated. Furthermore, a more refined method for projecting the buildout of development in the city would be of great benefit to the city in its planning processes. Accordingly, that work was done as a part of the 2009 partial plan update.

As noted in the adopted comprehensive plan, it is difficult to predict population increases that might occur due to annexation. Adding one major subdivision can substantially influence the city's total population. As a part of this assessment, a map has been prepared that shows possible future annexation areas (see Chapter 2). While no policy basis exists requiring the city to annex these areas in the future, the future city limit boundaries is useful in terms of Forsyth County and the city in anticipating possible future service arrangements.

Shifting from population to employment, Chapter 3 of the technical appendix to this community assessment provides projections of employment by industry. It is important to note, as alluded to under the discussion of employment options and related Quality Community Objectives, that employment data for the city are extremely limited.

For the City of Cumming, preparing for growth has, appropriately, focused primarily on ensuring that adequate water and sewer facilities will be in place to serve new development within the city and its larger service area. Cumming has prepared and implemented a capital improvement program for its water and sewer facilities, and in that regard it meets the spirit and intent of this quality community objective. The city has recently prepared updated master plans for water and sanitary sewer facilities within its service area. It is desirable that the city keep these master plan maps updated, and further, that it reconsider those master plans after doing more quantitative analysis of future needs, via population, housing, and employment projections.

The city has also planned ahead for its future administrative space needs, by constructing a city hall which will serve its facility needs for several years to come. It has also planned improvements at city parks and at the fairgrounds, and it established a new aquatics center.

Rapid growth in Forsyth County (until more recently) has stressed the road system, particularly state routes. For its part, Cumming has widened to four lanes major local roads leading to and within the city, including Veterans Memorial Parkway, Castleberry Road, and Tribble Gap Road. It has also completed local road improvements to Mary Alice Park Road, Pilgrim Mill Road, and participated with Forsyth County in the extension of Market Place Boulevard.

While Cumming has anticipated and been responsive to future demands on the local road system, the state route system is largely outside the scope of the city's responsibility and must receive financial attention of the Georgia Department of Transportation. Significant improvements over time have occurred to address traffic congestion on states routes in Cumming, such as the installation of a one-way pair system of roads between GA 400 and downtown (i.e., Pirkle Ferry Road and Maple Street), but it is generally accepted that potential remedies to traffic congestion are limited and that the state is largely unable to improve further the traffic flow on state routes in downtown Cumming. As stated in Forsyth County's Partial Plan Update:

"Projections show that, even after the 2030 road improvements are completed, 35 percent of Forsyth County roadways will operate at a level of service (LOS) of E or F. If funding shortfalls arise and some projects are not completed, those roadways could experience increased congestion resulting in countywide traffic problems. All but four of the Forsyth County roads that are projected to operate at a LOS of E or F in 2030 are state routes."

Population Projections for Infrastructure Decisions

Population and employment projections for the city are provided in the technical appendix of this community assessment, and such projections have been used in the past to arrive at the existing master plans for infrastructure. However, as also noted above, the city has an extraterritorial water and sewer service area (i.e., it extends well beyond the current city limits, as shown in Chapter 5 of the technical appendix of this community assessment). It is desirable that the city continue to update the projections of population and employment in the city's entire water and sewer service area.

Compatibility of Projections with School Board Projections

A search for population projections by the Forsyth County Board of Education did not yield any results. Therefore, at this time no comparison of the school board's projections with the city's can be made, to determine the degree of compatibility or incompatibility.

Review of Zoning Code and Development Regulations

Cumming comprehensively revised its zoning ordinance and official zoning map in 2003. In 2005, it amended the zoning ordinance. In May 2005, the city amended the zoning regulations to provide new regulatory chapters on conservation subdivisions and stream buffers. At that time, it also rewrote and adopted the model ordinances required for local governments within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District. Such regulations included revised flood damage prevention, soil erosion and sediment control, and subdivision and land development ordinances, as well as a new/revised stormwater ordinance. In 2008, the city adopted a comprehensive sign ordinance, and in 2009, the city adopted a new multi use zoning district as a part of the Cumming Zoning Ordinance. Generally, Cumming has met the spirit and intent of this program consideration by keeping its regulations up to date, particularly in light of state and regional mandates.

Understanding of Land Development Processes

This section combines several considerations suggested in the DCA QCO assessment tool, including the clarity and ease of understanding of development requirements, efforts to educate the citizens about land development processes, and efforts to maintain public awareness about planning and development issues.

Cumming's land development process is not complex or burdensome. Some but not all of the forms required to undertake development or to obtain a permit from the city are available from the city via its webpage under the Planning and Zoning Department.

The application form for a land disturbance (grading) permit is simple, at one page, and available from the city's planning and zoning department website for download. Fees are indicated on the permit application form. However, applicants may not know whether their project is "major" or "minor," and there are no definitions in the form or reference to them available on the web page. The applicant is asked whether the project is a development of regional impact (DRI) or not yet

may not know whether its project qualifies or not as a DRI. Also, the process of following the city's regulations is not summarized, and the regulations for issuing land disturbance permits are not available for download directly from the city's website. It is clear that the city requires that land development applicants submit their soil erosion plans separately to the Upper Chattahoochee River Soil and Water Conservation District prior to the city's approval. The process for inspections for land development does not appear to be specified.

The web-accessible information is also not as clear as it could be regarding the relationship of land disturbance permit approval to utility permitting. The city is the water and sewer utility provider, and the city also controls all utility approvals in-house. Fee amounts are available from the City of Cumming Utility Department's webpage, which is separate from the main web page of the city. There is also a section titled "4-Developers" which explains the fee requirements. Utilities-related ordinances are available for download, including stormwater management requirements. It is not immediately apparent how an applicant would navigate the utility site to inquire about approval of all plans, but all of the construction specifications (standard drawings) are available from the utilities web page and are available for download.

Given this brief review of land development permitting information via the web, it appears that the city's process is understandable but could be facilitated more easily with enhancements, additions, and cross-links to web-accessible information. While these observations apply only to the land development permitting process, they are likely to be applicable to several other permit processes such as sign permitting and the rezoning, conditional use, and variance processes. Furthermore, the city should look for additional permitting processes specified in its ordinances and provide information for them on the appropriate website.

Capital Improvements Program

The city's comprehensive plan includes a capital improvement program, which emphasizes water and wastewater improvements. As a part of this plan update, the city had updated the capital program as needed.

Designated Areas for Growth

The city's future land use plan map was updated and readopted during completion of the partial plan update in 2009. All vacant lands are anticipated to be developed during the 20-year planning horizon and are available for future development in accordance with the city's future land use plan map and zoning regulations.

EMPLOYMENT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

"Appropriate Business Objective: The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities."

"Employment Options Objective: A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce."

"Educational Opportunities Objective: Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions."

Summary

Cumming is in compliance with these Quality Community Objectives, as Table 3 indicates. The paragraphs which follow describe the extent to which the city complies with the various considerations suggested in the QCO assessment tool.

Table 3
Summary Assessment: Employment and Education QCOs

QCO Considerations	Degree of Compliance	References/Notes/Comments
Analysis of Types of Existing Businesses	Fully Compliant	Analysis updated in technical appendix of this community assessment
Diversity of Job Base	Fully Compliant	Analysis updated in technical appendix
Business Development Strategy	Fully Compliant	See Chamber of Commerce
Plans to Recruit Compatible Businesses and Industries	Fully Compliant	Plans articulated by Chamber of Commerce
Entrepreneur Support Program	Fully Compliant	Chamber of Commerce
Workforce Training Options	Fully Compliant	See Lanier Technical College
Higher Education Opportunities	Fully Compliant	North Georgia College & State University

Analysis of Types of Existing Businesses

As the only incorporated municipality and the central economy hub of Forsyth County, the City of Cumming has a very strong economic base and a wide variety of businesses and sources of jobs. Cumming is the location for a substantial share of the county's employment, totaling almost 30 percent of selected industry sectors.

As of 2002, Cumming had more than one-half of all retail trade jobs and more than 42 percent of all jobs in the accommodation and food services industries in Forsyth County. Since 2002, retail trade establishments have grown in a decentralized pattern throughout much of Forsyth County, but expansion of retail trade along Market Place Boulevard has been substantial and Cumming is still expected to have a majority or nearly a majority of the retail trade establishments and employment in Forsyth County. Similarly, Cumming is the services center for the county, with a majority of the jobs in educational services and health care and social assistance in the county as of 2002. Cumming is also the government center of the county, with a concentration of city, county, state, and federal government offices as well as a significant number of the county's public schools. For more detailed information, please see Chapter 3 of the technical appendix of this community assessment.

Diversity of Job Base versus a Reliance on Single Industries

One can conclude from the foregoing analysis of industries that the city has a well-diversified economic base, one that is especially strong in government, retail trade, manufacturing, and health care, but that also maintains substantial shares of total county employment in other industry sectors such as real estate and significant shares in others such as information. Cumming's revised future land use plan provides for expansion of all major sectors of the economy. There is considerable vacant acreage for the expansion of retail trade, office-professional establishments, and services, health care in particular. And there are still properties within Cumming that can be developed for light industrial and manufacturing establishments. Hence, Cumming provides significant opportunities now and is poised to continue being the location for a wide variety of jobs for skilled labor, unskilled labor, recent college graduates, and professionals and managers.

Analysis of Strengths/Weaknesses and Business Development Strategy

The Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce is a joint effort between the city and the county to provide information and resources to the citizens both within the city limits and in the unincorporated areas. The Chamber provides information on community events, education, economic development, new arrivals, and sporting events.

According to Forsyth County's Partial Plan Update (2009), The Development Authority of Forsyth County, in conjunction with Forsyth County government and the Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce, recently completed a target market analysis for Cumming and Forsyth County. This analysis covers strengths, challenges, and opportunities for both the city and county which was incorporated into the development of the county's business strategy plan.

The analysis determined that despite the recent decline in activity, the sagging national housing market, and the dipping consumer confidence, Forsyth County has and will continue to experience growth due to factors such as its location within the Atlanta metropolitan region, its workforce talents, and its lower tax rate in comparison to surrounding jurisdictions. The business analysis strategy has taken into consideration not only the factors listed above, but also input from the community, the existing economic base, and desired industries as well as national industrial trends (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

Plans to Recruit Compatible Businesses and Industries

Pharmaceutical manufacturing and testing is a new growth industry target that the County is interested in pursuing (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

Entrepreneur Support Program

The Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce operates a small business center which develops programs and initiatives to assist the local small business community. Forsyth has been labeled as Georgia's 30th Entrepreneur Friendly County, and through the Chamber it offers year

round small business classes such as long range strategic planning, job market trends, and advertising 101, in addition to a business expo and entrepreneur conference. In 2008, the Chamber created the community's first small business accelerator which is designed to seek out small business owners and entrepreneurs who are established and ready to grow in their business. This service also provides mentoring and business coaching through community business leaders and stakeholders to foster business growth, and create an initiative centered around new job creation and community based "economic gardening." (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

Workforce Training Options

Lanier Technical College serves as the leading workforce development resource for eight counties, including Forsyth, by providing adult education and technical training to support the economic development and well being of the community. Lanier Technical College has a branch located in Forsyth County which provides an economic development program called Quick Start. This program specializes in customized workforce training free of charge to qualified businesses in Georgia. Today, the program is one of the state's key assets for supporting new and expanding industries by training and educating residents within the community to successful obtain and excel in various employment opportunities (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

Existence of or Proximity to Higher Education Opportunities

North Georgia College and State University has a satellite Masters in Business Administration (MBA) program in the City of Cumming. It currently operates out of the fourth floor of Cumming City Hall, but there are plans underway for North Georgia College and State University to build a new campus on city-owned property (the aquatics center complex) between Pilgrim Mill Road and Georgia 400, which will further enhance higher education offerings in the locality. Cumming is located within convenient travel distances to other universities and colleges in Gwinnett and Fulton Counties.

HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

"Housing Opportunities Objective: Quality housing and a range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community, to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community."

"Traditional Neighborhood Objective: Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity."

"Infill Development Objective: Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community."

Summary

When Cumming prepared its current comprehensive plan in 2003, it was aware of the state's Quality Community Objectives and indeed adopted the QCOs. Cumming scores relatively well with regard to implementation of all measures associated with these three QCOs (Table 4).

Table 4
Summary Assessment: Housing, Traditional Neighborhood and Infill QCOs

QCO Considerations	Degree of Compliance	References/Notes/Comments
Mixed Use Districts	Fully compliant	CBD; new multi-use zoning district
Traditional Neighborhoods	Not fully compliant	See revised future land use plan map
Infill Development	Fully compliant	Revised existing land use inventory showing vacant sites
Redevelopment	Partially compliant; implementation needed	SR 9 corridor and CBD identified; more detailed planning suggested
Brownfield and Greyfield Development	Fully compliant	Zoning ordinance Section 719
Nodal Versus Strip or Linear Commercial Development	Not compliant	Land use plan recognizes linear commercial zoning patterns
Small Lot Residential Development	Not compliant	Generally inconsistent with city land use policies; some prospects exist, however
Development Following the Pattern of the Original Town	Compliant to the extent applicable	Policy support in comprehensive plan
Allowance for Accessory Housing Units	Fully compliant	Zoning ordinance Table 5.1 and Section 702
Affordable Housing for Workers in the Community	Fully compliant	Wide variety of affordable housing opportunities exist in the city
Sufficient Housing for Each Income Level	Fully compliant	Wide variety of affordable housing opportunities exist in the city
Options for Loft living and Downtown Living	Fully compliant	Zoning ordinance CBD zoning district; loft project in CBD complete
Other Allowances for Multi-family Housing	Not compliant – reconsideration suggested	Prescriptive standards for amount of bedrooms should be evaluated against market needs
Vacant and Developable Land Available for Multi-family Housing	Compliant	One large site available and zoned; more prospects exist for multi-family housing within mixed use developments
Community Development Corporations	Not compliant	No known CDCs operating in Cumming
Households with Special Housing Needs	Fully compliant	Zoning ordinance is permissive

The city meets virtually all housing opportunities considerations although there are some additional recommendations for Cumming that flow from this analysis. Cumming's Central Business District clearly matches the description and vision for the traditional neighborhood development QCO. Furthermore, the city has put in place appropriate mixed use development opportunities and has amended the future land use plan map to accommodate stand-alone traditional neighborhood development. With regard to the infill development QCO, the city complies with this objective by updating its existing land use inventory, promoting concentrated

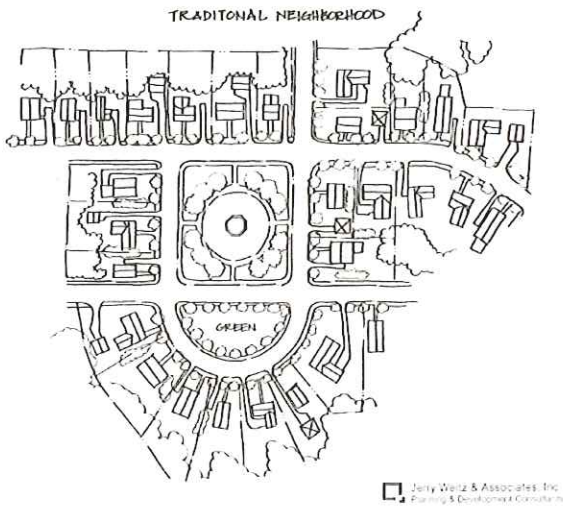
development in its CBD, and with plans to pursue redevelopment along the Atlanta Street (SR 9) corridor and in the CBD.

One or More Mixed Use Districts

Most of the zoning districts established in Cumming's zoning ordinance are single purpose such as for residential, institutional, commercial, etc. Single-family, detached dwellings are permitted outright in several non-residential zoning districts, including office-professional, institutional, neighborhood commercial, and highway business. This means that any one of those zoning districts can have a mixture of single-family and non-residential uses (i.e., "horizontal mixed uses"). The Central Business District (CBD) zoning district allows dwellings, located within a building containing another principal use, which is a form of "vertical" mixed use. In addition, the city in 2009 amended the zoning ordinance to create a new multi-use district. Therefore, the city authorizes the mixing of uses in a limited fashion in non-residential zoning districts and to a more formal extent in the CBD and the mixed use zoning districts. The city therefore complies with this criterion.

Traditional Neighborhood Development by Right

There are a few existing neighborhoods close to the central business district with some of the characteristics of traditional neighborhoods. Many of these neighborhoods are older (1950s and 1960s) and may become "areas requiring special attention" because of probable land use transitions to other uses and/or the need to target them for community development programs. Revisions have been made to the future land use plan to accommodate stand-alone traditional neighborhood development.



