

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Location and Description

The City of Grayson is located in the southeastern part of Gwinnett County, Georgia (see figure). Gwinnett County has been one of the fastest growing counties in the nation in terms of population growth during the 1980s and later, witnessing suburbanization on a massive scale in from the 1970s through at least the 1990s. As Gwinnett County has matured, the emphasis in terms of development and growth has shifted from one of suburbanization of “greenfields” to revitalization and redevelopment, at least in the earlier developed portions of the county.

Grayson is a small city that has largely escaped the massive growth pressures occurring in Gwinnett County, at least until recently. The eastern part of Gwinnett County has been one of the last parts of the county to experience suburbanization. Grayson is different from Norcross, Lawrenceville, Duluth, and other municipalities in the western and central portions of Gwinnett County which developed in prior decades and are now experiencing the issues of aging suburbs. In short, Grayson has only recently begun the process of becoming a suburb. This distinction between Grayson and other municipalities is an important one, as it sets the tone for its comprehensive plan – this document. With the exception of tiny Berkeley Lake in the western part of Gwinnett County, Grayson has one of the smallest land areas (at approximately 17.8 square miles) of the municipalities in Gwinnett County (see figure).

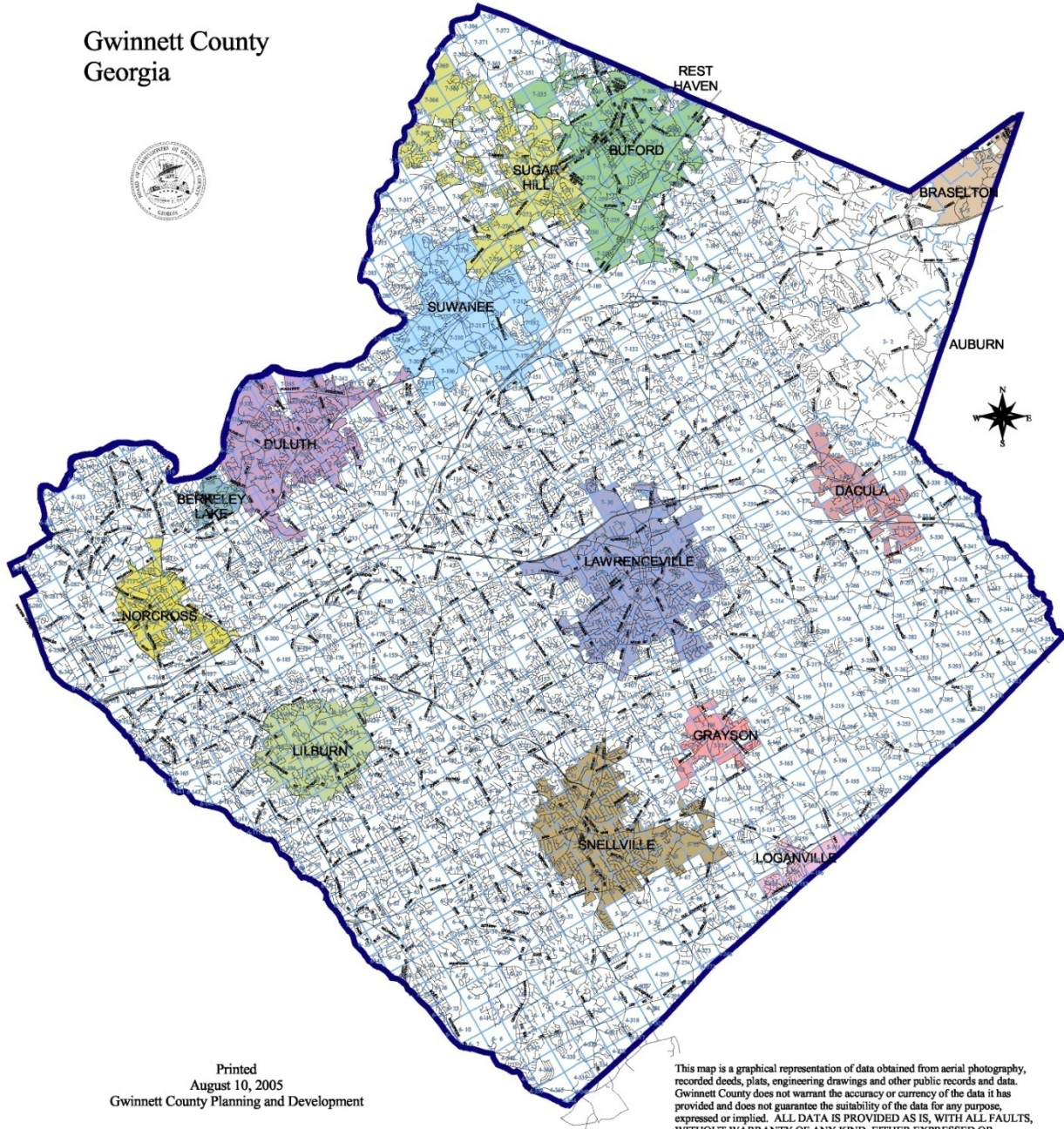
Although Grayson has remained a small city, in 2004, it completed 12 annexations which added 246.2 acres to the city limits (2004 Update of the Gwinnett County 2020 Comprehensive Plan Update, Table V-1, April 2005). Most of those annexations were in the northern part of the city along Grayson Highway (SR 20). While that year Grayson annexed more than most municipalities in Gwinnett County, Grayson has generally exhibited much less of a propensity to annex unincorporated lands than other Gwinnett Cities, again as shown in the following figure.

