

City of Dawsonville New Urban Center:

**Redevelopment of the Thunder Road Complex and Linking to Historic
Downtown Dawsonville**

September 12, 2005

Introduction

The City of Dawsonville, much like Dawson County and the Georgia Mountains Regions, is experiencing tremendous growth. The encroachment of metropolitan Atlanta into Dawson County and the increase in the county as a second home and tourist destination has created both positive economic opportunities for the city and negative challenges to overcome. These dynamics have created a set of unique possibilities that will help the Dawsonville redevelop the failed Thunder Road Complex area into a new town center providing possibilities for mixed development activities and link it to the traditional features in the historic downtown.

Downtown Dawsonville is still the traditional social center of Dawson County. There has been an economic shift in commercial activity in the county away from Dawsonville east towards the Georgia 400 corridor where it intersects with SR 53. The downtown area is currently a mix of historic and new structures filled with commercial and institutional uses. Some of the historic structures have been renovated, while others have not been well maintained. Growth in local tourism and the increase in demand for institutional space have kept most of the buildings in the traditional town center occupied. However, residential and commercial activity is moving away from the downtown and city to outlying areas of the county and GA 400 corridor.

It is essential to have a plan to guide the redevelopment of the Thunder Road Complex into a new and vibrant center of commercial and pedestrian activity, as well as linking this area to the historic town center and other community services. It is important that the plan is supported by all facets of the community including: businesses, elected officials and most importantly the local citizenry. The plan should: inventory and examine past and current development patterns; establish a declaration of problems, issues and concerns; identify opportunities and goals for what is needed in order for the plan to be successful; and, create a set of development guidelines that will ensure the optimal mix of design standards and land uses and make the areas attractive for redevelopment and new development.

This urban redevelopment plan is intended to re-develop the Thunder Road Complex into a city center that promotes livability and mobility. A place where a variety of land uses allow citizens to live, work, shop and enjoy the traditional historic qualities that exist in Dawsonville.

The Urban Redevelopment Act

The Urban Redevelopment Act (O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 et. seq.) was adopted in 1955 by the Georgia General Assembly. The 1950s were a period when many Federal resources were focused on improving living conditions and addressing poverty and blight in American cities. Most states, including Georgia, created state enabling legislation to access Federal Housing and Urban Renewal funds. Much has changed since O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 was adopted. Fewer federal funds are now available for community redevelopment, and over the last five decades many lessons have been learned about

the economics of adaptive reuse and historic preservation, creating livable communities, and the positive and negative social impacts of physical design. Still, for Georgia cities and counties embarking on community revitalization projects, the Urban Redevelopment Act remains the most powerful, flexible and easy to use legislative tool governing the use of eminent domain and bond financing to support successful public/private revitalization partnerships.

The Urban Redevelopment Act gives cities and counties in Georgia specific powers to rehabilitate, conserve or redevelop of any defined geographical area that is designated as a “slum area.” As a prerequisite to exercising these powers, the city council or county commission must adopt a resolution finding that the area constitutes a “slum area” as defined by the Act and that redevelopment of the area is “necessary in the interest of the public health, safety, morals, or welfare” of the residents of the jurisdiction. In addition to designating by resolution an “urban redevelopment area” appropriate for redevelopment projects, the Act requires adoption by the local government of an urban redevelopment plan for the target area.

The word “urban” in the title is actually misleading, since the Act is applicable to, and can be especially useful in, very small rural communities and even suburban settings. In fact, rural counties were among the first governments to use the Act for the purpose of rehabilitation of deteriorating neighborhoods or increasing their supply of affordable housing. Unfortunately, there is no actual record of how many urban redevelopment plans have been implemented using this statute, since the law does not require local governments using the Act to report to or seek approval from a state agency.

Another factor that has reduced the use of this Act is that it is easily confused with the similarly titled Urban Redevelopment Powers Act (O.C.G.A. 36-44-1), which authorizes tax allocation districts. Although both laws have community development as their goals, the Urban Redevelopment Powers Act is more procedurally complex, more difficult to implement, and has a much narrower focus and applicability.

Because of its age, certain assumptions implicit in the Act are somewhat out of tune with the latest trends in city planning and community development. Since the era when this law was drafted, city planners and local governments have made costly mistakes and learned important lessons about development and redevelopment--and their potential unintended effects on neighborhoods and downtowns. For example, some language in the Act implies that neighborhood decline, crime, and economic problems are linked to too much population density. More recent research tends to contradict this assumption.

And yet in spite of some dated language, the provisions of the law in no way prohibit a local government from encouraging higher density projects as part of a workable revitalization strategy.

Today, with suburban sprawl impinging on an ever-shrinking supply of undeveloped land, the pendulum of public policy and city planning theory have swung away from

separation of land uses that characterized the zoning ordinances of the 1970's and 1980's. Land use patterns based primarily on accommodating automobiles are now being retrofitted successfully with denser, more pedestrian oriented and use-integrated development modeled on the layout and aesthetic components that are so livable in the historic cores of our Georgia cities. Neo-traditional development principles (often labeled "smart growth") include: traditional gridded street patterns, smaller lots, narrower streets and setbacks, pedestrian circulation systems and village style neighborhood commercial nodes. The residential densities and lot sizes drawn from Georgia's historic districts have also proved to be good patterns for building more neighborly neighborhoods. These design elements along with a synergistic mix of land uses, are proving very marketable. While suburbs still house a large percentage of America's population, there is growing evidence that many people are gravitating toward neighborhoods with more nightlife and cultural diversity as well as a less stratified socioeconomic mix.

(Creating new housing within walking distance of downtown and neighborhood commercial nodes; adaptively reusing vacant mills, warehouses, and factories; and amending local fire and building codes to allow upstairs loft living in historic downtowns are common success stories based on re-integrating uses and exciting people places with varying levels of activity and interactivity.)

The Urban Redevelopment Act can be used alone, or in combination with many of Georgia's other legislative redevelopment tools to support local comprehensive planning, revitalize faltering commercial corridors, recruit and nurture small businesses, rehabilitate older homes and neighborhoods, ensure architecturally compatible infill development, and generate new adaptive reuses for old industrial and agricultural facilities. O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 offers solid support for innovative and thoughtfully crafted development strategies needed to solve the problems of these designated target areas.

The Urban Redevelopment Act has become more relevant recently for a variety of reasons. First, some sectors of the population (especially aging baby boomers, younger singles, and couples) are becoming increasingly interested in moving from the suburbs, which require long commutes to work, back into neglected section of large cities or relocating to small, charming towns. Real estate prices are appreciating and housing demand is strong near reinvigorated town centers and "village" commercial nodes. Second, our supply of affordable housing is aging and shrinking while the population needing this housing is growing; so many governments are looking to provide moderate income residents with viable options to manufactured housing. Third, at the state policy level, legislators and state agencies are encouraging cities and counties to be more strategic and creative in combining the state's wide array of legislative, programmatic and funding tools for community revitalization. Accordingly, adopting an urban redevelopment plan pursuant to the Act has now been added as a threshold criterion for accessing some important development incentives. Communities are being encouraged to focus multiple resources and tools in target areas that are economically disadvantaged or held back by impediments that discourage private sector investment.

Recent changes to Georgia's brownfield regulations and new streamlined programs created by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) now reduce liability for innocent investors (private or governmental) seeking to redevelop brownfield sites and offset site

cleanup costs with tax incentives. These constructive changes should help Georgia attract private investors to sites that were not economically viable previously, many of which are in or near downtowns and older neighborhoods. The Act is a promising tool for brownfield redevelopment because it simplifies land acquisition and allows the public sector to help finance infrastructure or related improvements.

