

Code Diagnostic

Task 2.0: Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

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Part I.

Introduction

I. Introduction

A Growing Community

Clayton County is situated 10 miles south of Atlanta, GA and covers approximately 144 square miles. The County hosts seven cities within its borders including College Park, Forest Park, Jonesboro, Lake City, Lovejoy, Morrow, and Riverdale. The current population is approximately 305,000 (the 2020 Census estimated population was 297,000). The population between 2010 and 2024 climbed significantly by 15% (or, at an average annual growth rate of about 1.1% annually) and is expected to increase to roughly 393,000 by 2050. Compared with peer counties in the Metro Atlanta Region, Clayton County ranks near the center in terms of current population, expected population growth, and anticipated employment growth according to the Atlanta Regional Commission's [21-County Data Dashboard](#).

The County benefits from its location, infrastructure, and development potential related to airport access, water supply, and multimodal networks. The County encompasses much of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (about 80%), maintains convenient access to I-75, I-285, I-675, and includes rail service lines via CSX and Norfolk Southern. In fact, Transportation and Utilities is the County's largest industry sector in terms of jobs. However, the County is economically diverse, with targeted plans for growth related to logistics and distribution, manufacturing, healthcare, biosciences, and film production.

The County is strategically investing in its major centers, community nodes, and corridors through commercial infill, transit-oriented development, and mixed-use development. Clayton County is focused on industrial/logistics development, increasing housing supply, securing workforce housing, encouraging density, and preserving its environmental resources (particularly along the Flint River and in southern parts of the County).

Moving Clayton Forward

The County took a significant step towards laying out a vision for its future by adopting [Moving Clayton Forward—A Vision for the Future \(2039\)](#). The County's Comprehensive Plan, completed and adopted in 2024, establishes a vision for the community, outlines growth and preservation mandates for the next two decades, and serves as a blueprint to guide strategic planning and decision-making as to how and where growth will occur through 2039.

A key aspect related to land use and zoning in the Comprehensive Plan is the Future Land Use Map and Character Area Map. The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) identifies land uses anticipated to occur in the long-term over the span of 15-20 years. This map guides long-term planning decisions for the County, including rezonings and zoning amendments. The FLUM breaks down land uses into 15 categories:

1. Agriculture
2. Conservation Residential
3. Low-Density Residential
4. Medium-Density Residential
5. High-Density Residential
6. Mixed-Use
7. Mixed-Use Industrial
8. Neighborhood Commercial

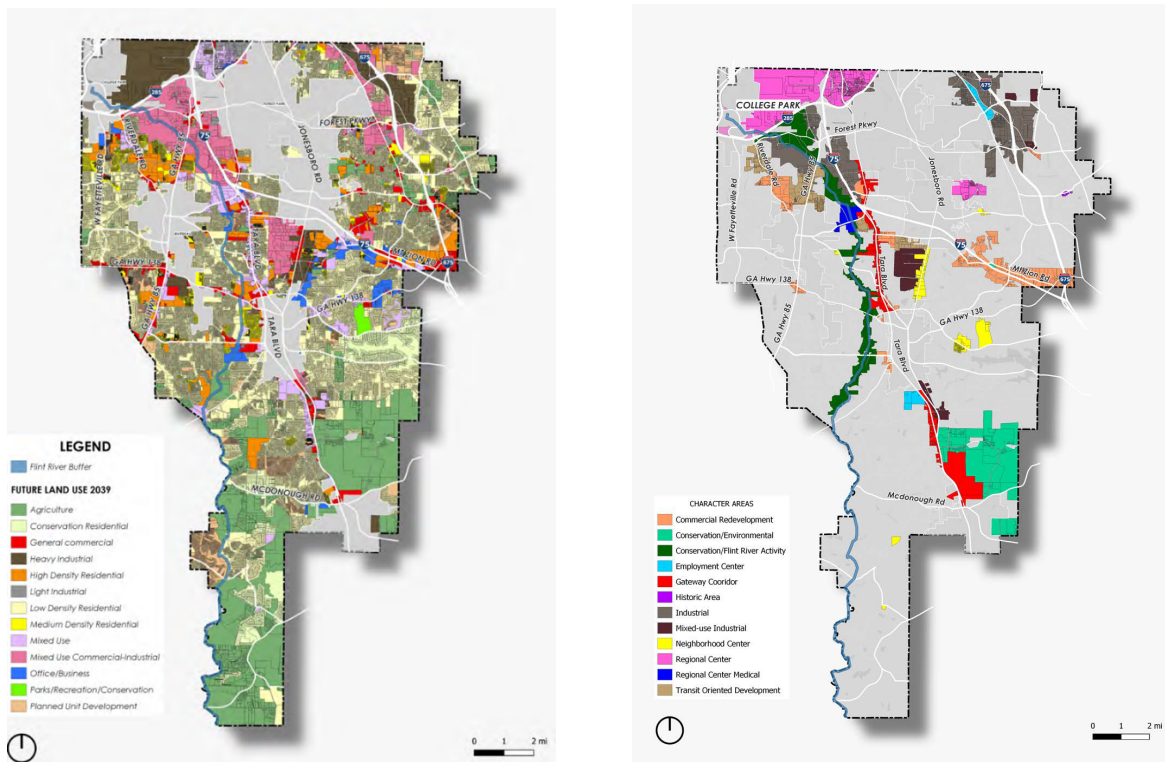


9. General Commercial
10. Office/Business
11. Light Industrial
12. Heavy Industrial
13. Parks Recreation Conservation
14. Public Institutional
15. Transportation/Utilities

The Character Area Map pinpoints specific regions of the County with the greatest potential for future growth and development. The character areas delineate suitable development types for each locale to give a sense of identity for the envisioned future. Character Areas include:

1. Commercial Redevelopment
2. Conservation/Environmental
3. Conservation/Flint River Activity
4. Employment Center
5. Gateway Corridor
6. Historic Area
7. Industrial
8. Mixed-Use Industrial
9. Neighborhood Center
10. Regional Center
11. Regional Center Medical
12. Transit Oriented Development

Figure 1: Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and Character Area Map



What is a Code Diagnostic?

The County’s Zoning Ordinance is the principal tool to implement the Comprehensive Plan by regulating the use, development, and design of land and ensuring the general health, safety, and well-being of the community. In general, the Zoning Ordinance should reflect County policy, which is laid out in the Comprehensive Plan, master plans, and other planning documents. As these documents are updated, there are often gaps between policy and zoning regulations. This requires an update to the zoning regulations to align with current policy and the County’s current and future needs.

Clayton County has engaged with a consultant team--Sizemore Group, Sycamore Consulting, and White Smith Cousino--to review and update its Zoning Ordinance. The Code Diagnostic is the first key deliverable in a larger process to identify recommendations for comprehensive revisions to the County-wide code. This report is intended to assist County staff in implementing necessary revisions.

The primary purpose of the Code Diagnostic is to describe how revised Zoning Ordinance can best implement the Comprehensive Plan. This Code Diagnostic takes a deep dive into priority issues expressed through the comprehensive planning process and those issues outlined by County staff.

How This Report is Written

This report assesses the County’s existing Zoning Ordinance and provides a blueprint for necessary revisions, based on observations of the consultant team and input received from County officials, stakeholders, and the advisory committee. Revisions include big-picture items (such as how to reorganize the Zoning Ordinance) to specific regulatory issues (such as landscaping standards and nonconformities).

The report is arranged by topic where each section provides further background context of issues, the consultant team’s findings, proposed alternatives, and recommendations for change. The County should consider the recommendations in this report with public input received during the code revision process.

Key Planning Documents

The consultant team reviewed a series of key planning documents, including the County’s Comprehensive Plan and relevant and recent studies, such as master plans, feasibility studies, and planning initiatives. These documents ensure a holistic approach to the analysis and preliminary recommendations within this report. An overview of each document reviewed is outlined in **Table 1: Key Planning Documents**.

Table 1: Key Planning Documents

Moving Clayton Forward (2024)	Clayton County’s Comprehensive Plan—A Vision for the Future (2039), was completed and adopted in 2024. The plan outlines growth and preservation goals over the next two decades and serves as a blueprint to guide strategic planning and decision-making as to how and where growth will occur through 2039.
Tara Boulevard Livable Center Initiative (2024)	A study aimed at reimagining an 11-mile corridor segment of Tara Boulevard and identifying three nodes (Tara Gateway, Jonesboro, and Lovejoy).



Table 1: Key Planning Documents

<u>Clayton Connects</u> (2015)	Clayton County's Greenway Trail Master Plan identifies 112 linear miles of parks and trails weaving through the County.
<u>Northwest Clayton Livable Center Initiative</u> (2004 Adoption and 2025 Update)	A study aimed at enhancing mobility and connectivity, promoting housing and TOD, and establishing a regional identity for NW Clayton.,
<u>MARTA's Clayton County High-Capacity Transit Transit-Supportive Land Use Study</u> (2022)	A study to secure funding for transit lines, development transit supportive zoning, and promote economic development around high-capacity corridors.
<u>The Aerotropolis Atlanta Blueprint 2.0</u> (2022)	An update to the 2016 document, this document establishes priorities and goals for Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) for areas within a 10-mile radius of the Hartsville-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.
<u>AeroATL, Greenway Model Mile</u> (2021)	A blueprint for developing a model Greenway Plan that implements concepts from Aerotropolis goals and objectives along the Flint River.
<u>Clayton County Water Authority 2020 Strategic Master Plan</u> (2020)	The County's master plan to addressing infrastructure needs regarding information technology, stormwater management, water production, distribution and conveyance, water reclamation, and general services.
<u>Aerotropolis Freight Cluster Plan</u> (2019)	A study focusing on freight industry operations within the South Metro ATL area.
Aerotropolis Atlanta Land Use Analysis and Recommendations (2019)	A land use assessment by the ARC includes action items focused on large-scale zoning efforts.
<u>AACID Transit Feasibility Study</u> (2019)	A feasibility study to determine what elements are needed to implement and enhance mobility and accessibility within the region.
<u>Clayton County Comprehensive Transportation Plan</u> (2018)	An update to the vision for the County's transportation network.
<u>ULI's Comprehensive Development Strategy to Implement the Atlanta's Aerotropolis: Recommendations for the Mountain View Area</u>	An Urban Land Institute (ULI) study focusing on the Mountain View area to inform zoning and land use recommendations.
<u>Huie Nature Preserve Master Plan</u> (2017)	A vision to transform 712 acres of the Huie Site to provide new recreational, community, and educational opportunities.



Big Ideas Summary

The following themes, or “big ideas,” demonstrate how the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite can implement the Comprehensive Plan and associated planning documents’ aspirational goals for economic development, land use, transportation, housing, and other community objectives.

1

Streamline the Development Process

Expedite development, clarify reviewing procedures, and clean up enforcement language.

2

Focus on Centers & Corridors

Implement Transit-Oriented Development, mixed-use development, and commercial redevelopment while enhancing strategies for placemaking, pedestrians, and interconnectivity.

3

Spur Development in Growth Areas

Tailor zoning strategies to spur economic development for Mountain View, Southern Regional Medical Center, Flint River Activity Center, and Rex Mill Cultural/Arts Area.

4

Strengthen Neighborhoods

Integrate accessory dwelling units, smaller lots and homes, compatible neighborhood infill, enhance development transitions into neighborhoods, and improve design quality.

5

Enhance Quality of Development

Address building and site design elements including open space and conservation, buffer yards, landscaping, signs, and lighting.

6

Improve Code User Experience

Introduce illustrations, modernize the use table and associated definitions, use straightforward language with commentary.



1. STREAMLINE THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

It is important that the Zoning Ordinance “make the right things easy” and avoid unnecessary delays in the development review process. The Zoning Ordinance should establish clear review processes to coordinate development and redevelopment and to set effective procedures for zoning administration. Below are several ways in which the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite will address this objective.

- **Expedite Certain Types of Development.** The Zoning Ordinance should formalize a process to expedite certain types of development offering a high degree of livability, economic prosperity, and high-quality development that otherwise might not occur through the standard development review process. [See Development Review]
- **Clarify Zoning Procedures.** The Zoning Ordinance should clearly indicate the procedural steps for the applicant, staff, and elected/appointed officials. [See Development Review]
- **Clean Up Nonconformity & Enforcement Language.** The Zoning Ordinance should include enforceable and legal tools to manage nonconformities. [See Nonconformities]

2. FOCUS ON CENTERS & CORRIDORS

The Zoning Ordinance should focus growth within centers and facilitate redevelopment along key gateway corridors. Below are several ways that the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite will address this objective.

- **Implement TOD and Transit Supportive Land Use Around Key Nodes:** Codify new and/or revise existing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) standards to implement MARTA Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Align the Zoning Ordinance with transit supportive land use recommendations around transit-oriented development nodes throughout the County. [See Transit Oriented Development]
- **Support & Balance Mixed-Use Development.** The County's mixed-use districts should facilitate and balance residential and commercial uses at differing scales, while promoting a business-friendly environment, high-quality development, and improving livability. [See Mixed-Use Districts]
- **Advance Mobility, Accessibility, and Connectivity.** Support county-wide trails and sidewalk networks. Update parking, access, pedestrian, and bicycle standards to connect the community with key nodes and future BRT. [See III. Development Strategies]
- **Encourage Design Flexibility.** The County's Planned Development Districts offer developers flexibility where the base zoning districts cannot achieve the desired development or redevelopment outcomes. Use incentive zoning to encourage better development with community benefits.

3. SPUR DEVELOPMENT IN GROWTH AREAS

One of the key goals of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite effort is to encourage a business-friendly environment. The Zoning Ordinance should introduce innovative zoning practices to foster entrepreneurship and creativity. Below are several ways that the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite will address this objective.

- **Prioritize Redevelopment at Tara Boulevard Node and Grow MedTech and Supporting Mixed-Land Uses in the Southern Regional Medical Center area.** Prioritize Tara Boulevard and the Southern Regional Medical Center as a key gateway and support mixed-use redevelopment focused on employment, retail, office, multi-family, MedTech, and supporting uses. [See Character Areas]
- **Focus Development Efforts and Public Investment in Mountain View:** Prioritize growth in Mountain View as a key international gateway into the County. Ensure adequate infrastructure, multimodal transit, high-quality development, and a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- **Support Mixed-Use Industrial Centers.** The County's industrial and logistics areas, such as the Fort Gillem area and Northwest Clayton, are key assets, with opportunities for employment and economic opportunity. Some industrial zones should accommodate a mixed-use, walkable pattern. [See Industrial Districts]
- **Support Flint River Initiatives.** Ensure land uses adjacent to the Flint River support future trail development a. [See Trail-Oriented Development]
- **Rehabilitate Rex Mill Village.** The Zoning Ordinance should create a framework for Rex Mill Village that coordinates efforts underway by the Atlanta Regional Commission to create a cultural/arts destination for this historic area. [See Arts & Cultural District]



4. STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOODS

The Zoning Ordinance should maintain the integrity of existing neighborhoods, while accommodating a broader mix of housing types and smaller lot sizes. Below are several ways in which the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite will address this objective.

- **Ensure Housing Options for All Residents.** Introduce a variety of housing types—senior housing, millennial housing, aging in place, affordable housing, workforce housing, and missing middle housing—in Clayton County neighborhoods. [See Residential Districts]
- **Integrate Neighborhood-Scale Mixed-Use Nodes.** Provide neighborhood services convenient to residents that lack access to commercial/retail uses. Support mixed-use development with a variety of housing types and affordability. [See Mixed-Use Districts]
- **Develop Neighborhood Transitions & Buffer Yards.** The Zoning Ordinance should develop effective separation distances and transitions between neighborhoods and more intense uses, such as industrial districts and residential uses of higher intensities. [See Neighborhood Transitions]
- **Clarify Building Design for Residential Buildings.** The Zoning Ordinance should develop consistent standards related to building design for residential uses. [See Building & Site Design]

5. ENHANCE QUALITY OF DEVELOPMENT

The Zoning Ordinance should update design and development standards so that they are clear and deliver the County's preferred development outcomes. Below are several ways in which the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite will address this objective.

- **Manage Industrial Growth Near Residential Uses:** Focus industrial and warehouse growth in areas that are compatible to this type of use and related transportation needs. Provide adequate buffers and transitions in locations near neighborhoods. [See Industrial Districts and Landscaping & Buffer Yards]
- **Enhance the Visual Appeal and Quality of Redevelopment Along Corridors:** Address blighted and abandoned buildings and ensure new commercial infill is pedestrian-friendly, promotes connectivity, and is visually appealing. [See Commercial Infill, Nonconformities, and Enforcement]
- **Leverage Open Space and Natural Resources as a Community Benefit.** Provide parks, open space, and natural resources at a variety of scales and typologies. [See Open Space]
- **Clarify Site & Building Design.** The Zoning Ordinance should set clear standards related to parking, exterior lighting, landscaping, signs, and building design. [See Building & Site Design, Parking, and Signs]
- **Establish Dimensional Standards.** The Zoning Ordinance should establish consistent rules of measurement and clear expectations for common dimensions, including height, lot area, depth, width, and setbacks. [See Graphics]

6. IMPROVE CODE ORGANIZATION, FORMATTING, & USABILITY

The Zoning Ordinance should have a clear and navigable structure and clear language, so that all users can understand it. Below are several ways to address this objective.

- **Restructure the Zoning Ordinance.** Organize and format the Zoning Ordinance in a logical manner to improve navigation by all users. [See Organization]
- **Introduce Tables, Diagrams, and Graphics.** Break up the text with supporting tables, charts, diagrams, and graphics that illustrate the intent of the zoning language. [See Graphics]
- **Use Straightforward Language & Create a User-Friendly Code.** Provide accessible, user-friendly, and easy to navigate text with clear terminology and definitions. [See Formatting and Legibility]
- **Modernize the Use Table.** Enhance the use table with color coding and provide up to date definitions associated for all uses. [See Uses]



Part II.

Zoning

Framework

II. Zoning Framework

What is a Zoning Framework?