Illustrative Traditional Neighborhood

Also, as noted above under "mixed uses," Cumming's zoning ordinance allows relatively small lots to be used for single-family dwellings in several non-residential zoning districts. Generally, Cumming's zoning ordinance does not define traditional neighborhood development, nor are there guidelines or principles which are designed to particularly encourage this form of development. . Again, the CBD zoning district and the new mixed use district both accommodate the basic principles of traditional neighborhood development.

Prospects for Infill Development

A revised existing land use inventory was completed in 2009 by the city's planning consultant. That inventory reveals that there are still several places in the City of Cumming that are ripe for nonresidential and residential infill development, and additional development has occurred on some of them since 2009.

Despite the downturn in the economy from 2008 to 2010, there is still significant building in the city underway or recently completed. In particular, the city's office market is blossoming with several office developments recently completed, including the infilling of (1) vacant tracts around the location of the old hospital site just west of the Central Business District; (2) additional property between East Maple Street and Pirkle Ferry Road; and along the south side of West Maple Street near its intersection with Kelly Mill Road. With regard to commercial and office infill development, there are a number of vacant lots which are appropriate for additional commercial and office development.

The Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce maintains an inventory of vacant sites and buildings in the county that are available for redevelopment or infill development using the CoStar Real Estate Database (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

Areas in Need of Redevelopment

With regard to redevelopment, though scattered sites exist which are in need of redevelopment, there is no significant pattern or concentration of parcels in need of redevelopment, except for the Atlanta Road (SR 9) corridor south of the CBD. The adopted comprehensive plan recognizes the need to revitalize this part of the city, and the work program calls for a special study and plan to help implement this objective. Similarly, the adopted comprehensive plan is supportive of redevelopment in the CBD.

Atlanta Highway (SR 9), south of downtown, could benefit from revitalization and redevelopment strategies.

Promotion of Brownfield and Greyfield Development

Though not considered "brownfields" in the traditional sense of that term, Cumming has an old landfill site and other parcels in the city which are known to pose substantial public environmental concerns. Several parcels are identified in the zoning ordinance, Section 719, as "Environmentally Sensitive Parcels." These areas have unstable ground or other situations that require environmental monitoring or compliance. Environmentally sensitive parcels are declared to be unsafe for building without additional technical review. A land reuse study and environmental strategy are required to be submitted prior to redevelopment.

Nodal Versus Strip or Linear Commercial Development

To some extent, Cummings future land use plan and zoning ordinance provide for a nodal development pattern with respect to neighborhood commercial uses. Examples of such neighborhood commercial nodes include the both intersections of Dahlonega Highway (SR 9) with SR 306, as well as the intersection of Nicholson Road and Castleberry Road.

However, the remainder of commercial zoning and development areas, which are mostly auto-oriented in nature, are spread out along major thoroughfares of the city, including SR 9 (Atlanta Road) from the southern city limits into the downtown, SR 20 west of the city, and along Market Place Boulevard which itself might be considered a regional shopping node. While some planning principles would suggest that strip or linear commercial development should be limited, it has been in existence in Cumming for more than 30 years and as such is unlikely to be altered to any significant degree.

Small Lot Residential Development (5,000 square feet or less)

Cumming does not have a small lot, single-function residential zoning district. The smallest lot size in R zones is 12,500 square feet in the R-3 zoning district. Small lot (6,000 square foot) development is permitted for single-family dwellings in several non-residential zoning districts, including office-professional, institutional, neighborhood commercial, highway business, and central business district. However, an overall cap in density of three units per acre is imposed, in order to prevent the large-scale use of those non-residential zoning districts for single-family use. Generally, Cumming elected in 2003 (as part of its zoning ordinance rewrite) to concentrate density vertically, in the downtown (CBD zoning district), as opposed to having small lot subdivisions.

Development Following the Pattern of the Original Town

Unlike some of the older "county seat" towns in Georgia, Cumming has a relatively limited "grid" network in its downtown. Virtually all of the blocks resembling a grid pattern in the downtown are occupied by office, institutional, government, and commercial uses. Given the unique way in which Cumming developed, it has relatively few "in-town" neighborhoods that were developed close to the Central Business District (CBD) with a grid network pattern of streets. Because of the way major thoroughfares radiate in a diagonal fashion outward from the central business district, extension of a downtown grid pattern of streets has not taken place. Topography has also constrained the extension of a grid pattern outside the CBD. With these limitations noted, however, the CBD policies fully support a more "fine-grained" development of small blocks. There are also some opportunities for extension of the denser network of streets found in the CBD, which again are recognized and encouraged in the comprehensive plan. Additionally, the city's plan policies support extension of a grid network of streets along Pilgrim Mill Road as new residential development occurs (see also discussion under the transportation alternatives QCO).

Allowance for Accessory Housing Units

Article II of the Cumming Zoning Ordinance defines both "detached" and "attached" accessory apartments. Attached accessory apartments are allowed outright in R-2 and R-3 zoning districts and permitted via conditional use in R-1 and R-1A zoning districts. Detached accessory apartments are allowed only by conditional use permit in R-2 and R-3 zoning districts (Table 5.1). All accessory apartment units are further regulated by Section 702 of the zoning ordinance, which specifies that units shall be at least 400 square feet and no larger than 1,000 square feet.

A dwelling unit above a garage is one example of an accessory housing unit, conditionally permitted by Cumming's zoning ordinance.

Affordable Housing for Workers in the Community

Cumming provides a concentration of many, diverse types of housing which are relatively non-existent in unincorporated Forsyth County. Beginning with what is usually considered the most private affordable housing type, Cumming has one mobile home park in the northern part of the city. New manufactured home parks are permitted in the city, but only after a conditional use permit is secured and only in the R-3 zoning district. Second, Cumming has a housing authority which operates housing for low- and moderate-income households.

Housing operated by the City of Cumming Housing Authority, along Tolbert Street and extending to the south side of West Maple Street. This complex provides significant housing for low- and moderate income households.

Third, the city has some "in town" neighborhoods close to the Central Business District which provide modest, affordable, single-family detached homes, some of which contain duplexes. Fourth, the city is home to a significant number of apartment complexes. Affordable apartment homes exist at several locations, including those along the east and west sides of Castleberry Road near Hutchinson Road and Tolbert Street, an older multi-family complex south of Meadow Drive just west of Atlanta Road (SR 9), and a complex west of Bald Ridge Road fronting on the south side of East Maple Street. Fifth, some townhouses have been constructed, and as noted earlier, Cumming allows for accessory apartments to be constructed in certain zoning districts.

Median family and non-family household incomes in Forsyth County have risen extensively over the past decade, such that other low and moderate income housing opportunities are less necessary, to the extent they are not already provided by Cumming's existing housing stock. Also, it is believed that there is more than a fair share of affordable housing opportunities in Cumming when considered in the context of the county as a whole.

Sufficient Housing for Each Income Level

As noted above, the City of Cumming has a wide variety of single-family dwellings, duplexes, some manufactured homes, townhouses, apartments, and public housing that collectively meet the needs for housing for each income level in the community. As noted in the county's partial plan update, although the county does not currently meet the need for affordable housing nor does it sponsor any programs that focus on households with special needs, the county, along with North Fulton, Cherokee, and Dawson County merged to form Habitat for Humanity-North Central Georgia in 2006. To date, Habitat for Humanity-North Central Georgia has built over 250 homes throughout their service area (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

Options for Loft living and Downtown Living

The city's CBD zoning district provides opportunities for the development of mixed-use projects, including downtown loft living. There is one project already under construction that will provide Cumming's first downtown loft living opportunities (picture right).

Cumming Station is in the CBD and provides lofts for downtown living.

Vacant and Developable Land Available for Multi-family Housing

As noted previously, the city made a decision back in 2003 to concentrate its multi-family housing stock in the downtown CBD, as opposed to spreading out such development opportunities in various parts of the city. Nonetheless, Cumming has one large site on the east side of Pilgrim Mill Road which is zoned for a large apartment complex. In addition, there are some extensive tracts of vacant land in Cumming which are most likely to be appropriate for large mixed-use developments, which could include multi-family housing.

Other Allowances for Multi-family Housing

Cumming's zoning ordinance (Section 714) provides some unique provisions with regard to future multi-family development. All developments containing twenty-five (25) or more dwelling units shall have a clubhouse, swimming pool, and tennis court(s). This provision was required so as to ensure that new apartment complexes provided sufficient on-site, active recreational facilities and to avoid overwhelming the city's park and recreation facilities. While the public purpose behind requiring these amenities is certainly justified, it may have the effect of discouraging additional multi-family dwellings in the city. These requirements are now antiquated. Section 714 of the zoning ordinance is also quite prescriptive in terms of specifying the mix of one-bedroom (at least

40 percent of the total units provided), two-bedroom (no more than 50 percent of total), and three-bedroom apartments (no more than 10 percent of total units).

Community Development Corporations

Cumming does not operate or cooperate with any known community development corporations.

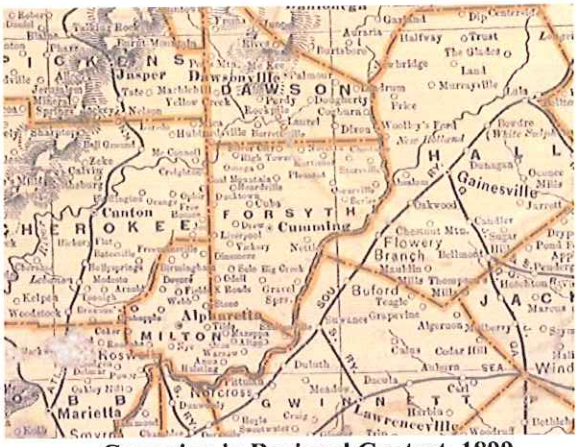
Households with Special Housing Needs

Cumming's zoning ordinance is reasonably permissive with regard to institutions and households with special housing needs. Institutional residential living and care facilities are defined in the zoning ordinance to include assisted living facilities, intermediate care homes, nursing homes, and personal care homes. Such facilities, when they serve no more than seventeen persons, are permitted uses in multi-family residential, office-professional, institutional, central business, and highway business zoning districts. Such homes with more than seventeen persons are permitted outright in institutional, central business, and highway business zoning districts and conditionally permitted in office-professional zoning districts.

In addition, Cumming's zoning ordinance allows for smaller homes in single-family neighborhoods. The definition of family reads: An individual, or two (2) or more persons related by blood, marriage, adoption or guardianship, or a group of not more than six (6) unrelated persons, occupying a single dwelling unit and using the same cooking facilities; provided however that domestic servants employed on the premises may be housed on the premises without being counted as a separate family or families. Any group which is licensed by the State of Georgia, or any political subdivision thereof, which contains up to six (6) developmentally disabled persons and up to two supervisors or surrogate parents residing on the premise at one time shall constitute a family." Therefore, Cumming's land use policies with regard to specialized housing arrangements are permissive and meet the spirit and intent of the housing needs QCO.

SENSE OF PLACE, COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND AESTHETICS

"Heritage Preservation Objective: The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community's character."



Cumming in Regional Context, 1899

"Sense of Place Objective: Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity

centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment."

Summary

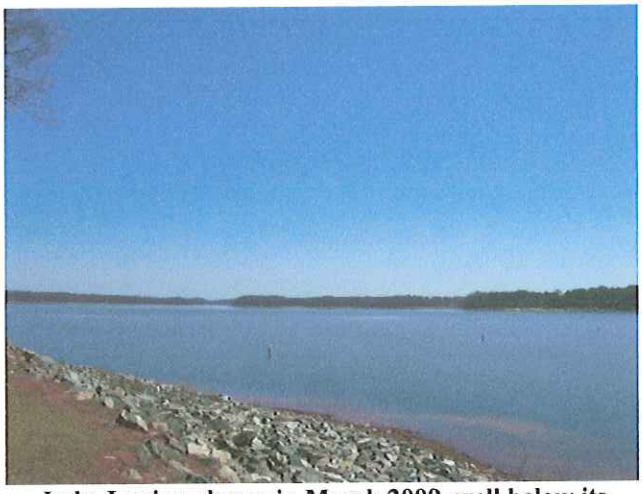
Cumming is in compliance with some but not all of these Quality Community Objectives, as Table 5 indicates. The paragraphs which follow describe the extent to which the city complies with the various considerations suggested in the QCO assessment tool.

Table 5
Summary Assessment: Character and Design-Related QCOs

QCO Considerations	Degree of Compliance	References/Notes/Comments
Characteristics of the Region	Fully Compliant	City capitalizes on Lake Lanier
Distinct, Recognizable Aspects of the Community	Mostly Inapplicable	Key landmarks, Buford Dam and Sawnee Mountain, lie just outside the city limits
Historic Districts and Historic Preservation Commission	Mostly Inapplicable	No local historic district exists; City has made efforts to preserve historic structures
Areas of Historical Importance	Fully Compliant	City has purchased and rehabilitated the historic sites including the Cumming School and old Gas Station
Ordinances Regulating Signage	Fully Compliant	City adopted sign ordinance in 2008
Ordinances Regulating Aesthetics	Partially Compliant	City has elected to regulate aesthetics through rezoning conditions, but does not have an appearance ordinance or require design review
Development Guidebook and Design Guidelines	Partially Compliant	City provides design guidance or development guidance on a case-by-case basis rather than through a guidebook
Plan for Protecting Designated Farmland	Inapplicable	Remaining agricultural lands are slated for development per 2003 policy
Street Tree Ordinance	Not Compliant	Development regulations could be reexamined
Street Tree Planting Campaign	Partially Compliant	Street trees installed as a part of streetscape improvements; addition to programs recommended
Clean and Beautiful Programs	Fully Compliant	Keep Forsyth County Beautiful

Characteristics of the Region

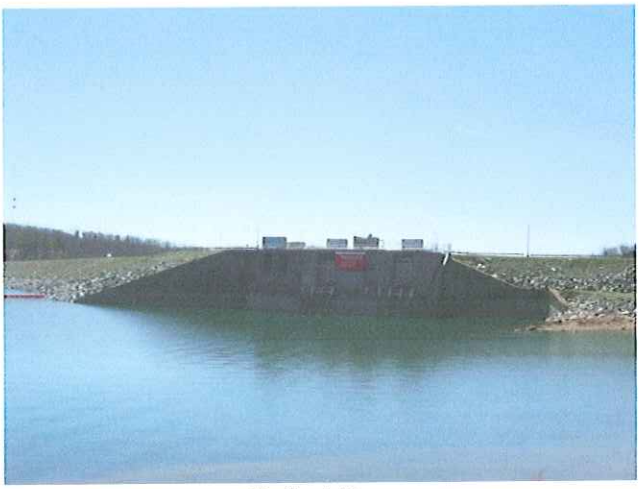
While Cumming and Forsyth County are becoming increasingly absorbed into the metropolitan Atlanta area, as one leaves Fulton County along Georgia 400, he or she enters the territory of Lake Lanier. While not recognized as a region onto itself, the vast Lake Sidney Lanier encompasses parts of Forsyth, Hall, Dawson, and Lumpkin Counties in the Georgia Mountains region. The lake is a common bond among these counties, forming important economic linkages as well as regional recreation opportunities.



Lake Lanier, shown in March 2009, well below its normal pool elevation of 1071.

Distinct, Recognizable Aspects of the Community

Two distinct landmarks exist in the Cumming area, Buford Dam (forming Lake Lanier and pictured right) and Sawnee Mountain. Cumming is associated with both, as Buford Dam Road crosses the dam and intersects with Atlanta Highway (SR 9) south of the downtown, and Sawnee Mountain (see prior discussion) lies just northwest of the city limits.



Buford Dam

Historic Districts and Historic Preservation Commission

The 2015 comprehensive plan recommended that the city adopt a citywide preservation ordinance and strive to become a certified local government. These recommendations were not implemented, primarily because there were very few historically and architecturally significant structures in the city and a decade later, those recommendations were dropped from the city's plan. Cumming therefore does not have any locally designated historic districts.

The most significant concentration of historic resources, some of which still exist, is along Kelly Mill Road. The Kelly Mill Road area in Cumming was previously identified in the 2015 General Plan and the Historic Resources Survey as having the greatest potential to be designated as an historic district. However, there are not sufficient historically or architecturally significant structures remaining along Kelly Mill Road to warrant designation as a local historic district. However, the City has made efforts to assist preservation of those assets both through private restoration (the Redd House on Kelly Mill Road) as well as through city funded restoration of historic properties (the Cumming School House and the Brannon-Heard Hotel). While

Cumming elected not to establish one or more historic districts, it did adopt historic preservation policies including nominating worthy structures to the National Register of Historic Places and encouraging adaptive reuse of historic resources for government uses, among others. As noted below, Cumming has implemented those policies.

Areas of Historical Importance

Historic preservation has been considered in past comprehensive planning efforts. The General Plan for the Year 2015, the plan preceding the current adopted comprehensive plan, contained an inventory of historic resources and landmarks. That older plan notes that according to a 1996 survey, there were 47 historic properties within the city limits of Cumming. Historic resources were mapped in the city's 2003 comprehensive plan (see Chapter 5 of the technical appendix of this community assessment). While some of these historic properties remain both in restored and unrestored status, many have not been preserved either due to lack of architectural significance or degradation of the structure to the point of making it impossible to preserve or restore.

