

## 2.0 Community Issues and Opportunities



The Community Issues and Opportunities chapter expresses the priority issues of concern to the citizens of the City of Suwanee and identifies several important planning issues resulting from available data, analysis, and the professional experience of the planners involved in the process. These issues help give shape to the rest of the Community Agenda by creating a clear focus for the changes the community wants to see over the course of the Comprehensive Plan.

The demographic data used for this analysis is based substantially on the 2000 census. Current (as of 2007) housing and population numbers have been calculated based on the existing land use patterns in the City, and these numbers have been projected forward to 2030 based on land use changes for the future. While this approach provides a reliable estimate of the population and housing stock numbers for 2030. The City will need to re-examine all data relating to population, housing and economic development after the release of the 2010 census data and update future projections and trends accordingly.

By most measures, the City of Suwanee has experienced success with mixed-use development including the implementation of the Town Center development. This mixed-use model introduced a new development form into Suwanee that has enhanced a strong sense of community among the residents of Suwanee. In looking ahead to the future of the City, much of the focus is concentrated on building upon the success of Town Center by connecting to other areas of the City, applying the mixed-use lessons to appropriate areas of new development, and enhancing the burgeoning sense of community throughout Suwanee.

## 2.1 Population

### Introduction

As recently as 40 years ago Suwanee, was a small rural community in northeast corner of the Gwinnett County with a population of only 615 people. Through the 1970's and even into the 1980's people slowly started trickling into Suwanee as the population climbed to 2,412 by 1990. Since then, Suwanee has added around 750 new residents per year - an annual increase of more than the City's entire population in 1970. The growth rate has continued up to the present where the City is estimated to have a population of 16,188 at the end of 2007.



The City estimates population by using the 2000 Census as a base and then using a formula that combines building permits, vacancy rates and average household size data. The estimate also takes into account increases in population due to annexation.

#### **POPULATION ESTIMATE:**

The characteristics of Suwanee's population have changed as the population has increased in Suwanee. The demographics have shifted from primarily school-aged to predominantly young adults and middle aged. The community is gradually becoming more diverse – particularly with recent increases in the city's Asian population. Where Suwanee's educational attainment and income were comparable to Gwinnett and Georgia just a few years ago, the population now is much more educated and affluent. With a highly educated and affluent population, Suwanee is well positioned to draw more high paying jobs into the area.

Year	Population
1970	615
1980	1,026
1990	2,412
2000	8,725
2001	10,107
2002	10,318
2003	10,646
2004	11,109
2005	13,339
2006	15,720
2007	16,188

Table 2.1-a

Source: City of Suwanee Planning Department and 2000 Census

### Age

In 1970 nearly half of Suwanee’s population was under the age of 24, with the largest segment of the population being between the ages of 5 and 14. Since that time, the age of Suwanee’s population has steadily increased, with the exception of the 55 and older cohort, which decreased in size. These trends convey that Suwanee is a community that 1) witnessed a rapid influx of families with school age children and 2) these families have laid roots in the community. According to the 2000 Census, the largest segment of Suwanee's population was between 25 and 55 years old.

In the last 7, years the City trended more toward smaller lot subdivisions and townhouses. These housing types tend to be more popular with empty nesters (parents whose children have left the house) and young married professionals without children. When the 2010 census is released it will be important to analyze Suwanee's aging trend. The City will need to ensure that housing options are provided to meet the needs of the aging population.

#### **POPULATION BY AGE:**

	1970		1980		1990		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>0 to 4</b>	48	7.7%	61	5.9%	218	9.0%	746	8.6%
<b>5 to 14</b>	126	20.1%	187	18.2%	399	16.5%	1,476	16.9%
<b>15 to 24</b>	108	17.3%	170	16.6%	242	10.0%	885	10.1%
<b>25 to 34</b>	84	13.4%	186	18.1%	473	19.6%	1,402	16.1%
<b>35 to 44</b>	65	10.4%	142	13.8%	597	24.8%	2,029	23.3%
<b>45 to 54</b>	82	13.1%	91	8.9%	220	9.1%	1,325	15.2%
<b>55 to 64</b>	64	10.2%	114	11.1%	133	5.5%	485	5.6%
<b>64 &amp; older</b>	49	7.8%	75	7.3%	130	5.4%	377	4.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,026</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,412</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>8,725</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 2.1-b

Source: 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census

### Race

Historically, Suwanee has been a predominantly Caucasian community. According to the 2000 Census, this continues to be the case, but the Census numbers also indicate that minority groups



experienced rapid growth, primarily in the Asian population. In 2000, the City was 84.5 percent white, 3.2 percent Hispanic, and 6.9 percent Asian or Pacific Islander. This Hispanic population is up from 1.2 percent in 1990 and the Asian population is up from 1.9 percent in 1990. This shift in Suwanee's demographics is consistent with the overall of shift in Gwinnett County becoming a more international community.

**Educational Attainment**

Suwanee has rapidly shifted to a much more educated community. In 1990, Suwanee residents were slightly more educated than the rest of the state but interestingly, less educated than the rest of Gwinnett County. In the following 10 years a dramatic shift occurred. From 1990 to 2000, Suwanee witnessed an 84 percent decline in the adult population with less than a 9th grade education, an increase of 19.1 percent in the adult population with a high school degree or higher, and a 67.7 percent increase with a Bachelor's degree or higher. Suwanee has clearly attracted more educated residents, even in comparison to Gwinnett overall.

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT:**

	Less than 9th Grade			High School degree or higher			Bachelor's Degree or higher		
	1990	2000	% change	1990	2000	% change	1990	2000	% change
<b>Suwanee</b>	10.0	1.6	- 84.0%	78.0	92.9	19.1%	27.2	45.6	67.7%
<b>Gwinnett</b>	4.5	4.6	2.2%	86.7	87.3	0.7%	29.6	34.1	15.2%
<b>Georgia</b>	12.0	7.6	- 36.7%	70.9	78.6	10.9%	19.3	24.3	25.9%

Table 2.1-c

Source: 1990, and 2000 Census

**Income**

In recent years the City has become considerably more affluent. In 1990, the per capita income and average household income for Suwanee was comparable to Gwinnett County and higher than the state. However, in the following decade both of these numbers increased by over 30 percent for the City, while Gwinnett and rest of the state experienced much smaller increases. A comparison with the rest of the cities in Gwinnett indicates that only Berkeley Lake has experienced a similar increase in affluence. This suggests that while Gwinnett County



remains suburban in form, it is becoming much more “urban” in terms of the characteristics of its residents. This may ultimately result in the county having to rethink and rework some of its policies and infrastructure to meet the needs of its growing population – particularly transit availability and housing affordability. While Suwanee is to some degree removed from this situation, it will undoubtedly face some of these same concerns as pressure grows on the city to align with these county trends.

**PER CAPITA AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME:**

	Per Capita			Household Income		
	1990	2000	% change	1989	1999	% change
<b>Suwanee</b>	\$ 17,301	\$ 22,566	30.4%	\$ 48,750	\$ 63,825	30.9%
<b>Gwinnett</b>	\$ 17,881	\$ 18,991	6.2%	\$ 43,518	\$ 45,976	5.7%
<b>Georgia</b>	\$ 13,361	\$ 16,066	17.8%	\$ 29,021	\$ 32,227	9.4%

Table 2.1-d

Source: 1990, and 2000 Census

Note: Per capita income adjusted to 1990 dollars and household income adjusted to 1990 dollars

**Population Projections**

**POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND HOUSING UNITS FOR SUWANE:**

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2007	2010	2020	2030 Low	2030 High
<b>Population</b>	615	1,026	2,412	8,725	13,339	16,253	<b>17,607</b>	<b>23,453</b>	<b>25,762</b>	<b>28,041</b>
<b>Number of Housing Units</b>	186	320	769	2,947	5,074	5,992	<b>6,092</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>9,908</b>	<b>9,908</b>
<b>Average Household Size</b>	3.43	3.21	3.02	2.89	2.89	2.89	<b>2.89</b>	<b>2.73</b>	<b>2.60</b>	<b>2.83</b>

Table 2.1-e

Note: Projections in ‘bold’ text; 2007 housing units based on building permit data



**COMPARITIVE POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR SUWANE:**

	By Suwanee	By Gwinnett County	By ARC
2005	13,339	12,553	20,750
2010	17,607	14,729	25,944
2020	23,453	19,585	33,769
2030	25,762 - 28,041	24,014	34,372

Table 2.1-f

Note: ARC population totals for Suwanee = 80% of the population for census tract 502.02

Source: Atlanta Regional Commission, The Gwinnett Unified Plan - Joint County-Cities Community Assessment

**POPULATION TREND LINES FOR SUWANE:**

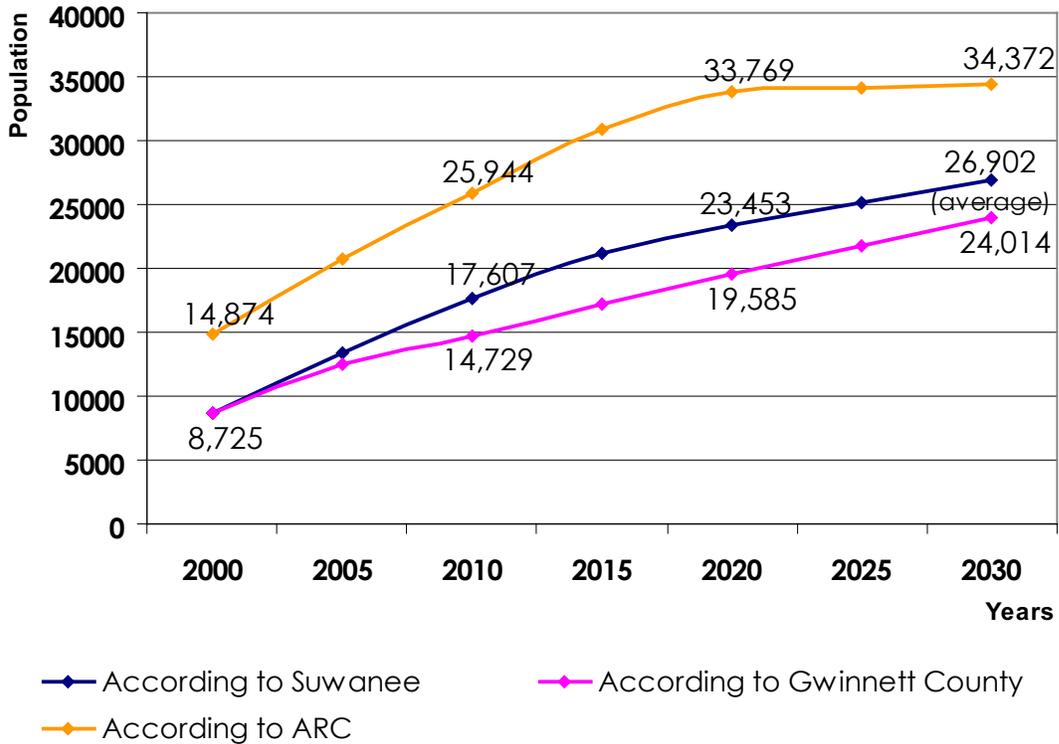


Figure 2.1-a

The Atlanta Regional Commission regularly issues population forecasts for counties within its ten-county planning area. In a recent update, ARC predicts Gwinnett County will add over 400,000 people by 2030 to lead the region in population growth. The Gwinnett County-Cities Joint Community Assessment mirrors this analysis with an estimated 2030 population of 1,019,166 – an increase of 430,718 persons over the 2000 census. Suwanee is part of this robust growth scenario for the county, although population forecasts from ARC and from the city itself vary considerably. Suwanee is almost entirely contained in census tract 502.02, with about one-half of the tract occupied by the city and one-half occupied by unincorporated county areas that are largely comprised of either low-density residential subdivisions or vacant land. Current ARC 2030 projections for census tract 502.02 estimate future population at 42,965 with growth slowing significantly between 2020 and 2030, while previous projections estimated the 2020 tract population at 36,801 and the city population at 29,551. If the city's share of the tract population is considered to be roughly 80%, it follows that the 2030 estimate for the city would be around 34,000. However, the supply-side analysis that is the basis of this Community Agenda projects a 2030 population of roughly 28,000, or 16% lower than the ARC figure.

**POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR GWINNETT COUNTY:**

	<b>By Gwinnett County</b>	<b>By ARC</b>
<b>2007</b>	776,380	740,200
<b>2010</b>	795,444	760,134
<b>2020</b>	920,660	900,950
<b>2030</b>	1,019,166	988,694

Table 2.1-g

Source: Atlanta Regional Commission, The Gwinnett Unified Plan - Joint County-Cities Community Assessment

The difference in population projections is largely due to land use policy and limited development potential. An estimated 9,908 total housing units could be present in the city in 2030 under the methodology described in Section 2.2.4 - Future Land Use and Development. With estimates of future household sizes ranging from approximately 2.6 to 2.8<sup>1</sup>, the city's 2030 population is likely to be between between 26,000 and 28,500 persons, as summarized in Table 2.1-e

<sup>1</sup> A simple regression analysis utilizing known numbers of housing units as x values and known household sizes as y values yields a 2030 average household size of 2.6 when future housing units are estimated at 9,908. ARC forecasts for 2030 Suwanee total population and households yields an average household size of 2.83.



It is highly likely that the average household size in 2030 will align with the lower number because of national trends, aging households, and the type of housing units likely to be built in the next twenty years based on an assumed city land use policy that will be more tailored to young couples and empty-nesters. In terms of policy, the city should be sure to remain aware of the interdependency between housing type and total population, as well as regional growth trends. If Suwanee makes the decision that a greater share of regional population is advantageous, it can take steps to achieve this by setting land use policies to effect the change.

The demographic trends discussed above point to an eventual need to consider planning for a growing elderly population in the future, which will likely create priorities regarding housing choices, recreation opportunities, and social services requirements. In addition, the increasingly diverse population that is changing the demographic landscape of Gwinnett County is changing Suwanee as well and must be recognized, planned for, and given a voice in the planning process.

**POPULATION: TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

TRENDS	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population continues to increase at a steady rate.</li> <li>• Suwanee is home to an increasing international community.</li> <li>• Recent years indicate that Suwanee is an ideal place for families with young children to plant their roots.</li> <li>• The population has achieved higher levels of education.</li> <li>• The population is increasingly affluent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to provide housing opportunities to meet the growing population.</li> <li>• The City needs to provide appropriate housing types, recreation opportunities and social services for the aging population</li> <li>• There will be increased pressure on the City's infrastructure and transportation network.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus areas can be targeted to redevelop as mixed-use centers that can accommodate greater densities.</li> <li>• Smaller household sizes in the future can encourage small lot subdivisions or increased townhome developments.</li> <li>• Suwanee can attract higher paying jobs based on the education and affluence levels of its community.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Land Use

### Land Use Accomplishment, Assessment and Needs

The City of Suwanee covers roughly 10 square miles (6,998 acres). Suwanee contains a wide variety of land uses including residential, commercial, office, industrial, mixed-use, recreational and conservation.



The rapid growth Suwanee experienced in the 1990's carried forward into the new millennium. Growth in the 90's followed more conventional suburban development practices, with different uses viewed as being incompatible and buffered from each other. However, a change in land use policies that favors planned mixed-use development accounted for a significant shift in the type of development occurring over the last several years. The City of Suwanee is projected to continue growing, but there is a strong desire that this growth should be sustainable and oriented toward improving and maintaining quality of life.

Since the last Comprehensive Plan, development in Suwanee has been dominated by planned mixed-use projects including Suwanee Station, Village Grove, Stonecypher, Old Suwanee, Town Center/Shadowbrook, Three Bridges, Baxley Point, Highland Station and McGinnis Reserve. These projects account for over 550 acres of developed land that includes a mixture of open space, residential, office, commercial, and retail uses. Mixed-use developments have improved the physical connections between residential and commercial uses, and there is a desire to continue this improvement. Future projects should be designed such that their layout and arrangement of land uses encourages and facilitates civic engagement and provides the infrastructure to allow people to walk between residences, jobs, recreation, retail, dining, and health care facilities.

In addition to the successful implementation of mixed-use land policies, the City has benefited from an abundance of light industrial opportunities and proximity to I-85. The development of Satellite Boulevard created a highly accessible light industrial corridor that provides a location for emerging high-tech office and industrial uses. Large single-user and multiple-user industrial buildings have developed rapidly, primarily along Satellite Boulevard, Horizon Drive, and Brogdon Road. These three areas total more than 3,000,000 square feet of office/industrial space and cover approximately 280 acres.

While planned mixed-use and light industrial uses accounted for a significant portion of Suwanee's growth in the last few years, some elements of conventional suburban growth have continued. The city has experienced continued development of residential subdivisions, automobile-oriented shopping centers, office condominiums, and stand-alone commercial buildings.

### **2.2.1 Recent Development Patterns**

#### **Single-Family Residential**

*Defined: Residences consisting of attached and detached houses, usually on separate fee simple lots. They can be located individually or grouped together within subdivisions or other planned developments.*

Single family residential uses are the most abundant use in the city, covering almost 3,000 acres (45%) and totaling about 6,865 total units. Many of the units were constructed in the 1990's and early 2000's, and tend to be located on lots around a third of an acre or larger. However, many of the single-family residential units built since 2000 are part of mixed-use projects and are on lots smaller than a third of acre. Townhouses are a relatively new single-family housing type that is almost exclusively found as part of mixed-use projects within the city. Townhouses on their own lots are considered single family residences.

