

# 02



A photograph of a person in an orange shirt pushing a stroller on a wooden boardwalk. The boardwalk is surrounded by lush green trees and bushes. The image is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent orange shape containing a white location pin icon.

# LAND USE

# Introduction

## CONTEXT

For the past several decades, Gwinnett County's population and economic growth has been swift and tremendous. Beginning in the 1980s, Gwinnett rapidly transformed from predominantly rural into a suburban, bedroom community of Atlanta. Single family neighborhoods proliferated, anchored by strip style shopping centers, with some industrial and office uses clustered around transportation corridors. Thus, Gwinnett's primary suburban character was established.

In recent years, Gwinnett has diversified, both in terms of demographics and development patterns. Finding ways to accommodate its projected population growth, support its new demographic diversity, and ensure that quality of life remains high for all residents will be the County's main challenge. The Land Use element addresses that challenge.

From the analysis of existing conditions and interviews with key stakeholders, the planning team identified Gwinnett's principal land use needs and opportunities for accommodating expected growth. Two major issues emerged, as stated on page 100.

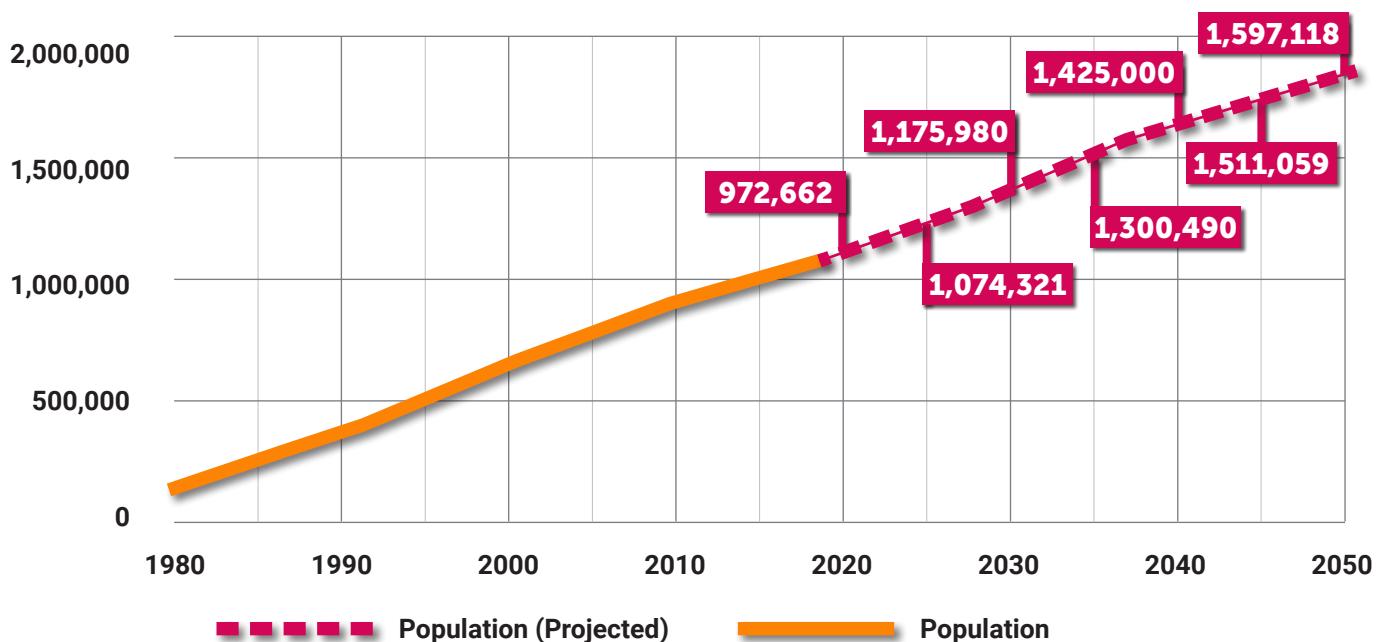
# MAIN ISSUES

## 1 GWINNETT HAS MORE GROWTH COMING THAN ITS CURRENT POLICIES CAN ACCOMMODATE

Gwinnett County is home to almost 1 million residents; however, future projections estimate it will surpass 1.5 million residents by 2045. The County's current policies cannot accommodate this anticipated growth. Some existing policies support denser forms of development but not sufficient to meet the expected demand over the next 20 years. New approaches and policy tools that promote redevelopment, gentle density, and community connectivity will be critical for maintaining Gwinnett County's regional competitiveness and high quality of life.

**FIGURE 2-1: GWINNETT COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

SOURCE: FOURTH ECONOMY ANALYSIS OF LIGHTCAST AND US CENSUS BUREAU DATA



## 2 ONE SIZE FITS ALL FORMS OF DEVELOPMENT NO LONGER WORK FOR GWINNETT

Gwinnett can no longer be considered uniformly suburban. Not only has Gwinnett's population diversified since the 1980s, but its urban form has also changed. Growth along major transportation routes and in popular retail and workplace destinations has altered the built environment significantly, resulting in distinct regions of varying intensities. These regions evolved to meet specific needs of residents throughout the county and are recognized for their unique characteristics. Given this diversity, a new approach to land use planning is necessary to support the distinctive qualities of the county's broad range of communities.

## WHY ACCOMMODATE POPULATION GROWTH?

Growth can feel threatening, especially in an area like Gwinnett County where longstanding residents remember a more rural community. However, there are many benefits to growth. First, a growing population—especially residents with technical skills or high levels of education—can signal to industries and businesses that they should locate in the area to capitalize on a strong workforce. This economic momentum can lead to new jobs in better employment sectors and higher employment rates. Supporting industries, like the service industry, tend to follow, creating more opportunities at various skill levels. Increased property taxes from new businesses and residents alike fund improvements to transportation networks and other critical infrastructure.

A growing tax digest also supports better amenities, including schools, parks, health services, and other programming. Properly managing residential and commercial growth can also encourage the density required for new retail, entertainment options, and public transit. Together, these benefits support high quality of life, especially when carefully accommodated through strong planning and development policies.

Growth can also bring significant challenges, particularly for infrastructure. However, the consequence of not growing when demand is high can be catastrophic. A 2022 study on the benefits and costs of smart growth holds that growth control policies, including restrictive zoning, can end up exacerbating problems—traffic, especially—often associated with growth (Litman 2022). In Gwinnett's case, a lack of available housing is likely to push prospective residents to nearby counties who will still commute to or through Gwinnett, increasing traffic congestion without contributing to the tax base that pays for road maintenance. Housing prices would likely increase resulting from high demand and low supply, further contributing to the County's affordability issue. If this trend were to accelerate, investment in the county could stagnate, leading to lower quality or cut services.

The benefits of embracing growth, especially in a high demand area, far outweigh the growing pains. From a land use perspective, planning for growth can strengthen neighborhoods, connecting them to new job opportunities and housing options. Building more densely can reduce trip distances and vehicle miles traveled—in some cases up to 52 percent (Litman 2022)—and build support for transit. All these benefits could enhance Gwinnett's already high quality of life and resolve some of its current planning challenges.

Source: <https://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/ndo738/research/agenda.pdf>



# Existing Conditions

This section analyzes historic land development trends and current conditions in Gwinnett County, addressing the two fundamental issues introduced at the start of this element:

- 1 **Gwinnett has more growth coming than its current policies can accommodate.**
- 2 **One size fits all forms of development no longer work for Gwinnett.**

## ISSUE #1: GROWTH CANNOT BE ACCOMMODATED BY CURRENT POLICY

Future housing unit demand in Gwinnett is anticipated to grow from 330,569 units in 2020 to 541,745 in 2045—an increase of over 211,000 units. To accommodate this expected demand, Gwinnett County must pursue different policies that allow for and incentivize housing types other than traditional single family homes. This section discusses the County's current policies and recent trends to demonstrate the need for a new approach.



## HISTORIC GROWTH

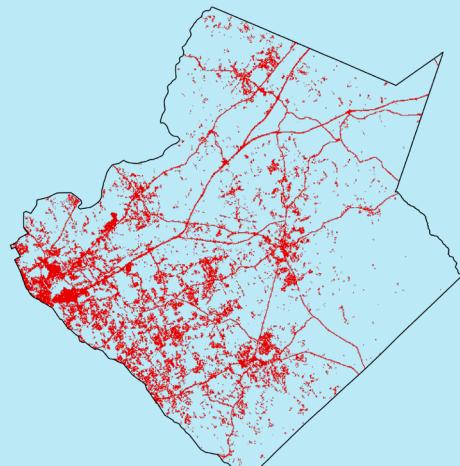
Gwinnett County has embraced suburban development, including single family subdivisions, low rise office parks, and shopping centers. In 2020, data showed that 89 percent of Gwinnett's residential land use consists of single family homes. Commercial land in Gwinnett is often separated from residential uses, leading to a car dependent population, a common feature of suburbs.

The rate of development has been swift. According to land cover data analyzed by the Georgia Conservancy's Georgia Now and Forever initiative, over 130,000 acres of land (about 48 percent of total land area) were developed in Gwinnett County between 1974 and 2019 (Figure 2-2). This leaves only about 19,000 acres of undeveloped land, comprising less than 10 percent of the total unincorporated area.

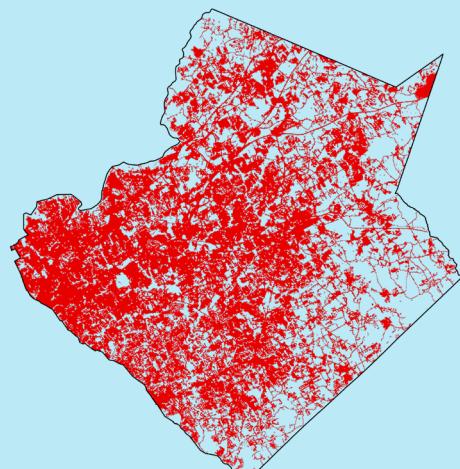
Population projections indicate that Gwinnett will continue to grow. With the projection of 600,000 new residents by 2045 from the 2022 Comprehensive Housing Study (Figure 2-1) and limited undeveloped land available, a new approach to growth is essential.

## FIGURE 2-2: DEVELOPED LAND COVER OVER TIME

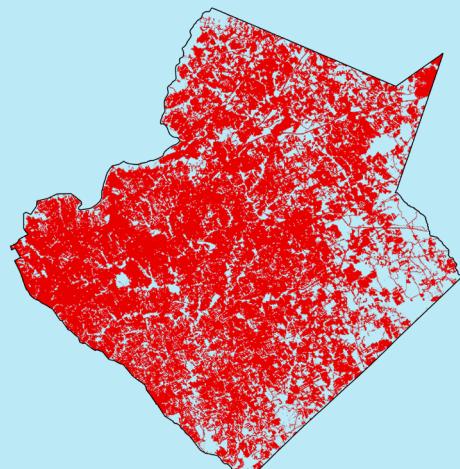
SOURCE: GEORGIA CONSERVANCY, GEORGIA NOW AND FOREVER INITIATIVE



**1974**

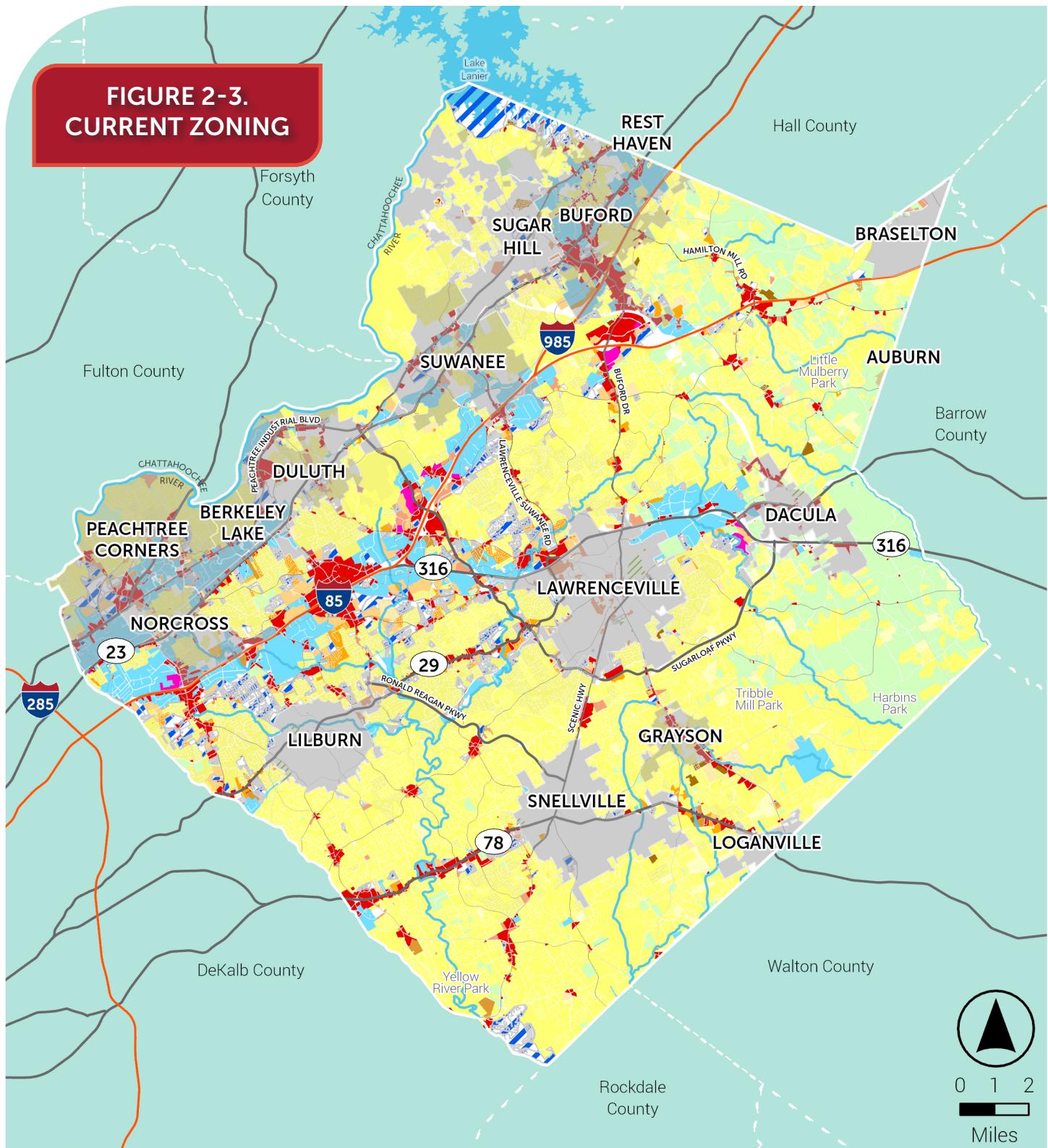


**2001**



**2019**

**FIGURE 2-3.**  
**CURRENT ZONING**



**Legend**

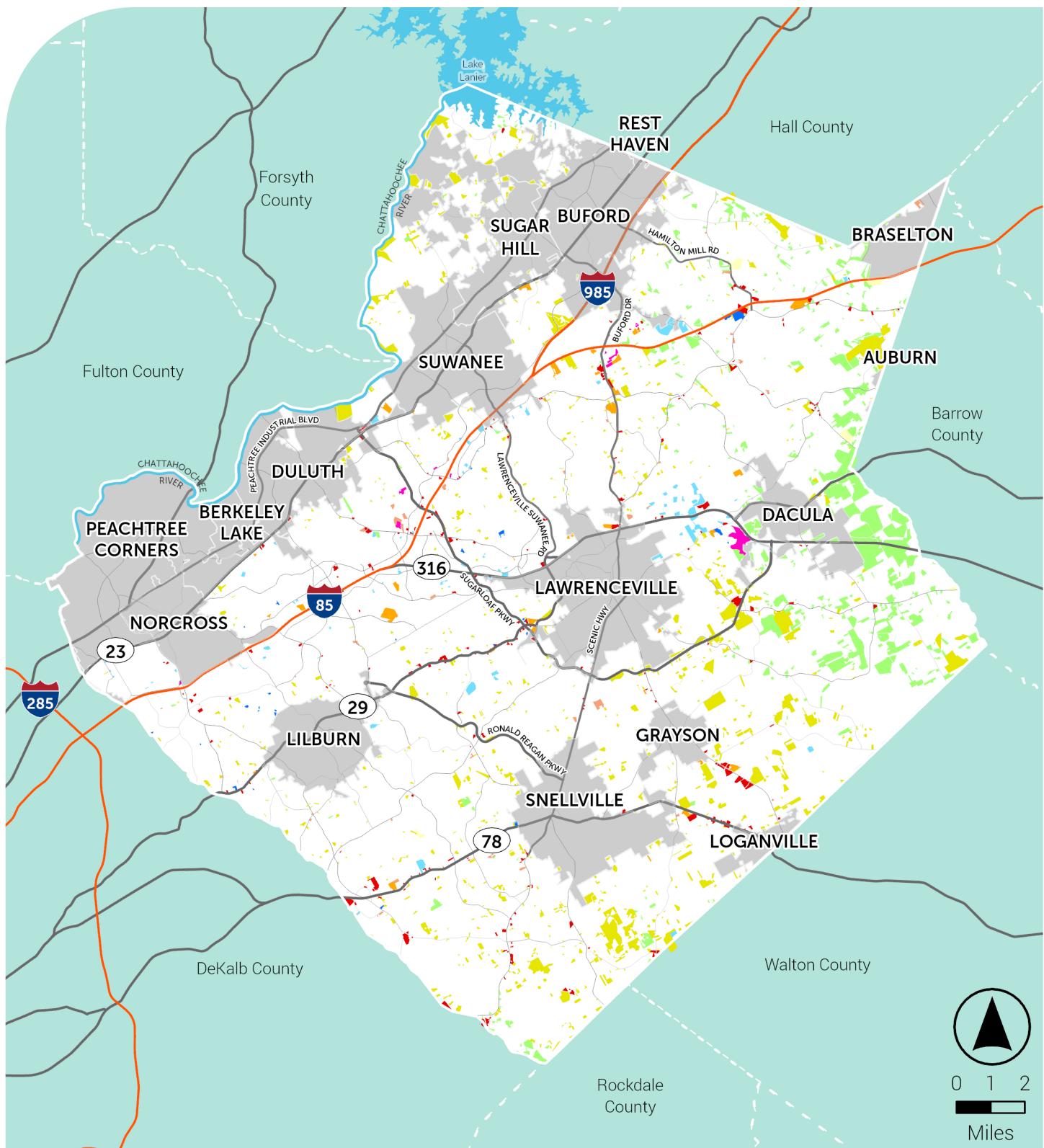
|              |     |      |       |      |                        |
|--------------|-----|------|-------|------|------------------------|
| C1 - C2 - C3 | MUC | OR   | R60   | RM13 | TND                    |
| HRR          | MUN | OSC  | R75   | RM24 | nonconforming with UDO |
| M1 - M2      | MUR | R100 | RA200 | RSR  |                        |
| MH           | OI  | R140 | RLL   | RTH  |                        |

## CURRENT ZONING

Gwinnett County's current zoning map (Figure 2-3) reflects the prevailing land use patterns in the county. Approximately 63 percent of the county's land is zoned for single family residential, including large lots. Not all land zoned for single family is utilized this way; some land is set aside for parks, recreation, utilities, and public right of way. (For an in depth discussion on existing land use, see page 115.)

Multifamily zoning accounts for only 7 percent, while mixed use districts make up less than 1 percent of Gwinnett's total land. To a degree, this makes sense; while multifamily and mixed use buildings naturally require less land than single family subdivisions with the same number of housing units, this distribution does not align with the County's goals of creating active, connected communities in line with its growth trajectory.





**FIGURE 2-4. ZONING  
OF BUILDABLE,  
UNDEVELOPED LAND**

**Legend**

|                      |                           |                        |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Commercial           | Open Space Conservation   | nonconforming with UDO |
| Industrial           | Multifamily               |                        |
| Mixed Use            | Single Family Residential |                        |
| Office/Institutional | Large Lot Single Family   |                        |

Gwinnett County's remaining buildable, undeveloped land (Figure 2-4) follows a similar trend: 72.6 percent is zoned for single family residential, including large lots, while only 5.3 percent allows for multifamily or mixed use of any kind. A substantial portion of the land zoned single family consists of the Rowen Foundation's future site (see page 136 for more details), meaning there will be a change in this distribution as that project progresses. However, if Gwinnett continues its historical growth patterns and predominantly invests in single family neighborhoods, there will not be enough housing created to meet the forecasted demand.



