

CHAPTER 7 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This chapter sets forth a summary list of “issues and opportunities” which are required to be stated and then addressed in the implementation component of the city’s comprehensive plan. The determination of what issues and opportunities were important followed an iterative process. First, preliminary issues and opportunities were identified in the Community Assessment, which was prepared in 2007 by Parsons Brinckerhoff as a part of the countywide process (with certain cities participating). The list was expanded by the city’s planning consultants and then vetted with the steering committee and stakeholders. The list of issues in this chapter represents the final, agreed upon issues and opportunities that are the primary emphases in terms of future planning. The issues and opportunities are divided into substantive areas. After each one, a statement regarding how the issue or opportunity is proposed to be implemented is provided.

Natural and Cultural Resources

1. Maintaining and Enhancing Tree Canopy

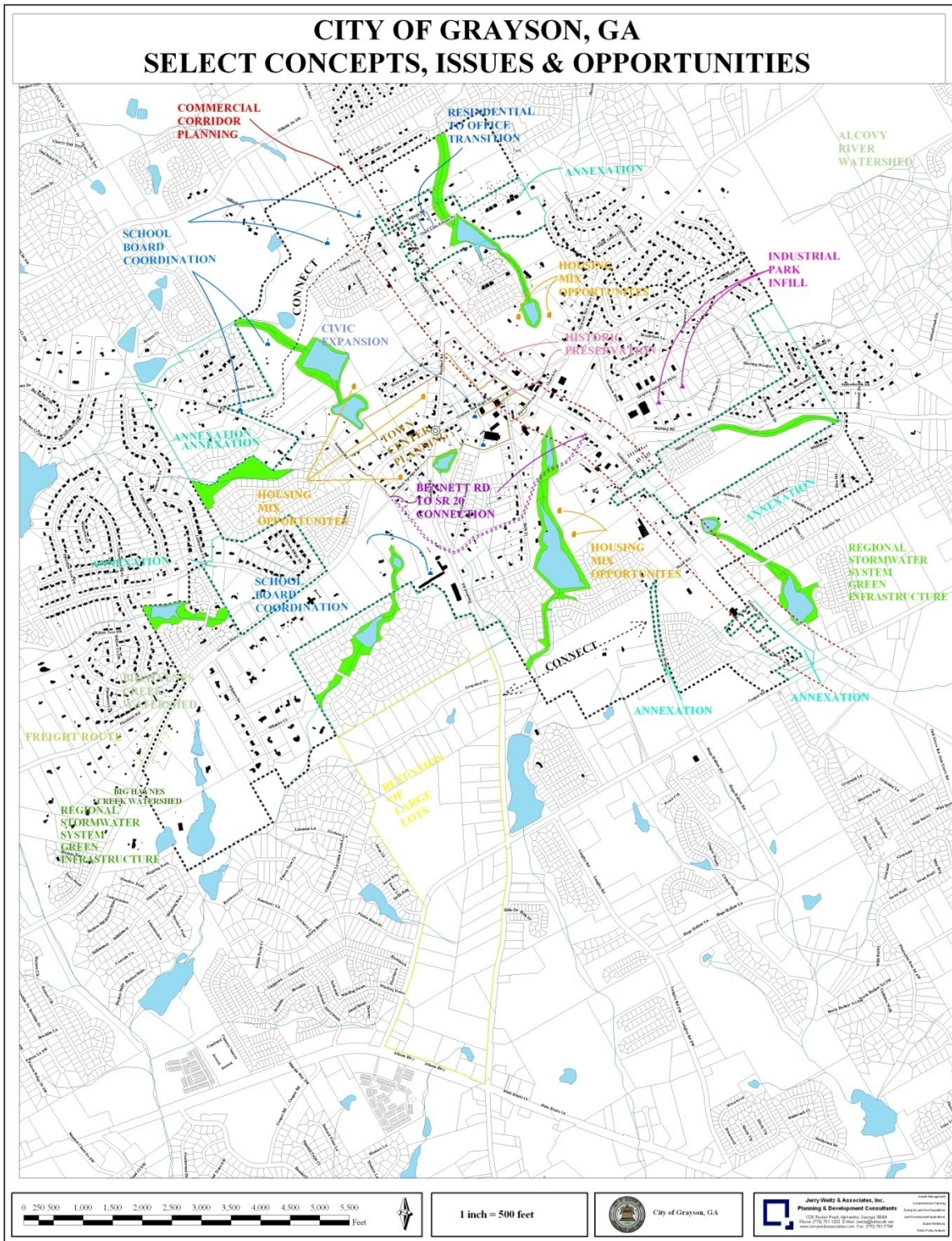
The issue of protecting and promoting tree canopy is being investigated in Gwinnett County. At issue is whether Grayson should adopt county regulations for tree canopy, or similar ones.

