

## Introduction

The Clay County Joint Comprehensive Plan Community Assessment is the first part of the comprehensive planning process. This Community Assessment includes a list of potential issues and opportunities the communities may wish to act upon; an analysis of existing development patterns; including a map of recommended character areas to be considered in the development of the community's vision; an evaluation of current policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with the Quality Community Objectives. Finally, this Community Assessment also includes an analysis of data and information relating to potential issues and opportunities prevalent to these communities.

## Population

The projected population for Clay County and the Cities of Bluffton and Fort Gaines over the next twenty plus years is expected to continue to decline. However, the current trends of migration to southern rural counties could cause an increase in the population or stabilize it. It is believed that as the State of Georgia's Metropolitan areas continue to grow many residences will chose to relocate to smaller communities to escape the hustle of the larger cities. In addition, natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornados are causing a shift in the nation's population, as citizens are relocating from areas and states with greater risk of several and life threatening weather. Also, the 65-and-over age group that has comprised, on average, 20% of the total population county-wide as well as within the Cities of Bluffton and Fort Gaines is expected to remain a vital part of the community and continue to increase in numbers.

### Clay County Total Population 1980-2000

	1980	1990	2000	% Change 1980-1990	% Change 1990-2000
<b>Clay County</b>	3,553	3,364	3,357	-5.62%	-0.21%
<b>Bluffton</b>	132	138	118	4.35%	-16.95%
<b>Fort Gaines</b>	1,260	1,248	1,110	-0.96%	-11.06%
<b>Unincorporated</b>	2,161	1,978	2,129	-9.25%	7.09%
<b>State of Georgia</b>	5,486,900	6,478,149	8,186,453	18.06%	26.37%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980, 1990, 2000. Lower Chattahoochee RDC Staff, 2006.

### Clay County Total Population Projections 2005-2030

	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
<b>Clay County</b>	3,308	3,259	3,210	3,161	3,112	3,065
<b>Bluffton</b>	115	111	108	104	101	98
<b>Fort Gaines</b>	1,073	1,035	998	960	923	887
<b>Unincorporated</b>	2,120	2,113	2,104	2,097	2,088	2,080

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Lower Chattahoochee RDC Staff, 2006.

## Issues

- Providing Infrastructure for a growing population (water, sewer, schools, transportation, etc.).

- Paying for Growth.
- Integrating New Comers with Old Timers.
- Increasing Property Values and potentially increasing Taxes.

## **Opportunities**

- Diversifying the population.
- Expanding Tax base from new residential, commercial and industrial growth.
- Expanding local Job Opportunities.
- Expanding Community Investment.

## ***Economic Development***

Clay County and its municipalities have a multitude of needs including workforce development, entrepreneurial assistance, and coordinated tourism marketing. There are a limited number of businesses in the county. The majority are retail-type establishments with limited employment opportunities. There are very few industrial-type businesses. Currently education is the largest “industry” creating jobs. Because of the county’s location, on Lake Walter F. George, there is potential for a variety of businesses allowing diversification and stability of the economy. Tourism, also, continues to be an excellent possibility as well as horticultural nurseries and agribusinesses.

## **Issues**

- Dependency on a small number of industries/business types results in high vulnerability to downturns in the dominate industry type.
- Business Recruitment Efforts are not effective and need to be changed.
- Community Economic Development programs are insufficient to meet the varied needs of the community.
- There are not enough jobs or economic opportunity to retain local residents.
- There is not enough affordable/workforce housing.
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## **Opportunities**

- Providing a Business Recruitment and Retention Program (BREP).
- Investing in infrastructure and community resources to remain competitive in business recruitment.
- Conduct a survey of workforce capabilities, supply, quality, and training needs.
- Providing Educational and workforce training opportunities.

## **Housing**

Housing stock in Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines consists of a mixture of traditional single family stick-built homes, multi-family units and manufactured and mobile home units. The county's 2000 housing inventory consists of 1,925 housing units, with 511 additional units in Fort Gaines and 59 additional units in Bluffton.

The number of housing units in Clay County has increased 21% since 1990. The majority of the county's housing stock is single family units, 53% of total units in 2000. Secondary housing components consist of multi-family and mobile home units. As of 2000 multi-family units comprised 5% of all housing units. The stock of mobile home units has increased substantially. In 1980, mobile home units comprised 7% of the total housing units; by 2000 the number of mobile home units had grown to 42% of the county's housing stock.

