

2016 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE



*Developed by the **Planning & Government Services Division**
of the **Northeast Georgia Regional Commission***



Acknowledgements

CITY OF MANSFIELD

Jefferson Riley, Mayor

Perry Lunsford, Councilmember

Helen Robertson, Councilmember

Chris Fulmer, Councilmember

Lisa Dunn, Councilmember

Jeana Hyde, Clerk

STEERING COMMITTEE

Jefferson Riley, Mayor

Perry Lunsford, Councilmember

Mike Dubin, Resident and business executive

Dennis Hyde, Resident and business owner

Sandra Johnson, Resident and business owner

Denise Stiles, Resident

NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

James Dove, Executive Director

Burke Walker, Director of Planning & Government Services

John Devine, AICP, Senior Planner (Project Lead)

Kenny Gilbert, GIS Planner

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW.....	3
2. NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES	4
3. COMMUNITY GOALS	7
4. LAND USE	8
<i>Character Areas Compatibility Index</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Character Areas Defining Narrative</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Character Areas Map</i>	<i>14</i>
5. COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM	15
<i>Short-Term Work Program, 2016-2020</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Report of Plan Accomplishments, 2011-2015.....</i>	<i>18</i>



1

Introduction & Overview

PURPOSE

This comprehensive plan serves as a decision-making guide for local government officials and community leaders. Based on input from the public and a steering committee, the plan identifies needs and opportunities, goals and policies, land use practices, and an implementation framework for key elements.

PROCESS

The comprehensive plan process follows the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, effective 3/1/2014.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public Input & Steering Committee

The planning process began with a public hearing, and was followed by a community input session during which the public and a local steering committee were invited to discuss local trends and aspirations. Following the initial public meetings, several work sessions were held with a steering committee, with citizen, staff, and elected official membership. An online questionnaire provided additional feedback opportunities, as did the availability of steering committee members to take questions and comments throughout the process (as presented at the first public hearing). A final public hearing was held before submittal of the plan to DCA for review.

NEGRC's Role

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission's Planning & Government Services Division oversaw the development of this plan, including facilitating public and steering committee meetings.

2

Needs & Opportunities

The following list of needs and opportunities results from a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis conducted at the first input meeting, with both steering committee and public present, as well as professional analysis of relevant data and results of the online questionnaire.

**Italicized entries indicate high priorities*

POPULATION

Needs

- *With Baxter International locating near Mansfield, the city expects an influx of residents who will require increased public services; associated growth will likely skew toward the younger end of the age spectrum*
- More citizen participation in the local government, including city council meeting attendance, is desired, especially to create a sense of “buy-in” concerning local decisions

Opportunities

- *Mansfield leaders see an opportunity to attract both retirees and younger residents because of the city’s proximity to health care, employment, and education*
- Public meeting attendees described a city of “helpers” and good neighbors who will volunteer when needed
- Survey respondents indicate a lack of cultural opportunities; the city would support resident-led initiatives to offer more by arranging for use of space and promotional resources, as well as providing other potential assistance

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Needs

- *The city lacks daily amenities/services, restaurants, and jobs, and its grocery store plans to move from downtown*
- *To achieve its goals for a thriving downtown with active local businesses, Mansfield needs a downtown master plan, strategic plan, or other similar effort (this document will likely identify additional specific planning needs)*

Opportunities

- *The city's historic downtown is ripe for reinvestment and careful, context-sensitive development, and Mansfield plans to invest public resources into downtown to create more development interest*
- *A neighborhood-appropriate commercial zoning classification will provide context-sensitive development opportunities*
- *Working with landowners to improve properties would create a more favorable climate for private investment*
- *Baxter International and other potential Stanton Springs industrial park occupants could provide significant employment opportunities for local residents*

HOUSING

Needs

- *Survey respondents cite run-down residential properties in need of improvement*