Implementation: Review of the city’s landscape ordinance is included in the city’s short-term work program. A policy is included that supports implementation.

2. Cultural/Historic Resource Protection

The city has an official Historian and maintains a history center on Rosebud Road. The city has a number of historic resources. In particular, the historic homes that have been converted to nonresidential uses, on the west side of SR 20 between Rosebud Road and Grayson Highway (SR 84) are particularly valued to the community, as it “shows you are in Grayson.” However, currently there are no formal regulations designed to protect historic resources from demolition. At issue is the extent to which Grayson will pursue formal efforts to preserve historic and cultural resources, beyond the current efforts of providing a history center and designating a city historian. In addition to numerous historic resources which have been inventoried, the possible preservation of the Brownlee farmland tract has been mentioned as an opportunity.

Implementation: Establishment of a local ordinance designating historic properties is included in the short-term work program, and the work program calls for actions to list eligible properties on the National Register of Historic Places.



Community Facilities and Services

3. Expansion of Current City Staff

Current City staff is limited mostly to city management and code enforcement officer. This limits significantly what Grayson can and is likely to accomplish as a municipal government. Some facilities and services such as garbage collection and development plan review are provided via the private sector. At issue is whether the city will continue to rely on the private sector for certain facilities and services, whether it will continue to rely on other service providers like Gwinnett County for law enforcement, or whether it will need to hire its own personnel (see also police force and code enforcement below).

Implementation: In the short term, the Mayor and City Council will monitor facility and service needs in relation to existing personnel and intergovernmental or private service arrangements. In the meantime, existing arrangements for service delivery will be continued. Over the long term, prior to implementation, Grayson may benefit from a staffing analysis/plan along with personnel classification system, prior to adding additional staff/personnel.

4. Establishment of a Police Force

Gwinnett County provides law enforcement services in Grayson, and the city does not have its own police force. Crime is considered low if not non-existent altogether, but should Grayson consider establishing its own police force during the short term or 20-year planning horizon?

Implementation: Since there is no evidence that there is a compelling need for a municipal police force, or that Gwinnett County is unable to handle current law enforcement needs, no short-term implementation measures are called for in the plan. Gwinnett County is also planning to provide a new police precinct in the Grayson area in 2009.

5. Expansion of City Hall

The plan addresses whether Grayson will need to expand its City Hall or build a new city hall building. Grayson owns an undeveloped parcel adjacent to the current city hall, which might be used for expansion.

Implementation: Needs for municipal office space depend on future personnel decisions. Since during the short term no new personnel are specifically called for, there may not be a need to plan immediately for a city hall expansion or a new city hall. Nonetheless, this Community Agenda in Chapter 5 identifies future needs at recommended level of service standards, and the short-term work program calls for the city to begin designing for improvements during the next five years. The nature of the municipal building should be carefully considered in the context of a more detailed redevelopment plan for Uptown Grayson, so that Grayson's civic buildings will maintain prominence.

6. Code Enforcement

The public participation process revealed the need for additional code enforcement. The city has established its own Code Enforcement Board pursuant to O.C.G.A. 36-74.

Implementation: The short-term work program calls for continuation of the code enforcement board, the monitoring of code enforcement activities, and the establishment of benchmarks for performance, then if needed, the hiring of additional personnel.