#### **Multifamily Residential**

*Defined: Residences containing two or more dwelling units, such as duplexes, triplexes, condominiums and apartments.*

There are currently 1,386 multifamily dwellings constructed on approximately 162 acres (3%). These units are primarily located in four apartment complexes, three of which are located off McGinnis Ferry Road; the fourth complex is a component of the Suwanee Station mixed-use project. There are several duplex units located on Eva Kennedy Drive. As part of the Town Center development, there are an additional 23 condominium apartments located above commercial uses.

## Mixed-Use

### Mixed-Use Village

*Defined: Predominantly residential developments that may include a variety of housing types, both single-family and multifamily, and possibly such limited-scale nonresidential uses as a church, corner market or other neighborhood-oriented service uses. Higher intensity mixed-use residential developments often contain live-work units with an office or store on the ground level and residential housing on the upper floors.*

Village Grove, Three Bridges, Stonecypher, and Old Suwanee are examples of the mixed-use village category. These developments are characterized by predominantly residential uses (single-family attached and detached) with limited non-residential uses. Old Suwanee includes six live/work units.

### Mixed-Use Center

*Defined: Predominantly commercial developments that may include a variety of retail, commercial and office uses as well as residences. Residences may be located in the same buildings as stores and offices or may be developed in clusters in and around the non-residential uses. Live-work arrangements in mixed-use centers may allow more intensive ground floor retail and service activity than in a mixed-use village.*

Only buildings that include both residential and non-residential uses show up on the land use map as mixed-use, although many projects are defined as Mixed-Use Village or Mixed-Use Center when viewed as a whole.

Suwanee Station, Town Center (including Shadowbrook at Town Center), and the Terraces at Suwanee Gateway are examples of this type of development. Suwanee Station so far has focused primarily on residential development (attached and detached single-family and multi-family), but there is a significant office and commercial component that is planned but not yet developed. Suwanee Town Center is anchored by Town Center Park, and includes retail, office and residential uses including residential uses above retail. The Terraces at Suwanee Gateway is a developing mixed-use center that will consist of extensive amounts of office, commercial/retail, single-family townhouses, and multi-family residential uses.

**Office/Professional**

*Defined: Non-residential developments predominantly occupied by establishments that primarily provide a service as opposed to the sale of goods or merchandise. These may include smaller scale one-story office uses or higher intensity multi-level mid-rise offices. Examples include professional offices, medical or engineering offices, real estate offices, insurance agencies and corporate headquarters.*

There are currently 48 acres (1%) of office/professional uses in Suwanee. These uses may be located within shopping centers, but office-condominiums have also emerged recently as larger components of the Village Grove, Three Bridges and Highland Station mixed-use projects. Office condominiums can also be found in Georgetown Square. Only recently has the City started to see more intensive stand-alone professional office buildings.

**Commercial/Retail**

*Defined: Commercial developments predominantly occupied by establishments that offer goods or merchandise for sale or rent, and other commercial uses that do not operate in "office" settings. Such uses include stores, shopping centers, hotels, restaurants, gasoline stations, automobile body shops, physical fitness centers, markets and building supply centers.*

Commercial development continues to be an important part of the city, covering approximately 381 acres (6%). Commercial development primarily exists as stand-alone shopping centers, individual sites, but also includes the first floor of buildings located in Town Center. Commercial development typologies in the city consist of community service shopping centers clustered around major road intersections, business-oriented commercial uses along the Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road corridor, and a concentration of highway-oriented commercial development at the I-85 interchange characterized by gasoline stations, hotels and restaurants. More community-oriented shopping centers have started to emerge along Peachtree Industrial Boulevard.

**Industrial**

*Defined: Land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities.*

Light manufacturing, distribution and business park uses are common along Buford Highway south of McGinnis Ferry Road, along portions of Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road, Brogdon Road, Tench Road extension and Satellite Boulevard. This covers approximately 720 acres (12%). Suwanee has added over 3,000,000 square feet of industrial uses since 2000. Most of these uses

are located in large-footprint industrial buildings located along Satellite Boulevard, Tench Road extension, and the Horizon Drive extension. A limited amount of smaller-footprint industrial uses have been added primarily off Buford Highway.

### **Institutional**

*Defined: State, federal or local government uses, and quasi-public institutions. Governmental uses include City Hall, fire stations, libraries, post offices and public schools (but not parks). Institutional uses include places of worship, cemeteries and other private non-profit uses.*

Public and institutional uses are typically not concentrated in specific locations and cover approximately 223 acres (4%). The majority of public and institutional land uses in the city are located on scattered sites throughout the City. The original City Hall and the central fire station form an identifiable "government center" on Buford highway just south of Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. However, a post office is located at Eva Kennedy and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and a new branch library was constructed on Main Street slightly west of Suwanee Dam Road in Old Town. The only public schools in the city limits are Suwanee Elementary located on Smithtown Road and Level Creek Elementary on Tench Road. The Gwinnett County Board of Education also operates a school bus driver training facility in an old school located on Buford Highway.

Other than the city's several places of worship, the remaining institutional land is dominated in acreage by Annandale Village, a residential facility for handicapped individuals.

### **Parks, Recreation and Preservation**

*Defined: Land dedicated to active or passive recreational uses. These lands may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf courses, recreation centers, etc.*

As a result of the 2001 Open Space Initiative, this is one of the land uses that has changed most dramatically since 2000. George Pierce Park is still the single largest recreation facility in the city at over 300 acres, but the city now includes a total of about 788 acres (13%) of recreational uses. New parks include Town Center Park, PlayTown Suwanee, Suwanee Creek Park, Sims Lake Park, and the addition of 2.5 miles of greenway along Suwanee Creek. The city has also purchased a number of other sites that are not yet open to the public. In addition, there are several subdivision recreation areas within the corporate limits that add to the city's overall inventory but are limited in use to the subdivision residents.

### **Agriculture and Forestry**

*Defined: Land being actively farmed, including crop cultivation or livestock operations, or set aside for commercial timber or pulpwood harvesting as an agricultural pursuit.*

Agricultural uses cover only about 157 acres (3%) of land in Suwanee, located primarily on three tracts. One tract is a small farming operation in Old Town; another is a horse farm located off Settles Bridge Road; and the third tract is a tree farm on Smithtown Road that was annexed into the city in 2006.

### **Undeveloped**

*Defined: Land not developed or not being used for a specific purpose, and lands where development has been abandoned or where deteriorated, vacant buildings are located.*

Undeveloped land constitutes only 763 acres or just over 10% of the city's parcel area. However, all of this land is not readily developable. About 14% (109 acres) of these sites are impacted by environmental challenges like wetlands, streams, lakes, steep slopes, poor access, etc. and future development on these portions would be either difficult or close to impossible. These tracts are generally scattered throughout the City. Many of the undeveloped tracts, constituting about 654 acres, are likely to be developed in the near future.

## **2.2.2 Existing Land Use Policies**

The city's historic land use policies were generally consistent with more conventional suburban areas, reflected in the zoning ordinance which separated uses into distinct districts. As a result of the 2000 update to the comprehensive plan, the city initiated land use policies that encourage mixed-use development and pedestrian mobility while deferring to existing policies in established residential areas. Annexation policy was geared towards bringing non-residential uses around the I-85 business district into the city, and simplifying the city limits by annexing unincorporated islands of land.

### **Major Zoning Ordinance Amendments**

A significant change in the zoning ordinance occurred during the 1999 comprehensive planning process. The city adopted the Planned Mixed-Use Development District late in 1999 and subsequently zoned over 550 acres to this new category. The PMUD district allows for larger

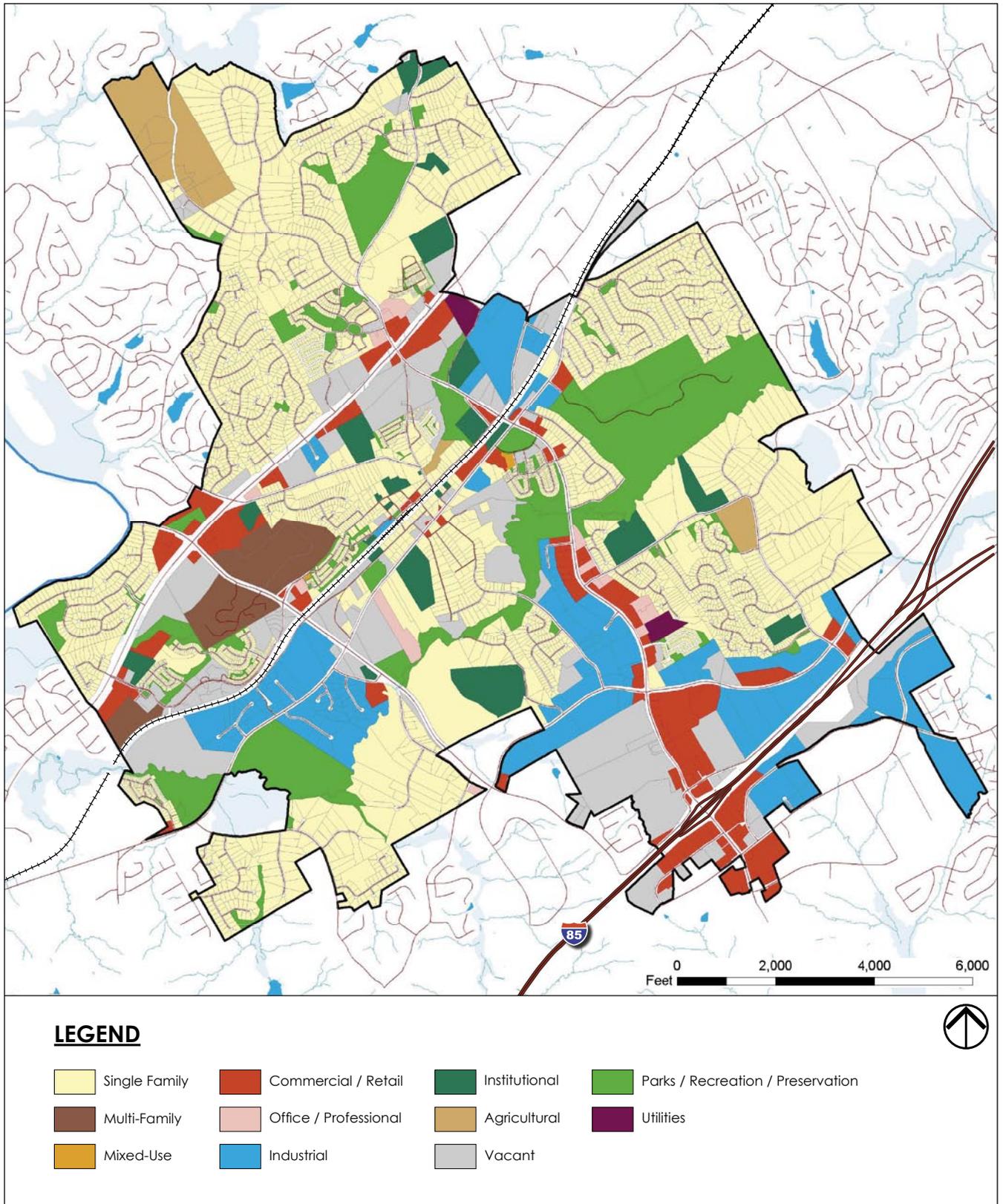


Figure 2.2-a: Existing Land Use

master-planned projects that connect residential uses to non-residential uses, encourages pedestrian mobility, requires land conservation, promotes more efficient use of land, and allows for the creation of neighborhoods with their own distinct character.

Another significant zoning ordinance amendment was the adoption of the Old Town Overlay District, which included two new zoning districts - the Infill Residential District and the Old Town Commercial District. The overlay district combined with the two new base districts are intended to provide structured guidance toward a more traditional form of development. To date, the districts have not yet been used on a large scale, but they are likely to be used more often as growth pressures radiate out from Town Center.

The city also amended the zoning ordinance to create special uses. This has allowed the city to more actively guide uses to appropriate locations. For example, automotive-related uses have been steered away from the more residential Peachtree Industrial Boulevard corridor to more exclusively commercial areas.

## **Annexation**

From 2000 to 2007, the City annexed a total of 711 acres including approximately 253 acres of residentially zoned land and approximately 1,000 new people..Most of the annexations were city-initiated annexations, which targeted the unincorporated island around Smithtown Road and Satellite Boulevard (between Highway 317 and Smithtown Road). An unincorporated island is an area that is entirely surrounded by city limits. The city has also targeted annexations in the commercial areas around the I-85 business district. In 2005, the city conducted an annexation study based on a fiscal impact analysis that was intended to determine if the revenue generated from annexed areas would be sufficient to cover the costs of providing services to the area.

### **2.2.3 Growth Areas**

Most of the large and/or isolated tracts are no longer available. Future growth will be within or near existing neighborhoods. This will make future development more challenging and complex. Just over 10% of the city's net developable land area (excluding infrastructure rights-of-way) is vacant and available for development or preservation as open space. Given the city's strategic location on interstate and regional arterial highways, as well as a main rail line into Atlanta's core, and considering the future growth policies of Gwinnett County, growth pressure can be expected to continue in the city for the foreseeable future. While some growth can be

accommodated on vacant land, and in residential or mixed-use neighborhoods that have not been fully built out, a large amount of future growth – both residential and economic – will need to occur on land that is currently developed to some degree. This “redevelopment approach” to accommodating and managing future growth rests on some basic policy assumptions derived from a philosophy of sustainability vocalized by the community during the public involvement process:

- *That growth should occur where there is adequate infrastructure - existing or planned - to accommodate it;*
- *That growth should occur where the city has made a substantial public investment in encouraging it;*
- *That growth should occur in places that potentially have the most beneficial and equitable effect for all city residents; and*
- *That growth should not endanger the city's high quality of life or sense of identity, or put existing neighborhoods at undue risk of change.*

Given these conditions, redevelopment opportunities fall into two broad categories: Intensification of land that preserves or expands existing uses in response to land use policy decisions (Example, Old Town);

Intensification of land that changes use based on escalating market pressure supported by policy. Though interrelated, each category points to different growth areas that were recognized as such by the community (Suwanee Gateway); and

Through numerous workshops and roundtable discussions with the community evolved into the priority Character Areas described below.

Town Center and Old Town are examples of future land use intensification that responds to city policy but generally preserves existing uses. Municipal action to create a new town center around a ten-acre park, build a new city hall, expand an adjacent greenway system, and revise the regulatory framework has created a climate where the growth experienced in Town Center on vacant land has changed the dynamic of the surrounding areas. While there is the potential for additional mixed-use development on commercial parcels along Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road and Buford Highway, the bulk of future growth in Town Center will be intensification of existing residential land in and around the Suwanee Lake Estates neighborhood and in Old Town and along Buford Highway. The growth strategies in these residential areas should reflect the need to maintain a high quality-of-life and preserve elements and landscapes unique to Suwanee's identity.

A changing market in the I-85 area (Suwanee Gateway) stimulated by the extension of McGinnis Ferry Road and by a large master planned development will likely lead to gradual transitioning of existing uses in the I-85 business district, away from warehousing and flex-space, and toward more mixed-use, commercial and professional office redevelopment. Given the community's desire to diversify the city's economic base, Suwanee Gateway represents a tremendous opportunity to expand into new industries and accommodate future business growth, along with providing space for new housing that is difficult to absorb elsewhere. The transformation of Suwanee Gateway will also affect the Lawrenceville-Suwanee corridor to the west, where there is some growth potential in underdeveloped land or obsolete buildings along Sharon Industrial Way.

#### **2.2.4 Future Land Use and Development**

With growth expected to concentrate in the Town Center, and Suwanee Gateway areas, Suwanee's future land use profile has evolved to define the Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road corridor as the city's principal urban artery, dominated by mixed-use and commercial developments over most of its length, and punctuated by parks and open space preservation (Figure 2.2-b). The influence of I-85 and Satellite Boulevard as regional thoroughfares is also clear in the proposed concentration of high-density office around the I-85 interchange, and the continued dominance of office-industrial uses along Satellite Boulevard. In northern Suwanee, ongoing and future development around the intersection of Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and Suwanee Dam Road pulls the mixed-use/commercial orientation of Lawrenceville-Suwanee north of the railroad, eventually ending at Sims Lake Park.

Single-family residential uses surround the Lawrenceville-Suwanee corridor and populate most of the remainder of the city, with the notable exceptions of the multifamily/shopping center concentration at the McGinnis Ferry/Peachtree Industrial Boulevard intersection, and the industrial parks on southwest Buford Highway. While these two nodes are identified as unique geographic areas that will likely remain in their present form into the near future, over time they could transition to other more intense land uses depending on market demand. In particular, the Buford Highway light industrial/warehouse properties are aging and becoming generally inconsistent with industrial trends in other areas of the city because of their small floor areas.