Additionally, several programs created or administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) are being modified based on refinements to state planning statutes resulting from the 2004 legislative session. Progressive communities that adopt urban redevelopment plans (especially in combination with other innovative redevelopment tools) may now be eligible for higher job tax credits and more competitive scoring on Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applications. These program initiatives were designed to enable both urban and very rural communities to create more effective strategies to address pockets of poverty. DCA has observed an increase in requests for information, training and technical assistance related to the Act, and this publication is intended to outline the Act and provide practical advice on developing an urban redevelopment plan.

Compared to some of Georgia's other planning and community development statutes, the Urban Redevelopment Act is straightforward, flexible and free from unnecessary red tape. The Act also does a good job of balancing the community's need to remove the barriers to its overall economic development created by slum and blight with protection of the rights of property owners, and low income residents in particular.

It should also be emphasized here that the great majority of existing urban redevelopment plans implemented under this statute to date have entailed neither major displacement of residents nor the use of eminent domain to acquire private property. Most neighborhood residents have ended up with improved living conditions with equal or even lower housing costs. Home ownership opportunities have been expanded, and the vast majority of land transactions under these plans have been between willing buyers and sellers.

Promising Uses for the Urban Redevelopment Act

- Deteriorating or underutilized sections of downtowns
- Brownfields
- Old warehouse or industrial districts
- Declining commercial corridors (grayfields)
- Deteriorating neighborhoods
- Mixed-use and neo-traditional developments
- Substandard or obsolescent mobile home parks
- Neighborhoods that might be negatively affected by facilities such as airports or water treatment facilities

Local Government Actions Required to Use the Act

City and county elected officials are the only bodies authorized to establish Urban Redevelopment Areas as defined under this Act. Because of its origin and intent, using the Act requires a local legislative or “finding of necessity” specifying geographic areas that have been determined to meet the definition of “slum and blight” included in the Act. Such a resolution should outline the negative conditions present in the proposed redevelopment areas and commit the local government to adopting a “workable” redevelopment plan for the area(s) to be revitalized.

Note that cities should be very careful to review their city charters when drafting the language of their enabling resolutions, because these charters may require specific formats, unique language or other requirements needed to make resolutions legal and binding.

The Act defines a “slum area” as:

an area which by reason of the presence of a substantial number of slum, deteriorated, *or deteriorating* structures; predominance of defective or inadequate street layout; faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness; unsanitary or unsafe conditions; *deterioration of site or other improvements*; tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land; the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes; by having development impaired by airport or transportation noise or by other environmental hazards; *or any combination of such factors* substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a Governmental Entity, retards the provisions of housing accommodations, or constitutes an economic or social liability and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare in its present condition and use.

The State Legislature asserted in the Act that the “existence of slum areas:

- Contributes substantially and increasingly to the spread of disease and crime; Constitutes an economic and social liability;
- Substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of municipalities and counties;
- Retards the provision of housing accommodations; or
- Aggravates traffic problems, and substantially impairs or arrests the elimination of traffic hazards and the improvement of traffic facilities;
- Are local centers of disease;
- Promote juvenile delinquency; and
- Contribute little to the tax income of the state and its municipalities and counties, consume an excessive proportion of its revenues because of the extra services

required for police, fire, accident, hospitalization, and other forms of public protection, services, and facilities.”

While it might seem politically unpalatable to brand any part of a community with this somewhat dated and pejorative label, it is sufficient (and essential) to include this finding in the written resolution of intent to use the Act. Handled sensitively, the urban redevelopment area designation need not be a subject of extensive public debate, community friction, or negative press coverage. Instead, the positive economic, aesthetic, and functional results of proposed revitalization should be the focus of community consensus building.

All of the above conditions need not exist in an area in order for a local government to invoke the powers of the Act. Any combination of these conditions would likely be sufficient to designate an urban redevelopment area. Obviously some of these slum and blight indicators are quite specific while others are more subjective. The key finding is that such conditions “substantially impairs or retards the sound growth of the municipality or county.”

The good news is that Georgia case law has consistently affirmed the principle that local governments must define slum and blight for themselves in the context of their local economies and thus communities have broad latitude to define appropriate target area boundaries. While a well written urban redevelopment plan will identify and provide examples of such conditions, Georgia courts have ruled that:

“Under this section, it is not required that any evidence or proof be taken or considered but simply that a resolution be adopted. This can only mean that the officials concerned exercise their own judgment based upon what they know or believe and make their findings. The very nature of matters required to be found by the resolution shows them not capable of being brought under judicial determination.”

These rulings mean that courts are unlikely to step in and second guess a local governing body’s legislative intent. This may also be the reason that the Act does not actually dictate quantifiable measurements of blight or research methodologies, either in the authorizing local resolution or in the plan. Nevertheless, there are a number of useful and reasonably accessible indicators of physical and economic decline that should not only help local governments evaluate and identify appropriate urban redevelopment area boundaries, but also inform the development of more effective remediation strategies. These indicators can also be used as benchmarks for measuring long range success as conditions in the target area begin to improve.

Possible Blight Indicators

Examining some of the following data should help a community identify and target appropriate redevelopment areas:

- Lower than average growth in assessed tax value
- Low real estate values
- Lower numbers of building permits than surrounding areas
- Deteriorated or poorly maintained housing stock
- Obsolescent buildings or facilities
- Visual Blight (examples might include poor quality strip commercial buildings, barren parking lots, broken or missing sidewalks and curbs, poor drainage, garish or poorly maintained signage, excessive and distracting utility poles and overhead lines and wires, junk, graffiti, and litter)
- High crime statistics
- Higher unemployment rates than the surrounding area
- High commercial vacancy rates (or a concentration of vacant or underutilized buildings)
- Lower than average (per square foot) rents
- High rental vacancy rates
- Greater percentage of the population below the poverty level
- Many bankruptcies and business closures
- Substandard public infrastructure (lack of sidewalks and pedestrian amenities, lighting, recreational facilities or open space, poor water quality or drainage)
- Confusing, dangerous or inefficient street layout (look at accident statistics)
- Fragmented, inappropriate or commercially nonviable subdivision platting or lot layout
- Unclear property ownership (clouded titles) inhibiting investment in the area
- High rate of delinquent property taxes
- Situations in which the high land to building value makes properties economically viable for redevelopment

While it is prudent for communities to back up subjective impressions of slum and blight by reviewing these indicators and trends, it may prove counterproductive to include massive amounts of point-in-time data in the actual redevelopment plan, because 1) extensive data gathering is likely to increase the cost and time needed to prepare a plan, 2) many of the data sources change rapidly and thus might require updating the plan frequently with little practical benefit, and 3) there is some possibility that incorrect or questionable data used to justify the actions proposed in the plan might provide grounds for legally challenging the plan. A reasonable and balanced approach to this issue is to look carefully at all the data available and then summarize relevant findings in more general terms in both the resolution and the plan.

Planning Requirements of the Act

Fortunately, the specific planning requirements of the Act are not excessive or overly complicated. It is also helpful that the minimum information required for an urban redevelopment plan is actually specified in the Act. The plan is primarily intended to provide citizens, existing landowners, and potential developer/investors with unambiguous details concerning the local government's vision for the revitalization area.

The amount of detail and complexity required of the plan may differ widely based on the size of the redevelopment area(s), the complexity and types of activities envisioned, and the entities chosen to carry out the plan. Plans may vary from a few pages if an urban redevelopment area will only address a single public facility or clean up deteriorated housing in a single neighborhood to many pages for a complex mixed use commercial development. The amount of detail in the plan should be appropriate to the community's specific goals and intentions for the target area.

Removing uncertainty is one key to spurring private market investment in target redevelopment areas. Once potential private partners and residents understand the long-range vision for the area, as well as the constraints, incentives and special financial tools available within these target areas, it will be easier for all parties to arrive at realistic and equitable land prices, project costs and potential profit margins for alternative build-out scenarios and secure construction and development financing for revitalization projects from banks and lenders.