7. Expansion of City Park

The city has received a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant for park improvements at City Park (including expanded area). This is an opportunity to expand amenities in Uptown Grayson.

Implementation: This item is included in the short-term work program, to complete park improvements at City Park using the LWCF grant.

8. Regional Stormwater Detention with Lakes and Ponds

Grayson has a number of lakes and ponds that collectively could form a “regional” stormwater management system. This is an opportunity that intersects with the issue described below regarding establishment of a stormwater utility in conjunction with Gwinnett County.

Implementation: More information is needed regarding the engineering feasibility of this opportunity. The short-term work program calls for an engineering study with participation by Gwinnett County.

Urban Design and Character

9. Urban Design and Aesthetic Improvement

Grayson desires to maintain and promote its image as an attractive and livable traditional Georgia “small town.” The city is currently working on implementation of a plan that will establish a small monument park at State Route 20 and its intersection with Rosebud Road. Grayson secured a TEA grant for the monument park, and Georgia Department of Transportation has agreed to lease property at the intersection for the monument park and gateway feature. This effort is an opportunity to establish a good example of what Grayson wants in the form of other “gateways” to the city. It has also been suggested that the median of SR 20 (installed as part of the road’s widening) be landscaped.

The city has also put into place a number of design-related regulations, including administrative design review of new commercial developments. As a part of the zoning ordinance, Grayson has adopted a general theme that it prefers architectural styles prominent in the 1880s to 1930s.

Yet another opportunity is the improvement of the look of signalized street intersections by installing “mast arm” traffic signals. Presently, mast arms for traffic signals have been installed at the intersection of Bennett Road and Grayson Highway (SR 84), are in process at Rosebud Road and SR 20, and are proposed at Rosebud Road and Grayson Highway (SR 84). Also at issue is what additional measures Grayson will need to undertake to ensure its character matches its vision for the future.

Implementation: Completion of the monument park and gateway is in the short-term work program, as the city is planning for installation of additional gateway features and landscaping of the median of SR 20.

10. Uptown Grayson Planning and Vision

The city desires a distinguished look, different from the rest of Gwinnett County. There is not yet a critical mass to downtown (Uptown Grayson), but the city wants to achieve a more viable downtown and promote it as a destination. In particular, the city would like to attract bigger and big name restaurants. At issue is the extent to which the city government will guide the vision and development/redevelopment of Uptown Grayson. Redevelopment prospects that have been identified include three duplexes on Rosebud Road and reuse or redevelopment of the school (Grayson Elementary) in Uptown Grayson.

Implementation: Grayson formally established a Downtown Development Authority in September 2008. Concepts for redeveloping and enhancing Uptown Grayson are included in this comprehensive plan (see Chapter 4). More refinement of the plan may take place through an LCI study or redevelopment plan (called for in short-term work program), or future efforts of the Downtown Development Authority. Note: this relates closely to land use, economic development and redevelopment objectives.

Economic Development and Redevelopment

11. Economic Development

At issue is whether Grayson can continue to provide the services it needs while remaining primarily a residential community. As a part of the planning process, Grayson wanted to know what types of future nonresidential development it could and should target in the future. For instance, it was suggested during the public participation process that office development and unique commercial center development such as “The Avenues” would be desirable. A goal of the comprehensive plan is to attract professional office uses to the city. The city also has very limited industrial development – one industrial park which is two-thirds built out and served only by septic tank.

Implementation: As a part of this plan, a preliminary market analysis was conducted which determined the approximate “capture” potential of Grayson with regard to office, retail, and traditional neighborhood development. No additional measures are called for in the short-term work program, but the future land use plan has been more or less “right sized” given this market information.

12. Downtown Development Authority

There have been discussions about Grayson establishing a Downtown Development Authority (DDA). A map has been drafted of a possible district. At issue is whether the city will pursue the establishment of a DDA. An immediate task of a DDA might be to secure ample off-street parking facilities for the downtown (Uptown Grayson).

Implementation: A DDA has now been established in Grayson, as of September 2008.