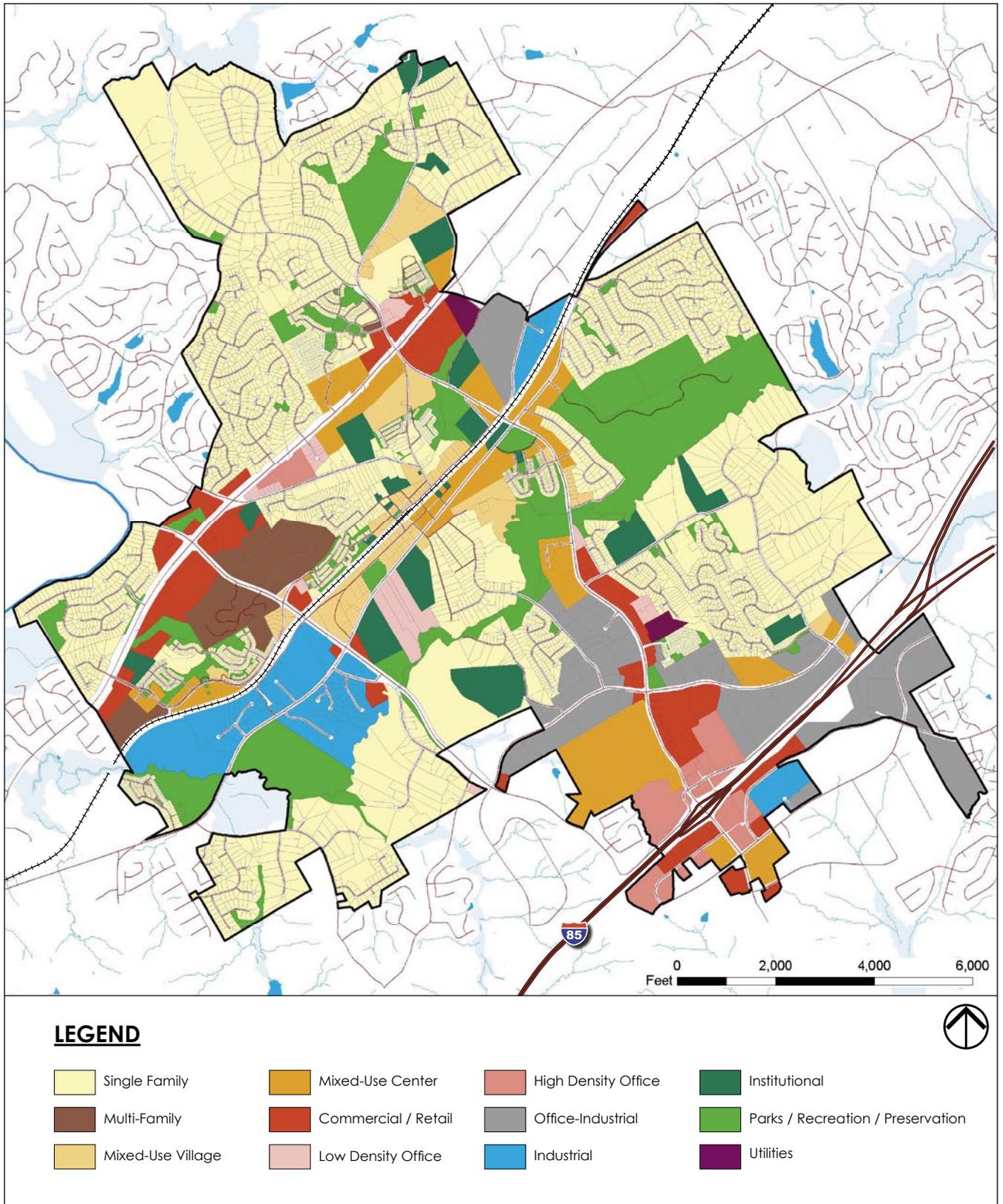


Figure 2.2-b: Future Land Use

The following tables summarize the expected future land use distribution for the City of Suwanee by the year 2030. In the first three tables, land uses are presented by Character Area and also includes city-wide totals. Tables 2.2-a1, 2.2-a2 and 2.2-a3 indicate existing development quantities, corresponding new development and redevelopment totals, resulting in total quantities for 2030. Table 2.2-b compares the existing land use (ELU) with the future land use (FLU) resulting in the change in acreage by 2030. The most striking trend in Table 2.2-b is the major increase in land use dedicated to office, both in the 139 acres of new high-density office near the interstate, and the additional 401 acres of mixed-use center which assumes office as the dominant use. This gain is offset by the conversion of approximately 763 acres of vacant land, which includes the greenfield site that is being developed by Opus. Still, because there is room for additional density on the Opus site, and because the proportion of office in a mixed-use center is variable, the increase in office indicates more of a shift in city land use policy than it does any quantifiable development type. This is also implicit in the 32-acre gain in industrial / office-industrial uses. The Agenda assumes that while there is an overall gain in this category, over time some of the existing light industrial and warehouse space will diversify or redevelop as flex-space with greater amounts of support office.

Certain assumptions have been made to calculate the development totals for each character area. These depend on the expected level of change foreseen in each area so as to reach the vision for 2030. The developable quantities for the land uses reflect those provided in the zoning ordinances for the City.<sup>2</sup>

- 
- <sup>2</sup> • Existing residential areas = Existing densities
- Residential: Low density = 4 units per acre; Medium density = 8 units per acre; High density = 20 units per acre  
Multi-family = 12 to 15 units per acre
  - Commercial/Retail: Stand alone = 0.20 FAR for existing and 0.25 FAR for future  
Within mixed-use developments: Low density = 5,000 sf per acre; Medium density = 8,000 sf per acre;  
High density = 12,000 sf per acre
  - Office: Low density = 5,000 sf per acre; Medium density = 10,000 sf per acre; High density = 20,000 sf per acre
  - Industrial and Office-Industrial = 0.3 FAR
  - Mixed-Use Village: 2/3 of total area = residential and 1/3 of total area = commercial/retail
  - Mixed-Use Centers: 1/3 of total area = residential and 2/3 of total area = office and commercial/retail

**LAND USE DISTRIBUTION:**

	Suwanee North			PIB			Suwanee Station			Buford West		
	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030
Residential (units)	392	125	517	844	556	1,400	1,221	291	1,512			
Commercial/Retail (sqft)				848,287	995,981	1,905,906	181,210	107,030	288,239	56,454	17,206	73,660
Office (sqft)				144,100	612,586	816,086		64,389	64,389			
Industrial & Office-Industrial (sqft)				99,317	-99,317					2,315,780	175,634	2,491,414
Institutional (acres)	8	1	9	26		26	9		9	2		
Utilities (acres)				12		12						
Parks (acres)	77		77	35	1	36	30	4	34			
Agricultural (acres)	130											
Vacant (acres)	12			176			47			67		

Table 2.2-a1

	Old Town			Town Center			Satellite North			Smithtown Road		
	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030
Residential (units)	1,251	480	1,731	318	365	683	106	78	184	140	19	160
Commercial/Retail (sqft)	80,869	103,552	184,421	236,599	140,698	377,298	364,771	66,287	431,059		5,378	5,378
Office (sqft)	186,873	344,289	531,162	4,889	230,922	235,811	179,740	-2,629	177,111		2,689	2,689
Industrial & Office-Industrial (sqft)	28,358	-28,358		1,140,052	-292,854	847,198	1,123,325	-33,323	1,090,002	65,340		65,340
Institutional (acres)	50	6	56	27	1	28				27		27
Utilities (acres)							11		11			
Parks (acres)	19	9	28	16	5	21	3	5	8			
Agricultural (acres)				5						22		
Vacant (acres)	95			68			18					

Table 2.2-a2

	Suwanee Gateway			Established Neighborhoods			CITY OF SUWANEE		
	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030	2007	New	2030
Residential (units)	4	1,136	1,140	2,589	-7	2,581	6,865	3,043	9,908
Commercial/Retail (sqft)	1,544,725	409,500	1,954,225	16,814	46,348	63,162	3,329,729	1,891,980	5,221,709
Office (sqft)		4,555,511	4,555,511	21,010		21,010	536,612	5,807,757	6,344,369
Industrial & Office-Industrial (sqft)	4,635,742	447,318	5,083,060				9,407,915	169,100	9,577,014
Institutional (acres)				73	6	79	223	11	234
Utilities (acres)							23		23
Parks (acres)	3	4	7	604	5	609	788	32	819
Agricultural (acres)							157		
Vacant (acres)	270			9			763		

Table 2.2-a3

**COMPARISON OF EXISTING VERSUS FUTURE LAND USE ACREAGE:**

	2007		2030		Change in Acreage
	Acreage	%	Acreage	%	
Single Family	2,787	45%	2,871	48%	84
Multi-Family	162	3%	173	3%	11
Mixed-Use Village	0	0	191	3%	191
Mixed-Use Center	3	0	404	7%	401
Commercial/Retail	381	6%	339	6%	-42
Low Density Office	48	1%	77	1%	29
High Density Office	0	0	139	2%	139
Industrial & Office-Industrial	720	12%	752	12%	32
Institutional	223	4%	234	4%	11
Utilities	23	0	23	0	23
Parks / Recreation / Preservation	788	13%	819	14%	32
Agricultural	157	3%	0	0	-157
Vacant	763	13%	0	0	-763

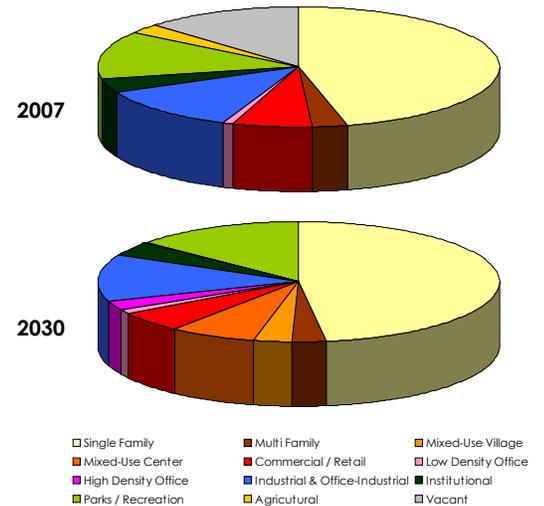


Table 2.2-b

Note: The calculated acreage takes into account only the parcel areas. It does not account for the street network and the right of ways. Total city acreage = 6,998 acres and Total parcel acreage within the city = 6,751 acres.

## Character Areas

This Community Agenda focuses particular attention on five Character Areas expected to have the most development, redevelopment and land use changes over the time horizon of this plan. Discussed briefly above, these Character Areas are Historic Old Town, Town Center, Suwanee Gateway, Satellite North (Sharon Industrial Way), and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. An additional five Character Areas cover the remainder of the city – Suwanee North, Suwanee Station, Buford West, Smithtown Road, and Established Neighborhoods. While significant growth or change is not anticipated - and in some cases discouraged - in these Character Areas, they nonetheless require attention in maintaining a high standard of municipal service provision and continuing care of public infrastructure. In particular, Smithtown Road and Suwanee North could have some level of capital investment targeted toward streetscape improvements and open space programming. Likewise, Suwanee Station and Buford West should be examined for changing circumstances and evaluated accordingly every ten years.

The highlights of the five priority Character Areas and their growth issues are summarized as follows (a detailed description of all the Character Areas are provided in Part 3 - "Future Development" of the document):

### Historic Old Town

Redevelopment in Old Town is slowly beginning to occur as new residences are being proposed; but non-residential development is lagging. New development will likely continue to occur in this area. Old Town's character should be fully defined to identify and resolve the increasing conflicts between old and new. The western portion of Town Center should be included in further discussions of the Old Town Overlay District because of the geographic overlap and the transition required between the two different development approaches. An update of the Old Town Master Plan should be undertaken to investigate ways to address infill development and the existing historic and rural character, and to consider the form and character of a "gateway district" along Buford Highway.

### Town Center and Adjacent Areas

Town Center has been successful in creating a sense of place and identity as the "Heart of Suwanee," and is acting as a catalyst for additional mixed-use and residential development demand. The parcels west of Buford Highway and south of Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road should

be included in any future Town Center expansion studies, as should the western portion of Town Center be included in further discussions of the Old Town Overlay District

### **Suwanee Gateway**

Gateway is emerging as the next significant growth area in the city after Town Center, especially with the development of the Terraces at Suwanee Gateway (Opus). Given Suwanee Gateway's potential, a detailed LCI-type planning effort could be conducted for the Gateway TAD area to determine locations and types of catalytic projects using the Competitive Assessment / Development Strategy Report and the existing Redevelopment Plan as the points of departure. Considering its future as a regional activity center on major transportation arteries, an LCI plan for Gateway could not only provide a comprehensive development and public space vision, but could analyze the transportation improvements necessary to support the development in the context of regional mobility and growth management. Regulatory changes could also be considered to help implement the land use and development vision established by an LCI plan.

### **Satellite North**

Satellite North has seen recent investment in commercial and office-warehousing uses, but continues to have areas that are underdeveloped given its proximity to Gateway and Town Center. In particular, a small-area planning effort should be considered to create a redevelopment plan for Sharon Industrial Way, with consideration given to the long-term future of the commercial area on the opposite side of Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. The city should also explore ways to extend Martin Farm Park and the Suwanee Creek greenway to the south along the low-lying area behind the parcels fronting Martin Farm Road to the east.

### **Peachtree Industrial Boulevard**

Peachtree Industrial Boulevard has two distinct parts characterized by the types of development occurring around each of the corridor's major intersections. In general, the corridor should be maintained as predominantly commercial to support the surrounding residential areas. More intensive commercial uses should be directed into the nodal areas surrounding the McGinnis Ferry and Suwanee Dam Road intersections with priority given the Suwanee Dam / Stonecypher Road area. In particular, the city should promote commercial mixed-use (office / retail) on both sides

of the corridor near the Suwanee Dam Road intersection to better complement the growth of Town Center. Essential to the growth of this node is the future mixed-use development of a large vacant tract south of the intersection, with suitable connections made to its surroundings.

**LAND USE: TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

TRENDS	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While residential demand remains strong, there is a need to create a balance of uses by increasing office uses.</li> <li>• The City has annexed land around I-85 so as to increase non-residential uses.</li> <li>• Future growth depends on redevelopment opportunities and the intensification and reuse of land.</li> <li>• Land use policies favor mixed-use developments that encourage sustainability and increase connectivity and pedestrian mobility thus providing a high quality of life. Town Center has been a catalyst for additional development opportunities.</li> <li>• The City preserves its unique landscapes and integrates available open spaces with occurring development.</li> <li>• Residential redevelopment is taking place in Old Town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth should be balanced to accommodate various needs but at the same time, it should preserve Suwanee's identity and uniqueness.</li> <li>• Land uses and increasing densities should correspond with transportation strategies.</li> <li>• There is an overall lack of connectivity between the residential areas and their surroundings.</li> <li>• There is a lack of office/high-tech land uses that can generate job opportunities and widen the City's economic base.</li> <li>• The City should be able to accommodate diverse industrial markets.</li> <li>• Old Town needs to refine its future character and growth strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directed growth can help maintain areas with a suburban residential character while refining and redeveloping others.</li> <li>• Commercial and office uses should take advantage of busy transportation nodes and corridors like the railway line and I-85. These should also be the target areas for intensive development.</li> <li>• Town Center provides an opportunity to expand its influence across Suwanee Dam Road as well as towards the Old Town Area.</li> <li>• Old Town could accommodate a larger population through strategic infill and connection to Town Center through a mixture of uses.</li> </ul>

## 2.3 Housing

From the establishment of the Suwanee Post Office in 1838 to its incorporation as a formal town in 1949, Suwanee was largely an agricultural town. The population was small, life was rural and commerce had focused on the railroad. The newly incorporated town still reflected the pattern first laid down when the Norfolk-Southern railroad came through in 1871: a small commercial district, fringed with residences, extending in a linear pattern east to west along the railroad tracks and Buford Highway. In 1960, the city contained just 115 houses.



The construction of I-85 in the 1960's caused a small burst of growth with the addition of 98 residential units, bringing the total number of units to 213 in 1970. Four primary housing types characterized pre-1970 Suwanee: ranches, bungalows, historic Victorian and regional farm style homes.

Over the next two decades, the city continued to grow slowly as the number of housing units increased to 825 units in 1990. This time period also saw the introduction of a new housing type with the addition of 25 multifamily units. Single-family units were a mix of large expensive homes built primarily in the 1980's and smaller more moderately priced homes constructed primarily in the 1960's and 1970's. Suwanee Farms (Meadowbrook Circle), Timberlost Trail, and Leaf Lake Lane typify the type of development occurring during this time period. Most of the homes during this period were served by septic systems only.

In the 1990's, Suwanee emerged as a bedroom community when the metro Atlanta growth wave hit. By the end of the decade, the number of residential units increased to 3,144 units, including 2,459 single-family residences and 685 multifamily residences. During this time period, single-family housing growth was characterized by more suburban-style single-family residential subdivisions with cul-de-sac streets and neighborhood amenity areas. Ruby Forest, Chattahoochee Run, and Forest Plantation/Stoneridge are examples of the types of neighborhoods constructed during this time. These more expensive homes were built on smaller lots served by sanitary sewer. This decade also introduced two apartment complexes along McGinnis Ferry Road, which are gated and, like their single-family counterparts, include significant neighborhood amenity areas.

Largely as a result of a change in policies outlined in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2000, the last eight years were characterized by residential units that were built in mostly mixed-use communities. The city’s total housing unit count increased to 5,992 units by the end of 2007 with housing types new to Suwanee like townhouses, apartments above storefront commercial, and gated single-family neighborhoods. At this point, single-family residential units comprise 67 percent of the total housing stock, single-family attached townhouses 10 percent and multifamily units 23 percent.

Although detached single-family residential homes continue to be the dominant form of housing in Suwanee, the units constructed during the last decade are often smaller in size, with some lots as small as 1/10 of an acre. The units are generally more consistent with traditional styles of development, including larger front porches, rear-loaded garages, and reduced front yard setbacks. This development form is often New Urbanism or Traditional Neighborhood Development.

While the lot sizes in Suwanee have continued to shrink, price points have risen. The neighborhoods built during this period also tend to mix housing types and provide a mix of nearby community retail and office uses. While still served by resident-only amenity centers, the neighborhoods are often also served by formal passive parks and informal community owned natural areas. Finally, two conventional garden-style apartment complexes were also constructed in this timeframe.