Opportunities

- *The city's existing residential neighborhoods provide a living blueprint for the type of housing and environments that residents would like to see in the future*
- *Adding a mixed-use zoning classification to the downtown area (and elsewhere, if appropriate) would diversify the housing stock while creating a live-work activity center*

NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Needs

- *Stakeholders showed unanimous regard for the downtown historic area's potential, but the community should evaluate ways to protect and enhance its stock of historic buildings*

Opportunities

- *The previous comprehensive plan touted Mansfield's tree canopy, and stakeholders listed it as a strength; related funding and promotional opportunities could be of interest*

COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES

Needs

- *Stakeholders cite a lack of recreation facilities, programming, leagues, and events*
- *An in-town public restroom is needed*

Opportunities

- *Mansfield recently has begun offering informal "senior center" activities at its community center; this type of*

creative, inexpensive programming should be continued and expanded to serve other age and interest groups

- The train depot and the “old, old city hall” are city-owned facilities that could represent excellent opportunities for event hosting and service provision, and could also be revenue generators
- *Mansfield plans a park/square on the large swath of former railroad right-of-way in the middle of downtown*

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

Needs

- Mansfield has no police department; leaders are exploring the possibility of sharing enforcement services with nearby Newborn as a means of increased protection

Opportunities

- The proximity of Mansfield and Newborn presents the opportunity for other shared services and facilities

TRANSPORTATION

Needs

- *Increased walkability, both downtown and in residential areas, is needed for economic development and safety*
- *Due to a lack of local control over SR 11, which is Mansfield’s Main Street, the city must work with GDOT to define and achieve local goals for the corridor*
- *Stakeholders indicate that improved traffic control devices (signage, calming measures, etc.) are necessary to counter speeding and high traffic volumes*

Opportunities

- *A comprehensive multi-use trail system (paved and unpaved) would provide connectivity, livability, environmental, and economic benefits, especially as related to the abandoned rail corridor*
- The Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center is located within short bicycling distance of the city; connective infrastructure would make the trip more appealing
- Georgia’s recent passage of transportation-focused SPLOST enabling legislation affords local governments the opportunity to create new revenue streams



3 Community Goals

VISION STATEMENT

Mansfield, Georgia, envisions a thriving, rural “hometown” community with a bustling downtown, safe and attractive streets and centers, and a neighborly atmosphere that welcomes residents of all ages.

GOALS & POLICIES

1. Spur local business development by focusing public investment on downtown and corridor beautification, walkability/bikeability, programming and events, etc.
2. Ensure that all types of growth (residential, commercial, institutional, etc.) respect the integrity and history of the community, while discouraging big-box development, in-town gas stations, franchises, and other incompatible uses
3. Increase sense of community and encourage healthy living by developing safe spaces for bicycling and walking, dog parks, playgrounds, passive and organized recreation, greenspace, and accessibility for residents of all abilities and ages
4. Protect and highlight local history
5. Promote the city to young families, professionals, retirees, and others seeking to experience a unique rural town
6. Anticipate and control impacts and opportunities associated with nearby growth, including traffic, development patterns and aesthetics, natural resources, and increased attention
7. Engage the citizenry in local government knowledge sharing and decision making

4

Land Use

Pursuant to the rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the following Character Areas Map and Defining Narrative provide the physical planning component of the comprehensive plan.

The DCA defines a character area as a specific district or section of the community that:

- *Has unique or special characteristics to be preserved or enhanced (such as a downtown, a historic district, [an] arts district, a neighborhood, or a transportation corridor);*
- *Has potential to evolve into a unique area with more intentional guidance of future development through adequate planning and implementation (such as a strip commercial corridor that could be revitalized into a more attractive village development pattern); or*
- *Requires special attention due to unique development issues (rapid change of development patterns, economic decline, etc.)*

Character areas typically provide greater flexibility than traditional future land use maps, in which each parcel is assigned a single category such as Residential or Commercial.