A zoning framework represents the County's approach to regulating allowable land use and development. This can range from conventional zoning tools (such as Euclidean zoning) to alternative or innovative strategies (such as "form-based" zoning, development patterns, or incentive zoning). The County's current Zoning Ordinance is structured using conventional zoning, offering a set of base zoning districts, special/overlay districts, and planned unit development district options.

Local governments can employ zoning strategies based on a variety of factors, such as staff resources, sophistication of the development community, political interest, and expressed desires of the community. Therefore, a zoning framework can either evolve incrementally over time, or transform completely, depending on the place. An incremental approach takes existing regulatory concepts and adjusts them to meet current land development policies. It assumes that the existing pattern of development does not meet all policy goals and that small tweaks or adjustments will improve them. Meanwhile, a transformational approach might start from scratch with an entirely new system, new concepts, and/or regulatory requirements. This approach assumes that existing zoning conditions fundamentally do not meet the needs of development.

Alternative zoning approaches ensure development outcomes that are otherwise not guaranteed or controlled through conventional zoning approaches. *Table 2: Comparison of Zoning* below provides a list of common approaches used for zoning. The table offers a description for each type followed by a comparison of the advantages and limitations of each.



Table 2: Comparison of Zoning Approaches

Zoning Approach	Advantages	Limitations
Conventional Zoning “Euclidean” zoning is the traditional and most common method of zoning, separating land into distinct districts and defining what uses are allowed.	• Most common and widely used • Clear structure with minimal ambiguity in applicability	• Perceived as inflexible and less dynamic, which may hinder innovative development and design
Overlay Special zoning superimposed over the base zoning district establishing additional rules or standards to address specific issues or targeted goals for a given area (e.g., historic; corridor; conservation; etc.)	• Addresses unique goals for defined areas to maintain character, environmental protection, or corridor redevelopment • May deviate from base zoning standards to introduce incentives or provide relief of standards	• Adds complexity by creating another layer of zoning regulation • Overlapping regulations may create inconsistencies • Requires additional administrative resources to enforce
Design Guidelines Typically, a separate document outside the zoning code with nonbinding design guidelines or provision overseen by a discretionary advisory board	• Companion document to the Zoning Ordinance that is easily amended • Encourages negotiation and discretion between applicants and the County • Often results in custom and varied design outcomes	• Adds complexity by adding a review process, which adds time and cost • Often lacks clarity on binding/non-binding provisions • If they are optional, applicants are free to ignore them
Performance Zoning Focuses on the “outcome” and development impacts using quantitative metrics (i.e., percentages, ratios, or other numerical thresholds)	• Effective in constrained conditions, such as topographical issues • Often used for environmental controls (i.e., impervious surface)	• Complicated • While they can cover a variety of situations, they can limit flexibility
Use Patterns Pattern templates for development based on established typologies (e.g., Transit Oriented Development or Traditional Neighborhood Development)	• Aligns with community input for predictable design • Can enable preferred development patterns by right • Suitable for some master planned development	• Potentially difficult to comprehend applicability (i.e. too conceptual) • By right approaches limit public comment on development applications • Often used in areas with large tracts of land/greenfields
Form-Based Zoning (FBC) Regulates physical form and design and emphasizes a building's relationship to the street, rather than the use or activity occurring within the building	• Emphasis is placed on the relationship of building and street • Offers visual approach to addressing bulk, height, and massing • Offers flexibility of use and function within buildings • Can be useful in historic settings, urban districts, downtowns, and corridors, & planned growth areas	• Most are unfamiliar with FBC concept; Difficult to understand (i.e., too conceptual) • Staff and citizens may still want control over allowable uses • Limited in application, since not ideal for addressing other portions of the Zoning Ordinance
Incentive Zoning Entices developers to provide a specified community benefit in return for increased density, height, expedited approvals, etc.	• Offers an effective way to encourage developers to build better design • Offsets costs to applicants for providing community benefits	• Used sparingly and strategically
Hybrid or Composite Zoning Combines elements of conventional Euclidean zoning with other flexible approaches, such as performance-based zoning, incentive zoning, or form-based zoning	• Offers more versatile zoning option; less rigid; with varied outcomes • Prioritizes aesthetics and character of development	• Adds complexity since regulations are more detailed • May increase ambiguity and need for administrative interpretation of standards



Table 3 lists Clayton County's current zoning districts, which includes:

- 10 residential districts;
- 4 office/business districts;
- 5 mixed-use districts
- 5 industrial districts;
- 1 planned unit development district; &
- 10 overlay/special districts.

Table 3: Current District Designations

Residential	
Agriculture	AG
Conservation Subdivision	CS
Estate Residential	ER
Residential 180	RS-180
Residential 110	RS-110
Residential 75	RG-75
Multiple Family Residential	RM
Multiple Family / Single Family	RMTSF
Single-Family Residential Attached Townhome	RTH
Mobile Home District	RMH
Nonresidential	
Office Institutional	OI
Office Institutional Vertical	OIV
Medical Center	MC
Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial	MXI
General Business	GB
Urban Village	UV
Mixed-Use Residential	MXR
Mixed-Use	MU
Medical Mixed-Use	MMX
Light Industrial	LI
Heavy Industrial	HI
Warehouse	WH
Industrial Park	INDP
Lake Marina	
Special/Overlay Districts	
Watershed Protection	WSP
Business Corridor	
Tara Boulevard	
Cherry Hills	
Highway 42	
Panhandle	
Highway 54	
East-West Corridor	
Old Dixie Highway-Tara Boulevard	
Mountain View	
Transit Oriented Development	TOD/RT
Planned Unit Development Districts	
Planned Unit Development	PUD

The consultant team evaluated the County's current zoning districts against the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) [see Figure 1: Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and Character Area Map]. This comparison shows how the existing districts align with the Future Land Use designations envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan. Refer to *Figure 2: Existing and Proposed Zoning Framework* for a comparison of existing and proposed districts.

To better align with the Future Land Use Map, the County can take the following steps to transition from the current zoning framework to a character-based structure.

STEP 1: RENAME DISTRICTS

The zoning district titles should reflect their character, intensity, and/or scale of development, and associate less with the type of uses, since they often vary within the zoning district. Additionally, several of the existing zoning districts contain terminology that is outdated or difficult to understand by agencies outside the planning department (such as the assessor's office). These districts should reflect modern terms of art.

- Retitle RS-180 and RS-110 to "Suburban Residential" to better align with Low-Density Residential FLUM designation.
- Retitle RG-75 to "Neighborhood Infill" to align with Medium-Density Residential FLUM designation.
- Retitle Mobile Home to "Manufactured Home Community".
- Retitle Urban Village to "Village Center" since this zoning district has historically been applied in non-urban settings.
- Retitle "Mixed-Use" to "Community Corridor" since this district is generally applied along the County's corridors.
- Retitle "Mixed-Use Residential" to "Mixed-Use Neighborhood".
- Retitle "Medical Mixed-Use" to "Regional Medical Center".
- Retitle "Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial" to "Industrial Mixed-Use" for simplification.



- Retitle Office Institutional to Office-Low-Rise and retitle Office Institutional Vertical to Office-Mid-Rise.
- Retitle “Industrial Park” to “Flex Industrial” to accommodate a broader mix of uses to support employment centers, such as limited retail and office.

STEP 2: CONSOLIDATE DISTRICTS

The County should consider consolidating districts where possible to reduce the overall number of districts and to simplify their usage and application. Districts with similar uses and dimensional standards warrant consolidation.

- Consolidate “RS-180” and “RS-110” residential districts into a single “Neighborhood Residential” (NR) zoning district, since they have a similar development pattern.
- Consolidate “Warehouse” district with “Light Industrial” and/or “Heavy Industrial” since it is applied sparingly; and revise and develop specific set of standards addressing warehouse use within the development standards of the Zoning Ordinance.
- Consolidate multiple commercial corridor overlays into a single County-wide “Gateway Corridors” overlay. [See Corridor Development Areas]
- Consolidate “Transit-Oriented Development” and “TOD Residential Support” into a single “Transit-Oriented Development” overlay and create subdistricts for core and support.

STEP 3: CREATE NEW DISTRICTS

- Add a “Neighborhood Infill” zoning district to allow for a greater mix of housing types (triplex; quadplex; etc.).
- Add “Neighborhood Business” district to align with Neighborhood Commercial FLUM designation for areas near residential neighborhoods with compatible scale and character.

STEP 4: EXPAND DISTRICTS

- Expand the existing “RM Multi-Family” district into two classifications – Low-Rise Residential (LRR) and Mid-Rise Residential (MRR) to reflect scale and distinguish character and configuration of development.

STEP 5: RECONSIDERATIONS

- Remove “Conservation Subdivision” as a standalone district, and change to a “Conservation Development” typology, which can become an alternative development option for multiple residential districts.



Figure 2: Existing and Proposed Zoning Framework

CURRENT FUTURE LAND USE			EXISTING DISTRICTS		PROPOSED DISTRICTS		ACTIONS				
Residential			Residential		Residential		Rename	Merge	New	Remove	Update
Agriculture	A low-density land use primarily including agricultural uses, forestry, and estate residential areas.		Agricultural	AG	Agricultural	AG					
Conservation Residential	The lowest density of residential uses, intended for single-family housing without use of public utilities, with densities lower than two DUA.		Conservation Subdivision	CS	~~Conservation Subdivision~~	~~CS~~					
			Estate Residential	ER	Estate Residential	ER					
Low-Density Residential	A low-density residential developments which may or may not use public utilities, with densities ranging from 2 to 4 DUA.		Residential	RS-180	Residential- Neighborhood Residential	RS-180 NR-1					
			Residential	RS-110	Residential Neighborhood Residential	RS-110 NR-2					
Medium-Density Residential	A moderate-density residential housing, including some duplex housing with densities ranging from 4 to 8 DUA.		Residential	RG-75	Residential Residential Infill	RG-75 RI					
			Single-Family Detached in Multi-Fa	RMTSF							
High-Density Residential	The highest single-use residential desnity in unincorporated Clayton County, with densities ranging between 8 to 18 DUA.		Mobile Home	RMH	~~Mobile Home~~ Manufactured Home	RMH MH					
			Multi-Family Residential	RM	Low-Rise Residential	LRR					
			Residential Attached Townhome	RTH							
					Mid-Rise Residential	MRR					
Commercial			Commercial		Commercial						
Office/Business	Intended to office, banking, or other personal business services not focused on retail use.		Office Institutional	OI	Office Institutional	OI					
			Office Institutional Vertical	OIV							
					Neighborhood Business	NB					
General Commercial	Intended for land dedicated to non-industrial business uses including retail sales, services, and entertainment facilities, with greater intensities targeting larger businesses.		General Business	GB	General Business	GB					
Mixed-Use			Mixed-Use		Mixed-Use						
Mixed-Use	Allows mixture of retail, residential, and office in a town center format, with densities ranging from 4 to 16 DUA, but higher densities may be allowed w/ certain provisions made for		Urban Village	UV	Urban Village Mixed-Use Village Center	MX-UV MX-NC					
			Mixed Use	MX	~~Mixed-Use~~ Mixed-Use Community Center	MX MX-CC					
			Mixed Use Residential	MXR	~~Mixed-Use Residential~~ Mixed-Use Neighborhood Center	MXR MX-NC					
			Medical Mixed-Use	MMX	~~Medical Mixed-Use~~ Mixed-Use Regional Medical Center Mixed-Use Employment Center	MMX MX-RMC MX-EC					
Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial	Allows mixture of office, commercial, and light industrial in an employment center format, with limits on certain types of office/industrial uses, encouraging walking, bicycling, and transit-ready development.		Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial	MXI	~~Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial~~ Mixed-Use Industrial Center	MXI MX-IC					
Industrial			Industrial		Industrial						
Light Industrial	Land dedicated to assembly, warehousing, wholesale trade facilities, and other industrial uses might coexist with some business uses.		Light Industrial	LI	Light Industrial	LI					
			Industrial Park	INDP							
			Warehouse	WH							
Heavy Industrial	Land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing, and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses with adverse		Heavy Industrial	HI	Heavy Industrial	HI					
Planned Development			Planned Development		Planned Development						
Planned Unit Development	Provides flexibility in regulation of land development, encourages innovation in design, layout, and type of structure; balanced mixture of residential and commercial; etc.		Planned Unit Development	PUD	Planned Development	PD-R					
Overlays			Overlays		Overlays						
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	Intended for land dedicated to active or passive recreation uses, either publicly or privately owned.		Watershed Protection	WSP	Watershed Protection	WSP					
			Lake Marina	LM	Lake Marina	LM					
			Panhandle Area		~~Panhandle Area~~ Conservation						
			Cherry Hills		Cherry Hills						
			Mountain View		Mountain View						
			Highway 54		Highway 54						
			Tara Boulevard		Gateway Corridors						
			Highway 42 Corridor								
			East-West Corridor								
			Old Dixie Highway-Tara Boulevard								
			Business Corridor								
Transit-Oriented Development	Allows moderate to high-density near trabsit stations or a range of mobility options, with a mix of uses and supporting uses, with densities at a minimum 15 DUA.		Transit Oriented Developmetn	TOD	Transit Oriented Developmetn	TOD					
			TOD Residential Support	RT	See Residential Infill District						

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:
ZONING DISTRICT FRAMEWORK

The consultant team recommends taking the following actions:

Character-Based Zoning Districts
Implement a character-based zoning district framework, using the Transition Table as an implementation tool, to align with the Future Land Use Map in the Comprehensive Plan.

Base Districts

AGRICULTURAL & RURAL DISTRICTS

Agricultural District
Agricultural lands make up nearly 20% of the County’s current land use distribution. Rural character areas include abundant woodlands, natural landscape, agriculture lands, open space, floodplains, and wetlands. Residential areas, like farmsteads and estate lots, are typically served by septic and well water and transportation infrastructure includes a network of country lanes with little to no sidewalks.

These areas are experiencing pressure to transition to conventional suburban-style residential development patterns. Along with this change comes the demand for water and sewer service extensions, new community facilities, road improvements, and similar services accompanying growth. The Comprehensive Plan recommends reducing the scattered rural residential development and targeting low-density residential development for these areas.

The chart below shows approaches used by counties in Georgia that have recently completed an update to their respective zoning districts. Common zoning strategies for rural residential areas include allowing agricultural and low-density residential uses and provisions for larger lots.

A Look at Other Communities

Community	Approach
Oconee County, GA	Includes options for low-density rural residential areas that support the county's Rural Places & Country Estates place types. AR and AR-3 districts, the Agricultural Residential Three-Acre District, are for general farming areas where some development of single-family residential areas is occurring. Standards include a 50-ft buffer area for new development adjacent to AR districts.
Hall County, GA	Includes an option for agricultural residential (AR) development for areas in the county to be developed and reserved for agricultural, residential, and compatible commercial or recreational purposes. AR-1 district allows a 1-acre lot minimum when services are provided by public water, and a 1.5-acre lot minimum. Otherwise, the lot frontage width is 50 feet.
Gwinnett County, GA	Includes an agricultural residential (RA-200) district, comprised of land having a predominantly rural character, to provide for agriculture, forestry, and very low-density residential uses, and to discourage subdivision of land for urban



development requiring urban services as a public water supply and sanitary sewers. The minimum lot size is 40,000, and the minimum lot width is 200 feet. Gwinnett County also includes a Residential Large Lot District with a minimum lot size of 32,000 square feet and a minimum lot width of 125 feet.

To mitigate loss of rural and agricultural land, the County might consider alternative methods of development. The County already employs conservation subdivisions as a strategy to protect open space. This concentrates the allowable developable area while maximizing open space in the process. This type of development reduces infrastructure costs and keeps the best soils for active farming. However, staff noted that developers do not use conservation subdivisions as hoped. The Consultant Team will review the standards and make suggestions to streamline provisions and introduce incentives for developers to encourage the use of conservation subdivisions.

The Agriculture District should support farming culture and strengthen the rural economy. The updated Zoning Ordinance may expand agricultural options by allowing agrarian support businesses, such as agri-business operations and farm-to-table restaurants, where farmers can sell products grown or produced on the property. Allowing these types of uses enables farmers to diversify income, maximize the productive use of farmland, and reduce pressure to subdivide agricultural land into residential lots.

Stakeholders and County staff have expressed the need for additional flexibility that supports agricultural operations and preserves Clayton County's farming heritage. The updated Zoning Ordinance should consider permitting agrarian support businesses that complement agricultural production and allow farmers to market goods produced on-site.

In addition, supporting uses such as wineries, farm markets, event venues, and agritourism activities should be evaluated. Agritourism, with visitor experiences or tourism-related activities, can help educate the community about agriculture and food production, provide supplemental income for farmers, and contribute to the County's local tourism economy while reinforcing the long-term viability of agricultural land uses. The Consultant Team will audit the County's agritourism definition and uses to ensure such uses are permitted as a secondary use in the Agriculture District and align with best practices.

RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

Clayton County's residential areas should strive to become complete neighborhoods, where residents have opportunities to live, learn, worship, recreate, and socialize. The County's zoning districts should accommodate a variety of neighborhood-scale uses while maintaining the integrity of neighborhoods. While some residential zoning districts are expected to remain unchanged, others may transition to more intense uses over time.

Estate Residential District

The Estate Residential District is generally applied near or on Lake Spivey and in the southern portion of the County. Most lots are long and narrow. According to staff, more than 60% of requested variances were related to the lot coverage and setbacks within the Estate Residential District. As part of the Zoning Ordinance rewrite, the consultant team will evaluate the requested variances and update the dimensional standards to reflect commonly granted variance requests. For example, the revised Zoning Ordinance could reduce the minimum lot width and adjust lot coverage to 12%.

Low-Density Residential

Low-Density Residential, namely the RS-180 and RS-110 zoning districts, make up the largest portion of the County's current land use distribution at nearly 40% (26,510 acres). These areas were mostly developed in the post-war era over the last 50-60 years. These established residential neighborhoods generally maintain single-family detached homes in a suburban development pattern.