**QUANTITY AND TYPE OF HOUSING UNITS:**

	New by unit type			Total by unit type						Total Units
	Single-Family	Townhouse	Multi-Family	Single-Family	Townhouse	Multi-Family	Single-Family	Townhouse	Multi-Family	
<b>2000</b>	110	0	342	2,569	71%	0	0	1,027	29%	3,596
<b>2001</b>	87	0	0	2,656	72%	0	0	1,027	28%	3,683
<b>2002</b>	74	8	0	2,730	72%	8	0.2%	1,027	27%	3,765
<b>2003</b>	65	69	0	2,795	72%	77	2%	1,027	26%	3,899
<b>2004</b>	180	97	336	2,975	66%	174	4%	1,363	30%	4,512
<b>2005</b>	299	240	23	3,274	65%	414	8%	1,386	27%	5,074
<b>2006</b>	619	123	0	3,893	67%	537	9%	1,386	24%	5,816
<b>2007</b>	130	46	0	4,023	67%	583	10%	1,386	23%	5,992

Table 2.3-a

Source: City of Suwanee Planning Department



## Housing Age and Occupancy

The City added over 2,300 residential units in the 1990's and more than 2,800 residential units in the last eight years. This indicates that almost 50 percent of the housing stock in Suwanee is less than 8 years old, and 86 percent is less than 17 years old. While Suwanee's housing stock is still relatively new, in the next 20 years the city will need to be prepared to develop strategies to ensure that these units are well maintained.

Suwanee has traditionally been a community where owner-occupied housing units dominate. In 1980, only 22 percent of the total residential units were renter-occupied. This number dropped to 12.6 percent in 1990. With the addition of two apartment complexes in the 1990's the rental rate increased back to roughly 22 percent in 2000. Current occupancy data is not available, but since 23 percent of the residential units in Suwanee are apartments, the rental rate has likely increased slightly beyond the 22 percent in recent years. With employment opportunities increasing in the City, multi-family complexes are ideal housing options for a new and diversifying work force who may see the benefits of living close to their place of work. Hence, the maintenance and enhancement of these complexes becomes important for the City. To ensure that these areas do not deteriorate physically and in turn adversely affect their surroundings, the City needs to take a firm stand in enforcing relevant codes.

## Cost of Housing

Relative to Gwinnett County, Suwanee is an expensive community for housing, whether renter or owner-occupied. Among other county municipalities and compared to unincorporated Gwinnett, only Berkeley Lake has a higher median home price than Suwanee, at \$208,900. Most of the apartments in Suwanee are relatively new; and as such, rental prices are somewhat higher than the rest of the county. The median contract rent in Suwanee is \$826 per month, compared to \$719 in Gwinnett.

In 2007, the City developed a Housing Affordability Study which examined the impact of the high rental rates and median home prices on housing affordability. This study determined that 50 percent of Extremely Low Income households were paying more than 30 percent of their gross income for housing; although affordable housing for workforce households (those earning 50 percent or less than the area's median income) can be found in older single-family detached and new townhouse stock. The study found that new homes are relatively expensive, but there were significant rental opportunities within the city's various apartment complexes. The report also concludes that people employed in lower-paying jobs in the city can and do find housing

within their means in rental areas and other parts of the county within a reasonable commute distance away.

### **Housing Forecasts and Needs**

Opportunities for large-scale single-family developments will be limited in the future as large tracts of land necessary to develop these types of communities will no longer be available. Single-family residential development is likely to be focused on infill opportunities particularly in the Old Town area but also in limited places in the Suwanee North and Smithtown Road character areas. There is also a considerable number of available attached and detached single-family residential lots in existing neighborhoods including Highland Station, Three Bridges, McGinnis Reserve, Stonecypher, Village Grove and Suwanee Station. Given that these units will likely be built in the next five years, the city should concentrate on creating a sensitive infill strategy for areas around Town Center and Old Town to accommodate limited amount of new single-family homes. The city should also re-evaluate housing affordability regularly, and determine whether other infill locations and policies are appropriate. The city should also consider collaborating with Gwinnett County to work toward a land use strategy for unincorporated and undeveloped land near the city limits to both address the countywide need for moderately-priced units and evaluate the impact of additional residential development on city facilities.

There is also ample opportunity for future townhouse and multifamily development associated with potential mixed-use projects in Suwanee Gateway and some areas along Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. When located appropriately, increased densities can have beneficial impacts by providing customers for nearby shopping areas and employee residences for businesses. Community opposition to higher density – particularly apartments – must be considered when evaluating the appropriateness of such uses.

In some circumstances, townhomes could provide useful and appropriate transitions from the commercial intensive areas, such as the PIB corridor to the existing single-family residential area. Market demands also suggest that future multifamily units are more likely to resemble the type of buildings found in Town Center as opposed to the garden-style complexes that characterized the 1990's and early 2000's. The city should continue to advocate for this positive change where appropriate, and with subsequent updates, evaluate the possibility of transitioning out the garden-style developments to the mixed-use platform over time.

Like the rest of the country, Suwanee's population will continue to change. There will be an increase in the community's average age which will increase the demand for senior housing opportunities. Increased demand for single-level homes, coupled with associated services, will be needed in the future. Since few large tracts suitable for master planned communities are available, this need will be largely met by infill opportunities and multi-family facilities.

**HOUSING: TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

TRENDS	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single family homes dominate the City though their lot sizes have decreased over the years.</li> <li>• The number of town home developments has increased over the years.</li> <li>• Housing prices continue to remain above county and state averages.</li> <li>• About half the housing stock in Suwanee is new.</li> <li>• Housing stock is of good quality construction.</li> <li>• There is an overall lack of housing types in terms of meeting the different needs of household sizes and income levels.</li> <li>• Lack of large tracts of land limit new large-scale single family developments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infill opportunities need to be guided so as to maintain the quality of life and character of the City.</li> <li>• Increased housing requires additional city-wide services like water, sewer, fire and the police.</li> <li>• There will be a need to constantly evaluate the quality of housing through policies and incentives so that no area in Suwanee deteriorates over time.</li> <li>• Housing types will need to diversify to meet the needs of a growing work force as well as an aging population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing policies encourage housing in mixed-use settings.</li> <li>• Developing higher density single family housing as a transition between commercial areas and established neighborhoods of Old Town (similar to Village Grove).</li> <li>• Mixed-use developments provide an opportunity to provide renter and owner occupied housing as well as live-work units in areas like Suwanee Station, Town Center, Satellite North and Suwanee Gateway.</li> <li>• Old Town is an ideal setting for strategic infill that maintains the character of the area while drawing people to live close to the City center and revitalize the neighborhood.</li> <li>• Senior Housing opportunities can be created near mixed-use neighborhoods such as Old Town, Town Center, Satellite North and Suwanee Gateway.</li> <li>• Diverse housing opportunities can be mixed in with commercial opportunities in areas like Town Center, the PIB corridor and Suwanee Gateway.</li> </ul>

## 2.4 Community Facilities

The adequacy and availability of community facilities is a necessary part of the comprehensive planning process due to the importance of maintaining and attracting future residents, businesses and industries to the area. Growth needs to be managed in such a way so as to not put an undue burden on existing community facilities, thereby



affecting the overall quality of life in the City. Although the City has grown rapidly in recent years, the City is now served by more parks, schools, and public safety resources than ever before. In addition to expanding existing assets, a new library was constructed and a new City Hall is under construction resulting in needed space for administration, police and the community as a whole.

### Open Space Assessment and Needs

Prior to the 2000 Comprehensive Plan, the City had only about 10 acres of city-owned parkland. In response to this lack of parkland, the Comprehensive Plan identified parkland and open space acquisition and protection as an important community goal. The City subsequently conducted an Open Space and Recreational Needs Assessment in 2001. The plan identified a need for additional passive parks and open space. The assessment found that Gwinnett County was providing adequate active recreation facilities for Suwanee, but open space preservation, passive park areas, and community gathering areas were limited. In response to this assessment and with backing of a citizen-approved referendum, the City initiated a \$17.7 million dollar Open Space Initiative through voter referendum and bond issue. This initiative resulted in the purchase and preservation of over 200 acres of open space and parks and the construction of approximately 2.5 miles of additional trails. When coupled with Gwinnett County resources the city has approximately 800 acres of park land within its corporate limits. This does not include an additional 530 acres of emerging Gwinnett County park land adjacent to or near the city. Below is an inventory of City open space facilities.

Parks open to the public:

- a) *City Hall Park* – One-third acre park located at the Municipal Complex. Facilities include a small fountain, small set of playground equipment and a small gazebo. No additions are planned.
- b) *Main Street Park* – Half-acre park located on Main Street in Old Town. Facilities include a small gazebo and one basketball court. No additions are planned.
- c) *Martin Farm Park* – 9-acre passive park located on Martin Farm Road. Serves as an access point to the Suwanee Creek Greenway. Facilities include a small gravel parking lot and some natural open space. Minor additions may be needed in the future.
- d) *Suwanee Creek Park* – 85-acre passive nature park located on Buford Highway adjacent to Suwanee Creek. Serves as the primary trailhead for Suwanee Creek Greenway. Features/amenities include approximately 100 parking spaces, restrooms, 2 pavilions, and over one mile of asphalt trail/bikeway, a three-quarters of a mile soft surface trail, and an outdoor classroom. Future phases are anticipated.
- e) *Town Center Park* – 10-acre urban-style park located at the intersection of Buford Highway and Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. Features/amenities include 120 parking spaces, 2,000 square foot performance building with stage, 1,500 person amphitheater-style grass seating area, dressing room, and restrooms. Park also contains several large passive event lawns, plazas, walkways, and an interactive fountain.
- f) *PlayTown Suwanee* – 3.5-acre children's interactive playground located on Main Street. Facilities include 46 parking spaces, restrooms, and a large custom-built playground structure. Future enhancements anticipated.
- g) *McGinnis Ferry Road/Burnette Road Trail Head* – A quarter-acre gravel parking area that serves as a trailhead for the Suwanee Creek Greenway.



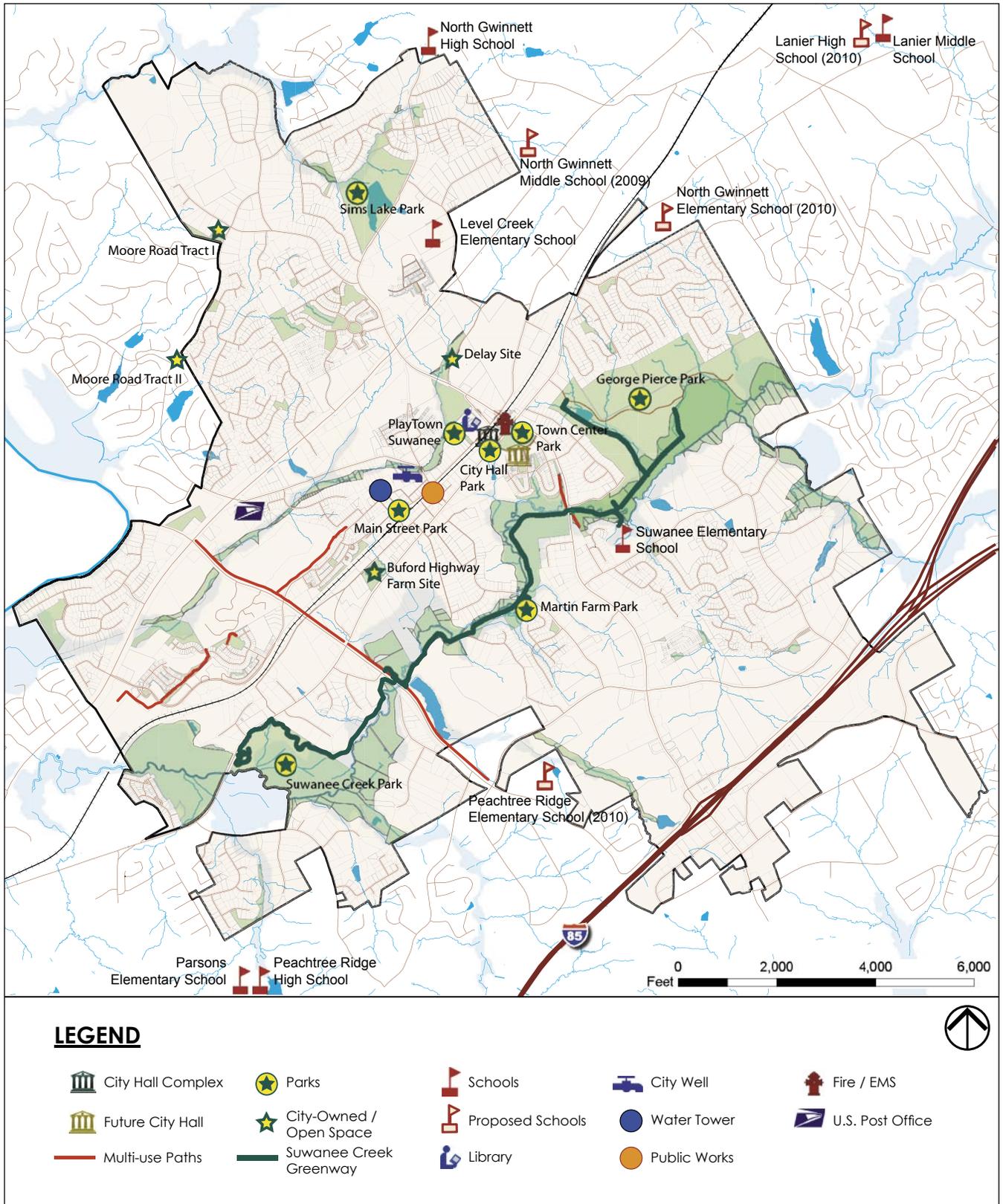


Figure 2.4-a: Community Facilities

- h) *Suwanee Creek Greenway* – Four mile hard-surface multi-use path extending between George Pierce Park and Suwanee Creek Park. The trail is 6 to 10 feet wide and constructed of asphalt, concrete or boardwalk. In 2007, a bridge over Suwanee Creek, adjacent to Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road was completed to help connect Town Center to the Greenway. The Greenway is accessible from Suwanee Creek Park, the Burnette Road/ McGinnis Ferry Road trail head, Martin Farm Road Park, and Town Center Park. Additional enhancements and improvements anticipated.

Sites owned by City but not open to public:

- a) *Sims Lake Park* – 62-acre future park site located on Suwanee Dam Road. Dam reconstruction complete. The project has been engineered and is under construction at the time of this planning effort. Current construction plans include approximately 80 parking spaces, restroom facilities, hard surface trails, a small shelter, a 10,000 square foot playground and a maintenance facility. Future phases are anticipated.
- b) *DeLay Site* – 23-acre future park site located on Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. The city has a life estate agreement with the previous property owner. No imminent plans for improvements.
- c) *Buford Highway Farm Site* – 6.9-acre future park site on Buford Highway. No imminent plans for improvements.
- d) *Moore Road Tract I* – 4.5-acre future park site on Moore Road. No imminent plans for improvements.
- e) *Moore Road Tract II* – 1.8-acre future park site on Moore Road. No imminent plans for improvements.

Gwinnett County provides an extensive active recreation program that serves the residents of Suwanee. George Pierce Park is an approximately 300-acre park located within the City Limits. It provides football fields, softball/baseball fields, soccer fields, basketball courts, trails, and a senior center. Since the implementation of the Open Space initiative, the City is well served by parks. However, there may be areas outside the City that are underserved by parks. This could contribute to increased use of City facilities.

## Facilities Assessment and Needs

The City of Suwanee administrative departments currently occupy four structures, three of which are located on Buford Highway near the intersection with Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. The four facilities are the current City Hall, the Crossroads Center (former City Hall), the rear portion of Fire Station No. 13, and the public works facility located off Mary Lou Street. The current City Hall totals approximately 11,000 square feet and houses the City Managers Office, Finance, Public Works, Human Resources, the City Clerk, some of Planning and Community Development and the City's Police Department. The Crossroads Center totals approximately 3,700 square feet and houses the municipal court and portions of Planning and Community Development. The rear portion of Fire Station No. 13 includes a 2,000 square foot vehicle maintenance area and a 1,000 square foot general storage area.

In 2005, the City conducted a city facilities assessment that determined an additional 22,000 to 28,000 square feet of office space, and an additional 3,000 square feet of public works maintenance covered shop will be needed in the mid-term future. As a result of this assessment, the City is constructing an approximately 23,000 square foot City Hall. The new facility will house the City Manager's Office, Finance, Human Resources, the City Clerk, Public Works and Inspections, and Planning and Community Development. The existing City Hall (constructed in 1997) will house the City Police Department. The Crossroads Center will continue to house the municipal court. The City will need to continue to search for a suitable location for the additional 3,000 square foot public works facility.

In 2002 Gwinnett County completed an approximately 20,000 square foot public library located on Main Street.

In 2007, Gwinnett County added a community facility at George Pierce Park. This first-class facility provides several community activities rooms – particularly for seniors.

## Public Safety Assessment and Need

### Public Safety:

The City of Suwanee Police Department currently budgets for 43 positions including 34 sworn police officers and 9 civilian positions. As demands and needs increase, police resources are increased accordingly.

Police currently use approximately half of the 11,000 square foot City Hall. In late 2008, the entire Police Department will take over the current City Hall building when administration vacates it to move into the new City Hall.

The Suwanee Police Department has a community policing oriented philosophy that focuses on building relationships, creating communication avenues and enhancing awareness of both residents and officers. This philosophy is labor intensive, but is expected to reduce overall calls for service over time.