The following table provides an overview of each of the character areas, including a brief description, zoning compatibility, and appropriate land uses for each. **(Note: not all zoning and land use classifications will necessarily be appropriate in all locations within a character area.)**

CHARACTER AREAS COMPATIBILITY INDEX

CHARACTER AREA	DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTER AREA	ZONING COMPATIBILITY	APPROPRIATE LAND USES
Agriculture	Lands in open or cultivated state, including woodlands, cultivated agriculture, and livestock use. Single-family residential structures are found, but only in association with a farm as the primary use of land	A	Ag/Forestry
Downtown	Traditional central business district and immediately surrounding commercial area, anchored on its western edge by the city's sole industry, Beaver Manufacturing, and identified for a mix of uses. This will be a highly walkable area.	B, M, PR, Future Mixed-Use Classification	Commercial, Office, Public Institutional, Mixed-Use, Residential, Park/Rec/Conservation
Rural Residential	Large-lot (one acre or greater), single-family residential development with open space, pastoral views, and high degree of building separation.	CR	Ag/Forestry, Residential, Public Institutional, Park/Rec/Conservation
Traditional Neighborhood	Existing neighborhoods and land planned for future residential development. Smaller lots, predominantly single-family residential, walkable areas with complete streets, preserved tree canopy, and neighborhood-appropriate commercial activity	PR, Future Neighborhood-Appropriate Commercial Classification	Residential, Public Institutional, Office, Commercial, Park/Rec/Conservation

***Note:** not all zoning and land use classifications will necessarily be appropriate in all locations within a character area.

CHARACTER AREAS DEFINING NARRATIVE

AGRICULTURE

These areas comprise working farmland and related properties within the City of Mansfield, and, together, are an important component of the rural heritage of the community. In light of farmland losses in recent years, it is crucial that agricultural areas be preserved. Primarily consisting of cultivated lands, this character area may also contain homestead residences and farm-related structures.

Compatibility

Zoning: A

Land use: Ag/Forestry



Implementation Measures

- Assist local farmers in selling their products through agritourism development, farmers markets, and similar activities
- Encourage voluntary resource preservation through conservation easements
- Protect riparian areas by enforcing buffers
- Protect rural and environmentally sensitive areas from the encroachment of incompatible uses
- Protect tree canopy
- Develop multi-use paths within greenway buffer zones
- Facilitate habitat preservation and active living by developing greenway and/or trails networks

DOWNTOWN



Much of the community's vision for this area, and for the city in general, focuses on bringing new interest and economic activity to downtown Mansfield while preserving historic buildings and encouraging new developments to

complement the original fabric of the city. The Beaver Manufacturing facility, a light-industrial operation that serves as the city's main employer, provides plenty of daytime interest, but after-hours activity is low. A planned City Center plaza and a rail-trail whose completion would connect to Covington and Porterdales will provide needed public gathering space. While a variety of architectural styles may be appropriate, the intent is that new construction be scaled and massed similarly to what currently exists, especially related to parking and addressing the street with direct pedestrian access as a priority. A new mixed-use zoning class is proposed for downtown, but land use patterns, narrow roadway widths, and natural environments should remain largely unaltered. All infrastructure investments should be made primarily with the city's complete streets goals in mind.



Compatibility

Zoning: B, M, PR, Future Mixed-Use Classification

Land use: Commercial, Office, Public Institutional, Mixed-Use, Residential, Park/Rec/Conservation

Implementation Measures

- Recruit desirable businesses
- Establish business incubator to leverage Stanton Springs
- Rehabilitate and revitalize buildings and infrastructure
- Provide information to interested property owners regarding funding opportunities for historic rehabilitation
- Protect tree canopy
- Pocket parks
- Plan for and implement Complete Streets that prioritize bicycling and walking
- Capital Improvement Programs – focused public spending
- Urban redevelopment/downtown development planning
- Smart growth audit
- Mixed-use zoning
- Sign regulations
- Overlay districts

RURAL RESIDENTIAL

This area preserves rural character through low residential density. Large residential lots with one-acre minimums are the norm, and building size, style, and setbacks currently vary. New developments should preserve open space and concentrate residences as near as possible to existing transportation corridors and activity nodes. Small, neighborhood-scale parks and networks of multi-use paths and extensive sidewalks should be developed to connect residents to commercial and civic centers in this geographically small town. Street connectivity should be incorporated within and between developments and neighboring character areas. Appropriate, small-scale public or institutional uses are also encouraged.



