

INTRODUCTION

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Flowerly Branch's comprehensive plan consists of three parts per state administrative rules effective May 1, 2005. The community assessment, which is a multi-chapter document that consists of many tables of data and various inventories and analyses, was prepared between May and August, 2005 and is packaged as a separate document (see Appendix A). Second, the community participation strategy was drafted and reviewed previously by the Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (see Appendix B). This document, the third of three, is the Community Agenda and contains the "plan" portion of the comprehensive plan.

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPATION

The public participation program included three visioning forums, during which issues and opportunities and preliminary character areas were identified and discussed, along with a citywide vision statement. To ensure adequate notice and participation, the city mailed to all property owners in the city notices of the first visioning forum, displayed two banners at gateways into the city announcing the visioning forums, and arranged to have public notice ads run on local cable television about the planning effort. Drafts of the community assessment, community participation strategy, and community agenda were made available via the city's web page and in hard copy upon request to all interested individuals.

A questionnaire was completed during the September 20th and 21st (2005) visioning forums, and the results were tabulated and presented to the community at the final (September 27th) visioning forum. A steering committee met three times to discuss the comprehensive planning project and provide guidance and input. Consultants interviewed stakeholders in connection with the planning effort.

CITYWIDE VISION STATEMENT

The following overall vision statement is adopted for the City of Flowerly Branch:

Flowerly Branch will preserve its small town feel, which is generated by Old Town with its historic districts and skinny streets. We are a community aside Lake Lanier, and we are proud to be home of the Atlanta Falcons football team. We acknowledge our role in protecting our environment and maintaining water quality in the Lake Lanier watershed, and we identify with the rest of the Georgia Mountains region north and west of us.

We envision modest increases in the city's boundaries over time, some of which will be master-planned residential communities, but only after considering the need to have a balanced property tax base and all the while retaining the city's small-town atmosphere. As the I-985 corridor develops, we envision a healthy retail and mixed use activity center evolving that will be distinguishable from other places. We will not be "swallowed whole" into the metropolitan Atlanta area, but rather, carefully assimilated into the metro area while retaining distinctiveness and charm. The mixtures of housing available in Flowerly Branch will provide for diversity and affordability, while ensuring that the mix is not overrun with apartments and

incompatible manufactured homes. We will expand housing opportunities for seniors, and they will be welcome and find comfortable living.

City leaders will play a large role in revitalizing Old Town as a major prong of its economic development efforts. In Old Town, residential properties will transition in use and obsolete buildings will be redeveloped, all guided by a responsive urban redevelopment agency and a redevelopment plan that has the backing of the citizenry and property owners, and all the while being sensitive to its historic resources. We envision Old Town will be free from truck and boat traffic by facilitating direct access from McEver Road to Spouts Springs Road, to be accomplished in the city's transportation plans. Industrial establishments north of the city will provide employment areas, and more facilities for small-scale operations and professional offices will be added to the city's mix.

Flowery Branch will by 2010 have a new city hall that meets the needs for city office space and that stimulates redevelopment prospects in Old Town. Flowery Branch will establish and maintain small parks and pocket open spaces in Old Town and elsewhere in the city. Old Town will retain its historic qualities and new development will respect historic characteristics short of artificially imitating them. Old Town will be connected to the city park at Lake Lanier and the I-985 activity center with safe sidewalks and/or multi-use trails. All of the city will be friendly to pedestrians, and residents will walk throughout the city for health and enjoyment reasons. We envision being able to walk or bike safely from the peace and quiet of the city's suburban and traditional neighborhoods to neighborhood commercial facilities.

We envision a city that soundly overcomes its prior reputation as "sleepy," or unable to aspire to great things. Our residents will respect the city's laws, which will be enhanced to address property maintenance, housing upkeep, and development design guidelines. Enforcement of codes will not be needed or at least not become political issues. The city will master plan its water and sewer facilities, extend them as economic development priorities dictate, and become a leader in water conservation efforts. Though there will be growing pains resulting from unprecedented, rapid development, the city government will expand facilities as needed to serve the new people, businesses, and institutions. We will work cooperatively with Hall County to continue receiving countywide services, maintain fire protection, and build new active parks and recreation centers. We will protect east-city residents with a new police precinct when needed.

Flowery Branch's Old Town, with its grid pattern of skinny streets and authentic historic character along the railroad, upon revitalization with a vibrant mix of retail, restaurants, civic uses and housing and the installation of sidewalks and streetscapes, will be the gem of South Hall, the premier destination place for residents in the greater South Hall area.

VISION FOR CHARACTER AREAS

Although the citywide vision statement will be respected in all parts of Flowery Branch, we envision distinctive areas of the city that give definable meaning to its neighborhoods, activity centers, employment places, and natural areas. The Character Area Visions, specified in Chapter 9 of this Community Agenda, will provide sound guidance in the update of the city's

land use regulations and in reviewing and approving new developments in the city. The city will apply development guidelines for character areas comprehensively but fairly and consistently.

QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES

The following Quality Community Objectives are hereby adopted to guide this comprehensive plan and the future growth, development, redevelopment, and change of Flowery Branch. The City may cite these as its own policies and will evaluate annexation and land use decisions in the context of these objectives. Where a land use decision would be inconsistent with one or more of these objectives, the City Planner and other city boards and the governing body should consider the extent to which development and land use proposals can be revised so as to be consistent with these objectives.

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

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

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

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

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

Environmental Protection Objective: Air quality and environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development. Environmentally sensitive areas deserve special protection, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sense of Place Objective: Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.

LIST OF ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Issues and opportunities for treatment in the comprehensive plan were first identified in the Community Assessment part of the comprehensive plan. During the visioning process (see summary of participation above), participants had an opportunity to state in a questionnaire whether various statements of concern were really issues or opportunities to be addressed in the comprehensive plan. The public participation process resulted in a fewer number of issues than initially proposed to be included in the plan. Also, issues that were not directly identified by the Consultant but stated during participation exercises, are addressed in this Community Agenda. Following is list of issues and opportunities that were approved by the comprehensive plan steering committee after input from citizens in visioning forums. Each of these issues are addressed in the appropriate element of this community agenda.

Population

- Underachievement of some of the city's population with regard to educational attainment.

Housing

- Specify and encourage a certain mix of housing types (e.g., single-family detached, townhouses, manufactured homes, apartments).
- The balance between owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing in the city.
- Age and condition of housing units in the city.
- Housing alternatives for the elderly.
- Upgrading of existing, smaller homes to meet new market demands.
- Residential property maintenance and housing code enforcement.

- City sponsorship or utilization of housing grants and programs.

Economic Development

- Programs to help seniors find paying jobs or volunteer opportunities.
- Diversification of area employment opportunities (beyond manufacturing).
- Promoting and capitalizing on Lake Lanier tourism potential.
- Promoting and capitalizing on being home to the Atlanta Falcons football team.
- Promoting and capitalizing on the history and historic resources of the city.
- Establishment of an urban redevelopment agency for revitalization activities.
- Staffing in addition to Better Hometown Coordinator for economic development.
- Tax credits, tax abatement, and other incentives for business development.
- Use or under-utilization of area colleges and universities (regarding economic development).
- Water and sewer master planning to provide for additional growth in city.
- Rate charges and fees for water and sewer as they relate to economic development.
- Attention to small businesses for their contribution to economic development.

Community Facilities and Services

- Master planning for expansion of the city's water system.
- Water conservation and "gray" (nonpotable) water reuse.
- Affirmation or renegotiation of city sewer service areas.
- Stormwater/drainage master planning for the downtown area.
- Provision of a police precinct on the east side of Interstate 985.
- Provision of a new city hall/municipal government complex.
- Establishment of city parks and initiation of recreation facilities and programs.
- Development of an annexation plan to guide future annexations.
- Participation of Flowery Branch in regional Lanier watershed protection efforts.

Transportation

- Alternatives for mobility in addition to using cars.
- Boat traffic through Flowery Branch into the Starboard marina.
- Road improvement standards that vary by character area.
- Improvement of narrow city streets in the downtown for additional growth.
- At-grade crossings of the railroad through town (safety and mobility).
- Availability of parking and loading areas for an expanded downtown district.
- Availability of sidewalks – need for sidewalk construction program in city.
- Designation of bicycle routes in the city.
- Rules for accessing nonresidential properties.
- Off-road pedestrian trails and greenways.
- Extension of the grid-pattern of downtown streets to adjacent areas.
- Strategies for improving aesthetics of the SR 13 (Atlanta Highway) corridor.
- Policy and program for street lighting.
- Maximum parking as well as minimum parking requirements
- Condition of existing city streets and programs for long-term maintenance.
- Traffic impact analysis studies for large developments.

- Accessibility for the disabled.

Natural Resources

- Regulations in addition to existing ones to protect water quality.
- Regulations limiting development on steep slopes.
- Implementation efforts to protect and preserve scenic views.
- Programs to identify and enhance the aesthetics of “gateways” into the city.
- Enhancement of, and additional connections to, Hall County Heritage Trail.

Land Use and Redevelopment

- Revitalization and/or redevelopment of obsolete blocks in the downtown.
- Noise impacts on residential properties from I-985 traffic.

These issues and others are all addressed in the following chapters, though not numbered as provided in this introduction. This list of issues and opportunities was developed after the community visioning forums and is included here to ensure that all community concerns are addressed in the Community Agenda.