One of the challenges of the County's low-density residential districts is its inflexibility with regard to lot size and unit size. The Comprehensive Plan revealed that the market demand for housing is changing drastically due to key demographic changes. GIS analysis reported that majority population segments of the County are trending as follows:

- 21%: Young, married couples with children in affordable homes in suburban areas;
- 11%: Non-native English speakers in single-parent or single-person households
- 15%: Families in semi-rural or low-density areas
- 7%: Young adults living alone or in shared nonfamily dwellings

Therefore, it is critical that the Zoning Ordinance accommodate the needs and housing price points of these various users. A proven strategy to address housing need and affordability is eliminating or significantly reducing lot size and unit size requirements. Allowing smaller lots in low-density residential areas could create opportunities for homeownership in established neighborhoods.

The table below offers a sample of commonly used zoning strategies in other communities in Georgia. Most communities still utilize a conventional method of distinguishing low-density residential districts by their physical characteristics, either by the type of housing product allowed, minimum lot size, or minimum frontage width.

A Look at Other Communities

Community	Approach
Liberty County, GA	Includes a range of single-family residential districts distinguished by their minimum lot area (R-8 for 8,000 SF; R-12 for 12,000 SF; R-20 for 20,000 SF; etc.).
Hall County, GA	Establishes a baseline minimum lot area for its low-density residential district (R-1) of 0.5 acres when serviced by public sewer or private system, and 0.8 acres otherwise.
Oconee County, GA	Establishes an R-1 Single-Family Residential district for one-family residences and related uses at low suburban residential densities on land served by water and/or sewer systems.
Berkeley County, SC	Berkeley County's Zoning Ordinance consolidates single-family residential districts into a single district, R1, to implement the land use goals of new residential growth areas within urbanizing areas of the county. The district maintains minimum lot requirements that relate to public water and sewer availability. The minimum lot size is 14,000 sq. ft. for lots with available water and sewer, and 30,000 sq. ft. for individual wells and septic tanks. The district establishes a chart establishing minimum yard requirements by parcel size. The benefits of this approach are that it integrates single-family residential lots into one district versus separating multiple districts for the same type of development.

The County should consider consolidating its single-family districts into a consolidated "Neighborhood Residential" district. Because the existing districts are achieving a similar character and form, a single district would simplify and reduce the number of districts trying to achieve the same outcome. The consolidated district could contain a chart outlining dimensional requirements by lot size to address the varying lot sizes and setbacks. Additionally, the consolidated district could include language to preserve the context and character of existing neighborhoods to maintain established development patterns.

The County should evaluate whether to continue requiring water and sewer connections for low-density residential districts. Portions of, if not the whole subdivision, of Paradise Haven Park, Lake Tara, and Pinebrook Heights are on septic and are therefore considered nonconforming conditions. The County could remove the requirement altogether from the district standards. Or, the County could establish a separate minimum lot size requirement for lots utilizing septic and well water. Separately, the County could also only require water/sewer connections for future residential growth areas.



Medium-Density Residential

Medium-density residential includes residential development of moderate densities that take on compact forms, either attached or detached. These include Townhouses, Cottage Courts, and/or Low-Rise Apartments (e.g., garden-style apartments or walk-up apartments). These types of development differ from other types because of the unique and compact configurations in relation to the lot. Standard features typically include narrow interior setbacks and/or zero-lot lines, provisions for alleyways or service lanes to accommodate access and utility services and often include smaller building footprints.

Due to the fundamentally different site and development characteristics, this type of district should include locational criteria and locate outside of the interior of single-family neighborhoods, such as near transit corridors or activity centers, larger lots anticipating redevelopment, or used as transitions to zoning districts of higher intensities. Additionally, these residential developments should utilize a separation buffer, dense landscaping, a privacy fence, or other means between zoning districts of lesser intensities.

A Look at Other Communities

Community	Approach
Cobb County, GA	Cobb County includes three zoning districts, one for fee simple townhouse (FST) and two for single-family attached/detached districts (RA-4 and RA-5). Each district allows a mix of residential housing, from single-family detached dwellings to triplexes and fourplexes up to 4 units/acre, 5 units/acre, and 6 units/acre.
Liberty County, GA	Includes an "Attached Residential" zoning classification for attached types, including townhouse, duplex, condominium, and other attached styles of dwelling units of greater intensities than single-family residential areas. This district is used via subdivision or on infill properties.

The County should introduce a new district, "Neighborhood Infill," that contains a blend of various housing types. This new zoning district would provide an alternative to the homogenous development pattern associated with the low-density residential districts mentioned above and provide an option to consider during the rezoning process. A Neighborhood Infill District would create a more sustainable development pattern blending lot sizes, increased densities, and housing types.

OFFICE DISTRICTS

Trends in Office

Cities and counties nationwide are re-evaluating how office uses are regulated within their zoning frameworks in response to evolving office market conditions, shifting workforce expectations, and increased competition for employment investment. Traditional, single-purpose office zoning districts—particularly suburban office parks—are increasingly misaligned with contemporary office settings.

Modern office environments are trending towards mixed-use environment settings, often branded as employment centers, which integrate office uses with housing, services, and amenities. These environments benefit from proximity to transit, universities, hospitals, research institutions, and technology centers, which provide workforce access, collaboration opportunities, and shared infrastructure. Isolated, office-only districts are proving less competitive relative to these integrated environments.¹

¹ Anderson, R. John. "Modernizing Employment Centers." Zoning Practice, vol. 35, no. 10, American Planning Association, Oct. 2018, pp. 2-7.



The rise of remote work and hybrid work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has had a lasting impact on office demand and building utilization. As a result, many communities are experiencing increased vacancy in older suburban office parks, pressure to convert or redevelop office buildings into residential or mixed-use projects, and interest from landowners in flexible alternatives that allow reinvestment in aging office properties. In response, jurisdictions are revising office zoning to facilitate adaptive reuse, redevelopment, and reinvestment, rather than protecting office-only districts that are longer viable over the long term.

Clayton County's Office Districts

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the changing distribution of office/business acreage. Current office/business acreage has remained consistent over the past 20 years but has decreased between 2005 and 2024. The Current Future Land Use (2034) Distribution suggests office/business acreage will decrease further over the next ten years, with just 32 acres and 0.05% of the County Future Land Use. The Comp Plan recommends an Employment Center category designed as a campus-style development. This could apply to areas near Clayton State University or in the County's new administrative campus.

Clayton County's Zoning Ordinance currently regulates office uses through multiple use categories and districts. Office use is defined by several terms—office parks, medical and dental office, planned center, professional office, medical-based office, banks (financial institutions), and administrative office (as an accessory use to warehouse/industrial uses). Current zoning districts permitting office use include:

- Office Institutional (OI);
- Office Institutional (OIV);
- Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial District;
- Urban Village (UV) District;
- Mountain View District;
- Medical Mixed-Use Center;
- Warehouse (WH); and
- Industrial Park (INDP).

The County's Office-Institutional District is generally consistent with office-institutional districts used in peer communities. Institutional uses often share similar characteristics with office uses (such as hours of operation and activity levels), though they may generate higher traffic volumes. The County might consider eliminating or retiring the Office Institutional (OIV) District.

Emerging Best Practices²

Peer jurisdictions are increasingly:

- Locating office and employment districts near neighborhoods and transit corridors to support workforce accessibility and reduce automobile dependence;
- Encouraging smaller block lengths (approximately 400-600 feet) to promote walkability and connectivity, rather than large superblocks typical of suburban office parks;
- Allowing ancillary non-office uses—such as restaurants, retail, personal services, child care, health clubs, hospitality, and open space—to support employees and reduce off-site trips; and
- Using height, form, and design standards to improve site efficiency and urban design outcomes; and
- Using form-based and site-design standards to orient buildings around central plazas, courtyards, or shared open space, improving connectivity and creating unified multi-building employment campuses.

² Strungys, A., et al. "[Modernizing Suburban Office and Industrial Zoning](#)." Zoning Practice, vol. 12, no. 12, American Planning Association, Dec. 2014, pp. 2-7.



Recommendations

The County should consider broadening allowable uses within office-oriented districts to include supportive non-office uses such as residential and live/work units, restaurants, personal services, open space and civic gathering areas, health clubs and fitness facilities, childcare facilities, and limited hospitality uses. To ensure that office and employment functions remain primary, the ordinance could limit non-office uses to a defined percentage of floor area or require that non-office uses are accessory or secondary to a predominantly office or employment development.

The County should consider eliminating or retiring the “Office Institutional Vertical” (OIV) District. This would reduce redundancy, improve clarity, and steer applicants and staff toward other zoning district options.

The County should consider adding a new “Employment Center” District. This district would encourage office and/or light industrial uses as the predominant activities, allow a complementary mix of residential and non-office uses that support employees, and accommodate campus-style or mixed-use employment environments.

The County should consider introducing a small-scale office district, such as “Professional Office” or “Neighborhood Office” District. This district could provide a transitional district near residential neighborhoods and between more intensive commercial or industrial areas and accommodate smaller scale office uses.

The County should consider introducing a new “Neighborhood Business” District. This new district could apply to areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods to allow neighborhood-scale businesses. It can also address conversion of residential structures into commercial buildings for food, beverage, and small-scale retail.

The County should evaluate updates to dimensional and design standards for office and employment districts, including:

- Increased height allowances where appropriate;
- Reduced emphasis on large building footprints;
- Block length and connectivity standards to support walkability; and
- Site design requirements that emphasize shared open space, pedestrian connections, and cohesive multi-building layouts.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS

Trends in Industrial

Like the office sector, the industrial sector is experiencing changes in space demands, how product is distributed, and locational criteria. Developers are looking for sites that match physical product and tenant demands. It is important that Clayton County meet the needs of development community.

Industrial uses are generally broken down into six subcategories having similar functional or physical characteristics. They are:

1. Warehousing & Wholesale Distribution uses involve the storage and distribution of goods generally delivered to sellers agent or the final consumer, including self-storage, warehouses, and wholesale facilities.
2. Freight uses involve the movement of goods using Intramodal transport such as air cargo, truck terminals, train, or boat.
3. Manufacturing & Production uses involve the manufacturing, processing, production, fabrication, packaging, or assembly of goods and products.



4. Flex Industrial is a newer term to accommodating uses such as research and development, office showrooms, technology, and service centers associated with industrial uses.
5. Telecommunications generally include data centers.
6. Extraction: uses involving the mining of natural resources from the ground.
7. Waste & Recycling uses that receive solid or liquid wastes from others for on-site disposal, storage, processing, or transfer to another location for processing or disposal, which may include incinerators, landfills, composting of waste materials, and recycling facilities.

The Zoning Ordinance currently describes several zoning districts oriented to industrial land uses.

- Light Industrial
- Heavy Industrial
- Industrial Park District
- Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial
- Warehouse District

According to the County's Comprehensive Plan, industrial land use makes up a significant portion of Clayton County's land use distribution. As of 2024, the breakdown of industrial land distribution includes Heavy Industrial, with 7,686 acres (11.59%), Light Industrial with 700 acres (1.06%) and Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial with 303 acres (0.46%). The percentage of land distribution dedicated to industrial uses has increased from 5.2% in 2005 to roughly 13% in 2024. In comparison, the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) expects the amount of Heavy and Light Industrial land uses to decrease and Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial land use to increase over the next 20 years. This means the County forecasts more land to convert or transition to Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial land use over time. Several of the areas expected to transition to Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial are depicted on pages 140-147 of the Comprehensive Plan.

Heavy, Light, & Mixed-Use Industrial Districts

The Heavy Industrial land use category is defined as those uses dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing, factories, warehousing, and wholesale trade, mining or mineral extraction activities, and similar uses. These uses are often disruptive to nearby uses. Light Industrial land use, in contrast, includes less disruptive uses such as assembly, warehousing, wholesale trade facilities, and other industrial uses that may coexist with business and office uses. Finally, the Mixed-Use Commercial Industrial land use category allows a wider range of uses intermixed with one another, including office, commercial, and light industrial uses. These areas should produce economic value, while encouraging different modes of mobility (walking, bicycling, and transit). Additionally, these areas should include open spaces that create a wider network of green space. The Consultant Team will work with staff to identify and distinguish between Heavy, Light, and Mixed-Use Industrial Districts.

The County might consider reducing the number of industrial-oriented districts. According to the County's GIS viewer, the Warehouse District is applied sparingly and only applies to a few parcels. Because a warehouse use is already permitted in the Heavy and Light Industrial Districts, we recommend eliminating the Warehouse District and integrating it with Heavy and/or Light Industrial Districts. The Zoning Ordinance can further distinguish between small/mini warehouses and larger warehouses by conditioning the use through the use regulations.

The County might also rethink the intent of its Industrial Park District. "Industrial park" is a traditional term used in post-WWII zoning. However, some jurisdictions have introduced modern approaches emphasizing mixed-uses, sustainability, and innovative technology, which benefit the County as a whole by sharing resources, minimizing waste, and promoting adaptive reuse of buildings. Terminology more closely aligned with the purpose and intent of the district might include "Employment Campus," or "Office-Industrial District." Alternatively, because the district is



applied sparingly, the County could eliminate the district and consolidate it with the Mixed-Use Industrial District.

Mixed-Use Commercial Industrial District

During the 2024 Comprehensive Plan process, the community raised concerns about health and wellness of neighborhoods, and the need for better planning regarding adjacencies and separation between industrial zoned areas and residential areas. The community expressed concerns over the impacts on health from proximity to the airport and industrial land uses that produce air and water pollution and noise. Additionally, truck traffic and movement associated with industrial or warehousing can conflict with adjacent non-industrial uses.

As a goal, the County has established a policy to focus industrial growth in industrial-supported areas (such as in and around Fort Gillem), and areas that are compatible with this type of use and suitable for industrial transportation needs) such as adjacent to highways and south of the Hartsville-Jackson Atlanta International Airport). New industrial projects should occur within existing areas having adequate water, sewer, stormwater, and transportation infrastructure for all component uses at build-out.

Compatibility between industrial and residential areas is a common zoning issue. Typically, these are addressed using performance or mitigation criteria for nuisances generated by industrial uses. The existing Zoning Ordinance currently includes a set of performance standards in Sec. 6.26.

What Are Other Community's Doing?	
Community	Approach
Chamblee, GA	Chamblee, GA includes an Industrial Transitional District intended for adaptive reuse of properties for low-impact industrial and commercial activities, mixed with residential uses, while maintaining an attractive external environment.
Bloomington, MN	Bloomington, MN recently introduced a Transitional Industrial (TI) District to accommodate a mix of industrial, retail, entertainment, and residential uses with standards ensuring a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use environment with active ground floors, and controls for impacts related to industrial uses.
Atlanta, GA	In 2020, Atlanta introduced an Industrial Mixed-Use (I-Mix) district to allow mixing industrial, residential, and commercial uses if a minimum amount of industrial use is provided. See The Works , one of the first industrial mixed-use developments in the country in Atlanta's Westside. The Upper Westside Overlay District supplements the base zoning and includes additional requirements.
Charlotte, NC	Charlotte introduced its Innovation Mixed-Use (IMU) Zoning District for areas that initially developed as industrial land, but are now transitioning to a broader mix of light industrial, artisan industrial, commercial, and moderate density residential uses, within a more walkable setting.
Denver, CO	In 2010, Denver introduced a series of Industrial Mixed-Use Districts intended to develop into a walkable development pattern over time.

The County Should maintain its Mixed-Use Commercial Industrial District but consider retitling the district so that it is shorter and more aligned with the intent of the district. Similar nomenclature include “Transitional Industrial” or “Industrial Mixed-Use Center” might be more appropriate.

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

Planned Development Districts (PDDs), historically called Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), are a special type of “floating” zoning district intended to allow greater flexibility in land use planning by modifying the base zoning district regulations in exchange for innovation and exceptional design quality in development. This district prioritizes multimodality, environmental, historical or cultural resources, and provides creative solutions in building configuration and site layout, open space, and enhances vehicular and pedestrian circulation. PDD’s promote innovation in development that



support and align with the Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives in ways that are not possible using a conventional base zoning district.

Each jurisdiction in Georgia has unique regulations for PDDs. Furthermore, each site rezoned to PDD is unique because the development outcome is negotiated with staff feedback, elected officials’ discretion, and appointed officials’ review and approval through the development review process.

The current Zoning Ordinance outlines provisions for PUDs in *Article 7. Planned Unit Developments*. PUDs require a Conceptual and Detailed Development Plan as part of the rezoning application that ultimately runs with the land. In addition, PUD applications require multi-step review, including technical review by the County’s Technical Review Committee, a Zoning Advisory Group public hearing, and finally a Board of Commissioners’ public hearing.

As of 2024, Planned Unit Developments comprised a total of 3,545 acres (5.35%) of the County’s land use distribution. The Future Land Use (2039) projects Planned Unit Development to remain roughly consistent over the next 20 years, with 3,378 acres (5.09%) of the total land distribution. Therefore, the County uses PUDs frequently and will continue to use them as part of its zoning process.

Per the Clayton County Zoning Viewer, PUDs are most frequently used for residential planned communities. The table below demonstrates how other communities are rethinking planned developments. Many communities are now including criteria to address certain types of planned developments, such as residential, industrial, commercial, or mixed-use. The County may want to consider distinguishing between types of PDDs to achieve a more predictable outcome for development, which currently varies from site to site.

A Look at Other Communities	
Community	Approach
Cobb County, GA	The County’s Unified Development Code update includes recommendations for “Planned Development” options for traditional neighborhood development.
Forsyth County, GA	The County’s Unified Development Code includes a Master Planned District. (MPD) intended for mixed-use development. The purpose statement includes clear criteria for approval; amount and type of uses envisioned; open space percentages; and general conditions for the built environment.
Hall County, GA	The County’s Unified Development Code provides multiple options for Planned Development Districts. The UDC outlines a clear intent, requirements for rezoning, administrative procedures, district classifications, standards, and other considerations for PDDs, including: • Planned Residential Development • Planned Office Development • Planned Commercial Development • Planned Industrial Development

Often, jurisdictions typically require a minimum acreage for Planned Development Districts to prevent the reliance and overutilization of PDDs, and to encourage consolidation of lots with redevelopment. Establishing a minimum acreage requirement, such as 2 or 5 acres, could help the County generate a comprehensive and cohesive development approach with a larger development site.