Under the definition of "urban redevelopment plan" contained in O.C.G.A. 36-61-1(21)8 a plan must:

- (A) Conform to the general plan for the municipality or county as a whole; and
- (B) Be sufficiently complete to indicate such land acquisition, demolition and removal of structures, redevelopment, improvements, and rehabilitation as may be proposed to be carried out in the urban redevelopment area; zoning and planning changes, if any; land uses; maximum densities; building requirements; and the plan's relationship to definite local objectives respecting appropriate land uses, improved traffic, public transportation, public utilities, recreational and community facilities, and other public improvements.

Plan elements should include:

- A statement that the URP is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan
- Clearly defined boundaries of the redevelopment area(s) (which need not be contiguous)
- Explanation of negative conditions in the area necessitating redevelopment and an explication of how the area meets the act's definition of slum and blight
- The city's land use objectives for the area (types of uses, building requirements, zoning changes, and development densities)
- Description of land parcels to be acquired
- Structures to be demolished or rehabilitated
- A workable plan for leveraging private resources to redevelop the area
- A strategy for relocating any displaced residents

- Any covenants or restrictions to be placed on properties in the redevelopment area in order to implement the plan
- Public infrastructure to be provided – transportation, water, sewer, sidewalks, lighting, streetscapes, public recreational space, parking, etc., to support redevelopment of the area
- A workable strategy for implementing the plan.

In addition, the plan must provide for:

- A feasible method for the relocation of families who will be displaced into decent, safe, and sanitary housing within their means, and
- Maximum opportunity for the rehabilitation or redevelopment of the area by private enterprise.

As a general rule, communities will benefit by providing more than the minimum required information in their plans, including using appropriate graphics and conceptual illustrations of the desired redevelopment outcome. Since the plan may place limitations on the possible uses of private property, it is important to have a reasonably detailed conceptual design and desired land use mix for the area.

Historic and Existing Conditions

Since its establishment the City of Dawsonville has been the main center of activity in Dawson County. Historically, downtown has been the economic, institutional and social center of the county. Land use composition in and around downtown Dawsonville is typical of small towns, that is most of the residential areas have traditionally been constructed within close proximity to downtown where most commercial businesses were located.

However, the historic fabric of Dawsonville has been severely threatened by a number of unrelated fires and lack of maintenance that destroyed some of the older buildings in the downtown community. As these buildings were lost contemporary structures were erected with little regard for the surrounding traditional architectural styles. Other structures were never replaced leaving vacant lots and properties in downtown. The streets in downtown are now open with little vegetation or shade, while pedestrian amenities are virtually non-existent.

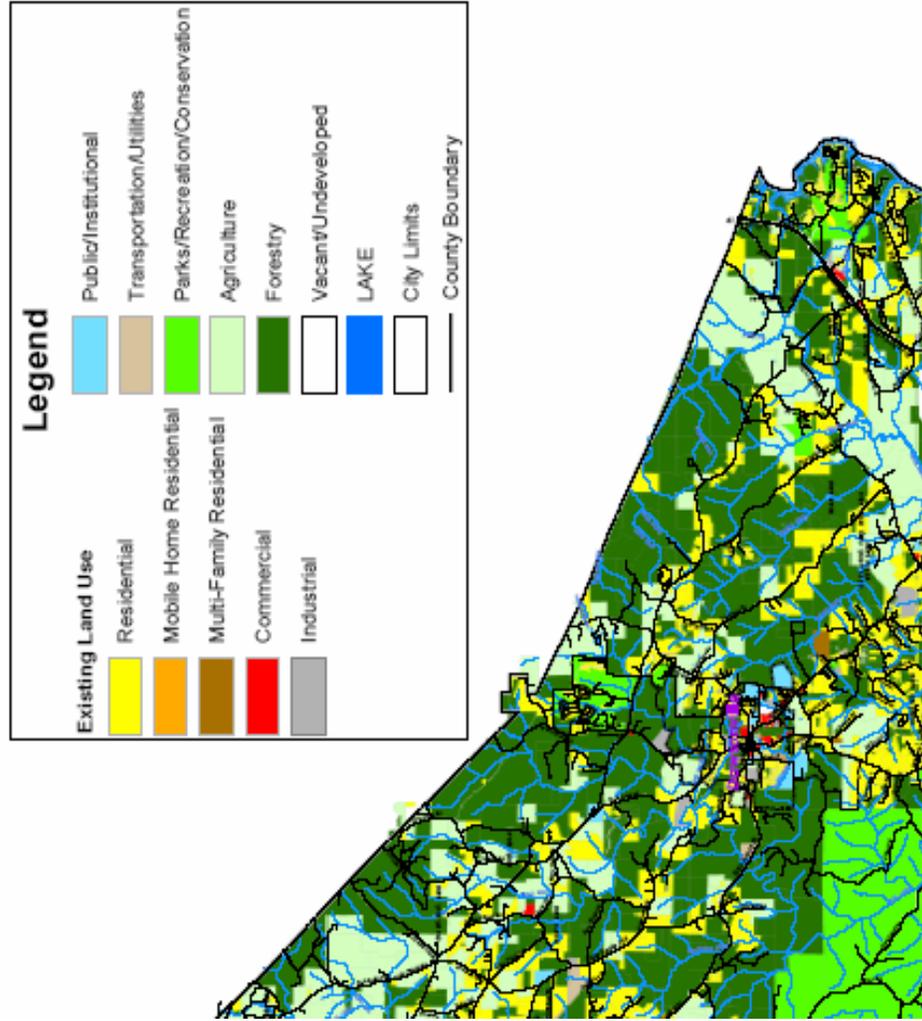
The continual change in the residential and commercial climate in Dawson County over the past fifteen years has shifted residential and commercial activity to the outlying areas of the county. These shifts have created changes in the traffic patterns, which resulted in a decline in the retail sector in downtown. Traditional institutional land uses such as local governments courts and administration and schools have assisted in keeping some traffic in downtown. Some of the decline was also offset by a concerted effort by the city and local private resources to promote tourism through its historic resources and local traditions. This included the development of the Georgia Racing

Hall of Fame complex on a vacant tract of land in close proximity of downtown, yet on SR 53, the main thoroughfare of Dawsonville.

After a few years of low visitor attendance and financial difficulties, Thunder Road, Georgia Racing Hall of Fame closed down. The city government uses a small portion of the nearly 40,000 square foot facility (six acres) for city hall and offices. The closure of this facility also reduced the amount of tourism traffic in the rest of downtown. Thus the current primary driver of activity in Dawsonville is public institutional uses and a few local services.

Adjacent to the current six acre complex are a few older single-family residential units (less than six units), Dawson County Schools, a few small commercial services that rely on highway traffic, and a vacant thirty-three acre tract of land.

Existing Land Use, Dawson County





The Georgia Racing Hall of Fame Complex. Dawsonville City Hall only occupies a few thousand square feet of the nearly 40,000 square foot building.



The nearly vacant Georgia Racing Hall of Fame Complex (six acres) and vacant adjacent thirty-three acres.

Structures such as this building remain empty in downtown Dawsonville.



Over the years dilapidated structures have eventually become vacant lots in downtown Dawsonville as seen below.



Residential and commercial shifts in the local economy has led to the conversion of land uses in downtown that are not conducive with such an environment.



Existing Zoning

The City of Dawsonville Land Use and Zoning Ordinance traditionally included basic and simple mix of residential and commercial districts at a few different levels of intensity. However, recent updates have included zoning districts are more sophisticated, flexible and reflective of the local character in the community. This ordinance is more quality growth oriented.

Most of the downtown is zoning Town Business, TB, (Historical District). This district promotes, protects and enhances historic structures and their uniqueness to the community. It also assures that new structures will be compatible with the historic features of downtown. The district allows a large variety of retail and service oriented uses that are generally of a smaller scale, which are generally associated with small towns. Another significant portion of downtown is zoned Institutional, INST, that accommodate public and semi-public land uses owned by government entities. These uses are also intended to serve as a buffer between more intensive non-residential and residential districts.