13. Formal Program Initiatives

At issue is whether Grayson should proceed with one or more of the various programs designed to improve the character and function of the city, including its downtown. Options include the Better Hometown Program, Main Street Program, and Signature Communities, among others.

Implementation: Evaluation of these programs is called for in the short-term work program.

Housing and Land Use

14. Housing Mix and Policy

Grayson values its current position as a desirable, low-density suburb. It only has one apartment complex (8 units), and it is seeking primarily upscale homes. Public discussion about future housing has revealed the city residents are receptive to some higher-end townhouses built in Uptown Grayson and possibly as part of new traditional neighborhoods. There is also some receptivity to senior and assisted living facilities. The residents are not receptive to freestanding apartments or mixed-income communities. The comprehensive plan is the opportunity for the city to articulate future housing policies. A preliminary market analysis, prepared as part of the comprehensive planning process, identified the opportunity for Grayson to absorb or capture a significant share of the market for traditional neighborhoods in Gwinnett County.

Implementation: Policies relative to desired housing types are provided in this comprehensive plan.

15. Land Use Trends

The widening of SR 20 means that houses have been torn down and others are likely to transition to nonresidential uses or be redeveloped. This is perhaps the most significant land use issue Grayson faces in the short-term. A desired land use trend is the conversion of homes along Grayson Parkway, within Uptown Grayson, for offices, commercial shops, and mixed uses in accordance with the vision for Uptown Grayson.

Implementation: Policies relative to these land use issues are provided in this Community Agenda (see Chapter 6).

16. Land Use Regulatory Initiatives and Reforms

The Grayson Zoning Ordinance was rewritten recently and continues to be revised (for instance, most recently to include a planned unit development ordinance). The city also considered a new overlay district for the Britt Street area, to encourage traditional neighborhood development. There is a need to keep the city's zoning ordinance current, and to continue to amend the zoning ordinance to meet land use objectives. The city's landscaping ordinance has also been identified as in need of review and revision. The city's sign ordinance has also been identified as needing improvement.

Implementation: Amendments to the zoning ordinance and landscape ordinance are called for in the short-term work program, as appropriate, pending further (continuous) study.

Transportation

17. Disconnected Road Pattern

Existing subdivisions that have been constructed have not provided through-street connections. A trend of cul-de-sacs in new residential subdivisions is continuing. This is an issue because, on the one hand, cul-de-sacs eliminate cut-through traffic, but on the other, significantly inhibit citywide mobility. At issue is what Grayson can and should do about its evolving disconnected pattern of streets.

Implementation: In response to this issue, a connection concept plan was prepared and is included as a part of this comprehensive plan.

18. Frontage or Backage Roads Along SR 20

The city's regulations promote or require inter-parcel connections among compatible developments. There is an opportunity, through new development and redevelopment along the newly widened SR 20 to achieve a system of local (or private) road connections serving development along SR 20.

Implementation: A connection concept plan, prepared and included as a part of this comprehensive plan, illustrates desired frontage and backage roads along SR 20.

19. Sidewalk Improvements

Grayson's residents desire a more walkable, pedestrian-friendly city. At issue is the ability of the city to provide for additional sidewalks given limited funds available for capital improvements. It is also desirable to have street lights and street trees at the edge of sidewalks.

Implementation: Included in the short-term work program are line items to prioritize sidewalk needs and to prepare and adopt a capital plan for the installation of sidewalks based on those priorities.

20. Off-street Trail and Greenway System

Grayson does not yet have any sort of off-street trail or greenway system. However, residents are very supportive of developing such as system.

Implementation: A system of greenways is conceptually shown on the map titled "connection concept plan," which has been prepared and is included as a part of this comprehensive plan. Acquisition of land for the greenway program is called for in the plan. Also, the short-term work program calls for a "reserved corridor" ordinance that will prevent building or subdivision of land within designated greenways.