Overview of Planning Documents

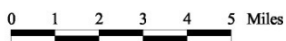
The first phase of the comprehensive planning process consisted of preparation of three reports: (1) a “Community Assessment Report,” (2) a “Technical Appendix to the Community Assessment Report,” and (3) A Community Participation Program. This document is the “Community Agenda,” which was prepared following review of the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program. The Community Assessment was prepared by Parsons Brinckerhoff for the county and several of the cities within the county. The Grayson City Council submitted the community assessment for regional and state review via resolution on March 19, 2007. The assessment, along with the city’s public participation program, were subsequently accepted by the region and state and the public part of the planning process began in earnest thereafter.

Chapter 1, Introduction and Summary
City of Grayson, GA, Comprehensive Plan Community Agenda

Gwinnett County
Georgia



Printed
August 10, 2005
Gwinnett County Planning and Development



This map is a graphical representation of data obtained from aerial photography, recorded deeds, plats, engineering drawings and other public records and data. Gwinnett County does not warrant the accuracy or currency of the data it has provided and does not guarantee the suitability of the data for any purpose, expressed or implied. ALL DATA IS PROVIDED AS IS, WITH ALL FAULTS, WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, EITHER EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. This map is the proprietary product of Gwinnett County and in no event will Gwinnett County be liable for damages, including any loss of profits, lost savings, or other incidental or consequential damages arising out of the use of or inability to use this map.

Framework for the Community Agenda

Goals of local comprehensive plans, according to general guidance by the state of Georgia, include among others the following: to coordinate land use and transportation planning; to provide infrastructure and services; to support sustainable economic development; to protect natural and cultural resources; and to provide adequate housing for the community. Comprehensive planning is also an opportunity to improve coordination with their other governments. Completion of the comprehensive planning process according to state rules allows a local government to maintain its Qualified Local Government (QLG) status and, thus, maintain its eligibility to receive certain state grants and loans.

At its most basic level, a “Community Agenda” according to the administrative rules for local planning effective May 1, 2005, consists of at least the following: a summary of issues and opportunities; a future development map of character areas, policies, and a short-term work program. Implied within these requirements is supportive demographic information, such as population projections. A citywide vision statement is optional under the planning rules.

The intent of Grayson’s comprehensive planning effort was not just to fulfill State requirements for local comprehensive planning. Rather, the city’s planning effort was envisioned as ultimately resulting in a document that would provide detailed guidance to more directly influence everyday planning and development decisions within Grayson over the next decade and beyond. In particular, the city and its planning consultants identified the following priorities to be addressed in the comprehensive plan:

- Ways to effectively use the comprehensive plan update to promote the desired image of Grayson as an attractive and livable traditional Georgia “small town.”
- Basic concepts for an economic development strategy to market this image and attract the types of development that fit well with this goal, especially for more professional and office types of businesses to Grayson.
- Development of the Georgia Highway 20 frontage as more of an urban boulevard rather than as a typical strip commercial highway.
- Coordination with the county using the municipal circulation plan as a means to improve coordination of County road improvements with Grayson land use and urban design goals.
- Potential preservation and enhancement actions for the town center.