The Police Department includes the following bureaus and divisions: Chief of Police, Field Operations Bureau, Administrative Services Bureau, Support Services Division, Records/Evidence, Special Services Division, Criminal Investigations, Training/Community Relations, Drug Task Force, Red Light Camera, Communications, Selective Enforcement, Patrol, and Park Police.

City facilities include a small jail that is not used at this time. The City contracts with the Gwinnett County Sheriff's office for this service.

Below is a list of some of the programs operated by the Police Department. These programs are a reflection of the City's continuing desire to focus on developing a sense of community.

#### *P.A.C.T. Program*

The PACT program (Police and Citizens Together) is an ongoing initiative serving individual neighborhoods. The program continues to be a vital part of the police department's community policing philosophy. The Department has consistently added new neighborhoods to the program as they have been completed. Neighborhoods are recognized as P.A.C.T neighborhoods when they have completed three meetings.

#### *Georgia Teens Ride with P.R.I.D.E (Parents Reducing Incidents Of Driver Error)*

The Suwanee Police Department in conjunction with the Georgia Traffic Injury Prevention Institute, hosts a drivers education class for parents/caretakers and teens between the ages of 14 and 16.

### *Selective Enforcement Unit*

The Selective Enforcement Unit (SEU) handles any type of specific issue, special detail, or problem identified as a public safety issue.

### *Park Patrol Officers*

The Park Patrol, a component within SEU, was started to address the tracts of land that have been acquired by the City through the Open Space Initiative. The department goal is to add one officer per year over the next five years to patrol the parks. Currently, 2 full-time officers are assigned to the City's 3 parks and trail system.

### *Citizens Police Academy*

The Suwanee Police Department started the Citizens Police Academy in the year 2000. The program is popular with citizens and local business owners. The department strives to conduct two academy classes per year.

### *C.O.P.S*

COPS (Caring Officers Proving Support) is a City program undertaken in conjunction with local schools. This program matches officers one-on-one with elementary school students that may need extra attention for a variety of reasons. The officers meet with the students once a week to discuss assorted life topics.

## **Healthcare**

Suwanee is generally well-served by hospitals. There are four hospitals in Gwinnett County, three of which have emergency rooms. Emory Eastside Medical Center, Gwinnett Medical Center (GMC), and Gwinnett Health System(GHS) /Joan Glancy Memorial Hospital have emergency rooms; Summit Ridge Hospital, located directly south of the Lawrenceville fire station, is a psychiatric hospital and does not have an emergency room. Gwinnett Health System, located in Lawrenceville, is a not-for-profit healthcare network that includes three hospitals and other support facilities. Suwanee residents are also served by the recently completed Emory John's

Creek Hospital.

The Gwinnett Coalition for Health and Human Services is a public/private partnership that was founded in 1989. The Coalition focuses on improving the health of Gwinnett residents, providing positive child and youth development programs, and strengthening families and communities. The Coalition's Board of Directors has representatives from a variety of community groups: Gwinnett County government, state government, health service providers, schools, corporate and professional services, and other community groups.

The Gwinnett Hospital System Foundation provides financial support to the hospital system for projects that address community needs in areas of awareness, health care, preventive medicine, health education and indigent care. Projects sponsored by the Foundation include the "Let's Talk" Family Communication Workshops, the Care-a-Van, the Parish Nursing Outreach Program, and the Marion Allison Webb Center for Mammography Screening.

Gwinnett County also operates public health centers in Buford, Lawrenceville and Norcross. Public health advocates at these centers educate residents on medical issues ranging from wellness to the use of infant car seats. In addition, they provide informational resources and referrals to healthcare agencies serving the County.

In addition to county-wide health services, Buford, Norcross, and Lawrenceville have jurisdictional human services centers. The County also provides a countywide program of services targeting the senior population, and the jurisdiction has a number of facilities located throughout the County that provide programs and services for seniors. There are no major health facilities located in the City of Suwanee. However, the non-profit Annandale facility, does provide services to developmentally challenged adults.

### **Utilities Assessment and Needs**

Gwinnett County provides water and sanitary sewer services to most City residents. Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources manages all aspects of these services. The County relies on Lake Lanier to meet fresh water needs. It provides a wholesale service to a number of cities within the county including Suwanee. Their water supply network serves 225,000 customers (as of 2006) resulting in an average withdrawal of 90 million gallons of water per day from Lake Lanier. Even though population and development within the County has increased, water usage in the same area has actually decreased over the years. The County has taken some initiatives to promote and enable water conservation by controlling water used for landscape maintenance

and also allowing businesses to use reclaimed waste water for irrigation, street washing and sewer cleaning. The County also provides waste water treatment to 140,000 customers.

The City also operates a small water system, with about 330 connections, that serves approximately 840 City residents. The water system assets include a well, a 150,000 gallon elevated water storage tank, and 6.5 miles of 2-inch, 6-inch and 8-inch waterline. The system also has a cross connection to the County water system on Buford Highway for backup. The City is currently in the process of studying the water system to determine the well condition, long-term capital needs, maintenance requirements, pricing implications, recommended levels of service, potential financing approaches, the water supply, and the condition of the distribution system.

### **Educational Facilities**

Gwinnett County Board of Education operates the public schools for Suwanee residents. Most of Suwanee is served by the North Gwinnett Cluster. This cluster includes Level Creek Elementary School, North Gwinnett High School, Lanier Middle School, Riverside Elementary School, and Suwanee Elementary School. This cluster includes other elementary schools that do not serve Suwanee residents. The school system anticipates the addition a new elementary school in 2010 and a new middle school in 2009 (to replace Lanier Middle School which will be moved to a new cluster), and an addition to Suwanee Elementary School in 2013 or 2014.

The Peachtree Ridge Cluster serves Suwanee residents living south of McGinnis Ferry Road and the AMLI apartments north of McGinnis Ferry Road. Schools serving Suwanee include Peachtree Ridge High School, Hull Middle School, and Parsons Elementary School. The school system projects a new elementary school in 2010, an addition to Parsons Elementary School in 2011, another elementary school in 2013/2014, and a middle school in 2013/2014.

In the next few years the schools system will be transitioning the introduction of the new Lanier Cluster. This cluster will not serve residents living in Suwanee, but it will pull some students away from the North Gwinnett Cluster. The new cluster will include a new middle school in 2008, a new elementary school in 2009 and a new high school in 2010.

The Gwinnett County schools serving Suwanee were slightly above capacity this school year. However, the school system indicates they have purchased 5 sites in the North Gwinnett cluster. Of the 5 sites, two are proposed for future elementary schools, two are proposed for future middle schools, and one is proposed for a future high school. Three of these sites will serve as a new cluster at some point in the future. The schools system is not prepared to project an

opening date for schools on any of these sites. Enrollment forecasts indicate that the Suwanee area schools will continue to be enrolled above capacity over the next few years. However the school system's projections do not currently assess the impact this new cluster will have on the capacity of the North Gwinnett Cluster.

**COMMUNITY FACILITIES: TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

TRENDS	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expansion of existing facilities and the construction of new ones have increased the number of parks, schools and public safety resources.</li> <li>• Adequate active recreational facilities are provided by the county within George Pierce Park.</li> <li>• City initiatives have been responsible for the increase in passive parks, open space preservation, the greenway and trail system and community gathering spaces.</li> <li>• Construction has begun on the new City Hall that will allow for more efficiently run services.</li> <li>• A newly constructed library serves the community.</li> <li>• The police department has increased in size and programs to meet the needs of the City.</li> <li>• The City is served by health facilities located outside the City but none within the City limits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is increased use of City park facilities by the underserved neighborhoods that lie outside the City limits.</li> <li>• A future aging population has limited medical facilities within the City to serve them.</li> <li>• Community facilities will need constant evaluation to meet needs of a diversifying population.</li> <li>• As the City grows on the east side of I-85, there will be a need to explore providing police facilities to maintain safety within that area.</li> <li>• Continued growth of the City and its population will need to be served with corresponding growth in community facilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redevelopment of areas provide opportunities to connect the City through a trail system thereby increasing pedestrian mobility and the overall quality of life.</li> <li>• Redevelopment opportunities also allow for the planning of open space and parks as part of the developments.</li> <li>• Public interest indicates an opportunity for the development of a performing arts center.</li> <li>• The City could attract satellite health and medical facilities to meet growing needs of the population.</li> </ul>

## 2.5 Transportation

Circulation systems include more than just roads in a sustainable city. Transportation facilities should be diverse enough to allow multiple methods of moving people and goods, while being sensitive and responsive to the profound influence they have on urban form. Suwanee recognizes and supports these goals, but faces the same transportation issues as many other smaller communities in



Metro Atlanta. As part of a metropolitan area with an estimated population of about 4.03 million, most people who use Suwanee's roads are passing through from one end of town to another; as a result, the roads they use are designed to accommodate high volumes of traffic and prioritize traffic passing through the city. These roads often create mobility conflicts within the city; and effective maintenance and congestion mitigation requires a financial commitment that is beyond the means of most small communities. However, there are strategies available to local governments that can afford a greater amount of mobility for local residents without prohibitive capital outlays. Good and flexible transportation planning includes a wide variety of circulation systems like roads, sidewalks, bikeways, trails, public transit, rail transit, parking, and supportive land use. With a combination of these strategies, movement through the City can be maximized.

As part of the Gwinnett County's comprehensive planning process, the County's consultants evaluated the road transportation system and prepared a countywide Interim Transportation Plan. Among the items studied, this report contains transportation-related projections for the year 2015 that anticipates where congestion will occur at different times in the day (morning, midday, and evening). It also evaluated different road improvement implementation scenarios and their effects on congestion. Road congestion was measured based on percent of Gwinnett County Lane Miles considered to be at Capacity or Congested (see page A-63 in Appendix).

Three implementation scenarios were developed and modeled based on three potential future funding levels. A "Baseline/ No Action" projection assumes the current transportation system is still in place by 2015 (in other words – no changes). "Potential Projects" scenario assumes projects that have been documented in the current FY06-11 TIP or a previous Comprehensive Transportation Plan are implemented. These projects are viewed as committed through 2015. Finally, "Aspirations Projects" are those projects from the Mobility 2030 Aspirations Plan and the Planning Team's professional opinion and input. These plans are "aggressive" construction

options. In other words, the scenario's range essentially from the most pessimistic (Baseline/no action) to the most optimistic (Aspirations Projects). "Potential projects" already in the FY06-11 TIP are estimated to cost almost \$740 million, with additional projects in the 2012-2015 year ranges expected to cost an additional \$114 million. The Interim Transportation Plan identifies 50 important projects that are anticipated require approximately \$2.7 billion in funding.

As a base, countywide 2005 congestion levels indicated that approximately 11 percent of the county's roads were considered to be "at capacity" or "congested" in the morning, 1 percent at midday, and about 14 percent in the evening. By 2015, the "Baseline/No Action" scenario projects morning congestion to triple to 34 percent, midday congestion to increase to approximately 14 percent, and evening traffic to triple to over 43 percent. In the most realistic implementation scenario, "Potential Projects," congestion still increases in the morning to almost 30 percent in the morning, 12 percent at midday, and 38 percent in the evening. In the most optimistic scenario, morning congestion is more than 2.5 times worse than 2005 levels at 27 percent, midday congestion is 10 times worse at 10 percent, and evening congestion is almost 2.5 times worse at 34 percent.

A review of these projections makes it clear that even in the most optimistic spending scenario, traffic congestion in Suwanee, around Suwanee, and throughout Gwinnett County will continue to worsen in the next few years. Suwanee is part of a regional transportation system in which traffic congestion will continue to increase substantially unless new sources of funding for transportation improvements are identified.

Solutions to road congestion need to be both on-system and off-system. Road construction alone cannot solve the projected traffic congestion issues. Alternative transportation options, such as but not limited to commuter rail (using existing Norfolk Southern rail lines), sidewalks, and others must be thoroughly explored.

Land use strategies are one of the most powerful tools the City can use to influence its residents day-to-day transportation needs. The City should continue to mix uses in a way that allows residents, workers and visitors to walk to various destinations (parks, shopping, dining, work) or at least minimize vehicular trips on major roads, encourage development of projects in Suwanee that meet the employment needs of Suwanee residents, and locate useful destinations near residents. These strategies could be essential to reducing the adverse impacts of increased congestion.

## Transportation Assessment

The Gwinnett County – Municipal Community Assessment studied the County's transportation system as part of a countywide comprehensive transportation plan. The study analyzed that the county's overall level of service now and in the future. The study identified problems and proposed numerous local and county-wide transportation projects to alleviate traffic congestion.

Several roads in Suwanee are projected to carry significant traffic loads by the year 2015. The highest volume road is anticipated to be I-85 with over 40,000 trips per day. Peachtree Industrial Boulevard (south of Moore Road), McGinnis Ferry Road (east of Buford Highway, and Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road (southeast of Smithtown Road) are all anticipated to carry between 20,000 and 40,000 vehicles per day. Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road (northwest of Smithtown Road) Buford Highway (south of Russell Street and north of Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road), McGinnis Ferry Road (west of Buford Highway), Peachtree Industrial Boulevard (north of Moore Road), and the first few hundred feet of Moore Road are all anticipated to carry between 10,000 and 20,000 vehicles per day. The rest of the roads in the City are anticipated carry fewer than 10,000 vehicles per day.

A study of the anticipated level of service indicates that by 2015, without significant upgrades to the overall transportation system, several roads will be considered at capacity or congested during the afternoon rush hour (PM traffic). This includes all of Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road/Suwanee Dam Road, McGinnis Ferry Road, Buford Highway south of Russell Street, and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard south of Moore Road.

In 2005, the County identified six intersections within the city limits with crash volumes in the top 100 for the County. Five of the intersections are Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road intersections including: Old Peachtree Road, I-85 north bound and south bound ramps, Satellite Boulevard and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. The other intersection with a high volume of crashes is Peachtree Industrial Boulevard at McGinnis Ferry Road. Several of these same intersections are also identified as needing improvements. These intersections include the I-85 north bound and south bound ramps at Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road, Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road at Old Peachtree Road, and Eva Kennedy/Moore Road/Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. The City should coordinate with the state and county departments of transportation to improve the safety of these intersections.

## Roads

A wide variety of streets and highways provide access and circulation to, through, or within Suwanee. These roads are classified by their functions: freeways, arterials, collectors, and local roads. Most roads constructed in Suwanee were constructed by the Georgia Department of Transportation, Gwinnett County DOT, or private developers. The state and county transportation departments maintain the freeways, arterials, and some collectors, while Suwanee maintains most local roads and some collectors.

### Freeways

Freeways are limited-access multi-lane divided roadways, permitting high-speed traffic. I-85 is a freeway that runs through the southern portion of Suwanee, with the I-85 Business District focused around Exit 111. It is maintained by Georgia DOT. The freeway has historically been a boon for the area; but also bisects the southern section of the city with Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road as the only crossing, creating traffic issues during both the morning and evening commutes. Gwinnett County has funded and engineered a project to extend McGinnis Ferry Road over I-85. When implemented this plan should relieve some of the traffic load from Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road.

### Arterials

Arterial roads give priority to through traffic and are designated to carry large volumes. These roads provide excellent access, but bisect the community. In Gwinnett County three classes of arterials have been designated; principal arterials, major arterials, and minor arterials.

Principal arterials are the most heavily traveled and generally have at least two lanes in each direction along with a median. Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road are principal arterials; Peachtree Industrial Boulevard was widened to four lanes in 2001.