Adjacent to downtown, the area that is targeted for redevelopment, the current zoning classifications include: Highway Business, Light Industrial and Planned Conservation Subdivision. The Highway Business District, HB, is where the current City Hall resides in the Thunder Road Complex. This district allows uses that serve residents at the community and regional level versus a neighborhood level. These types of businesses are normally larger in size and scale and are highway oriented for passerby traffic. The Light Industrial District, LI, allows for less intense land uses that have reduced and limited industrial impacts and are not objectionable to neighboring districts. The Planned Conservation Subdivision District, PCS, provides flexibility in ensuring preservation of open space within a master-planned residential development. While this area has its assigned zoning district, the majority of land is vacant.

Other surrounding zoning districts to downtown and the proposed area for redevelopment include: R-1, Single Family Residential; CBD, Central Business District; and, CIR, Restricted Industrial District. Most of this land is either vacant or is being used at a very low level of intensity.

Existing Transportation Network

Dawson County is served by a network of arterial highways, collector roads and local streets.

The most important arterial in Dawson County is Georgia 400, which travels in a north-south direction and is located in the eastern part of the county. This arterial has been a major force in contributing to the economic in Dawson County for the past ten years. The route provides relatively easy access from Dawson County to Metropolitan Atlanta and to the mountains to the north. Daily traffic on the facility is in excess of 30,000 vehicles per day.

State Route, SR 53, serves as a east-west route between Gainesville-Hall County and Jasper-Pickens County, and westward to Interstate 75. SR 53 travels past the proposed site for redevelopment and through downtown Dawsonville. The existing City Hall, Thunder Road Complex, is located on SR 53 adjacent to the downtown district.

State Route, SR 9, for many years served as the primary north-south arterial between Atlanta and Dahlonega. The completion of Georgia 400 provided an improved and direct alternative to this highway. However, local traffic continues to make use of SR 9, as it travels directly through Dawsonville and intersects with SR 53 on the square in downtown.

At the local level, Dawsonville has several local streets that provide a grid for downtown. However, many of these streets were designed years ago. They are generally narrow, do not include sidewalks and have little or no parking. This discourages consumer and pedestrian use of downtown and adjacent areas and has contributed greatly to the loss of residential and commercial activity away from Dawsonville to outlying areas in the county.

Poorly designed or total lack of pedestrian and parking amenities is a major contributor to the loss of commercial and residential activity in downtown.

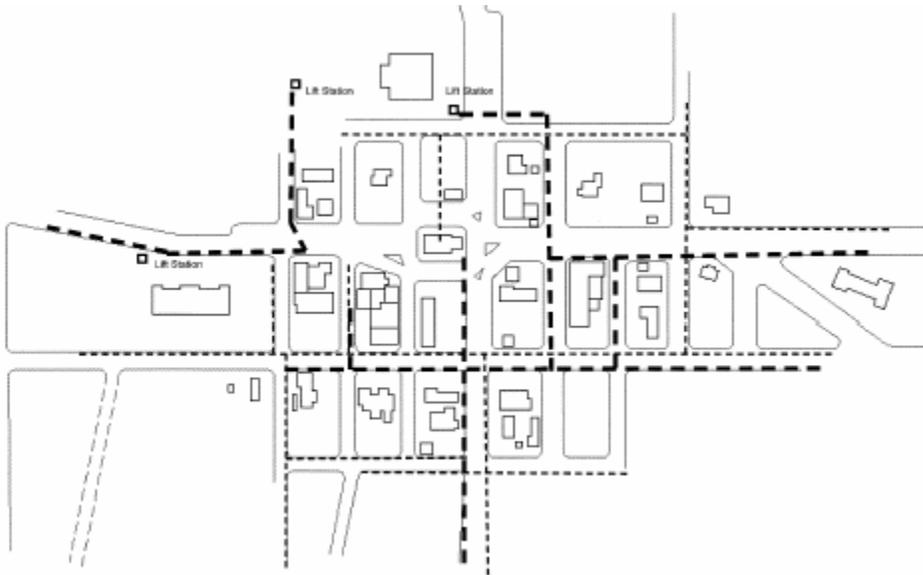


Other Infrastructure

The City of Dawsonville has both water and sewer capacity available for development. The city's wastewater treatment plant is operating at about 50% of its permitted capacity. The City purchases water from the Etowah Water and Sewer Authority, which has a permit to treat up to 3 million gallons of water per day.

Public safety services are provided by Dawson County. A fire station is located immediately adjacent to the proposed redevelopment site and the county sheriff's office and EMS office is located in downtown. The county middle school and the Dawson County Public Library are located adjacent to the site proposed for redevelopment. The county high school and elementary school are also within walking distance, via local streets, to this location. Most of the county offices and department are located within walking distance from the proposed site in downtown Dawsonville.

Downtown Dawsonville – Water and Sewer Infrastructure



Existing Demographics

From 1990 to 2000 both Dawson County and Dawsonville grew at a rate higher than the State of Georgia. The County is experiencing tremendous growth and is consistently one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. The county population increased from 9,402 in 1990 to 15,999 in 2000, an increase of almost 70%. Dawsonville's population increased over the same time frame from 467 to 619 persons, an increase of over 32%. Almost 85% of the population increase is coming from migration, persons moving into the county.

Most of those moving into the county are persons retiring to live either in the mountains or on Lake Lanier. The 2000 Census reported that just over 20% of the county is over the age of 55 and the median age in the county is 36.4 years. The median age for the City of Dawsonville increased from 30 to 33.5 years over the same time frame and like the county just over 20% of the local population is over the age of 55. Many of these residents live in housing in the city because they cannot afford to live elsewhere in the county. Also, these older housing units in the city are typically smaller, and meet most of their housing needs.

The city also has a higher percentage of persons under the age of 18 than in the county. Again this is because much of the housing in Dawsonville is older and smaller in size and is being rented to younger families with low and moderate incomes, and who also have children also living in their household. However, in the five years since the Census, rapid residential development is occurring in the southern part of the county where younger working families can live and easily commute to jobs in Forsyth and Hall Counties and other parts of Metropolitan Atlanta.

Most of the residential growth in Dawsonville has occurred due to the city annexing property and expanding its geographic boundaries. The downtown area has basically lost residential growth due to most housing units being aged and not well maintained or converted to some type of non-residential use.

The labor force in Dawson County increased at a rapid rate of 79% higher than the overall population growth rate. In 2000, the county labor force was made up of 8,454 workers. Unfortunately, almost 66% of the labor force commutes outside the county to their place of employment. More than one half of these persons work in Forsyth County. The labor force inside the city is made up of 252 workers. The city labor force is better educated than in the past with more than 72% having at least a high school diploma and almost 30% having some type of post secondary education. Just less than 16% have earned at least a bachelors or higher. However, almost 80% commute outside the city to their place of employment. Just about all of those commuting outside the city actually work within Dawson County.

Though the average size of a household is decreasing in Dawson County the average household income increased by more than two-thirds to \$47,486. This is higher than the state average by about \$5,000. The census also reported that per capita income

increased as well to \$23,122 over the past ten years. However, the average household income and per capita income increase significantly less in the City of Dawsonville than in the county. The 2000 Census reported a household income of \$34,327 and per capita income of \$20,207. These figures for the city are 79% and 70%, respectively of the state average. The Census also reported that approximately 12% of the total population in Dawsonville lived below the poverty level.

Dawsonville is typical of most small towns in the Georgia Mountains Region in that a socio-economic shift to younger households with low and moderate incomes is taking place. This is due to the type of housing opportunities that are available in the city versus those available in the county.