Purposes and Uses of the Comprehensive Plan

The Community Agenda is first, a physical plan intended to guide the physical development and redevelopment of the City by describing how, why, when, and where to build, rebuild, or preserve aspects of the community. Second, the Community Agenda covers a long-range planning horizon of 20 years (i.e., to the year 2028). Third, the Community Agenda is “comprehensive” in the sense that it covers the entire City limits, plus it encompasses all the functions that make a community work and considers the interrelatedness of functions. The

Community Agenda is based on the foundation that if the City knows where it wants to go, it possesses better prospects of getting there.

The Community Agenda is intended to serve numerous purposes. It provides a primary basis for evaluating all future development proposals, whether they are requests for rezoning, applications for special use permit or subdivision plat approval, and others. The Community Agenda is also intended to provide guidance for operating and capital improvement budgets. Business persons, investors, real estate brokers, and developers can learn from the plan what the future vision of the community is, as well as the overall direction and intensity of new growth and redevelopment. Market analysts and researchers can draw on the wealth of data provided in the Community Assessment (a separate precursor document) for their own specific needs. A preliminary market analysis was also conducted as a part of the comprehensive planning effort. Other local governments, regional entities, and state agencies also look at the contents of the Community Agenda as the best available statement of municipal policy and intent.

The ultimate clients, however, for the Community Agenda are the Mayor and City Council of Grayson and the Grayson Planning and Zoning Commission. By adopting the Community Agenda, the Mayor and City Council make an extremely important expression of their consent and support for the policies, and work program contained in the Community Agenda.

Summary of Participation

Grayson convened steering committee members and stakeholders for several meetings which took place at the Grayson Senior Center. The first public meeting of the committee was held on August 22, 2007. The city advertised this meeting broadly and as a result some 65 persons attended. Objectives of that first meeting included summarizing the process and major contents of the comprehensive plan, describing the committee's role and tasks, discussing possible "character" areas, and considering possible issues and opportunities.

On September 20, 2007, the committee met again and considered a presentation on past and present conditions, issues and opportunities already identified. It brainstormed on additional issues and opportunities to be considered in the comprehensive plan. A third meeting of the steering committee took place on November 1, 2007, at which time the city's consultants presented more detailed concepts and images for the downtown area (Uptown Grayson), the SR 20 corridor, and the remaining areas of the city. At this meeting considerable discussion was devoted to prospects for developing a town center (and the desired scale and mixture of uses), and access and land use patterns in the SR 20 corridor. Both a low intensity town center concept and a more intense redevelopment concept were presented to the committee.

The fourth meeting of the committee was held February 28, 2008, when there was a presentation by Robert Charles Lesser & Co. on market conditions. A connection concept plan was also the subject of discussion. The ideas of providing new roads and a roundabout at the intersection of Grayson Parkway and Rosebud Road raised several questions and concerns from the general citizenry and elected officials of the city.

The committee met a fifth time, on March 27, 2008, to consider certain findings and more detailed analysis and concepts regarding the proposed circulation improvements. This meeting focused on the connection concept plan, because of concerns and questions raised in the prior meeting of the steering committee.

The steering committee and committee members met two additional times after the March 27th meeting (April 24, 2008 and May 29, 2008), during which time the members discussed and finalized recommendations with regard to the future development map, future land use map, policies, and the recommended short-term work program.

The complete draft of the community agenda (this document) was finalized in September and presented to the city in early October. The Grayson Planning and Zoning Commission, along with steering committee members and stakeholders, convened a public hearing on October 13, 2008, at which time a detailed overview of the document was presented by the city's planning consultants and testimony and discussion took place. The Grayson City Council held another public hearing on October 20, 2008, after which a resolution was considered to authorize regional and state review of the draft Community Agenda document.