MIXED-USE DISTRICTS

Mixed-use development is a compact form of development that offers many benefits to cities and counties. Compared to Clayton County’s existing suburban, auto-oriented forms of development, mixed-use development offers a smarter alternative to generate increased tax revenue, support countywide goals for transit, walkability, and biking, attainable housing units closer to services and



amenities, safety, aesthetic, placemaking, and environmental objectives. In growth areas, mixed-use development is an effective and fiscally responsible approach to development with long lasting benefits to the community.

The Comprehensive Plan indicates that mixed-use land use makes up approximately 3.2% of the County's current land use distribution, as of 2024. This is a significant increase from the 2005 current land use designations, which indicated no mixed-use classification. In comparison, the future current land use distribution for mixed-use is projected to double by 2034 to 7.89%.

There Future Land Use Designations anticipates mixed-use development primarily in centers and along corridors in land use designations including Mixed-Use, Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial, Transit-Oriented Development, and Mixed-Use PUD. The Zoning Ordinance accommodates mixed-use in several zoning districts, namely Urban Village, Mixed-Use Residential, Neighborhood Mixed-Use, Mixed-Use District, Medical Mixed-Use, Mixed-Use Commercial-Industrial, Regional Mixed-Use, and Planned Unit Development.

By-Right Mixed-Use

The term mixed-use is used throughout the Zoning Ordinance (e.g., vertical mixed-use; mixed-use project; mixed-use with upper level residential, etc.). However, these terms should be clearly defined so that readers know what they mean. The following definitions offer examples of how mixed-use may clearly be defined the Zoning Ordinance.

- "Mixed-Use Building" means a building type that contains at least one dwelling unit and two or more non-residential uses allowed in the zoning district in which the mixed-use building is located. Note, this is separate from Live-Work, is "a building containing a business occupying the first floor where the living quarters of the business operator are located on upper story floors." To promote residential above ground-floor retail, the County could consider introducing a definition for "Upper-Story Residential," which prioritizes residential use.
- "Mixed-Use Development" means a single development containing residential and non-residential uses on one or more parcels where all uses are well-integrated and are reliant on common facilities such as vehicular access roads or drives and stormwater facilities.
- "Mixed-Use Community or Neighborhood" means a broad area or zone that includes two or more varying land uses. Lot may develop individually, but each lot is not required to involve two or more varying land uses.

The County should consider allowing the above uses by-right in growth areas such as TOD areas, activity centers, and gateway corridors. By-right development helps facilitate the development process without the need for a time-consuming and costly discretionary review process.

Balanced Mixed-Use in Growth Areas

Prescribed Integrated Land Use (PILU) is a strategy commonly used by municipalities to ensure a particular land use is represented using maximum and minimum percentages requirements. The County currently applies this approach to its Urban Village Mixed-Use District at a ratio of 50% residential/50% non-residential. While there is no "ideal" ratio, the County can consider the context of its growth areas where demand is expected to occur. As a general rule of thumb, predominantly residential areas could establish a ratio that increases businesses, services, and amenities. In contrast, transit-supportive areas might support more non-residential uses, given the increased level of foot traffic. Therefore, the current 50:50 ratio is likely unrealistic, whereas a ratio of 60 (residential) to 40 (nonresidential) is more practical. Another consideration is the size of the development. Ratios are more appropriate for large tracts that can accommodate multiple uses, or where the development outcome of the development is predictable (such as with planned developments with designated land uses).



As an alternative, the County might consider a sliding scale approach, where a minimum of 25% is required for nonresidential use, but an incentive or bonus is earned if the development exceeds the minimum standards. For example, where a development provides 50% nonresidential use, they may earn increased density.

In contrast or as a supplement to the prescriptive approach above, the County could consider form-based approach to mixed-use development. Form-based approaches regulate the physical form instead of emphasizing the use. This approach focuses on the design outcome and is less concerned with the type of uses. A design-based approach encourages an inviting built environment, with inclusive spaces for people to gather, attracts visitors, and creates youth-friendly spaces. Form-based codes and development frontages are some examples of form-based approaches.

Incentive Zoning

Finally, the County could use incentive zoning to encourage enhanced mixed-use development. This approach would offer increased flexibility (e.g., lot coverage, yard setback, landscaping), an incentive (e.g., reduced parking requirements) or a bonus (e.g., increased density or height above five stories) in exchange for certain community benefits. Community benefits might include increased open space, innovations in design, or other amenities.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS: ZONING DISTRICTS

The consultant team recommends taking the following actions related to zoning districts:

Agricultural District

Recommended actions to update agricultural district:

- Allow compatible “agribusiness” and “agritourism” uses in the Agriculture District.
- Introduce conservation development alternatives as an option within multiple zoning districts (e.g., agricultural, residential, commercial, mixed-use, industrial, planned unit development districts)

Residential Districts

Recommended actions to update residential districts:

- Consolidate districts that have similar character and development pattern.
- Develop new districts to introduce gradual density in neighborhoods.

Office Districts

Recommended actions to update office districts:

- Retire Office Institutional Vertical (OIV) District to reduce redundancy.
- Introduce Employment Center District as a mixed-use district to accommodate predominantly office use setting with supporting range of mixed use.
- Introduce Professional Office District to accommodate small scale and neighborhood-friendly office uses.
- Adjust dimensional and developmental standards, including increased height, reduced building footprint/lot coverage, and emphasis on open space and connectivity standards.



Industrial Districts

Recommended actions to update industrial districts:

- Consolidate Industrial Park District with Mixed-Use Industrial District.
- Consolidate Warehouse District with Light Industrial District.
- Update purpose statement to include locational criteria for Heavy Industrial District.
- Update use regulations to encourage a limited mix of retail/service uses.
- Enhance transition & screening standards to incorporate landscaping and site design to soften or shield from residential areas [See Neighborhood Transitions]
- For the Mixed-Use Industrial (MXI) District, broaden the types of uses permitted that are compatible to light industrial uses, especially for flex industry uses.

Planned Development Districts

Recommended actions to update planned development:

- Update terminology from planned unit development (PUD) to planned development districts (PDDs).
- Establish a minimum lot size requirement for PDDs (e.g., 2-acre minimum).
- Develop criteria for certain types of PDDs, such as residential, commercial, industrial, and/or mixed-use.

Mixed-Use Districts

Recommended actions to implement mixed-use development:

- Allow mixed-use development by-right by defining mixed-use building, development, and community in the Zoning Ordinance and applying these in growth areas.
- Encourage mixed-use developments using a blend of prescribed integrated land use (i.e., a sliding scale approach for nonresidential versus residential), form-based design; and incentive zoning.

Character Areas

USE PATTERNS

Use Patterns—also referred to as development patterns, place typologies, or development typologies—are cohesive development frameworks that integrate land use permissions, dimensional requirements, development standards, and desired building and site design characteristics into a single regulatory approach. Use Patterns are not zoning districts or overlay zones. Instead, they are alternative forms of development that may be permitted within one or more underlying zoning districts.

Unlike conventional zoning districts, which regulate development primarily through use and bulk controls, Use Patterns function as development models that can be applied across multiple zoning categories. They provide a predictable, form-based or performance-based approach to achieving specific development outcomes aligned with adopted policy goals. Common examples of Use Patterns include:

- Conservation Development



- Traditional Neighborhood Development
- Transit Oriented Development
- Commercial Infill
- Campus Development

Local governments have increasingly adopted Use Patterns as a flexible regulatory tool to implement emerging development trends and policy objectives. The following table offers examples of Use Patterns implemented in other communities.

A Look at Other Communities

Community	Approach
San Antonio, TX	The San Antonio introduced “Use Patterns” as part of its Unified Development Ordinance to implement various forms of smart growth development such as traditional neighborhood development, transit-oriented development, neighborhood centers, and conservation subdivisions..
Beaufort, SC	Beaufort, SC adopted Development Patterns as part of its Community Development Code ..
Suffolk, VA	Suffolk, VA implemented “Use Patterns” in its Zoning Code , with flexible regulations that promote mixed-use development as either a Village Green, Traditional Neighborhood Development, and Town Center.

The above examples demonstrate how Use Patterns can coexist with conventional zoning while providing additional flexibility and clarity for targeted development outcomes.

Use Patterns generally include controls that govern:

- Permitted and conditional uses;
- Dimensional requirements (e.g., density height, setbacks, etc.);
- Site and building design elements (e.g., frontage types, amenities, etc.);
- Parks, open space, and environmental features;
- Transportation and mobility provisions; and
- Any additional procedural or review requirements.

The following table outlines the benefits and drawbacks of Use Patterns.

Benefits	Drawbacks
• Implements character areas from the County’s Comprehensive Plan • Streamlines the development review and approval processes • Enhances predictability, through form-based or prescriptive standards • Reduces development cost to developer by avoiding lengthy design and discretionary reviews	• A single Use Pattern may not be appropriate in all contexts, creating a risk of a “one-size-fits-all” approach if not carefully tailored • Less familiar than traditional zoning approaches and may require education on the topic

The County’s Comprehensive Plan includes a Character Area Map delineating specific areas within Clayton County, each with unique characteristics or development potential. Clayton County could incorporate Use Patterns into its Zoning Ordinance as alternative development standards that may be applied to specific sites or corridors. This approach would allow the County to:

- Support economic development objectives (e.g., campus-style employment centers; trail-oriented development; etc.);
- Preserve environmental resources (e.g., conservation development);



- Promote regional transit priorities (e.g., trail-oriented development); and
- Encourage higher-quality design outcomes without wholesale rezoning

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT AREAS

The Comprehensive Plan includes a transportation goal to update the existing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay to align with MARTA's bus rapid transit (BRT) lines anticipated for expanded areas throughout Clayton County.

The Zoning Ordinance currently maintains a Transit Oriented Development Overlay for multiple subareas, including Norman Drive, Garden Walk Boulevard, Southern Regional Medical Center, Tara Boulevard, and Southlake Station. The purpose of the TOD Overlay is to align with MARTA's proposed high-capacity transit lines and lay the foundation for greater density and intensity of uses, encourage mix of uses, improve walkability and people-centric places, and reduce the impacts of parking.

The Big 5 Transit Supportive Land Use Principles

The Big 5 principles are key components of transit-supportive land use, recommended by MARTA to ensure the success of high-capacity transit projects like Bus Rapid Transit.³

1. **Density & Intensity.** This principle emphasizes the need for a critical mass of riders and demand, achieved through high job and employment density, to effectively support transit.
2. **Mix of Uses.** This principle advocates for a vibrant mix of land uses, including residential, commercial, and other services, which can generate transit trips and activity throughout the entire day.
3. **Walkability.** This principle emphasizes that transit must be supported by a safe, well-connected pedestrian network to allow people to easily access transit stops and surrounding areas on foot.
4. **People-Friendly Design.** This principle involves creating spaces where people want to stay and spend time, which generates activity throughout the day and night contributes to a livelier environment.
5. **Managed Parking.** This principle aims to minimize the use of surface parking lots by relocating parking to the rear of buildings, utilizing on-street parking, and implementing shared or hidden structure parking solutions.

Figure 3: The Big Five Transit Supporting Land Use Principles



MARTA/Clayton County High-Capacity Transit Plan

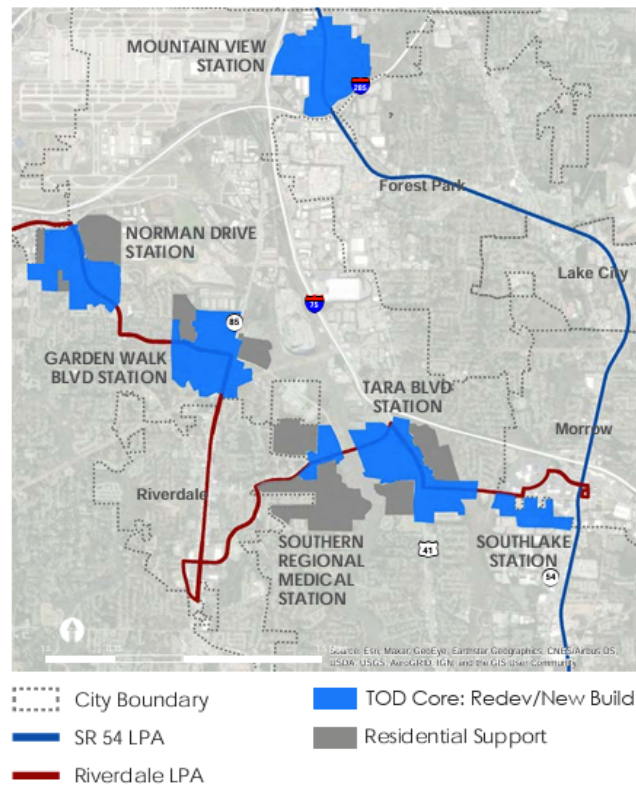
The Clayton County Transit System Plan was completed for Clayton County in February 2021 and outlines Transit Supportive Land Use recommendations for the County. The plan envisions a 30-year vision for transit improvements with a list of prioritized transportation projects providing enhanced mobility, with short, mid, to long-range improvements, improved bus network, and new transit elements such as Mobility Hubs, Arterial Rapid Transit (ART), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and additional

³ See MARTA's [Clayton County Transit Initiative](#) for more information on planned transit alignments and improvements.



Park-n-Ride lots. Current and future transit plans may be found via [Connect Clayton](#), an online hub hosted by MARTA/Clayton County. A summary of the transit plan is depicted in Figure 3 below.

Figure 4: MARTA/Clayton County High-Capacity Transit Plan



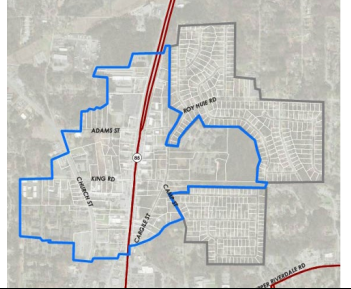
As mentioned earlier, Clayton County has already adopted five MARTA-recommended TOD overlay zones. Now, MARTA's [Implementation Strategy for Clayton County](#) makes several recommendations to update the existing TODs and create a new Mountain View Station TOD in anticipation of future BRT.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is characterized by fast and efficient service with 10 to 15-minute peak frequencies, dedicated operating lanes, transit signal prioritization, unique branding, and station amenities. MARTA is making significant investments in Clayton County, including two BRT alignments—the Southlake RAPID, which will run from Southlake Mall to College Park MARTA Station, and the SR 54 RAPID, which will connect East Point MARTA Station along SR 54 to Lovejoy. The plan aims to capitalize on existing high ridership numbers to attract investment from developers for mixed-use developments around future BRT Station nodes.

MARTA Recommendations Summary

RIVERDALE BRT STATION

Option A: Add a new TOD overlay
Option B: Significantly revise Cherry Hills/Tara Boulevard Overlay



TARA BOULEVARD STATION

Option A: Rezone station area to TOD District or revise TOD Overlay
Option B: Rezone adjacent residential to RG-75



NORMAN DRIVE

Option A: Include additional parcels in the Norman Dr. Station Area
Option B: Remove area from the Cherry Hills Overlay



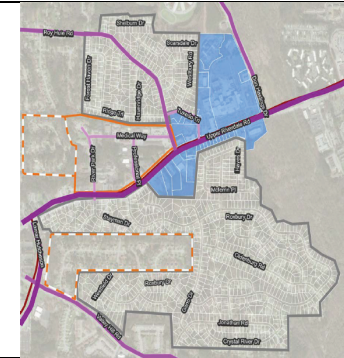
MOUNTAIN VIEW

Option A: Simplify into 2 tiers
Option B: Re-zone to MVMME, which most resembles TOD



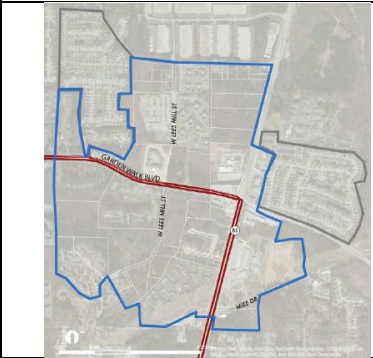
MEDICAL CENTER STATION

Option A: Regulate under a new TOD Overlay
Option B: Expand Tara Boulevard Overlay to cover this station area



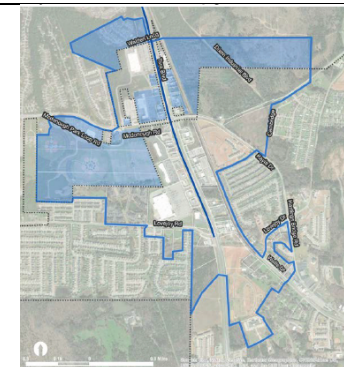
GARDEN WALK

Option A: Remove area from the Cherry Hills Overlay
Option B: Rezone residential support area to RG-75



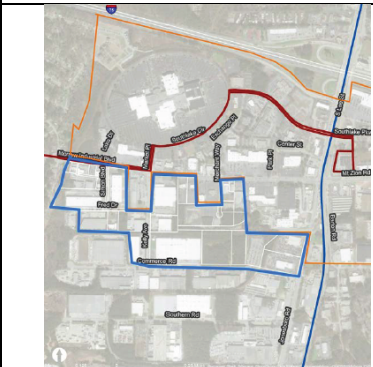
LOVEJOY STATION AREA

Option A: Rezone station area to TOD-Core



SOUTHLAKE STATION

Option A: Rezone station area to TOD



A Look at Other Communities

Community	Approach
City of Chamblee, GA	The City of Chamblee's Unified Development Ordinance includes a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) base zoning district, intended to support mixed-use development and higher density development within walking distance of the Chamblee MARTA Station. This district encourages a pedestrian-friendly traditional urban form, oriented to a network of pedestrian and bicycle pathways to the MARTA Station and minimizes automobile use by optimizing use of public transportation, bicycle and pedestrian access. Surrounding the TOD District is the Village Commercial District, which serves as a transition between the TOD District and other districts of lower intensity.
Atlanta, GA	The City of Atlanta's Zoning Code uses "Special Public Interest" Districts to implement Transit Oriented Development. For example, SPI 15 Lindbergh Transit Station Area Special Public Interest District is a base zoning district applied to development surrounding the Lindbergh Station.
Decatur, GA	The City of Decatur embeds its transit-oriented development as subareas within its Mixed-Use Zoning District. The MU District requires a Regulating Master Site Plan to aid in development review and coordination of infrastructure and site planning. The two subareas, Transit Station Subarea and Village Subarea, include standards for a nonresidential/residential percentage mix; residential density; open space; and additional requirements.

