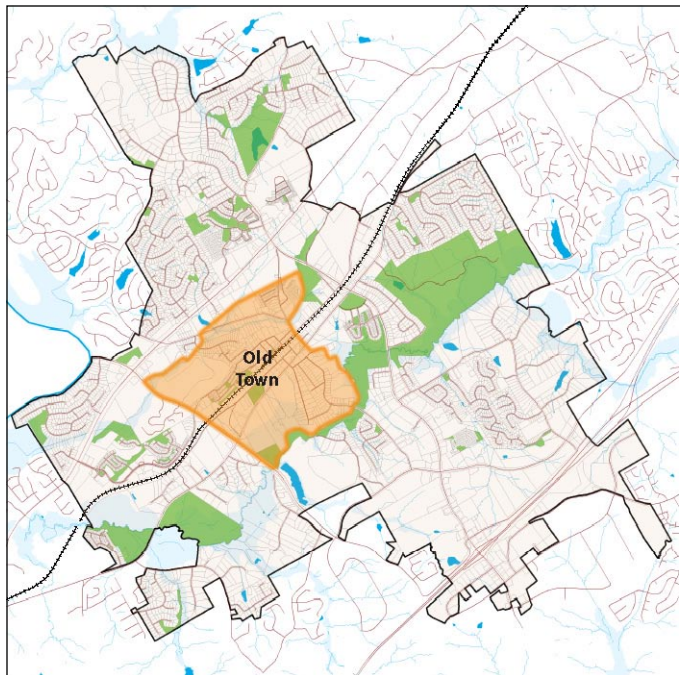


3.5 Historic Old Town Character Area



Downtown Suwanee is characterized by two areas: Historic Old Town and Town Center. Due to their proximity and similar purposes, the two areas can function together and complement one another quite well. The Old Town Character Area roughly represents the historic heart of Suwanee; and while much more developed over the last forty years than it had been for the majority of the city's existence, it has a somewhat rural, forested, single-family detached, and small-scale commercial environment that stands out as a special place. It is defined on three sides primarily by the Suwanee Creek floodplain to the southeast, McGinnis Ferry Road to the west, and Brushy Creek to the north. Buford Highway bisects the character area. Roughly

half of the Old Town Character Area, northwest of Buford Highway, is occupied by properties that had been subdivided and developed before 1950, while the southerly portion contains housing that was mostly built in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Vision for Old Town

While Suwanee is emerging as a vibrant, family-oriented city that embodies the highest quality of life and most up-to-date housing in the Atlanta region, it is still a place where the historic origins of the city are located. The vision for Old Town Suwanee acknowledges that attitude, and because of the tangible presence of history requires a very sensitive approach to growth. Overall, historic preservation should be balanced with new construction, and infill development encouraged but designed and built in ways that maintain and enhance the environment and unique small-town character. The area around the small, but distinct, Main Street should be reinforced with compact and compatible development; while Town Center should be extended to Russell Street along Buford Highway with buildings and uses that embody pedestrian-oriented principles: gracious sidewalks, lively storefronts, substantial and continuous building masses, and concealed parking and services. To accomplish this with a minimum of conflict with GDOT, the city should explore the possibility of relocating the Highway 23 designation of the section



View looking east along Buford Highway and toward Town Center Park

of Buford Highway from McGinnis Ferry Road to Suwanee Dam Road, to Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. Absent this, the city should work closely with future road projects to ensure the desired development forms are achievable. Russell Street itself should serve as a gateway to Old Town and Main Street, but complement and not compete with Town Center as a destination. Old Town should also encourage mobility options and walkability with new sidewalks where needed, and road improvements or extensions to provide street network connectivity to adjacent character areas.

