Suggested Typical Character Areas

Use this list of typical character areas in Georgia to prompt thinking about the character of your community and to help identify both existing and potential character areas in your community. Character area planning focuses on the way an area looks and how it functions, instead of only existing land use. Applying development strategies to character areas in your community can preserve existing areas, such as the downtown, and help others function better and become more attractive. You are encouraged to create additional character areas, or modify these, to fit your community vision. More details can be found by referring to DCA's Guidebooks: Discovering and Planning Your Community Character; Planning for Community Involvement; Visualizing Character Areas; and Character Areas: Techniques and Guidance.

Character Area	Description/Predominant Characteristics	Suggested Development Strategy
Conservation Area —or— **Greenspace**	Primarily natural lands and environmentally sensitive areas not suitable for development, e.g., scenic views, coast, steep slopes, flood plains, wetlands, watersheds, wildlife management areas and other environmentally sensitive areas.	Maintain natural, rural character and protect environmentally sensitive areas by: • Not allowing any new development. • Promoting use of conservation easements. • Widen roadways in these areas only when absolutely necessary. • Carefully design the roadway alterations to minimize visual impact. • Promote these areas as passive-use tourism and recreation destinations.
Linear Greenspace —or— **Trail Network** —or—	Area of protected open space that follows natural and man-made linear features for recreation, transportation and conservation purposes and links ecological, cultural and recreational amenities. Greenways can provide safe, efficient	Create these linkages by: • Linking greenspaces into a pleasant network of greenways • Set aside land for pedestrian and bicycle connections between schools, churches, recreation areas, city centers, residential neighborhoods and commercial areas.

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Pedestrian / Bike Network	pedestrian linkages and at the same time give users an opportunity to enjoy the natural environment.	Design greenways to serve as: • Alternative transportation networks, accommodating commuting to work or shopping as well as recreational biking, skateboarding, walking and jogging.
Agricultural Area	Lands in open or cultivated state or sparsely settled, including woodlands and farm lands.	Maintain rural character by: • Strictly limiting new development. • Protecting farmland and open space by maintaining large lot sizes (at least 25 acres). • Promoting use of conservation easements by land owners • Residential subdivisions should be severely limited, but if minor exceptions are made, they should be required to follow a rural cluster zoning or conservation subdivision design. Any new development should be required to use compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional rural character, and should not include "franchise" or "corporate" architecture. • Widen roadways only when absolutely necessary. • Carefully design the roadway alterations to minimize visual impact • Promote these areas as passive-use tourism and recreation destinations.

Supplemental Planning Recommendations

Character Area	Description/Predominant Characteristics	Suggested Development Strategy
		• Work to promote agriculture and agriculture-related businesses to keep agriculture industry viable.
Rural Residential Area	Rural, sparsely developed land likely to face development pressures for lower density (one unit per two+ acres) residential development. Typically will have low pedestrian orientation and access, very large lots, open space, pastoral views and high degree of building separation.	Maintain rural atmosphere while accommodating new residential or commercial development by: • Permitting rural cluster or conservation subdivision design that incorporate and protect significant amounts of open space.
Rural Village	Commercial activity area located at a highway or road intersection. Typically automobile focused. There is a mixture of uses to serve highway passers-by, rural and agricultural areas.	• Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain and reflect the regional rural character, and should not include "franchise" or "corporate" architecture. • Connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes. • Design for greater pedestrian orientation and access, more character with clustering of buildings within the center, leaving open space surrounding the center.
Suburban Area	Area where typical types of suburban residential subdivision development have occurred or are likely to occur (due to availability of water and sewer service). Characterized by low pedestrian	Foster retrofitting of these areas to better conform to traditional neighborhood development (TND) principles. Promote moderate density, traditional neighborhood development

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	orientation, little or no transit, high degree of open space, high to moderate degree of building separation, predominantly residential with scattered civic buildings and varied street patterns, often curvilinear.	(TND) style residential subdivisions: • Create neighborhood focal points by locating schools, community centers, or well-designed small-scale commercial activity centers at suitable locations within walking distance of residences. • There should be good vehicular and pedestrian/bike connections to retail/commercial services as well as internal street connectivity, connectivity to adjacent properties/subdivisions, and multiple site access points. • Wherever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes. • Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional character, and do not include "franchise" or "corporate" architecture. • Permit accessory housing units, or new well-designed, similarly scaled infill multifamily residences to increase neighborhood density and income diversity. • Promote mix of housing types and styles to create character and neighborhood diversity. • Promote street design that fosters traffic calming such as narrower

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		residential streets, on-street parking, and addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. • Add traffic calming improvements, sidewalks, street trees, and increased street interconnections to improve walk-ability and slow traffic within existing neighborhoods.
Existing Traditional Neighborhood	A neighborhood having relatively well-maintained housing, possessing a distinct identity through architectural style, lot and street design, and higher rates of home-ownership. Location near declining areas of town may also cause this neighborhood to decline over time.	• Focus on reinforcing stability by encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties. • Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. • Include well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents. • Provide strong pedestrian and bicycle connections to encourage these residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area.