*Image Source: Rowen Foundation*

## RECENT PERMITS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

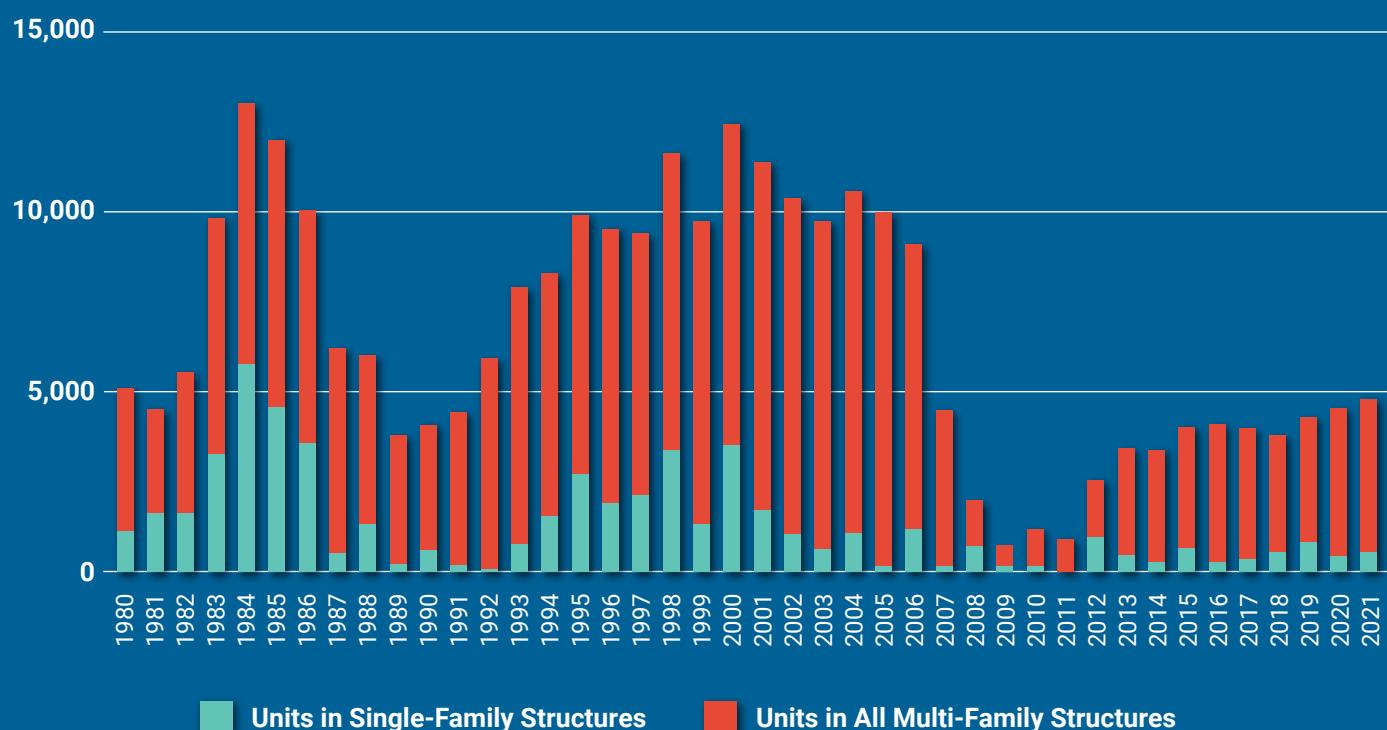
Permit data from 1980-2021 (Figure 2-5) shows that the pace of housing development in Gwinnett County has slowed down since the Great Recession. From 2010 to 2021, the County permitted an average of 3,666 units per year, 88 percent of which were single family housing.

To meet projected market demand based on population growth, approximately 8,500 new units must be built in Gwinnett annually. The continued predominance of single family unit construction will not meet this demand. Increasing the level of multifamily construction is important to reaching higher levels of overall housing unit production and to close the 4,834 unit gap between the future housing unit demand and the existing level of permitted housing units. This will be explored in more depth in Chapter 4, Housing.

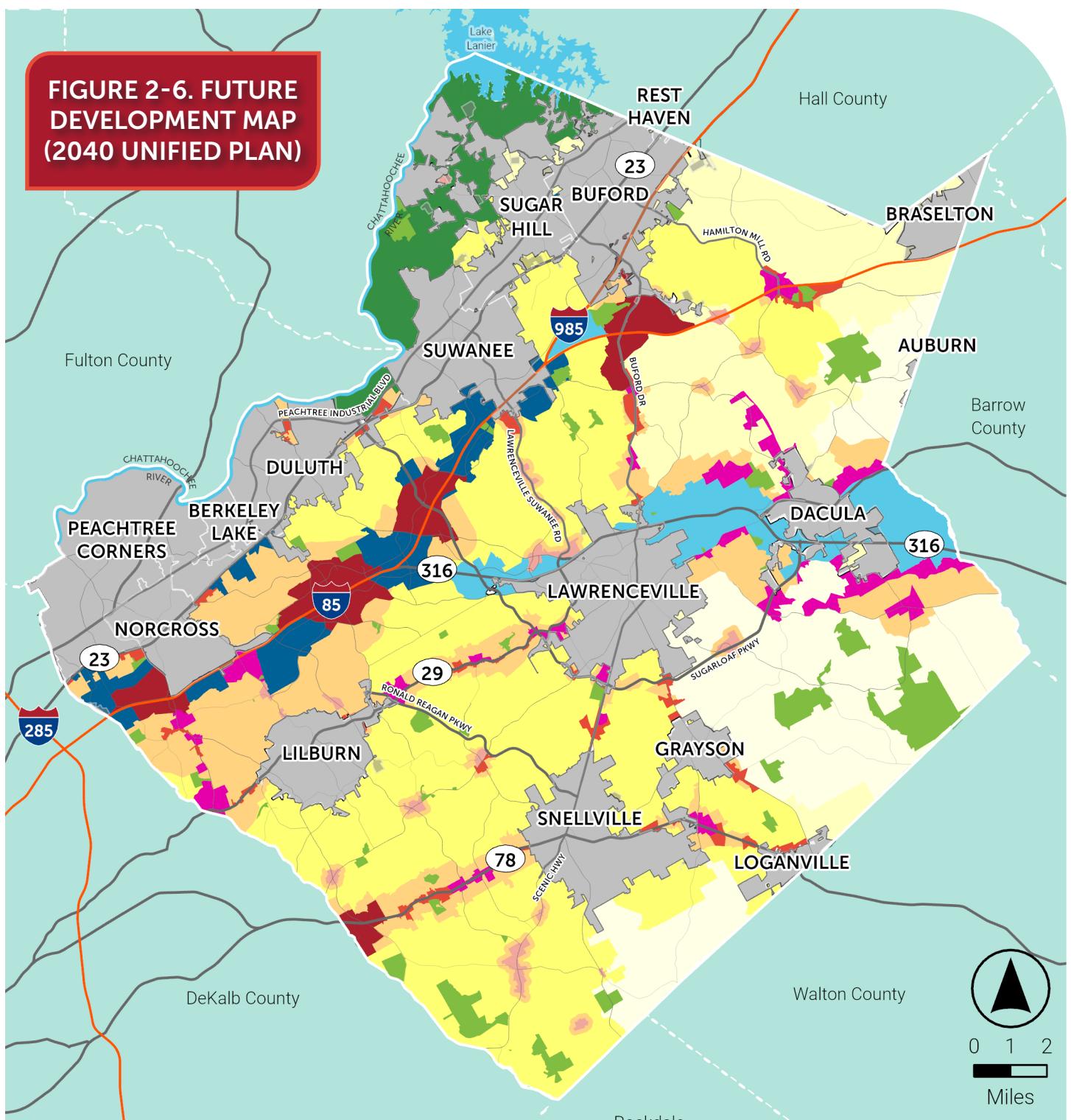
Gwinnett County's growth is guided through its Future Development Map (Figure 2-6), which was most recently updated in the 2040 Unified Plan. This map divides the county into four main character area types: Activity Centers, Employment Centers, Residential Neighborhoods, and Low Intensity areas. Each is further split into subcharacter areas for added specificity in terms of intensity and character for a total of 11 distinct character areas for Gwinnett.

### FIGURE 2-5: BUILDING PERMITS - SINGLE & MULTIFAMILY UNITS

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, SCODS

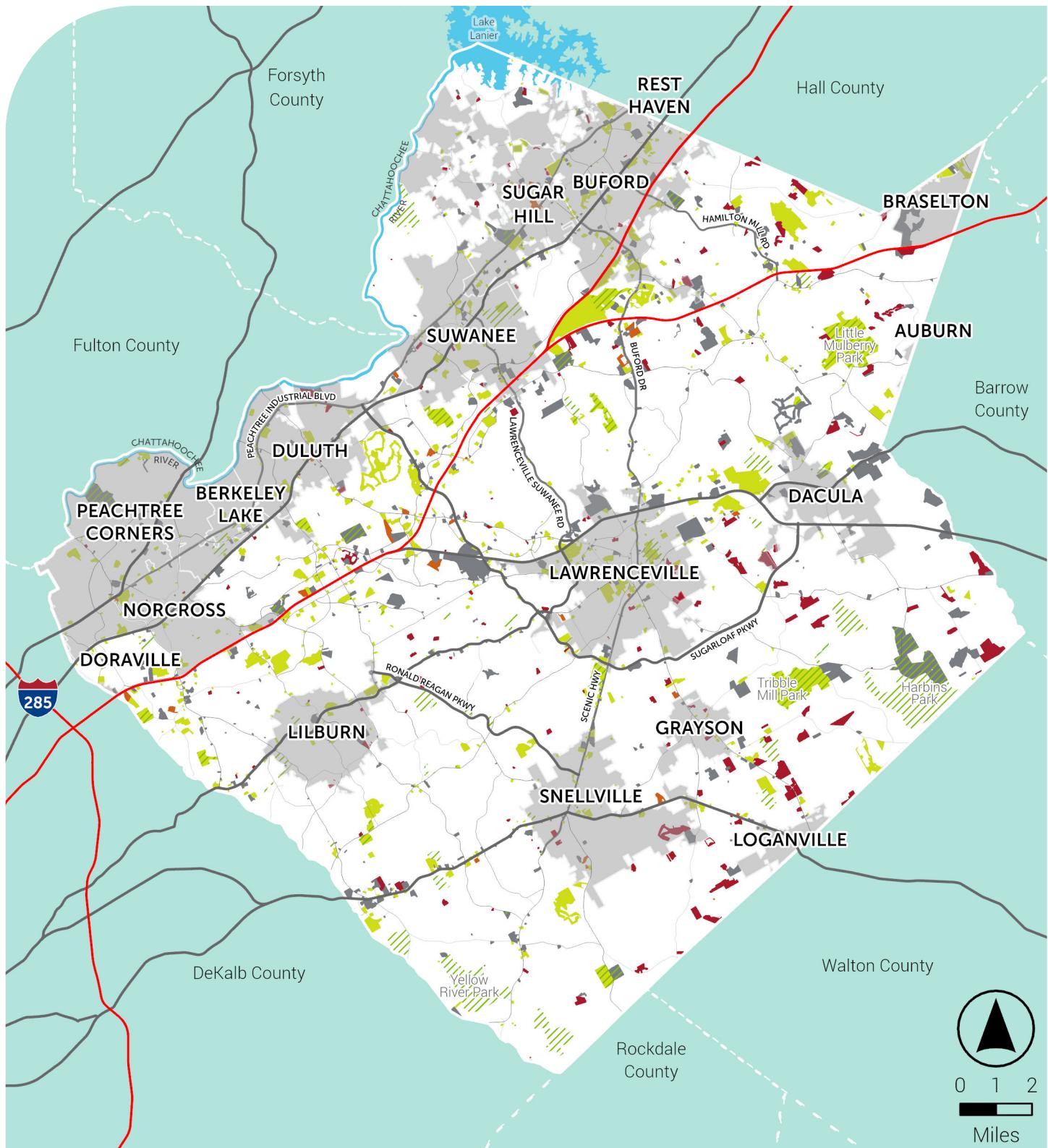


**FIGURE 2-6. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT MAP (2040 UNIFIED PLAN)**



**Legend**

|                          |                           |                        |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Regional Activity Center | Innovation District       | Emerging Suburban      |
| Community Node           | Chattahoochee River Area  | Suburban Estate Living |
| Community Mixed Use      | Community Amenities       | Municipalities         |
| Neighborhood Node        | Vibrant Communities       |                        |
| Workplace Center         | Established Neighborhoods |                        |



#### Legend

- Commercial Development Permit
- Multifamily Development Permit
- Subdivision Development Permit
- All Other Development Permits

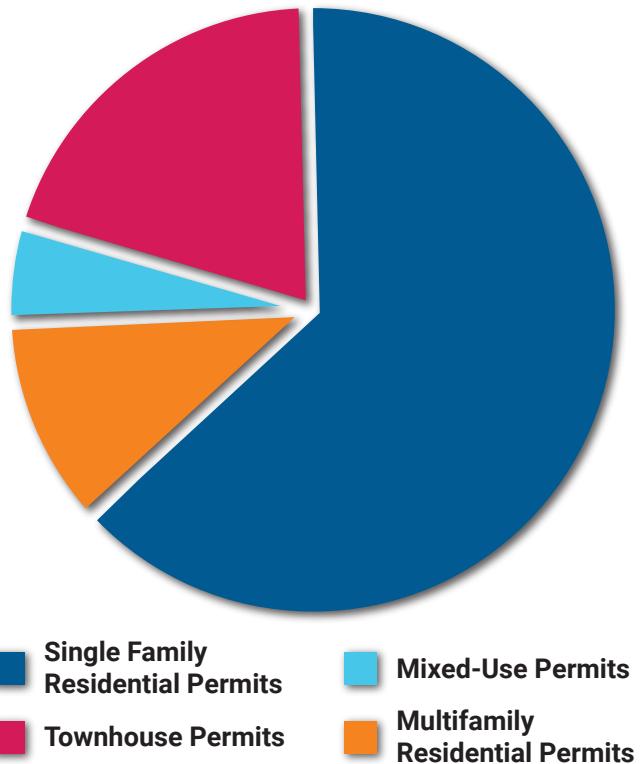
**FIGURE 2-7:  
DEVELOPMENT  
PERMITS BY TYPE**

While Activity Centers and Employment Centers are intended to be dense, mixed use, and explicitly nonresidential districts, many subcharacter areas within these two larger categories still allow single family residential development within their boundaries intending to create buffers between differing densities across uses. An analysis of the Development Permit Requests shows developers are taking advantage of this inclusion. 352 Single family Residential Development Permits have been processed since 2016 (Figure 2-7). In that same time frame, 91 Mixed Use or Multifamily Development Permits have led to a 4:1 ratio of single family to multifamily and mixed use developments in the county in recent years (Figure 2-8).

There have been five single family development permits in character areas where the previous Unified Plan explicitly does not allow them, specifically the Innovation District and the Regional Activity Centers. 46 single family residential building permits have been in areas intended for higher densities and mixed use, such as Community Mixed Use, Community Nodes, Neighborhood Nodes, and Vibrant Communities. The number of mixed use and multifamily permits in these areas is a close second at 43. This development pattern is an almost even mix of single family and mixed use/multifamily residential in character areas intended for mixed use, dense residential or no residential development.

This trend indicates that the existing plan still favors single family development more than intended. While the intent in the existing plan sets a vision for a denser urban form, the language lacks specificity on the ratio of single family and mixed use or multifamily development to achieve that vision. Therefore, it can be challenging for Gwinnett County Planning and Development staff to assess incoming permit requests to ensure the envisioned balance is achieved since there is nothing to measure it against.

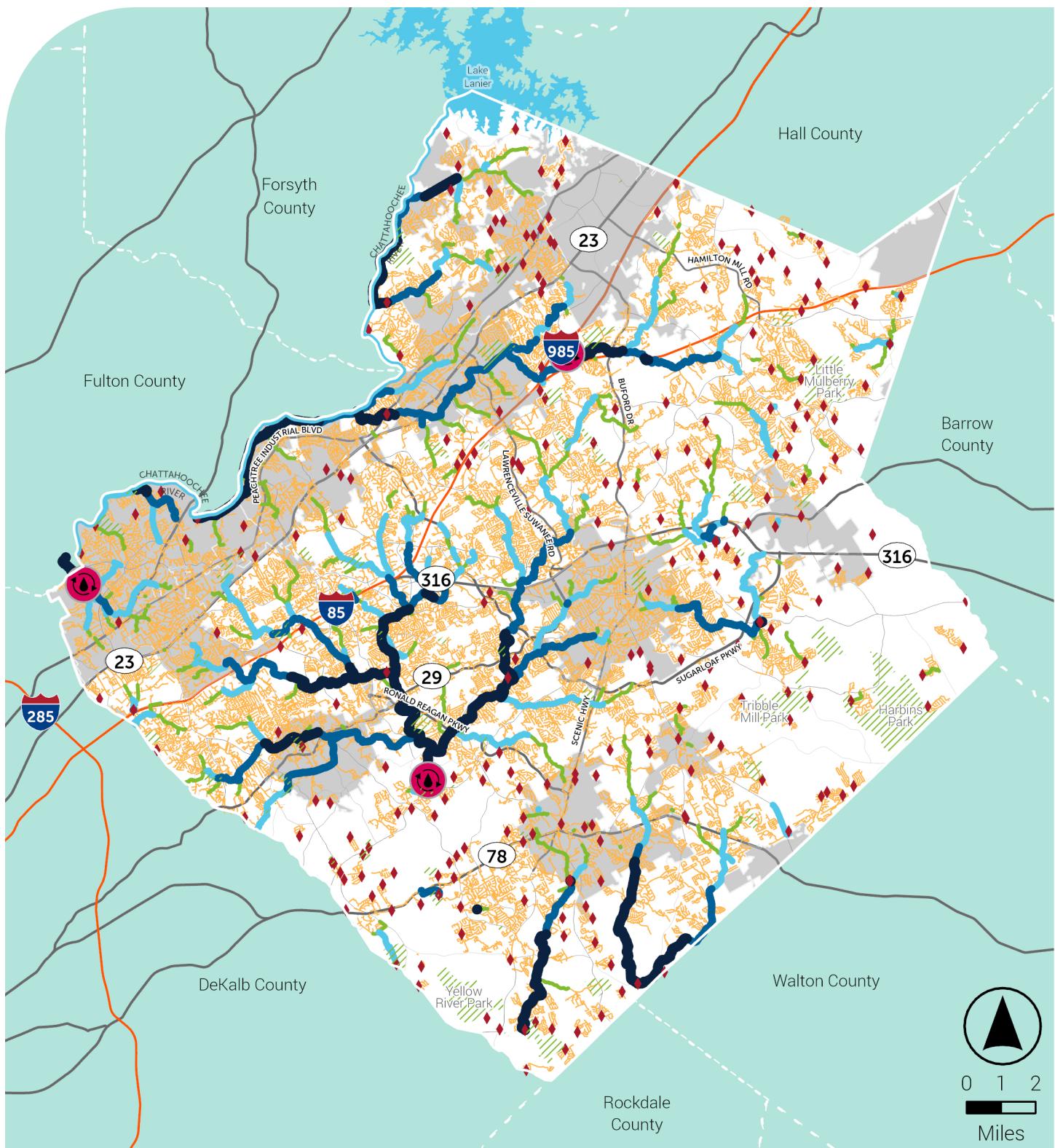
**FIGURE 2-8: RESIDENTIAL PERMITS BY HOUSING TYPE**



The residential development permit ratios could also indicate that Gwinnett is either not incentivizing multifamily and mixed use developments enough, and/or there are significant barriers to overcome. These barriers include:

- Community pushback against apartments
- Increased costs of building materials
- Financing challenges for nontraditional product types
- Unified Development Ordinance restrictions (including amenity requirements and/or stormwater regulations)
- Infrastructure capacity

If the trend continues, given the County's tendency toward single family residential, the character areas intended for denser and varied development likely will not be built to the density the 2040 Future Land Map envisions.



**FIGURE 2-9:**  
**WASTEWATER SYSTEM**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE**

## INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY

Much of Gwinnett County's more intense development has occurred along major transportation corridors like I-85 and Highway 316. Gwinnett has over 2,500 miles of right of way, which has expanded as the county has grown. Despite this expansion, the road network itself has not matched the pace of development, leading to greater congestion with few opportunities for correction beyond roadway capacity improvements that aren't always effective. The Gwinnett County Department of Transportation is actively pursuing alternative modes, including on-demand micro transit and trails, to reduce the number of car trips overburdening its roads.

Gwinnett County's wastewater infrastructure is a similar driver and inhibitor of growth. Approximately 180,000 consumers are connected to the sewer system, which follows a west to east pattern of development that aligns with Gwinnett's general development pattern (Figure 2-9). However, about 78,000 consumers, primarily in eastern Gwinnett, rely on private septic systems, which require larger lot sizes for their drain fields and maintaining a more rural character in that area.

Sewer expansion faces physical challenges. Southern Gwinnett County's vast reserves of bedrock have made it challenging and expensive to expand. Additionally, Gwinnett's rolling topography has required ingenious solutions for wastewater treatment, including an intricate pumping system that transports effluent to the County's three treatment facilities.

Because conditions vary across Gwinnett, development and redevelopment opportunities must consider each community's unique topographic and geologic context. Design and density guidelines must align with existing infrastructure, allowing certain areas of the county (such as the West and along major corridors) to accommodate a higher share of growth than the southern or eastern areas.

Two things are clear based on this analysis. First, Gwinnett must accelerate its development pace to accommodate expected demand over the next 20 years. Second, given challenges related to infrastructure, topography, and other environmental factors, redevelopment of sites closer to critical infrastructure will be a key pillar of a functional growth strategy. Introducing density in well served areas close to services is a must.

## ISSUE #2: ONE SIZE FITS ALL DEVELOPMENT NO LONGER WORKS

Known for decades as a bedroom community, Gwinnett County's development pattern has been characterized—unfairly, in many cases—as homogeneous. Much like the diversity of its residents, Gwinnett's built environment is no longer one size fits all.

### DIVERSITY IN TYPE

Existing land use data from 2020 (Figure 2-10) show that alternative housing types are emerging in Gwinnett. This is especially true in Gwinnett's more urbanized western corner, especially along major transportation corridors.

Almost half (41 percent) of Gwinnett's land is dedicated to single family residential uses (Figure 2-11, page 117), spread evenly throughout the County.