However, Cumming purchased and renovated the Cumming School, located at the northwest corner of School Street and Pilgrim Mill Road (pictured right). It is an old school house which later served as an office for the Forsyth County Board of Education. It was constructed in about 1923. This structure is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It houses a city department and also the Historical Society of Forsyth County, Inc. Also, most recently, the city purchased and restored an old gas station in the downtown which has long been recognized as a historic structure.

Cumming School, renovated by the City, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition, the City of Cumming purchased and completely refurbished the Brannon-Heard House, located at 111 Pilgrim Mill Road near the intersection with Pirkle Ferry and Highway 9/20. This structure was the only remaining travelers' hotel from the early 1900's remaining within the city. Built in 1905 by Charlie Brannon as a hotel, the structure was subsequently used as a boarding house, a dentist's office, divided into apartments and then purchased by Clifton Heard in 1945 and made a single family dwelling, finally operating as Heard's Antiques. The city purchased the dilapidating structure in 2006 and after three years of meticulous renovation and expansion, it re-opened to the public in May, 2009. The Brannon-Heard House has been used to date for the Sawnee Artist's Association "Art in Historic Cumming" and The Cumming-Forsyth Fibre-Artist's "Rug Exhibition." It is presently serving the community as a cultural events center geared toward presentation and preservation of local art and history.

Sketch of Original Brannon-Heard House

Brannon-Heard House as restored by the City, Now a Cultural Arts Center

Ordinances Regulating Signage

In February 2008, the City adopted a sign ordinance. Other than some regulations which applied only to the Georgia 400 corridor, until 2008 signage in Cumming was largely unregulated.

Ordinances Regulating Aesthetics

The city does not have any special regulations that govern the aesthetics of development. Rather, the city has implemented imposition of aesthetic requirements as conditions of rezoning and development of property on a case by case basis.

Development Guidebook and Design Guidelines

The city does not have any development or design guidelines.

Plan for Protecting Designated Farmland

Cumming elected back in 2003 to discontinue its agricultural zoning, thus eliminating its agricultural zoning district. There is still some agricultural land in Cumming, located between Dahlonega Highway (SR 9) and Pilgrim Mill Road (photo right). However, no specific plans exist for the retention of land for agricultural use, since during the planning horizon it is expected that agricultural lands will convert to housing or other uses.

Horses are still kept inside the city limits, such as on this property east of Camilla Street.

Street Tree Ordinance

In 2002, the city comprehensively rewrote its subdivision and land development regulations. Section 525 of that ordinance addresses street tree requirements. However, it simply provides that "street trees and other shrubbery that may be retained or planted shall be placed or retained so as not to obstruct sight distances at street intersections."

Market Place Boulevard, terminating at Bald Ridge Marina Road (currently outside the city limits), is a road that could benefit from the installation of street trees.

Therefore, that code provision is not proactive in terms of requiring the planting of street trees along the public road frontages of new developments and alongside new public streets to be dedicated to the city. There is also an opportunity, not yet implemented, to install street trees when major road improvements are made in the city.

Street Tree Planting Campaign

With the exception of planting street trees in the downtown area (CBD) of Cumming as a part of overall streetscape improvement projects, Cumming has not formally engaged in any street tree planting campaigns. As noted above, there are opportunities to beautify the city streets by engaging on its own initiative, or through cooperative efforts with other agencies, to provide street tree plantings during road improvements or to beautify existing streets in the city.

Clean and Beautiful Programs

Although the city does not operate its own clean and beautiful program, Forsyth County does on a countywide basis. According to the county website, Keep Forsyth County Beautiful was formed in 1993 and in June 21, 1994, that organization received certification as an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, Inc. The mission of Keep Forsyth County Beautiful is to cooperate with government, businesses, schools, civic organizations and citizens in a joint effort to improve beautification, litter reduction and recycling. The organization also sponsors annual events to promote volunteerism and increase public awareness of environmental issues, including but not limited to Christmas tree recycling, the Great American Cleanup, and a "Rivers Alive" Waterway Cleanup.

MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION

"Transportation Alternatives Objective: Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities, should be made available. Greater use of alternative transportation should be encouraged."

Summary

When Cumming prepared its current comprehensive plan in 2003, it was aware of the state's Quality Community Objectives and indeed adopted the QCOs. It prepared its comprehensive plan in a manner that acknowledges and implements the transportation alternatives QCO. Therefore, Cumming complies in its entirety with the various considerations suggested by the state assessment tool for quality community objectives relative to multi-modal transportation. The paragraphs in this section articulate the extent to which the city complies with the suggested benchmarks and other considerations of the state's QCO assessment tool. The findings are summarized as follows:

Table 6
Summary Assessment: Transportation Alternatives QCO

Transportation Consideration	Degree of Compliance	References/Notes/Comments
Evaluation of Sidewalk Network	Fully compliant	Chapter 10, comprehensive plan
Sidewalk Requirements for New Development	Fully compliant	Chapter 10, comprehensive plan; Sections 526 and 529 subdivision regulations
Connection of New Sidewalks to Existing Network	Fully compliant	Chapter 10, comprehensive plan; Sec. 529 subdivision regulations
Sidewalk and Vegetation Maintenance	Compliant; policy supportive	2004 adopted comprehensive plan
Plan for Bicycle Routes	Fully compliant	2004 adopted comprehensive plan
Safe Biking Routes to Schools	Compliant; policy supportive	2004 adopted comprehensive plan
Multi-Use Trail System Development	Policy supportive; implementation required	2004 adopted comprehensive plan
Public Transportation	Compliant; policy supportive	2004 adopted comprehensive plan
Connectivity of Development	Fully compliant	Section 904 zoning ordinance
Shared Parking Allowances	Fully compliant	Sections 901.6 and 913 zoning ordinance
Continuation of Existing Street Design	Compliant; policy supportive	2004 adopted comprehensive plan

Evaluation of Sidewalk Network

Cumming's adopted comprehensive plan includes a transportation element which provides an inventory and assessment of the city's sidewalk network. See Chapter 6 of the technical appendix of this community assessment for a tabular inventory of the existing sidewalk network on the arterial and collector road system in Cumming as of June 2003. In contrast with many small cities, Cumming is very well accessible via pedestrians due to its prior commitment to constructing adequate sidewalks along major city streets. The adopted (2004) comprehensive plan also provides in Table 10.18 and Table 10.19 specific needs for sidewalk additions and improvements through the year 2025, and a sidewalk improvement plan is provided in tabular format in Table 10.20 of the plan and Maps 10.8 and 10.9 illustrate the planned sidewalk network. These will be integrated into the community agenda.

Cumming has also ensured the installation of sidewalks in new road improvement projects, such as Mary Alice Park Road (figure right). This is a good example of the city's and county's commitment to improve the sidewalk network, in and around the city. The sidewalks along Mary Alice Park Road now provide for safe pedestrian access all the way from SR 9 (upon improvement of that intersection in the near future) with Mary Alice Park on Lake Lanier, more than a few miles away.

Sidewalks, including ramps for handicapped access, were installed on both sides of Mary Alice Park Road as a part of a roadway improvement in 2009.

Cumming is compliant with this QCO in terms of providing detailed inventories, assessments, and plans for the long-range improvement of its citywide sidewalk network. Also, a review of the 2003 sidewalk plan for the year 2025 reveals that Cumming's adopted plans score highly with respect to assuring that neighborhoods are linked with pedestrian access to various destinations, that neighborhoods have good pedestrian access to schools, and that there are multiple, safe walking routes to schools.

Sidewalk Requirements for New Development

Cumming's subdivision and land development regulations, rewritten in 2002, provide some requirements for the installation of sidewalks. Section 526 of that ordinance provides sidewalk specifications including standard widths of five feet in residential areas and eight feet in commercial areas. Section 529 that subdivisions and land developments that abut and access an abutting public street, shall have sidewalk and other road improvements installed along all abutting public streets. Therefore, Cumming complies with this consideration.

Connection of New Sidewalks to Existing Network

Cumming's adopted comprehensive plan contains a transportation element (Chapter 10) which includes policies for pedestrians and other travel modes. It specifically includes a policy that "individual developments, except for detached, single-family lots, shall provide direct pedestrian access ways to all public sidewalks or multi-use trails when located on a public street abutting the property to be development. While this policy is considered enforceable at the time of land development, Cumming should strengthen this policy with code requirements in its subdivision and land development regulations that specifically require these improvements. The subdivision and land development regulations specifically require in Section 529 that subdivisions and land developments that abut and access an abutting public street shall have sidewalk and other road improvements installed along all abutting public streets.

Sidewalk and Vegetation Maintenance

Cumming's 2004 comprehensive plan specifically calls for adequate funding to make repairs and to maintain the existing sidewalk network that is the city's responsibility (as opposed to state routes or county roads). Therefore, the city complies with this consideration.

Plan for Bicycle Routes

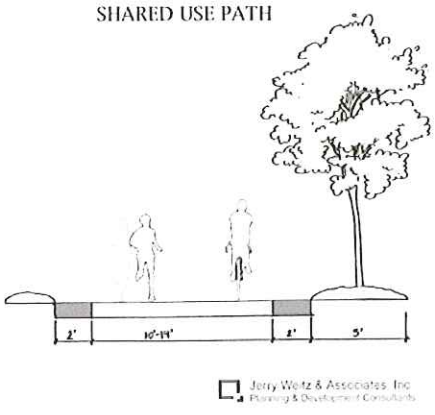
Cumming's 2004 comprehensive plan, transportation element (Chapter 10) is supportive of the provision of bicycle facilities. It calls for the city to encourage bike path opportunities in conjunction with other projects and programs, especially for access to schools (see discussion below). Furthermore, it calls for improvements to the transportation system over the long range (year 2025) to add bicycle travel lanes to the city's transportation system. It also calls for shared bicycle facility travel improvements along Kelly Mill Road and extension of the county's plan for a bikeway east of Georgia 400 (probably along Market Place Boulevard). Long-range improvements for bike facilities include these projects, as articulated in Table 10.22 of the comprehensive plan. The city's comprehensive plan also articulates standards for bicycle facilities. The *Atlanta Region Bicycle Transportation & Pedestrian Walkways Plan* identifies three roadways in Forsyth County as "strategic bicycle corridors," two of which are partially within the City of Cumming: State Route 9 and Buford Highway SR 20. Also, Forsyth County has adopted a Bicycle Transportation and Pedestrian Walkways Plan, and in 2008 it was updated by the county.

Safe Biking Routes to Schools

The City of Cumming's Transportation Element (Chapter 10 of the adopted 2004 comprehensive plan) specifically articulates a policy to work with the County school board to coordinate the provision of bicycle facilities at existing and proposed school facilities. Cumming is therefore in compliance with this aspect of the transportation alternatives QCO.

Multi-Use Trail System Development

The adopted (2004) comprehensive plan specifically calls for Cumming to extend a multi-use trail proposed by Forsyth County east of Georgia 400 and to explore possibilities to connect to the county's proposed greenway to Sawnee Mountain. Forsyth County's Big Creek Greenway multi-use trail is currently under construction. This is a three-phase project. Future trail plans suggest a connection of the Big Creek Greenway with the Sawnee Mountain Preserve.



Cross Section of Shared Use Path

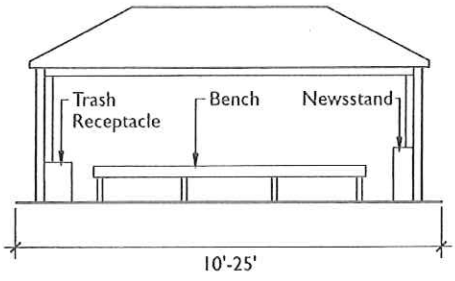
As indicated on the maps of areas requiring special attention, there is an opportunity for Cumming to provide a greenway that will provide the desired link.

Public Transportation

Due to existing socioeconomic characteristics, the city's comprehensive plan (2004) does not anticipate a significant shift from auto travel to public transit (see also Chapter 6 of the technical appendix of this community assessment). As of today, that conclusion has not changed significantly. Nonetheless, the city's comprehensive plan, transportation element (Chapter 10), specifically supports the improvement of public transportation in the city. Policies include support for the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority to provide park and ride lots and implement express bus service from the county to the North Springs MARTA station.

The lack of public transportation in the county is a concern for some businesses relocating into the area. Per the Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, Forsyth County provides public transportation to all of its citizens through the Dial-A-Ride program. The Dial-A-Ride program is operated by the public transportation division of the Forsyth County Fleet Services Department. The program is funded by the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, the Georgia Department of Transportation, and passenger fees. Fees are based on the number of stops a person must make. The five vans operate Monday through Friday by appointment only. The vans are utilized for medical appointments, shopping, employment, education, and personal errands (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

Forsyth County also has one park and ride lot for the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) Xpress bus. This lot is located on the southbound side of Georgia 400, off of Georgia 400 exit 14 near the Lakeland Plaza shopping center, just outside the current city limits of Cumming (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009 Draft).



BUS SHELTER AMENITIES

Source: Khaled Shammout

Bus shelters when installed at park and ride lots contribute to the comfort of patrons.

Connectivity of Development

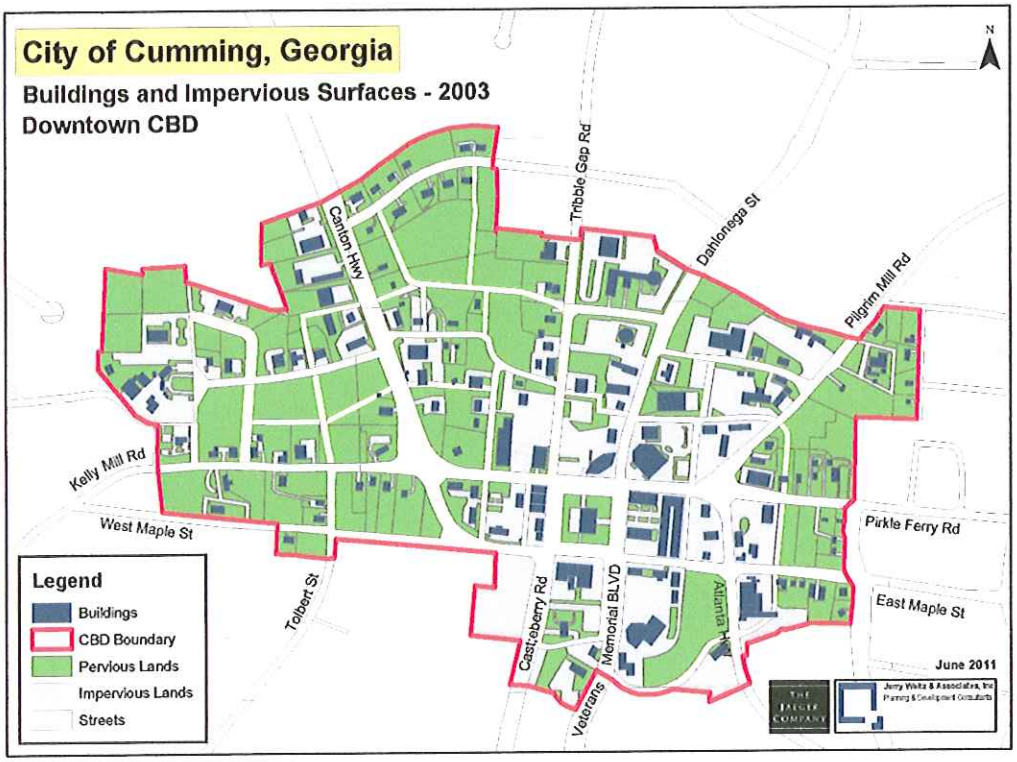
Section 904 of the city's zoning ordinance addresses requirements for interparcel access. In cases of new development or major building renovation and repaving projects in office, institutional, and commercial, zoning districts, inter-parcel access for vehicles between abutting properties shall be provided so that access to individual properties can be achieved between adjacent developments as an alternative to forcing all movement onto abutting highways and public roads. Therefore, the city complies with this consideration of the transportation alternatives QCO.

Shared Parking Allowances

One of the purposes of the parking regulations in the City of Cumming's zoning ordinance (Section 901.6) is to promote flexible approaches to the provision of off-street parking, including shared parking arrangements. Per Section 913 of the zoning ordinance, the Zoning Administrator may authorize a reduction in the total number of required off-street parking spaces for two or more uses jointly providing parking facilities when their respective hours of need of maximum parking do not normally overlap, provided that the developer submits sufficient data to demonstrate that the hours of maximum demand for parking at the respective uses do not normally overlap. The required spaces assigned to one use may not be assigned to another use at the same time, except that one-half (1/2) of the parking spaces required for churches, theaters or assembly halls whose peak attendance will be at night or on Sundays may be assigned to a use which will be closed at night or on Sundays. Therefore, Cumming complies with this consideration.

