

Section 5

Land Availability Analysis

5A. Land Availability

Overview

In analyzing the availability of property for open space acquisition and greenway development in the County, it is clear that the southwestern and central section, extending north to Sugar Loaf Parkway and east to Scenic Highway 124, contain the highest population densities. These areas, along with the area bounded by I-85, Highway 316, Lawrenceville Suwanee Road and the city of Lawrenceville, are the only areas with population densities exceeding three persons per acre. In the remaining areas of the County, the population densities are less than three persons per acre and, if development patterns continue at 0.3 acre lots, exceeding three persons per acre is unlikely in these areas.

The impact of mass transit, higher density developments, mixed-use developments and development patterns greater than three units per acre are most likely to occur along major transportation corridors and major activity centers. These areas have the density to support transportation alternatives that will lead to development of vertical housing stock and increased density.

To determine the availability of open space in Gwinnett, the County was divided into thirteen areas. The thirteen areas each consist of three or four USGS 7.5-minute quadrangles joined together. To analyze the properties within each area, parcels of land were identified in the categories listed below.

Parcel Size:

- 0 to 20 acres
- 21 to 30 acres
- 31 to 50 acres
- 51 to 100 acres
- 101 acres and greater

Appraised value of structures located on the property:

- \$0.00
- \$1.00 to 100,000.00
- \$101,000.00 to 300,000.00
- \$300,001.00 and greater

In addition to looking at the size and value of structures on the properties, a matrix was developed for each area that includes the following elements:

- Connectivity potential
- Potential for conservation easements, transfer of development rights or the purchase of development rights

- 303D streams
- Other streams
- Major utility corridors
- Potential for reclamation of disturbed sites
- Historic properties
- Number of city, county and national parks
- 1990 to 2000 growth rate
- Projected growth rate (2000 – 2020)
- Current population densities

On the following pages, a “Property Characteristic Matrix” is provided for each of the thirteen areas studied. The corresponding map follows each matrix.

General Findings:

Acquisition Potential

- The largest number of parcels is in the 0 to 20-acre category.
- There are 104,352 parcels in the 0 to 20-acre category with improvements under \$100,000.00.
- There are 408 parcels in the 21 to 30-acre category with improvements under \$100,000.00.
- There are 392 parcels in the 30 to 50-acre category with improvements under \$100,000.00.
- There are 311 parcels in the 51 to 100-acre category with varying property values.
- There are 141 parcels in the 101-acre and larger category with varying property values.
- There are numerous 50-acre properties remaining along the Chattahoochee River, east of Scenic Highway 124 and north of Lawrenceville-Suwanee Highway. A limited number of these properties are still zoned agricultural.
- Properties remain in the southwestern section of the County that, when grouped with other open properties, can provide open space relief in high-density areas.
- Large open properties along the I-85 corridor, and in the area of the I-85 and Highway 316 split, are limited.

Greenway and Linear Open Space Corridors

- The Chattahoochee, Alcovy and Apalachee River corridors have the highest potential for greenway development.
- Sections of the Yellow River and numerous creeks have high potential for greenway development while other sections cut through heavily developed residential communities.
- Utility corridors offer another opportunity for connecting alternatives. The majority fall into one of four major categories:

Gas Pipelines	approximately 85 miles
Electric Transmission Lines	approximately 321 miles
Water	limited to a few off road easements
Sewer lines	limited to large collector lines

Portions of these major utility corridors have high potential for greenway development while other sections cut through heavily developed residential communities and offer moderate potential. If you look at the long-range potential, it would be high for most of the corridors. There are two factors that can limit the effectiveness of utilization of the utility corridors for greenway development. In highly-developed neighborhoods, each residential property owner will have to

agree to the easement, as the utility easements do not address public access for trails in the original easement agreement. The second limiting factor is overcoming the public perception that greenways will have a negative impact on the surrounding properties and increase crime in the neighborhoods. In the early development period, these factors will lead to resistance to the use of some corridors for greenways.

- All of the non-303D rivers are located in the low-density areas of the County.
- Potential for greenway corridors beyond those listed in the Gwinnett County Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Transportation Plan exist in the northern and eastern sections of the County.
- Open space and forested areas still remain along many roads east of Scenic Highway 124 and roads north of Highway 316 and east of Highway 20 offer trail opportunities.