Compatibility

Zoning: CR

Land use: Ag/Forestry, Residential, Public Institutional, Park/Rec/Conservation

Implementation Measures

- Encourage voluntary resource preservation through conservation easements
- Protect riparian areas by enforcing buffers
- Implement context-sensitive design principles in streetscaping, building situation, traffic management, etc.
- Create multi-modal connections to nearby commercial and civic centers
- Protect tree canopy
- Plan for and implement Complete Streets that prioritize bicycling and walking
- Establish maximum (rather than minimum) setback requirements to bring buildings closer to the street for the purpose of increasing walkability and ensuring a more traditional neighborhood feel
- Cluster Development – set aside a significant portion of new developments as undivided, protected open space

TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD



“Smart growth” principles guide development in these predominantly residential areas. The city would like to ensure that future construction adheres to the traditional neighborhood patterns created in this

district. Small, neighborhood-scale parks and networks of multi-use paths, extensive sidewalks, and neighborhood-appropriate commercial operations should be developed to connect residents to recreational, economic, and civic activity (creation of such a zoning classification is proposed). Street connectivity should be incorporated within and between developments. Appropriate, small-scale public or institutional uses are also encouraged.

Compatibility

Zoning: PR, Future
Neighborhood-Appropriate
Commercial Classification

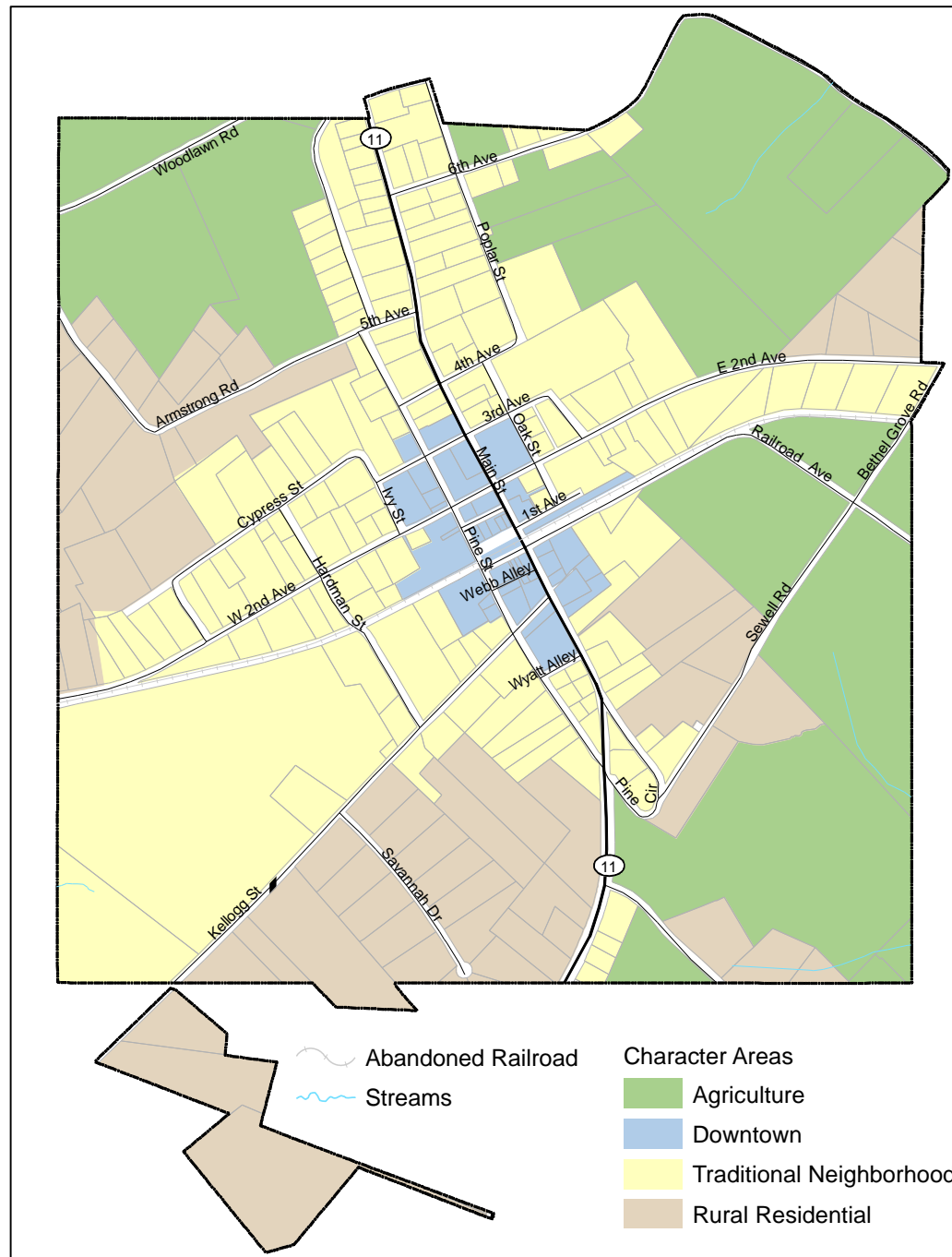
Land use: Residential, Public
Institutional, Office,
Commercial,
Park/Rec/Conservation