Major arterials are designated to carry slightly lower volumes of traffic than principal arterials. They have two or three lanes that may or may not be divided. Suwanee is served by McGinnis Ferry Road, Satellite Boulevard, Buford Highway (US 23), and Horizon Drive / Old Peachtree Road. In 2005, Satellite Boulevard was extended to Georgia Highway 20 in Buford and Horizon Drive extended to the edge of the city limits. McGinnis Ferry Road is planned to be extended over I-85 and connected to Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road south of Crestridge Drive. Forsyth and Fulton County are also currently widening McGinnis Ferry Road west of Suwanee. Along with these road improvements, the McGinnis Ferry Road bridge over the Chattahoochee River

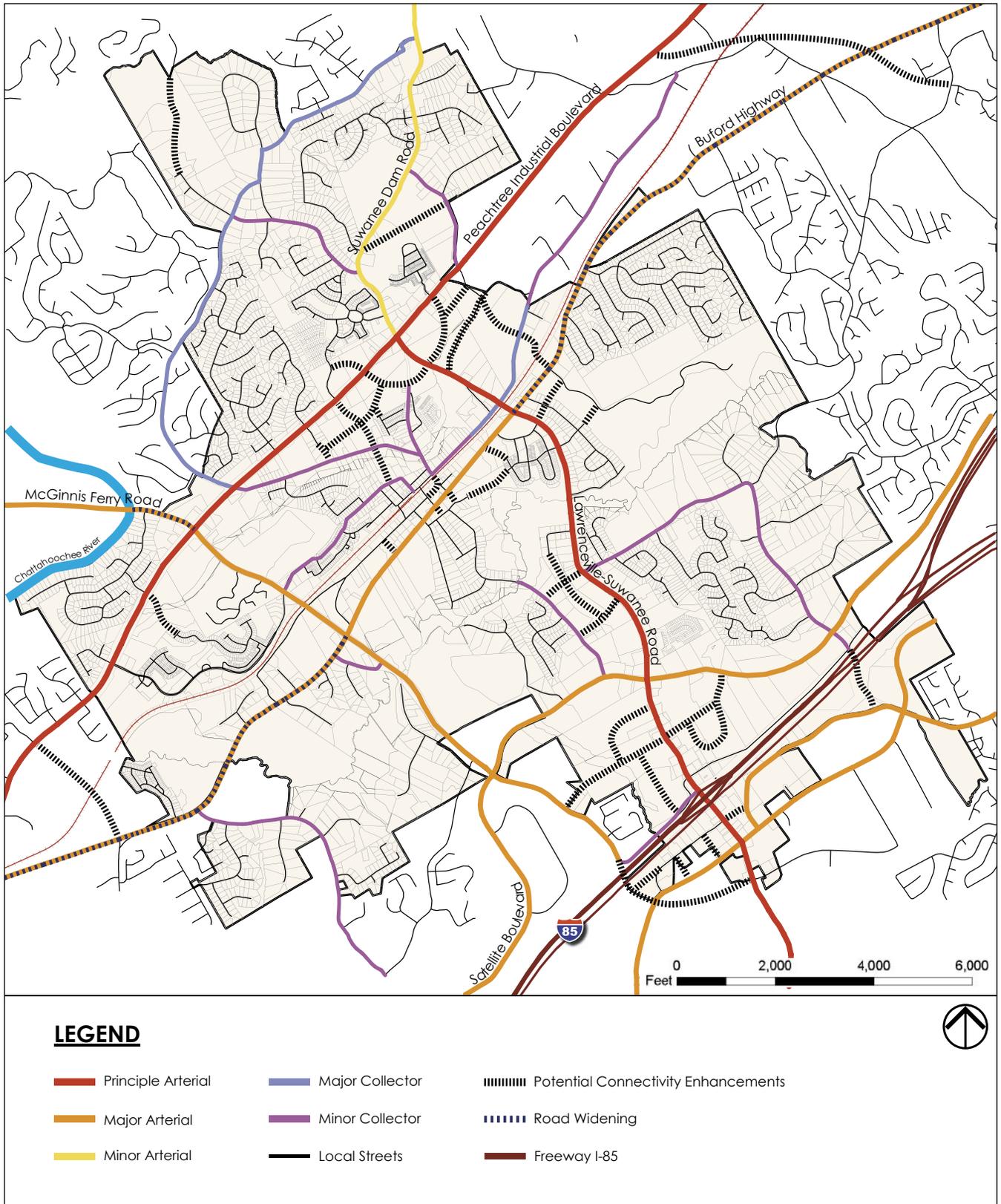


Figure 2.5-a: Transportation



is expected to be completed in 2010. All of these improvements should improve McGinnis Ferry Road's function as an arterial.

Minor arterials are generally two lanes wide and carry lower volumes of traffic than the other two classes of arterials. The only minor arterial in Suwanee is Suwanee Dam Road west of Peachtree Industrial Boulevard.

As mentioned above, arterials are maintained by either Gwinnett County or Georgia DOT.

### Collectors

There are two classes of collectors: minor and major. Collector roads have a minimum of two lanes and distribute traffic from local roads onto arterials, and vice-versa. The chief difference between major and minor collectors is the width of the pavement, with typically 24 feet of pavement width for minor collectors and 36 feet of width for major collectors. Collectors in Suwanee include: Moore Road, a portion of Martin Farm Road, Suwanee Creek Road, Scales Road, Main Street, and Smithtown Road. Two collectors have been recently completed in Suwanee: an extension of Tench Road between Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and Brogdon Road, and an extension of Scales Road (named Station Center Boulevard) from McGinnis Ferry Road to Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. Another collector, currently under construction, will connect Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road to Burnette Road (and McGinnis Ferry Road once the extension is completed). This new collector will also lead to the closing of Burnette Road at Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. Collectors may be maintained by either Gwinnett County or the City of Suwanee depending on the roadway.

### Local Streets

Local roads are those streets that provide direct access to properties, both residential and commercial. They are intended as primary circulation facilities for residents and not intended to replace or supplement arterial roads. Most often a two-lane section with two-way traffic, they may permit on-street parking on one or both sides and are characterized by frequent driveway cuts and a "neighborhood" character. Local streets should be designed for low vehicular speeds, and in residential areas, may incorporate additional traffic-calming devices like bulb outs, crosswalks, speed tables or textured pavement. With the addition of several neighborhoods, the inventory of local streets has been expanded considerably. Local streets are maintained by the city, with the exception of local streets in gated communities. Streets within gated apartments belong to the private property owner or owners; and as such maintenance is the obligation of the property owner or owners.

## Public Transit

The most notable forms of public transit include buses or trains. The City is not currently directly involved in any public transit; however, Gwinnett County does have a bus system that provides both local and express service. There are currently no stops in Suwanee for the local bus routes; but park-and-ride lots served by the I-985 Express Route 101A and the Discover Mills Express Route 103A are nearby. Parking for the I-985 Express route is located at the I-985 exit for Highway 20, and parking for the Discover Mills route is located at the northeast corner of Discover Mills east of Sugarloaf Parkway. Both of these routes serve Downtown and Midtown Atlanta.

## Passenger Rail

Currently, the only passenger rail in Suwanee is Amtrak's Crescent, which runs on the Norfolk Southern line described below; the Washington D.C. – Atlanta service does not stop in the city. However, in 1994, the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority (GRPA) was established by the State of Georgia to develop commuter rail service across Georgia. In 1995, the GRPA subsequently identified six commuter rail lines that would radiate outward from Atlanta to Athens, Senoia, Bremen, Madison, Canton and Gainesville. Suwanee was identified as a potential stop along the Atlanta to Gainesville commuter rail line, with additional stops at Sugar Hill, Duluth and Norcross. Commuter rail is a form of passenger rail service that uses the general railroad system and typically operates between a central city and the adjacent suburbs during rush hours to take commuters to work and back home.

In 2000, in an effort to plan for this potential commuter rail line, the city identified the Suwanee Station character area as an appropriate location for the Suwanee stop. When the area was developed a denser mixed-use project was approved so that a stop could be supported; and the city required the developer set aside space for facilities associated with a commuter rail stop. While the line has not made any progress in the last ten years, the city should continue to work with neighboring cities to advocate for the implementation of this commuter rail line.

Although it is unknown when commuter rail will become a reality, it would provide a valuable transportation option for residents of Suwanee who work in Atlanta and other cities along the line. Commuter rail faces financial and political challenges beyond Suwanee, but the city should stay on top of events and be ready to act should an opportunity arise.

## Freight Rail

A Norfolk Southern freight rail line runs from the northeast to the southwest through the center of the city. At-grade road crossings are in place at Suwanee Dam Road and Russell Street; McGinnis Ferry Road goes over the rail line. There is a single rail spur line located in the Old Town area, which serves an industrial facility that produces and distributes large metal containers. Although not a part of the freight rail system, a substantial amount of freight passes through the city via a truck terminal located at the intersection of Buford Highway and McGinnis Ferry Road. Trucks typically proceed to the terminal using I-85 Exit 111 and head west on Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road, then south on Buford Highway or Satellite Boulevard and west on McGinnis Ferry Road.

## Parking

Currently there are no major parking areas in the City that do not meet the needs of nearby facilities, although the success of Town Center creates some parking problems during major events. The City is currently pursuing a pedestrian underpass under the rail line that would connect Town Center to the Old Town area where more parking is available. The best opportunity for significant new parking facilities exists in Suwanee Gateway as it redevelops in the future. A circulator shuttle between remote parking in Gateway and Town Center could provide a solution to parking challenges during events. In the long term, a circulator could also provide access to Gateway jobs for potential rail commuters. The city should explore instituting a shuttle service that would operate during major events, with a companion feasibility study for a permanent circulator subsidized in whole or part by Gateway employers.

## Trails, Bikeways and Sidewalks

One of the foremost goals of Suwanee is to provide and improve pedestrian mobility, and the city has implemented a number of strategies to accomplish this. Suwanee completed its first Alternative Transportation Plan in 1999 which became the impetus for several sidewalk projects, including projects on Buford Highway in front of City Hall, as well as on Moore Road, Settles Bridge Road, and Scales Road. The City also explored potential locations for trails in the Open Space and Recreational Needs Assessment,



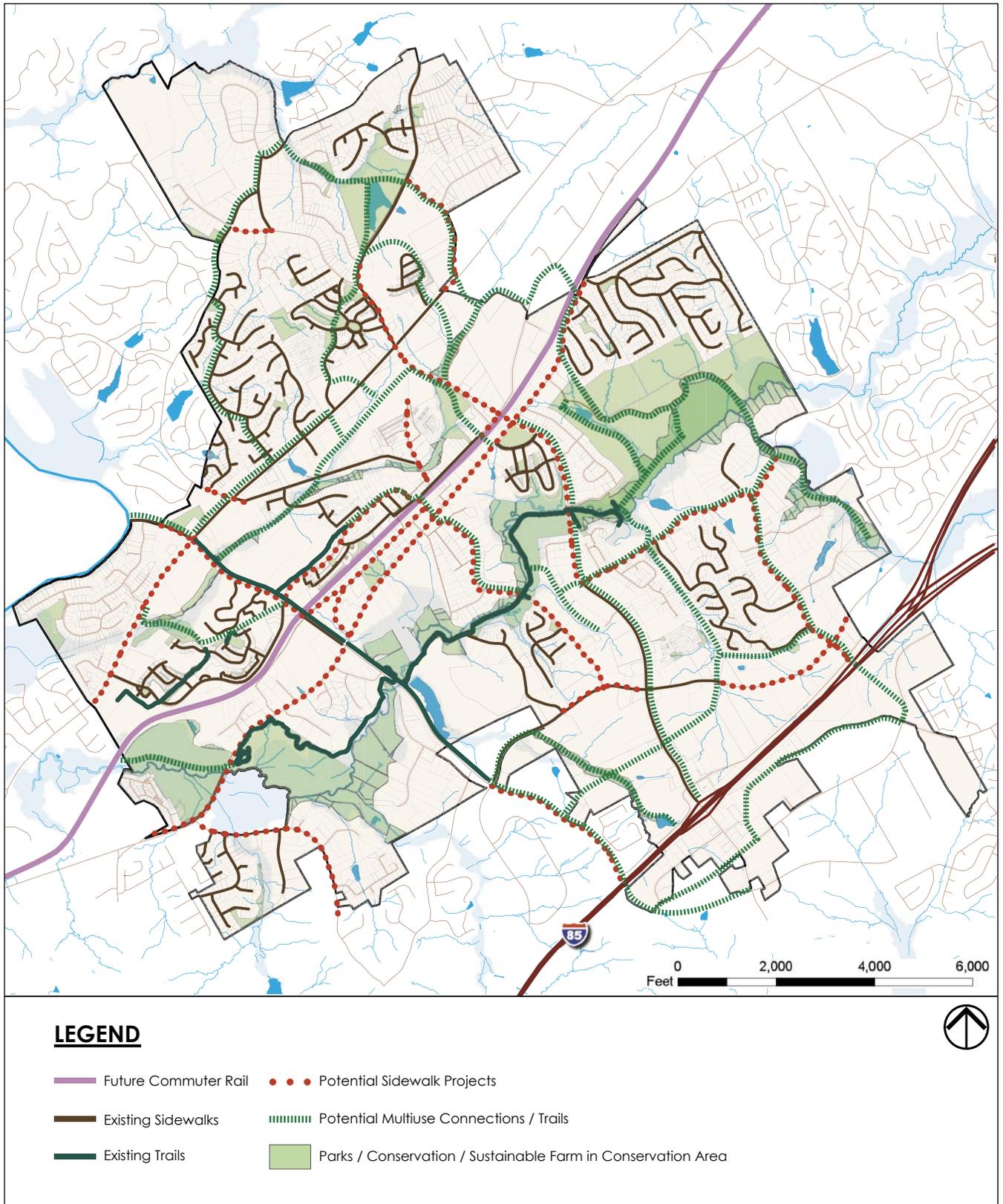


Figure 2.5-b: Alternate Transportation

In the early 1990's, the City constructed the Richard Trice Trail along Suwanee Creek between George Pierce Park and Martin Farm Road. In 2004, the city extended the trail approximately 2.5 miles and named the entire 4+ mile greenway the Suwanee Creek Greenway. The city recently constructed a pedestrian bridge over Suwanee Creek that connects Town Center to the Greenway. Eventually, with construction of the McGinnis Ferry Road multiuse path by Gwinnett County, the city's greenway system will connect to four parks, an elementary school, a major private recreation center (Suwanee Sports Academy), three apartment complexes, ten neighborhoods, and Town Center.

As mentioned above, a pedestrian underpass also is planned to run under the Norfolk Southern rail line behind the existing City Hall; along with a pedestrian crosswalk at Buford Highway this connection would substantially increase pedestrian mobility between the Old Town area and Town Center. Additionally, projects built under the Planned Mixed-Use Development zoning category are required to provide sidewalks on both sides of all internal roads; and in some projects, trails have been required as well. Since the early 1990's, the city also has required all new developments to place sidewalks along road frontages.

In 2007, Suwanee completed a new Alternative Transportation Plan (ATP). The new ATP identifies sidewalk and greenway projects, potential bicycle routes, and safety improvements that would increase pedestrian mobility and identifies potential solutions for creating pedestrian crossings for Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. The plan provides assistance for determining priorities for completing the projects identified in the ATP. Since the ATP was completed recently, it is still an accurate reflection of the city's needs and goals regarding pedestrian transportation.

## Land Use

Land use policies can be a powerful tool for overcoming traffic problems, although good land use policies are not a panacea for Suwanee's traffic problems. Land use policies that allow for more efficient use of land and a mixture of uses can reduce driving distances by bringing uses closer to those they serve, increase the effectiveness of pedestrian mobility, and increase the viability of public transit. The Atlanta Regional Commission acknowledges this with their LCI program, which seeks to balance transportation investments with land use efficiency as a regional solution for congestion and diminishing environmental quality. The LCI program revolves around ten planning principles, which are the basis of a land use approach to better transportation systems:

- Land use mix / efficiency appropriate for future growth
- Transportation demand reduction measures
- Internal mobility requirements
- Jobs / housing match; income mix in housing
- Street network continuity
- Need assessment / identification of future transit
- Transportation interconnectivity between centers
- Development organization, promotion and economic restructuring
- Stakeholder involvement
- Public and private investment strategy

For Suwanee, which will continue to grow in population over the next 20 years, every effort should be made to support existing and potential LCI areas and the planning principles they represent. In the emerging Gateway activity center, this would mean reinforcing and augmenting office and flex-space uses to increase job opportunities, providing nearby housing and open space, and diversifying the circulation system while making better connections to other areas of the City.

### Transportation Strategies

In summary, like the rest of the metropolitan Atlanta area, the city is challenged by serious transportation problems. Because it is such a major obstacle to sustainable growth, the city is adopting a multifaceted strategy to increase mobility within and around its borders. First, the city will focus efforts on improving the local transportation grid. The transportation map (Figure 2.5-a) identifies locations where additional connections would be beneficial, and the city should adopt policies that can ensure these connections are built as part of development or redevelopment proposals. Second, the city will continue to focus on land use policies that require a mixture of uses and more efficient use of land in the appropriate locations. Third, the city will continue to work with other local governments along the potential Atlanta - Gainesville commuter rail line to encourage the implementation of this line; and it will also plan for a viable stop within the city for the line. Fourth, the city will continue to expand its efforts to be pedestrian friendly by seeking ways to implement the projects identified in the Alternative Transportation Plan. Because several of the city's arterials and the rail line effectively block pedestrian mobility, the city should pursue projects that overcome these impediments. Finally, the city will continue to work with county and state officials and staff to identify transportation priorities for the Suwanee area.

**TRANSPORTATION: TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

TRENDS	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The future indicates increased traffic congestion resulting from local and regional growth.</li> <li>• The City lacks transit options.</li> <li>• Multiple methods of mobility do not exist in the City. The majority continue to depend on the automobile.</li> <li>• Plans are in place for I-85 and McGinnis Ferry Road improvements that can help ease traffic problems.</li> <li>• Plans for a pedestrian underpass at Town Center should be advantageous to pedestrian mobility.</li> <li>• Strategies put in place by the City have resulted in the implementation of increased trails systems within the City though they are not yet sufficient to help alleviate mobility problems.</li> <li>• There is a lack of large parking facilities within the City that could be useful for events.</li> <li>• There is a general lack of connectivity between parcels throughout the City.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The City's geography is divided by I-85 and the Norfolk Southern rail line and it is necessary to connect the different sides.</li> <li>• Lack of mobility options such as bikes, buses, light and commuter rail, sidewalks, trails, etc.</li> <li>• Lack of sufficient traffic management strategies make major intersections and roads inefficient.</li> <li>• Lack of funding options that can support required transportation projects.</li> <li>• Local traffic is affected by pass-through traffic due to the City's proximity to important roadways.</li> <li>• Events held at the Town Center can create traffic congestion.</li> <li>• Continued growth in Metro Atlanta will impact traffic along Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road, McGinnis Ferry Road, Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and the roads around the Gateway area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue intergovernmental partnerships with the goal of making the commuter rail and planned road improvements a reality.</li> <li>• The City can put into place policies that ensure inter-parcel connectivity for all new developments and redevelopments.</li> <li>• Redevelopment and infill opportunities allow for an improved local transportation grid that provides alternate routes for moving local traffic.</li> <li>• Redevelopment also allows for increased sidewalks to be part of the design thereby increasing pedestrian mobility.</li> <li>• Alternative congestion relief strategies are possible through land use planning and management.</li> <li>• The appropriate mixture and balance of land uses is beneficial for increasing connectivity and improving mobility.</li> <li>• Increase pedestrian safety by increasing signalized intersections.</li> <li>• Pursue making Buford Highway a pedestrian oriented road versus a high-speed state highway.</li> <li>• Shuttle services between major City facilities can help alleviate local traffic issues.</li> </ul>

## 2.6 Cultural, Natural & Historic Resources

Suwanee, Georgia is believed to have started about three miles southwest of the current downtown area of Suwanee, where Suwanee Creek flows into the Chattahoochee River. For hundreds of years, prior to the beginning of the Town of Suwanee, a large Indian Village flourished on both sides of the river. Shawnee Indians originally settled the village. Both Cherokee and Creek Indians refer to Suwanee Old Town in U.S. government documents as early as the late 1700's by which time the village was inhabited. It is also later shown on maps ceding land to the U.S. government by the Cherokee in 1817 and the Creeks in 1818. There are various accounts regarding the naming of the City of Suwanee. One suggests that Suwanee is an Indian word meaning "echo". Another account credits the name to the early white settlers' way of pronouncing the word "Shawnee." Either way, the name Suwanee appears to be closely tied to the City's Indian heritage.