The Comprehensive Plan includes a Transit-Oriented Development designation on the Character Map. These districts collectively call for compact, mixed-use, walkable areas that accommodate a range of mobility options in proximity to transit stations, with designated space for transit stations, bus stops, and other public transport facilities.

Tara Boulevard Livable Centers Initiative

The Tara Boulevard Livable Centers Initiative was completed in July 2024 and outlines a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Study for an 11-mile segment of the Tara Boulevard corridor in Clayton County. The initiative was prepared in collaboration with State and Federal transportation agencies and evaluates conditions of three primary nodes—Tara Gateway, Jonesboro, and Lovejoy—focusing on potential market dynamics, transportation and mobility, and placemaking opportunities. The report calls for strategic redevelopment, enhanced connectivity, and community focused placemaking initiatives. Specific recommendations include improving pedestrian infrastructure, readying for future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines, improved landscaping, and updating the zoning to encourage transit-oriented, mixed-use development.

Key takeaways from the Tara Boulevard LCI Study related to zoning include:

- **Tara Gateway.** This node is within proximity to I-75 and ATL Airport making it a strong employment center with room for multi-family development. MARTA RAPID (Marta's planned bus-rapid transit service) provides an active and unique opportunity for transit-oriented development. Several large properties, like Tara Crossings and Southside Discount Mall, are ripe for redevelopment and present opportunities for retail and services. Southern Regional Medical Center offers a strong market for medical office and health/wellness sectors.
- **Jonesboro City Center.** Jonesboro should accommodate low-scale mixed-use with multi-family residential.
- **Lovejoy Node.** The Lovejoy area is experiencing significant new residential development. Downtown Lovejoy can incorporate independent local businesses. A Community Center offers an area for events and placemaking. Future retail will need to occur to support growth, along with food and beverage concepts.



Stakeholders noted that Transit-Oriented Development Areas should integrate multimodal options as often as possible. Community members want to see Micro-Transit Stations (like the facility used at Marrow High School), driverless vehicles, charging stations for electric vehicles, and electric bicycles addressed in the Zoning Ordinance. Participants in meetings pointed to the AMLI development at Atlantic Station as an example.

Zoning Alternatives

TOD as a Base Zoning District: The County could rezone properties as a TOD based on the MARTA TOD model base zoning district (Core-Redevelopment/New Build, and Support-Residential), where practicable. This offers the most streamlined and direct pathway to achieve the “big 5” supporting land use principles. If the County proceeds with this option, then properties within a designated TOD area should be removed from conflicting corridor overlays and rezoned to TOD as a base district, where possible. Property owners, however, may oppose rezoning to a more intensive zoning district that allows infill residential development.

Revise Existing TOD Overlay: The County could choose to simply revise its existing TOD Overlay. This option presents a less risky alternative to rezoning subject properties to a base zoning district. Property owners may favor this option because there is certainty in maintaining existing entitlements. The TOD Overlay provides additional entitlements without having to go through a rezoning process. However, multiple overlapping overlays can create conflicting information and confusion.

Re-Use RG-75 as Residential Infill: The County could reuse its existing RG-75 zoning district as a way to support TOD Core areas with “gentle density”. Residential areas surrounding transit stations could rezone to RG-75 or introduce a separate residential infill district that supports transit efforts, but that could also be used in other infill areas countywide.

The Consultant Team recommends adjusting the County’s existing TOD zoning areas and applying TOD standards as TOD-Core and TOD-Support. Character-based placemaking strategies should be tailored to each TOD zoning areas.

CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT AREAS

The success of Clayton County’s gateway corridors rests on redevelopment and incremental contributions over time. Stakeholders would like to see consistent and cohesive approach to corridors and noted Decatur and Woodstock as example communities.

The County is continuing efforts that can assist with funding and addressing long-term concerns with public improvements in its gateway corridors. For example, the County currently maintains a newly introduced impact fee ordinance, hotel tax, and is considering other options such as Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) and Special Service Districts (SSDs) as future options.

In addition to the base districts, the County’s Zoning Ordinance includes 11 special districts and overlay districts. They include:

- Watershed Protection (WSP)
- Tara Boulevard
- Cherry Hills
- Highway 42 Corridor
- Panhandle Area
- Highway 54
- East-West Corridor
- Mountain View
- Old Dixie Highway-Tara Boulevard



- Transit Oriented Development (TOD)
- TOD Residential Support (RT)
- Business Corridor

Out of the above overlays, two address environmental/conservation concerns, five address corridors, two address transit-oriented development, and one addresses economic development needs for a specific area of the County.

Consolidating Corridor Overlays

To concentrate efforts on successful corridors, the County should consider consolidating its many corridor overlays into a single Gateway Corridor Overlay. Clayton County's Zoning Ordinance currently maintains several overlays that control the visual aesthetics of building and site design along its major thoroughfares. For example, the Tara Boulevard and Highway 42 overlays are two examples of overlays that contain similar standards. These overlays, as well as others, include the same procedures and review process and overlap in the types of land uses that the standards are trying to address.

Focus on Commercial Standards

In general, the current Tara Boulevard and Highway 42 overlays lack clear objectives and prioritization of strategies and apply to various types of land uses (including residential, non-residential, and industrial properties). One way the County could provide clarity is to refocus the overlay district on commercial development along major corridors throughout the County. The County should consider removing residential and industrial properties from the overlays and apply development standards, where applicable, within the Zoning Ordinance. It is recommended that all residential standards be removed from the overlays and integrated into the Zoning Ordinance as Development Standards. This mainly includes building materials, building design, and color. Single-family residential is typically exempt from overlay requirements in most jurisdictions. Furthermore, development standards could apply to "missing middle" housing types to support high-quality residential infill construction.

Simplify Corridor Overlay Standards

There are many standards in the current overlays that could be integrated into the Zoning Ordinance as Development Standards that apply to all development throughout the County:

- Underground Utilities
- Access Management & Inter-parcel connectivity
- Buffer Yards
- Open Space Standards
- Accessory Structures
- Off-Street Parking
- Bicycle Parking
- Shared Parking
- Loading Standards
- Signs

Another way the overlays can add clarity is by removing all language regarding subdivision design. The Subdivision Ordinance should address this issue and is separate from the Zoning Ordinance.

Clayton County maintains several overlays addressing corridors across its major thoroughfares and activity centers. Tara Boulevard, Highway 42 Corridor, and East-West Corridor are examples of overlays that apply similar standards to properties along corridors.



In evaluating these three overlays, there is conflicting information between what is included in the Zoning Ordinance itself, versus what is included in the standalone Design Guidelines documents. Because the overlay standards are written in the Zoning Ordinance, the standalone documents should be retired. The ordinance that adopts the revised Zoning Ordinance can could state that the standalone documents are no longer effective.

COMMERCIAL INFILL AREAS

Much of Clayton County is built out along its major commercial corridors and nodes. Existing development has taken on the form of strip center retail, big box retail, and standalone retail formats. This type of retail development typically includes vast expanses of surface parking, with little to no consideration for pedestrian needs, such as shade, landscaping, and/or walkways. Over the years, these types of developments experience an ebb and flow of tenant changes, storefront vacancies, absentee landlords, deferred maintenance issues, underutilization, and deterioration or dilapidation in many instances. As buildings naturally approach the end of their life cycle, redevelopment of these sites presents opportunities for revitalization to meet the County’s goals to improve quality of life, livability, sustainability, and transportation objectives.

The 2024 Comprehensive Plan designates several areas in the County as Commercial Redevelopment on the Character Map. These catalyst sites encourage incremental redevelopment, economic growth, and pedestrian activity. Corridor redevelopment should encourage retrofitting and/or revitalization of large commercial strip centers into mixed-use, high-quality developments that support the surrounding community. Redevelopment of existing sites likely will occur in the following ways:

- 1. Convert to mixed-use development, adding more density and value to the property;
- 2. Redevelop as a more integrated commercial development, with considerations for stronger interconnections between parcels, new buildings replacing expansive parking lots, and placemaking strategies emphasizing the pedestrian experience, and bicycle accommodations; and/or
- 3. Rehabilitate the existing development, with cosmetic changes and site improvements.

Stakeholders noted several large sites throughout the County that are ripe for redevelopment, including Tara Crossing, several car dealerships, and many others. These areas should transform into walkable, mixed-use destinations. The community wants to see more gathering spots and local activity hubs close to neighborhoods. Community members also would like to see enhanced shopping experiences with fine dining options, dine-in, small cafes, and boutique retail (e.g., [Fayetteville Pavilion](#)).

Therefore, the County should develop an approach for adaptive commercial infill in anticipation of the various outcomes for commercial redevelopment. There are several ways that the Zoning Ordinance can introduce and integrate adaptive redevelopment. The table below demonstrates how other communities have approached commercial infill redevelopment.

What Are Other Community’s Doing?	
Community	Approach
Decatur, GA	Decatur, GA applies a form-based approach to its General Business District , which allows certain types of building types (single-story and mixed-use shopfront, residential flats, civic building, general building, etc.). The emphasis is placed on activation of the ground floor and promoting upper-floor residential.
Chamblee, GA	In 2015, Chamblee, GA introduced an addendum to its Unified Development Code that included adaptive reuse guidelines for non-conforming strip commercial and industrial properties.



Future adaptive zoning strategies could address flexible building siting, connectivity across parcels, improved internal vehicular circulation, locational criteria for various site elements, emphasis on the building's entrance(s) and a prioritized pedestrian experience, added landscaping and shade trees, and provisions for scale, massing, and building design.

The Gateway Corridors Overlay is an existing zoning tool that could address adaptive reuse of commercial areas. The overlay could be revised and updated to include strategies addressing adaptive reuse of existing commercial development, and/or incentivize urbanization to a more intense development condition, such as a mixed-use development with greater density. However, this approach would only apply to properties already in the overlay, and not to all properties identified on the Comprehensive Plan Character Area map.

Alternatively, the County could introduce County-wide design standards that apply to all commercial redevelopments. The Development Standards section of the Zoning Ordinance would include those standards and adaptive reuse standards and incentives that address redevelopment of commercial sites.

CONSERVATION AREAS

Highway 54 Overlay

Similar to the overlays described above, the Highway 42 Overlay contains standards that apply to nonresidential developments. However, the underlying zoning districts are predominantly residential (RS-180, bookended by Mixed-Use Village to the west and Mixed-Use to the east). It is unclear if this overlay district is designed to protect low-density residential areas, or to guide future development to transition to mixed-use development. The purpose statement should clarify the intent of the – i.e., is it conservation or growth? If intended to guide growth, the recommendations of the Tara Boulevard/Cherry Hills and Highway 42 Overlays apply to the Highway 54 Overlay. If intended to protect low-density characteristics, the purpose statement should distinguish it from other overlays that promote growth along corridors.

Panhandle Overlay

The Panhandle Area Overlay is intended to conserve the rural, agricultural, and natural aesthetic found throughout the County's southernmost area. The purpose of the standards is to guide future growth in a uniform and harmonious manner to protect the scale, massing, and general character typical of a rural setting.

Current zoning districts include low density residential including Agriculture, Estate Residential, and RS-180. Recent development applications include Planned Unit Developments and subdivisions, which suggest more housing is expected in the pipeline for the panhandle. With residential growth expectations, the essential question remains how the County expects to preserve the unique rural character, and provide the desired amenities for residents?

A conservation approach should include stipulating the desired types of zoning districts, development types, and/or uses allowed within the panhandle area. Zoning districts should be defined as low-density residential districts. As an alternative path, development might occur through conservation or cluster development that preserves open space and natural areas in exchange for smaller lots clustered together. These types of developments leave a significant portion of the original tract of land as protected open space, either in their natural state or as an amenity to the development (i.e., natural trails or passive recreation). Often, these types of development include a density bonus to encourage developers to utilize these types of development over the base district options.



Another conservation strategy is to review the existing overlay to determine whether the standards are adequate to protect against future growth encroachment. A cursory review suggests that the standards are inadequate to guide potential future rezoning applications. As an example, consider an application that seeks a rezoning from Agriculture to Planned Unit Development, with a non-residential use. While PUDs should generally align with the Comprehensive Plan and the intent of the Zoning Ordinance, the current overlay standards only prohibit hotels, adult entertainment, and clubs. The County might want to consider revisiting the use standards prescribed in the overlay to ensure that appropriate scale and types of uses are governed for the panhandle. For example, some jurisdictions limit the allowable square footage, or footprint, of non-residential uses and/or development types to protect against out-of-scale buildings encroaching into the area.

A third approach would add to the overlay standards to include a set of alternate performance criteria. For example, off-street parking could include alternate standards for pervious surface, such as gravel lots, which are common in rural settings. Another characteristic attributed with rural areas is increased open space, either to support natural and/or wildlife areas or as increased vegetation and tree plantings. Jurisdictions often include increased separation between new residential areas adjacent to agricultural areas to minimize land conflicts and preserve open space areas.

The Comprehensive Plan Character Area Map envisions a conservation approach in areas southeast of Clayton County, south of Noah's Ark Road and north of Lovejoy. Because the County already has standards addressing conservation approaches, it is recommended that the County expand the existing Conservation Overlay to apply to this southeast area of the County as a new subdistrict. This new subdistrict surrounding Shamrock Lake could include additional standards, as applicable.

TRAIL-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Flint River Activity Area

In 2017, the [Finding the Flint](#) coalition launched with a mission to restore visibility and ecological function of the Flint River headwaters, largely hidden beneath Hartsfield-Jackson Airport and enclosed by industrial infrastructure. Key objectives include:

- Revealing the river's presence through trails, pocket parks, and daylighting creeks;
- Enhancing water quality and flood resilience through green infrastructure; and
- Connecting disadvantaged Southside neighborhoods to a shared natural asset.

Projects that are planned or underway include College Park Headwaters Preserve, [Flint River Community Center](#), and 146-acre [Reynolds Nature Preserve](#) in Morrow.

The Flint River Activity Area is designated as a character area on the County's Character Area Map, which outlines recommended land use and development strategies for specific areas throughout the County. Recommended land uses for the Flint River Activity Area include wildlife habitat, natural reserves, ecological restoration, passive recreation, medium- and high-density housing, office, commercial, and mixed-use. The envisioned character of this area includes pedestrian and alternative transportation modes including greenways; lands set aside for public and civic uses; alternative transportation networks; new structures and facilities to support improved water quality of the Flint River; and situate new structures to open up to the Flint River.

One of the key priority areas identified in the Aerotropolis Blueprint 2.0 is northwest Clayton to support trail-oriented development, improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and leverage the Flint River as a natural asset. As a continuation effort, the AeroATL Model Mile Feasibility Study developed a greenway concept that would connect communities, improve quality of life, and help attract businesses. In 2018, a joint study developed a master plan that identified a large network of trails to connect communities in the South Metro Atlanta region. The focus is developing seven



model mile communities, with two such model mile communities falling within Clayton County. Two identified project areas include Clayton and Forest Park Project Areas.

In [Envisioning a Regional Trail Network](#), the Atlanta Regional Commission identifies the Flint River corridor in Clayton County as an opportunity to expand the region’s trail network and connect with the greater Atlanta Metro Region. The report gives a multitude of local and regional examples of precedents for greenways that connect neighborhoods and community destinations.

A Look at Other Communities

Community	Approach
Columbia County, GA	The Euclaw Creek Greenway is a river corridor trail that provides access between neighborhoods and community destinations.
Chamblee, GA	The City of Chamblee includes a Rail Trail Overlay district that applies additional regulations to properties adjacent to the rail trail. Standards include the building’s relationship to the trail, considerations for loading areas, fences and walls, building design, uses, parking, and signs.

The Flint River Activity Area would require further study, concept development, and community input to determine the extents and scope of potential development impacts along the Flint River corridor. A future trail would likely occur as a greenway trail used by non-motorized travelers and commonly constructed in areas such as parks, stream corridors, undeveloped land, etc. Clayton Connects, Clayton County’s Greenway Trial Master Plan generally illustrates an interconnected system of existing and proposed greenway trails across the County. These trails are typically constructed with a minimum ten-foot width with an additional two feet on either side, paved, and meeting the design and construction specifications following the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) regulations. However, the trail system would intersect with and traverse through neighborhoods and multiple activity centers.

The Consultant Team will work with staff to develop a framework for trail-oriented development implementation. This TOD framework should support the goals of the Flint River Activity character area and include standards, such as cafes oriented towards paths similar to the Atlanta Beltline, for development. It is further recommended that the County investigate the Flint River corridor to identify potential zoning outcomes and solutions, which is outside the scope of this Code Diagnostic.

Huie Site

The Huie Site, managed by the Clayton County Water Authority (CCWA) includes over 4,000 acres of primarily forested and undeveloped land, used for treating the County’s wastewater. Because of the vast amount of land, the CCWA envisions portions of the land to become open to the public. A future nature preserve includes a 712-acre site that will provide new recreational, community and educational opportunities for county residents. The Huie Site Master Plan envisions over ten miles of trail systems, play areas, passive recreational fields, forestry management demonstration areas and wetlands centers, in addition to numerous community facilities. The Huie Site is currently zoned “Agriculture” and is not expected to change zoning classification.

MEDICAL CENTER AREA

Southern Regional Medical Center Hospital Overlay

This area of Clayton County includes the greatest concentration of higher income jobs compared to the rest of the County. It also regularly attracts an influx of younger medical students and interns. Furthermore, the employment center is located along MARTA’s bus-rapid transit route with a station provided at the Southern Regional Medical Center Hospital. The Flint River bifurcates the area and offers opportunities for connection, healthy activities, and trail-oriented development.