**HOUSEHOLD INCOME: Households
Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3).**

	Dawsonville city, Georgia
Total:	217
Less than \$10,000	39
\$10,000 to \$14,999	9
\$15,000 to \$19,999	18
\$20,000 to \$24,999	12
\$25,000 to \$29,999	20
\$30,000 to \$34,999	14
\$35,000 to \$39,999	10
\$40,000 to \$44,999	11
\$45,000 to \$49,999	9
\$50,000 to \$59,999	25
\$60,000 to \$74,999	15
\$75,000 to \$99,999	22
\$100,000 to \$124,999	3
\$125,000 to \$149,999	0
\$150,000 to \$199,999	3
\$200,000 or more	7

POVERTY STATUS

Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3).

	Dawsonville city, Georgia
Total:	547
Income in 1999 below poverty level:	65
Under 5 years	17
5 years	0
6 to 11 years	3
12 to 17 years	3
18 to 64 years	34
65 to 74 years	3
75 years and over	5
Income in 1999 at or above poverty level:	482
Under 5 years	34
5 years	6
6 to 11 years	55
12 to 17 years	55
18 to 64 years	289
65 to 74 years	31
75 years and over	12

Existing Slum Area – Under Utilized and Deteriorating

Due to both demographic and economic changes in Dawson County and in Dawsonville economic stress is beginning to be seen in the city. Some of the concerns are listed below:

- Many of the historic structures in downtown are not being maintained and are subject to dilapidation. Local tourism is not enough to support the use and maintenance of structures designed to accommodate the local community.
- The loss of adequate housing opportunities for all income levels and types of households. Several residential structures no longer exist either due to lack of maintenance or the conversion to non-residential land uses.
- Vacant lots and tracts exist between downtown and city hall because the majority of development is moving to the outlying areas of the county, primarily to the Georgia 400 corridor.
- A large under utilized facility exists in town where city hall is now located. City Hall only occupies about 10% of the nearly 40,000 square foot facility. The surrounding land (30+ acres) proposed for related development lies vacant and unused zoned to a district (industrial) that most likely will never happen due to its location.

These concerns together constitutes an economic and social liability within the city. The identified areas are at different stages of deterioration. For those areas that have not yet seen obvious deterioration, they are in a state of circumstance where growth may be retarded and quality development may not happen.

The conditions of blight (slum) as described above apply to the following areas:

(Descriptive boundaries of slum area, also see map: 1) City Hall site, surrounding vacant site (30 acre) bordered by Allen Street, SR 53, Memory Lane, etc; 2) vacant land across SR 53 from city hall and link into Church and 4th Streets and into downtown (also along SR 53 and Academy Street; 3) downtown historic district areas.)

The described area is subject to slum and blight without extensive measures of prevention undertaken by the City of Dawsonville. This includes undertaking the creation of a Redevelopment Plan to establish a new urban center with mixed uses, renovated historic district with additional housing opportunities, and pedestrian connectivity between the two areas. Redevelopment of these areas is in the best interest of the public health, safety, moral and welfare of the residents of the City of Dawsonville.

The City of Dawsonville will act as the official redevelopment entity implementing the redevelopment plan.

Target area

Public Participation: City Responses and Desires

In 2004 and early 2005, the City of Dawsonville participated, with Dawson County, in an update to the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan prepared by Jerry Weitz and Associates. One component of plan participation included a visioning questionnaire for the City of Dawsonville. City residents were asked to rate their opinion on a number of quality growth related issues. The results of this visioning process has provided the directive for city officials to build on the planning process by creating a specific plan for a new urban center of mixed uses, protecting and enhancing the historic district, providing for good pedestrian movement and connectivity between the downtown historic areas, residences and the new urban center.

Below are the responses from the Dawsonville visioning questionnaire:

CITY OF DAWSONVILLE VISIONING QUESTIONNAIRE (# RESPONSES SHOWN)

1. Dawsonville is growing at a rate of development that is too fast.

(n = 49) (49% agree or strongly agree)

0	15	10	19	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	30.6%	27.8%	38.8%	10.2%

2. Dawsonville is a unique place with a character that distinguishes it from other places.

(n = 49) (73.5% agree or strongly agree)

1	5	7	31	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.0%	10.2%	14.3%	63.3%	10.2%

If you agree or strongly disagree, describe the character. Tabulated separately.

3. Dawsonville needs special programs and regulations to protect historic buildings and sites. (n = 48) (85.5% agree or strongly agree)

1	0	6	27	14
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.0%		12.5%	56.3%	29.2%

4. Dawsonville will increase its city limits substantially during the next ten years.

(n = 49) (61.1% agree or strongly agree)

1	9	9	28	2
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.0%	18.4%	18.4%	57.1%	4.0%

5. During the next 20 years, Dawsonville should strive to become which of the following?

11	→ Protected farming	34	→ Part of Georgia Mountains region
4	→ Rural development	2	→ Extension of Atlanta metro area
9	→ Gated communities	18	→ Light Industry work place
34	→ Mountain tourism economy	1	→ Distribution center (trucking)
8	→ Dense, single-family neighborhoods	11	→ Home to major institution(s)
4	→ Residential with golf course	8	→ Outlet malls/large retailers
2	→ Auto dealerships	2	→ Commercial recreation (e.g., race track)
32	→ Elderly communities	32	→ Mixed-use pedestrian centers
13	→ Apartment communities	35	→ Historic district

6. Architectural designs of new developments need to be reviewed and approved by a committee. (n = 45) (97.7% agree or strongly agree)

0	1	0	24	20
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	2.2%		53.3%	44.4%

7. Planning for bicycle lanes or paths should be a priority in Dawsonville.

(n = 48) (75% agree or strongly agree)

2	3	7	28	8
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.2%	6.3%	14.6%	58.3%	16.7%

8. Dawsonville needs to institute a program of installing more sidewalks in town.

(n = 48) (85.4% agree or strongly agree)

0	1	6	23	18
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	2.1%	12.5%	47.9%	37.5%

9. Public water and public sanitary sewer service should eventually be provided in all incorporated portions of Dawsonville.

(n = 47) (83% agree or strongly agree)

0	1	7	29	10
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	2.1%	14.9%	61.7%	21.3%

10. There are opportunities for Dawsonville to work with Dawson County in terms of providing more efficient services.

(n = 48) (93.8% agree or strongly agree)

0	0	3	25	20
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
		6.3%	52.1%	41.7%

11. Planned residential communities with densities of TWO UNITS PER ACRE are appropriate in Dawsonville, assuming public water and sanitary sewer are available.

(n = 47) (74.4% agree or strongly agree)

1	6	5	32	3
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.1%	12.8%	10.6%	68.1%	6.3%

12. Planned residential communities with densities of FOUR UNITS PER ACRE are appropriate in Dawsonville, assuming public water and sanitary sewer are available.

(n = 48) (48% agree or strongly agree)

7	16	2	20	3
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
14.6%	33.3%	4.2%	41.7%	6.3%

13. Planned residential communities with densities of SIX UNITS PER ACRE are appropriate in Dawsonville, assuming public water and sanitary sewer are available.

(n = 46) (19.5% agree or strongly agree)

13	22	2	7	2
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
28.3%	47.8%	4.3%	15.2%	4.3%

14. Planned residential communities with densities of MORE THAN SIX UNITS PER ACRE are appropriate in Dawsonville, assuming public water and sanitary sewer are available.

(n = 45) (20% agree or strongly agree)

19	15	2	7	2
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
42.2%	33.3%	4.4%	15.6%	4.4%

15. Dawsonville is doing enough to protect the aesthetic character of the city.
(n = 47) (4.3% agree or strongly agree)

9	24	12	2	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
19.1%	51.1%	25.5%	4.3%	

Note: If you strongly disagree or disagree, please note the areas of concern that you believe are not being addressed results tabulated separately.

16. Please submit any additional comments you would like the city to consider in planning for its future. Results tabulated separately.