Continuation of Existing Street Design

Cumming is specifically in compliance with this consideration of the transportation alternatives QCO, since it has policies in Chapter 10 of its comprehensive plan to extend the grid street pattern in the Central Business District as new development and redevelopment occurs (see figure below from the comprehensive plan); furthermore, it includes an adopted policy which calls for extension of a grid pattern or modified grid pattern as residential uses develop along both sides of Pilgrim Mill Road (the primary residential development opportunity area remaining in the city). Therefore, Cumming complies with this consideration.



REGIONALISM AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

"Regional Identity Objective: Regions should promote and preserve an "identity," defined in terms of traditional regional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics."

"Regional Cooperation Objective: Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources."

"Regional Solutions Objective: Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer."

Summary

When Cumming prepared its current comprehensive plan in 2003 (adopted 2004), it was aware of the state's Quality Community Objectives and indeed adopted the QCOs. It prepared its comprehensive plan in a manner that acknowledges and implements the transportation alternatives QCO. Therefore, Cumming complies in its entirety with the various considerations suggested by the state assessment tool for quality community objectives relative to multi-modal transportation. The paragraphs in this section articulate the extent to which the city complies with the suggested benchmarks and other considerations of the state's QCO assessment tool. The findings are summarized as follows:

Table 7
Summary Assessment: Regional and Coordination QCOs

QCO Consideration	Degree of Compliance	References/Notes/Comments
Joint Comprehensive Planning	Not compliant	City and county have separate plans
Regional Economic Development Organizations	Fully compliant	Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce
Regional Environmental Organizations and Initiatives	Historically inapplicable; opportunities exist	Environmental organizations include primarily those associated with Lake Lanier
Provision for Sharing of Services and Joint Service Delivery	Compliant; policy supportive	Several services of the city and county are consolidated; policies support coordination
Satisfaction with Service Delivery Strategy	Fully compliant	Service delivery strategy to be renegotiated in the short term
Connections to the Surrounding Region for Economic Livelihood	Mostly inapplicable	Lake Lanier is the major connection of Cumming to adjacent local governments in terms of economic livelihood
Businesses Drawing on Regional Heritage	Mostly inapplicable; partially compliant	Restaurant contained within Cumming School, a significant historic resource

Joint Comprehensive Planning

In the early 1980s, Cumming operated a joint planning commission and planning department with Forsyth County. However, long ago it decided to provide its own planning and zoning department and to prepare its own comprehensive plan. Prior comprehensive plans by the city were prepared in 1991 and 2003, independently of but coordinated with Forsyth County's comprehensive plan

Regional Economic Development Organizations

Forsyth County participates in the Lanier Joint Development Authority, created in 1995 and administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs with neighboring Hall County. Regional partnerships are rewarded in the State of Georgia in the form of additional job tax credits for companies hiring new employees (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009). The Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce is a countywide economic development organization that is supported financially by both the city and the county.

Regional Environmental Organizations and Initiatives

A number of organizations have developed with an eye toward protecting the water quality and environmental conditions surrounding Lake Lanier. In the past, Cumming has very little frontage on Lake Lanier proper. However, with annexation of Mary Alice Park, Cumming now has a more significant presence on the lake, and therefore, its participation in lake-oriented environmental organizations and initiatives should correspondingly increase.

Provision for Sharing of Services and Joint Service Delivery

The city and county share those services which have made the most sense from a production and efficiency standpoint. Cumming is a part of the county's fire, 911, and emergency management facilities and services. Economic development is consolidated in the sense that both local governments financially support the Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce. Cumming provides water and sewer services to a service area that extends beyond the city limits to a significant portion of unincorporated Forsyth County, while the county provides water and sewer services to the remainder of the county. Libraries and schools are also provided on a countywide basis, as are the traditional countywide functions like sheriff, coroner, family and children services, and public health, among others. Cumming provides its own park and recreation services, which are now extensive and include the fairgrounds and Mary Alice Park. And, as noted above, the city provides its own planning and zoning department. The staffs of the city and county cooperate on a daily basis with regard to information sharing such as GIS data files among others.

Satisfaction with Service Delivery Strategy

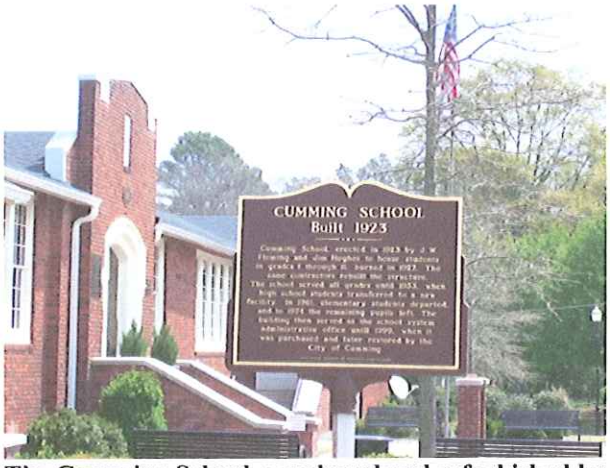
In 2004, Forsyth County and the City of Cumming completed an update to their Service Delivery Strategy. The currently adopted comprehensive plan recognizes the service delivery strategy and alludes to major intergovernmental agreements (see also Chapter 7 of the technical appendix of this community assessment). Service delivery strategies will be renegotiated as part of the process of preparing the Community Agenda part of the comprehensive plan. One of the primary issues that is expected to receive attention and debate is the renewal of the water services agreement which expires in the year 2012.

Connections to the Surrounding Region for Economic Livelihood

This consideration is considered largely inapplicable to the city, though it is recognized that Lake Lanier is a major feature that the city shares with some adjacent local governments.

Businesses Drawing on Regional Heritage

As noted under the discussion of the historic preservation QCO, the city does not have very many historic resources remaining and therefore does not have a discernable regional heritage to maintain or promote. Therefore, this consideration is largely inapplicable in Cumming. However, the city has combined a business opportunity with heritage preservation and promotion by providing for a restaurant within its restored historic property, the Cumming School (picture right).



The Cumming School, purchased and refurbished by the City in 1999, draws on the history of the city and at the same time, incorporates a restaurant, thus contributing to desired mixed-use character of the CBD.

Regional Tourism Partnerships and Promotion of Tourism Opportunities

According to the county's partial plan update, Forsyth County has partnered with the City of Cumming for inclusion in the Georgia 400 Hospitality Highway tourist campaign that draws attention to cultural events while engaging multiple communities across the corridor. The particular slogan for Forsyth County and the City of Cumming is "Come Play in Our Backyard" with a lake symbol emphasizing the recreational opportunities of Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River. The purpose of this campaign is to attract tourists to the myriad of entertainment opportunities provided, many of which relate to the county's customs. This heritage is expressed, for example, by the Cumming Country Fair and Festival which has grown to an eleven day event which highlights the agricultural and rural lifestyle once prevalent in the county (Forsyth County Partial Plan Update, 2009).

CHAPTER 2
AREAS REQUIRING SPECIAL ATTENTION

This section constitutes a second required component of the community assessment for the City of Cumming. It consists of a narrative description of "areas requiring special attention" per the local planning requirements of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Generally, this component is an assessment of existing land use conditions and trends, with attention to identifying specific areas that deserve additional policy formulation or regulation. The discussion in this chapter is divided into the categories of areas of special attention as outlined in the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (Local Planning Requirements).

AREAS LIKELY TO BE ANNEXED

The local planning requirements suggest that areas likely to be annexed during the planning horizon be included in the analysis of areas of special attention. This community assessment includes a map of areas which may be likely for annexation over the next twenty years. This map does not commit the city to annexing these lands, as it is most likely going to require consent and application by the property owners in order for the City of Cumming to annex these lands. In a few instances in the northern part of the city, there are "unincorporated islands" which per state law the city can annex without the consent of the property owners. Pursuit of this annexation plan would tend to "round out" or "square off" the city limits, to 5,184 acres (an increase of 1,334 acres or more than one-third).

SIGNIFICANT NATURAL OR CULTURAL RESOURCES

The adopted (2004) comprehensive plan contains a detailed natural resources inventory and refers to past historic resource surveys (see also Chapter 4 of the technical appendix of this community assessment). There are no natural resources that have not already been identified along with programs and/or policies and regulations to implement natural resource protection, with one exception – a map of difficult to develop sites is included as an area requiring special attention, since there are some properties that remain vacant in the city due to steep slopes and/or flood plains. The intent of this map is to further acknowledge the difficulty of developing these sites, establish policies for them, and to call for consideration of additional regulations with regard to steeply sloping lands. Some of these difficult to develop sites have, appropriately, already been set aside as open space or conservation areas.

AREAS WHERE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OR CHANGE IN LAND USES IS LIKELY TO OCCUR

In order to accomplish this consideration, the city updated its existing land use inventory and its future land use plan maps in 2009. These are citywide maps and thus not "areas requiring special attention." However, the maps were prepared in order to gain updated knowledge as to what vacant lands still exist in the city, and thus where rapid development may take place in the near future or during the 20-year planning horizon. Also, there is a map showing residential

neighborhoods which are undergoing some transition or may need to be targeted for community development.

AREAS OUTPACING AVAILABILITY OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Generally, Cumming is adequately served with all of the community facilities and services needed to serve additional growth and development, including water, sewer, schools, and so forth. There are congested arterials which are the responsibility of the state, as noted elsewhere (see discussion of "Growth Preparedness" QCO). There are, therefore, no areas that have been identified where development threatens to outpace community facilities and services in Cumming.

AREAS IN NEED OF REDEVELOPMENT OR SIGNIFICANT AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENT

While Cumming is similar to other local governments in having some scattered, vacant or underutilized properties, it really does not have a significant concentration of properties that are in significant need for redevelopment. Two exceptions exists to this finding, however. As recognized in the adopted (2004) comprehensive plan, the Atlanta Highway (SR 9) corridor has been identified as an area in need for significant aesthetic improvement and with some redevelopment opportunities. That corridor is shown on a map and labeled as an area requiring special attention. In addition, the city's central business district has a number of redevelopment opportunities and is also shown on a map and labeled as an area requiring special attention. Generally, Cumming's CBD is free from blight, and so identifying it as an area requiring special attention in this category should not be implied as suggesting urban blight. Rather, it is an area where the existing comprehensive plan recognizes that concerted redevelopment efforts, intensification strategies, and streetscape improvements are appropriate.

LARGE ABANDONED SITES OR STRUCTURES

Cumming is fortunate not to have any large sites that have been abandoned. Therefore, this consideration does not apply, and there are no such areas to map as "areas requiring special attention."

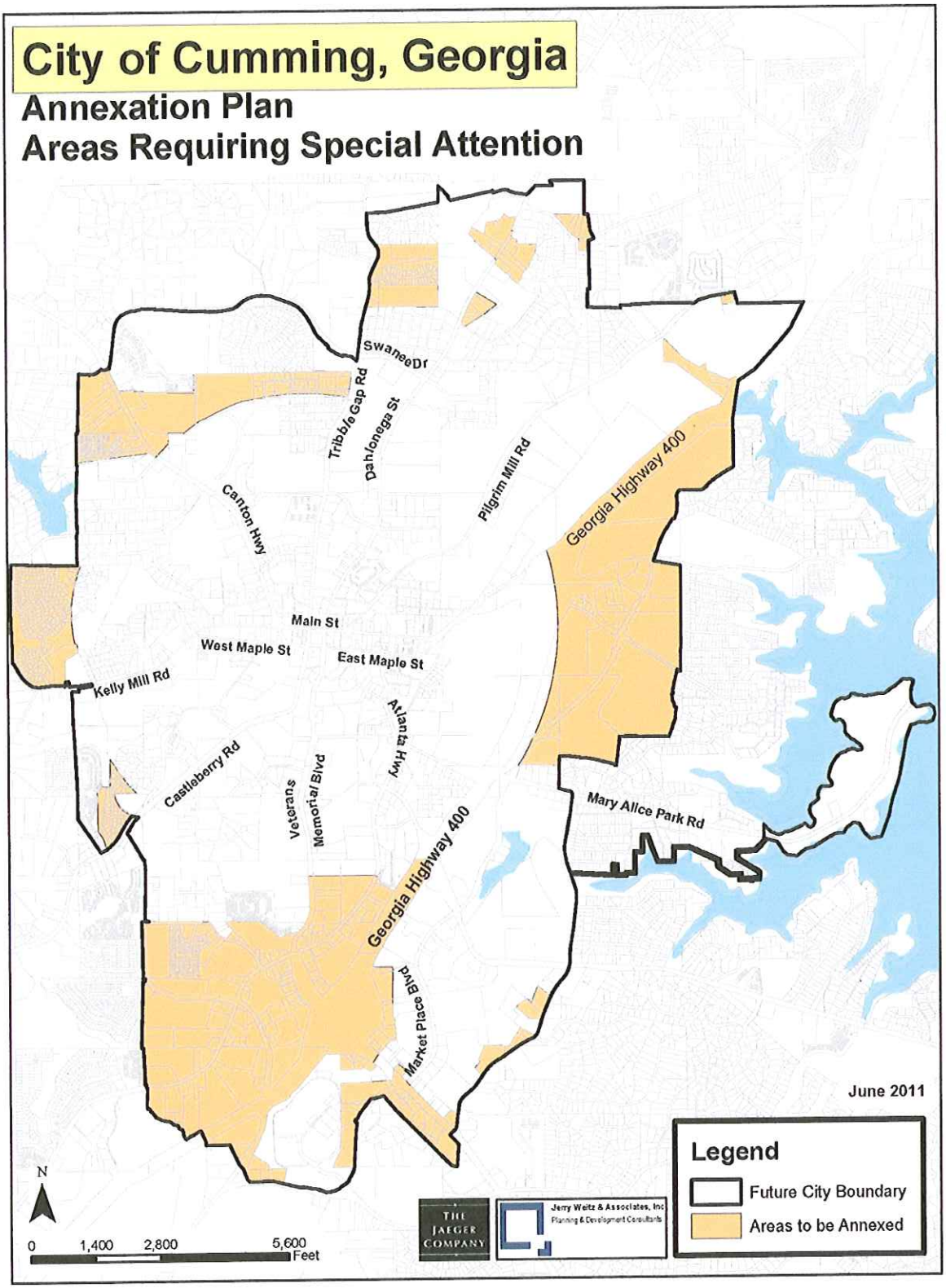
AREAS WITH SIGNIFICANT INFILL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

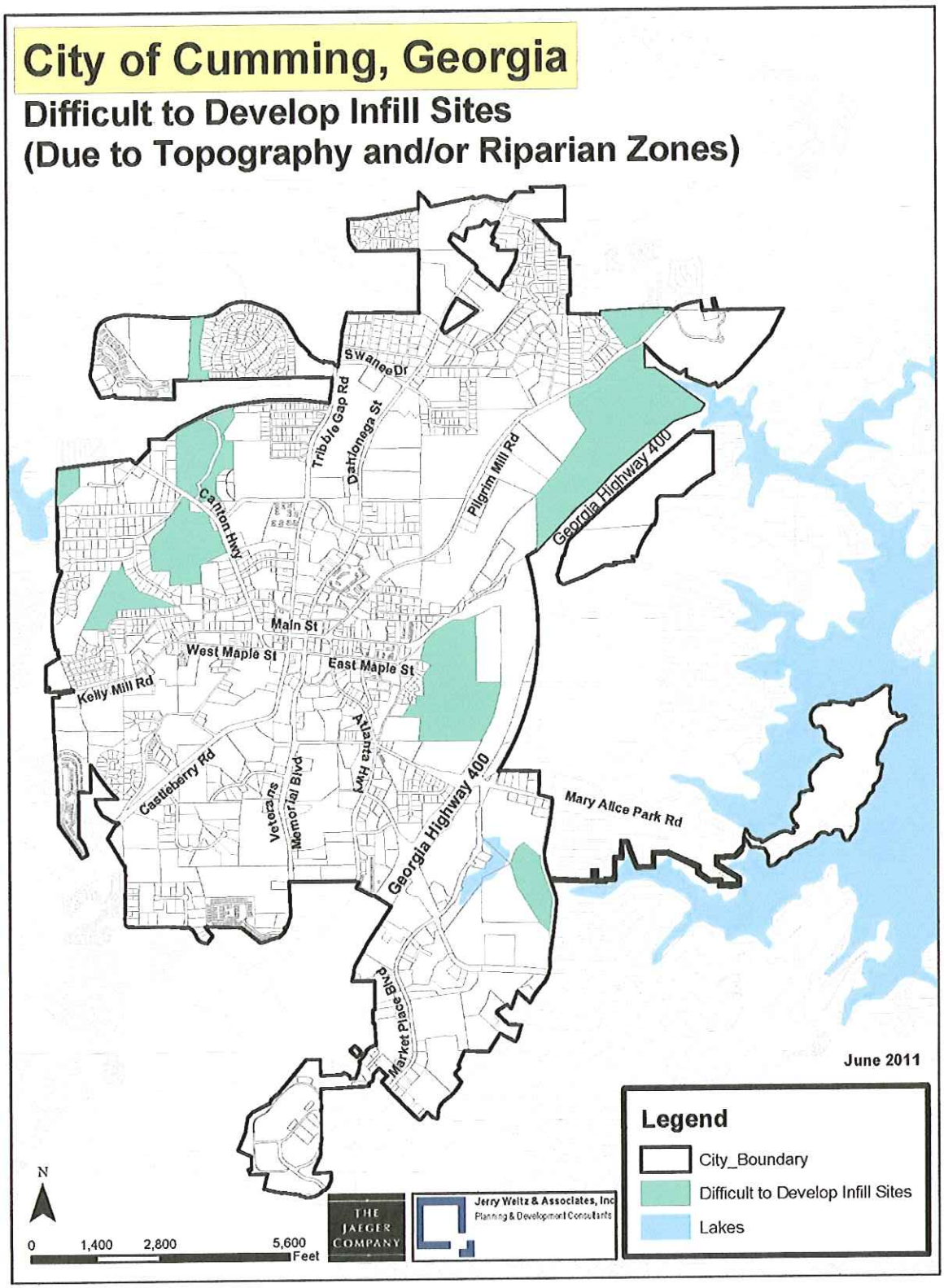
The existing land use map provides an updated inventory of vacant lands in the city. There are substantial opportunities for new development in the city, and given that Cumming is the central urban area for the entire county, development on such vacant lands would be considered "infill." The existing land use plan map while not labeled as such provides a map of infill via the vacant land and agricultural land use designations.