5B. Summary of Land Availability Analysis

Overview

As detailed in Section 2B, *Existing Protected Open Space and Open Space Planning Programs, Summary of Open Space and Park Lands in Gwinnett County*, Gwinnett County has conducted an aggressive acquisition campaign. Over 3,595 acres of passive parkland and open space have been purchased. This is the most open space protected by any city or county agency in the Atlanta MSA during past two years. The acquisitions have been distributed throughout the County and include areas of high populations densities and developing areas with relatively low population densities. The acquisition strategy is providing passive parkland in areas that were identified as being underserved by the Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation 2000 Capital Improvements Plan. Acquisitions have also been made in areas of growth identified in the Gwinnett County Comprehensive Plan. This plan also includes approved greenway routes along many of the County's major stream corridors. This balanced approach should continue into the future as the County continues to seek the protection of over 50,000 acres of open space.

In addition to considering the two planning documents aforementioned, there are other factors the County should consider as evaluation factors for future open space and greenway corridor acquisitions. In Section 2C, *Targeting Preservation Efforts*, targets for preservation are identified. These include:

- Streams and Floodplains
- High-Quality Watersheds
- Parkland in Urbanized Areas
- Restoration of Stream Banks in Urbanized Areas
- Prime Wildlife Habitat
- Distribution of Greenspace

These factors, along with population densities and geographic distribution, will allow the County to broaden the evaluation process and the desired objectives of the land acquisition process. The target factors were used to guide the development of property evaluation forms that are included in Appendix F, and will allow the County to compare and contrast the multiple objective benefits of properties considered for acquisition. This evaluation form will allow staff to review potential sites quickly and provide the County Commissioners with information on environmental and site factors. The cost of the sites can then be evaluated along with the environmental, transportation, and recreation benefits of each site.

Targeting factors outlined in previous studies are also included in the evaluation forms and should be used in determining property acquisitions. They include:

- Providing additional parkland in areas identified in previous studies as being underserved

- Protecting historic structures and landscapes
- Protecting scenic views
- Protecting watershed recharge areas
- Protecting natural environments with endangered plant and animal species
- Promoting transportation options
- Promoting improved health and fitness through improved walking and bicycling opportunities

Acquisition Recommendations

Stream Corridor Acquisition for Greenway Development and Open Space Protection

Stream corridor acquisition covers stream corridors located throughout the County. The acquisition of properties within these corridors will achieve many of the specific target goals and provide new recreation opportunities that are not currently provided by the County in the form of an interconnected greenway system. Within the framework of the greenway system there are several stream corridors that should be the highest priority for acquisition. River corridors in the high priority list include Yellow, Alcovy, Apalachee and Chattahoochee Rivers. Creeks included in the high priority list include Big Haynes, Brushy, Ivy, No Business and Suwanee. The acquisition of properties along the stream corridors will serve both local and regional needs as the trails in some locations have the potential to connect to other county and regional systems, and the water quality benefits will be shared with all downstream communities.

Most of these corridors are included in the Gwinnett County 2020 Comprehensive Plan discussion on proposed greenways and bikeways. Because these stream corridor greenways are part of the adopted plan, they would be high priorities for acquisition.

Chattahoochee River Corridor

While listed in the stream corridor acquisition for greenway development and open space protection category as one of the high priority river corridors, the Chattahoochee River Corridor is part of a much larger regional trail network. Within this corridor, properties controlled by municipal, county, state and federal agencies will be involved in the acquisition of property and the development of various recreation, greenway and open space facilities. The National Park Service has taken the lead in the acquisition of properties for the regional trail system. Therefore, the primary areas of concern for the County will be water quality, stormwater control and public access to the river and greenway system. The County will need to target properties within the corridor that meet these two goals as well as the overall target goals for the open space program.

Parks and Recreation 2000 Capital Improvements Plan

In the Parks and Recreation 2000 Capital Improvements Plan, areas were identified as having service gaps between existing park facilities. These gaps were primarily identified based on a two mile radius service area for existing parks. In addition to this

traditional approach to serving community park needs, the plan identified alternative land acquisition strategies including “*cluster community parks*” resulting from acquisition of several small tracts in close proximity to one another or near existing parks. The plan recommended the purchase of land to expand existing facilities and the development of smaller passive community parks. In addition, greenway corridors to connect existing park facilities and the acquisition of smaller tracts “...*for special uses such as soccer complexes, open space or aquatic facilities,*” was also recommended. These recommendations were based primarily on the need to improve active recreation opportunities. However, the need to augment active facilities with passive parkland and open space was recognized in the study, and was reflected in the land acquisition strategy recommendations.