The number of housing units in the cities of Fort Gaines and Bluffton has declined since 1980. As of 2000, multi-family units comprised 18% of housing stock in Fort Gaines. There are no multi-family units located in Bluffton. Mobile home units represent the largest increase in housing stock in both communities; mobile home units represented less than 4% of housing stock in Fort Gaines in 1980, but increased to 17% by 1990 and 21% by 2000. Bluffton's mobile home stock similarly increased, from less than 3% of total stock in 1980 to 16% in 1990 and 32% by 2000.

### **Clay County Number of Household Units by Type 1980-2000**

	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	1,318	1,586	1,925
<b>Single Family Units</b>	1,138	1,038	1,015
<b>Multi-Family Units</b>	84	75	93
<b>Mobile Home/Trailer</b>	96	455	814
<b>All Other Units</b>	0	18	3

*Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980, 1990, 2000.*

### **Fort Gaines Number of Household Units by Type 1980-2000**

	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	561	542	511
<b>Single Family Units</b>	490	374	312
<b>Multi-Family Units</b>	49	69	90
<b>Mobile Home/Trailer</b>	22	92	109
<b>All Other Units</b>	0	7	0

*Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980, 1990, 2000.*

### **Bluffton Number of Household Units by Type 1980-2000**

	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	71	64	59
<b>Single Family Units</b>	69	54	40

<b>Multi-Family Units</b>	0	0	0
<b>Mobile Home/Trailer</b>	2	10	19
<b>All Other Units</b>	0	0	0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980, 1990, 2000.

**Clay County Projected Number of Households and Household Size 2005-2030**

	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>Number of Households</b>	1,386	1,424	1,463	1,501	1,540	1,578
<b>Average Household Size</b>	2.33	2.21	2.08	1.96	1.84	1.72

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980, 1990, 2000. Lower Chattahoochee RDC Staff, 2006.

**Issues**

- Lack of varied housing options available to meet resident needs at all stages of life.
- Existing sub-standard lots with no or declining infrastructure.
- Lack of zoning or building code enforcement.
- Abundance of substandard housing and blighted structures.
- No control over recreational vehicles (i.e. travel trailers and campers).

**Opportunities**

- Increasing affordable housing options.
- Developing design guidelines for areas in need of revitalization.
- Provide opportunities for mixed-use developments.
- Provide incentives for rehabilitation of existing housing stock.

**Natural and Cultural Resources**

Clay County should expand appropriate infrastructures to meet development needs and minimize the affects on sensitive areas. Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines should develop educational programs to promote conservation and protection of important resources for all segments of society. The County and its municipalities should also strengthen and improve existing regulations regarding development in sensitive areas.

**Issues**

- Lack of control over the Chattahoochee River
- Lack of regulation over hunters' leases and camps.
- No recreation facilities for local residents.
- No full-time game warden.
- Lack of infrastructure at Cotton Hill Park.
- Preserving water quality.

## **Opportunities**

- Participate in state/local discussions on water quality.
- Insure local governments have appropriate planning tools to protect streams, flora, and fauna.
- Establish an archives to protect historic artifacts and documents.
- Protect W. Town Branch – Cemochechobee Creek.
- Develop ecotourism and agritourism opportunities.
- Use best management practices related to Quality Deer Management
- Develop an arts inventory of local craftspersons.

## ***Community Facilities***

The Clay County, City of Bluffton, and City of Fort Gaines community facilities have adequately met demand for the last ten (10) years. Notable infrastructure projects are as follows: Clay County is currently constructing a water system for the northern end of the county where residential development is denser. The County has also adopted a zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations in 2002 in order to control population density and preserve water quality. The City of Bluffton has constructed a 50,000 gallon primary water tank and is using their older 12,000 gallon water tank as a secondary water source. The City of Fort Gaines has improved its water distribution facilities with the addition of a new water tank and the replacement of water lines in a three-phase project.

## **Issues**

- Providing Infrastructure for a growing population (water, sewer, schools, transportation, etc.).
- Paying for Growth.
- Lack of medical facilities and medical professionals.
- Lack of recycling programs and facilities.
- Preserving water quality.

## **Opportunities**

- Expanding Tax base from new residential, commercial and industrial growth.
- Improving the perception of existing medical care and recruiting new medical personnel and facilities.
- Improving educational opportunities for all age-groups.
- Improving recreational facilities and opportunities for all age-groups.
- Maintaining and improving existing park facilities.
- Preserving water quality by providing sewer to lake developments.