A summary of some of the survey results identified the following support of this plan:

- 85.5% agree or strongly agree that Dawsonville needs special programs and regulations to protect historic buildings and sites.
- 97.7% agree or strongly agree that architectural designs of new developments need to be reviewed and approved by a committee.
- 75% agree or strongly agree with planning for bicycle lanes or paths should be a priority.
- 85.4% agree or strongly agree with the need to institute a program of installing more sidewalks in town.
- The highest priorities on what Dawsonville should become during the next 20 years were: Historic District, Part of the Georgia Mountain Region, Mountain Tourism Economy, Elderly Communities and Mixed-Use Pedestrian Centers.

This input from the public has aided in developing a base of priorities from which city officials can begin to address through this redevelopment plan. It is most important to note that since this input has come as a result of the update to the comprehensive plan. The efforts and recommendations found in the redevelopment plan will relatively conform and be consistent with the city's comprehensive plan.

VISION – CITY OF DAWSONVILLE

Dawsonville, an integral part of Dawson County and the Georgia Mountains region, envisions a future where it maintains and enhances its distinct character, which includes the birthplace of stockcar racing, moonshine production/running), a mountain heritage, rich scenic beauty, friendly people, and small town/rural atmosphere (photo right).

Dawsonville will further define its unique character through traditional town planning principles (sketch below).

The downtown will be a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use destination, free from truck traffic and franchise architecture, with proud citizens and small business owners who admire their past. It will preserve historic, cultural, and small-town qualities and maintain and promote aesthetic charm (photo right).



Dawsonville will continue to serve as the government and cultural center for the county. Its city limits will expand over time in a responsible manner to accommodate more urban development, consistent with this vision, without losing its identity and heritage.



Plan Phasing and Recommendations

The proposed redevelopment plan is to take place in three phases. A phased approach identifies an effort that is logical in sequence and in priority of need. Phasing will allow the city, acting as the Redevelopment Entity, to build momentum through out the planning redevelopment process, continually gain public input and make the necessary adjustments as the plan progress.

Phase one includes the creation of a new mixed use urban center. This will occur at the Thunder Road Complex where city hall currently exists. It will include the 6 acres that contains the complex and an additional adjacent 31.7 acres and create a new urban center contained mixed uses of commercial retail, office, residential and institutional. The center will include amenities such as green space and trails providing interconnectivity with in the center. The mixed used development will be a center of livability, meaning it will provide the opportunities for living, working and recreation. Once complete the site will contain over 150,000 square feet of retail space, 120,000 square feet of office space, 40,000 square feet of institutional space and a minimum of 82 residential units, plus another potential 50 more residential units over retail or office space on Main Street.

The main focal point of the new urban center will begin at the entrance off of SR 53 onto a Main Street. The street will provide a link through the site to Allen Street. The plan will require Main Street and other streets to have sidewalks, street trees and landscaping. Main Street will have an urban feel as there will be zero setbacks from the sidewalk and landscaping. The structures will have retail shops at the street level with offices and/or residential units above. All parking facilities will be placed at the rear and sides of the buildings.

An area specifically for residential development will be strategically located within the development, as opposed to the periphery, so that residents can have easy access to the whole site. The residential area will also include connectivity to a greenway trail along Flat Creek to a public greenspace area that will double as stormwater detention facility for the site. The trail will provide linkage to a number of internal and external sites, including the Post Office, the Library, and an adjacent city park.

The development of the site will include locating a mix of traffic generating activities on the site. Some of initial uses will include a grocery store, the new location of the Post Office, smaller retail shops and a restaurant. This will constitute about 60,000 square feet of commercial space and 20,000 square feet of institutional space. This will soon be followed with the development of the retail/restaurant/office facilities along Main Street and the residential townhouses. This will also include the trail system along Flat Creek. Final facilities to be constructed in the urban center will the office and shops that will be located on the periphery of the site along Allen Street and Memory Lane.

Architectural Rendering of Main Street

Planning and Zoning Changes

Current zoning does not allow for such a mixed use center to take place. Dawsonville will need to appropriately zone the property in order to allow the development to take place and accomplish the implementation of this plan. The site is currently zoned to three different classifications: Highway Business, Light Industrial, and Planned Conservation Subdivision. None of the classifications allows the mixing of use and are actually incompatible in some cases.

The recommended zoning for this site is the Planned Unit Development, PUD. The PUD allows and mix and combinations of land uses found in several of the zoning districts in Dawsonville. The intent of the district is to provide flexibility in the application of zoning controls, and encourage imaginative and innovative design for the unified development of the tract or tracts of land. The PUD creates its own design standards and scheduling, which it will adhere to throughout the development process. Every detail is subject to consideration, scrutiny and negotiation by the City in the site plan approval process. The developer is bound to the site plan and standards, and is not allowed to deviate from them without going through a public revision process with the Governing Body.

The City will be updating their comprehensive plan in the latter part of 2005 and early 2006. As Dawsonville addresses the full update of their comprehensive plan, the city will need to assess the progress of the new urban center and future refine the current land use designation of commercial to an urban center.

Recommended Performance Standards for PUD District for New Urban Center

Recommendations, but not limited to:

Main Street

- Right-of-way, 100 feet;
- Street width, 30 feet, with 3 foot landscaped center island (low ground cover or perennial flowers)
- Street parking, 45 degree stall angle, 9 x 19 stall;
- Landscape strip, 8 feet width, between curb and sidewalk;
- Landscape island at each corner parking space;
- Sidewalk 10 feet, width;
- Intersection with Memory Lane; 4-way stop;
- Crosswalks raised at all intersection, raised pavers (4 inches high, ramps 1 foot minimum);
- Street trees, large canopy trees/40 feet or intermediate focus trees/25 feet;
- Uniform street furniture;
- Street lighting, decorative, located at crosswalks and parking area entrances;
- Building setback from sidewalk, zero;
- Building height, 35 feet occupied space;

- Type A building, sprinkled;
- Architectural building style, as approved by city council;
- Street window display, minimum area approved by zoning administrator;
- Canopies or recessed entry, as approved by zoning administrator;
- Signage, Hanging sign (18 inches (h) x 36 inches (l) or mounted (18 inches (h) x 20 feet (l), design as approved by zoning administrator;
- Upper floor office or residential entry from building rear or alley;
- Balconies (office or residential) protrusion no greater than street level canopies, as approved by zoning administrator;
- Residential over retail, minimum 800 square feet for loft residences and 1,000 square feet for 2 bedroom residences;
- Sidewalk café hours and space, as approved by zoning administrator;
- Off street parking, each parking area must be at least 20% green space, bio-retention or pervious designed for stormwater management;

Residential Townhomes

- All units a minimum of 1,200 square feet;
- Building height, 35 feet occupied space;
- Architectural building style as approved by city council;
- Type A building, sprinkled or 2 hour firewall;
- Off street parking, each parking area must be at least 20% green space, bio-retention or pervious designed for stormwater management;
- Sidewalk pedestrian access to Main Street Memory Lane, Allen Street and Flat Creek greenway;