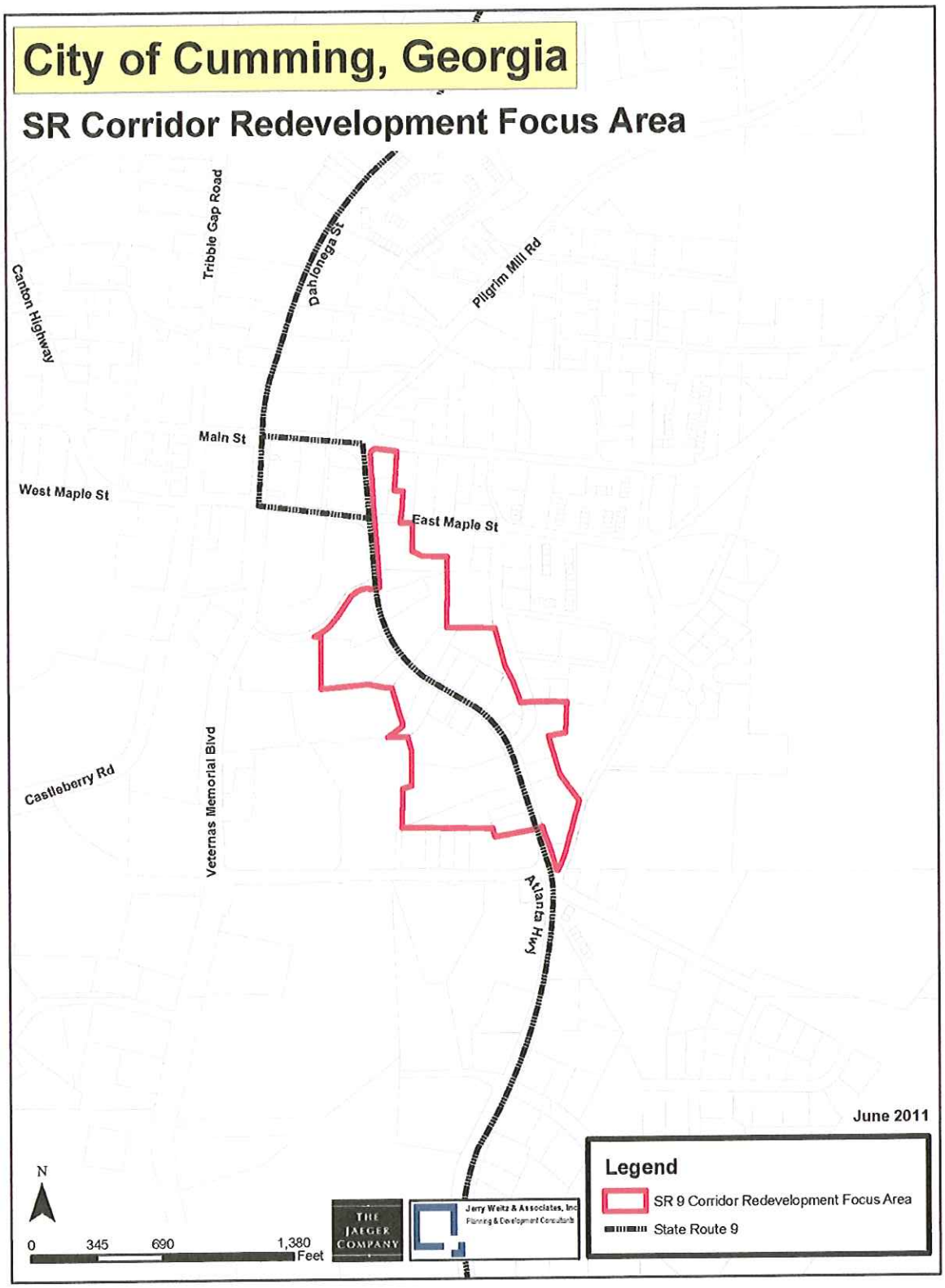
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT DISINVESTMENT, LEVELS OF POVERTY, OR UNEMPLOYMENT

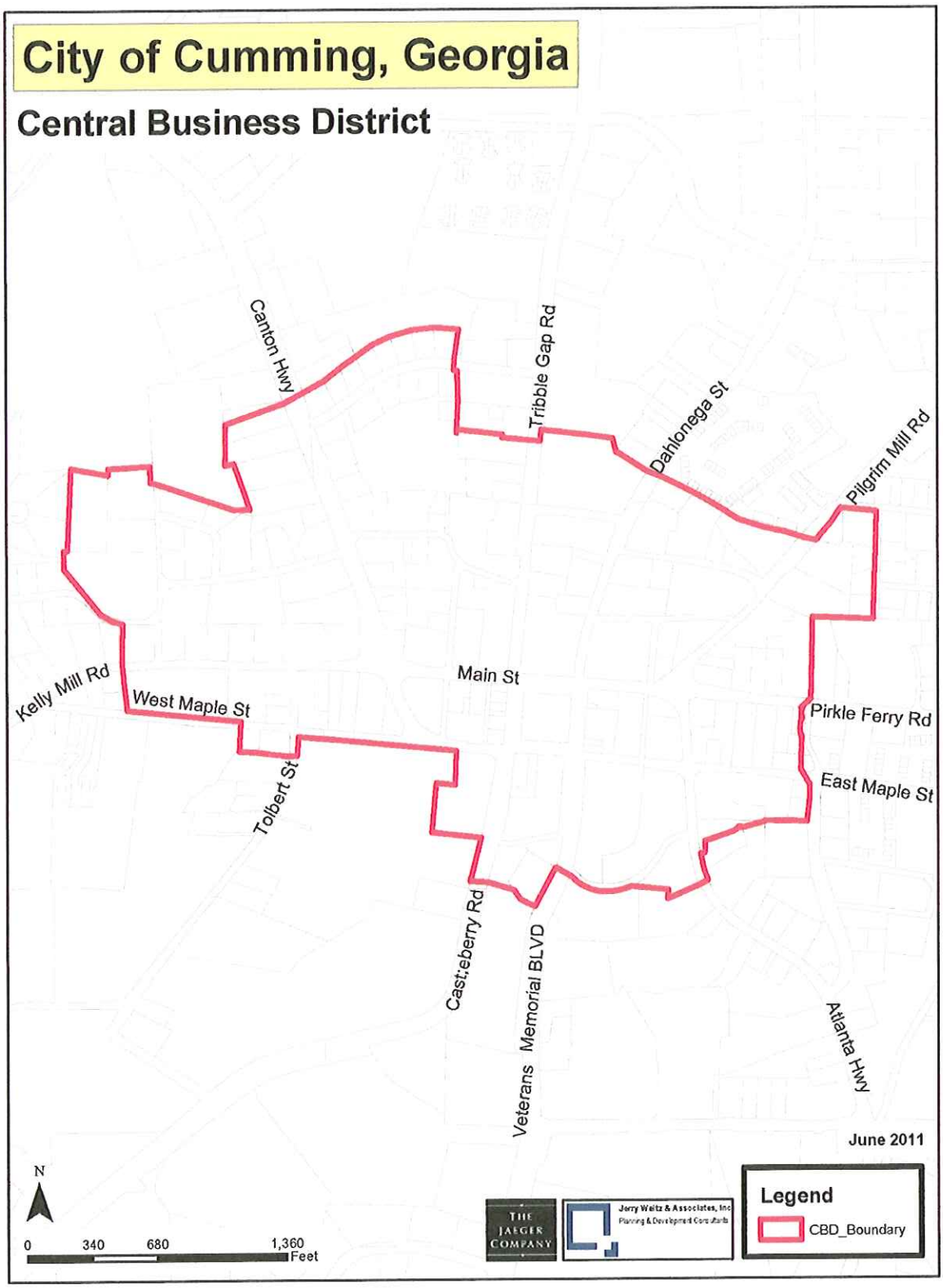
Cumming is relatively small in terms of land area, and there are no statistics reasonably available which would further inform this analysis. Generally, because of the excellent central location of Cumming in Forsyth County within a high-growth area, there are few if any areas of significant, concentrated disinvestment. Properties that were previously developed generally do not go unused for very long, given the strength of the local economy and advantages of central location.

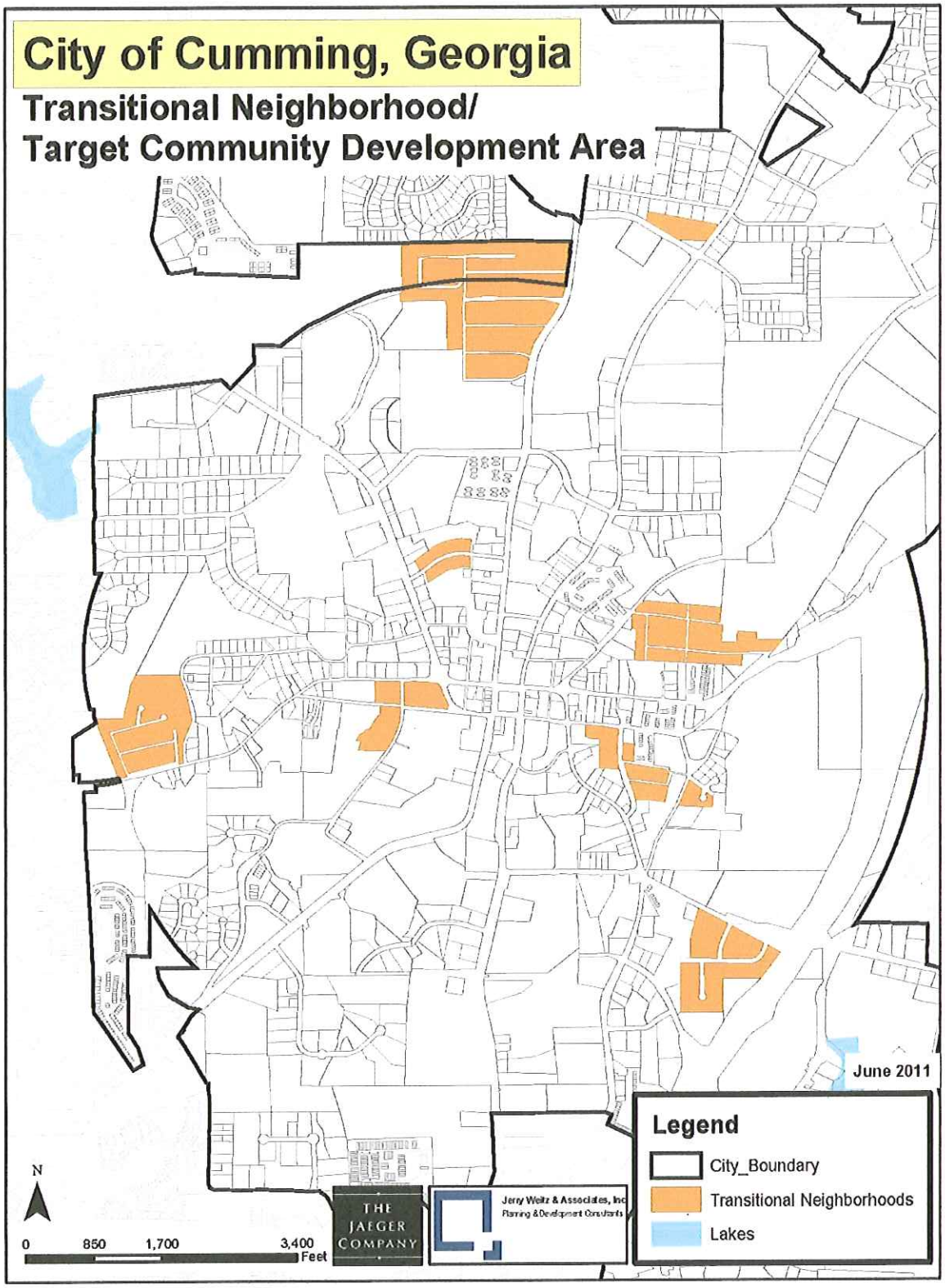
Unemployment rates for Forsyth County's residents have remained considerably lower than other parts of the metropolitan Atlanta region and the state. Even with the substantial downturn in global and national economies, Forsyth County and its residents have generally weathered the economic recession quite well.


City of Cumming, Georgia
Annexation Plan
Areas Requiring Special Attention
Swanee Dr
Tribble Gap Rd
Dahlonega St
Pilgrim Mill Rd
Georgia Highway 400
Canton Hwy
Main St
West Maple St
East Maple St
Kelly Mill Rd
Atlanta Hwy
Castleberry Rd
Veterans Memorial Blvd
Mary Alice Park Rd
Georgia Highway 400
Market Place Blvd
June 2011
Legend
Future City Boundary
Areas to be Annexed
N
0
1,400
2,800
5,600
Feet
THE JAEGER COMPANY
Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc
Planning & Development Consultants


City of Cumming, Georgia
Difficult to Develop Infill Sites
(Due to Topography and/or Riparian Zones)
Swanee Dr
Tribble Gap Rd
Dahlonega St
Pilgrim Mill Rd
Georgia Highway 400
Canton Hwy
Main St
West Maple St
East Maple St
Kelly Mill Rd
Castleberry Rd
Veterans Memorial Blvd
Atlanta Hwy
Georgia Highway 400
Mary Alice Park Rd
Market Place Blvd
June 2011
Legend
City_Boundary
Difficult to Develop Infill Sites
Lakes
N
0
1,400
2,800
5,600
Feet
THE JAEGER COMPANY
Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc
Planning & Development Consultants


City of Cumming, Georgia
SR Corridor Redevelopment Focus Area
Tribble Gap Road
Dahlonega St
Pilgrim Mill Rd
Canton Highway
Main St
West Maple St
East Maple St
Castleberry Rd
Veterans Memorial Blvd
Atlanta Hwy
June 2011
N
0
345
690
1,380
Feet
THE JAEGER COMPANY
Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc
Planning & Development Consultants
Legend
SR 9 Corridor Redevelopment Focus Area
State Route 9


City of Cumming, Georgia
Central Business District
Canton Hwy
Tribble Gap Rd
Dahlonega St
Pilgrim Mill Rd
Kelly Mill Rd
West Maple St
Main St
Pirkle Ferry Rd
East Maple St
Tolbert St
Castleberry Rd
Veterans Memorial BLVD
Atlanta Hwy
June 2011
N
0 340 680 1,360 Feet
THE JAEGER COMPANY
Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc
Planning & Development Consultants
Legend
CBD_Boundary


City of Cumming, Georgia
Transitional Neighborhood/
Target Community Development Area
June 2011
Legend
City_Boundary
Transitional Neighborhoods
Lakes
N
0
850
1,700
3,400
Feet
THE JAEGER COMPANY
Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc
Planning & Development Consultants

CHAPTER 3
ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section of the community assessment takes the discussion of consistency with QCOs and the "areas requiring special attention" by more fully articulating the various issues and opportunities that can be drawn from those preceding analyses. Where the QCO analysis suggests less than full compliance with a particular QCO, this section elaborates on the current situations and how to improve them. The "issue" or "opportunity" is first described, then various alternatives or solutions which are readily available are analyzed, and then finally, implementation measures are described, which are usually in the form of additional policies and/or individual entries in the city's updated "short-term work program."