On the 15th day of December 1818, the General Assembly of Georgia passed an act creating the counties of Gwinnett, Hall and Walton. Gwinnett County is adjacent to Walton County on the southeast and Hall County on the northeast. The County was named for Button Gwinnett, who represented Georgia in the Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1776 and who wrote his name on the Declaration of Independence on August 2, 1776. Gwinnett was killed in a duel in 1777. On January 12, 1954, the Georgia Historical Commission dedicated a marker on the Courthouse Square in Lawrenceville in honor of Button Gwinnett.

As is the case with many communities throughout the South, Suwanee can trace its beginnings to the growth and evolution of transportation. As transportation evolved, the community of Suwanee evolved with it. In 1820, a Land Lottery was held in Gwinnett County. Four land lots awarded in that lottery that intersect in the Town of Suwanee, about 100 feet to the east of where Davis Street crosses Buford Highway. The federal government recognized Suwanee as a town when the Suwanee Post Office was established in 1838. On May 21, 1869 Abram Moore sold a right of way to the Georgia Airline Railroad 100 feet through his property. The Southern Railroad and depot were constructed through this section of Gwinnett County in 1871. The village of Suwanee grew around this depot. A second small railroad station called Shadow Brook, was added on the south side of the railroad tracks at what is now the intersection of

the tracks and Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. "The Belle," which stopped at this station, was in operation from 1879 to 1931. In 1881, the Richmond & Danville railroad opened a narrow-gauge railroad, known as the Lawrenceville-Suwanee Narrow-Gauge Railroad, from Lawrenceville to Suwanee. Suwanee became a changing station as people transferred from this line to the Southern Railroad line that could take them into Atlanta

In 1880, there were 39 dwelling units and 216 people in the Town of Suwanee. There was a hotel, a department store and other commercial establishments in the town. In 1923, the Sandborn Map Company published a detailed map of the town. The 1923 map showed 12 stores in operation, a cotton gin house, a feed mill, two auto repair garages, two blacksmith shops, a coffin factory, a gristmill, a planing mill and a livery stable. The still standing Pierce's Corner was built in 1910.

Cotton was the town's economic base. Up until 1830, the majority of farmers in the Suwanee area grew cotton. The first cotton gin house was built between 1872 and 1875 on the northeast corner of Jackson and Scales streets. As the transportation network continued to grow and expand, so did the City of Suwanee. With the growth of the highway system in the 1970s, more development was occurring along I-85 and the Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. The historic downtown area has remained largely the same, as it must have appeared in the early part of this century.

The historic and cultural landmarks in Gwinnett range from schools to churches to mines. There are seventeen (17) sites within Gwinnett County on the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP), however, none of these are located in Suwanee. There are many other sites and buildings in the county that have no official designation, yet their presence provides the community with an opportunity to build a larger and better historic legacy for future generations. In 2006, the county documented 236 properties, including cemeteries, which had generally been omitted from earlier surveys. Tracts with archaeological significance are located throughout the county and are especially concentrated along the Chattahoochee River in the northwestern part of Gwinnett. There is also a trail of archaeologically significant tracts along Sugarloaf Parkway stretching between Lawrenceville, Suwanee, and Duluth. The City has identified five cemeteries located within the City limits.

### **Historic Resources Accomplishments, Assessment, and Needs**

In 2001, the City formed a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to assist City efforts to preserve and revitalize the Old Town area. The DDA has a vision of a walkable community with lifetime housing, a viable and sustainable economic base, and a wide array of recreation,

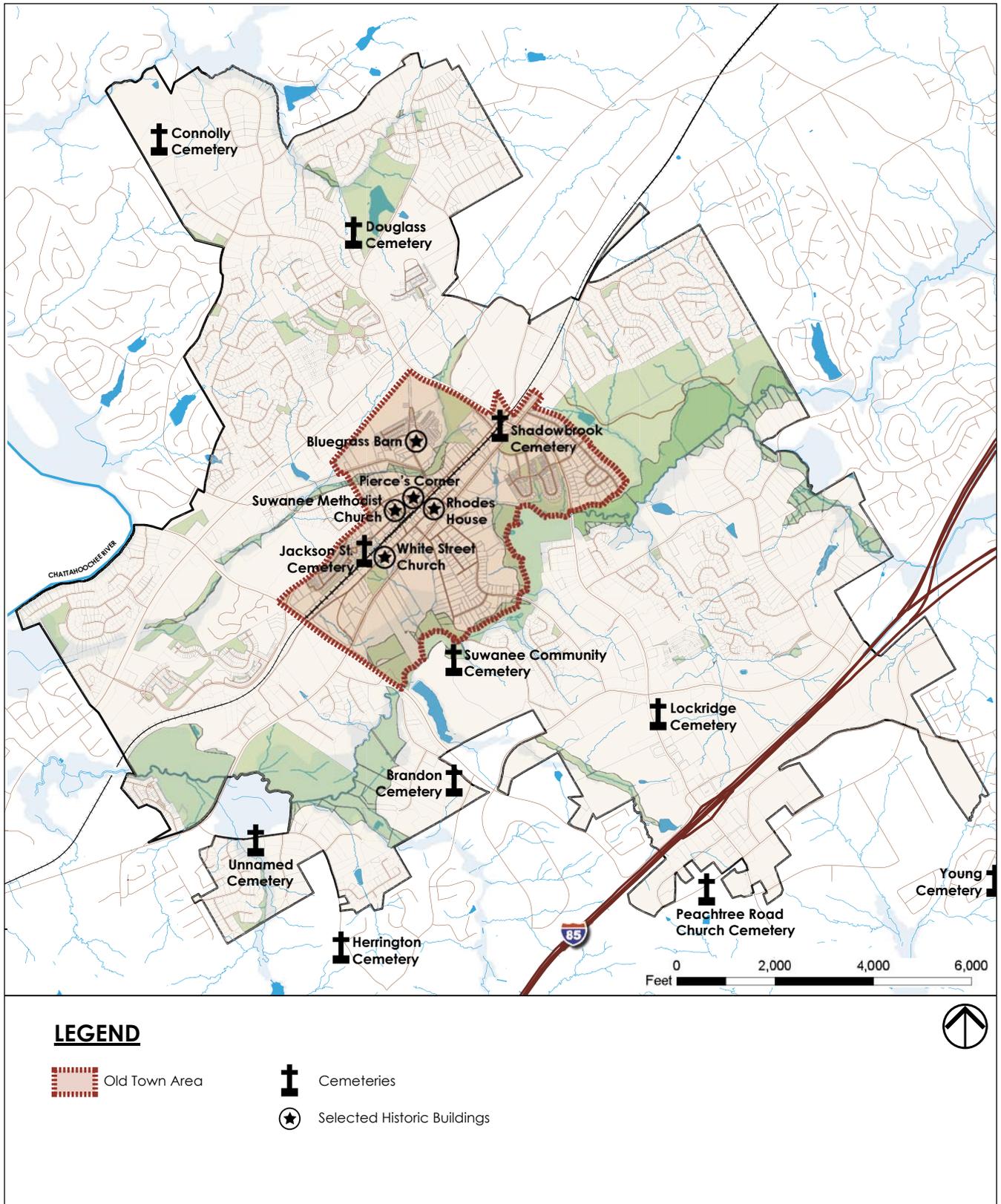


Figure 2.6-a: Historic Resources

entertainment, shopping, services, and performing arts. A variety of housing types will be built in downtown Suwanee, providing choices and home ownership opportunities for residents at all stages of life. A historic district is envisioned to protect historic homes and buildings and ensure that infill construction will complement the existing styles of architecture. Residents will be able to walk, bike, or take a trolley to downtown destinations, such as the library, parks and trails, a community garden at Williams Farm, shopping and restaurants, and special events at Town Center. Wayfinding signage will make it easy to get around. With the designation of Buford Highway as a local road, Suwanee will create an attractive, tree-lined boulevard running through downtown. The gateway into Old Town at Russell Street will be developed as mixed-use. Together with the renovated Pierce's Corner, it will spur the redevelopment of the industrial site in Old Town.

In 2002, the City completed and adopted the Old Town Master Plan (OTMP). This Plan is a comprehensive study of the historic area of Suwanee – including both the Main Street and the Buford Highway corridors. The OTMP was a community-based planning effort to guide future development and reinvestment into the City's historic Old Town area. The key component was the proposed creation of a new Town Center intended to strengthen Suwanee's sense of identity. Due to existing residences, low visibility, location, and overall lack of infrastructure and utilities, the plan recommended protecting historic Old Town and focusing more intensive development at the proposed new Town Center.

The City subsequently created an Urban Redevelopment Agency covering the Old Town area to assist with implementation of the Old Town Master Plan. This helped the City purchase a 23-acre tract to locate a park and future town center-style development. A team of consultants and stakeholders used the Old Town Master Plan as a guide and generated the New Town Center Plan, which provides a greater level of analysis of the site and its development potential.

The adopted New Town Center Plan synthesized the site plan, market conditions analysis, community needs and desires into a single report. The city purchased the 23 acres, constructed a 10-acre park, and after evaluating proposals, sold four tracts on the remainder of the site for private development consistent with the city's planning efforts. The New Town Center is creating some redevelopment pressure in areas developed decades ago. Also, the Old Town area is beginning to experience some interest in redevelopment. As such, the City should conduct an update to the Old Town Master Plan in order to develop detailed policies to guide redevelopment and infill in the area.

## Natural Resources Accomplishments, Assessment, and Needs

The City and its citizens have taken several steps toward protection of natural resources. These steps included new regulatory controls and significant local initiatives to protect the environment. Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (MNGWPD) was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 2001 to establish policy, create plans and promote intergovernmental coordination of all water issues in the district from a regional perspective. Locally, this meant the MNGWPD created several model ordinances to provide guidance for various environmental regulatory policies. In September 2003, Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District Board adopted three comprehensive plans to ensure adequate supplies of drinking water, to protect water quality and to minimize the impacts of development on the District's watersheds and downstream water quality. The City of Suwanee will coordinate with other Gwinnett County and other local governments in the County in implementing the District Plans.

The most notable regulatory action was the adoption of stormwater quality and channel protection requirements as part of the City development regulations. The City of Suwanee also re-adopted the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance to comply with state regulations. The City adopted a new Floodplain Management Ordinance modeled on Gwinnett County's ordinance. The City also adopted an Illicit Discharge and Illegal Connection ordinance to regulate what flows into stormwater facilities and regulate connections to sewer lines. Other environmental regulations adopted by the City include a Conservation Subdivision Ordinance, a Litter Control Ordinance, a Handbill Distribution Ordinance, and an amended Noise Control Ordinance.



Importantly, the 2001 Open Space bond referendum, approved in November 2001, allowed the City to take a proactive approach to protecting natural resources by providing funding for the protection and acquisition of environmentally sensitive tracts. The City subsequently purchased an 85 acre tract with approximately 60 acres of wetlands along Suwanee Creek, a 61-acre tract with a lake on Suwanee Dam Road, a 24-acre tract along Brushy Creek in Old Town, a 10-acre tract with wetlands along McGinnis Ferry Road, and a 7-acre tract with several small streams along Buford Highway. On the 61 acre parcel on Suwanee Dam Road (Sims Lake Park), the City reconstructed the existing dam on the site to meet Safe Dam requirements. The parcels purchased were all identified in the City's Open Space and Recreational Needs Assessment.

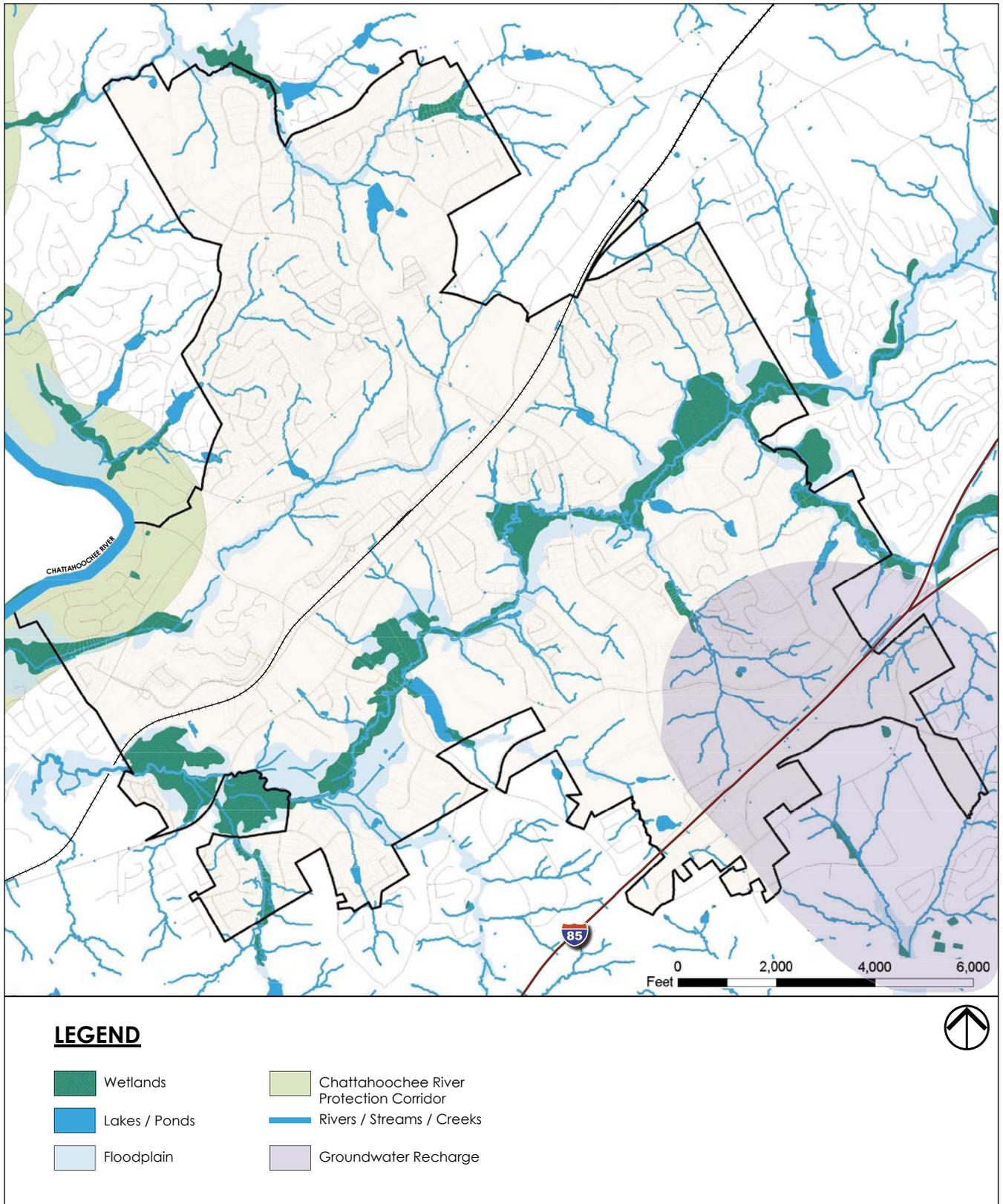


Figure 2.6-b: Natural Resources

### River and Stream Corridors

Protection of the Chattahoochee is provided by the Metropolitan River Protection Act (Georgia Code 12-5-440 et seq.), which was passed by the Georgia Legislature in 1973 and created a 2000-foot Corridor on both sides of the River. Protection in the Corridor is provided by the Chattahoochee Corridor Plan, which was authorized by the Act and includes standards that must be met by development in the Corridor. These standards include limits on land disturbance and impervious surface, floodplain requirements, and a 50-foot undisturbed vegetative buffer and 150-foot impervious surface setback on the River and a 35-foot undisturbed buffer on certain tributaries in the Corridor. The Chattahoochee River touches the western edge of the City of Suwanee. There are currently two tracts of land that have some remaining developable area within the river protection corridor.

In 2005, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District adopted a Watershed Protection Plan that includes the City of Suwanee. As a result of this plan, the City was required to adopt new Stream Buffer requirements increasing stream buffer regulations from 25 feet in width to 75 feet in width.

### Groundwater Recharge Areas

Groundwater recharge areas are geologic formations where water is taken into the ground to replenish aquifers, the underground holding tanks of groundwater. In order to avoid toxic and hazardous waste contamination to drinking water supplies, groundwater recharge areas must be protected. These areas are especially sensitive to hazardous substances, which could contaminate local drinking water. There are a total of nine groundwater recharge areas in Gwinnett County; one of these is located on the eastern edge of the city limits of Suwanee. The Groundwater Recharge Ordinance was adopted by the City in 1999.