Implementation Measures

- Rehabilitate and revitalize buildings and infrastructure
- Protect tree canopy
- Pocket parks
- Plan for and implement Complete Streets that prioritize bicycling and walking
- Create multi-modal connections to nearby commercial and civic centers
- Implement context-sensitive design principles in streetscaping, building situation, traffic management, etc.
- Encourage quality, creative design of higher-density residential developments
- Ensure that new residential infill development is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood
- Compact Development – develop land in a compact way, and configure buildings on a block scale to make efficient use of land and resources
- Addition of neighborhood commercial centers on appropriate infill sites to serve surrounding neighborhood
- Residential development with healthy mix of uses (corner groceries, barber shops, drugstores) within easy walking distance of residences

CHARACTER AREAS MAP



5

Community Work Program

*The **Short-Term Work Program** (2016-2020), updated every five years, provides a list of specific activities that the community plans to address as immediate priorities. A **Report of Plan Accomplishments**, which provides status commentary on the previous work plan (2011-2015), follows.*

SHORT-TERM WORK PROGRAM, 2016-2020

#	ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	COST ESTIMATE	FUNDING SOURCE
POPULATION					
1	Designate staff member or elected official to serve as public engagement officer to increase community participation in local government activities (meeting notices, social media, etc.)	2016	City leadership/ staff	None	NA
2	Implement Honorary Councilmember program similar to City of Oxford (citizen shadows councilmember for a month)	2016	City leadership	None	NA
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT					
3	Identify suitable locations (especially downtown) for commercial development that is consistent with the community's vision, and seek out developers and business owners (establishing a DDA or Main Street Program might be beneficial in assisting with this)	2016-2020	City leadership	None	NA
4	Study/implement mechanisms to discourage big-box development	2016-2017	City leadership	Minimal	City
5	Develop downtown plan for economic development, historic preservation, complete streets connectivity, tourism, etc.	2016-2018	City leadership	\$5,000-\$10,000	City, DCA
6	Develop branding plan to promote city, especially to retirees and employees of the nearby Stanton Springs industrial park	2017-2019	City leadership	\$2,000-\$5,000	City
LAND USE, HOUSING, AND DEVELOPMENT					
7	Update zoning code to ensure that new development is compatible with the community's vision as expressed in this comprehensive plan, and to create mixed-use and neighborhood-appropriate commercial classifications	2017-2018	City leadership	\$5,000-\$15,000	City, DCA
8	Inventory housing stock and develop blighted properties plan	2018-2019	City leadership	\$5,000+	City, DCA
9	Review annexation policies and establish specific future needs	2017-2018	City leadership	None	NA
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES					
10	Seek assistance and advice from NEGRC historic preservation planners on how best to protect and enhance historic resources	2017	City leadership	\$0-\$7,500	City, DCA, DNR
11	Apply for Recreational Trails Program funding for trail improvements (including trailhead at city center) and connectivity	2016	City leadership/ staff	\$500	City