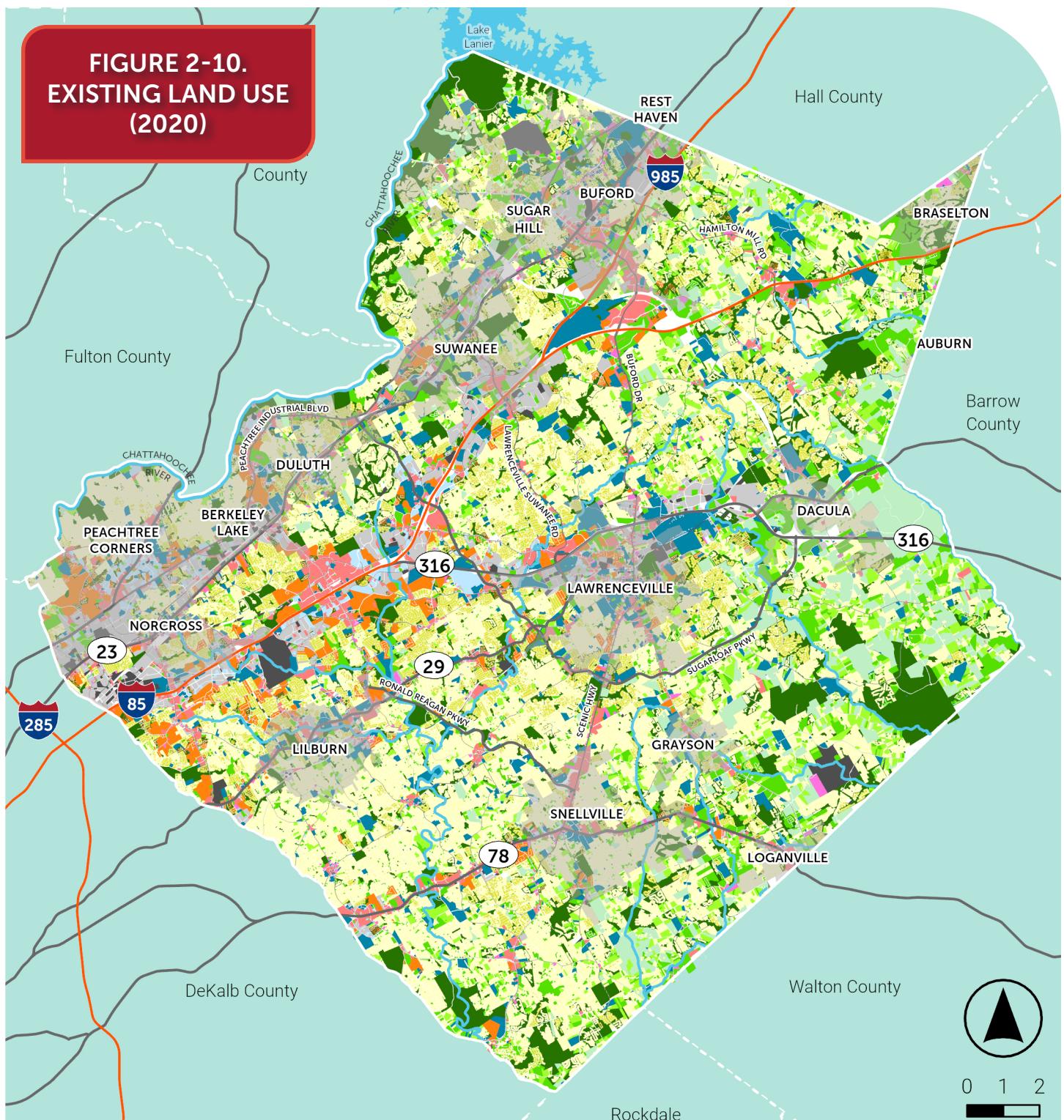
About 33 percent (84,422 acres) of the single family lots fall into the low-density residential category, where lot sizes range from 0.33 to 5 acres. A smaller but growing portion (8 percent) of detached single family homes fall into the medium-density residential category, with lot sizes between 1/8 and 1/3 of an acre (reaching densities of 3-8 units per acre).

Gwinnett County's residential properties with densities above eight units per acre, which include townhomes, mixed use, multifamily, and some dense single family, are mostly located in western and central Gwinnett (Figure 2-12, page 118). These properties are concentrated between I-85 and Highway 29, with some located near Lawrenceville near Highway 316.

Data from the American Communities Survey demonstrates this further (Figure 2-13, page 119). Not counting multifamily within incorporated areas, most of Gwinnett's multifamily units are located just south of I-85, with pockets of multifamily clustered on Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road and near The Mall of Georgia.

While these development patterns historically have been concentrated in specific areas, they are beginning to appear in less urbanized areas of the county.

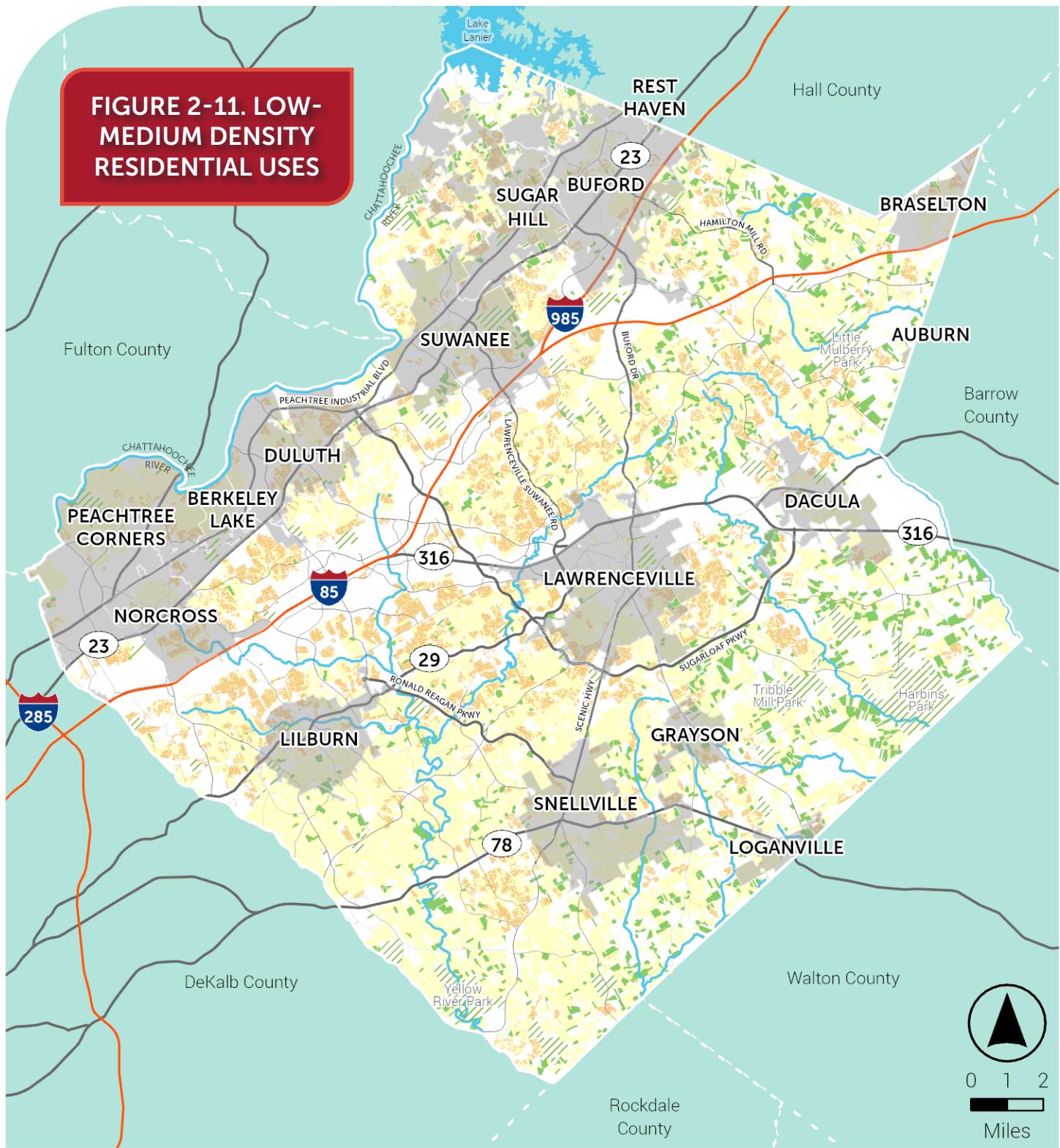
**FIGURE 2-10.**  
**EXISTING LAND USE**  
**(2020)**



**Legend**

|                                      |                      |                            |                              |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Agriculture                          | Light Industrial     | Medium Density Residential | Park/Recreation/Conservation |
| Commercial/Retail                    | Heavy Industrial     | High Density Residential   | Undeveloped                  |
| Office/Professional                  | Institutional/Public | Mixed Use                  |                              |
| Transportation/Communication/Utility | Estate               | Multifamily                |                              |
|                                      |                      | Low Density Residential    |                              |

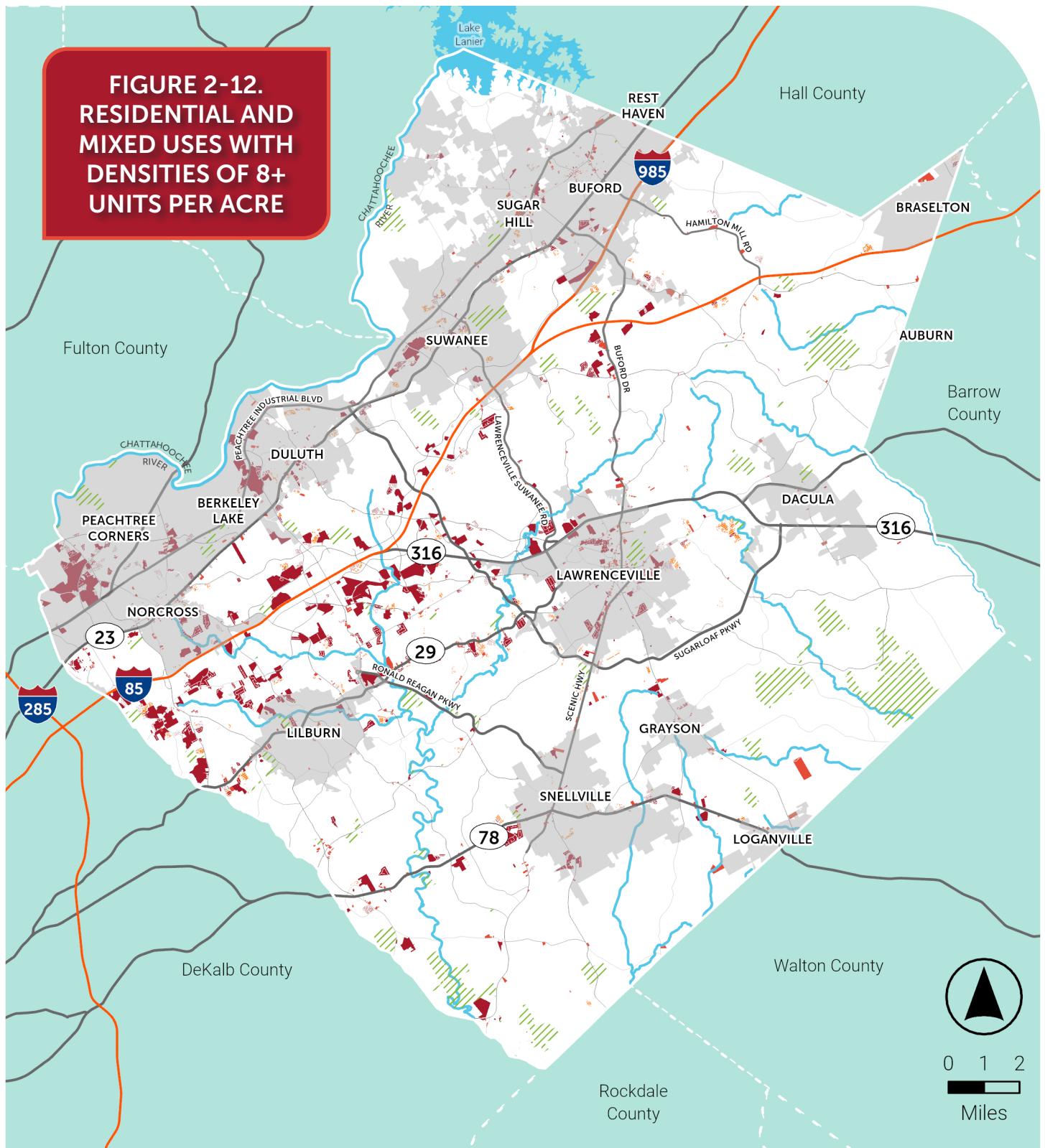
## FIGURE 2-11. LOW-MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL USES



## Legend

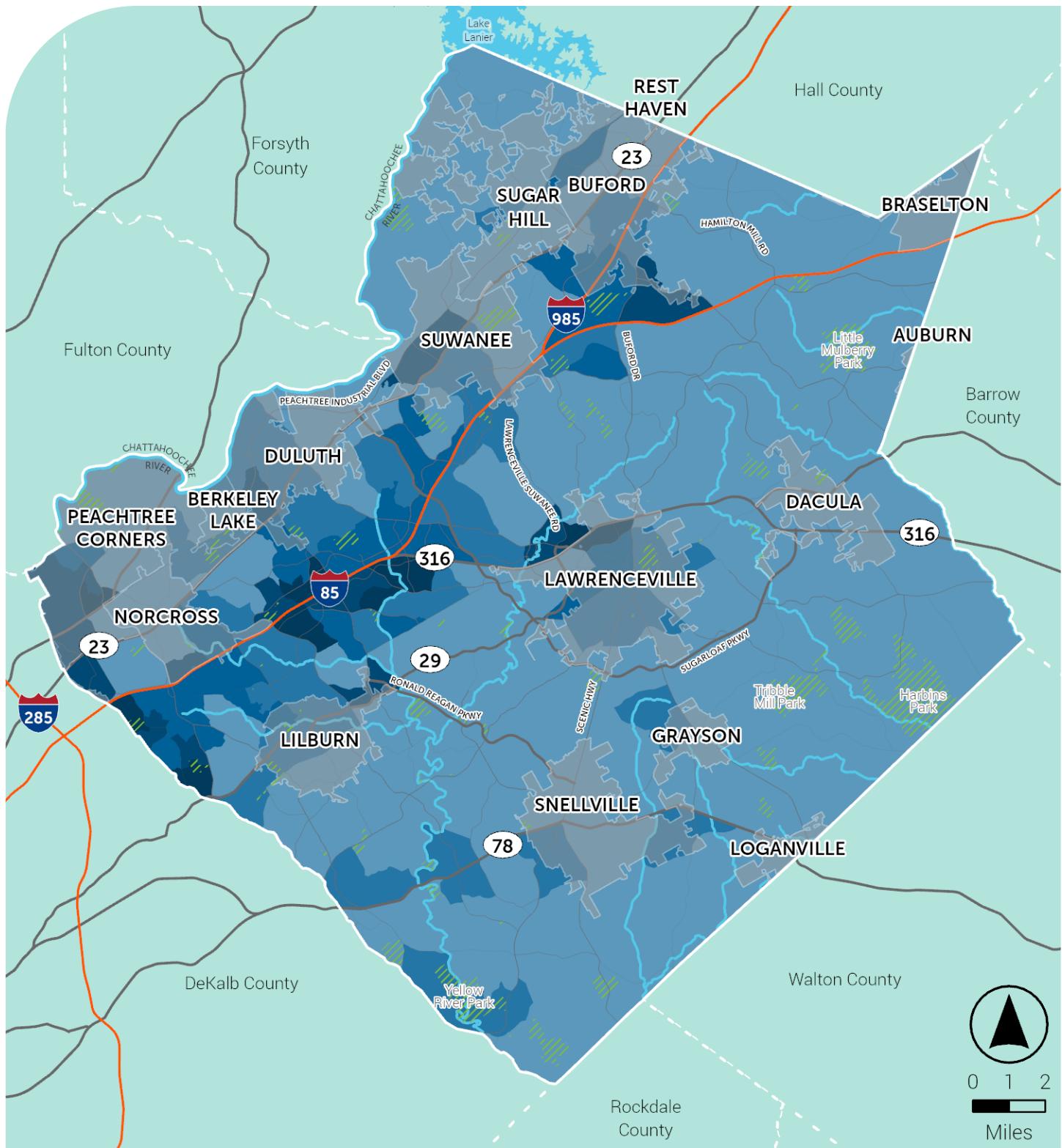
-  Estate (single family over 5 acres)
-  Low Density Residential (1/3 acre to 5 acres)
-  Medium Density Residential (1/8 acre to 1/3 acre)
-  Parks

**FIGURE 2-12.**  
**RESIDENTIAL AND  
MIXED USES WITH  
DENSITIES OF 8+  
UNITS PER ACRE**



**Legend**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| High Density Residential (8 or more units/acre)    |  |
| Mixed Use  |  |
| Multifamily Dwellings (includes mobile home parks) |  |
| Parks  |  |
| Rivers   |  |



#### Legend

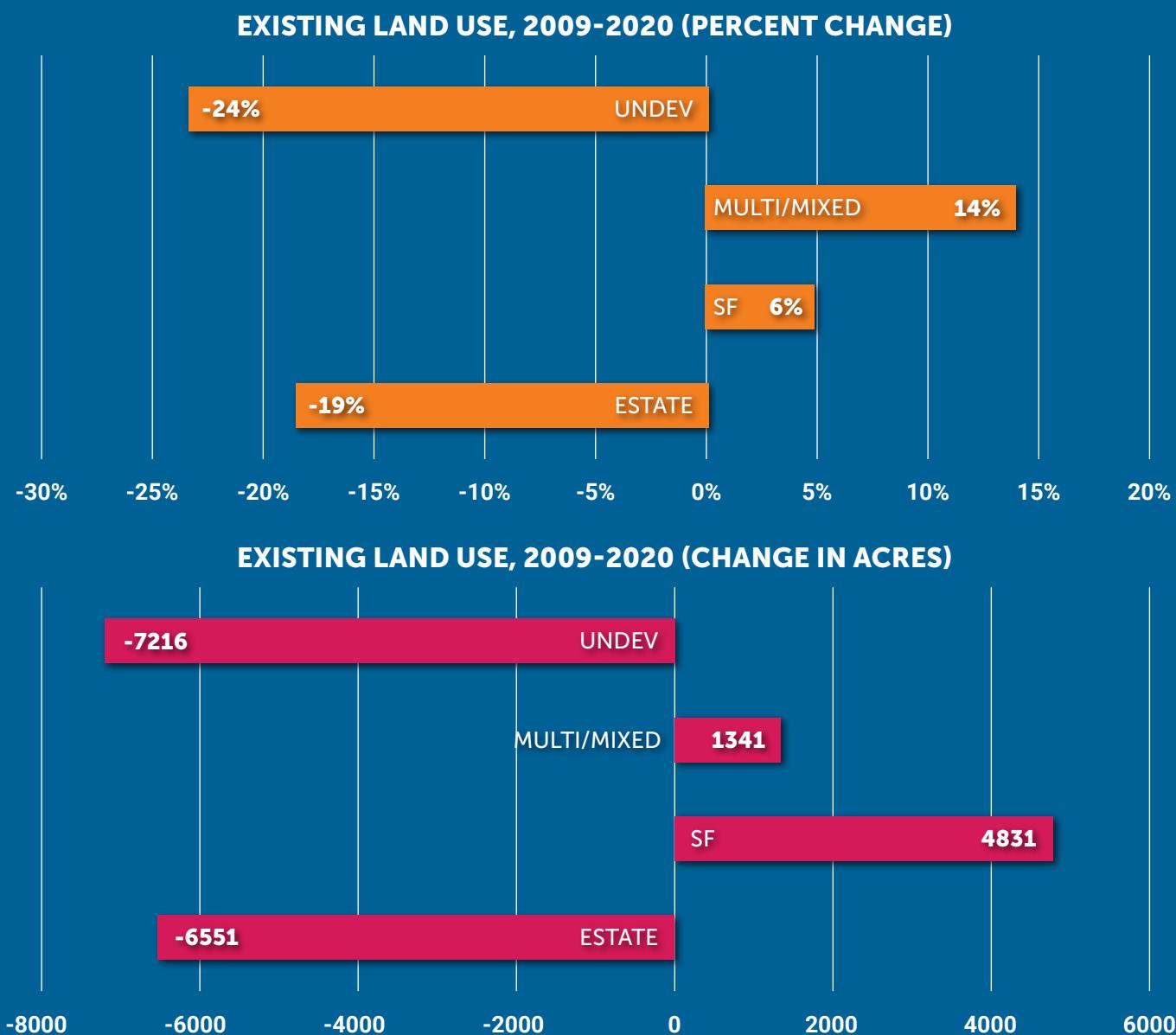
|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <span style="background-color: #0070C0; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span> | 0-20% multifamily        |
| <span style="background-color: #008080; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span> | 20.01-40% multifamily    |
| <span style="background-color: #009090; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span> | 40.01-60% multifamily    |
| <span style="background-color: #00A0A0; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span> | 60.1-80% multifamily     |
| <span style="background-color: #00B0B0; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span> | 80.01-96.45% multifamily |

■ Parks      ■ Rivers

**FIGURE 2-13.**  
**MULTIFAMILY**  
**PERCENTAGES BY**  
**CENSUS TRACT**

Types other than traditional single family housing are on the rise. A comparison of Existing Land Use data from 2009 to 2020 reveals that, while low density residential remains predominant, Gwinnett County has developed over 6,000 acres of new medium-density residential and 1,400 acres of multifamily housing in the last ten years, resulting in percent change figures of 48 percent and 19 percent respectively (Figure 2-14). While this increase in denser forms of housing is a step in the right direction, this trend must continue to accommodate projected population growth.