Typical Existing Development Character

The development patterns that characterize Historic Old Town have evolved from a century of small-town growth, compressed into four general categories. The “historic heart” of the city is the small core containing Main Street, originally the site of the 1871 Georgia Air Line depot and the line of adjacent storehouses that burned in an 1881 fire. Today, the depot is gone and the storehouse sites contain small commercial buildings as well as recently-built office space and small-lot single-family homes. The few blocks surrounding Main Street continue the small-town feel with historic churches and homes on roads lined by hedgerows and fences, with an out-of-character metal industrial building flanking the railroad. Further out along Stonecypher Road, and across the railroad to the southeast, plainly-designed foursquare, bungalow and double-pen historic homes mix with newer ranch houses and the occasional barn or garden shed. The large treed lots and small roads dominating this area give it the feel of the country; with stone embankments, picket fences, small gardens, and gourd trees farm providing a memorable character rare in metro Atlanta. Across Buford Highway to the south, single-family detached lots continue with a few historic homes closer in and newer homes dating to the 1960s, 70s and 80s mixed randomly on the balance of the parcels; Eva Kennedy Road to the north has a similar lot pattern. A few older (and in some cases deteriorating) auto-oriented commercial uses occur along Buford Highway at its northern and central portions; while newer but more limited commercial and institutional uses occupy larger frontages to the south along with a significant amount of undeveloped and steeply-rolling land. Finally, an area of new small-lot single-family subdivisions lines Scales Road to the north and south in the northwest corner of the character area, as well as a large garden-style apartment complex accessed from Scales and McGinnis Ferry roads.

Future Development

While Old Town can and should grow in the future, development must be controlled and designed so that the best features of the area are not lost but enhanced. Since there are so few places where large-scale new construction can occur, the growth strategy for Old Town should be carefully-crafted infill responding to the unique context in the historic areas. Overall, preservation of historic structures and landscapes should be stressed, with a comprehensive survey of historic resources to validate or revisit previous inventories as a first step. In the Main Street district, future development should tend toward small one- or two-story mixed-use buildings or small-lot housing and should occur on sites that do not contain historic resources. New development should be sensitive to the existing lot character and tree cover as well as the proportions and scale of adjacent buildings and roads. In the residential areas to the north and along Stonecypher

Road the same preservation ethic applies. Infill development or redevelopment could occur on existing large lots but should be targeted toward single-family detached or duplex housing designed as a single large home.

Subdivisions of larger parcels is acceptable at certain locations, but should be done in a way to preserve the random spacing of existing lot frontages, a key aspect of the area's character. This could be accomplished by positioning new buildings toward the rear of existing lots, and using shared drives or flag lot layouts to minimize building density on the rural-type roads and spread the development over a larger area. The inverse is true for new development along Buford Highway, where two- to three-story mixed-use buildings should create a uniform street wall north of Davis Street as much as possible. North of the Buford Highway/McGinnis Ferry Road intersection, large undeveloped and heavily-wooded parcels along White Lane provide an opportunity for additional housing on higher ground, and open space along the creek bed leading to Suwanee Creek and its greenway. Although difficult to accomplish, Buford Highway in this stretch should preserve its rural, tree-lined character. Finally, in the areas of newer subdivisions, future development should follow the current small-lot single-family pattern.

LAND USE AREAS AND DEVELOPABLE QUANTITIES IN 2030:

Land Use	Existing Acres	Acres in 2030
Single Family	309	269
Multi-Family	85	85
MU Village	0	109
MU Center	0	13
Mixed-Use	1	0
Comm/Retail	28	28
Office	17	44
Industrial	2	0
Institutional	50	74
Parks/Recreation	72	76
Vacant	133	0

Development	New Growth	Total Quantities
Residential	306 units	2,404 units
Comm/Retail	134,444 sf	440,476 sf
Office	223,889 sf	309,444 sf
Institutional		74 acres
Parks/Recreation		76 acres

Table 3.5-a⁸

⁸ Calculation of developable quantities:

- Residential: Low density = 4 units per acre
Multi-family = 12 units per acre
- Commercial/Retail: Stand alone = 0.25 FAR
Within mixed-use developments: Low density = 5,000 sf per acre
- Office: Low density = 5,000 sf per acre
- Mixed-Use Village: 2/3 of total area = residential and 1/3 of total area = commercial/retail
- Mixed-Use Centers: 1/3 of total area = residential and 2/3 of total area = office and commercial/retail