Areas that were targeted in Tier 1 of the Parks & Recreation 2000 Capital Improvements Plan for new parks and/or park facilities were:

- Sugarloaf / Kanoheda Area (community park);
- N. Snellville Area (community park);
- West District - including Beaver Ruin area, Rockbridge area, Meadowcreek area, and Peachtree Corners area;
- Harbins Area (community park);
- Collins Hill Area;
- South District - off Hwy. 124 (community park);
- Expansions to existing parks including Rhodes Jordan Park; Dacula Park; and Pinckneyville Park);
- Open space and greenways acquisitions.

A new concept introduced in the plan was a small community park of 20 acres that would serve primarily passive, unorganized recreation pursuits. These parks would serve as alternative park sites to the larger community parks. Land requirements would be less, making them more feasible in the areas of high population densities where few large undeveloped tracts of land remain. The concept for these smaller parks is consistent with many of the targets for preservation identified in this master plan.

Scenic and Historic Properties

In Section 6 of this master plan we have detailed historic and scenic properties from the Gwinnett County 2020 Comprehensive Plan. The important historical and aesthetic benefits that these properties add to the fabric of the County makes them targets for acquisition. Efforts to protect historic and scenic sites, as well as sites with significant cultural resources, should be high priorities for acquisition throughout the County.

Redevelopment Areas

In the highly developed sections of the County, the number of undeveloped sites is limited. To provide open space in these areas, redevelopment of brownfield and other developed sites is an option. Brownfields are defined as, “a piece of industrial or commercial property that is abandoned or underused and often environmentally contaminated, especially one considered as a potential site for redevelopment, ” by the

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, copyright 2000. A brownfield site, or any other property suitable for redevelopment that would accomplish the targets of preservation, should be considered for acquisition and redevelopment.

Redevelopment sites provide opportunities to take properties that are not in compliance with the current storm water and water quality standards and redevelop them in such a manner as to provide stream bank improvements, increase wildlife habitat, provide community greenway connections and increase open space throughout the County. The redevelopment of Brownfield sites can provide an opportunity to acquire larger tracts of land in highly developed sections of the County, along with tracts that are in the 20 acre size category. Tracts 20 acres and larger would meet the size requirements for public access, but other smaller sites in floodplain areas should also be considered for acquisition without public access. These smaller tracts can have a positive impact on water quality and flood control without public access. They can also provide green space for visual interest in areas that are highly developed with little natural vegetation remaining. Revegetating these areas with native plants can improve views for nearby residents and motorists alike.

Another important benefit of redevelopment is the reduction in the loss of undeveloped greenspace. If open space and parkland needs can be met through redevelopment, less impact on remaining green space will occur. The redevelopment of brownfield sites opens up opportunities for grant funding. The Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfield Revitalization Act, P.L. 107-118, signed by President Bush on January 11, 2002 called for funding of \$250 million a year for cleanup of brownfield sites. This increase in funding, along with modification to EPA's role of enforcement, was provided with the intent of encouraging redevelopment of more brownfield properties. A summary of this act is provided in Appendix H.

Open Space Needs

The process of analyzing open space needs in the County has included a review of existing planning documents, public input, property availability analysis, existing and projected population densities and the establishment of open space preservation targets. After completing the analysis, the following areas within Gwinnett County were identified as having the most significant open space needs.

Zone 1

Starting at the Chattahoochee River, take Cumming Highway east to the intersection with Suwanee Dam Road. Turn south onto Suwanee Dam Road, and travel eastward to the intersection with West Price Road. Veer left on West Price Road. Go east on Woodward Mill Road and follow it to Interstate 985. Follow Interstate 985 northeast to the Hall County line. Traveling northwest along the County line, the boundary intersects the Chattahoochee River. At this point, the boundary follows the Chattahoochee River south back to the starting point.

Zone 1 is served by federal properties near Lake Sidney Lanier and the Chattahoochee River but has no County-owned open space or parkland. Numerous large tracts over 100 acres still remain in this zone along with many tracts under 100 acres. The larger sites are concentrated in the northern portion of zone 1 and near the Chattahoochee River. Many of these tracts are undeveloped and others in the 100 plus and 51 to 100 acre categories have improvements in the \$1 to \$100,000 cost range. Zone 1 experienced a growth rate of 118% during the last decade. With this level of growth, the large tracts will be prime targets for development. The current population densities are 0 to 2 people per acre, but will continue to increase with the rapid population growth. Acquisitions contiguous to federal parkland, the Chattahoochee River and along smaller streams will provide open space and greenway opportunities throughout zone 1. Recommended acquisitions will also provide transportation opportunities for residents of this zone and provide vital wildlife habitat and corridors connecting to the large federal parks.