NATURAL RESOURCES

Greenspace Protection

Cumming has a long-term lease for Mary Alice Park, which will ensure that lands along Lake Lanier will continue to be preserved in its natural state, along with active recreational opportunities along the shoreline. At issue is whether that major step forward toward greenspace preservation will be sufficient for the next five years and beyond. Are there other opportunities, and/or should Cumming do more in the long run to improve its percentage of open space (as a percentage of total land area in the city)?

Aerial View of Mary Alice Park

On the one hand, Cumming has invested significantly in its prior efforts, and as noted in the discussion of the open space Quality Community Objective (QCO), it has taken other steps such as required dedication of open spaces and recreation sites within multi-family developments. That policy is appropriate to help the city meet longer term recreation needs but does not in itself ensure or guarantee permanently protected open space.

One tool that has not yet been utilized in Cumming is the "conservation" subdivision, and there are significant opportunities for such land development technique to take place. While permitted in Cumming via a 2005 ordinance amendment, and though there are built-in incentives by way of reduced development costs for developers to take advantage of that technique, there is still no guarantee that conservation subdivisions will be constructed.

One alternative is for the city to acquire more conservation lands. This is easier said than done in today's economic recession. The city can and should plan to include more open space in the acquisition of any future park and recreation lands (a policy is included to that effect), thus continuing and enhancing its positive step of getting Mary Alice Park under long-term lease from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Another possible step is for the city to more strongly encourage, or even require, conservation subdivisions. As noted, there are places with flood plains and steeply sloping lands (see "areas requiring special attention") that are prime candidates for conservation subdivision development. At minimum, a strong policy statement in the land use plan suggesting that conservation subdivision techniques are encouraged in areas mapped as "difficult to develop." Cumming should monitor how development in these areas, if it occurs, uses conservation subdivision techniques, and if conservation subdivision techniques are not adequately employed, stronger measures such as a mandate (regulation) could be instituted.

Conservation Subdivision

With regard to implementation, two additional policy statements as described in "possible solutions" above have been added to the revised set of policies. The prior plan's short-term work program recognized the opportunity for a greenway along Kelly Mill Branch and called for acquisition and development of a greenway that connects with the county's greenway to Sawnee Mountain.

Development Practices for Steeply Sloping Lands

As noted in the discussion of the environmental protection QCO, Cumming has adequate regulations in place to protect its most environmentally sensitive lands. However, some of the most difficult to develop lands still remain in the city, and as other vacant land is consumed, these parcels will be increasingly eyed for development. If development takes place improperly on these sites (i.e., with little attention to increased erosion potential and aesthetics), the mark on the ridges and steep slopes will be left forever for all to see.

The city could rely on its existing ordinances and hope that development will be sensitive to the viewsheds along steeply sloping lands. Or, it could take a more proactive approach. It could develop policies in its plan that articulate the desire for more sensitive development along ridge lines and parcels with steep slopes. The city could develop some basic guidelines and attempt to enforce them in the rezoning, subdivision, and land development process. Finally, a stronger step would be to prescribe additional regulations for these sites.

Tree Protection

As noted in the review of the environmental protection QCO, Cumming does not have sufficient regulations in place to ensure tree protection. This plan update includes additional policies for the protection of trees.

HOUSING AND LAND USE

Land Development Process

A basic review of the application forms and processes available on the city's web page reveals that improvements can be made to make the land development process more easily understandable and accessible to permit applicants. Some of the suggestions are articulated in the discussion of the "growth preparedness" QCO. The short-term work program calls for the city to reevaluate and improve its web-based development guidance and technical assistance products, with particular attention paid toward unifying the city's information on the utilities and home web pages.

Promotion of Traditional Neighborhood Development

As noted in the discussion of Quality Community Objectives, Cumming made a decision in 2003 not to opt for a future development pattern that would involve the creation of dense neighborhoods surrounding the Central Business District. Instead, it opted for a policy of more "horizontal" than "vertical" residential development, concentrated in the CBD, and also incorporated policies to extend the grid street pattern evident in parts of the CBD. While this is considered a noteworthy example of promoting neotraditional development principles in light of the city's preferences, there are additional opportunities for promoting traditional neighborhood development.

Cumming expects that several large tracts of agricultural, vacant or underutilized land will get developed as master planned, mixed use communities. The city has adopted a new multi use (MU) zoning district and has articulated the desire to see mixed use development with traditional neighborhood development principles occur in both the new MU district and the CBD. Further, there are opportunities to guide residential portions of those future mixed use, master planned communities in the direction of traditional neighborhood development principles. Policies are included in this partial plan update to encourage adherence to traditional neighborhood development principles in future mixed use master planned communities. The short-term work program also calls for more development guidance in the form of a development guidelines document.

Redevelopment

The city's adopted comprehensive plan already recognized the need for redevelopment in two areas, the Central Business District (CBD), and the Atlanta Road (SR 9) corridor south of the CBD. This plan update will maintain and reinforce the adopted (2004) comprehensive plan by calling for more detailed subarea plans for the CBD and the Atlanta Street corridor delineated on maps under "areas requiring special attention."

Multi-Family Housing Allowances

The discussion of the housing QCO revealed that Cumming's zoning ordinance is very prescriptive in terms of specifying the proportions of one-bedroom and two-bedroom units to be provided in apartment complexes. Because such prescriptive standards may not be consistent with changes to the housing market over time, they should be reconsidered and if appropriate, amended. The city should decide whether its prescriptive bedroom ratio standards are still necessary and appropriate.

Design Guides and Aesthetics

Review of the "Sense of Place" QCO revealed that the city does not have much by way of formal guidelines to improve the aesthetics of development. It was not until 2008 that the city prepared and adopted a comprehensive sign ordinance. As Cumming extends its plan to another 20-year horizon and specifies new activities and programs for the next five years, it is appropriate that the city provide additional guidelines in various arenas. As already noted, guidance is needed for steeply sloping lands and traditional neighborhoods within larger-scale, mixed use, and master planned developments which are anticipated to take place in the future in the city. It would therefore be appropriate, since additional guidance is called for elsewhere, that design guidelines documents be broad enough to include general aesthetic improvement. The short-term work program reflects that position.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION

Population Projections for Infrastructure Decisions

Cumming's adopted (2004) comprehensive plan provides projections of population, but the city does have a detailed set of projections for its entire water and sewer service area. The importance of having reliable projections of future growth in the water and sewer service area cannot be overemphasized – providing for too much growth via oversized water and sewer lines and treatment facilities is a waste of public dollars, while undersizing of those facilities can also result in the inefficient revision or retrofit of infrastructure and facility master plans. Given this importance, the city should update its existing, detailed projections of population, housing, and employment (load generators) on the city's water and sewer systems in the entire service area (both unincorporated and incorporated) to yield reliable long-term demands for the city's water and sewer system.

Street Trees and Street Tree Planting Programs

Also under the "sense of place" QCO, there were opportunities described with regard to providing better street tree canopy in the city. Many suburban communities require street tree plantings as a part of new land developments, and Cumming needs to move in that direction, with revisions to regulations that ensure trees will shade public rights of ways and tree canopies will enhance the aesthetic character of the city.

There is also an opportunity to partner with Keep Forsyth Beautiful in coordinating street tree planting efforts within the city limits of Cumming. Additionally, the design guidelines document is an opportunity to address street tree planting specifications.

Multi-Use Trail System Development

As discussed elsewhere, Forsyth County has long-range plans to provide a greenway along Big Creek that will ultimately connect to the Sawnee Mountain Ridge preserve. There is an important opportunity to preserve additional flood plains along Kelly Mill Branch in the western part of the city that will enable a greenway link from the county's project improvement to the city's neighborhoods and schools. This opportunity is recognized in this community assessment (see difficult to develop sites under "areas requiring special attention").

Service Delivery Strategy

One of the primary issues that are expected to receive attention and debate is the renewal of the water services agreement which expires in the year 2012.

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

LAND USE TRENDS

During the past decade, the City of Cumming has witnessed the following major land use trends, among others.

Single-Family Residential Development

Generally, the city has not witnessed much additional single-family residential development. This is not surprising, in that the city's future land use plan map does not promote very many opportunities for additional subdivision tract development. As noted under the discussion of the "growth preparedness" QCO in Chapter 1 of this community assessment, new single-family residential development has been limited mostly to a new subdivision in the western part of the city, north of Kelly Mill Road, which added approximately two-dozen new homes to the city's housing stock. There have also been a few "infill" dwellings constructed along Samaritan Drive just north of Kelly Mill Road. Also, a small number of older residential structures along Pirkle Ferry Road and E. Maple Street has been demolished, in anticipation of new office development. The net result is that few single-family dwellings have been added to the city's housing stock in the last five years.

Multi-Family Residential Development

As noted under the discussion of the "growth preparedness" QCO in Chapter 1 of the community assessment, the city has witnessed a significant increase (more than 200 units) in the number of townhouses in two locations since 2003. There was no new apartment of multi-family condominium housing constructed in the city during this reporting period.

Public-Institutional Development

Cumming is the major institutional center of Forsyth County. As of 2003, it already had extensive areas of institutional development including Northside Hospital (Cumming campus), city and county government buildings and properties, the City of Cumming Fairgrounds, numerous churches, and other smaller institutional properties.

Northside Hospital has expanded its facilities.

During the reporting period, there have been some significant expansions of public-institutional uses, including but not limited to additions at the Northside Hospital campus and the building of

additional county offices at the northwest quadrant of Georgia 400 and Bald Ridge Marina/Pirkle Ferry Road interchange. Between Pilgrim Mill Road and Georgia 400, just west of the Pilgrim Mill Road/GA 400 interchange, a large institutional campus is under development which includes the city's new aquatic center (opened Summer 2011), a new state driver's license facility (completed), an armory (proposed), and a new campus for North Georgia College and State University (proposed).

Office-Professional Development

Cumming has witnessed significant additional office-professional development, and is there is active and recent construction of offices in the city. There are two primary locations that are significant in this regard. First, the area containing the one-way pairs (Pirkle Ferry Road and East Maple Street) into downtown has become the location of significant and ongoing expansion of office developments. Secondly, the area around the old hospital has continued to evolve as a concentration of office uses. Offices were recently constructed on the south side of East Samaritan Drive (just west of SR 20), and a new office park was constructed on the south side of West Maple Street.

A few conversions of residences to offices have occurred along Kelly Mill Road, as well. Additional office park tracts are now available in the Mary Alice Office Park between Atlanta Road (SR 9) and Georgia 400 on the south side of Mary Alice Park Road.

Office park with available space

Commercial Development

The most significant additions to the commercial development stock in Cumming have taken place along Market Place Boulevard. The "planned shopping center" regional commercial node has expanded as planned, first along that part of Market Place Boulevard between SR 20 and Buford Dam Road, then along the west side of Market Place Boulevard between Buford Dam Road and Mary Alice Park Road. In the latter area, Cumming has added major "big box" stores grouped in a "power center" type pattern.

Retail development nearing completion (2009) off of Market Place Boulevard.

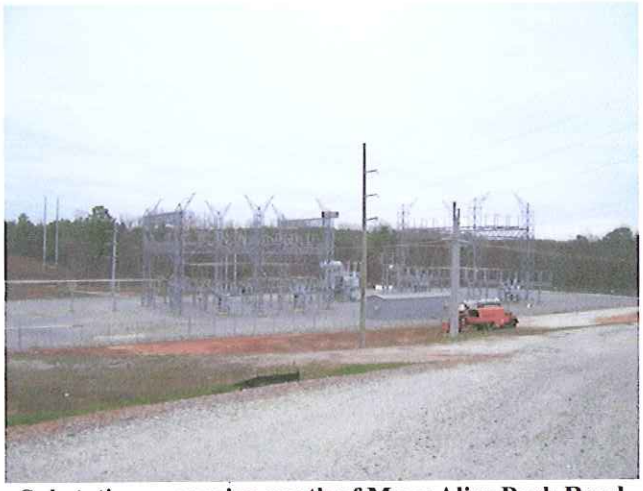
In addition to the major concentration of commercial retail uses along Market Place Boulevard, Cumming has witnessed some additional commercial development infilling existing locations, such as along SR 20 (bank and restaurant) and office-commercial development along Conner Parkway. Though some changes in businesses have occurred, the Atlanta Road (SR 9) corridor has generally remained unchanged, and that corridor remains a target for redevelopment strategies. Significantly, Cumming has a true "mixed use" development, Cumming Station, in the Central Business District.

Industrial Development

With the exception of some infilling of manufacturing and industrial development in the existing industrial park along Castleberry Industrial Drive, the city's already significant industrial base has remained relatively unchanged during this reporting period.

Transportation/Communication/Utilities

The most significant trend with regard to this land use is a major expansion of the electric utility substation on the north side of Mary Alice Park Road, just west of Georgia 400 (picture right).



Substation expansion north of Mary Alice Park Road

Park/Recreation/Conservation

Cumming has witnessed a significant increase in the amount of park, recreation, and conservation land during the last several years, some well recognized and others of a much more subtle nature. First, as townhouse and single-family residential development has taken place, small areas of active recreation (e.g., tennis courts, club houses, etc.) have been constructed, and some conservation lands have been set aside. While these areas may not have public access and are designed to serve the private residential developments, they are noteworthy additions to the recreation and open space network. More significantly, Cumming through its annexation and long-term lease of Mary Alice Park has added substantially to the active recreation land and conservation land under the control of the city. Furthermore, the recent addition of the aquatic center on the large, city-owned institutional tract at Pilgrim Mill Road and Georgia 400 is yet another major expansion of the city's active recreation space.

Agricultural and Vacant Land

Despite all of the significant development trends occurring now in Cumming, as summarized in the preceding paragraphs, there are large tracts of agricultural and vacant land that have huge

potential for new development. These new growth areas are almost too numerous to summarize here, but include the following:

- A major holding of currently agricultural land surrounded by SR 9 on the west, Brooks Farm Road and Camilla Street on the south, and Pilgrim Mill Road on the east.
- Large land holdings north of Pirkle Ferry Road, west of Pilgrim Mill Road, and west of Georgia 400, along both sides of Bald Ridge.
- A large land area north of the utility substation on the north side of Mary Alice Park Road, south of E. Maple Street/Pirkle Ferry Road, west of Georgia 400. This area also is topographically influenced by Bald Ridge.
- Almost all of that area bounded by Buford Dam Road on the south, Market Place Boulevard on the west, Mary Alice Park on the north, and Sanders Road on the east.
- Significant land holdings east of existing commercial development, south of Buford Dam Road, and west of Sanders Road.
- Vacant lands surrounding the Northside Hospital, Cumming Campus.
- Significant vacant and agricultural tracts along both sides of Veterans Memorial Boulevard, south of Meadow Drive and north of SR 20/SR 9.
- Difficult-to-develop tracts along Kelly Mill Branch, north and south of SR 20.
- Vacant infill sites on the south side of Kelly Mill Road.
- Infill sites along Conners Parkway, north of the CBD, west of Dahlonega Highway (SR 9) in the northernmost part of the city, and north of Charles Place east of Dahlonega Highway (SR 9).

It is also important to note that the existing land use inventory marks significantly underutilized land as "vacant." To explain, there are significant tracts of land which contain a single-family home, on tracts north of the CBD, along the west side of Dahlonega Highway (SR 9), along the east side of Pilgrim Mill Road, and along the west side of Veterans Memorial Parkway, which have significant development potential and are not expected to be retained in their current land uses over the long-term planning horizon. Hence, in order to fully capture the growth potential and so as not to overestimate the amount of single-family development, these large tracts with single-family homes are classified as "vacant."