**FIGURE 2-14: EXISTING LAND USE CHANGE, 2009-2020**



## DIVERSITY IN DENSITIES

A deeper dive into the distribution of residential uses across Gwinnett shows great variety in lot size and density among single family neighborhoods, especially among lots developed in the last decade.

Gwinnett County has approximately 238,000 lots designated as single family residential, shown by year built in Figure 2-15. About 47 percent of these lots are between 1/3 of an acre and 1 acre.

**However, an equal percentage is 1/3 of an acre or less.** This means there are just as many single family lots at densities between 3-8 units per acre as those at lower densities (Figure 2-16, page 123).

Examining residential distribution throughout Gwinnett, it also becomes evident that single family subdivisions at higher densities are proliferating throughout the county (Figure 2-17, page 124).

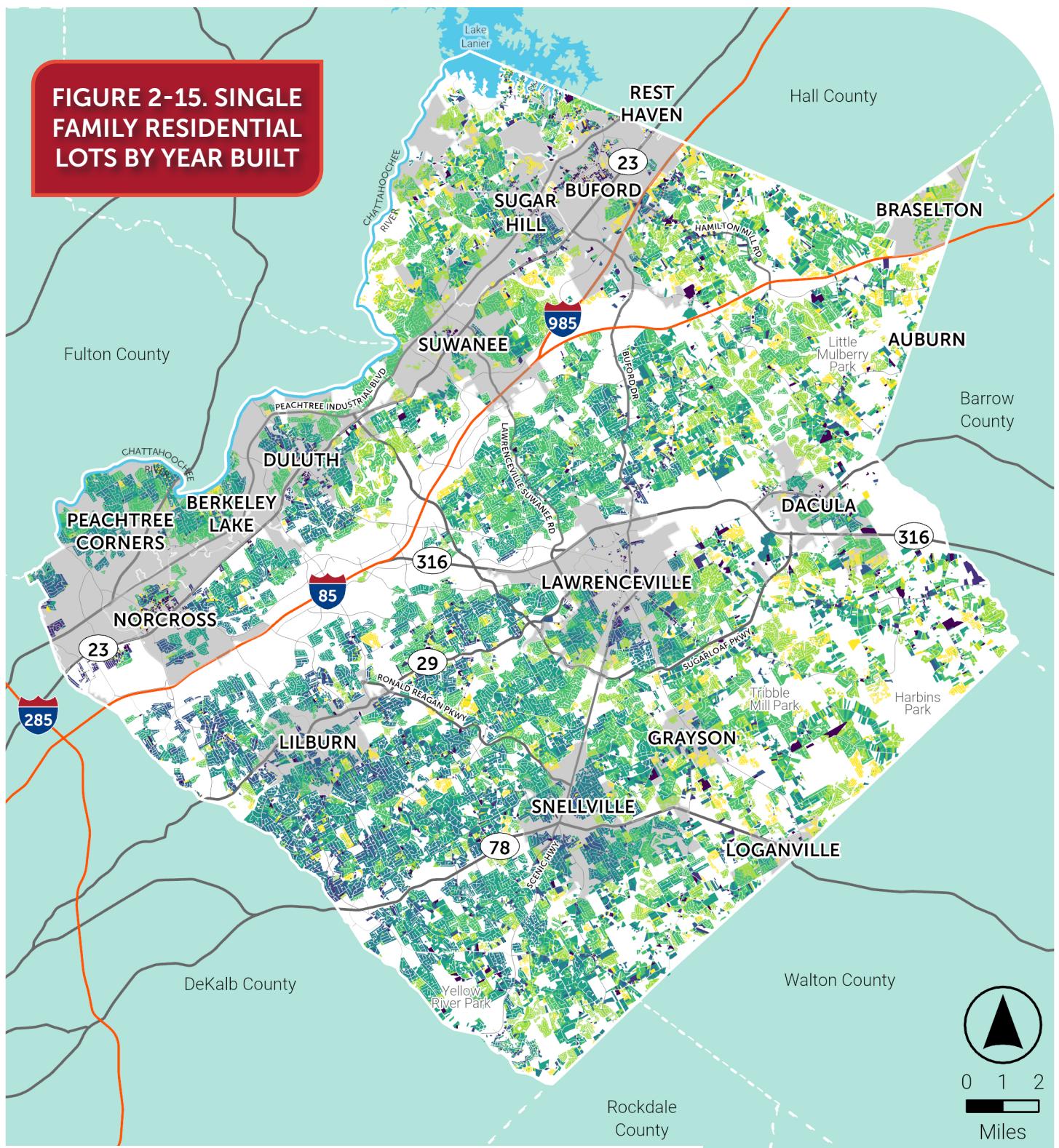
This pattern is reinforced by ACS data measuring density of housing units by census tract (Figure 2-18, page 125). Higher density concentrations are not just limited to the areas where multifamily buildings are more common; they also extend into census tracts that are predominantly single family subdivisions.

These land use patterns add further detail to Gwinnett County's suburban to urban evolution. Early suburban developments were built close to I-85, providing residents with convenient access to Atlanta. Given Gwinnett was mostly rural at the time, these early lots and retail centers were built at very low densities. As more residents moved to the county in the following decades, development spread further to the southern and eastern portions of Gwinnett. Demand accelerated, and single family subdivisions became denser to accommodate a greater influx of new residents. This trend continues today, with new, denser single family being sited in remaining undeveloped areas of the county that are infrastructurally challenged and farther from transportation corridors that could better support this greater density.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Gwinnett will need more than single family development to accommodate projected population growth. Not all current residents want to live in single family homes, and future residents may also want more diverse housing options. Redevelopment—especially of aging, underperforming development in locations well served by infrastructure—will be critical for delivering new housing, retail, and community amenities catered to diverse populations with minimal strain on infrastructure and remaining undeveloped land.

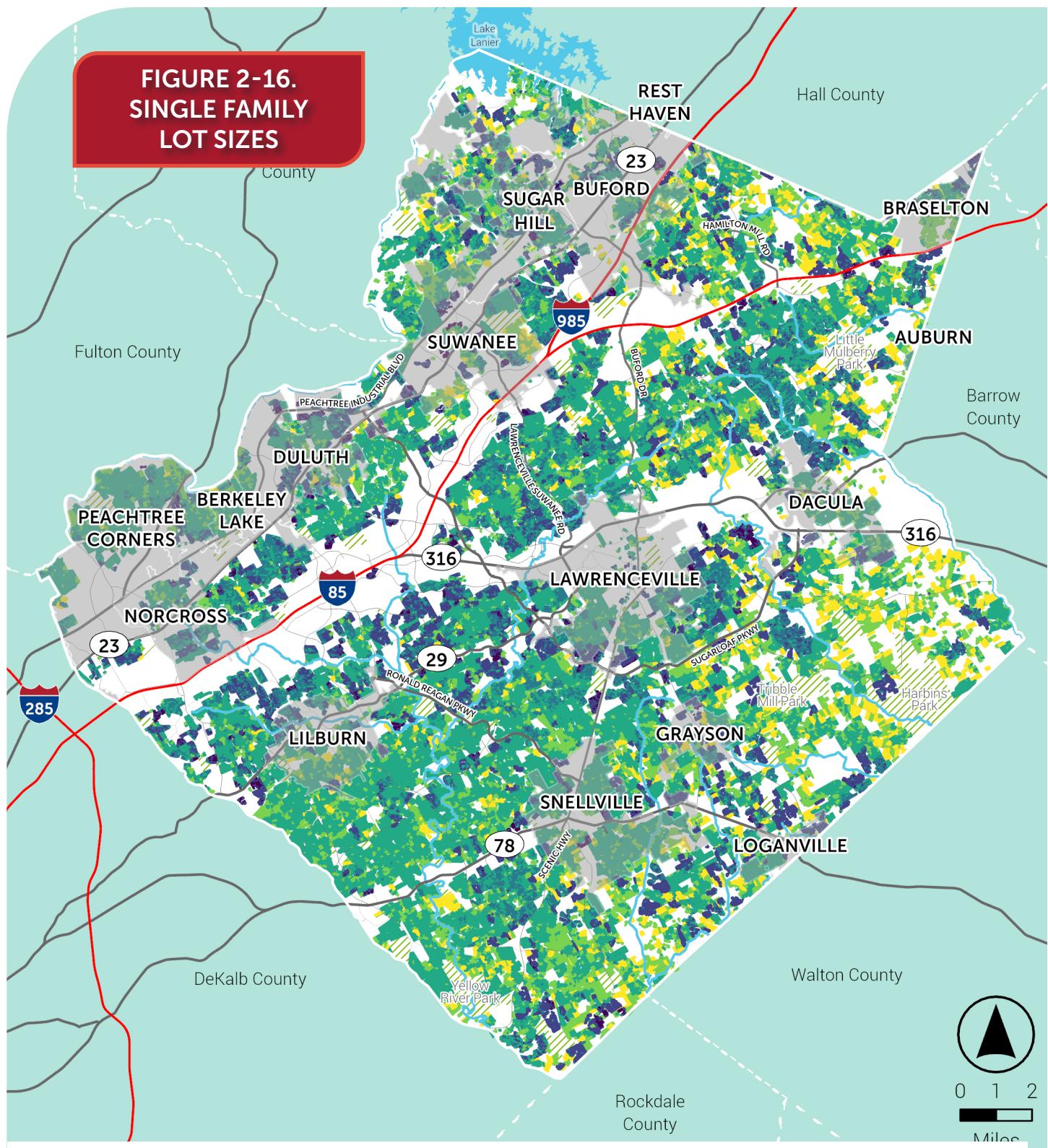
**FIGURE 2-15. SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL LOTS BY YEAR BUILT**



**Legend**

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1889 - 1950 | 1981 - 1990 |
| 1951 - 1960 | 1991 - 2000 |
| 1961 - 1970 | 2001 - 2010 |
| 1971 - 1980 | 2011 - 2020 |

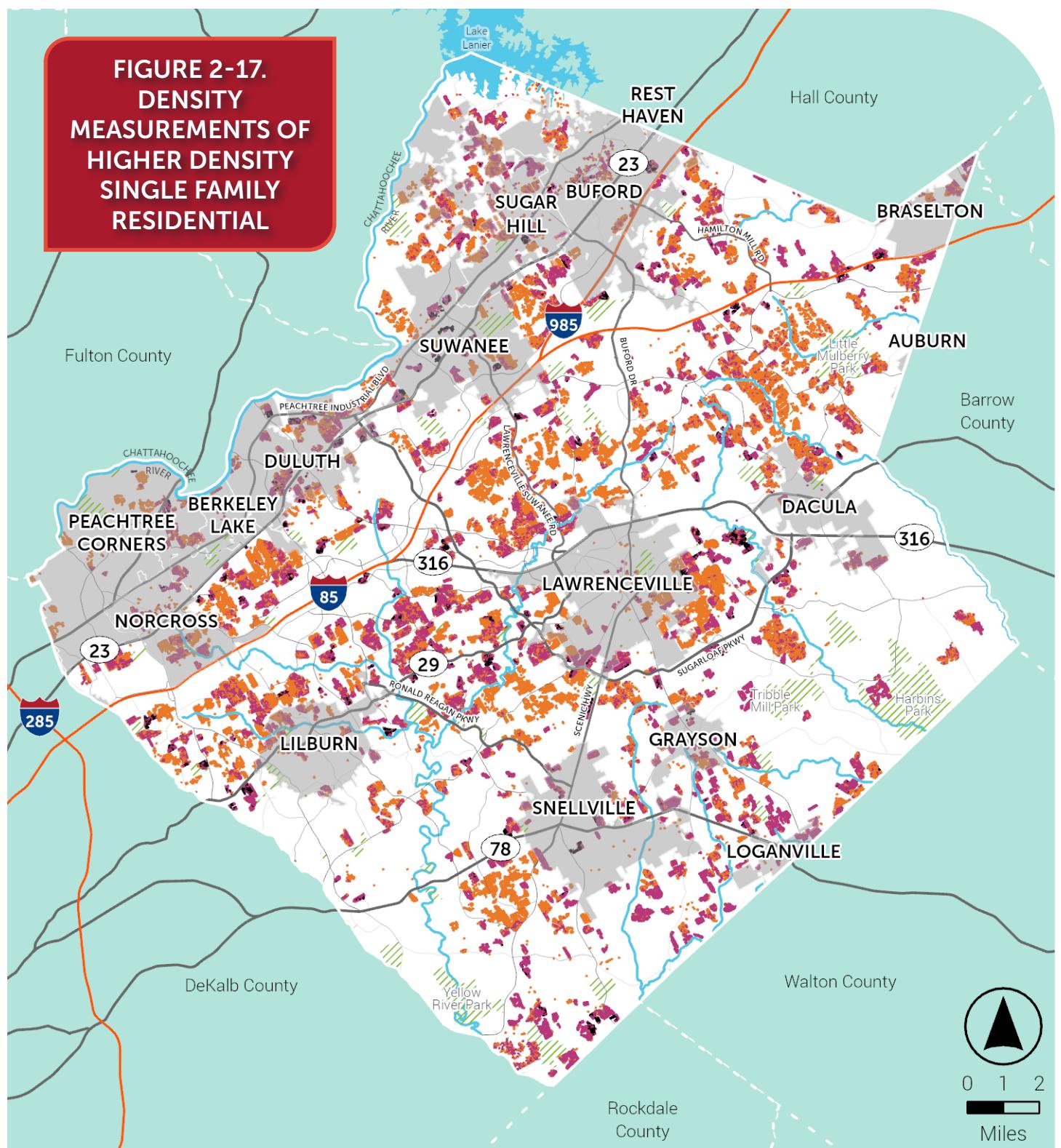
**FIGURE 2-16.**  
**SINGLE FAMILY**  
**LOT SIZES**



**Legend**

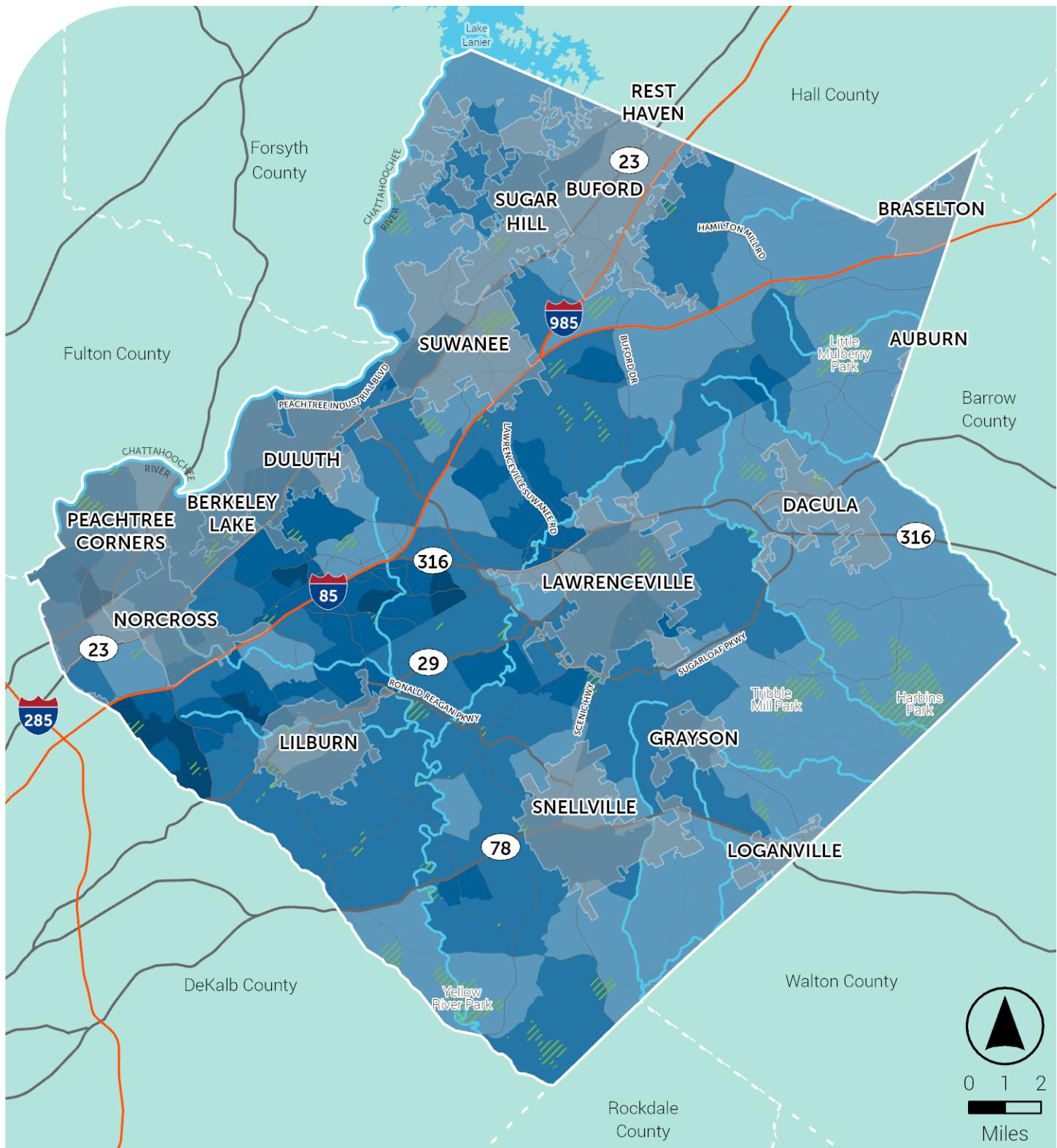
|          |                  |
|----------|------------------|
| 1/8 acre | 1/3-1 acre       |
| 1/4 acre | 1 acre - 5 acres |
| 1/3 acre | 5+ acres         |

**FIGURE 2-17.**  
**DENSITY**  
**MEASUREMENTS OF**  
**HIGHER DENSITY**  
**SINGLE FAMILY**  
**RESIDENTIAL**



**Legend**

- 8+ units per acre
- 4.1-8 units per acre
- 3.1-4 units per acre



**FIGURE 2-18.**  
**AVERAGE HOUSING**  
**DENSITIES BY CENSUS**  
**TRACT**

## WHAT DOES DENSITY LOOK LIKE?

Density is most often defined by units per acre. Different numbers are typically attributed to different zoning designations and serve as one mechanism for guiding development, while other design regulations like setbacks and maximum lot coverage make up the rest.