21. Road Ownership and Road Resurfacing

At issue are the many city and county roads in the city of Grayson and a critical mass of roads that will soon need to be repaved. Most of the roads owned by the city now are within residential subdivisions. Road work on city streets is contracted out at this time. Gwinnett County would like to see Grayson take over ownership of some of the roads in the city now owned and maintained by the county. Like most local governments, there is not sufficient funding to meet the critical mass of road paving needs.

Implementation: Grayson needs to determine the extent of its road surfacing needs and place priorities on them given limited funding. This is called for in the short-term work program.

Intergovernmental Coordination

22. Annexation Policy

The comprehensive plan is an opportunity for the city to articulate an annexation policy and negotiate acceptance of such a plan with Gwinnett County. Through the public participation process, it was determined that Grayson should pursue a strategy of “filling in any gaps” but not to undertake an aggressive annexation policy that would begin to undermine the small town character.

Implementation: Future annexation areas have been identified and mapped in this comprehensive plan. Policies for annexation are also included.

23. School Board – City Cooperation

Throughout the planning process, discussion circulated back to issues and opportunities for coordination between the Gwinnett County Board of Education and the city. One such issue is the reuse or redevelopment of the older, existing school in Uptown Grayson (on the south side of Grayson Highway/SR 84). That school property is considered one of the largest and best opportunities for Uptown Grayson to redevelop in a way consistent with the city’s desired vision.

Implementation: Appropriate policies and work program items are included.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation Responsibilities

The City of Grayson’s consulting city planner is the primary administrative agent responsible for implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, Community Agenda. The City Council must approve funding at levels appropriate to carry out the programs called for in the short-term work program.

The Grayson Planning and Zoning Commission provides overall support for plan implementation and should periodically investigate the progress of plan implementation. Ad-hoc committees can be formed, such as the one created for preparing the comprehensive plan, as needed to help guide the process of implementation. At any time, a particular program may rise

in level of importance such that the Grayson Mayor and City Council address program particulars directly, or through committees.

Short-term Work Program

Table 13 provides the specific actions needed to implement Grayson’s Comprehensive Plan.

Table 13
Short-Term Work Program
City of Grayson, 2009-2013

Description	Year(s) To Be Implemented	Estimated Cost (\$)	Responsible Party	Possible Funding Sources
NATURAL RESOURCES				
Consider and if appropriate implement additional regulations that encourage the maintenance, retention, or expansion of tree canopy cover in the City	2009-2010	\$5,000	Consulting City Planner (contract)	Operating Budget
HISTORIC RESOURCES				
Prepare and adopt an ordinance that protects landmarks and the most worthy historic properties from demolition	2009	\$20,000	City historian; consultant	Technical Assistance by ARC
Add eligible properties to the National Register of Historic Places	2009-2013	\$2,500 per nomination	City historian; consultant	Operating Budget
COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES				
Prepare design(s) for expansion of City Hall	2009-2011	\$50,000	City Administrator	Operating Budget
Code Enforcement: Continue the code enforcement board, monitor code enforcement activities, and establish benchmarks for performance, then if needed, hire an additional code enforcement officer	2009-2010	Staff function; cost for additional position	Code enforcement officer and board; Mayor and City Council	Operating Budget
Parks and Recreation: Complete park improvements at City Park	2009	Per Grant	City Administrator	Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
Regional Stormwater Detention: Conduct an engineering feasibility study of using various lakes and ponds in the city for regional (multi-site) detention facilities; consider participating in countywide stormwater utility	2009-2010	\$50,000	Engineering consultant	Gwinnett County; Grayson operating budget
URBAN DESIGN AND AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENT				
Complete monument park and gateway features at SR 20 and Rosebud Road	2009	\$75,000	City Administrator	Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA)
Design and install additional gateway features at selected locations	2010-2013	\$50,000 annually	City Administrator	TEA; operating budget
Prepare plan for installation of landscaping in the median of SR 20; implement	2009 - 2010	\$40,000	Consulting city planner	TEA; operating budget
Refine concepts in this plan for Uptown Grayson through a LCI study or more detailed redevelopment plan	2009-2010	\$60,000	Consulting city planner, steering committee	Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) of ARC
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT				
Establish and operate a Downtown Development Authority	2008	Staff function	City Administrator	Operating budget
Evaluate and consider formal program initiative such as Better Hometown, Main Street, and Signature Communities	2009-2013	Staff function	Consulting city planner	Operating budget