SUMMARY OF EXISTING LAND USE IN 2009

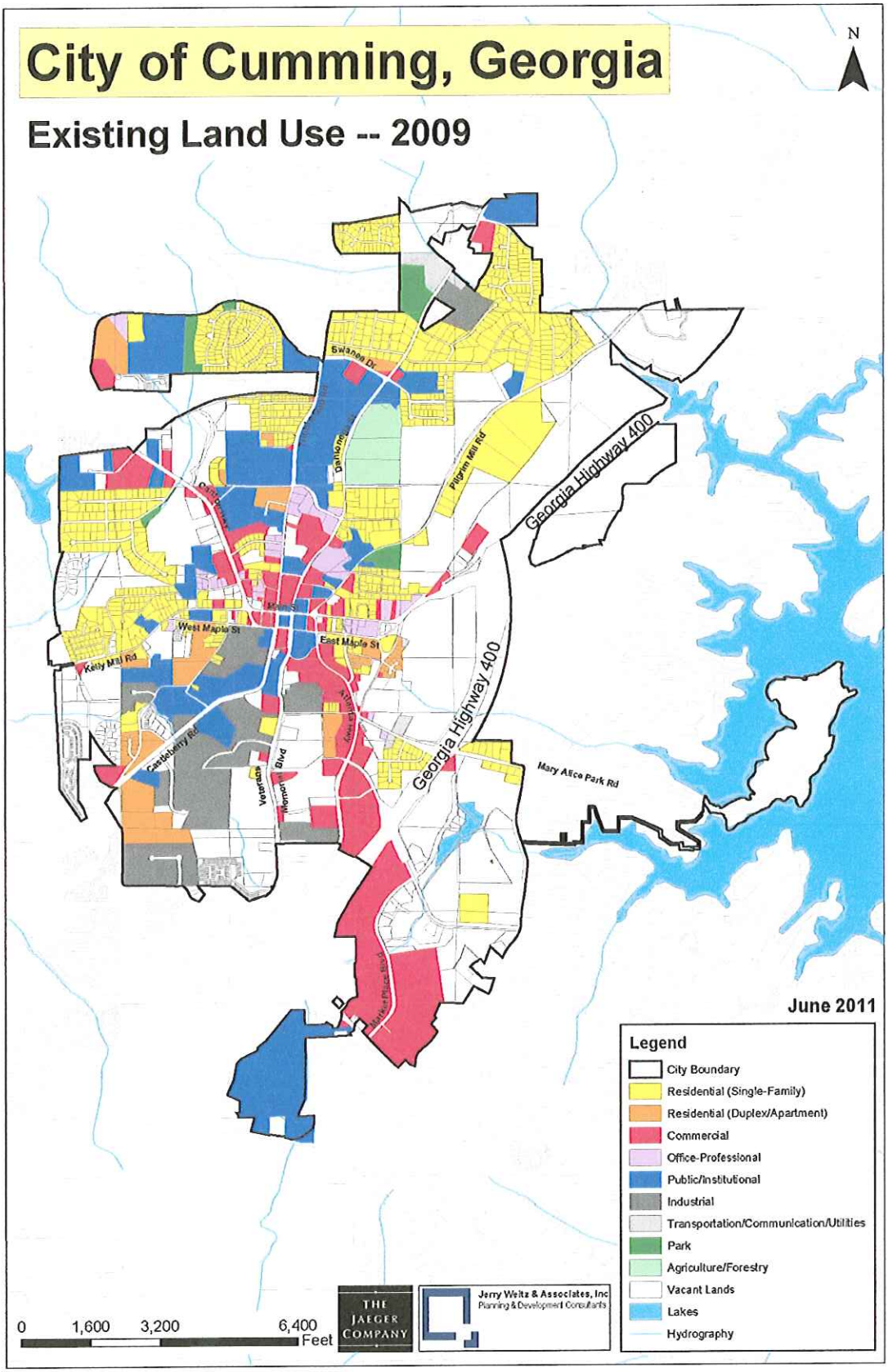
Table 8 provides a summary of existing land use as of April 2009. Existing land use categories are the same as those described in the adopted (2004) comprehensive plan and do not require elaboration here. The agricultural land use category, coupled with the vacant/undeveloped category, provides a strong indicator of Cumming's unrealized development potential.

Table 8
Existing Land Use, April 2009
City of Cumming

Land Use	April 2009	
	Acreage	Percent of Total Area
Agriculture and forestry	120.0	3.1%
Residential, Single-Family	723.4	18.8%
Residential, Multi-Family	162.1	4.2%
Public-Institutional	345.4	9.0%
Transportation/Communication/ Utilities	43.2	1.1%
Office-Professional	94.3	2.5%
Commercial	458.7	11.9%
Industrial	218.8	5.7%
Parks, Recreation, Conservation	169.5	4.4%
Public Right-of-Ways	574.2	14.9%
Vacant/Undeveloped	940.9	24.4%
Total (Cumming City Limits)	3,850.5	100%

Source: Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc. Existing land use inventory updated April 2009. Calculations of acres by GIS.

Generally, the classification of land uses in 2009 was enabled by the use of high-resolution aerial photography which was not available for prior inventory tasks. This means that the updated existing land use inventory is considered much more accurate and reliable than prior inventories, and thus comparisons with historic data risks conclusions that might be misleading.


City of Cumming, Georgia
Existing Land Use -- 2009
N
Georgia Highway 400
Georgia Highway 400
Pilgrim Mill Rd
Mary Alice Park Rd
Kelly Mill Rd
Castleberry Rd
West Maple St
East Maple St
Veterans Blvd
Market Place Blvd
June 2011
Legend
City Boundary
Residential (Single-Family)
Residential (Duplex/Apartment)
Commercial
Office-Professional
Public/Institutional
Industrial
Transportation/Communication/Utilities
Park
Agriculture/Forestry
Vacant Lands
Lakes
Hydrography
0
1,600
3,200
6,400
Feet
THE JAEGER COMPANY
Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc
Planning & Development Consultants

EXAMINATION OF THE 2025 FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

An Opportunity for Reexamination

From the foregoing analysis, it is possible to take a new look at the evolving development patterns in the city and to reexamine the future land use map in light of evolving and desirable development patterns. In 2003, the city's revision of land use policy via the future land use plan and 2003 zoning ordinance retained the overall outlook of a suburban municipality with major employment, but also called for more intensive development in the Central Business District (CBD). This section of the plan update looks back to the thinking involved in developing the 2025 future land use plan map and critically reassesses it based on new knowledge, general market prospects, considerations of balance among land uses, and additional progress toward housing and land use-related Quality Community Objectives (QCOs).

Office-Commercial Multi-Story Designation

The 2025 plan called for the very large, vacant land holdings along both sides of Georgia 400 to become office and commercial mixed use development in campus-style settings. This recommendation seemed reasonable at the time, as it was thought that Cumming's evolving land use pattern would resemble those of Roswell and Alpharetta in the Georgia 400 corridor to the south. Specifically, it was thought that a new class "A" office node would likely emerge in Cumming.

That thought prevailed in light of the major commercial activity center at Market Place Boulevard and SR 20, which has since expanded north along the extension of Market Place Boulevard. At that time, it was thought that the retail market was unlikely to support huge, additional commercial complexes in the Georgia 400 corridor. Furthermore, with two major developed commercial corridors (SR 9 north and south and SR 20 west of the CBD) and a concentration of commercial uses in the CBD itself, serious concern existed at that time about providing too much land for more retail uses in the context of an environment where an "over-retailization" of the Atlanta market was the norm.

Now, the prospect of several millions of new square feet of office buildings in a campus-style environment seems much less feasible and unlikely.[1] The city's planning consultant considered suggesting the elimination of this category from the land use plan altogether, given the unlikelihood of support in the market in the short-term and even the long-term. However, it still appears to be a good match for undeveloped lands surrounding the Northside Hospital, Cumming Campus. In that location, substantial expansion of the hospital is still possible, but it is also likely that extensive medical office development will occur at that location, consistent with the

[1] With almost 200 vacant acres assigned to the commercial-office mixed use category in the 2025 plan, and the prospect of development at floor-area ratios of 1.5 or more considering zoning ordinance permissions and topographical challenges of the sites in question (i.e., Bald Ridge), an estimated 13 million or more square feet of office-commercial space could be constructed per the 2025 plan in the Georgia 400 corridor and vicinity.

general land use pattern around hospitals. Moreover, the hospital campus area though only a short drive from the restaurants and shops along Market Place Boulevard, could benefit from restaurants and other retail and business services developed as a part of the hospital campus itself. The existing "institutional" zoning district would provide for some but not all such complementary uses, and, if developed under the institutional zoning district (a floor-area ratio of 0.7), would resemble more of a suburban than urban land use pattern.

Not only is there concern about the prospect of so much office space planned for the Georgia 400 corridor, but the suggested pattern of campus office-commercial parks separated from any living opportunities raises concerns about future traffic patterns. To further substantiate the need for change, one simply has to look at the fact that office development is occurring in other locations in Cumming, further weakening market prospects for new, stand-alone, office-dominated employment campuses. Though no formal market study was completed as a part of this community assessment, it is reasonably safe to conclude that Cumming is unlikely to absorb anywhere near the capacity of its land use plan for office development during the planning horizon.

Therefore, the 2030 land use plan should retain the office-commercial, multi-story future land use district but assign it only to a limited area surrounding the hospital campus. To make the zoning ordinance and map consistent with the future land use map, rezoning of hundreds of acres would be required.

Re-designation of OCMS Parcels as Multiple Use (MU)

Given the city's recent (2009) adoption of a new multiple use zoning district, and the input from city planning and zoning staff, the land use plan map redesignates the OCMS-designated parcels as multiple or mixed use. Such a change is likely to lead to much greater flexibility in the future development of these large sites, to include appropriate residential development, and probably a lot less office development.

Central Business District (CBD)

Cumming took a bold, forward-thinking step in 2003 and 2004 by designating a central business district and potentially allowing high density residential development within it. As noted in Chapter 1 of this community assessment, Cumming seeks to achieve the vision of a pedestrian-friendly, more urban CBD than it currently has, consistent with principles of smart growth and the state's QCOs. And, as also pointed out in Chapter 1, Cumming now has its first true mixed-use development, Cumming Station, which provides for loft dwellings above retail and service spaces in the CBD. That development is not constructed anywhere near the allowed building height (8 stories) or the maximum floor-area ratio allowed in the CBD zoning district, that project is a positive and significant step toward revitalization and recreation of an urban CBD in Cumming.

When the 2003 zoning ordinance was written and adopted, it designated all of the CBD as it appears on the 2025 future land use plan map as CBD zoning. That decision was entirely appropriate especially in the context of "consistency" between land use plans and official zoning

maps, and again it also was consistent with the vision of the city to promote a more urban CBD and infuse significant new housing opportunities in the downtown.

The 2025 plan (see 2009 partial plan update) provided for a CBD boundary (an overlay boundary, of sorts) but designated individual land uses for individual blocks and properties within the CBD, such as public-institutional and commercial. This was done because: (1) some of the blocks such as the city hall and county properties were considered unlikely to change or intensify; and (2) to get an accurate estimation of buildout potential of individual land use categories. In critically re-examining the future land use plan map, it is evident that there are some blocks of land in the CBD that were suggested as appropriate for CBD mixed use (including residential up to 30 units per acre) but which are unlikely to change from their current land uses. That re-examination led to some land use changes within the CBD for individual blocks and uses.

The net result of those changes is a scaling back of sorts of properties shown as appropriate for high density residential mixed use. This is viewed as more realistic in terms of predicted land use change in the CBD. And while it does not appear that even new development will approach the maximum heights and floor-area ratios allowed in the CBD zoning district, it relieves some potential stress on the CBD's road infrastructure if developers were to take advantage of allowable maximums for height and bulk.

Stand-Alone Office Development along Pilgrim Mill Road

It might be repetitive but it is critical to point out again that the 2025 future land use plan was heavy in terms of allocating office uses. In addition to the Office-Commercial Multi-Story designation, which has been unrealized so far in the city in terms of development potential, offices are allowed to be constructed in all commercial districts in addition to the office-professional and institutional zoning district. And, as already noted, the prime hot-spots for office development have been close to the old hospital, and along the one-way pairs of Pirkle Ferry Road and East Maple Street between the CBD and Georgia 400. One must also consider that a substantial portion of the future medical office growth Cumming might absorb during the planning horizon is likely to locate within the Northside Hospital campus or immediate area.

All of these findings call into question seriously the designations of stand-alone future office development along both sides of Pilgrim Mill Road. Much of the land (220 acres total) designated for office-professional development in the 2025 plan was to be located in that corridor. With other locations becoming hot spots for office growth, better locations elsewhere, and the unlikelihood of absorption of that much new, stand-alone office space as designated in the 2025 plan, it is wise to reconsider and reclassify the extensive properties designated for stand-alone office-professional land uses along the Pilgrim Mill Road corridor.

Re-Designation of Pilgrim Mill Road Corridor for Other Uses

It is worth articulating all possibilities for the future land use pattern in the area along Pilgrim Mill Road. The plan, in other location, appears to fully saturate market potential for most commercial and retail uses, and especially for office space. That makes those uses improbable,

though they should not necessarily be "zoned out" of the area, either. Light industrial development is at least possible, but the city has concentrated its light industrial areas in the southwest part of the city. It is neither necessary nor desirable to add a new industrial area to the city, especially given the mostly residential and open space character along Pilgrim Mill Road. Similarly, there are multiple opportunities for expansion of public-institutional uses (see discussion elsewhere of the city's property which will house a new college campus, aquatic center, driver's license office, and armory, on property further north of the office designations on Pilgrim Mill Road.

With institutional, industrial, commercial, and office uses mostly ruled out for this location, what does this leave? It leaves open space (which is unrealistic), mixed uses (which are already adequately provided for in other locations including due east of the subject area), and residential uses of some form or fashion.

Before examining prospects for residential use, some review of past policy discussion is in order. One option is to pursue master planned residential communities. In 2003, the Cumming City Council and Planning and Zoning Board raised concern about the form of planned unit developments, given a lack of guidance on development outcomes, and high densities allowed.[2] This means that higher density residential development is not considered an acceptable development prospect for the Pilgrim Mill corridor. Cumming capped multi-family densities at 6 units per acre outside the CBD, and as a result, residential regulations have led to approximately 200 or more townhouses built at that maximum density of six units per acre. Given that the vast majority of residential development experienced in Cumming during the last six years has been townhouses, designations for more townhouses would not appear to be desirable from a policy standpoint nor prudent from a market perspective.

Cumming's future land use plan really does not provide much opportunity for new, detached, single-family housing. This point is strongly reemphasized in 2010 census data provided in the technical appendix of this community assessment. To some extent, at least, the lack of very many opportunities for additional, detached single-family dwellings was also a conscious policy choice of city leaders. That policy decision, not to encourage a lot of detached, single-family dwellings in Cumming is substantiated in part by the massive amounts of single-family subdivisions developed during the past 20 years or so in all parts of unincorporated Forsyth County. In short, Forsyth County is by and large a low-density, bedroom community and Cumming is, by and large, the major employment center.

From two standpoints, however, there are reasons for the city to re-evaluate the prior policy of not promoting more detached, single-family dwellings within the city limits. First, the land use plan, and the overall land use mix in the city, risks becoming imbalanced if the current policy of not providing for new, single-family detached dwellings is continued. Second, with the exception of the new townhouse units that have been recently constructed, the city's housing stock gets progressively older with each decade unless newer units are constructed. As the city's detached

[2] Prior zoning regulations which were repealed via the 2003 zoning ordinance, would have allowed up to 15 units per acre of residential development. City leaders decided then they did not want to promote high density development in locations other than within the CBD.

residential neighborhoods age, the opportunity for existing residents to "trade up" or upgrade to newer detached units becomes highly constrained, unless new subdivisions are constructed.

CHAPTER 5
PRELIMINARY CHARACTER AREAS

This chapter provides preliminary character areas for consideration in the community participation process. According to local planning requirements, cities and counties are required to prepare a map of character areas as a part of the community agenda (called a "future development map" in the state's rules). The intent behind delineating character areas is to capture the unique design or feel of a given area, regardless of land use. That is to say, one generally hopes to define these areas in ways where one land use is not dominant. However, from a practical standpoint, character areas are often defined almost as much by "function" (i.e., use) as they are by "form" (i.e., character). That is the case with the City of Cumming.

Character is often defined in terms of a particular geography: character may follow a linear "corridor," usually a roadway; or it may be concentrated (or conceptualized to be located) in a "center" of some type, such as a place centered at the intersection of two major roadways. Or, it may simply be some other type of "area" or "neighborhood" that does not follow a linear (corridor) pattern or is not geographically centered around a given place or road intersection. Character areas are almost always appropriately based on a continuum from exurban, to rural, to suburban, to urban, or some combination of them.

After careful consideration, the following ten preliminary character areas are proposed for more discussion in the community participation process. Note that 7 of 10 are exclusively or predominantly nonresidential. They are described in more detail on the following pages.

- Central Business District (CBD)
- Mixed Use
- Commercial Activity Center
- Highway Corridor
- Office Professional
- Institutional
- Industrial
- Suburban Residential
- Parks
- Sensitive Land

Central Business District (CDB)

Vision: A compact, attractive, pedestrian-friendly downtown with redevelopment opportunities and some remaining historic fabric.