What does density actually look like? The basic calculation of units per acre doesn't reveal the configuration of a set of housing units. For example, a development of eight housing units per acre could take one of the following forms:

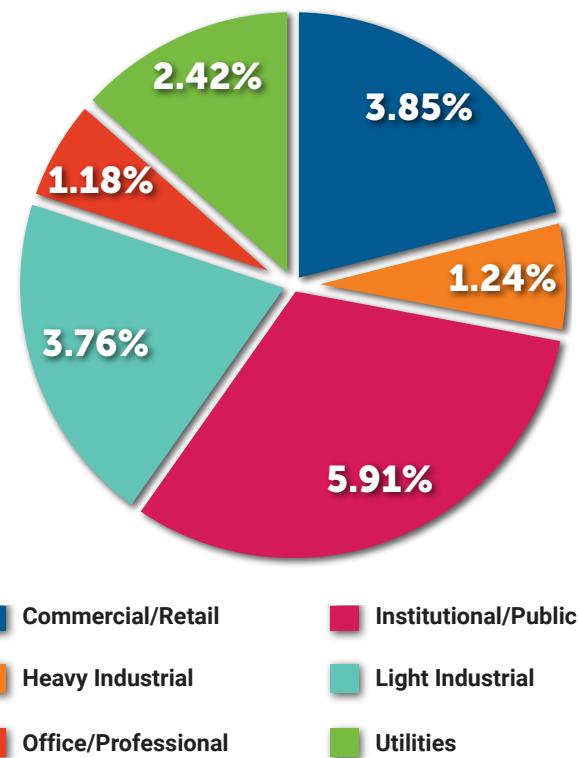
- Eight single family homes, each on one 1/8 acre lot
- Four duplexes, each on one 1/4 acre lot
- A single, four story building with eight apartments or condos surrounded by retail or other nonresidential uses

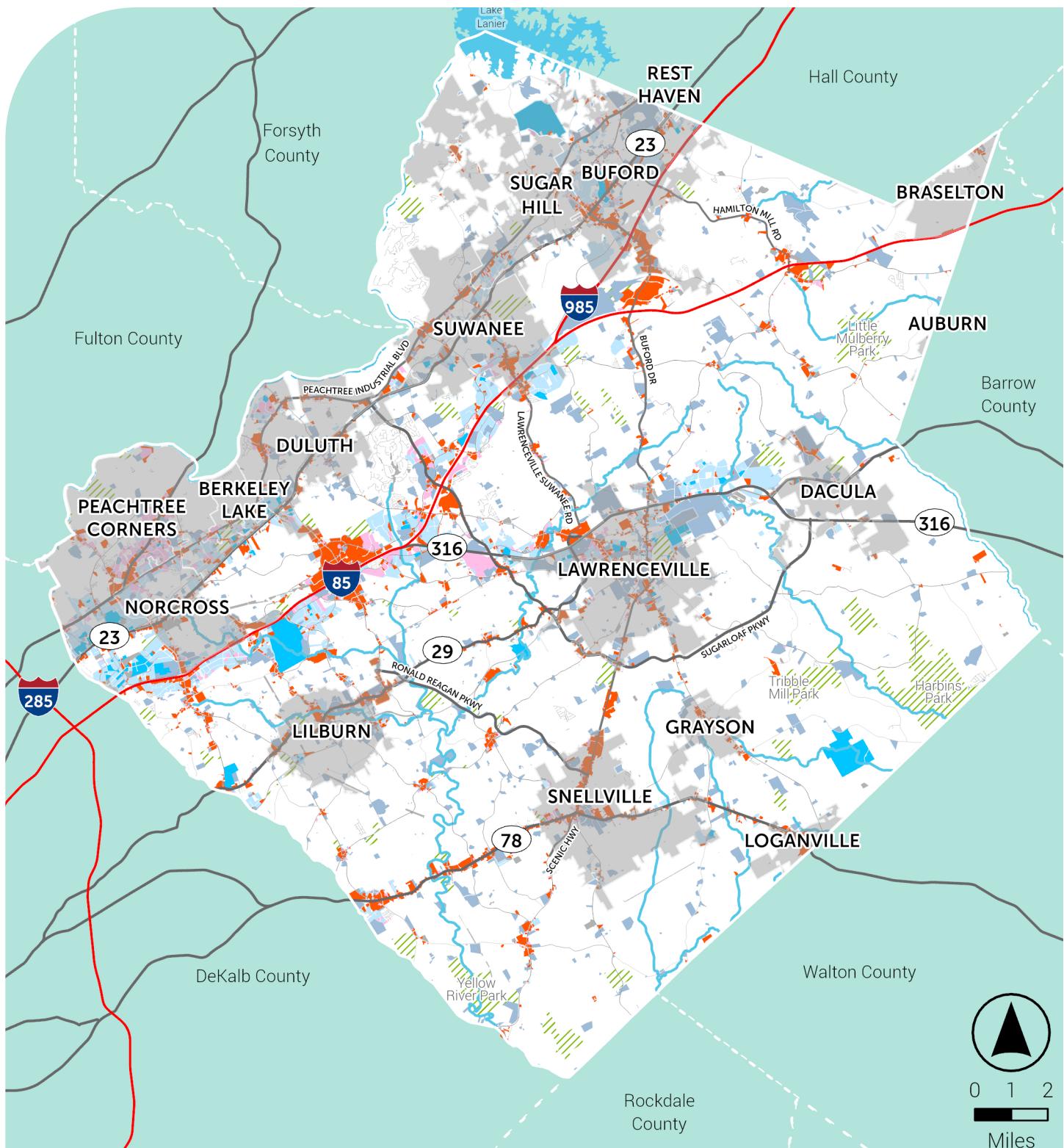
The preceding analysis shows that parts of Gwinnett County that could be considered more rural with a higher concentration of estate zoning include some housing developments at these higher densities (most of which are single family subdivisions). Other regulations related to form can be more useful for establishing standards for future development. Interested residents can learn more about density in the book *Visualizing Density* by Alex MacLean and Julie Campoli.

## NONRESIDENTIAL LAND USES

Nonresidential uses cover approximately 18.4 percent of Gwinnett County, with a significant portion dedicated to institutional/public and light industrial uses (Figures 2-19 and 2-20, page 127). Many retail, office, industrial, and institutional uses are concentrated in the western part of Gwinnett. However, bands of nonresidential uses (mostly retail) extend across major transportation corridors.

**FIGURE 2-19: NONRESIDENTIAL LAND USES**





#### Legend

|                                      |                      |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Commercial/Retail                    | Heavy Industrial     |
| Office/Professional                  | Institutional/Public |
| Transportation/Communication/Utility | Parks                |
| Light Industrial                     | Rivers               |

**FIGURE 2-20.**  
**NONRESIDENTIAL**  
**LAND USES**

## DIVERSITY IN PEOPLE

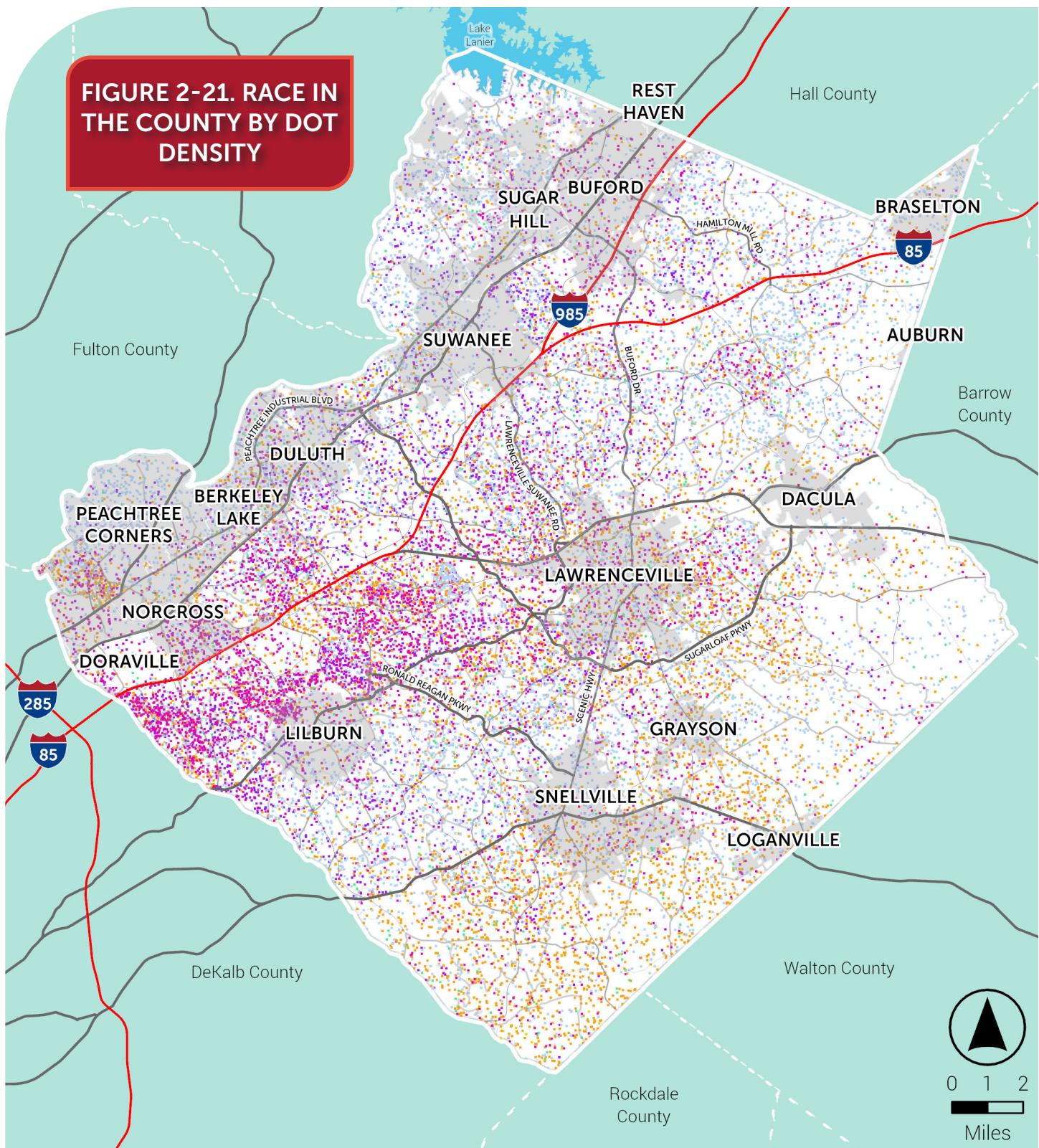
Gwinnett County's population has grown more diverse in recent years, and the County has taken intentional measures to include and celebrate residents of diverse communities in its civic engagement, programming, and brand.

Looking at racial and ethnic background in detail shows Gwinnett's unique blend of diversity throughout the county (Figure 2-21, page 129). Over 60 percent of Gwinnett County's census tracts are majority nonwhite, with nearly 20 percent being over 75 percent nonwhite (Figure 2-22, page 130). A smaller number (~9 percent) are majority Hispanic/Latino, although several other census tracts also feature large Hispanic/Latino populations (Figure 2-23, page 131). Many of these racially and ethnically diverse census tracts are clustered in the western and southern portions of Gwinnett County, with some near Lawrenceville, Duluth, and Buford.

These demographic maps correlate closely with median household income (Figure 2-24, page 132). About 28 percent of census tracts have a median household income of \$60,000 or less; over half have a median household income under \$80,000. These lower median HHIs are mostly concentrated in the western part of the County, specifically between the I-85 and Highway 29 corridors and around the perimeter of the City of Lawrenceville.

These factors suggest patterns of diversity within Gwinnett and a need for future growth policies prioritizing equity. When these trends are juxtaposed against land uses, most of Gwinnett County's multifamily and high-density residential buildings are also located in these lower-income, majority nonwhite census tracts (Figure 2-25, page 133). The issue of housing affordability will be explored further in Chapter 4, Housing.

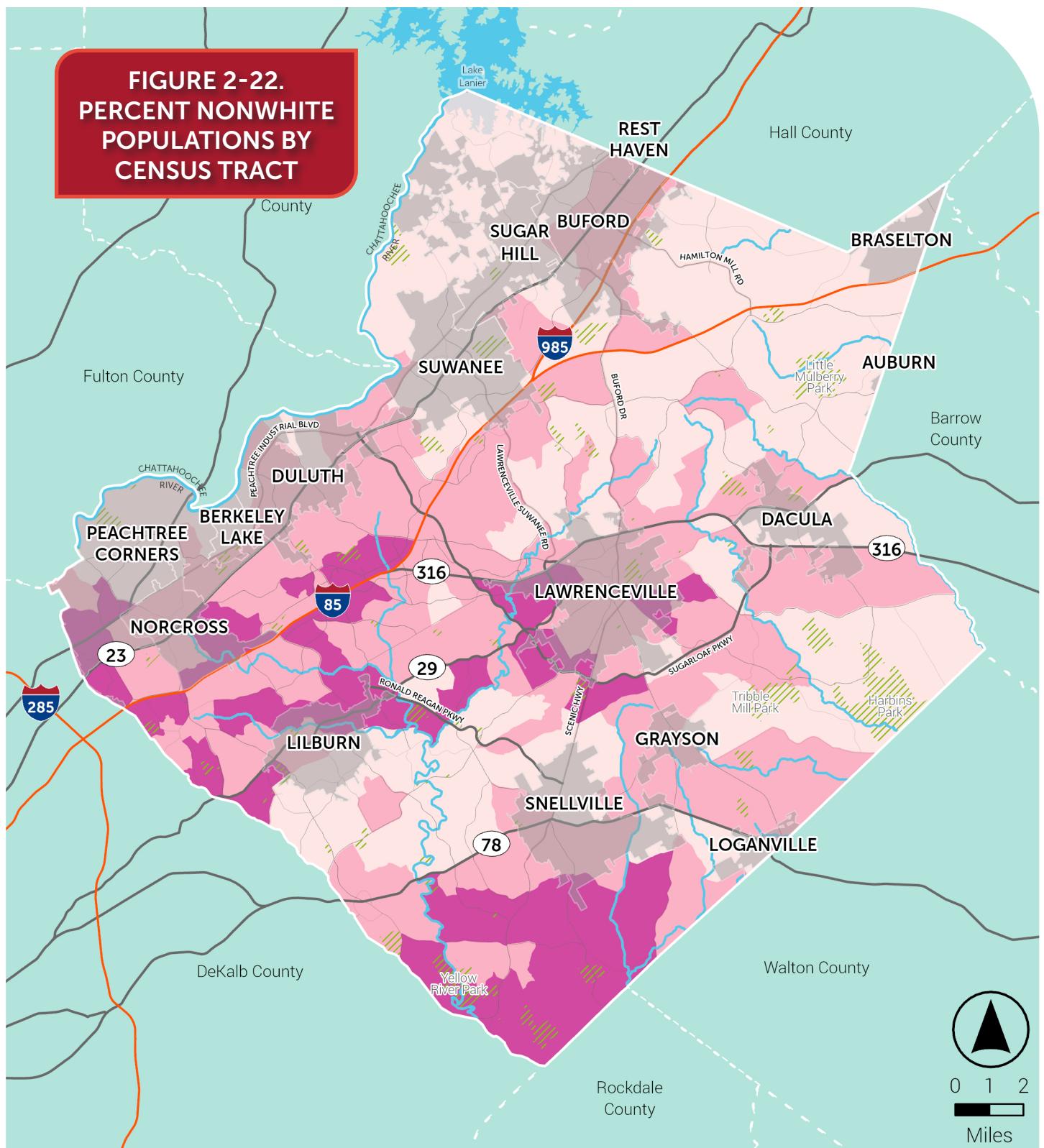
**FIGURE 2-21. RACE IN THE COUNTY BY DOT DENSITY**



**Legend** 1 Dot = ~15 people

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ● Non-Hispanic White        | ● American Indian and Alaska Native    |
| ● Hispanic or Latino        | ● Two or More Races                    |
| ● Black or African American | ● Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander |
| ● Asian                     | ● Other                                |

**FIGURE 2-22.**  
**PERCENT NONWHITE POPULATIONS BY CENSUS TRACT**

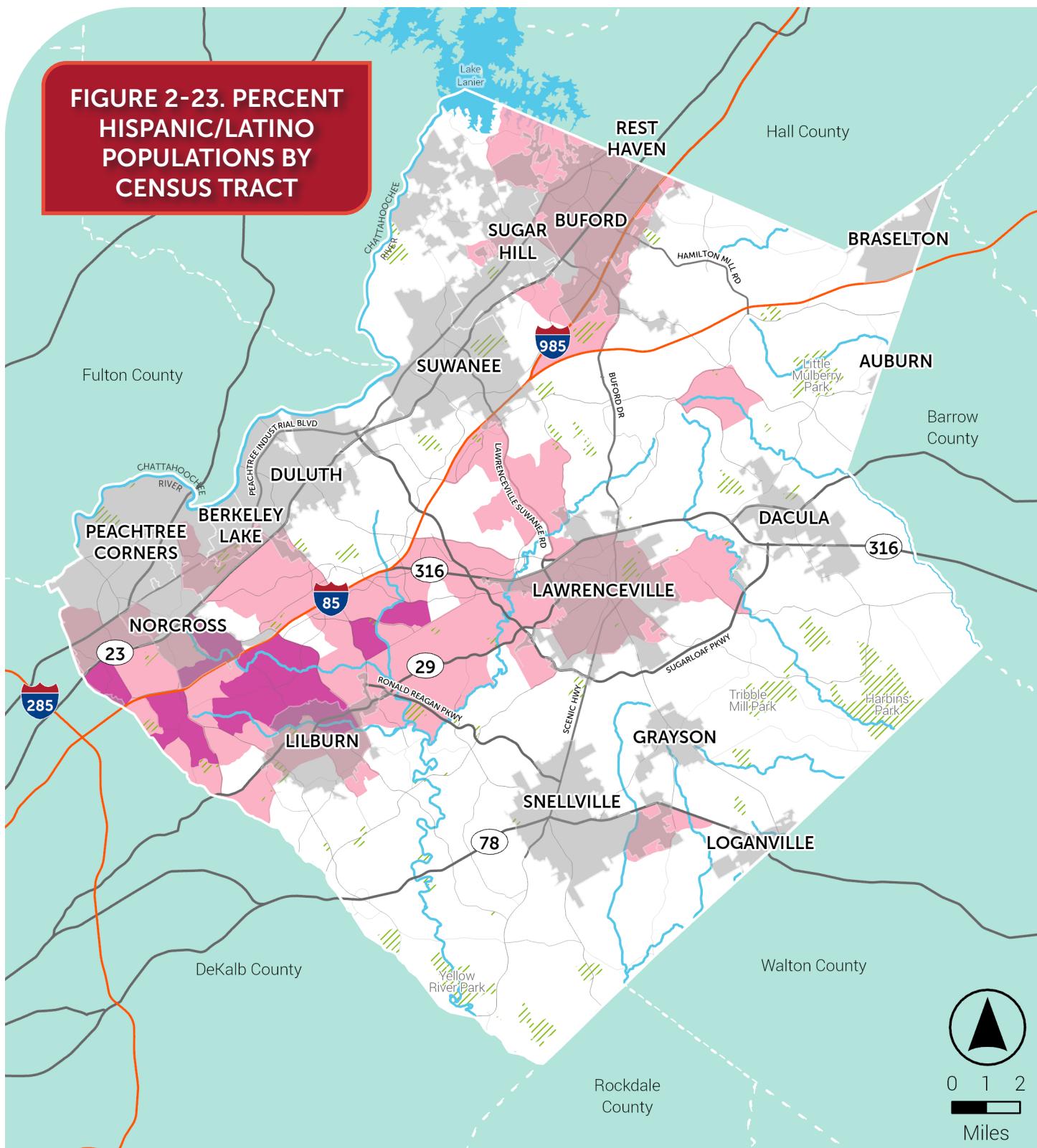


**Legend**

- 50% and under
- 50% - 75%
- 75% and over



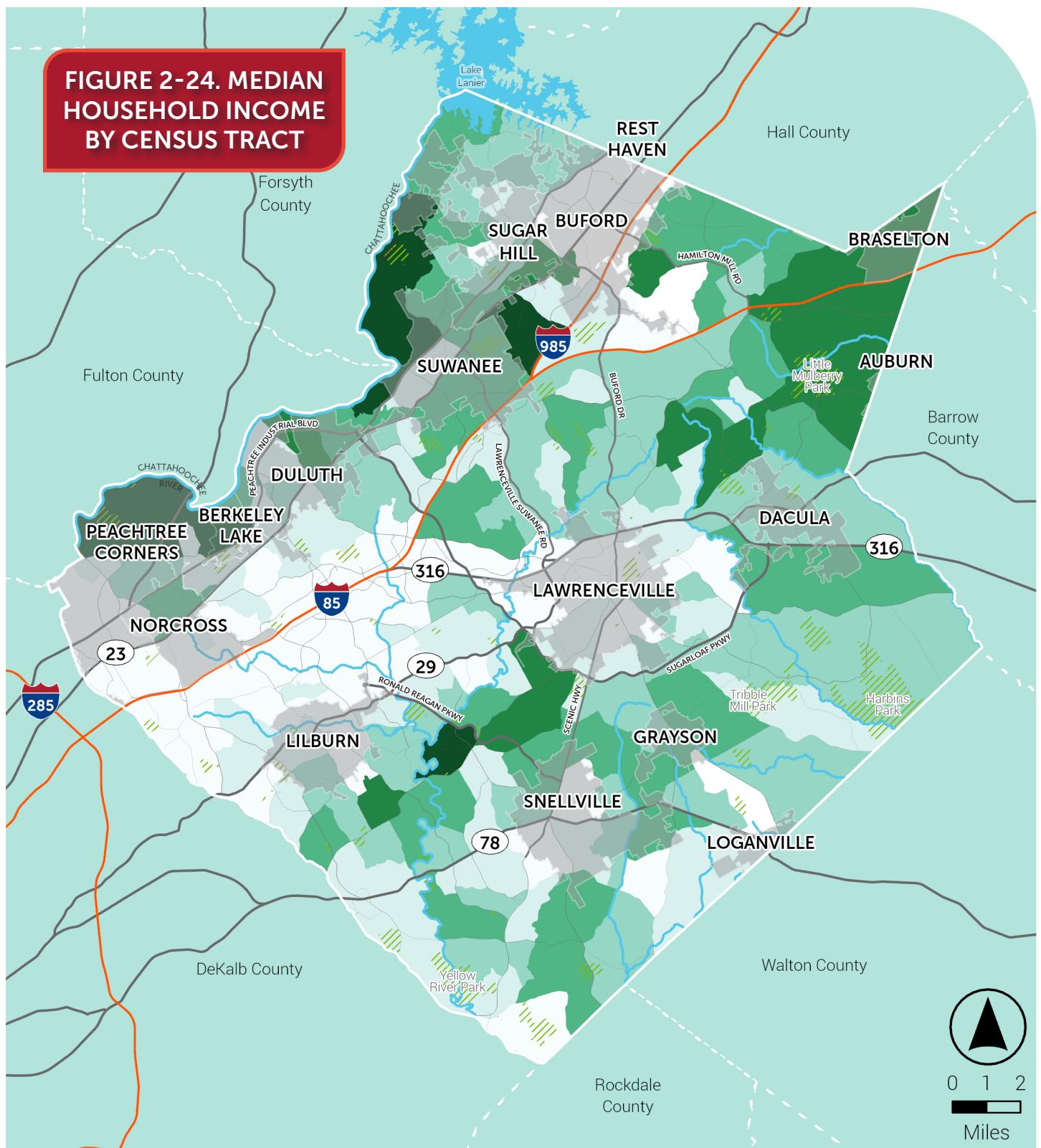
**FIGURE 2-23. PERCENT HISPANIC/LATINO POPULATIONS BY CENSUS TRACT**