**Chapter 7, Issues and Opportunities and Implementation
City of Grayson, GA, Comprehensive Plan Community Agenda**

Description	Year(s) To Be Implemented	Estimated Cost (\$)	Responsible Party	Possible Funding Sources
LAND USE				
Amend the City's zoning code, landscape ordinance, and related codes, as needed	2009-2013	Staff function	Consulting city planner	Operating Budget
Prepare and adopt additional regulations to reserve lands designated for future local roads and greenways	2009	\$2,000	Consulting city planner	Operating Budget
Revise and resubmit for state and regional review this short-term work program	2013	Staff function	Consulting city planner	Operating Budget
TRANSPORTATION				
Prioritize sidewalk needs, prepare and adopt a capital plan for the installation of sidewalks based on those priorities	2009	Consultant or staff function	Consulting city planner	Operating Budget
Acquire lands within designated greenways for recreation	2009-2013	To be Determined	Mayor and City Council	City Capital Budget; LWCF
Determine the extent of its road resurfacing needs and place priorities on them given limited funding	2010	\$25,000	Engineering consultant	Operating Budget
Implement the connection concept plan, including new local roads and greenways	Long Range	Per capital program	Mayor and City Council	Various city and county sources
Consider developing an impact fee program for roads and greenway trails (parks) to fund the connection concept plan	2009-2010	\$15,000 - \$20,000	Consultant	Operating Budget
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION				
Seek to implement coordination strategies with the Gwinnett County Board of Education	2009-2013	Staff function	City Administrator	Operating Budget
Participate in efforts to update master plans of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District	2009-2013	Staff function	Consulting city planner	Operating Budget
Reconsider, and revise existing intergovernmental agreements and develop new intergovernmental agreements, as appropriate.	2009-2013	Staff function	City Administrator	Operating Budget

Capital Cost Estimating

This Community Agenda calls for certain capital improvements to be constructed by Grayson. For instance, the Connection Concept Plan calls for a system of approximately six miles of greenway trails – many of these are inside the city but some of them are proposed for currently unincorporated lands. The plan also calls for construction of the Bennett Road Extension and some other roads that may require the assistance of the City of Grayson. At this time, reasonable cost estimates for these various projects cannot be presented with certainty, given that preliminary designs have not been accomplished. Also, the division of costs is not presently known among the city, developers and subdividers (in some cases), and perhaps Gwinnett County through the SPLOST program, and any grants that might be secured.

Research conducted for this Community Agenda suggests that there are wide variations in cost estimates available from local governments. There are many variables associated with the provision of capital cost estimates. First, there are land acquisition costs. In the case of this Community Agenda, no outright land acquisition is called for, and no research has been done for this plan to determine the typical costs of land per acre in Grayson. Furthermore, the Connection Concept Plan again suggests that greenway and roadway improvements be instituted at the time of development, with funding in whole or in part by developers and subdividers.

Second, capital costs depend on the specific project specifications and are therefore difficult to generalize. Take for instance, a sidewalk extension project, or a road improvement called for in the Connection Concept Plan. There is the cost of actually installing the sidewalk or pavement, for which estimates of cost are available. But then one usually has to include the costs of curb and gutter, as sidewalk and urban roadway projects are rarely installed without addressing drainage issues along the roadway or path (though they can be done without installing curbs and gutters). One should not assume the land is flat, and therefore, the costs of grading the land where a sidewalk or road is needed must be included. All of the incidental costs associated with grading, such as soil erosion control, must also be included. Then, the crossing of streams can require something as basic as a culvert (if the stream is small, in the case of a road or pedestrian crossing), or such stream crossings may require the construction of bridges at great expense. If a road or sidewalk project crosses another road, improvements to the intersection may be required to correctly tie in the improvement to existing infrastructure, at considerable additional costs for ADA-accessible (handicapped access ramps), or perhaps a pedestrian or traffic signal (or both). There are other incidental costs as well, such as striping and signing the road or pedestrian way.

