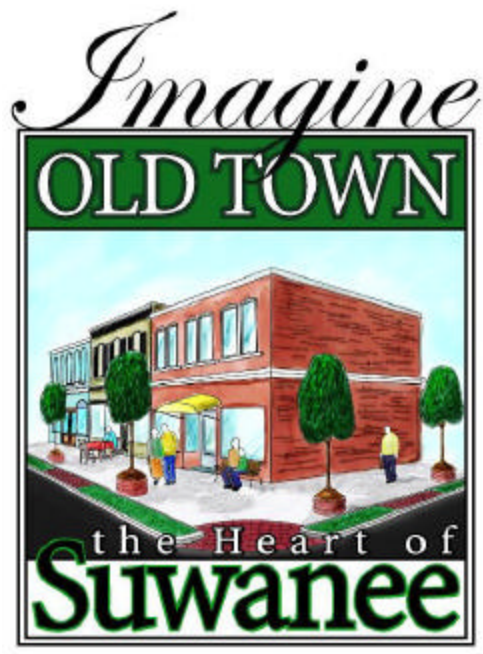


Suwanee Old Town Master Plan Report

February 19, 2002



Executive Summary

New, exciting developments are planned for the historic part of Suwanee, Georgia. Like many other historic railroad towns, the advent of the car and the construction of the highway system have left the center of town behind in an almost forgotten world. The historic Old Town Suwanee area, located along Main Street where it crosses Scales and Russell Roads, was once a vibrant center with homes, shops and offices. New subdivisions and strip malls have sprung up along the highways, and local citizens and visitors tend to identify Suwanee more with an interstate exit than any sense of history.

The City of Suwanee has taken several aggressive steps to reestablish its historic downtown area as the heart of its community. In 2000, the City was designated a Better Hometown Community, which opens the City to alternative funding sources and technical assistance in its redevelopment efforts. The City also recently formed a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to help raise funding, promote redevelopment of the area, and serve as a “development company” for the City if needed. In the Fall of 2000, the City participated in a design charrette with the University of Georgia, which produced some design concepts and ideas that the City wanted to take a step further and incorporate into an executable plan of action.

Inspired by the spirit and intent of the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Program, the City hired a team of planning consultants, Jordan, Jones & Goulding (JJG) and Urban Collage, in April 2001 to assist them with the plan’s development. The plan drawing presented on the following page, **Figure ES-1**, is one key product of this effort. It illustrates a community vision for the area that was the result of extensive public involvement, and one that supports the goals of the LCI program by encouraging the development of a live-work-play environment.

Currently the historic downtown is not highly visible from major transportation routes. Many people that pass by Old Town on Buford Highway and Suwanee Dam Road are not even aware it is there. A key objective of this project was to assess the overall area and identify an appropriate

location for a traditional, mixed-use town center, one that symbolizes Suwanee and helps to draw attention to the old downtown. It is intended that all new development will be designed in a complementary manner that highlights the Old Town’s historic character whether along Main Street or Buford Highway.

The Old Town Master Plan is the culmination of many hours of study. The City explored the possibility of encouraging significant new growth and development in the heart of Old Town along Main Street. Responding to a lack of visibility, access, road capacity, sewer and other infrastructure, as well as the wishes of current residents, the City decided to focus efforts on existing undeveloped land within the study area that does not have the same constraints. The City chose to focus efforts around the proposed library on Main Street and on 60 undeveloped acres across from City Hall while simultaneously supporting appropriate redevelopment and infill development in and around the Main Street/Scales Road area.