**Legend**

- 25% and under
- 25% - 50%
- 50% and over

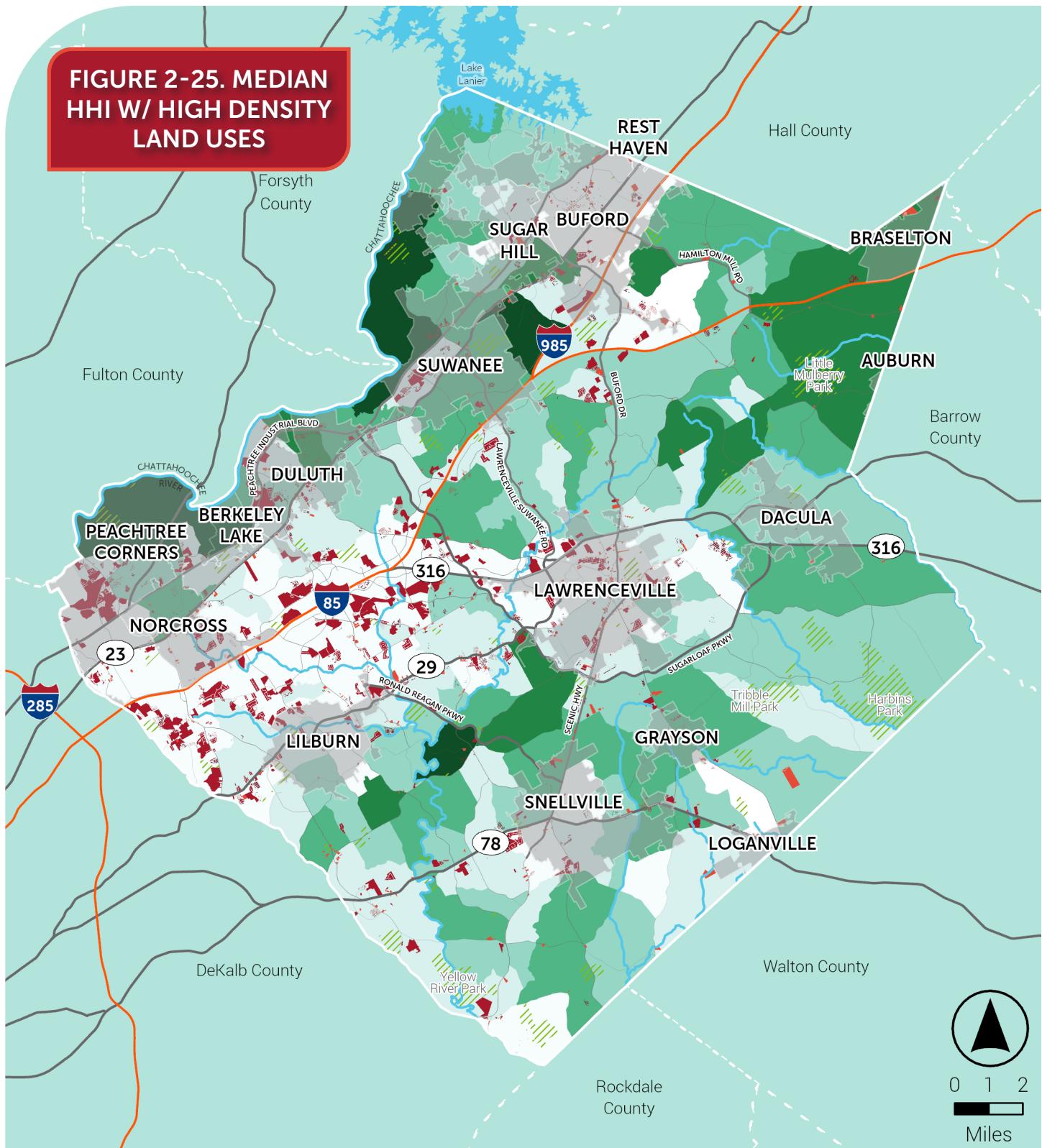
**FIGURE 2-24. MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY CENSUS TRACT**



**Legend**

|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| \$60,000 or lower   | \$120,001-\$140,000 |
| \$60,001-\$80,000   | \$140,001 or higher |
| \$80,001-\$100,000  |                     |
| \$100,001-\$120,000 |                     |

**FIGURE 2-25. MEDIAN HHI W/ HIGH DENSITY LAND USES**

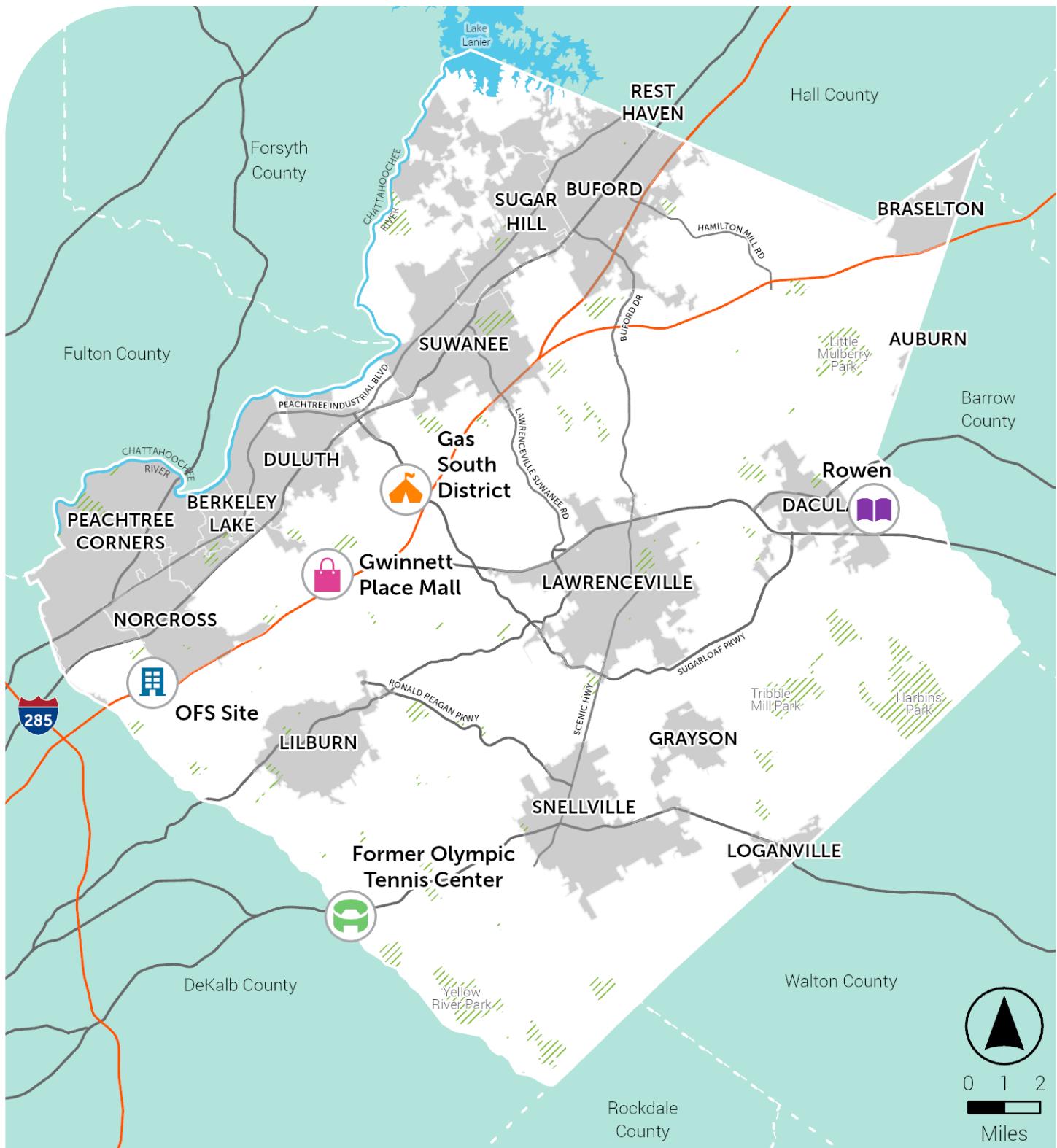


**Legend**

|                     |                     |                          |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| \$60,000 or lower   | \$120,001-\$140,000 | High Density Residential |
| \$60,001-\$80,000   | \$140,001 or higher | Mixed Use                |
| \$80,001-\$100,000  |                     | Multifamily Dwellings    |
| \$100,001-\$120,000 |                     |                          |

Additionally, much of Gwinnett County's industrial land—which hosts a variety of light and heavy industries, including manufacturing and logistics—is located close to I-85, the County's main transportation artery. While it is necessary for industrial areas to have freeway access, the County should consider expanding housing options that promote affordability in areas that pose fewer health and safety risks, especially for disadvantaged groups.

This analysis shows that not only are Gwinnett's residents more diverse than ever, but the County is not uniformly suburban from end to end. Denser housing types are growing more popular, and single family subdivisions are becoming denser as well. These housing types are not necessarily being sited in ideal locations, however, which can result in unintended consequences for specific communities. Going forward, new land use policies must embrace a diversified approach that tailors recommendations to Gwinnett's kaleidoscopic communities.



#### Legend

|  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
|  | Former Olympic Tennis Center |
|  | Gas South District           |
|  | OFS Site                     |
|  | Gwinnett Place Mall          |
|  | Rowen                        |

**FIGURE 2-26. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

# UPCOMING INITIATIVES & PROJECTS

Gwinnett County has recognized the need for new types of development and is actively working towards implementing several major projects of its own (Figure 2-26).

## ROWEN

Rowen is an upcoming development along Highway 316 that seeks to create Georgia's largest knowledge community on 2,000 acres in eastern Gwinnett County. The Rowen Foundation leads the project and aims to create over 22 million square feet of offices, research facilities, public spaces, and residences while preserving 500 acres of forest and constructing 5 miles of walking trails throughout the site. The Rowen Foundation intends to take advantage of Gwinnett's proximity to over 50 educational institutions to create a research hub for various fields, including medicine, agriculture, and environmental protection. Design guidelines are in place to ensure the campus takes a sustainability-centered design approach partnered with zero-emission strategies. Phase 1 sites became available in Q1 of 2023, with completion slated for Q1 of 2024. The Rowen Village, a vibrant space with a mix of offices, multifamily residential, community spaces, restaurants, and the arts, will anchor the site.

## GWINNETT PLACE MALL REDEVELOPMENT

At its pinnacle, Gwinnett Place Mall was one of the most popular destinations in the area. However, several factors have left the mall largely, but not totally, vacant. Gwinnett County purchased a 39 acre portion of the site for \$23 million in 2020. The redevelopment vision for the site is to support economic security by creating a dense, mixed use center of activity that is well connected, green, and walkable. However, the anchor tenants own their land, complicating the County's redevelopment process. A Livable Centers Initiative project proposed a mixed use strategy called the Global Villages in August 2022, and the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners adopted a separate but complementary revitalization policy in February 2023. The next steps involve demolishing the County owned property of the mall building and the former Sears.

## OPTICAL FIBER SOLUTIONS REDEVELOPMENT

In 2018, Gwinnett County officials bought 103 acres of the OFS plant site at the Jimmy Carter Boulevard exit off I-85. The site is within the Gateway 85 Community Improvement District, which has been active in its redevelopment planning, contributing to the first redevelopment study for the area in 2011. Several visions have been proposed for the site, including a multimodal transit hub and mixed use area with housing, retail, office, and greenspace. The most recent proposal, Atlanta Media Complex, proposes reusing the site as a movie studio, complete with sound stages, back lots, offices, and student housing.

## FORMER OLYMPIC TENNIS CENTER REDEVELOPMENT

This 31 acre site off Highway 78 hosted the 1995 Olympic tennis matches but has been underused since and was cleared in 2017 to make way for redevelopment. Gwinnett County owns the site and has been working on crafting a development plan that excites residents and maximizes the site's potential. On October 24, 2023, the Board of Commissioners approved a rezoning application and site plan that proposes mixed use development, including over 240 multifamily units, a large footprint commercial space that could house a grocery store or similar business, small scale commercial and retail space, office space, and a communal green space.

## GAS SOUTH DISTRICT EXPANSION

The Gas South District has been the focus of redevelopment efforts for quite some time. After several years of construction and planning, it hosted the grand reopening of its Convention Center in January of 2023. Other key sites within the District include the Hudgens Center for Art and Learning, Gas South Arena—which hosts concerts, hockey games, and other events—and several family-friendly entertainment options. The center will be further enhanced by the nearby Westin Hotel, set to open in Spring 2024. In addition to its more corporate side, the entertainment area will be redeveloped to add mixed use development on the current surface parking lot.

## WHAT WE LEARNED FROM RESIDENTS

Across the engagement activities for the 2045 Unified Plan, it became clear that residents want to focus land use improvements on two things:

- 1 bringing services and amenities closer to neighborhoods
- 2 keeping the Gwinnett feel that they have come to enjoy

The project team oriented engagement activities around digging deeper into these two themes. Community workshops, presented as Daily Community Cafes, offered residents a chance to discuss in detail the types of development they considered appropriate for their community. These workshops also served to educate residents on their Daily Community's fair share of Gwinnett's projected growth and the benefits that come with growth.

The preferences below summarize feedback the project team received, but do not capture all the nuances of that feedback which the Daily Community framework can accommodate. For a full summary of engagement, see Appendix C.

### COMMUNITY PREFERENCES: LAND USE

|   |
|---|
| New development and redevelopment should create more opportunities to walk, enjoy public space, and take advantage of amenities |
| Focus development in areas that are already disturbed instead of undeveloped land   |
| Cluster development in between neighborhoods at existing centers of activity (e.g. shopping centers, along main corridors)      |
| Preserve rural, undeveloped areas and maintain tree canopy  |
| Make sure new development is high quality and attractive  |
| Incorporate new public space and greenspace into redevelopment  |
| Reduce the amount of parking in shopping centers  |
| Make sure new development does not put undue stress on transportation infrastructure  |

# Needs & Opportunities

Based on existing conditions, the planning team identified several land use needs and related opportunities in Gwinnett County. These needs and opportunities are also organized according to the two themes put forth by the analysis above.

## NEEDS

### **ISSUE #1: GWINNETT HAS MORE GROWTH COMING THAN CURRENT POLICIES CAN ACCOMMODATE.**

#### **1 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT**

Gwinnett County has about 19,000 acres of buildable, undeveloped land remaining (Figure 2-4, page 107). Some of this is already slated for development (see Upcoming Projects, page 136). However, the County aims to approach the development of this land judiciously, with a goal of preserving rural and natural lands where preservation is appropriate and supported by the community. Additionally, some of these development opportunities face significant limitations, including a lack of access to sewer infrastructure.

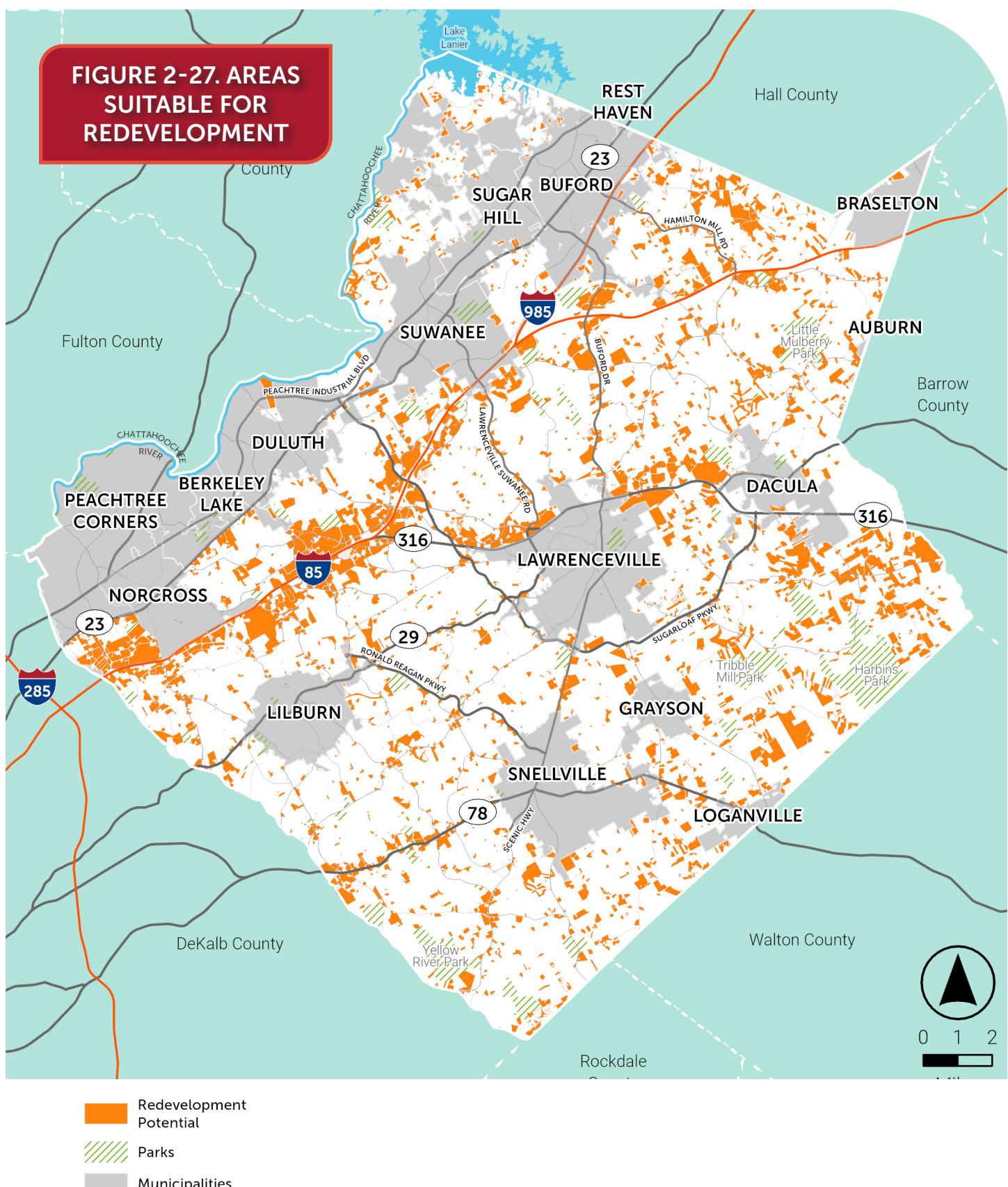
Between the relatively small amount of land remaining, development limitations, and the desire to preserve remaining natural resources, it will be vital for the County to focus on redevelopment opportunities. Approximately 26,000 acres of land can be considered potentially suitable for redevelopment (Figure 2-27).

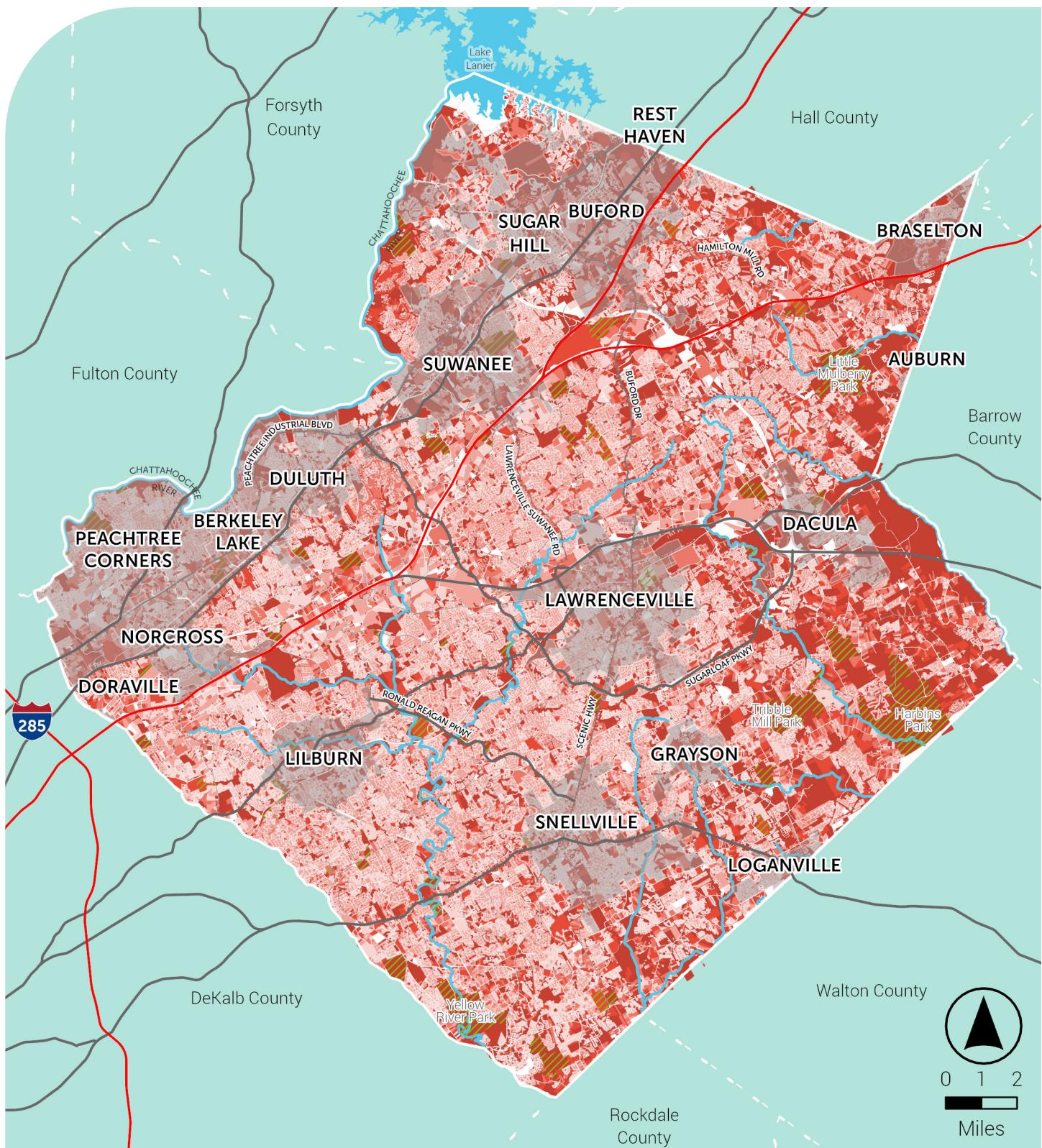
This suitability measurement considers various qualities that would render a parcel more susceptible to change, including but not limited to:

- A high ratio of land value to improvement value (meaning that the land is more valuable than what's on it) (Figure 2-28, page 141)
- Proximity to transportation corridors
- Proximity to wastewater infrastructure
- Large areas of underutilized space (i.e., surface parking lots) (Figure 2-29, page 142)

Figure 2-27 shows where some of these opportunities for redevelopment exist. Using this analysis and recommendations provided in later sections, Gwinnett County Planning and Development staff can identify particularly good opportunities for new redevelopment projects that support the growth communities want to see.