Memory Lane and Allen Street

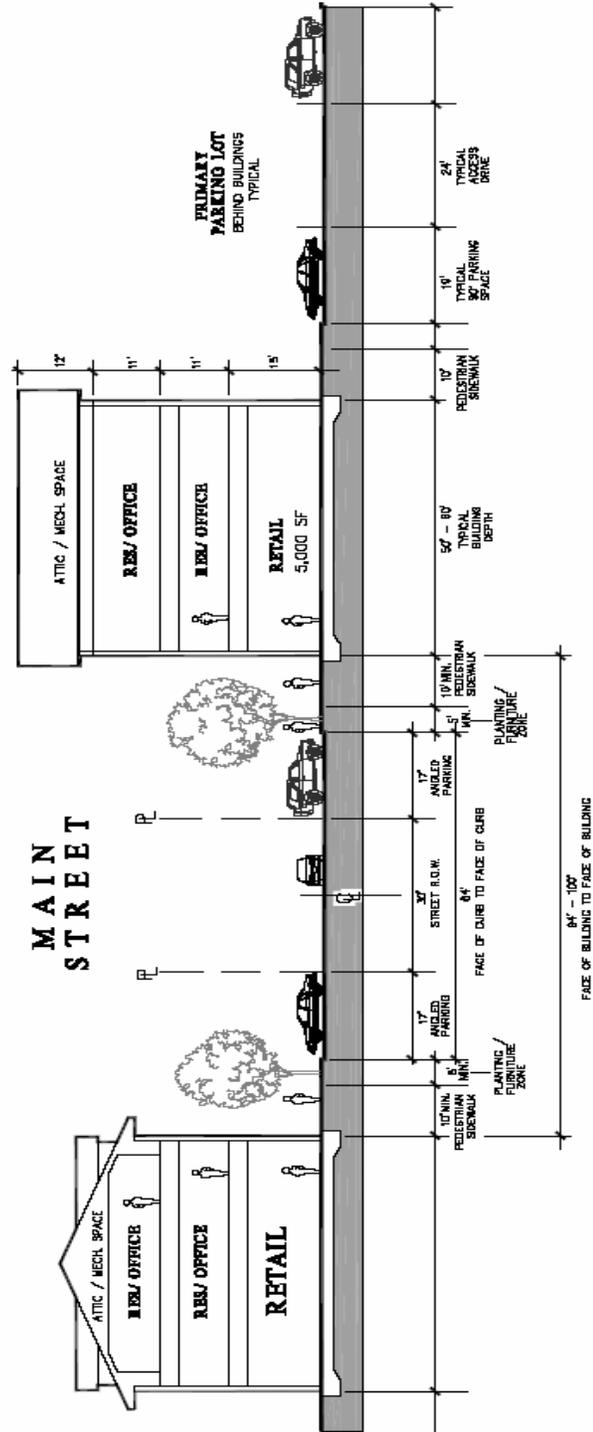
- Right-of-way, 65 feet;
- Sidewalk 5 feet, width;
- Crosswalks raised at pedestrian path linking parking areas, Jack Heard Street, and to city park - raised pavers (4 inches high, ramps 1 foot minimum);
- Street trees, large canopy trees/40 feet or intermediate focus trees/25 feet;
- Uniform street furniture;
- Street lighting, decorative, located at crosswalks and parking area entrances;

Flat Creek Stormwater Facility

- Considered community common area;
- Perimeter pedestrian path;

Typical Cross-section for Main Street in the proposed new urban center.

D A W S O N V I L L E



CONCEPTUAL CROSS-SECTION

Typical new urban center mixed-use design with street level retail and office or residential use above.



Insert Architectural Rendering of Townhouses

Renovation of Historic District

The second phase of the urban redevelopment plan is the renovation and reuse of the historic districts in downtown. The historic districts in downtown Dawsonville are set up to provide a unique mixture of commercial, residential and public uses, including public spaces and infrastructure. Downtown revitalization makes good economic sense, and it is the economic development through revitalization that creates community activity and jobs. In addition, downtown revitalization can have a positive impact on the property values in the surrounding neighborhoods.

The city must work toward using the maximum capacity of the downtown's built environment, which protects the public investment of the city. Committing to public investment typically reaps great returns in private investment. Most empty structures in downtown have often outlived their original use and design for the community. Their role in the local economy is lost in the lack of the city's dedication to its most important asset. Conclusively, a city's commitment to downtown revitalization and adaptive reuse of the built environment may be the most effective single act of fiscal responsibility the local government can make.

Issues Facing Downtown Redevelopment

It is not unusual for a local government to face a number of daunting issues facing them in their efforts of downtown revitalization.

First, could include the lack of appropriate zoning and development guidelines or codes. The zoning districts for a historic downtown should reflect the community's vision for what they want it to be. The appropriate zoning districts should clearly identify what they want in downtown and what they do not want in downtown.

Inadequate infrastructure is often a contributor to deteriorated downtown areas. Problems may range from sidewalk problems, to smells from combined stormwater and sanitary sewer systems, lighting, exposed electrical lines, litter, traffic design and signalization. Problems with any or all of these most likely in some way cause pedestrian traffic and consumer activity to locate where such things are not a problem. Included in the infrastructure should be parking. Questions such as is there a lack of parking, is it inappropriately located, are consumers aware of its existence or lack existence, is the parking taken up by employees, are buildings truly accessible to vehicles and pedestrians?

Every downtown faces problems with substandard structures. Downtown structures are some of the oldest buildings in town, where maintenance and improvements can be costly and enforcement of codes can be difficult for any number of reasons. However, it takes commitment to having up to date codes and enforcement of them, even if it means undertaking drastic measures such as court action or eminent domain.

The lack of funding for downtown revitalization can create difficulties for revitalization programs and operations. When there is a lack of commitment in funding redevelopment efforts it generally has an even greater effect on private investment.

Downtowns usually operate with several different property owners and business owners. There is not always a coordinated effort in marketing, hours of operation and methods management as seen at shopping centers and malls.

If a downtown area is in a state of deterioration it generally attracts crime into the community. It then has the stigma that it is too dangerous to go downtown to shop or to operate a business.

Revitalization Efforts and Recommendations for the Historic District

Dawsonville's commitment to revitalizing the historic downtown will not happen without monetary commitment in both the public and private sector. Several items and issues cannot be addressed without the proper funding. They are discussed below.

No downtown revitalization effort has ever been successful without a coordinated program of planning and implementation. This may require the funding and employing a professional position to work with property owners, business owners, identify and oversee infrastructure problems, and coordinate events and activities in downtown. Without a professional person in place all planning and coordination activities are fragments and mostly unsuccessful.

A market study for downtown business and traffic should be performed at least every two years. Such an analysis will help business owners keep their merchandise and services up to date. It will also allow the city to recruit new businesses into downtown as technology changes and population shifts take place.

The most costly improvements that face downtowns are related to infrastructure. However, appropriate planning and scheduling of such improvements, including funding, can help ease the cost burden throughout designated time frame. Often times when the private sector sees the commitment of the city in making downtown improvements, they will partner and contribute funds as well. It is also important to know that public grant funds are available through a number of state and federal agencies. Local public and private dollars can be leveraged to increase the amount of investment into the local infrastructure. This includes providing adequate parking for visitors and patrons of downtown as well as making downtown attractive with street-scaping.

Zoning and other regulatory improvements should be studied and addressed. Amendments should be made and reflect the policies and standards that would best serve downtown and are consistent with recommended guidance found in this plan and the comprehensive plan. This includes design guidelines that are reflective of the local character and uniqueness of downtown Dawsonville.

