

Georgia Department of Community Affairs  
**State Planning Recommendations**

**CHARACTER AREAS**

*Use this list of recommended character areas to identify both existing and potential character areas in your community. Character area planning focuses on the way an area looks and how it functions. Applying development strategies to character areas in your community can preserve existing areas, such as the downtown, and help others function better and become more attractive. You can create additional character areas, or modify these, to fit your community vision. More details can be found by referring to DCA's Guidebooks: [Discovering and Planning Your Community Character](#); [Planning for Community Involvement](#); [Character Areas: Techniques and Guidance](#); and [Smart Code 6.5-Specific Function Chart](#).*

Character Area	Description/Predominant Characteristics	Suggested Development Strategy
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conservation Area and Greenspace</b></p>	<p>Primarily undeveloped natural lands and environmentally sensitive areas not suitable for development, e.g., scenic views, coast, steep slopes, flood plains, wetlands, watersheds, wildlife management areas and other environmentally sensitive areas.</p>	<p>Maintain natural, rural character by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not allowing any new development.</li> <li>• Promoting use of conservation easements.</li> <li>• Widen roadways in these areas only when absolutely necessary.</li> <li>• Carefully design the roadway alterations to minimize visual impact.</li> <li>• Promote these areas as passive-use tourism and recreation destinations.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Linear Greenspace, Trail &amp; Pedestrian / Bike Network</b></p>	<p>Area of protected open space that follows natural and manmade linear features for recreation, transportation and conservation purposes and links ecological, cultural and recreational amenities.</p> <p>Greenways can provide safe, efficient pedestrian linkages</p>	<p>Create these linkages by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking greenspaces into a pleasant network of greenways</li> <li>• Set aside land for pedestrian and bicycle connections between schools, churches, recreation areas, city centers, residential neighborhoods and commercial areas.</li> </ul>

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	<p>and at the same time give users an opportunity to enjoy the natural environment. Properly designed greenways can serve as an alternative transportation network, accommodating commuting to work or shopping as well as recreational biking, skateboarding, walking and jogging.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Agricultural Area</b></p>	<p>Lands in open or cultivated state or sparsely settled, including woodlands and farm lands.</p>	<p>Maintain rural character by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strictly limiting new development.</li> <li>• Protecting farmland and open space by maintaining large lot sizes (at least 10 acres).</li> <li>• Promoting use of conservation easements by land owners</li> <li>• Residential subdivisions should be severely limited, but if minor exceptions are made, they should be required to follow a rural cluster zoning or conservation subdivision design. Any new development should be required to use compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional rural character, and should not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture.</li> <li>• Widen roadways only when absolutely necessary.</li> <li>• Carefully design the roadway alterations to minimize visual impact</li> <li>• Promote these areas as passive-use tourism and recreation destinations.</li> </ul>

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<b>Rural Residential Area</b>	Rural, undeveloped land likely to face development pressures for lower density (one unit per two+ acres) residential development. Typically will have low pedestrian orientation and access, very large lots, open space, pastoral views and high degree of building separation.	<p>Maintain rural atmosphere while accommodating new residential development by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permitting rural cluster or conservation subdivision design that incorporate significant amounts of open space.</li> <li>• Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional rural character, and should not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture.</li> <li>• Wherever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes.</li> <li>• Can be designed for greater pedestrian orientation and access, more character with attractive clustering of buildings within the center, leaving open space surrounding the center.</li> </ul>
<b>Rural Village</b>	Commercial activity area located at a highway intersection. Typically automobile focused. There is a mixture of uses to serve highway passers-by, rural and agricultural areas.	
<b>Suburban Area Developing</b>	Area where pressures for the typical types of suburban residential subdivision development are greatest (due to availability of water and sewer service). Without intervention, this area is likely to evolve with low pedestrian orientation, little or no transit, high open space, high to moderate degree of building separation, predominantly residential with scattered civic buildings and varied street patterns, often curvilinear.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote moderate density, traditional neighborhood development (TND) style residential subdivisions.</li> <li>• New development should be a master-planned with mixed-uses, blending residential development with schools, parks, recreation, retail businesses and services, linked in a compact pattern that encourages walking and minimizes the need for auto trips within the subdivision.</li> <li>• There should be strong connectivity and continuity between each master planned development.</li> <li>• There should be good vehicular and pedestrian/bike connections to retail/commercial services as well as internal street connectivity, connectivity to adjacent properties/subdivisions, and multiple site access points.</li> <li>• Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional</li> </ul>