**FIGURE 2-27. AREAS SUITABLE FOR REDEVELOPMENT**





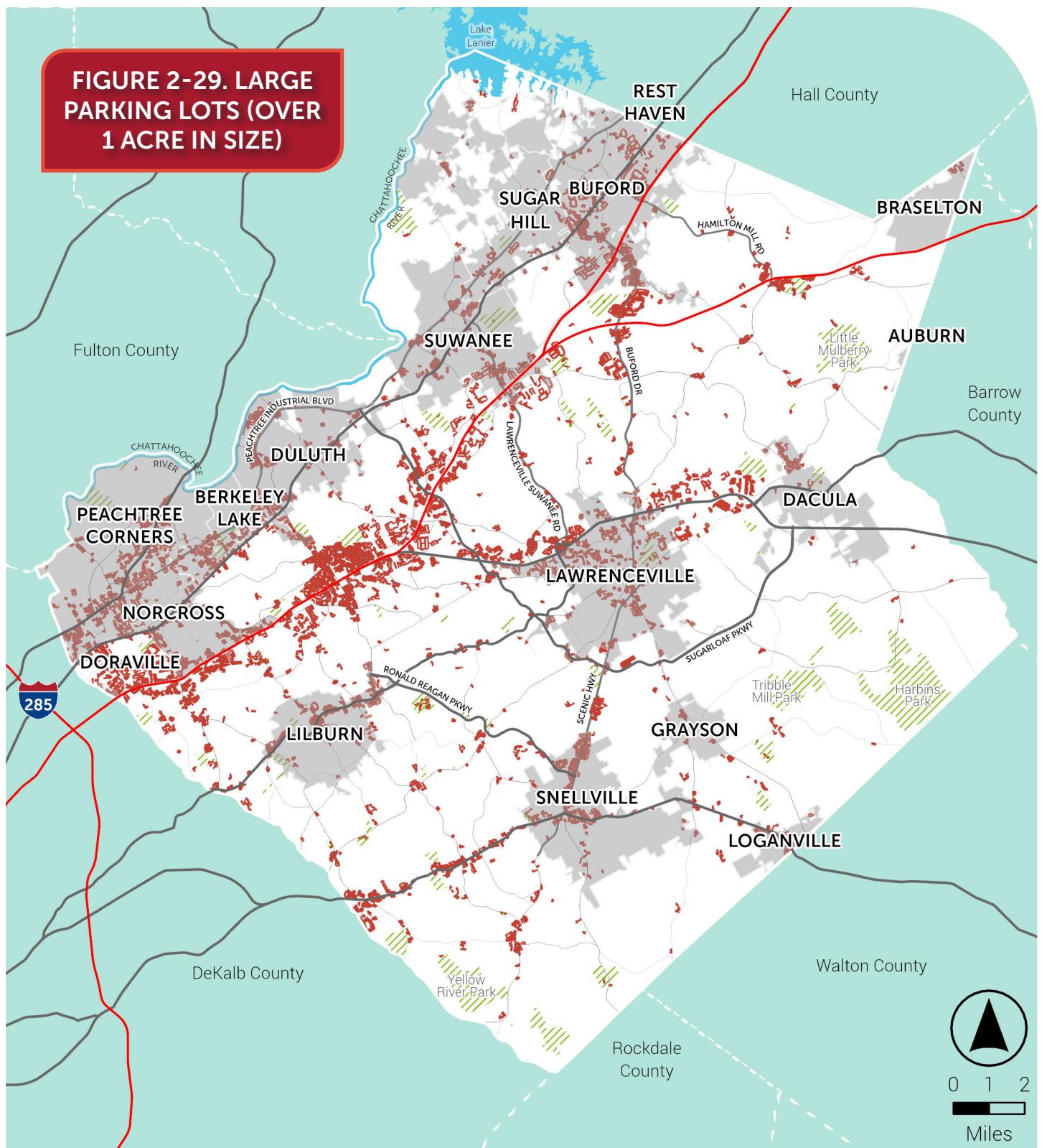
## Legend

A horizontal bar chart showing the distribution of data across three categories:

- 0% - 20.95% (Dark Red)
- 20.96% - 53.28% (Orange)
- 53.29% - 71.89% (Light Orange)

## FIGURE 2-28. LAND-IMPROVEMENT RATIO

**FIGURE 2-29. LARGE PARKING LOTS (OVER 1 ACRE IN SIZE)**



**Legend**

- Parking Lots over 1 acre
- Parks

## 2 ALIGNMENT OF GROWTH WITH INFRASTRUCTURE

As the County grows and densifies, new development must align with infrastructure improvements and vice versa. Several County departments share a strong desire to jointly address issues related to growth and development. The Department of Water Resources is engaged in very detailed planning efforts for its sewer infrastructure. Similarly, the Department of Transportation has completed its Transit Development Plan to recommend alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle trips. The County could consider establishing a holistic impact fee program, so that new development and redevelopment projects can support infrastructural systems through financial resources, helping development pay for itself with minimal burdens to residents.

## 4 PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Many former forests and farms in Gwinnett County have been developed into suburban subdivisions or industrial uses. Nearly 91,000 acres of forest and 38,000 acres of pasture lands and farmland have been lost since 1974. Some rural areas remain in northern and eastern Gwinnett but are experiencing growth pressure, especially if they have sewer access. Residents and County staff would like to prioritize preserving these remaining undeveloped areas to maximize their natural resource benefits. However, this can only be done with respect to private property rights. The County could evaluate the feasibility of a Transfer of Development Rights program that protects these remaining natural lands, transferring the density allowed by right into Daily Community centers.

## 3 AMENITIES, RETAIL, AND WORKPLACES CLOSER TO RESIDENCES

In addition to new housing development, the County must identify strategic opportunities to create local jobs, retail, and other amenities that more households can support. There is a strong desire for more opportunities near people's homes, which could be added through strategic redevelopment.

# OPPORTUNITIES

## ISSUE #1: GWINNETT HAS MORE GROWTH COMING THAN CURRENT POLICIES CAN ACCOMMODATE.

### 1 REDUCING BARRIERS TO REDEVELOPMENT

Redevelopment is less common than greenfield development for many reasons. Chief among them is that redevelopment is usually more expensive, complex, and lengthy. On top of these barriers, developers often face other hurdles, including complicated review processes, complicated regulations, and financing. Gwinnett County should reduce barriers to redevelopment and find ways to incentivize these projects if they satisfy community development goals.

### 3 INCREASING HOUSING MIX

As older commercial and industrial buildings and some housing reach the end of their life cycles (typically 50 years), Gwinnett County should discourage defaulting to single family housing and promote a mix of units that satisfy the variety of needs and preferences of its residents.

### 2 CAPITALIZING ON BENEFITS OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

Redevelopment offers opportunities to invest in community infrastructure. Tying the improvement of transportation systems (sidewalks, trails, bike lanes), public spaces, and aesthetics and safety (wayfinding, streetlights) to new development will allow those benefits to be more smoothly produced, making communities more active, connected, and lively.

# NEEDS

## ISSUE #2: ONE SIZE FITS ALL DEVELOPMENT NO LONGER WORKS

### 1 RECOGNITION OF GWINNETT COUNTY'S UNIQUE COMMUNITIES

Residents are passionate about where they live. Many communities within Gwinnett are quite established (Centerville and Mountain Park, for example) and consider their slice of Gwinnett distinct from others. Recognizing these delineations can cultivate a sense of pride and investment in making these communities better. As communities and preferences change, it will be imperative to offer housing and amenities that create a more holistic, balanced community where residents feel at home and are represented.

### 2 CLEAR, BALANCED, AND FLEXIBLE LAND USE POLICY FRAMEWORK

The County's Planning and Development staff need more specific direction on land-use decisions. Because Gwinnett is diversifying, developments must consider a hyper-localized, holistic context to be successfully welcomed by the existing community. Current development policy is too vague and broad to accomplish this and creates challenges and inefficiencies within the development review process. As a result, developers shy away from innovative projects and residents find recent development unsuitable to their communities. Clarifying and specifying the County's land use policy can make it easier for decisionmakers to approve quality development and redevelopment that fits within communities.

### 3 IMPROVED COORDINATION WITH CITIES REGARDING FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING

There are 16 municipalities either entirely or partially located within Gwinnett County. While the boundaries are vivid on a map, residents routinely cross them to access retail, employment, and entertainment opportunities. As the County plans for future growth, it will be imperative to coordinate with cities on initiatives that can be mutually beneficial for economic development, housing, transportation, and quality of life improvements.

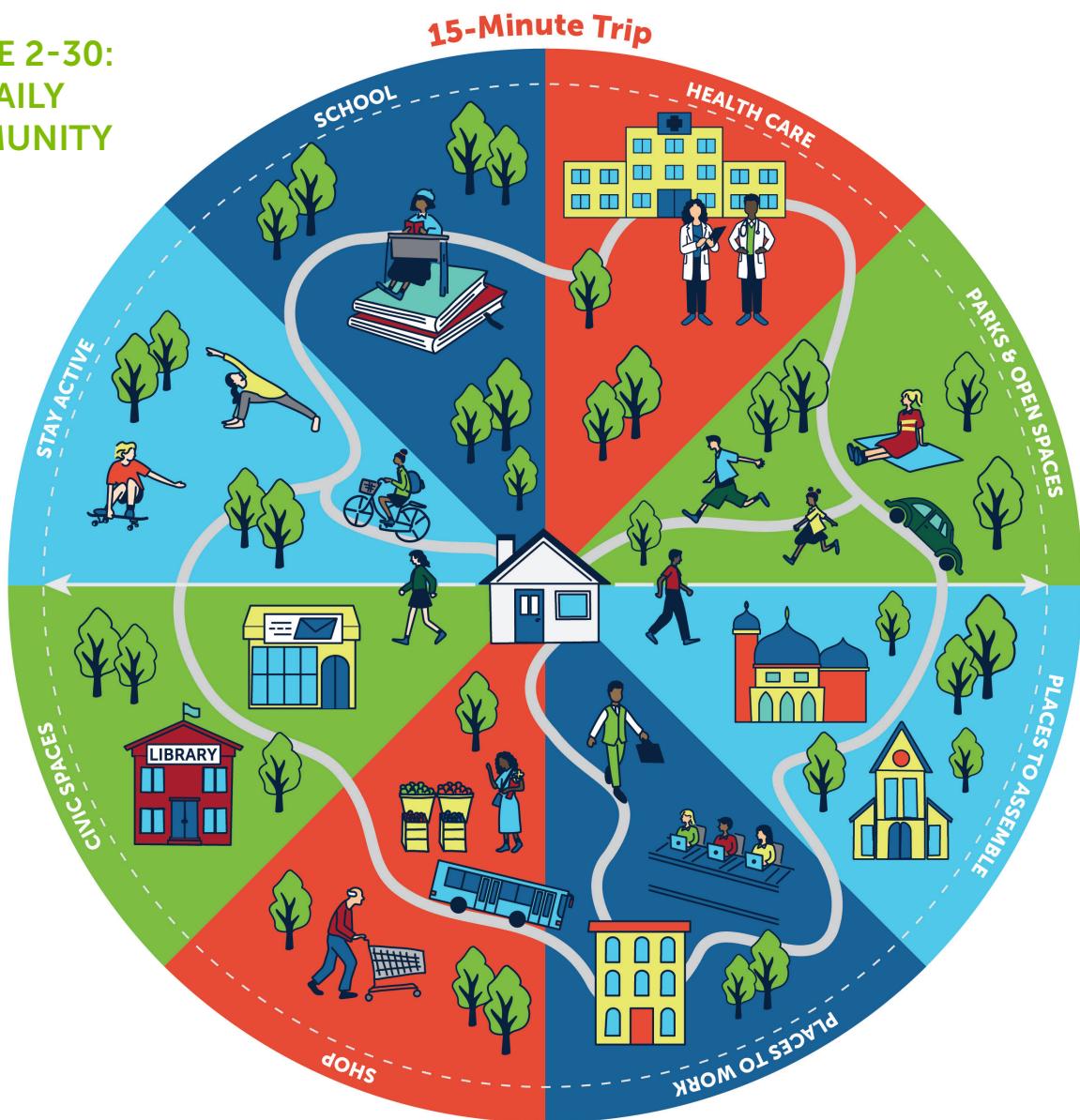
# OPPORTUNITIES

## ISSUE #2: ONE SIZE FITS ALL DEVELOPMENT NO LONGER WORKS

### 1 PLANNING FOR LAND USE AT THE COMMUNITY SCALE

Honoring Gwinnett County's diverse communities is crucial when planning for future growth. To advance a more specific approach that plans for land use at a smaller scale, the planning team proposes the use of the Daily Community framework (Figure 2-30).

FIGURE 2-30:  
THE DAILY  
COMMUNITY



Loosely inspired by the 15 Minute City concept, the Daily Community is one in which a resident can access work, goods, and services within a 15 minute trip of their home. Adapted for a Gwinnett context, the Daily Community consists of a central core surrounded by neighborhoods, supported by connectivity through multiple transportation options. This framework recognizes and makes space for the diversity of residents and places within Gwinnett County. By zooming in to the community scale, this plan provides clearer, more specific land use guidance that creates great places, accommodates growth, and strengthens communities according to their preferences and needs.

## 3 MAKING DESIRABLE DEVELOPMENT TYPES BUILDABLE BY RIGHT

One of the biggest hurdles to development occurring is the length of time the process can take—every month a developer or investor holds onto a property, the higher their costs rise (which are then typically passed on to the end user). Types of development that help meet Gwinnett goals—such as Accessory Dwelling Units and small-footprint cottage courts—should be allowed by right in appropriate zones throughout the county. These types of development often serve the greater good and provide many benefits but can be seen as threatening the status quo and are commonly derailed by a handful of residents who oppose them.

## 2 TRANSFORMING UNDERUTILIZED PARCELS INTO ENJOYABLE PLACES

Many aging retail centers no longer serve the needs of nearby neighborhoods and have become underutilized. Residents then drive further to meet their daily needs, increasing traffic and wear on the roadway infrastructure. These underutilized areas are ripe to be redeveloped into community hubs that serve their Daily Communities' needs and wants.



# Goals & Best Practices

Throughout this chapter, the planning team has presented two main issues: the County must prioritize redevelopment to accommodate future growth, and this development must reflect the changing needs and preferences of Gwinnett County's diverse communities. To address these issues, the planning team proposes four goals:

- 1** Expand options for creative redevelopment.
- 2** Strengthen administrative controls of development decisions.
- 3** Maintain a high quality of life through investments in community centers.
- 4** Develop a framework that protects remaining natural and rural parts of Gwinnett County from overdevelopment.

Within these goals, the planning team developed guiding principles and implementation steps that Gwinnett County leaders can follow when engaging in development projects that advance the Daily Community.



## EXPAND OPTIONS FOR CREATIVE REDEVELOPMENT

Redevelopment projects are rare for several reasons. They can be difficult for developers to deliver without a fully committed public partner, and they often are prohibited in many places. Opportunities for quality redevelopment should be expanded across unincorporated Gwinnett County to accommodate future growth, provide amenities, and create the connected communities residents desire. The County should also expand its partnerships with developers to see these projects through to completion. Two best practices should be followed to achieve this goal:

**1**

## INCENTIVIZE REDEVELOPMENT OF UNDERUTILIZED SITES IN AND AROUND SUBURBAN COMMERCIAL CENTERS.

This plan's analysis identifies areas where redevelopment opportunities are more likely, and proposes future land uses accordingly. Gwinnett County can be better prepared to act on these opportunities by:

- Aligning development regulations with these new opportunities, ensuring they abide by guidelines from goal #2 (page 153)
- Pursuing relationships with property owners who see opportunities in redevelopment
- Establishing funding structures at the County level to support these deals
- Supporting desired redevelopment with by right development types as much as possible

**2**

## PROMOTE QUALITY, CONNECTED URBAN DESIGN IN NEW DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT.

In the design of every new project, ensure that urban design principles are upheld. These include things like:

- Keeping block sizes small to encourage walkability
- Fostering a relationship between buildings and the street
- Providing adequate open space and pedestrian infrastructure
- Offering multiple points of ingress/egress
- Transitioning from suburban to urban scales

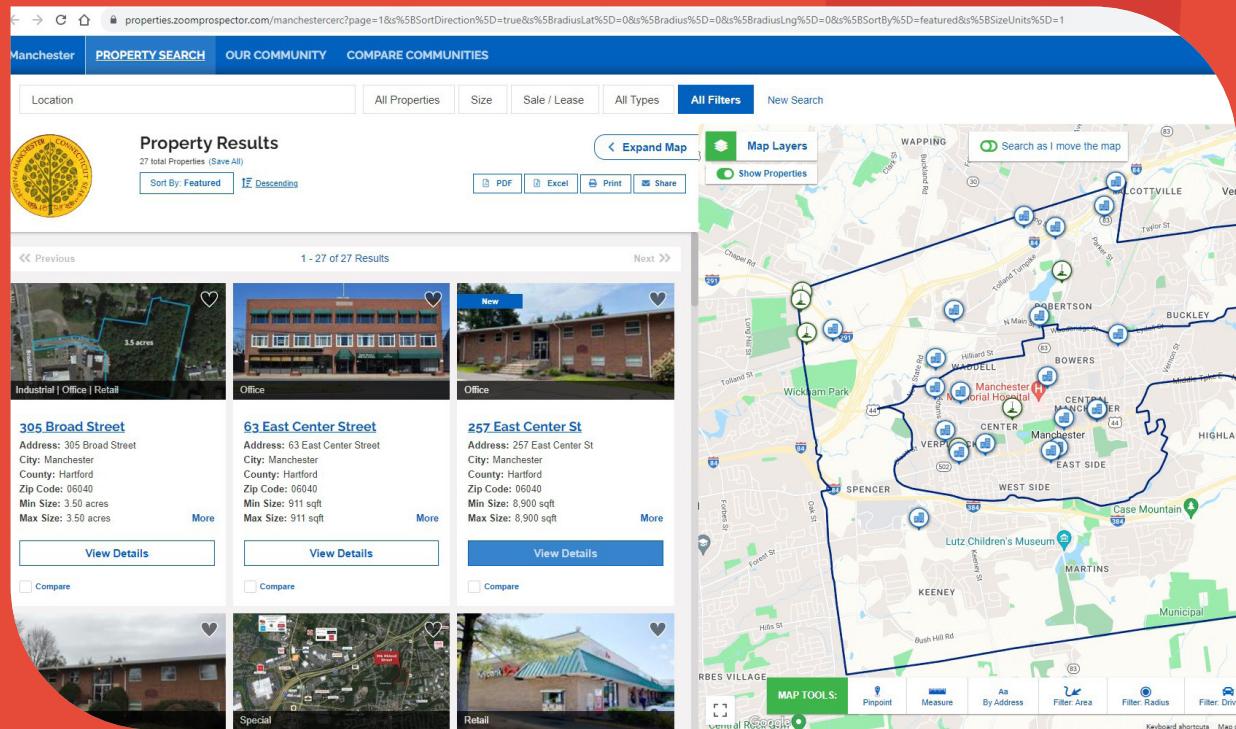
### DESIGN IN A SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT

The built environment of any place is very difficult to change once lots are subdivided, blocks are established, and streets are paved. The suburban environment in particular has remarkable staying power thanks to its form. While there are some universal principles for good urban design, some will be less appropriate for parts of unincorporated Gwinnett that are distinctly suburban. However, incorporating these principles where possible—alongside other suburban design ideas specific to Gwinnett—and considering community needs can create new places or reimagine old ones to maximize their full potential as wonderful areas to live.

## CASE STUDY: INNOVATIVE REDEVELOPMENT TOOLS

### SITE FINDER - MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT

Manchester, Connecticut, hosts a GIS program on their website called the Site Finder. The program is a one stop shop for developers to find available properties within the city. With a focus on commercial and industrial sites, the properties are identified on an interactive map. Basic information on pricing, square footage, allowed uses, and other categories is provided, similar to information compiled by sites like Zillow for residential real estate. The map includes iconography to let the user know at a glance if the site is already improved with a structure or whether it is considered a developable greenfield. Providing this information on the city's website allows users to easily cross reference to the applicable zoning and other information pertinent to the site's development or redevelopment. If the County adopted an approach comparable to the Site Finder, Gwinnett could prioritize specific areas suitable for redevelopment. Several best practices within Goals 2 and 3 could also be incorporated into such a tool, creating a comprehensive and systematic approach to development within the county.