Zone 2

Starting at the Chattahoochee River, take E. Jones Bridge Road southeast to the intersection with Peachtree Street. Go south on Peachtree Street to the intersection with Beaver Ruin Road. Go west on Beaver Ruin Road and follow it to Indian Trail Road. Turn right onto Indian Trail Road and follow it to Interstate 85. Follow Interstate 85 southwest to the County line. Traveling northwest along the County line, the boundary intersects the Chattahoochee River. At this point, the boundary follows the Chattahoochee River north to the starting point.

Zone 2 contains some the highest and lowest population densities in the County due to the mix of residential and commercial development within the zone. The population densities range from a high of 10 to 12 to 0 to 2 people per acre in the areas with more commercial development. Growth rates in zone 2 have stabilized as it has approached build out over the last decade. The lowest growth rate in zone 2 was 7.8% and the highest was 84%. Zone 2's western boundary is formed by the Chattahoochee River, but unlike more central and northern sections of the County, lacks large federal park holdings along the river.

Currently, the only County-owned parkland along the river in zone 2 is located at Jones Bridge Park and Pinckneyville Arts Center. Both of these sites provide public access to the river for water sports and passive recreation. As the County's greenway system develops, a major trailhead will be needed in zone 2 to serve as a destination for trail users who start at Settlers Bridge Park to the northwest. If property can be found to expand Jones Bridge Park, this would improve access to the river at this heavily used facility. Clustering of property near Jones Bridge Park is another option for this park.

Analysis of the available undeveloped tracts in zone 2 revealed three vacant tracts in the 51 to 100-acre category that were undeveloped. Two of the tracts are contiguous to each other and the third is contiguous with property already owned by the County. The majority of tracts over 30 acres are located along the river. Redevelopment opportunities exist in this district, with numerous large tracts serving nonresidential uses at this time.

Zone 3

Starting at the DeKalb County line, take Lawrenceville Highway northeast to the intersection with Killian Hill Road. Go east on Killian Hill Road and follow it to the intersection with Stone Mountain Highway. Turn south on Stone Mountain Highway, and follow it to the DeKalb County line. At this point, the boundary follows the County line back to the starting point.

Zone 3 is a highly developed area with population densities of 2.01 to 4 people per acre. Growth rates in this area have been very stable over the past decade with growth ranging from .8% to 38%. This area is dominated by established single-family residential developments. Mountain Park and Harmony Grove Park currently serve this zone. A new park will house the Mountain Park Aquatic Center and Activity Building. While this zone is home to three parks, they are all small and devoted primarily to active recreation activities. This zone is in need of passive parks and open space.

The number of large tracts is very limited. Clustering acquisition of smaller tracts and stream corridors may be the best option for providing open space in zone 3. There are numerous parcels under 20 acres that, if clustered, would create parks or open space in the 15 to 30 acre range and a few parcels over 20 that clustered with smaller surrounding properties could create parks or open space in the 25 to 50 acre range. Property adjacent to existing parks should also be considered for purchase to offer more passive areas in existing community parks.

Zone 4

Starting at the Chattahoochee River, take McGinnis Ferry Road east to Interstate 85. Follow Interstate 85 northeast to Lawrenceville-Suwanee Highway. Travel south on Lawrenceville-Suwanee Highway until you get to State Route 316. Travel west on State Route 316 until reaching the Interstate 85 split. Take Interstate 85 north to Pruett Road. Travel north on Pruett Road until intersecting with Old Peachtree Road. Travel in a northerly arc, passing just to the east of Suwanee Creek Unit, until reaching the Chattahoochee River. At this point, the boundary follows the Chattahoochee River back to the starting point.

East of I-85 numerous parcels from under 20 acres to 100 acres in size remain undeveloped. Several parcels have improvements valued at \$1 to \$100,000, and many are completely undeveloped. Most remain in low density zoning classifications and one tract of approximately 90 acres is zoned agriculture. These

tracts are just north of the Discover Mills mall and within a LCI study area. This zone currently has population densities of 3 to 3.99 people per acre and will continue to increase with additional development. There is a major north-south power line and sewer easement, which can provide alternative access routes for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Zone 4 is outside the community park service area of Collins Hill Park and the proposed parks at the Kanoheda and McDaniel Farm Park sites. The only parkland in this zone is the land donated by the Discover Mills mall. Acquisition and protection in this zone should be a high priority.