In 2023, the Board of Commissioners initiated a resolution to allow staff to investigate the creation of an Overlay District around the Southern Regional Medical Center, encompassing approximately 64 parcels. In 2024, the BOC adopted the Southern Regional Medical Center Hospital Overlay with the purpose of protecting the limited amount of land surrounding the SRMC complex, integrating the Southern Regional Medical Center Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District, and taking into consideration future development along the Flint River.

The Hospital Overlay includes multiple tiers, including:

- Hospital (H-H);
- Medical Offices (H-MO);
- Residential-Mixed-Use (H-RMX); and
- Conservation (H-CON).

The recently adopted overlay includes permitted uses, conditional uses, and district standards for each subdistrict to guide future development.

Although the overlay has been adopted by the Board of Commissioners as an overlay district, the County's zoning viewer appears to show each tier implemented as a base zoning subdistrict.

Therefore, the following actions are recommended:

- Add the overall boundary of the Hospital Overlay to the zoning map. This would delineate the extents of the overlay and distinguish it from other overlay boundaries. It is suggested to rename the Hospital Overlay to Medical Center Overlay.
- Update the Conservation Tier to include a cross-reference to trail-oriented development standards (to be established in the code rewrite).
- Update the Transit Oriented Development standards to include character-based standards tailored to the Medical Center area.

MOUNTAIN VIEW AREA

International Mixed-Use District

The vision for the “aerotropolis” surrounding the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport is ambitious but also logical given the scale of transportation infrastructure and potential for industry in this large metro area. Neighborhoods adjacent to airports, like Mountain View, will have some land use restrictions for safety and noise. The code update approach is to target industries best suited for this location and make sure the zoning code reflects what those developments need.

We recommend simplifying and aligning the Mountain View zone similar to the approach in the TOD overlays. Tiers, or subdistricts, could be consolidated to provide more flexibility. The list of uses within the tier could be prioritized to a short list of targeted industries but generally should remain flexible and encourage mixed uses. The name of the zone could be changed to make clear the intended vision for the area.

The existing development standards are already geared towards creating desirable, walkable streetscapes. The revised Zoning Ordinance could enhance this form-based approach with an emphasis on building form and placement with:

- Illustrations of massing, street cross sections, and façade types, to demonstrate the vision for the district;
- Using a maximum front setback and street prioritization diagrams to clearly designate the desired outcomes for building placement and frontage types.
- Maximizing heights and densities per the Mountain View Master Plan zoning recommendations with a height minimum of two stories and no maximums. (Note: some older court cases invalidated maximum height requirements under conventional zoning)



enabling legislation, but this has become a common feature of form-based codes and transit-supportive development standards (White, “Legal Issues with Form-Based Codes,” *The Commissioner* (October 2016).)

Overall, we recommend adding graphics and illustrations to demonstrate what the County is trying to achieve with the zone. The Mountain View zone should consolidate some sections – lighting, signs, parking, plans required –with the general development standards and submittal requirements in the Zoning Ordinance.

Some of the development standards are very prescriptive and could deter innovative project proposals. For example, the zone could include relaxed open space and public improvement requirements to achieve more performance-based or objective-based outcomes. This could prioritize key gateways, intersections, streets, or lots for enhanced design and amenity space based on the master plan. By prescribing development outcomes in specific locations where they will have the biggest impact, the County is creating reasonable expectations and predictability for developers.

The Mountain View zone could incentivize some of the community benefits in the Aerotropolis vision by allowing increased development standards in exchange for publicly accessible open space, mid-block accessibility, enhanced streetscape or transit facilities, EV charging, public art, or greenway development. This approach gives flexibility to the developer and creates buy-in for the private sector to build out some of the public amenities.

The County should consider what additional actions it can take to facilitate the kinds of development it is trying to attract. Where possible, demonstrate the County’s vision and ease the development costs by implementing upzoning/rezoning, aggregating lots, designating future streets, greenways, or open spaces, and making infrastructure investments and improvements with public projects. Supplemental, illustrative documents from the County, such as a planting or street tree list, building materials palette, and streetscape design guidelines with standardized components will simplify and expedite the design process for applicants.

What Are Other Communities Doing?

Community	Approach
Charlotte, NC	The airport zoning involves a mixed-use “destination” district with two designated areas for “Regional Activity Center” of commercial development (hotels, restaurants, shops) and “Manufacturing & Logistics.” In this case, the Destination District is City-owned land offered to development teams. The City conducted a market study to understand what economic development needs are for the area. The stated goals are for revenue generation, land activation, placemaking, and airport-compatible development. A new planned development, the “River District,” west of the airport offers a more residential and office-oriented approach.
Clark County and Las Vegas, NV	Clark County and Las Vegas have Regional Opportunity Sites with coordinated efforts for targeted development – Las Vegas Medical District, Stadium District, and Maryland Parkway Corridor Transit-Oriented Development Plan. These districts use a form-based including standards for streetscape and open space to enhance the quality of the public realm. They also encourage reinvestment in vacant commercial centers by incentivizing adaptive reuse or redevelopment of underdeveloped properties and changing the zoning to allow a broader mix of uses. The County has designated employment areas proximate to major transportation facilities like airports. Their goal is to support industrial and employment uses by protecting the viability of the sites. This is accomplished by preventing encroachment from incompatible uses or conversion of designated parcels to alternate uses.

ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT

Rex Mill Village Arts and Entertainment Overlay



The Rex Mill Village area contains one of Clayton County's remaining 19th century rural mill sites, including the Rex Grist Mill (listed on the National Register of Historic Places), a mix of residential mill-era to mid-century single-family homes, brick commercial structures, a historic monument, and open space along Big Cotton Indian Creek. The historic setting presents opportunities for adaptive reuse, creative placemaking, and preservation of the historic site and structures, rehabilitation, and redevelopment. Stakeholders want to see this area become a hangout place for the community (for example, [The Silos](#) in Easley, SC, which includes fire pits, food trucks, cabanas, and other ways to create social experiences).

The Atlanta Regional Commission, in coordination with Clayton County, underwent an investigation of the site to advance the 2024 Moving Clayton Forward Comprehensive Plan and the Historic Area Character Area identified for the Rex Mill Village Area. The study identified culturally significant structures to list on the National Register of Historic Places. As a result of the study, ARC developed a working draft of a Rex Mill Village Arts and Entertainment District Overlay. The Consultant Team will incorporate the new overlay for Rex Mill into the Zoning Ordinance.

This proposed overlay includes two subareas including Subarea 1, which contains the historic properties, and Subarea 2, which includes lower intensity portion of the Mill Village, intended for redevelopment and reuse with compatible new development. Each district contains a set of allowable uses tailored to creative placemaking and artisan uses. The overlay also contains standards addressing adaptive reuse projects as well as a series of development standards that apply within the district.

It is recommended that the County incorporate the Rex Mill Village Arts and Entertainment District Overlay, and the Consultant Team calibrate design standards and zoning procedures, as applicable, so that the Community Development Department may issue permits without clearance from the historic board.

OTHER AREAS

Lake Marina Overlay

Sec. 3.34 of the Zoning Ordinance outlines provisions for the Lake Marina Overlay. This overlay applies to properties around Lake Spivey and addresses the types of small-scale uses permitted to cultivate the needs of boating and recreation. Because of the limited scale and scope of this overlay, no recommendations are provided.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS: STREAMLINE SPECIAL PURPOSE AREAS

Overlays

Recommended actions to update existing overlays:

- Align the Clayton County Zoning Viewer to match the Zoning Ordinance boundary map and terminology description (e.g., "hospital" versus "medical") to avoid confusion.
- Clarify purpose statements of each overlay to clearly indicate the intent of zoning strategies (e.g., growth strategies along gateway corridors versus conservation strategies in the panhandle area).
- Consolidate application procedures into a single area of the code to reduce redundancy, since they are the same for all overlays.



- Clarify the role and applicability of design guidelines versus zoning standards.
- Change “tiers,” which ties an increase in something (i.e., density, intensity, height) to “subdistricts” or “character areas.”

Use Patterns

Recommended actions to implement character areas:

- Introduce Use Patterns in the Zoning Ordinance to implement character areas designated in the Comprehensive Plan’s Character Area Map.

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Areas

Recommended actions to implement TOD strategies:

- Update the County’s zoning map to align the TOD Overlay boundaries with MARTA bus rapid transit (BRT) stations anticipated for existing and expanded areas throughout Clayton County.
- Update Core and Supportive Tier boundaries for each TOD Station Area.
- Introduce character-based placemaking strategies tailored to each TOD Station Area.

Corridor Redevelopment Areas

Recommended actions to implement corridor redevelopment strategies:

- Consolidate overlays into a single “gateway corridors” overlay to eliminate overlap and redundancy of standards.
- Focus the “gateway corridors” overlay on essential nonresidential development and redevelopment by removing all low-density residential, multi-family residential, and industrial areas from overlays.
- Remove overlap of “gateway corridors” overlay with “Transit Oriented Development” overlay to avoid redundancy and streamline development (e.g., the Cherry Hills overlay overlaps both the Lee’s Mill and Norman Drive TODs).

Commercial Infill Redevelopment

Recommended actions to implement commercial infill strategies:

- Introduce adaptive reuse standards that address flexible building siting, connectivity across parcels, improved vehicular circulation, locational criteria for various site elements, emphasis on the building’s entrance(s) and a prioritized pedestrian experience, enhanced landscaping and shade trees, and provisions for scale, massing, and building design.

Conservation Areas

Recommended actions to implement conservation strategies:

- Provide a clear purpose statement intended for the conservation/growth along the Highway 54 corridor.
- Review and update the existing Panhandle Overlay to:
 - Ensure desired zoning districts and uses;
 - Require alternative development paths including conservation and cluster developments with density bonus incentives;
 - Limit future development through building size and/or other character-defining design standards.
- Expand the Conservation Overlay to apply to southeastern portion of Clayton County as a new subdistrict and incorporate conservation strategies as appropriate.



Trail-Oriented Development Area

Recommended actions to implement trail-oriented development strategies:

- The County should develop a detailed small area plan and/or feasibility study along the Flint River and adjacent properties to understand impacts of development and trail-oriented development implementation, to inform zoning recommendations, which is outside scope of this Code Diagnostic.
- The Consultant Team can work with staff to develop a zoning framework for trail-oriented development along the Flint River Activity Area.

Medical Center Area

Recommended actions to update the Hospital Overlay:

- Add boundary of Hospital Overlay to the official zoning map to delineate extents of the overlay and distinguish it from other overlay boundaries.
- Rename “Hospital Overlay” to “Medical Center Overlay.”
- Apply trail-oriented development standards to the Conservation Tier.
- Apply transit-oriented development standards and tailor placemaking strategies to the medical center.

Mountain View Area

Recommended actions to update and streamline the Mountain View Overlay:

- Add boundary of Mountain View Overlay to the official zoning map to delineate extents of the overlay and distinguish it from other overlay boundaries.
- Reduce the number of tiers from 5 to 2 subdistricts. Consolidate the “Education,” and “Mixed Use Residential” tiers. Consolidate “Regional Entertainment,” “Makers and Advanced Manufacturing,” “Regional Mixed-Use Retail,” and “International Mixed-Use Office” tiers.
- Prioritize preferred uses by targeting markets and industries.
- Apply transit-oriented development standards and tailor placemaking strategies to the Mountain View station area.
- Calibrate height requirements in the district/subdistricts in relation to airport flight path requirements.

Arts & Entertainment Overlay

Recommended actions to implement arts & entertainment strategies:

- Incorporate the Rex Mill Village Arts & Entertainment District Overlay and adjust zoning procedures as necessary to integrate administrative review and approval by planning staff.



Part III.

Development

Strategies

III. Development Strategies

Neighborhood Transitions

Neighborhood transition strategies protect residential areas from redevelopment of larger or more intense uses. Specific adjacency concerns might include industrial areas, major corridor redevelopment, and areas of higher intensity residential use, such as mixed-use development. Neighborhood transition standards can help mitigate the impact these redeveloping properties have on residential areas by creating an increased transition zone.

There are many benefits to introducing neighborhood transition standards to the Zoning Ordinance. Transition standards can help control:

- Types of uses permitted within proximity to residential zones;
- Activities and land use allowed;
- Height, either through step-downs or bulk planes;
- Screening, such as added landscaping and privacy fence and/or walls;
- Additional performance standards that address light, noise, hours of operation, and other concerns associated with industrial, commercial, or higher intensity uses.

The Zoning Ordinance should include neighborhood transition standards that apply between areas of lower intensity residential zoning districts and higher intensity zoning districts, such as commercial, business, and/or industrial zoning districts.

Housing Options

Accessory Dwelling Units

The Zoning Ordinance currently defines Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) and already permits them in several zoning districts, including AG, ER, RS-180, and within the TOD overlay. While accessory dwelling units have existed for decades, they have become increasingly popular as communities demand alternative housing types to meet affordability and basic housing needs. Over the past few decades, some states have implemented policy and regulations on ADUs. Hawaii, California, Washington, and Vermont are early adopters of state-wide regulation that accommodates ADUs. Other states—namely Utah, Montana, Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire—have followed suit. In Georgia, accessory dwelling units are legal, but construction is only possible within certain zoning districts that allow those structures. Therefore, Clayton County should consider expanding accessory dwelling units as a permitted use in other zoning districts. The Zoning Ordinance should control the square footage and introduce design standards to ensure a quality building and compatible architecture within existing neighborhoods.

Stakeholders see many benefits of accessory dwelling units, including accommodating aging parents, affordable housing, aging-in-place, and housing young professionals that are not yet ready for a house. The advantages of accessory dwelling units to landowners include additional rental income and added value to the property. Many stakeholders noted concern with the terminology of accessory dwelling units, noting that “backyard cottage” might be more welcoming in neighborhood since it more reflects the scale of the structure. Other characteristics expressed by community members include:

- Architectural compatibility;
- “Good neighbor” policy for siting and orientation of units in the back yard so that they do not overlook adjacent property;



- Avoiding misuse of ADUs by institutional investors and developers; and
- Owner occupancy requirements.

Tiny Homes

The notion of tiny homes, defined as a small house less than 400 square feet, is a popular topic among stakeholders. Meeting participants noted tiny homes as an effective way for residents just starting out or transitioning into homeownership. The County would like to introduce tiny homes as an option in the Zoning Ordinance, particularly as an accessory dwelling unit option. However, the Zoning Ordinance should establish controls to produce a predictable outcome. Some County officials would like tiny homes allowed via special exception to avoid excessive use of the option. Locational criteria for tiny homes could be added so that those developments are located near services, amenities, and transit. The Consultant Team will introduce tiny home use definition along with associated standards to coordinate with staff during the drafting process.

Smaller Lot/Cottage Homes

The market demand for residential housing is evolving. Homebuilders are seeing increasing demand for smaller housing products on smaller lots. Therefore, a gap exists between what the market demands (smaller lots) and what the Zoning Ordinance permits (larger lots). Thus, the Zoning Ordinance should adapt to meet market demand and provide alternative options for smaller house types and lot sizes. A new residential zoning district that includes lower minimum lot size requirements could address this concern. Alternative options, such as conservation development, could also address the need for smaller lots. Finally, neighborhood infill is a third option that could assist with compatible infill in neighborhoods.

Compatible Neighborhood Infill

The Zoning Ordinance should expand its guidance for a range of housing types such as duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhouses, and small walk-up apartments. These housing options can serve multiple functions such as accommodating workforce housing, supporting attainable living, and offering stability to neighborhoods by adding rooftops that support local businesses, amenities, and services. One factor to consider for lower intensity housing types include locational criteria to determine appropriate locations of these types, such as on corner lots, or minimum spacing between like uses, adjacency requirements, and/or provisions for lots that receive access from alleyways or service lanes. Minimum design criteria could be established for each development type. Standard lot dimensions and design criteria should be considered for compatibility with surrounding neighborhood context.

Townhouse Developments

Townhouse developments are a popular “go-to” among developers because they appeal to the market and are less costly than detached alternatives. However, community members expressed concern with recent townhouse development, noting the lack of quality with respect to design and low curb appeal. The County should include controls to improve the aesthetic of building design, such as entrance orientation, number of units per building, and provisions for visitor parking or on-street parking. The Consultant Team will work with staff during the drafting stage to refine provisions related to townhouse development.

Low-Rise and Mid-Rise Housing

Higher intensity housing types, such as apartments and condominiums, are one of the leading drivers of the rental market and are a popular “go-to” for developers. However, stakeholders noted that public perception of high-density typically is associated with rental apartments. Lack of homeownership options (such as condominiums) often creates a stigma of transience when compared to long-term home investors. Therefore, the County should re-evaluate its current definition and approach for multi-family and consider its impact on the community in terms of building and site design. Larger housing developments often lack high-quality building and site



design and therefore lead to misconceptions of “multi-family” as less desirable or incompatible to neighborhoods. To alleviate this perception, Zoning Ordinance should provide for open space and/or amenity space that supports neighborhood cohesion. Community serving spaces should be walkable and require maintenance plan for garbage pick-up and upkeep. The County could establish a minimum baseline for building and site design that applies to larger residential developments. Locational criteria is another factor to consider for higher intensity residential developments. These housing types are configured differently on sites compared with the smaller residential infill housing. Therefore, they are more appropriate in areas that occur on the edges of neighborhoods, adjacent to corridors, or within activity centers. Material standards were cited frequently by community members. They would like to avoid the use of vinyl, use fiber cement siding, and avoid certain colors. Downtown Snellville and Downtown Duluth are two examples of communities that employ good design with regard to multi-family development.

Uses

The current list of uses will be audited against modern industry classifications (such as the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) and the American Planning Association’s Land-Based Classification Standards (LBCS) to ensure that all known uses are accounted for.

The County has already identified a list of “quick fixes” to complete as part of the update to the use matrix. These include:

- Clarifying districts where “special event facilities” are allowed (GB, MX).
- Clarifying districts where “auto brokers” are allowed.
- Establishing the minimum size threshold of a grocery store and distinguishing between convenience store and grocery store using square foot size or building footprint thresholds.
- Ensuring schools and public institutions are permitted in all districts.
- Ensure all uses have an associated definition (e.g., “truck terminal”).