The screenshot displays the Manchester Site Finder interface. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for Manchester, PROPERTY SEARCH, OUR COMMUNITY, and COMPARE COMMUNITIES. Below this is a search bar with filters for Location, All Properties, Size, Sale / Lease, All Types, and All Filters. The main content area is titled 'Property Results' with a sub-tot of 27 total properties. It features a 'Sort By: Featured' dropdown and a 'Descending' button. To the right is a map of Manchester, Connecticut, with a blue line highlighting specific sites. The map includes labels for various neighborhoods like WAPPING, ROBERTSON, BOWERS, and EAST SIDE, along with major roads and landmarks. Below the map, a 'MAP TOOLS' section provides options for Pinpoint, Measure, By Address, Filter Area, Filter Radius, and Filter Drive. On the left, a grid of property cards shows details for three listed properties: 305 Broad Street, 63 East Center Street, and 257 East Center St. Each card includes a thumbnail image, address, city, county, zip code, min size, max size, and a 'View Details' button. The '305 Broad Street' listing also includes a 'More' link and a 'Compare' checkbox.

Image Source: City of Manchester Economic Development

## CASE STUDY: STRIP MALL REDEVELOPMENT

### TOCO HILLS SHOPPING CENTER - DECATUR, GEORGIA

Once a state-of-the-art shopping center when it was built in the 1950s, Toco Hills Shopping Center's best days seemed to be long gone. Older commercial strip developments in Gwinnett are likely familiar with the phenomenon: a rotating cast of tenants came and went, leaving behind empty storefronts and declining tax revenues. However, national retail developer EDENS saw Toco Hills's potential. Starting in 2005, they gained control of the property in pieces, giving parts of the site a full makeover to bring back their original 1950s flair with a more people-centered approach. Eighteen years later, the number and quality of tenants have increased dramatically. The Toco Hills Shopping Center highlights the importance of focusing on smaller commercial developments. It also demonstrates that success can happen incrementally, and when it comes to sites with complicated ownership and committed leases, taking a long-term approach can lead to success.



*Image Source: Flying Biscuit Café*



## STRENGTHEN ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS OF DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

Gwinnett County stakeholders with experience at various stages of the development process have noted that existing regulations lack clarity and specificity. In addition, loopholes within them have enabled low quality development to be approved. Development reviews should be straightforward and supportive of the County's diversified, community centric land use vision. Finally, many projects with community benefits are often stymied by a handful of well organized groups who oppose most (and sometimes all) types of development. To better facilitate this, the planning team proposes strengthening governance regarding development decisions, following these best practices:

### **1 ESTABLISH PREFERRED CRITERIA FOR DEVELOPMENT, BASED ON TYPE AND SCALE**

This plan's Future Development Map reflects the diversity of Gwinnett County's neighborhoods and community centers, some of which have yet to be developed. Each center will require different parameters for development to fit within that area's scale and character. This Unified Plan proposes a rubric for new development, with passing grades awarded if proposals meet the standards across a sliding scale of appropriateness for each community. Ranges for density, proportional mix of uses, FAR, height, and other design-based guidelines can be set based on each community's character.

### **2 DETERMINE DEVELOPMENT TYPES THAT CAN BE PERMITTED BY RIGHT**

Projects that add much needed housing—particularly with smaller footprints or in apartment-style developments—should be permitted by right where their form is aligned with community character and the future development map.

### **3 EDUCATE DECISIONMAKERS ON THE BENEFITS OF NEW FORMS OF DEVELOPMENT**

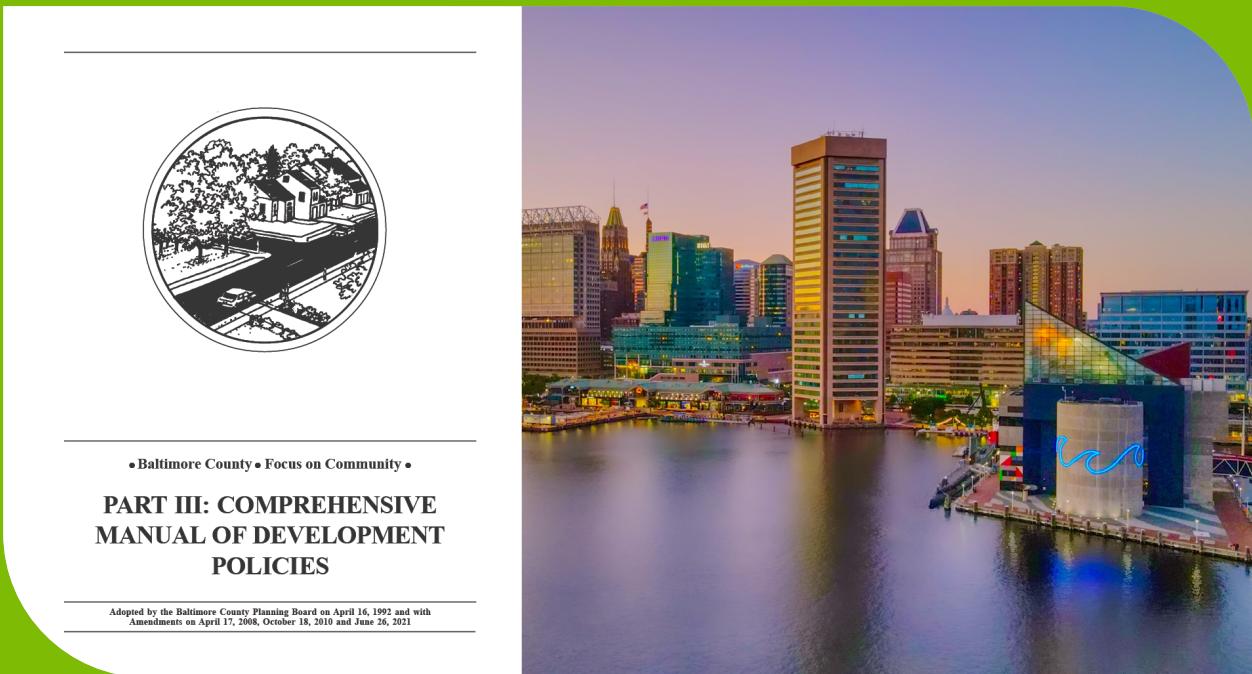
Breaking development norms can be a tough sell—it's more difficult to achieve, difficult to pencil out budget-wise, and can strain infrastructure. However, the benefits of greater tax value per acre, overall economic impact, housing, and alternative transportation options can outweigh the drawbacks. Educating decisionmakers on these benefits will allow for more confidence in policy directions and decisions that bring community benefit.

## CASE STUDY: PREFERRED CRITERIA RUBRIC

### BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND

Baltimore County, Maryland created a Comprehensive Manual of Development Policies, synthesizing land-use development policies and zoning regulations into a simple, easy-to-use format. The manual guides development according to the goals of the County's master plan. It divides commercial development into typologies (such as Main Street, Freestanding, Offices, and Shopping Center/Mall) and provides guidelines for on-site design, parking, landscaping, open space, and signage for each one. Along with individual typologies, the manual also defines how they apply within specific geographic areas of the county and provides guidelines for development according to their unique characteristics.

An approach like Baltimore County's could support the development of Daily Communities within Gwinnett County, emphasizing redevelopment projects that follow a range of desirable standards. Tailoring development policies to each community center provides more control over the type of development, leading to less homogeneity in design and creating a sense of place, strengthening community character.





## MAINTAIN HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH INVESTMENTS IN COMMUNITY CENTERS

In recent years, marquee redevelopment sites (see page 136) have received significant planning and investment attention. While these are exciting and hold enormous potential, Gwinnett County should consider pursuing smaller, incremental redevelopment projects in other areas—especially areas south and east of I-85. Pilot projects could show the potential of infill, redevelopment, and community-building without breaking the bank and could build support for future investments. To accomplish this goal, the planning team recommends two best practices:

### **1 IDENTIFY LOW HANGING FRUIT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREMENTAL REDEVELOPMENT**

These include face lifts of suburban shopping centers that are well leased, modest infill projects like cottage courts and other missing middle housing, and small scale public space projects that align with other civic uses (like schools).

### **2 PARTNER WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES TO ENSURE REPRESENTATION AND AVOID COMMERCIAL GENTRIFICATION**

Many of Gwinnett's commercial areas in need of revitalization are far from underutilized or empty. Revitalization could make these areas more desirable, thus raising rents and potentially pushing current businesses out. Ensuring that business owners and community members are involved in revitalization marks one step toward achieving the dual goal of supporting those communities and creating quality, enjoyable spaces.

## CASE STUDY: INCREMENTAL REDEVELOPMENT - FUNDING TOOLS

MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT

The City of Manchester, Connecticut, has established two grant programs for redeveloping aging properties. One is specifically dedicated to facade improvements, while the other addresses compliance issues with building, fire, and health codes, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act. Each grant program sets parameters for eligibility and distributes the funds on a sliding scale. The facade grant program also requires matching funds by the owner or developer to ensure that projects will move forward consistent with the application submitted. Between 2020 and 2023, 57 homes were rehabilitated under these programs. Gwinnett could look to model these programs for both residential properties as well as commercial properties to give incremental updates where larger redevelopment is not feasible.



*Image Source: Manchester City Government*

# CASE STUDY: INCREMENTAL REDEVELOPMENT – HOUSING POLICY CHANGES

## CLARKSTON AND COLLEGE PARK, GEORGIA

Jurisdictions across metro Atlanta have begun implementing incremental changes in housing policies in recent years, following national trends. Because of these policy changes, less common housing types are being constructed, catering to a wider variety of housing needs.

In Clarkston, the Cottages on Vaughan—a pocket community of eight micro-homes—has been overwhelmingly successful. Sitting on a half acre lot a few blocks from downtown Clarkston, the 250-500 square foot homes are arranged around a central green, which acts as the yard and open space for every home in the community. The site was fully developed and sold out within two years of its announcement. The pre-bid list included over a thousand interested buyers.



Source: MicroLife Institute

The success of the Cottages on Vaughan proves there is a desire for nontraditional housing types in the Atlanta metropolitan area. South Park Cottages, a similar project in College Park featuring 29 micro-homes ranging from 400-600 square feet, officially opened in June 2023. All the houses sold before opening, with a long wait list of disappointed would-be buyers. Though the houses are small, the amenities—including a dog park, walking paths, and other shared open space—create an attractive community environment not typically found in single family developments. Much like the micro-home development in Clarkston, South Park Cottages are located on a



**South Park Cottages Nearing Completion,  
Source: Georgia Municipal Association**

small infill lot within an established area close to desirable services. By utilizing these nontraditional sites with ready access to infrastructure and reduced land costs, additional housing can be delivered affordably while limiting the impacts that a standard suburban-style housing development would have on the environment. The financial achievements of both cottage-style developments prove smaller units can succeed in the marketplace.

## CASE STUDY: EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT: PREDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM - HENNEPIN COUNTY, MINNESOTA

Hennepin County's Predevelopment Program for emerging developers from historically marginalized groups provides an example of an initiative that caters to the local community. The program establishes parameters on who qualifies, including a cap on the total projects a person has completed, to ensure that the initiative isn't being offered to developers who are already familiar with the development process. The Predevelopment Program is intended to support emerging developers through necessary predevelopment activities to get a project off the ground. It focuses on commercial, mixed use, and multifamily development projects. Qualified developers are eligible to receive assistance with architectural, financial, and real estate services. Recipients are then partnered with qualified third-party design or financial consultants based on their needs. A similar program could be created for Gwinnett, focusing on revitalizing commercial strip developments and empowering communities to take ownership.



Image Source: KSTP



## DEVELOP A FRAMEWORK THAT PROTECTS REMAINING NATURAL AND RURAL PARTS OF GWINNETT COUNTY FROM OVER-DEVELOPMENT

Gwinnett County leaders and residents share a strong desire to protect the County's remaining natural resources. Protection of forests, farmland, and scenic landscapes provides benefits for water quality and flood mitigation, as well as aesthetic value. Equally important, however, is supporting Daily Communities within more rural areas of Gwinnett County. These two priorities are not mutually exclusive. By focusing development close to retail, workplaces, and amenities, more land is left available for conservation and ecosystem services. To build out this strategy, we propose three best practices:

### **1 CONSERVE LAND WITH HIGH ECOLOGICAL PRODUCTIVITY, DIFFICULT DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES, OR BOTH**

Not all land is created equal. Certain sites will more readily support new development, while others face insurmountable challenges like challenging topography, bedrock, or wetlands. Gwinnett County should develop a conservation strategy with a combination of methods, including direct acquisition or community partnerships, that allows for a mix of strategic conservation and context-appropriate development.

### **2 CLUSTER NEW DEVELOPMENT AROUND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND AMENITIES**

In areas where infrastructure is limited, building densely close to services and other amenities provides multiple benefits. First, return on public investment is higher. By clustering new development, fewer miles of pavement and pipe need to be extended to support it. This type of development also encourages community interaction, especially if oriented around public spaces or common destinations. For eastern Gwinnett, it is important to remember that density does not always mean tall. Rather, Daily Communities in this region of Gwinnett would likely adopt a gentler density that provides amenities at an appropriate scale.

### **3 USE SEWER AND ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE AS A GROWTH MANAGEMENT TOOL**

One of the greatest growth management tools a jurisdiction has in Georgia is where it elects to expand sewer service and transportation infrastructure. Without these, there is no other development possible other than large-lot residential uses or basic commercial services (these uses, however, are not always desirable either). In considering expansion of sewer and roadway networks to eastern Gwinnett communities, there should be frank discussions on the tradeoffs.

## CASE STUDY:

### *GEORGIA PIEDMONT LAND TRUST – SUWANEE, GEORGIA*

While there are several land trusts that operate throughout Georgia, Georgia Piedmont Land Trust is unique in its explicit focus on land conservation within urbanizing areas. Conservation projects they've undertaken range from large scale wetlands restoration parks and farmland conservation in counties on the urban fringe to small scale community gardens within the City of Atlanta. Georgia Piedmont Land Trust either acquires land directly, or works with local landowners to place land under a conservation easement. The latter requires a land management plan, which the landowner is responsible for with Georgia Piedmont Land Trust's technical assistance. Working with local land trusts is one strategy Gwinnett County could pursue to protect land at minimal expense and develop a strategy for long term land conservation.



*Rocky Face Ridge Park*  
Image Source: Georgia Piedmont Land Trust

## CASE STUDY:

### *FEARRINGTON VILLAGE – PITTSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA*

Surrounded by rolling hills and idyllic pastures in between Chapel Hill and Pittsboro, North Carolina, the rural mixed use community of Fearrington Village could provide inspiration for how Gwinnett County can develop specific areas of its remaining buildable, greenfield land. Fearrington Village began with the purchase of a 640 acre farm on the outskirts of the growing Research Triangle region. The founders were interested in creating a village with a true mix of uses, including residential, shopping, dining, and other services connected by streets and walking paths. Though its aesthetics are quaint—the residences and shops are modeled after an English country hamlet—the community's form has produced a livable, walkable, and highly desirable neighborhood that showcases how development and rural character can go hand in hand. Fearrington Village is now home to approximately 2,300 residents and boasts several local retail establishments, including a bookstore, coffee shop, restaurant, and an award-winning hotel. Its geographic context as one of the last remaining rural areas within a short to the job centers of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill provide a useful analog for how clustered development can help the rural parts of Gwinnett maintain their character.



*Image Source: Trip Advisor*



## LAND USE IMPLEMENTATION

To meet the projected demand coming to Gwinnett County over the next 20 years, strategic redevelopment that fosters new forms of housing, community amenities, public spaces, and connections is vital for maintaining and enhancing the high quality of life enjoyed by Gwinnett residents. The Land Use section of the Community Work Program (page 407) identifies short- and long-term steps for how to encourage this type of development, according to the proposed goals and best practices devised by the planning team.

# UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE: PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Gwinnett County's Unified Development Ordinance serves as the day to day regulatory framework for all development in Gwinnett. The UDO establishes specific zoning districts with parameters for form and use, as well as regulations governing subdivision, stormwater, signage, and more. The UDO is updated regularly; revisions to its residential zoning categories were adopted in a major update by the Board of Commissioners as recently as 2023.

Throughout the 2045 Unified Plan, there are recommendations to change Gwinnett County's UDO that would be recommended or necessary to allow the Daily Community framework to flourish. High-priority changes that would align the 2045 Unified Plan's future development framework with the County's current UDO are listed below.

## 1 FLOOR AREA RATIO

Many of the Future Development Types propose FARs that are higher than those currently allowed. It is recommended that the allowable FAR for the following districts be increased to match the targeted density ranges and typical land use FAR identified in the comp plan: LRR, MRR, MU-N, MU-C, MU-R (both base and bonus), O-I, C-2, C-3. Additionally, determine the frequency with which bonuses for FAR in MU-R are used, eliminate bonuses which are ineffective, and add density provisions to those which are being utilized by developers.

## 2 HEIGHT MAXIMUMS

Several zoning districts should be reviewed to ensure that height maximums are sufficient for updated FAR. This is especially true for mixed use and multifamily residential districts. O-I and high density commercial zoning districts should also be reviewed for height allowances.

## 3 INCENTIVES FOR TOUGH SITES

For sites with size, geometry, or topography challenges, consider revising the UDO to provide

incentives for development, including FAR bonuses, density bonuses, height bonuses, by right parking reductions, or expedited review processes.

## 4 BLOCK SIZE REGULATION

Implementing maximum block length standards in additional districts. Standards should be adopted in mixed use districts, especially those within Urban and Village Center areas, to encourage adherence to the People Friendly Design guidelines.

## 5 ASSESS INDUSTRIAL TYPES

Verify that the industrial categories are aligning with Gwinnett's needs. Consider the creation of a lighter, true flex industrial use category, which could be allowed in a broader range of zones beyond traditional industrial districts, including C-3 or other higher use districts.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDED UDO CHANGES

### Sec. 210-120

- Revise maximum FAR for LRR district to 2.5
- Revise maximum height for LRR district to match guidance from Urban - Low future development type
- Revise maximum FAR for MRR district to 3.0
- Revise maximum height for MRR district to match guidance from Neighborhood - High Mix future development type

### Sec. 210-130

- Change "Dwelling, ADU" use designations from conditional to permitted in R-100, R-75, and R-60 districts
- Change "Dwelling, Cottage Court" use designations from conditional to permitted in R-75, R-60, and R-IF districts
- Change "Dwelling, Duplex" use designations from conditional to permitted in R-IF and LRR districts
- Change "Dwelling, Triplex" use designations from conditional to permitted in R-IF and LRR districts
- Change "Dwelling, Fourplex" use designations from conditional to permitted in R-IF and LRR districts
- Consider making cottage courts, duplexes, and fourplexes permitted uses in lower-density residential districts

### Sec. 211-70

- Remove maximum FAR for O-I district
- Remove maximum height for O-I district
- Remove maximum FAR for C-2 district
- Remove maximum height for C-2 district
- Remove maximum FAR for C-3 district
- Remove maximum height for C-3 district

### Sec. 211-80

- Consider removing convenience stores with fuel pumps from list of appropriate uses for C-2 districts
- Consider new flex industrial category of uses, to include smaller scale production, maker spaces, craft manufacturing (i.e. small manufacturing of other goods that does not produce noise, odor, smoke, or other nuisances
- For flex industrial uses, require onsite retail sales, tours, classes, or other regular public interaction
- For flex industrial uses, establish standards for maximum floor area, storage of goods and materials, landscaping, and screening requirements
- If flex industrial category is added, permit use within C-3 district

### Sec. 211-90

- Establish distance requirements between uses for convenience stores with fuel pumps
- Consider adding maximum inventory capacity to automobile rental and sales to reduce size of establishments
- Consider additional design guidelines for these uses, including outdoor storage regulations and work bays placed along side setbacks

### Sec. 211-100 (new section)

- Consider adding design standards (similar to Sec. 213-80) for O-I, C-1, C-2, and C-3 districts based on recommendations for Urban future development types

## ALL PROPOSED UDO CHANGES

### **Sec. 211-110 (new section)**

- Consider adding design standards for M-1 and M-2 districts based on recommendations for Workplace Center future development types

### **Sec. 213-50**

- Revise maximum FAR for MU-N district to 2.5
- Revise maximum height for MU-N district to match guidance from Urban - Low future development type
- Revise maximum FAR for MU-C district to 2.5
- Revise maximum height for MU-C district to match guidance from Neighborhood - High Mix future development type

### **Sec. 213-60.3**

- Add permitted uses for flex industrial (from Sec. 211-80) to list of permitted uses for MU-C

### **Sec. 213-60.4**

- Add permitted uses for flex industrial (from Sec. 211-80) to list of permitted uses for MU-C

### **Sec. 213-70**

- Eliminate bonuses which are ineffective and add density to those which are being utilized by developers

### **Sec. 213-80**

- Add block length maximums for mixed use districts based on guidance from Urban and Village Center future development types
- Adjust design guidelines for mixed use districts to align with recommended block size, street design, and open space metrics found in the Urban and Village Center future development types

### **Sec. 900-60**

- Review street design standards based on recommendations from Land Use and Transportation Elements of the 2045 Unified Plan

### **Sec. 900-90**

- Review sidewalk requirements based on recommendations from Land Use and Transportation Elements of the 2045 Unified Plan