#	ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	COST ESTIMATE	FUNDING SOURCE
COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES					
12	Create a cultural and recreation board to recommend and implement programming, planning, and other related work	2016	City leadership	None	NA
13	Designate a facilities and services committee of elected officials, staff, and citizens to study and advise on specific needs, especially as related to young, aging, and disabled populations; it should also evaluate ways to use the depot and the “old, old city hall”	2016	City leadership	None	NA
14	Develop capital improvements program out of facilities and services committee recommendations and other identified needs	2017-2020	City leadership/ staff	None	NA
15	Build or designate a public restroom location downtown	2018	City PW	Unknown	City
16	Beautify downtown by creating a City Center plaza and attractive, safe streetscapes while working with landowners to improve private properties	2016-2020	City PW	\$350,000+	City, GDOT, DNR, grants
17	Increase law enforcement presence, either through a shared-services agreement with a neighboring jurisdiction or increased presence of sheriff’s deputies	2017-2020	City leadership	Unknown	City
18	Prepare for emergencies by establishing a volunteer response unit and continuing to participate in county-wide disaster planning	2016-2020	City leadership/ staff	None	NA
TRANSPORTATION					
19	Adopt the Northeast Georgia Plan for Bicycling and Walking	2016	City leadership	None	NA
20	Develop a local complete streets and trails plan that improves safety across all modes, especially bicycling and walking	2017-2018	City leadership	\$1,000- \$2,000	City, GDOT
21	Partner with Newton Trails to develop the proposed rail-trail and other trails	2016-2020	City leadership, Newton Trails	No cost to city	Newton Trails
22	Develop and implement a plan for SR11 in collaboration with GDOT	2016-2020	City leadership	Unknown	City, GDOT
23	Evaluate and improve traffic control to increase safety and reduce traffic in collaboration with Newton County and GDOT	2018-2020	City leadership	Unknown	City, County, GDOT
24	Prioritize transportation needs for inclusion in future community and regional plans (ex.: T-SPLOST)	2017	City leadership	None	NA
25	Develop a sidewalk improvement program, particularly for connecting to the Nonie Needham Nature Trail and Educational Path	2016-2020	City PW	\$100,000+	City, GDOT, grants

REPORT OF PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS, 2011-2015

ACTIVITY	STATUS	NOTES
Apply for grant to inventory trees and develop maintenance plan	Completed	
Inventory trees and develop maintenance plan	Completed	
Develop and implement tree planting plan for downtown	Completed	
Tree Restoration Project: develop and implement tree planting plan for various areas around town to restore tree canopy lost due to age, disease, storms, etc.	Completed	
Assess and develop sign replacement plan to meet minimum retro-reflectivity standards	Underway	2016 completion
Replace non-compliant warning and regulatory signs to meet minimum retro-reflectivity standards	Underway	2016 completion
Encourage context-appropriate façade improvements to structures in Downtown character area	Postponed	2016-2020 completion – <i>this is a policy element and, as such, is not appropriate for direct inclusion in the new STWP; however, 2016-2020 element #3 addresses it indirectly via the creation of a downtown development authority, which the city plans to use to assist with downtown improvements</i>