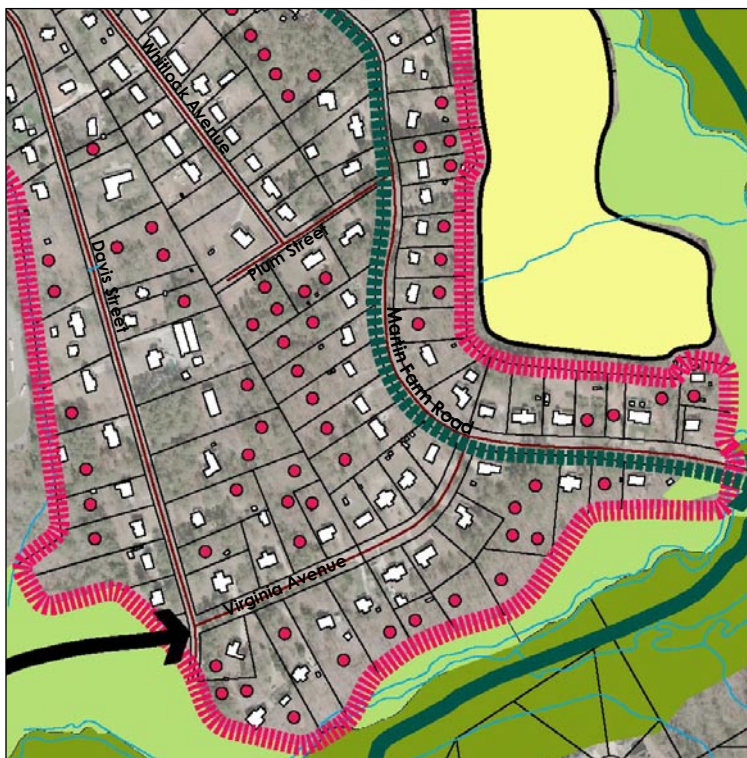
Implementation Measures

Goals	Implementation Measures
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an update of the Old Town Master Plan, that investigates ways to add infill development, preserve the existing historic and rural character, revitalize the area, as well as considers the form and character of a "Gateway District" along Buford Highway on and around Russell Street • Undertake a small-area planning effort that focuses on future development for the parcels on either side of Buford Highway from McGinnis Ferry Road to Davis Street • Undertake a small-area planning effort for the undeveloped parcels north of the Buford Highway – McGinnis Ferry Road intersection, especially the area along White Lane • Revisit / revise the Old Town Overlay District regulations as necessary to reflect the outcomes of the Old Town Master Plan update
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the Old Town Master Plan update, examine the housing implications (diversity, affordability) of an infill strategy that preserves the existing rural character of the city's historic core • Evaluate the provision of senior housing in the Old Town area and identify potential locations / strategies for increasing opportunities as necessary • Evaluate the possibility of incentive programs for improving quality and maintenance of Old Town housing in need
Community Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the support and participation of the current property owner, consider marketing, expanding or in some way formalizing as a city cultural resource the bluegrass music concerts that occur on the rural compound along Stonecypher Road • Pursue improving the seven-acre tract of city-owned land along Buford Highway as a rural preservation "farm park" • Initiate a feasibility study to investigate the potential for a performing arts center in Old Town, or as otherwise part of a city-wide effort
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study the transportation, urban design and policy implications of maintaining Buford Highway as a rural corridor; and explore the possibility of removing the state highway designation from the McGinnis Ferry – Suwanee Dam Road segment and reassigning it to Peachtree Industrial Boulevard • Improve connections for vehicles and pedestrians between Martin Farm Road and Stonecypher Road • Study the possibility of new vehicular and pedestrian connections between Eva Kennedy Road and Scales Road • Improve pedestrian facilities in Old Town by the addition of sidewalks and multiuse trails, to enhance mobility both inside and across the Character Area

<p>Natural and Historic Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider implementing a historic preservation overlay or ordinance for the most valuable sections of Old Town • Support the preservation of the existing tree canopy by partnering with groups like the Georgia Conservancy, the Georgia Native Plant Society, and others to inventory significant trees in the Old Town urban forest
<p>Economic Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for expanding local retail around Main Street through physical enhancements like adaptive reuse / new development projects or programs offering grants, tax abatement and other incentives

Target Area Plan

The target area plan for Old Town illustrates the infill strategy on existing large single-family parcels, where new homes have been added to the rear of the wooded lots with shared driveways accessing Davis Street and Martin Farm Road. The resulting subdivision pattern preserves the varied lot widths, and roughly doubles density without compromising the neighborhood's character. Should property owners wish to assemble tracts for redevelopment, this also could be appropriate provided the design is sensitive to the area and enhances rather than detracts from the overall community.





