

# Suwanee's approach to **LAND USE**



For many decades, around the nation suburban planning largely emphasized separating land uses into distinct districts, such as housing in one area and commercial or industrial uses in others. While this approach offers certain benefits, it often results in a heavy reliance on vehicles to travel between daily destinations. While not abandoning this approach entirely, in the late 1990s Suwanee shifted to allowing and encouraging **well-designed interesting mixed-use areas** where people can live, work, shop, and gather with or without a vehicle.

Prior to this shift, neighborhoods and developments such as Town Center, Old Suwanee, and Village Grove would not have been permitted by the past regulations. This policy evolution places greater emphasis on community design, walkability, and compact development where appropriate while simultaneously preserving and valuing established neighborhoods. The city's 2040 Comprehensive Plan includes a community-developed Vision Statement for what Suwanee should be like in 2040.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

"Suwanee 2040 will be a safe, fun, attractive, inclusive, evolving city with a unique, vibrant downtown that is well-connected to established neighborhoods and commercial/employment opportunities. Neighborhoods farther from downtown will be largely suburban, while development types closer to downtown will be taller, denser, and highly walkable. Town Center will be the city's economic, social, and cultural hub. Historic Old Town will be characterized by a mixture of old and new quaint smaller scale development integrated into the existing fabric. Suwanee Gateway will serve local and regional commercial and employment needs. Established neighborhoods will continue to be an essential source of quality homes attractive to families. Art, parks, greenways, and open space will be important elements for recreation and identity. Suwanee will continue to grow in a deliberate manner than enhances the city's varied communities and quality of life." – **2040 Comprehensive Plan**

## **PLANNING**

To accomplish the city's vision, the city uses various zoning tools and strategies contained within the city's various zoning regulations, master plans, and planning policies. While some suburban communities may be characterized as bedroom communities largely composed of housing, Suwanee strives to achieve a **healthy, exciting, and balanced mix of development types and uses that allow for a more complete community**. When potential projects are considered by the city, they are measured against the city's goals, vision, and comprehensive plan.

## **FORM-BASED APPROACH**

The city heavily focuses on community design and form. Effective land-use planning involves not only identifying appropriate locations for different uses, but also determining the form those uses should take. "Form" refers to the architecture of buildings and their placement in relation to streets, public spaces, and surrounding development. This approach, commonly known as form-based planning, guides development toward a human scale that supports a mix of uses, reinforces walkability, and creates a more compact and connected community.

In Suwanee, this framework helps ensure that growth meets community needs while contributing to a cohesive and livable built environment. That is why in certain areas of the city, newer developments tend to have taller buildings that are closer to the street, with wide sidewalks and parking on-street or placed behind the buildings. This form results in more compact areas like traditional downtowns.

However, compact design is not the only form in Suwanee. Suwanee is composed of various types of development forms. The city's land use vision and goals are outlined and discussed extensively in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The 2040 Plan identifies character areas throughout the city, each with its own form, land use composition, and future development goals.

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## CHARACTER AREAS

Decisions regarding development and redevelopment of areas are made with respect to the existing and planned character of each unique area. Within each of the city's 11 Character Areas, there is an overarching expectation that land uses within these districts include quality design, landscaping, pedestrian amenities, and enhance the overall image of the city. Below are a few examples of the city's character areas:

**TOWN CENTER** is designed with traditional neighborhood principles and compactness.

**HISTORIC OLD TOWN** is developed in a historic pattern on the existing framework.

**PEACHTREE INDUSTRIAL BOULEVARD** is an example of suburban commercial development.

**SMITHTOWN ROAD** is an example of large lot suburban development.

**SUWANEЕ GATEWAY** is transitioning from an aging commercial interstate interchange to a high intensity class 'A' office area with supporting hospitality.

**For more information, please see [Suwanee.com/services/documents-downloads](https://www.suwanee.com/services/documents-downloads) for access to the city's current and previous comprehensive plan and other master plans related to downtown, parks, and pedestrian transportation plans.**