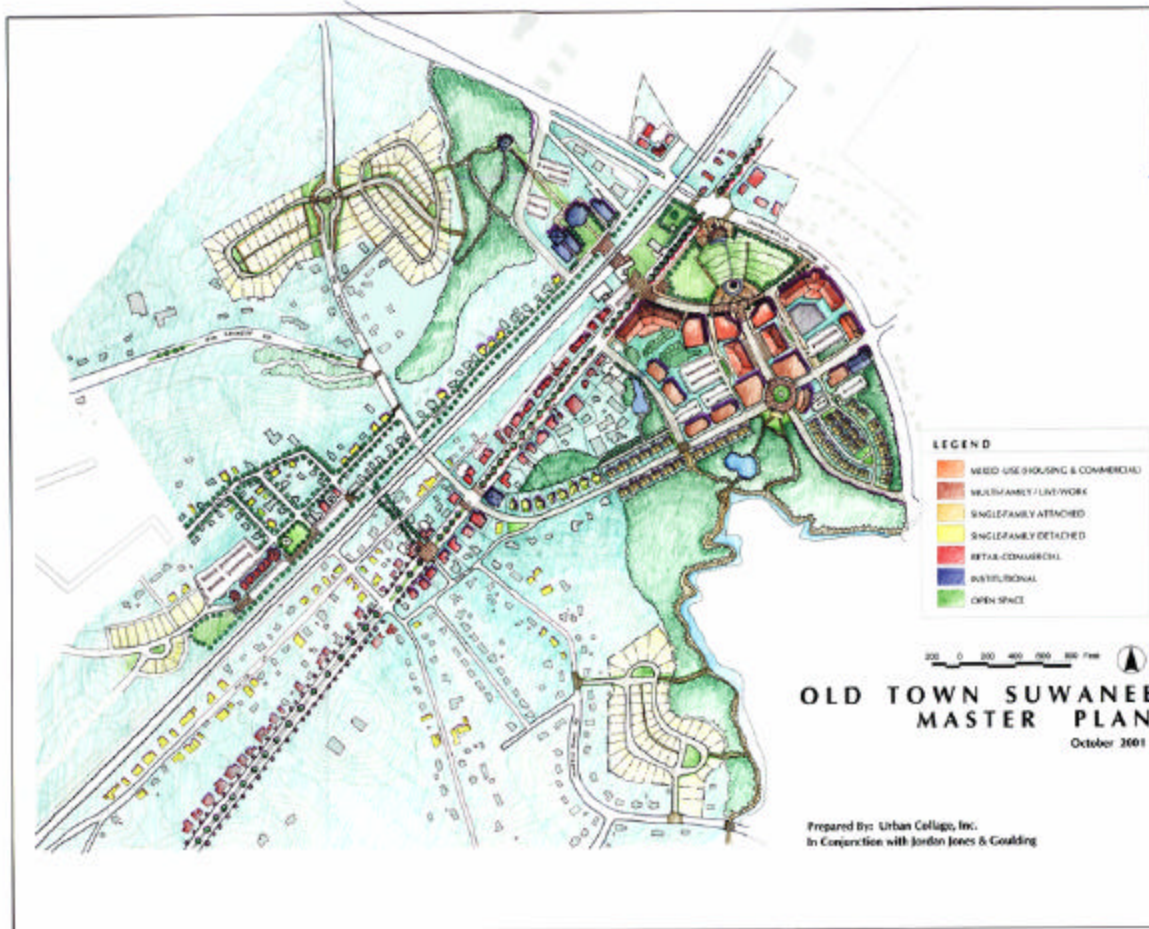
The Old Town Master Plan establishes a vision that can be achieved only through a combination of public investment, careful planning and active promotion.

Key public investments needed to make this plan a reality include:

- ♦ Creation of a new Town Square;
- ♦ Encourage complementary uses for new and



Figure ES -1
Old Town Suwanee Master Plan



Note: A larger fold-out version of this plan can be found in Section 5, page 53.
Source: Urban Collage, February 2002.

infill development

- ◆ Support for the construction of a new county library;
- ◆ Development of a multi-modal transportation system; and
- ◆ Improvement of infrastructure in the historic Old Town Suwanee area.

Capitalizing on its access and existing civic uses a new Town Square is proposed at the corner of Buford Highway and Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road, directly across from City Hall. It will include a new town amphitheater (illustrated in

Figure ES-2). The Town Square also will serve as a community gathering spot, a passive recreation area and the focal point for a new mixed-use development.

The proposed mixed-use development as drawn would be a true live-work-play community that would include approximately 82,000 square feet of institutional uses, 49,600 square feet of retail commercial space and 249,400 square feet of mixed housing/commercial. It is estimated that this development could provide an additional 245 single-family parcels, 227 new multi-family and 421 mixed-use housing/commercial units by 2025.

Figure ES -2
Artist rendering of the proposed Amphitheatre



Note: This figure is included as a conceptual drawing only.

Source: Urban Collage, November 2001

Within walking distance of the proposed Town Square, Gwinnett County is planning to build a new library on Main Street in 2003. This new facility will help to draw attention to the downtown area and provide a center for community activities. To link this new library to the Town Square, the city plans to build a pedestrian underpass under the railroad tracks behind City Hall. Once constructed, this tunnel will provide a vital link along a proposed multipurpose path that would stretch from the Richard Trice Trail on Suwanee Creek to a proposed passive park/nature preserve behind the Library.

This new trail will be part of a much larger city multi-purpose path system, and an even greater multi-modal county transportation system. In the coming years, the Gwinnett County Transit system will be operating a local bus route through the study area along Buford Highway. The proposed path and sidewalk system, as well as the addition

of a more urbanized landform, will help support transit ridership.

To help support this new development, the City also proposes to improve Old Town's roadways and public utilities. Much of the Old Town area still relies on septic tanks, and many of its narrow roads are in need of improvement. Through careful planning and public investment, the older portions of town can be brought up to modern standards.

The careful planning needed to implement this plan requires enacting new zoning regulations and the adoption of new land use policies. This plan includes new design standards to help preserve the historic character of the area and to provide a recognizable and unifying theme or look to the area. This plan recommends the adoption of an Old Town Overlay District that requires new buildings in the area be consistent with the setbacks and character of the historic buildings.

Executive Summary

Finally, active promotion of the plan by the Downtown Development Authority and the City is essential for the plan's implementation. Private investment needs to be fostered with careful direction and financial support. Towards this end, it is recommended that the City undertake a full market study to more accurately determine what elements of this plan that the market will support and what adjustments may be needed to ensure that the plan will be a success. As illustrated in **Figures ES-3 and ES-4**, the improvements called for in this plan can have a dramatic impact on the look of Suwanee's Old Town and with continued investment and planning restore the heart of the community. The City and Downtown Development Authority should

continuously examine and evaluate the goals and recommendations outlined in this plan to ensure consistency with the community's priorities. The City may want to consider an annual review of the plan in some form.

Figure ES -3
A new look for Historic Main Street



Source: Urban Collage, October 2001.