## ***Intergovernmental***

The governments in Clay County cooperate with surrounding jurisdictions to achieve many goals such as a Multi-County 911, a Regional Technology Authority to bring broad band technology to Southwest Georgia. Other cooperative organizations include the Regional Airport Authority, the

Regional Jail Authority, the Regional Development Authority, and the Historic Chattahoochee Commission. Issues and opportunities exist between Clay County, the City of Bluffton, and the City of Fort Gaines as well as between neighboring jurisdictions such as Quitman, Randolph, Calhoun, and Early Counties. In order to reduce issues and make the most of the potential opportunities the County should maintain open communication and dialogue with its neighboring jurisdictions throughout the planning process. Furthermore, the Service Delivery Strategies of each government should be updated regularly. The SDS update will be done in conjunction with the update of the Comprehensive Plan.

## **Issues**

- Working relationship among local governments is strained.
- Important to keep line of communication open with neighboring jurisdictions in Georgia.
- No communication or coordination with neighboring jurisdictions in Alabama.
- Actively participate in regional authorities and in regional planning efforts.
- Lack of citizen participation in leadership training efforts.

## **Opportunities**

- In order to bring growth and needed services to area counties and cities an opportunity exists for communities to develop stronger working relationships and to share resources when necessary.
- Solicit citizen and elected official participation in regional leadership training.
- Consolidation of some county and city services.
- The Service Delivery Strategy will need to be updated as party of the Comprehensive Plan process.

## ***Transportation***

Clay County is served by U.S. Highway 27; Georgia Highways 37, 39, and 266; 164 miles of improved roads and 206 miles of unpaved roads. The City of Fort Gaines is served by Georgia Highway 39 (North – South), Georgia Highway 37 (East –West), and Georgia Highway 266. The major city arterial streets are Hancock, Jefferson, Washington and Commerce Streets. The City of Bluffton is served by U.S. 27 and 3 miles of city streets.

Neither the City of Bluffton nor the City of Fort Gaines has public transportation. However, Clay County serves both communities with a Section 18, government funded public transportation program. There are currently four vans operating on a fixed route and an as-needed basis.

There is no rail transportation in Clay County. There is no airstrip in Clay County. However, there is a small private airstrip in the City of Fort Gaines. Also, the County participates in the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Airport Authority in efforts to expand the existing Cuthbert-Randolph County Airport.

Clay County is located on the Chattahoochee River at a point where barge traffic is possible. The lock, dam, and Lake Walter F. George make water traffic a possible means of transportation.

However, there is no port facility in the county. The nearest barge facilities are located in Eufaula, Alabama, 23 miles North of Fort Gaines and Columbia, Alabama.

Challenges ahead include the widening U.S. Hwy 27, paving existing dirt roads, and developing the Phenomenon Trail, a multi-modal trail from George Bagby State Park to the City of Fort Gaines.

## **Issues**

- Lack of paved roads and multi-modal trails.
- Poor maintenance of roads.
- Low lake levels reduce navigation opportunities.
- Lack of funding sources, needed equipment, and trained personnel.

## **Opportunities**

- Regionalize the local transit system.
- Providing facilities for boats navigating the lake and river.
- Constructing the Phenomenon Trail.
- Expanding multi-modal opportunities.
- Designating GA Hwy 39 as a Scenic Byway.
- Four-laning US Hwy 27

## **Land Use**

Maximizing land development opportunities while protecting natural resources is an important goal for Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines. Key challenges for county and city officials include protecting natural resources while encouraging development and establishing an effective mix of appropriate land uses. Agricultural use dominates the county's existing land use. Second to agricultural is the residential use of land in the county. While single-family detached housing is the predominant residential use, manufactured housing is the second most frequently used residential type. Commercial uses are predominantly located in the Town Center and along Federal and State Routes make up less than one percent of total land use.

## **Issues**

- Determine if any brownfields exists; connect developers to the federal and state incentives for cleaning up brownfields sites.
- Aid to struggling areas while creating opportunities for reinvestment and redevelopment in deteriorating areas.
- Land use mix is heavily favored towards agricultural use and residential use need to diversify land use base.

## **Opportunities**

- Provide water and sewer to most densely developed areas in the northern part of the county.

- Encourage traditional neighborhood development. Traditional neighborhoods should be required when developing adjacent to or within a historic district
- Protect natural resources within developments. Promote the use of the conservation subdivision ordinance. Create incentives to conserve greenspace.
- Develop Phenomenon Trail.