New & Emerging Uses

Unique and emerging uses will also be addressed. New uses that will be introduced to the Zoning Ordinance include the following:

- Mixed-use definitions such as mixed-use development, mixed-use building, upper-level residential, and live-work;
- Housing types such as accessory dwelling unit, triplex, quadplex, cottage court, and senior living; and
- Mixed-use industrial uses such as breweries, distilleries, food halls, wine bars, and similar commercialized social spaces.

Administratively Approved Use Permits

All proposed uses require some level of approval. Uses are generally approved at staff level by-right or if they adhere to supplemental regulations in the Zoning Ordinance. These uses have little impact to surrounding properties, are deemed compatible with the underlying zoning district, and therefore do not necessitate approval by a reviewing board.

- Accessory Use definition should be evaluated.

Some uses may include statutory requirements or other additional regulations that staff reviews to ensure compatibility, function, or operations adhere to these requirements. Staff has identified the following list of uses in need of an update:

- Home Occupations (to include micro-businesses to reflect work-from-home versus those that require registration with the County/State) [See “[Cottage Food Items](#),” Official Code of



Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.) §26-2-470, et. seq., and Chapter 40-7-19, "[Cottage Food Regulations](#), as amended."];

- Personal Wireless Service Facilities [Per FCC requirements];
- Electric Vehicle Charging Stations;
- Alcohol Sales [Pursuant to Title 3 – Alcoholic Beverages of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated];
- Food Trucks and Mobile Vendors [See Georgia Department of Public Health Food Service Rules and Regulations and Georgia Department of Agriculture Regulations];
- Manufactured Homes [Pursuant to County Health Department approval and County-required Permit and Decal requirements]; and
- Modular housing and container homes.

Limitations on Certain Uses

Some uses can adversely affect the County's neighborhoods while other uses can proliferate and saturate the market. Furthermore, access to certain uses and activities are linked to increases in health concerns. Stakeholders and participants in community meetings requested regulations for several uses such as required separation distances and/or quota limits by geographic area. The following list of uses were identified as needing limitations:

- Short-term rentals;
- Vaping and tobacco-related retail;
- Beauty supply stores;
- Liquor and beer;
- Massage parlors;
- Fast-food restaurants;
- Tattoo parlors; and
- Tire shops.

Open Space

The 2039 Comprehensive Plan calls for a character-based approach to open space. There are various factors to consider when delineating the characteristics of open space, including types of activity, scale and typology, composition of elements, contiguity, and accessibility.

Spaces can range in their degree of activity. For example, a **passive** space is set aside for conservation or low-impact recreation, such as an urban forest or wildlife habitat. Or, an **active** space is designed for recreation or community gathering space, such as a sports and recreation field. This could factor in the general location and suitability of using open space in various character areas. Active spaces are more suitable to an urban center whereas passive spaces are suited adjacent to creeks and natural settings. Additionally, the County could distinguish open space based on scale, whether the space is public or semi-public/private, and composition. Typologies can distinguish between the degree of public, semi-public, and private spaces and their desired traits. A public space might have greater visibility and accessibility from the street. Meanwhile, private open space might contribute if it exhibits certain desired outcomes such as environmental benefits and active recreation. However, some communities do not count private space towards minimum open space requirements since it is not publicly accessible. For example, community amenities that are associated with an apartment building (i.e., a pool) do not necessarily contribute to the public realm. By contrast, a new trail or a public green is often accessed and used by the general public.

Therefore, the Zoning Ordinance should clarify what types of open space count towards minimum open space requirements and develop specific criteria for open space typologies. The composition, or spatial criteria, should consider physical and visual accessibility to/from the public, contiguity and



connectivity of open spaces as extensions of the public realm, and conformance with general open space design guidelines and/or standards to ensure comfort, durability, and lively spaces. Once the types and characteristics of open spaces are defined, the County should evaluate which types of open space should be prioritized for character areas. This strategy incentivizes developers by forcing them to consider how to use scarcity of land to meet the minimum required percentage of open space.

Public Improvement Standards

Undergrounding Utilities

Clayton County's Zoning Ordinance provides for undergrounding utilities (Sec. 4.12 Public Improvement Standards). This should be revised to include administrative relief criteria for undergrounding. Undergrounding utilities is an effective strategy that creates long-term value in key corridors and activity centers. Jurisdictions often require burying utilities underground to support walkable, urban environments. The benefits of this include improved:

- **Aesthetics:** By removing the visual clutter of above ground poles and hanging wires, there is simply more space for other visually appealing elements along the street.
- **Public Safety & Resilience:** Buried lines are less vulnerable to storm-induced events, which reduces outage incidents and decreases risk to pedestrians and vehicles.
- **Maintenance:** Channeling of infrastructure underground eliminates the large number of service poles above ground and the need to maintain them.

While channeling utilities underground helps strengthen an attractive built environment, it creates a burden on developers due to added cost and complexity. The upfront cost of undergrounding is high because of the trenching, conduits, transformers, and equipment necessary. Time is also a factor due to the intense coordination between GDOT, County officials, and multiple utility companies involved. Spatial considerations between various utility lines, such as gas, water, and sewer, must be coordinated as well. Routing utilities underground often is accompanied by easements that allow future access for upgrades and maintenance.

The cost, time, and coordination aspects of undergrounding utilities can make or break infill or redevelopment projects. The County should consider the financial feasibility of smaller projects and the impact it has on redevelopment and improving an overall district. To reduce the cost burden, some local governments create programs such as special assessment districts (e.g., San Antonio) or add a small surcharge on utility bills (e.g., Hilton Head Island) to assist with undergrounding. While such tools are beyond the scope of this project, the Zoning Ordinance could include an “escape valve” or relief for minor additions and smaller developments in the form of flexible provisions with exceptions, waivers, administrative adjustments, and/or in-lieu fees to alleviate the burden of undergrounding utilities.

New development must also ensure adequate provisions are made for sidewalk infrastructure. Currently, the County requires eight-foot-wide sidewalks as a minimum for new development. The Zoning Ordinance should clearly state minimum requirements for sidewalks county-wide with clear criteria for exemptions.

Building & Site Design

Building Design

The Zoning Ordinance currently addresses building design predominantly in Sec. 6.7, Sec 6.8, and Sec 6.9 of Article 6: Development Standards. Applicants are required to submit a Plan Book for all



proposed residential development showing building elevations and design elements. The current architecture & appearance standards include design standards applicable to:

- Single-family detached or two-family attached dwellings;
- Townhouse dwellings; and
- Multi-family dwellings.

Article 6 also contains building design standards for industrial and commercial developments as well. Some of the County's overlays contain additional building design standards. For example, Sec. 4.107 Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay District contains provisions for townhouse and multi-family residential development.

Stakeholders desire increased attention for building design requirements. In particular, the Zoning Ordinance should require enduring materials such as brick, stone, and glass. Additionally, buildings should include four-sided design – at least for building walls that face public streets.

County staff has identified a list of “quick fixes” related to building design, including:

- Create context-sensitive aesthetics for the Character Areas used in the 2039 Comprehensive Plan.
- Review overlays for residential standards; and make into baseline development standards in the Zoning Ordinance.
- Vary the number of exterior finish materials used (not just one material).
- Refer to “building design,” not architecture, throughout the Zoning Ordinance.

Development frontage regulations could provide an effective placemaking strategy to improve general aesthetics of development along TODs, activity centers, and gateway corridors. A development's frontage refers to the portion of the site and building that directly abuts a street (as opposed to a 360-degree view of the building), which establishes a direct relationship with the public realm. The Zoning Ordinance can use development frontages to define how a building relates to the street and prioritize an active presence (as opposed to passive “dead” space) to promote an interactive pedestrian-oriented environment. Various development types (e.g., priority retail, flexible commercial, open space, etc.) can tailor frontage conditions to varying contexts.

The consultant team recommends that the County consider using development frontage as a way to focus enhancements to building design at the street or public realm. The Zoning Ordinance can also calibrate building design regulations so that they optimize flexibility for the developer on properties in TOD, gateway corridors, and activity centers.

Exterior Lighting

Outdoor lighting is tied to the County's goal to implement character areas from the Comprehensive Plan. More density and clustered development may necessitate increased controls for outdoor lighting to preserve the night sky. The updated outdoor lighting regulations could reflect more modern industry standards and provide standards tailored to different areas of the County. A best practice is to regulate the amount of lighting using a lumens per acre or lumens per square foot limit. The International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) uses the individual lighting power allowances for building exteriors that serve as a basis to limit overlighting in conjunction with the lighting zones.

Additionally, off-site impacts of exterior lighting can be controlled using [Backlight, Uplight, and Clare](#) (“BUG”) ratings, which is a best practice. BUG ratings are based on the manufacturer's spec sheet for the luminaire. As such, they are easily verifiable during site plan review. Using BUG ratings eliminates the need to regulate footcandles at the lot line, which is a common standard in zoning and development codes.



For more sensitive areas, lighting color (measured in Kelvins) has impacts on flora and fauna. Furthermore, lighting emissions can affect nighttime visibility and increase skyglow (See International Dark-Sky Association, [Why Is Blue Light at Night Bad?](#), December 22, 2016). To minimize blue light emission, warm spectrum amber lighting should be used rather than cool spectrum blue or white lighting.

Finally, the County can further control nuisances related to light with considerations for searchlights, intense accent lighting, and other glare nuisances.

Landscaping & Buffer Yards

Because Clayton County includes a large portion of land dedicated to industry and commercial uses, there are a lot of edge conditions adjacent to residential neighborhoods. This means that neighborhoods will interface with industrial and commercial areas, and the associated impacts of those uses. Therefore, the Zoning Ordinance should establish transition standards for commercial and industrial development abutting residential areas [See Neighborhood Transitions].

The current Zoning Ordinance establishes buffer yard standards in Sec. 6.35 for all districts. Buffer yard standards are given under each zoning district and scattered throughout the Zoning Ordinance. These requirements should be consolidated into a single section of the code and reorganized using a practical layout with tables and representative graphics. That way, the Zoning Ordinance may offer clear guidance on requirements between zoning districts and land use intensities. This will make the Zoning Ordinance easier to read by those who use it, such as landscape architects that quickly need to navigate to landscape requirements.

In addition to consolidating the buffer yard standards, the consultant team will evaluate potential design alternatives to existing buffer yard widths and standards. During public engagement, stakeholders and County staff cited inadequate buffers between industrial and residential areas as a specific concern. Additionally, buffers between areas of higher intensity and lower intensity residential uses are a concern. Potential alternatives could include:

- Increasing existing buffer yard widths;
- Increasing planting density/opacity;
- Increasing alternative buffer yard types for added flexibility;
- Requiring buffer yards between use categories (versus by zoning district); and
- Using performance requirements for buffers, based on factors such as noise, light, glare, air pollutants, and hours of operation.

Enhanced Landscaping

Stakeholders want to attract future business to commercial areas and felt the need to improve the curb appeal of properties through landscaping. Redevelopment can improve the aesthetic of surface parking lots by requiring landscaping between the edge of the street and the perimeter of surface parking areas.

Parking

Cities [nationwide](#) are reexamining and reforming parking requirements to tackle important issues such as housing costs, equity concerns, and balancing transit, walking, and bicycling as alternative modes for getting around. Reducing parking requirements would:



- Decrease/reallocate construction cost: By allowing only what the market demands, developers only build what they need instead of meeting arbitrary ratios. This saves money and allows developers to spend it elsewhere on design, amenities, and value adds.
- Lower housing costs: By reducing or eliminating parking (i.e., unbundling), housing can become more affordable for those who do not rely on cars as their primary mode of transportation.
- Increase space for competing amenities: By removing excess parking, more room is created for shade trees, landscaped areas, outdoor amenities, and buildable area.
- Encourage multimodal options: By restricting parking, occupants are more likely to consider alternative options such as transit, walking, and bicycling.

The Zoning Ordinance includes parking requirements in Article 6: Development Standards under Sec. 6.32. Additional parking regulations are found in the TOD and corridor overlay districts. A few areas in which the County might reexamine its parking include:

- Eliminate parking requirements in TOD Overlay areas.
- Significantly reduce requirements in strategic areas, like activity centers and along transit corridors.
- Lower the minimum required parking for all uses, except single-family residential.
- Introduce a maximum percentage (e.g., 150%).
- Authorize “Alternative Parking Plans” that propose ratios lower than indicated in the Zoning Ordinance if the applicant demonstrates less need by either a parking demand study or by reference to standard parking resources published by nationally recognized organizations.
- Require “Alternative Parking Plans” for shopping centers, mixed-use developments, and complex developments, where shared parking between uses is likely and to facilitate a single calculation for such uses.
- Allow parking reductions to developments that participate in cross-access agreements.
- Consolidate parking standards into a single section of the zoning code, versus scattering throughout the code with repeating standards.
- Apply parking by use type and development type for all districts.
- Simplify ratios so that they are per GFA, versus by type of occupants (which is difficult to enforce) or by usable floor space (which requires intense calculation)
- Evaluate and adjust ratios. For example, multifamily ratios could apply per bedroom for studio, 1BR, and 2BR units; and not apply to 3BR units.

The consultant team recommends that the County examine its parking requirements and make adjustments that facilitate redevelopment within TODs, gateway corridors, and activity centers. Additional action could include adjusting parking ratios and adding more flexibility to regulatory provisions. The consultant team will work with County staff, the advisory committee, and stakeholders to identify the most effective approach for Clayton County.

Signs

Signs are noticeable features of the built environment. They serve important purposes, such as identifying a place of business, directing traffic and wayfinding for navigation, and expressing a visual aesthetic. However, signs also can negatively impact a community by creating visual clutter along roadways that can distract and overwhelm drivers, disrupting the quiet enjoyment of a neighborhood, and contributing to the appearance of blight when they are not adequately maintained. The Zoning Ordinance can mitigate these negative impacts by regulating size, lighting, setbacks, and other characteristics of signs. Zoning codes must balance the important purposes of signs for communication and aesthetics with these negative impacts.



Clayton County's sign regulations should regulate by design and physical characteristics rather than what a sign says. This principle is known as "content neutrality." The consultant team will evaluate the current sign standards and develop context appropriate strategies that make sense for Clayton County. We will tailor sign standards by zoning district to allow signs of the appropriate scale and features that relate to the context.

The County has identified a number of "quick fixes" to be addressed in the update, including:

- Implement character areas from the 2039 Comprehensive Plan.
- Review the Master Sign Plan and recommend implementation methods
- Establish signage as a design element that can contribute to a sense of place/gateways.
- Limit sign height (pedestrian-oriented signage) on major corridors and sunset existing signs for two (2) years.
- Reduce the prominence of signage while balancing commercial and aesthetic interest.
- Address monuments and murals.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS: DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Neighborhood Transitions

Recommended actions to implement neighborhood transitions:

- Introduce transition standards that address separation distance, types of uses/activities allowed, and design standards for transition areas between corridors and residential uses.
- Introduce transition standards that address separation distance, types of uses/activities allowed, and design standards for transition areas between industrial uses and residential uses.

Housing Options

Recommended actions to implement regulations related to housing:

- Expand ADUs as a permitted use in other zoning districts.
- Introduce and permit smaller lot sizes in existing zoning districts and/or new zoning districts.
- Introduce compatible neighborhood infill housing types, with minimum locational and design criteria.
- Eliminate the use of "multi-family" and distinguish between low-rise and mid-rise residential buildings.

Uses

Recommended actions to implement updates related to uses:

- Audit uses against for completeness and statutory requirements and address "quick fixes" for new & emerging uses.
- Update use table for principal, accessory, and temporary uses.

Open Space

Recommended actions to update open space standards:

- Review the current open space requirements and establish appropriate minimum open space requirements by zoning district and/or development type.



- Define, delineate, and assign value to various open space types.

Public Improvement Standards

Recommended actions to update public improvement standards:

- Consolidate public improvement standards to a single section of the zoning code and apply to TOD and Gateway Corridor Overlays.
- Revise public improvement standards to include administrative relief for undergrounding utilities and consider alternatives to reduce cost burden.
- Ensure minimum requirements for sidewalks are established in the code.

Building & Site Design

Recommended actions to update building design and site design:

- Simplify and revise outdoor lighting controls using lighting zones, 'BUG' ratings, and nuisance provisions.
- Use development frontages as a best practice to control building design, and/or increasing flexibility of building design standards.

Landscaping & Buffer Yards

Recommended actions to update landscaping and buffer yards:

- Review the current buffer yard requirements to ensure adequate screening and separation distance between districts and/or land use types.
- Add flexibility for developers to meet buffer yard types, with fences and/or walls, evergreen trees, and a mix of plantings.

Parking

Recommended actions to update parking regulations:

- Work closely with County staff, Advisory Committee, and stakeholders to identify a tailored and context-appropriate strategy for parking.
- Eliminate parking requirements to promote transit readiness in TOD areas.
- Lower parking reductions, or create parking maximums, in gateway corridors and activity centers.
- Encourage/incentivize parking reductions by introducing alternative parking plans, administrative reductions in exchange for community benefits, and other means.
- Right-size parking ratios and methods to calculate required parking.

Signs

Recommended action to update sign regulations:

- Audit the sign regulations for content neutrality and develop a contextual approach to implement signs by character districts.



Part IV.

Administrative

Processes

IV. Administrative Processes

Development Review

Clarifying Review Procedures

Uncertainty in the development review and approval process can lead to costly delays. The Zoning Ordinance should clearly demonstrate the flow of a development application, the roles and responsibilities of County officials and designated review boards, and any required noticing or public hearings procedures mandated by state law. The Zoning Ordinance can achieve this through flow charts or outlining common workflows for all processes.