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		• Encourage and support neighborhood schools.
Developing Traditional Neighborhood	Community neighborhood with characteristics such as high degree of pedestrian orientation, sidewalks, street trees, and street furniture; on-street parking; small, regular lots; limited open space; buildings close to or at the front property line; predominance of alleys; low degree of building separation; neighborhood-scale businesses scattered throughout the area.	• Create neighborhood focal points by locating schools, community centers, or well-designed small-scale commercial activity centers at suitable locations within walking distance of residences. • There should be good vehicular and pedestrian/bike connections to retail/commercial services as well as internal street connectivity, connectivity to adjacent properties/subdivisions, and multiple site access points. • Wherever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes. • Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional character, and do not include "franchise" or "corporate" architecture. • Permit accessory housing units, or new well-designed, similarly scaled infill multifamily residences to increase neighborhood density and income diversity. • Promote mix of housing types and styles to create character and neighborhood diversity. • Promote street design that fosters

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		traffic calming such as narrower residential streets, on-street parking, and addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. • Add traffic calming improvements, sidewalks, street trees, and increased street interconnections to improve walk-ability and slow traffic within existing neighborhoods.
Residential Redevelopment Area	An area that has most of its original housing stock in place, but has worsening housing conditions due to low rates of homeownership and neglect of property maintenance. There may be a lack of neighborhood identity and gradual invasion of different type and intensity of use that may not be compatible with the neighborhood residential use, or a neighborhood that has declined sufficiently that housing conditions are bad, there may be large areas of vacant land or deteriorating, unoccupied structures.	• Focus on strategic public investments to improve conditions, appropriate infill development on scattered vacant sites, and encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties. • Public assistance and investment, such as homeownership assistance, code enforcement, sidewalks, right-of-way improvements, and redevelopment incentives, should be focused where needed to ensure that the neighborhood becomes more stable, mixed-income community with a larger percentage of owner-occupied housing. • Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. • The redevelopment strategy for the area should focus on preserving and rehabilitating what remains of the

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		original housing stock, while rebuilding, on the remaining land, a new, attractive neighborhood following the principles of traditional neighborhood development. • The neighborhood should include a well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, school, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents. • Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided to encourage residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area. • New streets should be connected (i.e. minimize or prohibit cul-de-sacs) to disperse traffic, shorten walking/biking trips. • Design features that encourage safe, accessible streets should be employed – such as, narrower streets, on-street parking, sidewalks, street trees, and landscaped raised medians for minor collectors and wider streets.
Neighborhood Center	A neighborhood focal point with a	• Each Neighborhood Center should

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	concentration of activities such as general retail, school, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses easily accessible by pedestrians.	include a mix of retail, services, and offices to serve neighborhood residents day-to-day needs. • Residential development should reinforce the center through locating higher density housing options adjacent to the center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments and condominiums. • Design for each Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. • Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. Include direct connections to the greenspace and trail networks. • Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to other neighborhood amenities, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, parks, schools, etc.
Town Center	A focal point for several neighborhoods that has a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space	• Each Town Center should include a relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, open spaces, and employment to serve a multi-neighborhood market area.

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	uses easily accessible by pedestrians.	• Residential development should reinforce the Town Center by locating higher density housing options adjacent to the center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments and condominiums. • Design for each Town Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. • Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. • Include direct connections to the greenspace and trail networks. • Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by including sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, schools, etc.
Regional Center	Concentration of regionally-marketed commercial and retail centers, office and employment areas, higher-education facilities, sports and recreational complexes. These areas are characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, and high transit use, including	• Should include relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area. • Include a diverse mix of higher-density housing types, such as multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, and

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	stops, shelters and transfer points; on-site parking; low degree of internal open space; high floor-area-ratio; large tracts of land, campus or unified development.	condominiums, including affordable and workforce housing. • Design should be very pedestrian oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. • Include direct connections to nearby networks of greenspace or trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreation purposes. • Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. Shared parking and maximum parking limits should be encouraged. • Provide bike lanes or wide curb lanes to encourage bicycling and provide additional safety, provide conveniently located, preferably sheltered, bicycle parking at retail and office destinations and in multi-family dwellings. • Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional character, and should not include "franchise" or "corporate" architecture. • Particular attention should be paid to signage to prevent visual clutter. Encourage way-finding, on-site, and monument style signage.
Downtown	The traditional central business district and immediately surrounding commercial,	• Downtown should include relatively high-density mix of retail, office,

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	industrial, or mixed-use areas.	services, and employment to serve a regional market area.
		• Residential development should reinforce the traditional town center through a combination of rehabilitation of historic buildings in the downtown area and compatible new infill development targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, and condominiums.
		• Design should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses.
		• Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear.
		• Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by including sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, schools, etc.
		• New residential and commercial development should be concentrated in and around the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods on infill sites.
		• Parking should be handled on a district basis and parking structures should be