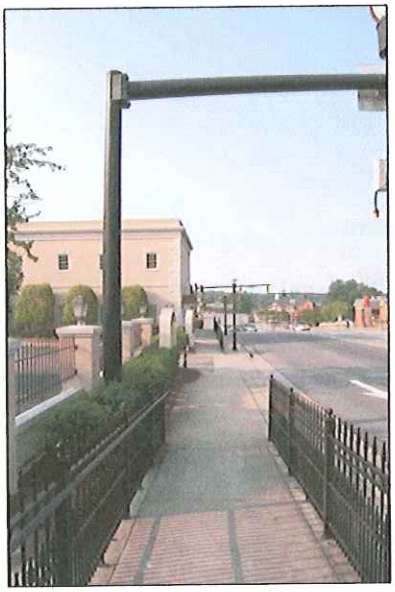
Uses and Intensities: Predominantly mixed use and main street-style commercial, including retail and service establishments, restaurants, offices, civic buildings and uses, institutional, and residential, and pocket parks and civic green spaces. New, luxury, high-density housing is promoted in the CBD (maximum FAR of 2.3.

Major Features: Rectangular or square block, lot, and street pattern, including sidewalks, pedestrian plazas, street trees, and other distinctive streetscape features.

Regulations: To be implemented by CBD zoning and downtown master plan.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Appropriate business, heritage preservation, open space preservation, transportation alternatives, housing opportunities, infill development, and sense of place.

This pocket park in the plaza of the Forsyth County Government Building creates a pedestrian-friendly downtown and preserves open space.



The streetscape of the CBD includes wide sidewalks along major thoroughfares with minimal plantings.

New construction in the CBD promotes designs compatible with typical "Main Street" architecture.

Aerial view of Cumming's Central Business District.

Mixed Use

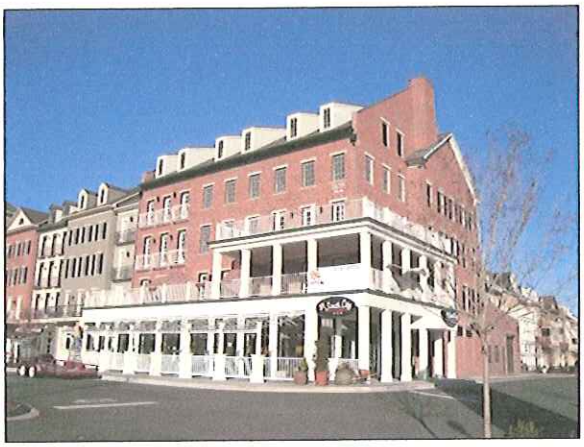
Vision: Areas that will be developed with a combination of different land uses intended to create an environment where compatible land uses can be located in close proximity to each other. Diverse places with unique architecture contributing to the economic base of the city.

Uses and Intensities: Acceptable uses include business/office parks and large-scale retail commercial and service uses. This area may include some housing. Commercial building intensities should be within a range of approximately 15,000 to 38,000 square feet of building space per acre (a Floor-Area Ratio of 0.5 to 0.85).

Major Features: Automobile traffic is frequent, and individual developments are not necessarily connected with one another. Driveways and curb radii are designed to accommodate smaller delivery trucks. Pedestrian accessibility is generally not anticipated, though pedestrian access is required along road frontages. Entrances, frontages, and building façades are softened with landscaping and low-lying identification signs.

Regulations: This character area will be primarily implemented with the multi-use zoning district already established in the Cumming zoning ordinance.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Appropriate business and employment options.



Developments like this in Smyrna, Georgia also combine residential loft and apartment living on upper floors with retail below creating a Mixed Use development.

Cumming Station, in the city's central business district, is an excellent example of desired, vertically integrated, mixed use.

Commercial Activity Center

Vision: This character area will be an accessible center of retail businesses, services (including "big box" establishments), and complementary uses.

Uses and Intensities: Dominated by commercial uses, this character area is the proper place for big box retail, shopping centers, lodging and auto-related uses. Commercial intensities are typically up to 15,000 square feet of building space per acre (FAR of 0.34), but up to 0.5 FAR is permitted.

Major Features: Developments are served by a network of collector and arterial roads. Pedestrian accessibility is promoted, although most activity is via the automobile for access. Entrances, frontages, and building façades are softened with landscaping and low-lying monument signs.

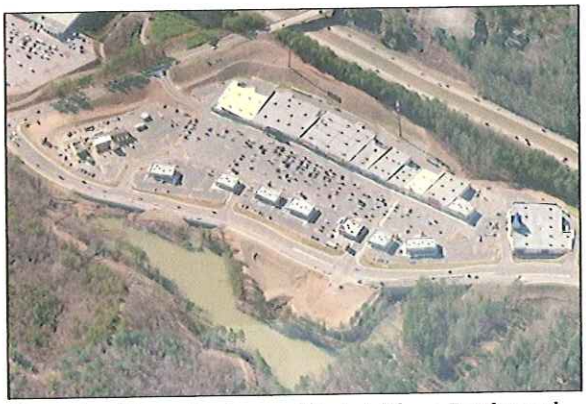
Regulations: This character area is implemented with the planned shopping center zoning district.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Appropriate business, employment options.

Commercial Activity Centers like that found along Market Place Boulevard are automobile orientated and feature service stations (Race Trac gas station on Buford Highway shown above), big box retail and other commercial enterprises typically not found in the Central Business District.

Signage is monumental in design, but low to the ground as this example for the Super Target on Market Place Boulevard. Landscaping is not only used to connect such signage to the ground but to soften the harsh lines of the Commercial Activity Center landscape.

Big box retailers, like Target, are found in the Commercial Activity Center found on Market Place Boulevard.



Cumming Town Center on Market Place Boulevard.

Highway Corridor

Vision: This character area will be an accessible center of small to mid-sized retail businesses, services, and complementary uses.

Uses and Intensities: Dominated by a major automobile corridor, this character area is the proper place for mid-sized shopping centers, auto-related uses and retail services. Commercial intensities are typically up to 15,000 square feet of building space per acre (FAR of 0.34), but up to 0.5 FAR is permitted.

Major Features: These areas are served by a main arterial road. Pedestrian accessibility is promoted, although most activity is via the automobile for access. Landscaping tends to be minimal and focuses on frontages with signage typically attached to a building or as a free standing sign.

Regulations: Implemented by the highway business zoning district.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Appropriate businesses, employment options, community gateway opportunities.

Pedestrian amenities are limited or nonexistent in the Highway Corridor as shown at this intersection of Meadow Drive and Atlanta Highway.

Development along the Highway Corridor can be small service or retail orientated business.

Development along the Highway Corridor can also include large retail development, such as this Ingles on Canton Highway.

Along Atlanta Highway there are substantial opportunities for redevelopment and corridor improvement.

Office-Professional

Vision: Uses range from individual business offices to small complexes of buildings providing professional office space connected by an interior road network. May or may not include pedestrian amenities, but does include landscaping to buffer buildings from each other and the roadway.

Uses and Intensities: Primary office-professional space is for small businesses consisting of a few offices or may contain multiple small offices per building. Relatively low intensities, with an average Floor-Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.25 and a maximum FAR of 0.3.

Major Features: These are mostly single-function land use districts where public access is controlled with one or two access points by automobile. Uses in this area rely on automobiles to provide access with limited pedestrian access if any. Landscaping is typically focused on the parking lot and road frontage but may include foundation plantings.

Regulations: Implemented by the OP, Office-Professional zoning district.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Appropriate business, employment options.

Office-professional complexes such as this example on Pirkle Ferry Road may include one-story, as shown above.

Typically, office-professional buildings are multiple stories.

This character area may include adaptive use of residential structures for offices, such as in this case along Kelly Mill Road.

Institutional

Vision: Large institutional campuses including county public schools, municipal and county facilities, and large churches.

Uses and Intensities: Primarily public and institutional. Relatively low existing intensities, with a Floor-Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.22 to 0.34, up to FAR of 0.7 (higher in multi-story institutional district).

Major Features: These are mostly single-function land use districts where public access is controlled or limited. Areas are designed for trucks, and individual establishments are not connected with one another. In the case of schools, pedestrian accessibility is provided, but other institutions are largely reliant on the automobile for access. Campus-style site planning and generous landscaping are encouraged.

Regulations: This character area is implemented with an institutional zoning district as per the adopted zoning ordinance.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Educational opportunities, employment options.

The Forsyth Central School is an example of an institutional campus compromising multiple buildings with recreational uses in an organized manner.

The generous landscaping in front of the Post Office on Tribble Gap Road softens harsh lines of the buildings and its generous setback.

Typically pedestrian access does not extend from the public street into institutional campuses, as at the United States Post Office on Tribble Gap Road.

Higher floor-area ratios exist in the hospital area, which contemplates even higher building intensities as medical facility needs expand.

Industrial

Vision: Contributing heavily to the blue collar employment base, this character area functions as a concentration of employment and job activity.

Uses and Intensities: Light and heavy industries are the primary uses contemplated within this Character Area. Maximum Floor-Area Ratio of 0.65).

Major Features: Truck traffic is frequent, and individual manufacturing establishments are not necessarily connected with one another. Driveways and curb radii are designed to accommodate large trucks. Pedestrian accessibility is generally not anticipated, though pedestrian access is required along road frontages. Entrances, frontages, and building façades are softened with landscaping and low-lying identification signs.

Regulations: This character area is implemented with a manufacturing zoning district.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Appropriate business, employment options.

View through the Castleberry Industrial Drive in Cumming. The expansive road and parking network allows delivery trucks ease of access and support parking for employees.

Industrial areas in Cumming include large industrial complexes, such as Koch Foods on Meadow Drive.

Smaller industrial buildings like this one on Castleberry Industrial Drive may also feature a showroom for retail sales.

Tyson Foods, one of Cumming's largest and most established industrial facilities.

Suburban Residential

Vision: Conventional suburban subdivisions with larger lots (1/3 to 1 acre) that may have cul-de-sacs and curvilinear streets. Houses are set back from the road. Streets are built to relatively wide standard when compared with traditional neighborhoods.

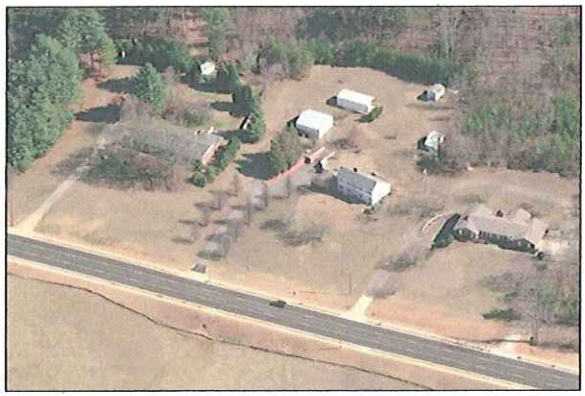
Uses and Densities: Acceptable uses are almost exclusively single-family residences, though some civic and recreational uses integrated into subdivision plans are acceptable. Duplexes, townhouses, multi-family, and accessory apartments are not permitted. Densities are in the range of 1-3 dwelling units per acre.

Major Features: Houses are setback from city streets. Garages are visible in street scene. Automobile access dominates function but sidewalks are required.

Regulations: Implemented with existing residential zoning districts per Cumming zoning ordinance.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Open space preservation, housing opportunities, infill development, and suburban sense of place.

Parkside Walk off of Pilgrim Mill Road is typical of cul-de-sac subdivisions found within the city limits.



Single-lot suburban residential development along major thoroughfares includes deeper setbacks than those found in planned subdivisions.

This residence in Parkside Walk is typical of suburban residential development with a prominent garage orientated to the street.

This character includes some older, established suburban residential neighborhoods.

Parks

Vision: This Character Area provides opportunities for residents of the city, as well as visitors to enjoy recreational opportunities.

Uses and Intensities: These lands are set aside for recreation use including "passive" use, such as hiking and walking, as well as more "active uses" of baseball, soccer and swimming. Park spaces may be "private" (associated with a development) or "public" (operated by Forsyth County or City of Cumming).

Major Features: Parks and open spaces may feature athletic fields (i.e. baseball, soccer, etc.) or be more "passive" park with the landscape in a more naturalized condition.

Regulations: No specific regulations are needed to implement this character area.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Open space preservation, environmental protection, sense of place.

Cumming City Park located on Pilgrim Mill Road provides several recreational uses, including ball fields, a soccer field, swimming pool, tennis courts and a children's playground.

This children's playground is found at the Cumming City Park.

This private park located on Pine Lake Drive is associated with suburban development and adjacent to a subdivision. This is a "passive" park with no programmed recreational use.

Mary Alice Park on Lake Lanier.

Sensitive Land

Vision: These areas contain fragile ecosystems which should be preserved to protect these "sensitive lands."

Uses and Intensities: Since these are lands that are or should be set aside for greenspace, uses are limited to preservation of natural features. Impervious surface limitations should apply.

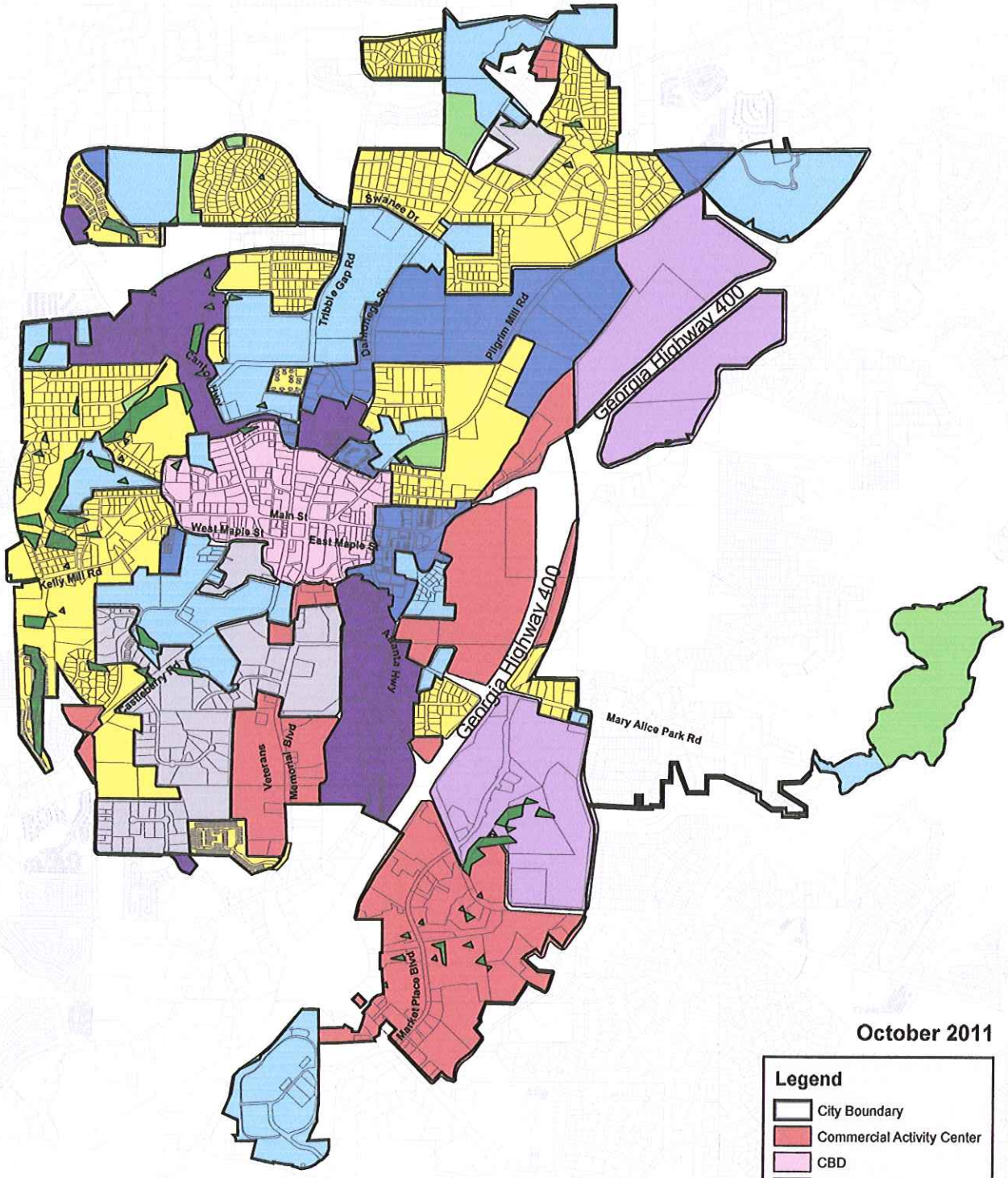
Major Features: Environmentally sensitive areas include such features as wetlands or riparian corridors, severe slopes, and mature woodlands. Conservation of these areas facilitates habitat enhancement and provides for maximum water quality enhancement. Access is limited to conservation-compatible activities.

Regulations: Implemented mostly by the environmental sensitive parcel overlay of the zoning ordinance.

Quality Community Objectives Implemented: Open space preservation, environmental protection, regional cooperation, transportation alternatives.

The overflow from Pine Lake is a sensitive area that is of enviornmental significance.

Mary Alice Lake adjacent to Market Place Boulevard must be monitored to insure that run off from the adjacent Commercial Activity Center does not pollute it.

City of Cumming, Georgia

Preliminary Character Areas - 2011