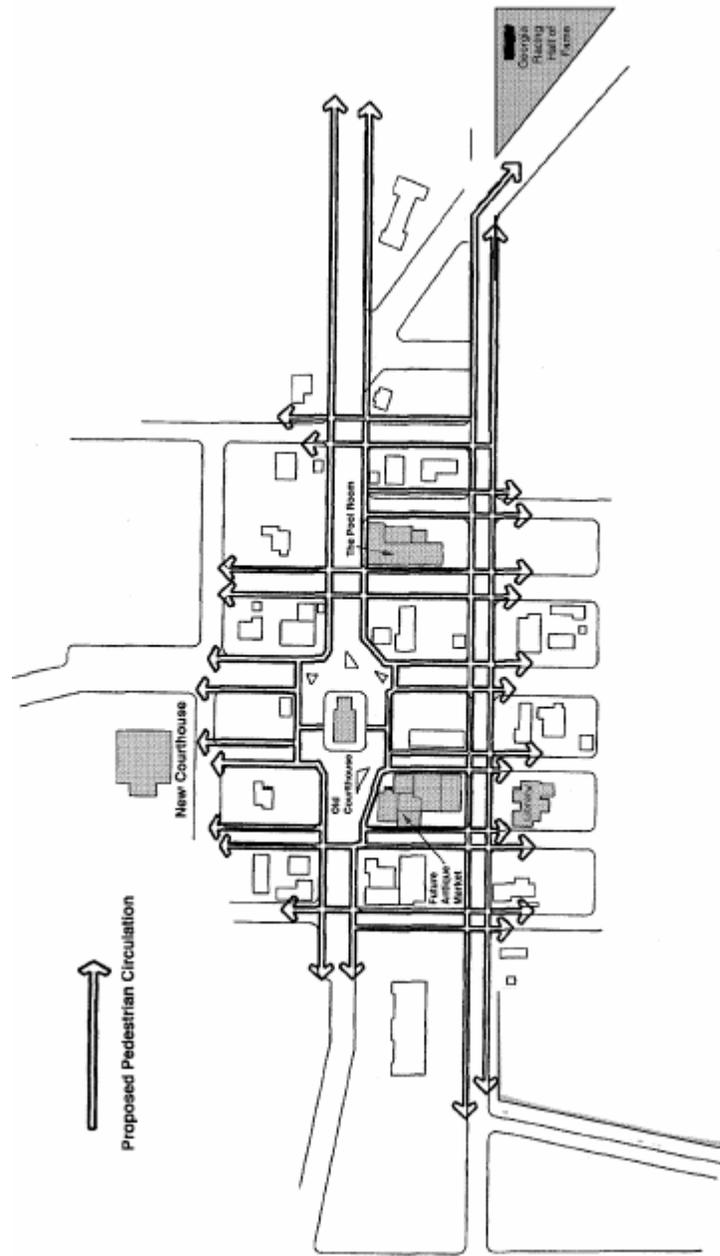
For downtown businesses to be successful, they must rely on more than just the tourists and daytime patrons. At one time most of the businesses in downtown doubled as residences as well. Most shops were at the street entrance level and residences were either above or behind the businesses, and homes were dotted throughout downtown and on its periphery. Where possible residential units should be allowed above or behind stores or offices. In some cases, housing should be constructed as infill on vacant lots in downtown. The added residential activity will create a local demand for shopping and services.

Pedestrian Improvements from the New Urban Center to Historic Downtown

The third phase in the redevelopment plan is the creation of pedestrian improvements and connectivity from downtown to the new urban center.

Pedestrian-oriented development is heralded as an effective planning tool in designing livable and sustainable communities of the future. The connection between land use, trip generation and pedestrian travel has been well documented by leading architects and community planners in development projects across the country for many years now. The more thought that is put into making developments friendly to pedestrians, the higher the percentage of trips that is made on foot or by bicycle. Pedestrian activity on the streets has been shown to have a positive effect on commercial success, reduced crime rates, improved personal health and mobility, community cohesiveness, reduced dependence on the automobile and improved air quality. Pedestrian oriented facilities in the local community were strongly emphasized in the visioning questionnaire in the recent update to the land use element in the city's comprehensive plan.

Sidewalks, if required on all road frontages, provide a safe place for people to walk to visit friends, go shopping, or get to work and school. Sidewalks set back from the street's edge with a landscaped planting strip provide a cool and attractive place to walk. And, if development densities do not justify sidewalks on street frontages in the present, allowing developers to contribute to a sidewalk fund will help build the connections when future densities arrive.



Thirteen Points for Effective Pedestrian Design

Duany Plater-Zyberck, an urban design firm considered pioneers in town planning across the US, have published a list of 13 points for effective pedestrian-oriented design in urbanized areas. In rural Georgia, communities should consider adapting some or all of the following principles for use in current lower-density communities and integrate them into land use practices (where applicable) in order to provide a more pedestrian-friendly foundation for the growth that is coming in the near future. It must be noted, however, that while some of these principals may be applicable in rural areas, they are presently used in more urbanized areas and may not be completely suitable for every community. Their presentation in this document is intended for “planning tool” purposes only and should be considered in that regard.

1. The neighborhood has a **discernible center**. This is often a square or a green space and sometimes a busy or memorable street corner.
2. Most of the dwellings are within a **five-minute walk** of the center, an average of roughly 2,000 feet.
3. There are a **variety of dwelling types** — usually houses, row houses and apartments — so that younger and older people, singles and families, the poor and the wealthy may find places to live.
4. At the edge of the neighborhood, there are **shops and workplaces** of sufficiently varied types to supply the weekly needs of a household. (Collective neighborhood edges form a town center.)
5. An elementary school is close enough so that most **children can walk** from their home.
6. There are small **playgrounds accessible** to every dwelling - not more than a tenth of a mile away.
7. Streets within the neighborhood form a "connected network", which **disperses traffic** by providing a variety of pedestrian and vehicular routes to any destination.
8. The streets are relatively **narrow** and shaded by rows of trees. This slows traffic, creating an environment suitable for pedestrians and bicycles.
9. Buildings in the neighborhood center are placed **close to the street**, creating a well-defined outdoor room.

10. Parking lots and garage doors rarely front the street. Parking is relegated to the **rear of buildings**, usually accessed by alleys.
11. Certain prominent sites at the termination of street vistas or in the neighborhood center are reserved for civic buildings. These provide sites for community meetings, education, and religious or cultural activities.
12. The neighborhood is organized to be self-governing. A formal association debates and decides matters of maintenance, security, and physical change. Taxation is the responsibility of the larger community.
13. For single-family homes: A small ancillary building is permitted within the backyard of each house. It may be used as a rental unit or place to work (e.g., office or craft workshop).

Connectivity

During the 1960s through the 1990s, roadway design practices favored a poorly connected “hierarchical” network, with numerous cul-de-sacs. This practice increases the amount of travel required to reach various destinations, concentrates traffic onto fewer roads, and creates barriers to non-motorized travel. A connected road network emphasizes accessibility by accommodating more direct travel with traffic dispersed over more roads, while a hierarchical road network emphasizes *mobility* by accommodating higher traffic volumes and speeds on fewer roads. New Urbanism and Smart Growth land use policies support improved connectivity as a way to increase land use accessibility. For a particular development or neighborhood, connectivity applies both internally (streets within that area) and externally (connections with arterials and other neighborhoods).

Most Georgia Mountains’ communities have not yet embraced the concept of connectivity in its street development standards. Most new developments are still approved as cul-de-sac streets that force all trips onto arterial streets, thereby creating the ever-growing problem of rush hour congestion. By requiring developers to stub streets in multiple directions (to allow connections to future developments), and permitting cul-de-sacs only when they cannot be avoided (due to a physical impediment like streams or elevation changes), local government are able to lay the groundwork for a future transportation network to be created. The benefits to bicycles and pedestrians is that this internal street network allows children and adults to walk and/or ride bikes to nearby destinations instead of being forced onto heavily trafficked arterial streets (which often have no sidewalks).

Efforts to increase connectivity must overcome the common preference for residential cul-de-sac streets. Cul-de-sacs are popular because they have limited traffic volumes and speeds, and help create a sense of community and security. More connected residential streets can have these attributes if designed with short blocks, “T” intersections, narrower widths and other Traffic Calming features to control vehicle

traffic speeds and volumes. In addition the use of community design features can promote the same sense of community and security as cul-de-sacs. Another objection to a connected street network is that it requires more road right-of-way, however, this can be offset- by reducing street widths.

A connectivity study should be preformed to identify the most appropriate routes that local residents would use in walking their homes to and from Dawsonville two activity centers, the new urban center and historic downtown. This would serve the dual purpose that a pedestrian network would be created as development (and redevelopment) takes place in Dawsonville and fulfilling an expressed need in the city's comprehensive plan.

Following the development of a pedestrian plan the city should identify and pursue funding opportunities. Some of these funding sources should include, but are not limited to: Georgia DOT Transportation Enhancement (TE) funding, local SPLOST dollars, local development fund grants, recreation and assistance grants, greenspace funding and possibly impact fees.

Having a plan in place that is supported by the public, elected officials and the business community is the first step in ensuring that future growth in Dawsonville is quality growth. This plan will help guide the city in the redevelopment and connectivity process, which will promote greater livability and mobility in Dawsonville.