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		faced with retail a ground level.
In-Town Corridor	Developed or open land paralleling the route of a street or highway in town that is already or likely to experience uncontrolled strip development if growth is not properly managed.	• Gradually convert corridor to attractive boulevard with signage guiding visitors to downtown and scenic areas around the community. • The appearance of the corridor can immediately be improved through street-scaping enhancements (street lights, street trees, landscaping, etc.). • In the longer term, enact design and signage guidelines for new development, including minimal building setback requirements from the street and parking in the rear, to ensure that the corridors become more attractive as properties develop or redevelop. • Corridors leading to town centers or downtown, in particular, should be attractive, where development is carefully controlled (or redevelopment tools are used) to maintain or improve appearances. • Reduce the role and impact of automobiles in the community by employing attractive traffic-calming measures along major roadways and exploring alternative solutions to parking congestion. • Provide basic access for pedestrians and bicycles, consider vehicular safety

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		measures including driveway consolidation and raised medians (which also improve safety for bike/pedestrians). • Coordinate land uses and bike/pedestrian facilities with transit stops where applicable.
Gateway Corridor	Developed or open land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community.	• Focus on appearance with appropriate signage, landscaping and other beautification measures. • Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory/way-finding signage to clustered developments. • Retrofit or mask existing strip development or other unsightly features as necessary.
Rural Scenic Corridor	Developed or open land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that has significant natural, historic, or cultural features, and scenic or pastoral views.	• Establish guidelines on development to protect the characteristics deemed to have scenic value. • Enact guidelines for new development that enhances the scenic value of the corridor and addresses landscaping and architectural design. • Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to clustered developments. • Provide pedestrian linkages to adjacent and nearby residential or commercial districts.

Supplemental Planning Recommendations

Character Area	Description/Predominant Characteristics	Suggested Development Strategy
Rural Highway Corridor	Developed or open land on both sides of designated high-volume transportation facility, such as arterial roads and highways.	• Focus development in well-planned rural villages at major road crossings. • Maintain a natural vegetation buffer (at least 50 feet in width) along the corridor. • Any unavoidable new development not locating in rural villages should be set-back behind this buffer, with access roads, shared driveways or inter-parcel road connections providing alternate access to these developments and reducing curb cuts and traffic on the main highway. • Encourage landscaped, raised medians to provide vehicular safety, aesthetics, and also pedestrian crossing refuge. • Provide paved shoulders that can be used by bicycles or as emergency breakdown lanes. • Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to developments. • Unacceptable uses: new billboards.
Commercial Redevelopment Area	Declining, unattractive, vacant or under-utilized strip shopping center. Characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic and transit if applicable; on-site parking; low degree of open space; moderate floor-area-ratio; large tracts of land, campus or unified development.	• Retro-fit to be more aesthetically appealing and, therefore, more marketable to prospective tenants by: • Building new commercial structures at the street front, taking up a portion of the oversize parking lot and creating a shopping "square" around a smaller internal parking lot.

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		• Upgrading the appearance of existing older commercial buildings with façade improvement, new architectural elements, or awnings. • Reconfiguring the parking lot and circulation routes for automobiles. • Providing pedestrian and bicycling amenities, including covered walkways, benches, lighting and bike racks. • Adding landscaping and other appearance enhancements, trees and landscaping in parking lots to provide shade and help reduce storm water runoff.
Employment Center –or– **Office Park**	Typically campus-style development characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, and transit if applicable; on-site parking; low degree of open space; moderate floor-area-ratio.	• Focus upon encouraging pervious paving and screening of cars and other unattractive aspects of businesses. • Use buffers to separate from adjacent uses. • Encourage greater mix of uses (such as retail and services to serve office employees) to reduce automobile reliance/use on site.
Light Industrial –or– **Industrial Area**	Area used in low or high manufacturing, wholesale trade, and distribution activities that do or do not generate excessive noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisance characteristics.	• Develop or, where possible, retrofit as part of planned industrial park having adequate water, sewer, storm-water, and transportation infrastructure for all component uses at build-out. Incorporate landscaping and site design to soften or shield views of buildings and parking lots, loading docks, etc.

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		• Incorporate signage and lighting guidelines to enhance quality of development. • Encourage greater mix of uses (such as retail and services to serve industry employees) to reduce automobile reliance/use on site.
Historic Area	Historic district or area containing features, landmarks, civic or cultural uses of historic interest. Characteristics may vary based on size, location and history of the community.	• Protect historic properties from demolition and encourage rehabilitation with appropriate incentives, including National Register of Historic places designation, which enables eligibility for tax incentive programs. • Historic properties should be maintained or rehabilitated/restored according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. • New development in the area should be of scale and architectural design to fit well into the historic fabric of that area. • Pedestrian access and open space should be provided to enhance citizen enjoyment of the area. • Linkages to regional greenspace/trail system should be encouraged as well.
Other/Special	A district or area that presently does not fit or is not envisioned fitting into the above categories. It may, for instance, have singular characteristics such as hospital or airport not likely to be replicated elsewhere within the community.	To be determined locally.

Supplemental Planning Recommendations: Suggested Character Areas