With regard to actual sidewalk construction (just the concrete cost and installation), a recent bid opportunity in Powder Springs, GA, for a sidewalk extension project received 15 bids – the costs *per square yard* for the sidewalk itself ranged from \$15.61 all the way to \$52.00, with several in the range of \$22 to \$30 per square yard. One can translate that cost to a metric that is more informative with regard to sidewalk construction – a square yard is 9 square feet. If one uses the cost figure of \$30 per square yard, a linear foot of a five-foot wide sidewalk (five square feet) would cost \$16.50 per linear foot (5/9 or 55% of a square yard). This appears to be a reasonable, current cost estimate for constructing a sidewalk (concrete and labor alone), though readers are cautioned that again the bids on which that estimate is based had a wide range of variance, and local estimates should always be used where possible. Furthermore, like most everything else, costs are rising rapidly, almost exponentially it seems. And remember, that estimate does not include land acquisition, grading, and all the other various incidental costs. In

the case of the Powder Springs sidewalk bid mentioned above, grading cost estimates ranged from less than \$5 per linear foot all the way to \$31 per linear foot of sidewalk (5 foot wide, 4 inches thick). Total costs for the sidewalk project ranged from a low of \$29 per linear foot to \$46 per linear foot and beyond. As one can see, even when the project has specifications, there can be a wide range of cost estimates by bidders.

Shifting attention to greenway trails, if they were concrete and 10 foot in width, one could in essence double the cost estimate for a sidewalk to determine the construction costs and labor for just the trail itself (i.e., \$33 per foot or \$174,200 per linear mile). This figure is corroborated by estimates in a recreation plan for Sandy Springs, which show cost estimates of \$30 per linear foot for a ten-foot wide trail and \$40 for a twelve-foot trail. However, again one may have to consider grading costs, and other incidental requirements. If a pedestrian crossing of a road is needed, signaling may add \$50,000. Add decorative wood rail fences and there may be an additional cost of \$50 per foot. Pedestrian bridges appear to range from \$500 to \$1,000 per linear foot according to a trail plan in Hickory, North Carolina. It appears customary or at least reasonably defensible to budget for \$100 per linear feet of greenway (\$528,000 per linear mile). But again, other sources cite greenway total project costs per mile of \$264,000 and \$300,000.

With regard to roads and road paving projects, one estimate (1995) found in the literature indicated the cost for paving a 26-foot wide road was \$71.50 per linear foot, or \$377,520 per mile – inflation would make that figure much higher today. It appears that Georgia DOT uses a figure of \$270,000 per mile to repave the top surface of a road, with deep repaving to correct damage estimated at \$600,000 per mile (width not shown in source).¹ It can be misleading to try and present a per-linear-foot estimate of road construction, since there could be many separate items included in the linear unit cost (e.g., sidewalk, curb and gutter drainage, lighting, etc.). Also, it is not informative when the width and thickness specifications are not provided in such estimates.

When it comes to building construction, it is reasonable to assume that municipal space will cost in the range of \$180 to \$200 per square foot, though again with recently skyrocketing capital costs those figures should be used with caution. Projects with more building amenities would obviously be higher than that estimate. A fire station in Roswell was built in the early 2000s at a cost of \$225 per square foot.

It is customary for a public project cost estimate to have a contingency as high as 30 percent and to estimate the cost of inflation (assuming 6% annually is typical) since public projects often will not take place until several years into the future. Permits if required can range from 20 to 25 percent of the physical construction costs for a given project. Engineering and architectural fees typically vary between 7 and 15 percent of the total project cost, with the higher number usually being used.²

¹ “Cash Woes Wipe Out 250 Road Projects.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 29, 2007, at page E-3.

² J. Thomas Tanner, PE. “Construction Cost Estimating.” Chapter 31 in *Land Development Handbook: Planning, Engineering, and Surveying*, Second Ed. The Dewberry Companies. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.