Amendment and Update of the Plan

As an adopted expression of the City's policy, the Community Agenda must be maintained in a manner that still reflects the desires of the current Mayor and City Council. Developers, the general public, and other agencies have a right to rely on the adopted Comprehensive Plan as an expression of current policy. In cases where it is determined that a particular policy, goal, program, or statement is no longer a valid expression of the City's policy, then the plan needs to be amended. Otherwise, the validity of the plan is weakened, and those that have relied on the Community Agenda when it is not a reflection of current policy have then been, in effect, misled. Local governments are required to update the Comprehensive Plan every five years, and at that time, they are encouraged to provide major rewrites of the Comprehensive Plan. Regardless, the Comprehensive Plan must be comprehensively revised every 10 years. Amendments may be considered by the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council whenever the City finds it necessary to do so. When there is a significant change in policy by the Mayor and City Council, for instance a decision to drop a major capital improvement project that is described in the adopted plan, the plan should be amended.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMUNITY AGENDA

Population, Housing, and Economy (Chapter 2)

In 2008, Grayson has an estimated population of 2,216 residing in approximately 800 housing units. There are approximately 250 lots that have been platted but not built upon in Grayson, which suggests that population growth will become accelerated again as soon as the residential market economy recovers. Based on the land use plan, Grayson is likely at "buildout" (end of the planning horizon in 2028) to grow to 7,868 persons with 2,840 housing units. The vast majority of housing units in the city will be detached, single-family residences, though some attached housing types are called for within the Uptown Grayson part of the city through town center planning and development. Uptown Grayson will eventually be ringed in part by new traditional neighborhood development (TND), which provides for an alternative physical design to conventional suburbs (i.e., with grid street patterns, houses close to the street, and higher densities than found in most of Grayson's other neighborhoods).

Although Grayson is at this time a bedroom community, its economy will grow significantly. Current (year 2008) employment is estimated at 1,828 jobs in Grayson, and the larger Grayson Zip Code (30017) had employment of 2,418 (including only establishments with payroll). The land use plan calls for the city to grow its economic base, primarily along Grayson Highway (SR

20) with new office and retail/commercial development. Based on the land use plan, there is capacity to add more than 4,500 jobs, leading to prospects that Grayson's total employment could reach 6,391 by buildout (year 2028). If Grayson attracts that much non-residential development, it will be what is termed a "job rich" community, something that may be a surprise to those accustomed to Grayson's image as a low-density residential community.

Natural and Cultural Resources (Chapter 3)

Grayson's natural environment poses relatively few limitations on development. The city is divided between the Big Haynes Creek and Alcovy River Watersheds, both of which are "water supply" watersheds. This chapter summarizes various environmental characteristics in the city, including flood plains and wetlands.

A narrative history of Grayson is provided in this chapter, and based on the desires of the steering committee it includes a descriptive inventory of 37 historic structures and properties (prepared by the city's historian).

Character Areas and Land Use (Chapter 4)

This chapter provides detailed descriptions of character areas which are shown on the "future development map." It also provides an existing land use map and summary description of existing land uses and land use trends. To provide more detail for policymaking and to aid decisions regarding rezoning and special land use permit applications, this chapter includes a future land use plan and compares acreages of existing and future land use in an effort to predict major land use change during the planning horizon. The statistics with regard to land use change form the basis for projecting population and jobs and inform other parts of this plan.

Community Facilities and Transportation (Chapter 5)

This chapter provides a detailed description of existing, planned, and proposed community facilities and services in Grayson. It also provides local transportation concepts to supplement countywide transportation master planning which includes the Grayson area. Central to this chapter is the "Connection Concept Plan," which shows a series of local road improvements and private ways, along with a six-mile greenway system in and around Grayson.

Policies (Chapter 6)

This chapter presents a consolidated set of policies that will guide future decision making. The policies are organized by substantive area (housing, land use, natural resources, etc.).

Issues and Opportunities and Implementation (Chapter 7)

This chapter provides the final set of issues and opportunities that was used to establish priorities for the content of this comprehensive plan. After each issue or opportunity, the chapter describes how each one is implemented (or not) in this Community Agenda. This chapter also includes one of the most important components of the plan – the short-term work program – which provides a listing of specific measures that Grayson will take to implement the comprehensive plan. Finally, this chapter discusses capital cost estimating in a general sense.