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		<p>character, and do not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wherever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes.</li> <li>• Promote street design that fosters traffic calming such as narrower residential streets, on-street parking, and addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Suburban Area Built Out</b></p>	<p>Area where typical types of suburban residential subdivision development have occurred. Characterized by low pedestrian orientation, little or no transit, high open space, high to moderate degree of building separation, predominantly residential with scattered civic buildings and varied street patterns, often curvilinear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster retrofitting of these areas to better conform with traditional neighborhood development (TND) principles.</li> <li>• This includes creating neighborhood focal points by locating schools, community centers, or well-designed small commercial activity centers at suitable locations within walking distance of residences.</li> <li>• Add traffic calming improvements, sidewalks, and increased street interconnections to improve walk-ability within existing neighborhoods.</li> <li>• Permit accessory housing units, or new well-designed, small-scale infill multifamily residences to increase neighborhood density and income diversity.</li> </ul>

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Traditional Neighborhoods:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stable</li> <li>- Declining</li> <li>- Redevelopment</li> </ul>	<p>Residential area in older part of the community typically developed prior to WWII. Characteristics include high pedestrian orientation, sidewalks, street trees, and street furniture; on-street parking; small, regular lots; limited open space; buildings close to or at the front property line; predominance of alleys; low degree of building separation; neighborhood-scale businesses scattered throughout the area.</p>	<p>Already exhibiting many of the characteristics of traditional neighborhood development (TND), these older neighborhoods should be encouraged to maintain their original character, with only compatible infill development permitted. There are three types of traditional neighborhoods that each call for their own redevelopment strategies: stable, declining, and redevelopment.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Traditional Neighborhood Stable</b></p>	<p>A neighborhood having relatively well-maintained housing, possess a distinct identity through architectural style, lot and street design, and has higher rates of home-ownership. Location near declining areas of town may also cause this neighborhood to decline over time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on reinforcing stability by encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties.</li> <li>• Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing.</li> <li>• Include well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents.</li> <li>• Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided to encourage these residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Traditional Neighborhood Declining</b></p>	<p>An area that has most of its original housing stock in place, but housing conditions are worsening due to low rates of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on strategic public investments to improve conditions, appropriate infill development on scattered vacant sites, and encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties.</li> </ul>

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	<p>homeownership and neglect of property maintenance. There may be a lack of neighborhood identity and gradual invasion of different type and intensity of use that may not be compatible with the neighborhood residential use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public assistance and investment should be focused where needed to ensure that the neighborhood becomes more stable, mixed-income community with a larger percentage of owner-occupied housing.</li> <li>• Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing.</li> <li>• The neighborhood should, however, also include well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Traditional Neighborhood Redevelopment Area</b></p>	<p>A neighborhood that has declined sufficiently that housing conditions are bad, there may be large areas of vacant land or deteriorating, unoccupied structures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The redevelopment strategy for the area should focus on preserving and rehabilitating what remains of the original housing stock, while rebuilding, on the remaining land, a new, attractive neighborhood following the principles of traditional neighborhood development.</li> <li>• The neighborhood should include a well-designed new neighborhood activity center at appropriate location, which would provide a focal point for the neighborhood, while also providing a suitable location for a grocery store, hardware store, and similar appropriately-scaled retail establishments serving neighborhood residents.</li> <li>• Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided to encourage residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area.</li> <li>• New streets should be connected (i.e. minimize or prohibit cul-de-sacs) to disperse traffic, shorten walking/biking trips.</li> <li>• Design features that encourage safe, accessible streets should be employed – such as, narrower streets, on-street parking, sidewalks, street trees, and landscaped raised medians for minor collectors and wider streets.</li> </ul>