## Analysis of Existing Development Patterns

An analysis of existing development patterns provides an understanding of how land is used at a specific point in time. An existing land use map is the first step in gaining an understanding of not only what land uses exist and where they are but how they interact. The purpose of this section is to map and review existing land use in Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines; look at areas in need of attention, areas in need of protection and areas with development opportunities. The last task is the creation of a draft character area map which groups areas of similar land use characteristics or land use traits.

The following table illustrates the acreage and percent of total land in the counties and cities dedicated to existing land uses. Acreage totals does not include roads.

### Existing Land Use Tables

Clay County Existing Land Use	Acres	% of County Total
Residential	4561.06	4
Agriculture/Forestry	112,138.71	92
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	2500.65	2
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	2100.75	2
Public/Institutional	134.61	< 1
Industrial	462.53	< 1
Commercial	82.12	< 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>121,980.43</b>	<b>100</b>

Bluffton Existing Land Use	Acres	% of City Total
Residential		
Agriculture/Forestry		
Parks/Recreation/Conservation		
Public/Institutional		
Industrial		
Commercial		
<b>Total</b>		

<b>Fort Gaines Existing Land Use</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>% of City Total</b>
<b>Residential (low density)</b>	698.33	
<b>Residential (high density)</b>	276.66	
<b>Agriculture/Forestry</b>	1368.86	
<b>Transportation/Communication/Utilities</b>	189.85	
<b>Parks/Recreation/Conservation</b>	284.57	
<b>Public/Institutional</b>	38.23	
<b>Industrial</b>	86.56	
<b>Commercial</b>	88.09	
<b>Total</b>		

### Existing Land Use Definitions Table

<b>Existing Land Use</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Residential	Single-family residential uses, multi-family residential uses (apartments and duplexes), and manufactured and mobile home units (all normally located on no less than a one-quarter of an acre lots)
Agriculture/Forestry	Land used for agricultural purposes such as farming and/or livestock production and timber production
Commercial	Commercial uses including office use; retail, restaurants, convenience store, car dealerships, etc.
Industrial	Land dedicated to industrial uses(includes both light and heavy industrial uses)
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	State, Federal and local parks, active and passive recreation activities, and protected land; includes land preserved in land trust
Public/Institutional	Community facilities excluding utilities, government (schools, public safety facilities, courthouse, jail, health facilities, churches, and libraries)
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	Land used transportation, communication or utility facilities (cell towers, power stations, water tower, and water treatment facilities)
Road Right-of-Way	Land dedicated to road use including right of way
Undeveloped/Vacant	Land where no apparent active uses exist; property with dilapidated or abandoned structures or overgrown vacant lots

### ***Areas Requiring Special Attention***

There are many areas in Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines that require special attention.

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***Areas Where Development is Likely to Occur***

The major growth area in Clay County is the northern section of the county along the coast of Lake Walter F. George.

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***Significant Natural Resources***

The natural environment places certain opportunities and constraints on the way land is used. Soil conditions, slopes, flood frequency and wetlands all affect where development can safely and feasibly occur. In Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines, areas adjacent to and affecting the Chattahoochee River and important underground aquifers should be reviewed for compliance with state and local ordinances and regulations.

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***Significant Cultural Resources***

A county-wide historic resources survey has been completed. The City of Fort Gaines is currently on the National Register of Historic Places as is Sutton's Corners in the eastern part of the county. Other areas of unique character, local and regional significance, integrity and relationship to other important historic resources are:

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### ***Areas with Significant In-fill Development Opportunities***

In-fill opportunities exist in and around Fort Gaines. Overall, in-fill opportunities within the city limits are good with available public water and public sewer. However, some of the existing vacant lots should be kept for park and open space.

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### ***Brownfields***

In general terms, brownfields are abandoned or underused industrial or commercial properties where redevelopment is complicated by actual or perceived environmental contamination. There is no requirement on size, location, age or past use for brownfields. Some examples of brownfields include abandoned gas stations and unused former manufacturing plants.

Some issues involving brownfields are the potential to cause harm to the population and the environment, the reduction in employment opportunities and tax revenue, the increase in illegal dumping, and the reduction in the property value for the surrounding area. Redeveloping brownfields can restore property to productive use, increase property values, improve public health and the environment, and utilize existing public infrastructure and increasing job opportunities and local tax revenues.

Potential brownfields in Clay County consist of ...