-  Existing Building Footprints
-  Conceptual Infill Strategy

Figure 3.5-a Conceptual infill strategy in Old Town

The target area plan also illustrates one possible approach for the Russell Street gateway area, with two-story mixed-use buildings lining Russell Street from Buford Highway to White Street. To the north, townhouses or mixed-use commercial buildings transition between the gateway area and the higher densities of Town Center; while to the south the more single-family detached context of White Street provides a setting for “Suwanee Flats” – a grouping of three-story buildings designed as large homes

but containing ground-floor residents that could serve the needs of seniors. The Suwanee Flats are reproduced across Buford Highway, with the site layout incorporating a central open space court mirrored to the south that establishes a view corridor to Main Street.

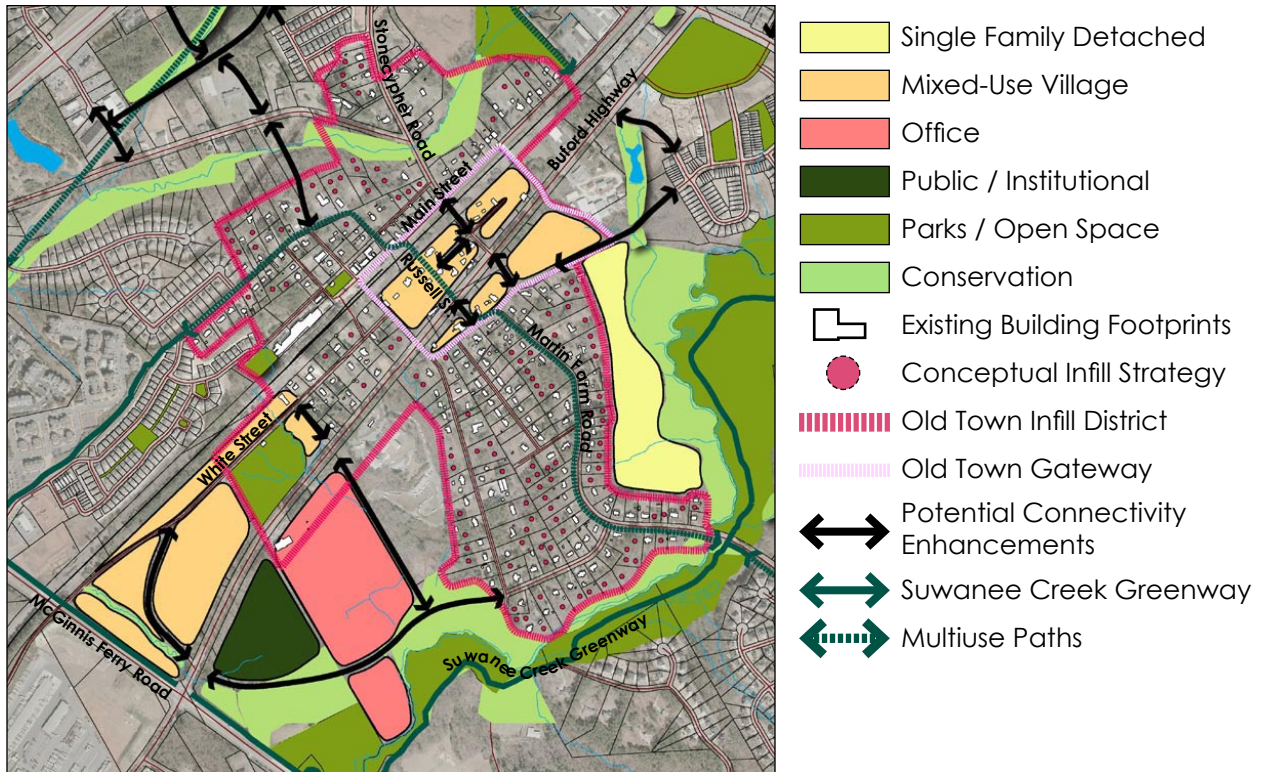


Figure 3.5-b Historic Old Town Target Area Plan

Note: The planning and development shown for this target area is only a conceptual approach showing possible growth in the area.



View looking east along Buford Highway towards Town Center