West of I-85, there are numerous parcels under 50 acres and a few tracts of over 100 acres that remain undeveloped. Several parcels have improvement valued at \$1 to \$100,000. These parcels may be suitable for park development with the removal of the existing improvements. This is one of the fastest growing sections of the County, with a growth rate of over 400% between 1990 and 2000. Zone 4 currently has population densities of 0 to 2 people per acre and will continue to increase with the rapid rate of growth it is currently experiencing. There is a north-south bikeway proposed along Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and the Suwanee Creek Greenway connects with the Chattahoochee River Greenway within this district. Connectivity among park and open space sites will be high in this zone with the development of proposed greenways and bikeway facilities. Acquisition for the implementation of bikeway and greenway facilities should be a high priority in this district.

Zone 5

Starting at the intersection of Interstate 85 and Jimmy Carter Boulevard, take Interstate 85 north to Indian Trail Road. Go north on Indian Trail Road to Beaver Ruin Road. Follow Beaver Ruin Road northeast to Satellite Boulevard, continuing northeast to Pleasant Hill Road. Following Pleasant Hill Road southeast to Interstate 85. Take Interstate 85 north to State Route 316. Follow State Route 316 to Sugarloaf Parkway. Follow Sugarloaf Parkway southeast to Lawrenceville Highway. Follow Lawrenceville Highway southwest to Rockbridge Road and then back to Jimmy Carter Boulevard. At this point, the boundary follows Jimmy Carter Boulevard west back to the starting point.

Along the western boundary and running north following I-85, starting at Jimmy Carter Boulevard population densities range from 6 to 8 and to a low of 2.01 to 4 people per acre. Population growth is highest in the northern portion of zone 5, south of Highway 316. Recent acquisition of the 25.4-acre Kanoheda site will provide much needed open space in this region. Several existing community parks are located outside zone 5, requiring longer drive times for active park amenities for residents of this area of the County. Several sites of 20 to 30-acres and 31 to 50-acres remain undeveloped in zone 5, but properties over this size are limited. The undeveloped tracts over 50 acres are located primarily near streams and are large flood plain properties. Potential redevelopment sites are

located throughout the district with an active stone quarry offering the largest single redevelopment opportunity in zone 5. For the future, there is also a large undeveloped buffer around the quarry.

Many of the vacant parcels include stream corridors, which may limit development potential. There are several open tracts, or tracts with limited building improvements, that if acquired and connected would exceed 100-acres. This would be consistent with the Parks and Recreation Department policy for clustering park land acquisition to meet passive park needs.

Zone 6

Starting at the intersection of Five Forks Trickum Road and Killian Hill Road, take Five Forks Trickum Road northeast to the intersection with Ronald Reagan Parkway. Go east on Ronald Reagan Parkway to Webb Gin House Road. Go northeast on Webb Gin House Road, to Grayson Highway. Go east on Grayson Highway to Cooper Road. Go south on Cooper Road to Rosebud Drive. Take Rosebud Drive south to Lenora Road. Go west, and follow the road through several name changes until it becomes Killian Hill Road. At this point, the boundary follows Killian Hill Drive back to Five Forks Trickum Road.

Zone 6 covers large portions west of the communities of Snellville and Grayson. Each of these communities contains small tracts of municipal parkland, but no County parkland is located within zone 6. Population densities in zone 6 range from 0 to 2 people per acre to a high of 2.01 to 4 people per acre. Population growth over the last decade ranged from a low of 15.4% to a high of 140%. The high growth section of zone 6 contains the highest number of large undeveloped tracts of land.

The potential to locate open space tracts is currently good but will diminish as the population continues to grow in zone 6. The potential for greenway and open space corridors is high, but not as high as other sections of the County. There is good availability of large tracts in the northeastern section of zone 6 with tracts of 50 to 100 acres dispersed throughout. Tracts of 20 to 50 acres are plentiful throughout zone 6. Open space stream corridors along Big Haynes Creek and its tributary streams offer the highest potential for greenway development.

Acquisition Criteria

See Appendix F for a suggested property evaluation process that should be considered for use in determining which specific parcels of land are included within the Gwinnett County Open Space and Greenway Plan.