### Wetlands

Wetlands serve as important fish and wildlife habitats and breeding grounds and are an integral part of food chain production. Numerous plants and animal species have adapted to the special conditions of freshwater wetlands and cannot survive elsewhere. They serve as storage areas for flood protection/control, erosion control, water quality maintenance, groundwater recharge and supply and for recreation opportunities. In Suwanee, wetlands are primarily found along streams and particularly along Suwanee Creek. In 1999, the City amended its zoning ordinance to clearly require compliance with U.S. Army Corp of Engineers requirements

regarding any land disturbance proposed in a wetland area.

### Floodplains

Suwanee, Level, Ivy and Brushy creeks are the primary sources of flooding in the City. Flooding usually occurs during the spring due to periods of frontal system activity. Floodplain Management is required under the National Flood Insurance Act of 1963 and the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973. The City has adopted Gwinnett County's FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)-reviewed Floodplain Management Ordinance. Additional restrictions regarding lots containing floodplain areas and site plans also are outlined in the Zoning Ordinance, Use Provisions.

### **Cultural, Natural, and Historic Resources Issues and Opportunities**

During the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan, an overriding question was, "How to balance growth with the preservation of the overall character of Suwanee?" The City of Suwanee has established a priority to promote development and redevelopment that emphasizes a historically sensitive look and feel. Town Center exhibits architecture that evokes a traditional "Main Street." New construction in or near historic areas should be appropriate and respect the history of those areas. More appreciation and care for our historic resources can help add to the local identity of our communities. There is an overall and pervasive concern for the future of the Old Town Character Area. Old Town has a charming character that can serve as the foundation for a significant cultural resource. While the specific development and redevelopment strategies are presented in Section 3.5, certain areas are designated for historic preservation while some areas have been identified for redevelopment or appropriate infill development. It will be important to preserve this unique character with an Old Town infill strategy and consideration for a historic preservation overlay or ordinance for the most valuable sections of Old Town.

One strategy to preserve the character of Suwanee is the preservation of the natural landscape and tree canopy in areas of development. Where trees are lacking, street trees should be provided as appropriate. This is especially critical along the Buford Highway and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard corridors.

The City has developed a wonderful series of parks and greenways. As the city further develops, the plan ensures that these parks remain sustainable, vibrant, and are integrated into the future development as described in the Community Facilities section. Also of crucial concern is the protection of stream corridors, buffers, wetlands, and overall water quality.

The City borders the Chattahoochee River, a major natural resource for the Southeastern United States. The plan seeks to preserve as much of the natural environment as possible, including river corridors and existing stream beds, by potentially incorporating them into park or conservation areas. One example is the potential expansion of the Suwanee Creek Greenway to the east and west, with a possible extension to Buford Highway.

Potential water supply sources for an increasing population and workforce must be preserved and protected. Especially considering the implications of the Level 4 drought experienced in 2007 and 2008, the City should be an active participant in any future inter-jurisdictional efforts to address the raw water supply crisis for the region. The City has an underground well for drinking water in Old Town; a comprehensive study of the City water system should be conducted.

**CULTURAL, NATURAL & HISTORIC RESOURCES: TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

TRENDS	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suwanee Creek is an important natural resources that offers an opportunity for open space preservation and protection.</li> <li>• A groundwater recharge area exists on the east side of I-85.</li> <li>• The City has an underground well that provides drinking water to a fraction of the City's population.</li> <li>• Adoption of a number of environmental regulations has been beneficial in regulating new development and improving the quality of the natural environment.</li> <li>• The City has funded open space to help increase its inventory of natural resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate redevelopment and infill could threaten and change the character of the Old Town area.</li> <li>• Need to balance growth with the preservation of the overall character of the City.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic preservation initiatives can protect Old Town.</li> <li>• Partnering with groups like the Georgia Conservancy can help protect the City's tree canopy.</li> <li>• Increased open space and parks provide an opportunity to connect them through a system of trails and greenways.</li> </ul>

## 2.7 Economic Development

### Economic Development Accomplishments, Assessment, and Needs

In the last ten years the city experienced significant economic growth and development, and has had to confront the challenges that are part of economic growth. In the future, the City will also need to address the slowing of growth and its implications. Unfortunately, because of the city's size and the timing of the plan update, economic development data for the



city is relatively limited. The most current data is largely from the 2000 census, and some data is only available at the county level. Therefore, much of the issue identification is based on observation and knowledge of current conditions and information developed from previous city-generated studies: I-85 Business District Competitive Assessment and development Strategy Report and Suwanee Gateway Redevelopment Plan.

### Employment by Sector

Because most employees in metro Atlanta commute to work, the number of business licenses in Suwanee does not translate well into data regarding Suwanee residents' employment. Instead, it reveals the types of jobs within the city that are available to residents if they so choose. A review of current business licenses indicates growth in the number of local business over the last several years. In 2000, the city issued 635 business licenses; by 2007, the number of business licenses had more than tripled to 2,175. In the same time span, however, the city's population grew more modestly, just short of doubling.

While the number of businesses increased dramatically, the breakdown of businesses by sector remained nearly the same; with the only significant changes being a 4 percent decrease in manufacturing which was offset by a 5 increase in wholesale trade.

**TYPE OF BUSINESS BY SECTOR:**

Business Sector	2000		2007	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Forestry	0	0%	0	0%
Mining	0	0%	0	0%
Hunting, Fishing and Trapping	0	0%	0	0%
Construction	101	16%	300	14%
Wholesale Trade	37	6%	234	11%
Services	233	37%	811	37%
Agricultural	14	2%	42	2%
Manufacturing	77	12%	184	8%
Retail Trade	118	19%	442	20%
FIRE (Finance, Insurance & Real Estate)	42	7%	149	7%
Transportation and Public Utilities	13	2%	13	1%
<b>Total Companies</b>	<b>635</b>		<b>2,175</b>	

Table 2.7-a

Source: Suwanee SIC Code Listing

**Labor Force Trends**

As of the last official national census in 2000, Suwanee continues to have a lower unemployment rate than Gwinnett County and the State of Georgia. In 2000, the unemployment rate for Suwanee was 1.1 percent; while for Gwinnett it was 3.3 percent, and for the state 3.5 percent.

**Source of Personal Income**

Because little data is available on personal income of Suwanee residents, county data is used as an approximation. Between 1990 and 2000 there were no significant changes in personal income by type for Gwinnett residents. In 1990, 86 percent of county residents supported themselves by wages or salary; in 2000, the number slightly declined to 85 percent. This one-percent change was offset by a 1 point increase in the percentage of workers whose earnings are achieved through retirement (1.6 percent to 2.5 percent).

## Commuting Patterns

According to the 2000 census, county and Suwanee residents' dominant commute mode was in a single-occupancy vehicle, mirroring most of metro Atlanta workers. Almost 85 percent of Suwanee residents drive alone to work, with another 7 percent carpooling to work with two or more people in the vehicle. About 2 percent of residents walk to work, and nearly 5 percent of residents work at home. The average commute time for a Suwanee resident is 31.3 minutes, which is comparable to the average county resident commute of 31.5 minutes. Almost 73 percent of Suwanee commuters who drive to work leave between 6:00 am and 8:30 am, meaning that Suwanee commuters are on the road during peak morning drive times. As the number of businesses in Suwanee has increased substantially since 2000 – particularly relative to population it is likely that the total percentage of commuters leaving Suwanee decreased somewhat. In 1990, 34 percent of Suwanee residents commuted to a job outside Gwinnett County. By 2000, this percentage increased to 43 percent. Policies that encourage job opportunities in Suwanee should be pursued. As new commuting information becomes available, it will be interesting to examine the impact on commuting times within the last decade.

## Jobs-Housing Balance

The jobs-housing balance ratio is a measure of whether or not a community is importing or exporting workers. Generally a ratio above 1.5 indicates that a community has more jobs than dwelling units, and more than likely imports workers. In 2000, the Gwinnett County jobs-housing balance ratio was 1:4 consequently, the county can be assumed to be neither jobs-rich nor a pure bedroom community. Data for Suwanee is currently unavailable. The city should make efforts to examine this ratio locally; and if the results reflect the county's standing then explore economic development strategies to increase job opportunities in the city. A higher job-housing balance ratio could mean that more jobs are available locally for Suwanee residents, which could translate into reduced commute times and improved quality of life.

## Suwanee Gateway

In the 1960's, I-85 was completed to the Suwanee exit, leading to a hospitality boom around the interchange in the 1970's. Since much of the area was developed during that decade, many of the buildings around the interchange are older than most other "modern" developments in Suwanee. Recent development in the city has been subjected to more stringent architectural and design standards, widening the disparity with construction around much of the I-85 area.

Because of these and other factors, the city undertook a formal study and assessment of the interchange area in 2005 to identify a strategy for improvement. In September of the same year, the city adopted the I-85 Business District Competitive Assessment and Development Strategy Report, which recommended policies and implementation measures for improving the district to transform it into Suwanee Gateway. The study found that the Suwanee Gateway area was facing significant emerging competitive pressures from newer development north and south of Exit 111. In addition, the area contains numerous obsolete and antiquated building types and forms (particularly older generation motels and other buildings) that are eyesores, prime locations for crime, and generally hindering the full potential of the area. The study found that for Suwanee Gateway to remain vibrant long-term, specific efforts needed to be undertaken. A key recommendation of the report is to create a new identity for the I-85 Business District, to achieve the following strategic goals:

- Ensure that the sum is greater than its constituent parts - the idea of creating an overall theme and identity for the area is to “brand” the area with a distinct name and image that as the individual components of Suwanee Gateway change and evolve over time, the brand will continue in the minds of residents, business and visitors.
- Achieve an identity that will endure and create value - a strong identity built over time will create value for all in the area. For example, association with Midtown or Vinings is so valuable that projects located miles from the actual areas claim to be in these areas.
- Prioritize design consistency to link together a diverse area and mix of uses - the district is currently a very diverse mix of uses, separated by vacant and underutilized parcels and bisected by I-85. The Suwanee Gateway identity can provide a consistent theme between all of the currently unconnected uses in the district.

The report discussed a five-part implementation strategy – improving the transportation grid, creating catalyst projects, installing streetscapes to improve the pedestrian environment, exploring regulatory / incentive / funding policies, and undertaking a branding campaign - to transform the current I-85 district into Suwanee Gateway. Several aspects of these five strategies have been advanced in the last few years.

### **Implementation of the Suwanee Gateway Strategy**

*Branding campaign:* The city subsequently hired a public relations/marketing company to help brand Suwanee Gateway. In January of 2008, the city adopted and started implementation of the branding campaign.

*Catalyst project:* In 2006, the city identified a suitable potential catalyst project, now called the Terraces at Suwanee Gateway. A development of regional impact, the project proposes approximately 1.1 million square feet of office and retail uses, and up to 700 residential units in a variety of housing options. The project is currently underway with development permits issued for almost 300,000 square feet of office and retail uses. A parkway that will connect Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road to Burnette Road (the future McGinnis Ferry Road extension) also is currently under construction

*Pedestrian streetscapes:* A streetscape project has been designed for Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road that includes sidewalks, benches, and street trees. Funding for the streetscape project has been allocated, but the project is currently on hold due to drought conditions.

*Total Elimination of Eyesores Program:* The TEE program, instituted in 2006, is a concerted code enforcement effort focused on encouraging property maintenance in the Suwanee Gateway area. The project also recommended demolition of several vacant buildings that were becoming nuisances. The TEE program is an ongoing effort that requires coordination between the Community Development Division, the Police Department, Public Works, and Codes Enforcement.

*Gateway TAD:* The most significant component of the effort to revitalize the Gateway area is obtaining a funding source for capital improvements or public-private partnerships. The city identified a Tax Allocation District (TAD) as the tool of choice to encourage Gateway redevelopment and created the Suwanee Gateway Tax Allocation District in 2007.

TADs are essentially funding mechanisms premised on future increases in property value (the increment) above the base assessment at day one of the district's establishment, supplying revenue to repay bonds issued to create the additional value<sup>3</sup>. TADs typically have a life of 25 years and are valid only for a strictly defined geographic area. Unlike tax abatement programs, property tax allocations to the city, county and school board are frozen at their assessed value at the date of the TAD creation, with taxes annually collected at that level guaranteeing some measure of continued municipal funding. The increment, which represents new value above the base assessment, is generated by new development or improvements to existing property. TAD bonds provide incentives to spur this development either by related public improvements,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Site A has a taxable value of \$1,000,000 dollars while it is developed with a deteriorating hotel. Site A owners remove the deteriorating hotel and replace it with a 6 story office building that increases the taxable value of land to \$3,000,000. The tax increment for Site A is \$2,000,000 (the increase of \$3,000,000 over \$1,000,000). In a TAD the additional taxes generated by the land improvement must be spent in the district. This allows the City to pay for improvements to the area, such as road improvements, demolition of vacant or deteriorating buildings, acquisition of land, environmental remediation, etc. which facilitates redevelopment of Site A or other sites in the district.

equity in public-private partnerships, or financial participation. Once the TAD expires, property tax assessments are restored to their full value.

The City subsequently created a TAD plan for the Suwanee Gateway, obtained authorization for the TAD via a voter referendum, and adopted the TAD plan. The TAD is estimated to produce between \$14,000,000 and \$35,000,000 revenue, depending upon participation of the school system and the county, to be directed toward projects in Gateway.

*Gwinnett Chamber – Partnership Gwinnett:* The Gwinnett County Chamber of Commerce serves as the primary economic development organization in Gwinnett County. The Chamber of Commerce, along with partners in government, education, healthcare and business, are implementing Gwinnett's Community and Economic Development Plan known as Partnership Gwinnett. The plan will serve to create over 65,000 new jobs and \$5.8 billion in new net wealth in Gwinnett over the next five years.

### **Economic Development Issues and Opportunities**

The City of Suwanee is no longer a traditional bedroom community. There are several areas with significant retail, industrial, office and service land uses that contribute to the economy and provide many employment opportunities. Still, there is a need for economic diversification and additional business attraction in the city, including creation of highly-skilled jobs such as high-tech, biotech, and energy-tech businesses and industry as well as growth in the healthcare and related services sectors. This is an important policy goal to better balance the city's jobs / housing ratio and give Suwanee residents a wider variety of job opportunities closer to home.

Given Suwanee's location along I-85, it is ideally situated to capture higher intensity development with little negative impact to its citizens. The I-85 corridor throughout Gwinnett County will continue to evolve from the dominant commercial-light industrial uses to a more office and service orientation. The I-85 / Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road interchange is the heart of Suwanee Gateway; this exceptional access is a prime factor in the feasibility of significant economic development as those mentioned above. Further, land use trends predict that some current industrial uses will be redeveloped as office and service uses in the future. As an economic development priority area, the city should aggressively market "Suwanee Gateway" to developers and businesses and pursue the growth program contained in the Competitive Assessment / Development Strategy Report, especially with regards to "branding" this emerging district.

The city should (1) encourage new retail uses that are more likely to be fully occupied over time (2) recruit more diverse retail uses that include a wider range of goods and services and (3) recruit a mixture of national and local retailers. New retail development should be low-density, one- to two-story buildings with predominantly brick construction in commercial areas. It should also be located in planned centers with coordinated inter-parcel access and shared parking areas, and strong multi-modal linkages to residential areas. The maximum size of retail establishments in certain locations should be limited where access or visual character is an issue. A recent review of commercial vacancy rates in Suwanee revealed that 18 percent of multi-tenant retail spaces were vacant. The City should continue to closely monitor this trend.

Quality economic development must be sustainable over the long term, and employment opportunities should be targeted toward local residents of Suwanee as well as outside of the community.

The City of Suwanee has not historically undertaken conventional “suit-and-tie” economic development recruitment efforts. Larger regional players, such as the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce with its Partnership Gwinnett Program, adequately fill that role. Instead, the City has found that focusing on quality of life issues for its current residents is a highly effective economic development tool. A high quality of life is essential in attracting new businesses that depend on knowledgeable, highly skilled workers. As the city continues to grow, diverse quality-of-life objectives and features like good government, a safe and clean community, quality housing, low taxes, good schools, ample shopping, and sense of community are critical. To this end, the city has made efforts to focus on providing quality of life features and services such as, Town Center Park, Suwanee Creek Greenway, Sims Lake Park, local events, Community-Oriented Policing, P.A.C.T. programs, social connectivity, and other similar efforts.

In 2007, the City of Suwanee was named one of the Top Ten Small Places to Live in the entire United States by *MONEY Magazine*. This recognition was the result of quality of life initiatives and directly enhances the city's overall economic development efforts. The key to Suwanee's prosperity is to capitalize on prudent investments made in the past and expand the range of possibilities in the future.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

TRENDS	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The I-85 Business District has shown physical and economic deterioration that has negatively impacted the City.</li> <li>• The City has maintained light industrial uses to serve its economic base.</li> <li>• Local businesses have increased over the past few years.</li> <li>• The City has a lower employment rate compared to the county and the State of Georgia.</li> <li>• Peachtree Industrial Boulevard continues to be a desirable corridor for commercial uses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suwanee is no longer a traditional bedroom community.</li> <li>• Need for economic development to be sustainable over the long term.</li> <li>• The industrial market constantly changes and land uses need to adapt accordingly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract jobs that can serve local residents.</li> <li>• Access to ample electrical power makes the City attractive to technology based businesses.</li> <li>• Character of the City's population can support diverse retail uses and retailers.</li> <li>• To balance the jobs-housing ratio there is an opportunity to attract high-tech and medical industries.</li> <li>• Proximity to I-85 can allow for high intensity economic development in Suwanee Gateway without a negative impact on the rest of the City.</li> </ul>