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### ***Areas of Disinvestment, Needing Redevelopment, or Improvements to Aesthetics or Attractiveness***

All communities have areas of disinvestment or areas in need of improvement; Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines are no different. As the county grows, market forces will take care of (improve) most of the areas in need of revitalization. However in some cases a public/private partnership will be needed to make improvements happen.

Areas of concern include the following:

## **Recommended Character Areas**

Establishing character areas serve to recognize the differences that exist between appearance and land-use in the town center and rural landscape of Clay County, Bluffton, and Fort Gaines. Character areas define future development activities by recognizing what land development characteristics need to be preserved and what land development practices need to be changed. Desired land use results are determined by establishing goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategies and tools for each defined community character area.

### **Character Area Table**

<b>Character Area</b>	<b>Description/Predominant Characteristics</b>	<b>Development Plan</b>
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	State, federal and local parks, active and passive recreation activity areas also includes protected open space (wetlands, floodplains, stream corridors, and natural buffers)	Limiting new development, promoting use of conservation easements, promote areas as passive-use tourism and recreation destinations, widening roadways should only be done when absolutely necessary and carefully designed
Agriculture/Forestry	Lands in open or cultivated state or sparsely settled, including woodlands and farm lands	Limiting new development, protecting farmland and open space (maintaining appropriate lot size), promoting use of conservation easements by land owners, limit the development of residential subdivisions, require compatible architecture designs that maintain the rural character, widening roadways should only be done when absolutely necessary and carefully designed. Any residential development should be done as rural cluster or conservation subdivision
Rural Residential Area	Rural, undeveloped land likely to face development pressures for lower density residential development, low pedestrian orientation and access, typically large lot, open space, and pastoral views	Permitting rural cluster or conservation subdivision design that incorporate significant amounts of open space, require compatible architecture designs that maintain the rural character

Residential	Predominantly residential with scattered civic buildings and varied street patterns, often curvilinear, low pedestrian orientation, little to no transit, high open space, moderate degree of building separation	Promote moderate density, traditional neighborhood development style residential subdivisions, 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, add traffic calming improvements, sidewalks, and improve street connections. Permit well-designed housing units to increase neighborhood density and income diversity.
Traditional Neighborhood (Stable)	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.	Focus on reinforcing stability by encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties. Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. 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. 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.
Traditional Neighborhood Declining	An area that has most of its original housing stock in place, but housing conditions are worsening due to low rates of 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.	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. 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. Vacant properties in the neighborhood offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. 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.
Town Center	Focal point for several neighborhoods with a concentration of activities (general retail, professional office, high-density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses easily accessible by pedestrians	Area which is very pedestrian oriented, walk able connections between different uses, enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, by adding sidewalks and creating trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood center, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, schools, etc. Including a relatively high-density mix or retail, offices, services and employment to serve a regional market area. Residential development should reinforce the town center by locating high density housing options adjacent to the center. Residential developments should be mixed income including multi-family town homes, apartments, duplexes and condominiums
Corridors (In-town, Gateway, Scenic, Major Highway)	Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of designated high-volume transportation facility, should include orientation of buildings to highway; high transit, including stops and shelters; on-site parking and large set-backs for buildings	All types of corridors should include driveway consolidation and landscape raised medians, bicycle accommodations, traffic calming, and a buffer for pedestrians
In-town Corridor	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	Encourage attractive boulevards with signage guiding visitors to downtown and scenic areas around the community, enhance corridor appearance through streetscaping (street lights, landscaping), enact design guidelines for new development to include minimal building setback requirements from the street, employ traffic calming measures among major roadways to reduce the impact of automobiles, provide basic access for pedestrians and bicycles
Scenic Corridor	Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a street or highway in town that has significant natural, historic, or cultural features, and scenic or pastoral views	Establish guidelines to protect scenic values and addresses landscaping and architectural design, manage flow of traffic, provide pedestrian linkages to adjacent and nearby residential or commercial districts

Major Highway Corridor	Developer or undeveloped land on both sides of the designated high-volume transportation facility such as highways	Maintain a natural vegetation buffer along the corridor, ensure all new developments are setback behind the buffer with access roads, encourage landscaping, raised medians for automobile and pedestrian safety. Provide paved shoulders for bicycles or emergency breakdown lanes, manage access to keep traffic flowing.
Other/Special	Includes districts or areas that presently does not fit or is not envisioned fitting into any of the above categories. May also include also areas with single characteristics such as a hospital or others that are not likely to be replicated elsewhere within the community	To be determined locally