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<b>Character Area</b>	<b>Description/Predominant Characteristics</b>	<b>Suggested Development Strategy</b>
<b>Neighborhood Center</b>	<p>A neighborhood focal point with a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses easily accessible by pedestrians.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each Neighborhood Center should include a mix of retail, services, and offices to serve neighborhood residents day-to-day needs.</li> <li>• Residential development should reinforce the center through locating higher density housing options adjacent to the center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments and condominiums.</li> <li>• Design for each Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses.</li> <li>• Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. Include direct connections to the greenspace and trail networks.</li> <li>• Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to other neighborhood amenities, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, parks, schools, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Town Center</b>	<p>A focal point for several neighborhoods that has a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses easily accessible by pedestrians.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each Town Center should include a relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area.</li> <li>• Residential development should reinforce the town center through locating higher density housing options adjacent to the center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments and condominiums.</li> <li>• Design for each Town Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses.</li> <li>• Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear.</li> <li>• Include direct connections to the greenspace and trail networks.</li> <li>• Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks,</li> </ul>

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		schools, etc.
<b>Downtown</b>	The traditional central business district and immediately surrounding commercial, industrial, or mixed-use areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown should include relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area.</li> <li>• Residential development should reinforce the traditional town center through a combination of rehabilitation of historic buildings in the downtown area and compatible new infill development targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, and condominiums.</li> <li>• Design should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses.</li> <li>• Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear.</li> <li>• Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating other pedestrian-friendly trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, schools, etc.</li> <li>• New residential and commercial development should be concentrated in and around the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods on infill sites.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Activity Center</b>	Concentration of regionally-marketed commercial and retail centers, office and employment areas, higher-education facilities, sports and recreational complexes. These areas are characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, and high transit use, including stops, shelters and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should include relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area.</li> <li>• Include a diverse mix of higher-density housing types, including multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, and condominiums, including affordable and workforce housing.</li> <li>• Design should be very pedestrian oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses.</li> <li>• Include direct connections to nearby networks of greenspace or trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreation purposes.</li> </ul>



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	<p>transfer points; on-site parking; low degree of internal open space; high floor-area-ratio; large tracts of land, campus or unified development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear.</li> <li>• Provide bike lanes or wide curb lanes to encourage bicycling and provide additional safety, provide conveniently located, preferably sheltered, bicycle parking at retail and office destinations and in multi-family dwellings.</li> <li>• Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain the regional character, and should not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Corridors:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In-Town</li> <li>- Gateway</li> <li>- Scenic</li> <li>- Major Highway</li> </ul>	<p>Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of designated high-volume transportation facility. Characteristics include orientation of buildings to highway; high transit, including stops and shelters; on-site parking; and large set-backs for buildings.</p>	<p>In order to encourage pedestrian activity that capitalizes on the existing neighborhood fabric in the older parts of the community a hierarchical or tiered approach to corridor design should be adopted. This approach should focus on pedestrian comfort, safety and convenience in areas near the community’s center where smaller lots and greater proximity to a range of services exists. As corridors move farther from the center and parcel sizes and development patterns work against easy pedestrian circulation, the focus should shift to vehicular safety, corridor appearance and traffic speeds while still providing basic access and safety for pedestrians. Finally, on major thoroughfares that serve as gateways to the community, the focus should be limited to corridor appearance only – providing a high quality image of the community. Best practices for all types of corridors include: driveway consolidation and landscaped raised medians, bicycle accommodations, traffic calming, and a buffer for pedestrians.</p>

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<b>In-Town Corridor</b>	Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a street or highway in town that is already or likely to experience uncontrolled strip development if growth is not properly managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gradually convert corridor to attractive boulevard with signage guiding visitors to downtown and scenic areas around the community.</li> <li>• The appearance of the corridor can immediately be improved through streetscaping enhancements (street lights, landscaping, etc.).</li> <li>• In the longer term, enact design guidelines for new development, including minimal building setback requirements from the street, to ensure that the corridors become more attractive as properties develop or redevelop.</li> <li>• Corridors leading to town centers or downtown, in particular, should be attractive, where development is carefully controlled (or redevelopment tools are used) to maintain or improve appearances.</li> <li>• Reduce the role and impact of automobiles in the community by employing attractive traffic-calming measures along major roadways and exploring alternative solutions to parking congestion.</li> <li>• Provide basic access for pedestrians and bicycles, consider vehicular safety measures including driveway consolidation and raised medians (which also improve safety for bike/pedestrians).</li> <li>• Coordinate land uses and bike/pedestrian facilities with transit stops where applicable.</li> </ul>
<b>Gateway Corridor</b>	Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on appearance with appropriate signage, landscaping and other beautification measures.</li> <li>• Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to clustered developments.</li> <li>• Retrofit or mask existing strip development or other unsightly features as necessary.</li> </ul>