The consultant team will evaluate zoning-related processes and clarify procedures within the Zoning Ordinance. Processes should provide applicants with clear direction on how to submit applications, completeness of applications, timing of applications, administrative review of applications (including the County's Technical Review Committee involvement), and guide them through the development review process. The consultant team will evaluate the following application processes for optimization to clarify related steps of the development review and approval procedures:

- Zoning Map Amendment (Rezoning)
- Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map Amendment
- Planned Unit Development
- Conditional Use Permits
- Interpretations of the Zoning Code
- Zoning Variance
- Administrative Appeal
- Zoning Compliance of Building Permits (use, sign, fence, building, certificate of occupancy)

Expedited Review

The County's Community and Economic Development Department offers a multitude of [incentives](#) for businesses, including:

- *Tier 1 Designation.* Clayton County is designated as a Tier 1 County by the State of Georgia. This means any business that creates 2 new full-time jobs is eligible for a \$4,000 per job tax credit for 10 years.
- *Community Improvement Districts.* CIDs are a self-taxing district where businesses in the geographic footprint tax themselves to pay for projects that will improve the economics and quality of life within the designated area. The Aerotropolis CIDs seek to raise the collective value of their community's commercial properties while making the CIDs a destination for new businesses, residents, and visitors. The CIDs support a public safety program addressing property and business concerns and enhance perception of the community.
- *Opportunity Zones.* The County maintains many opportunity zones, which include federal tax credit advantages for businesses.
- *New Markets Tax Credits.* The NMTC increases the flow of capital to businesses and low-income communities. In census tracts where individual poverty rate is at least 20 percent or where median family income does not exceed 80 percent of the area median, projects with total planned capital costs of at least \$2 million qualify for tax credits.
- *Streamlined Permitting.* The County offers a streamlined project manager (e.g., 7-day turnaround) for impactful projects, and the County will take the project through the rezoning process to assist investors.

In addition to the incentives listed above, the County maintains an expedited review process for certain types of development that offer to bring desired economic benefits to the county. To provide



a clear process, the Zoning Ordinance should formalize the process for eligibility, review criteria, application and review workflows to enhance predictability for the applicants. The County can facilitate a smooth application process by requiring or recommending a pre-application conference and dedicated project manager to walk applicants through the process. Eligible projects would get priority placement in the review queue using the streamlined project manager system already in place and priority scheduling for any public meetings.

An expedited review for economic development merit requires eligibility parameters that are clear and easy to determine. Eligibility criteria could include:

- Endorsement from the Economic Development Office or similar organization;
- Creation of a certain number of jobs at a specified wage level;
- Amount of capital investment;
- Project uses focused on targeted industries, especially those that would employ the skills found in the local workforce;
- Within specific geographic areas or zones (e.g. Mountain View Overlay, TOD overlays, Community Improvement District, or Opportunity or Enterprise Zone);
- The project's scale;
- Not rezoning or otherwise displacing residential development;
- Proximate to important transportation infrastructure such as major arterials, gateway corridors, transit hubs, or the airport.

Eligibility for expedited review often includes target industries. Example target industries in other communities include: aviation/aerospace, clean technology, information technology, financial/professional services, logistics and distribution, manufacturing, and corporate headquarters. These are typically identified through an Economic Development study or otherwise designated by the Economic Development Department or similar agency based on the local economic context.

What Are Other Community's Doing?

Community	Approach
New Castle County, DE	The Economic Empowerment District (EED) was created to facilitate employment uses and complementary accessory uses in a master planned setting while also protecting surrounding neighborhoods. The district lists targeted industries identified in the County's Economic Development Strategic Plan to clearly define priority uses. To be eligible, projects must also meet thresholds for parcel size, and location to transportation infrastructure. The EED creates a clear and predictable path for approval (but not an expedited review) and includes incentives for alternative parking or landscape calculations, or customized design standards.
St. Johns County, FL	The Expedited Review process sets project eligibility criteria for job creation at or above the county average wage. Additional factors are left to discretionary review by the County Administrator – amount of capital investment, types of skills relative to existing work force, and the project's ability to diversify and strengthen the area's economy. Projects approved by the County's Business Incentive Program automatically qualify for expedited review. Public projects, utilities, and extraction/mining uses are not eligible. The County facilitates expedited review with a pre-application process and concurrent reviews for the various required permits and approvals.
Collier County, FL	Projects proposals fitting the list of targeted industries are eligible for the Fast Track Program which applies to rezoning, subdivision, or site development approvals, and building permits. If a project is deemed eligible through the pre-approval process, it receives priority review. Projects receive an expedited review with the intent of providing process certainty, reduced approval times, and providing a central point of contact.

Administrative Relief of Dimensional Requirements



The code currently allows up to 10% relief from certain zoning standards, including setbacks and sign area. This percentage could increase to 15% or a maximum of 20% to allow additional flexibility for the development community and for staff to administratively approve adjustments.

Nonconformities

The existing Zoning Ordinance currently references nonconformities throughout the document in various sections and addresses several nonconforming conditions in Article 9: Nonconforming Structures, Lots, and Uses. In some instances, nonconforming provisions are repeated throughout the document. This scattered and repetitive content makes it challenging for the reader to clearly understand the concept of nonconforming conditions. The updated code will consolidate all nonconformity provisions into a single section of the code to clarify language that addresses nonconforming lots, structures, uses, and other conditions, to make it easier for enforcement of those conditions.

Stakeholders repeatedly noted concerns with the depreciating appearance and deferred maintenance of existing properties. For example, vacant or underutilized lots are sometimes used as dumping grounds and stakeholders believe that there is little recourse to abate this. The community would like to elevate curb appeal and beautify commercial and residential properties. The County has introduced a “Blight Tax” that could mitigate this problem and reduce perceptions related to boarded up buildings and blighted properties. The Consultant Team will review the enforcement procedures and strengthen language, where applicable.

Counties commonly address nonconformities—lots, setbacks, uses, structures, site conditions, and signs—through enforcement procedures and regulatory tools established in the Zoning Ordinance. Those terms and provisions are typically consolidated into a single section of the code, where clear definitions and terms of enforcement are laid out for various situations that arise during the development or redevelopment process. During the drafting phase of the Zoning Ordinance, the Consultant Team will address:

- **Nonconforming Lots:** this includes substandard size and/or dimensions of lots.
- **Nonconforming Uses:** these uses not permitted under the current zoning district.
- **Nonconforming Structures:** these are buildings not meeting current standards (e.g., setback dimensions or height).
- **Nonconforming Site Features:** these are landscaping, buffers, fences or walls, or parking conditions that do not meet zoning requirements.
- **Nonconforming Signs.** common topics related to nonconforming signs include sunsetting existing signs on major corridors after two years and strengthening criteria for enforcing minor repair and maintenance.

Enforcement

A number of code enforcement concerns were raised during engagement with stakeholders and staff alike. Staff raised particular concern in residential neighborhoods involving “pad splits,” where a single-family detached house is converted into a rental property containing the maximum amounts of renters possible. This appears to be a nationwide trend and has adverse effects on the neighboring residents, driving up complaints to enforcement offices. Staff noted these types of properties are becoming a nuisance for several reasons. Firstly, many rooms like the dining room or living room are gutted to maximize the number of rentable bedrooms, effectively removing any common space. The increased number of persons per household has an impact on parking as well. Because the landlords are out-of-town, common maintenance items are not attended to and therefore create a burden on the neighborhood.



The Consultant Team will evaluate ways in which the Zoning Ordinance can deter this type of phenomenon from occurring in residential areas. Several methods mentioned include evaluating the County's definitions, adding quotas for this type of use in residential neighborhoods, enhanced recourse language to determine whether alternative language can address this issue.

Other "quick fixes" were identified by staff. Those include:

- *Enforce the Zoning Ordinance.* Enforcement is an important issue, when it comes to maintaining and repairing buildings, signs, and other structures on properties, which create an inviting and welcoming atmosphere where people want to visit. [See Nonconformities]
- *Rely on the Building Code, where possible.* The Zoning Ordinance could reference the IBC and IRC for building height measurements and other terminology. This remove redundant language in the Zoning Ordinance and facilitate inter-department review of uses. [See Legibility]
- *Removing language related to the Subdivision Regulations.* Currently, the Zoning Ordinance makes several references to subdivision topics. However, the Zoning Administrator is unable to administer these provisions, so it is best to remove the language from the Zoning Ordinance altogether.



PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:**CLARIFY & STREAMLINE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES****Expedited Review**

Recommended actions to streamline development review:

- Develop criteria for the County's expedited review process and clearly define the benefits to developers so that efficient planning review facilitates economic development.
- Increase the percentage (max 20%) for administrative approvals to provide relief of zoning dimensional requirements and increase flexibility for development.

Procedures

Recommended actions to help streamline and clarify procedures:

- Consolidate all procedures into a single article of the Zoning Ordinance.
- Use flowcharts to depict clear process and procedures.
- Define authority of review boards and officials and their associated roles and establish clear reviewing criteria.
- Distinguish between minor and major modifications and strengthen criteria for what constitutes a minor modification.

Nonconformities

Recommended actions to address nonconforming conditions:

- Update the zoning variance requirements and process to clearly state which standards may be varied.
- Implement common strategies to address nonconformities:
 - "Grandfathering" clauses or provisions addressing legal nonconforming status;
 - Limitations on expansion or alterations of uses or structures;
 - Amortization clause, or phase out period, for undesirable or incompatible uses;
 - Thresholds for rebuilding, where a certain percentage of the building is damaged or a specified period has transpired; and
 - Abandonment or discontinuation clauses, where the right to resume a use or activity transpires.



Part V.

Code

Experience

V. Improving the Code Experience

Organization

Many stakeholders have commented on the inefficiency and outdated feel of the current Zoning Ordinance. Stakeholders expressed the need for a more streamlined look and feel and generally creating a more readable content to help code users (such as developers, applicants, and property owners) navigate the document.

Easy navigation is important so that users understand what the County expects of development while increasing the predictability in the development review and approval process. To improve the overall user experience, the consultant team proposes restructuring the Zoning Ordinance to make information easier to find, reformatting to enhance readability, and provide visual enhancements to navigate the code better.

The consultant team will rearrange the Zoning Ordinance to make it easier for the reader to navigate. The annotated outline will present the most used content upfront (i.e., zoning districts and use regulations) and locate the more technical information (i.e., legal terms and definitions) towards the end of the document.

The consultant team will prepare an annotated outline showing a proposed reorganization of the current Zoning Ordinance structure. A breakdown of the new structure should resemble the following:

- Article 1: General Provisions
- Article 2: Zoning Districts
- Article 3: Use Regulations
- Article 4: Development Standards
- Article 5: Reviewing Agencies
- Article 6: Procedures
- Article 7: Nonconformities
- Article 8: Enforcement
- Article 9: Administration

Formatting

The Zoning Ordinance should maintain consistent formatting throughout the document. The current Zoning Ordinance lacks a logical order and formatting style. The consultant team will use a Style Guide as a template to build on the code's structure (Article, Section, and Subsection).

In this context, “formatting” refers to:

- Style (e.g., font type or paragraph shading);
- Paragraph hierarchy (i.e., how paragraphs are numbered or lettered, as well as how other sections refer to them, such as “article,” “section,” and “paragraph”);
- Text attributes (e.g., Capitalized, **bold**, or *italic* text);
- Consistency of how numbers and percentages appear within the text;
- Punctuation (e.g., use of the Oxford comma, or the type of punctuation at the end of listed items);
- Cross-referencing to internal and external information, such as the ability to link back to the Table of Contents;



- Use of acronyms;
- Numbering and titling of figures, tables, and graphics; and
- Page layout (e.g., margins, spacing, running headers and footers).

Most of the pages for zoning districts within the existing Zoning Ordinance include the following subsections:

- District Intent
- Permitted Uses
- Conditional Uses
- Additional Restrictions
- Applicability of standards
- Dimensional Standards
 - Lot Area, Width, Depth, Frontage, Coverage
 - Sewer and Water
 - Building Setbacks, Footprint, Height, etc.
- Development Standards, where applicable
- Architectural Standards, where applicable

However, some districts include some or all of the above listed items, and other districts do not contain any of the above.

Each zoning district should have a consistent layout and composition of elements. The consultant team will prepare a consistent layout to be used for all zoning districts, establish a clear purpose statement for each, and compose a layout that contains applicable information and/or cross-references to relevant information elsewhere in the code.

Legibility

Terminology

All persons who read the Zoning Ordinance should have a clear understanding of its purpose and intent. Therefore, the Zoning Ordinance should include clear and consistent terminology, definitions, text, and standards. The consultant team will remove redundant or obsolete text and references that no longer apply, and avoid the use of jargon, “legalese,” or “terms of art” that the general public does not often use. The new Zoning Ordinance will simplify existing language to increase public understanding. For example, the Zoning Ordinance will remove all references to land development (which is handled under a separate Subdivision Ordinance).

The consultant team will review all definitions for accuracy, obsolescence, and alignment with statutory requirements. The new Zoning Ordinance will update the definitions to ensure that all uses in the Zoning Ordinance pair with an associated definition. As an example, County staff provided the following list of uses lacking a definition:

- Warehouse
- Wholesale
- Electrical Charging Station
- Data Center
- Duplex
- Accessory Dwelling Unit
- Food Dessert
- Amenity Area
- Personal Service Shop
- Transit Oriented Development



Navigation

Headers and footers typically help readers with navigation. These are located at the top and bottom of each page to guide readers on the content displayed concerning other areas of the code. Headers and footers often include interactive links to take readers back to the table of contents or the start of an Article or Section

Informal Commentary

Informal commentary is helpful to the casual or infrequent reader on complex regulatory provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. When used, commentaries are distinguished from the regulatory text using text attributes (e.g., color, font, or text style), icons, or call-out boxes. An Executive Summary, and/or a “How-To” section at the beginning of the code can help explain the role of these commentary boxes in understanding and interpreting the regulatory text.

Graphics

Graphics add value to the Zoning Ordinance by supplementing and illustrating the intent of standards. Illustrations, diagrams, tables, and other user-friendly graphics help communicate the standards to the reader. Tables, for instance, are a helpful way to display quantitative information such as buffer yard dimensions or setback requirements. Visuals such as these help break up the text and make code language easier for the layperson to understand.

Use Table

The Zoning Ordinance utilizes a use table to list allowed uses in each zoning district, which is a best practice. Use tables streamline the code, removing repetitive list of uses from the individual district regulations. They also are user-friendly and easy to comprehend by the average reader. Color coding can enhance and further facilitate reading. Refer to *Figure 5: Sample Use Table* below for an example of a use table. The list of uses should include broad use categories, to include uses with similar characteristics (e.g., residential uses). Categories should be ordered alphabetically and simplified to reduce redundancies.

Figure 5: Sample Use Table

Table 155.271-1: Use Table (PR, AGC, AGC-1, RUD, RUD-1, RSF-40, RSF-30, RMX-20, RMX-10, and RMX-6 Districts)										
Uses	Use Conditions	PR	AGC	AGC-1	RUD	RUD-1	RSF-40	RSF-30	RMX-20	RMX-10
ACCESSORY USES										
Refer to Subchapter C, Part 4 for accessory uses for all districts.										
ACCOMMODATION AND GROUP LIVING										
Assisted Living, Skilled Nursing, Continuing Care Retirement Facilities			SE	SE	SE				P	P
Bed and Breakfasts	Subpart 3.5	SE	SE	SE	SE	SE	SE	SE	SE	SE
Community Residences, Long-Term (up to 5 residents)						P	P	P	P	P
Community Residences, Long-Term (up to 15 residents)									P	P
Community Residences, Short-Term									P	P
Emergency Shelters										P
Group Living, including Rooming Houses, Dormitories, and Fraternity and Sorority Housing									SE	SE
Hotels and Motels										
Short-Term Rentals	Subpart 3.33	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Transitional Housing										
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES										
Agricultural Processing			P	P	P	P				
Agricultural Support Sales and Services			P	P	P	P				
Animal Production and Livestock (Keeping or Raising)			P	P	P	P				



PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

IMPROVING THE CODE EXPERIENCE

Organization

Recommended actions to address organization:

- Prepare an annotated outline showing a proposed structure for the updated Zoning Ordinance.

Formatting

Recommended actions to address formatting:

- Prepare a style guide for consistent formatting during drafting.
- Compose a standard layout to be used for all zoning districts.

Legibility

The following actions to address legibility:

- Review and update all definitions.
- Simplify terminology and language used.
- Use informal commentary and navigation tools throughout the Zoning Ordinance to help the reader.

Graphics

Recommended actions to address graphics:

- Increase the use of illustrations, diagrams, tables, and other user-friendly images throughout the code.
- Revise the use table, color-coded by zoning district, and include cross-references to associated supplemental use regulations.
- Update rules for measurement with illustrations for measuring height, lot dimensions, and other common quantitative aspects of the code.



VI. Conclusion & Next Steps

This Zoning Ordinance update is an effort to implement the goals and objectives of the County's Comprehensive Plan and associated planning documents. This diagnostic identifies the gaps between zoning and policy to assist the County in fully realizing the community's planning goals and objectives.

The Zoning Ordinance Diagnostic report is one step as part of a longer planning process. The County, along with its consultant team, will hold additional public engagement to take comments on the proposed approaches, strategies, and recommendations gathered in this report. The County and consultant team will present a preliminary set of recommendations back to the community, stakeholders, and elected/appointed officials. These meetings are important to ensure the recommendations are in line with the community vision.

County staff will identify any recommendations to fast-track in advance of the remaining recommendations. These are items that the County might consider as "quick fixes", or those deemed easy to implement as interim amendments. For example, the residential zoning districts are expected to be prioritized in advance of commercial districts.

The County will develop final recommendations following input received from public engagement. A set of refined recommendations will inform the drafting efforts to occur in early 2026. Drafting efforts will consist of rewriting the County's Zoning Ordinance in a series of modules. The County will invite project stakeholders and the public to review and provide final comments on all proposed revisions as the project nears completion. The final draft of the new Zoning Ordinance will reflect input gathered prior to the adoption and approval of the Zoning Ordinance amendments.

CLAYTON COUNTY ZONING REWRITE DIGITAL PROJECT HUB

To stay informed about the Clayton County Zoning Rewrite process, visit the County's [Digital Project Hub](#).

The Digital Project Hub includes the following:

1. Project Overview
2. Project Schedule
3. Upcoming Events
4. Documents
5. Contact Information
6. Frequently Asked Questions