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<b>Scenic Corridor</b>	Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that has significant natural, historic, or cultural features, and scenic or pastoral views.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish guidelines on development to protect the characteristics deemed to have scenic value.</li> <li>• Enact guidelines for new development that enhances the scenic value of the corridor and addresses landscaping and architectural design.</li> <li>• Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to clustered developments.</li> <li>• Provide pedestrian linkages to adjacent and nearby residential or commercial districts.</li> </ul>
<b>Major Highway Corridor</b>	Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of designated high-volume transportation facility, such as arterial roads and highways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a natural vegetation buffer (at least 50 feet in width) along the corridor.</li> <li>• All new development should be set-back behind this buffer, with access roads, shared driveways or inter-parcel road connections providing alternate access to these developments and reducing curb cuts and traffic on the main highway.</li> <li>• Encourage landscaped, raised medians to provide vehicular safety, aesthetics, and also pedestrian crossing refuge.</li> <li>• Provide pedestrian facilities behind drainage ditches or curb.</li> <li>• Provide paved shoulders that can be used by bicycles or as emergency breakdown lanes.</li> <li>• Coordinate land uses and bike/pedestrian facilities with transit stops, if applicable.</li> <li>• Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory signage to developments.</li> <li>• Unacceptable uses: new billboards.</li> </ul>

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<b>Commercial Redevelopment Area</b>	Declining, unattractive, vacant or under-utilized strip shopping center. Characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic and transit if applicable; on-site parking; low degree of open space; moderate floor-area-ratio; large tracts of land, campus or unified development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retro-fit to be more aesthetically appealing and, therefore, more marketable to prospective tenants by:</li> <li>• Building new commercial structures at the street front, taking up a portion of the oversize parking lot and creating a shopping “square” around a smaller internal parking lot.</li> <li>• Upgrading the appearance of existing older commercial buildings with façade improvement, new architectural elements, or awnings.</li> <li>• Reconfiguring the parking lot and circulation routes for automobiles.</li> <li>• Providing pedestrian and bicycling amenities, including covered walkways, benches, lighting and bike racks.</li> <li>• Adding landscaping and other appearance enhancements, trees in parking lots to provide shade and help reduce storm water runoff.</li> </ul>
<b>Employment Center, Office Park</b>	Typically campus-style development characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, and transit if applicable; on-site parking; low degree of open space; moderate floor-area-ratio.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus upon encouraging pervious paving and screening of cars and other unattractive aspects of businesses.</li> <li>• Use buffers to separate from adjacent uses.</li> <li>• Encourage greater mix of uses (such as retail and services to serve office employees) to reduce automobile reliance/use on site.</li> </ul>
<b>Light Industrial Area</b>	Area used in low intensity manufacturing, wholesale trade, and distribution activities that do not generate excessive noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisance characteristics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop or, where possible, retrofit as part of planned industrial park having adequate water, sewer, storm-water, and transportation infrastructure for all component uses at build-out. Incorporate landscaping and site design to soften or shield views of buildings and parking lots, loading docks, etc.</li> <li>• Incorporate signage and lighting guidelines to enhance quality of development.</li> </ul>

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<b>Industrial Area</b>	Land used in higher intensity manufacturing, assembly, processing activities where noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisance characteristics are not contained on-site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage greater mix of uses (such as retail and services to serve industry employees) to reduce automobile reliance/use on site.</li> </ul>
<b>Historic Area</b>	Historic district or area containing features, landmarks, civic or cultural uses of historic interest. Characteristics may vary based on size, location and history of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect historic properties from demolition and encourage rehabilitation with appropriate incentives, including National Register of Historic places designation, which enables eligibility for tax incentive programs.</li> <li>• Historic properties should be maintained or rehabilitated/restored according to the Secretary of the Interior’s <u>Standards for Rehabilitation</u>.</li> <li>• New development in the area should be of scale and architectural design to fit well into the historic fabric of that area.</li> <li>• Pedestrian access and open space should be provided to enhance citizen enjoyment of the area.</li> <li>• Linkages to regional greenspace/trail system should be encouraged as well.</li> </ul>
<b>Other/Special</b>	A district or area that presently does not fit or is not envisioned fitting into the above categories. It may, for instance, have singular characteristics such as hospital, airport, big box, etc. not likely to be replicated elsewhere within the community.	To be determined locally.