
**Conceptual Plans for
Downtown Baldwin
Willingham Avenue/S. Main Street
Level Grove Road**

**Baldwin, Georgia
Cornelia Georgia**

**Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Office of Planning and Quality Growth
Special Projects Team
Summer 2008**



Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....2
INTRODUCTION.....3
GROWTH PREPAREDNESS.....11
DOWNTOWN BALDWIN.....15
WILLINGHAM AVENUE/SOUTH MAIN STREET.....24
LEVEL GROVE ROAD.....29

Acknowledgements

The project team was made up of staff from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Office of Planning and Quality Growth Special Projects Team:

Annaka Woodruff, Manager
Bradd Stuart, RLA AICP
Cherie Bennett
Steve Gavigan
Casey Deen
Lydia Doyle

Assistance from the Department included the following:

Jim Frederick, Office Director
Kathy Papa, Region 2 Representative
Bettina Durant
Lisa Westin
Reid Peacock, Summer Intern

In addition to the participants from the Department, this project was made possible by the hard work and assistance from the following:

Betty Harper
Mark Reed
Ray Holcomb, Interim Mayor, Baldwin
City of Baldwin Public Safety Staff
Angela Steedley

Margaret Ballard, Mayor, Cornelia
Donald Anderson, Cornelia City Manager
Jeff Barron
Mona Painter
John Herschel

Introduction

Executive Summary

Downtown Baldwin, Level Grove Road and Willingham Avenue/Main Street present unique challenges and opportunities to the Cities of Baldwin and Cornelia. Downtown Baldwin, once the heart of the community, appears to have suffered in the recent past from disinvestment at the public and private levels. Willingham Avenue/Main Street is a primary entrance into Downtown Cornelia and Downtown Baldwin. This corridor appears to have been neglected during changes in local transportation enhancements and national economic pressures. Level Grove Road is also a main entrance into Downtown Cornelia. In the past several years, traffic on Level Grove Road has increased significantly; changing from a small two-lane residential street to a busier commercial-oriented roadway.

This plan presents a general strategy for growth and redevelopment of the study areas. Its goal is to determine ways to improve the safety and character of the corridors and Downtown Baldwin and suggest opportunities to accommodate modes of transportation other than the automobile. This plan envisions that Downtown Baldwin, Level Grove Road and the Willingham Avenue/Main Street area

can be more than just beautified and safe - they can be great destinations and more economically productive addresses.



How this plan was created

The team, which included staff from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Office of Planning and Quality Growth, worked with the staff of the Cities of Baldwin and Cornelia as well as recommended stakeholders and elected officials. Most importantly, the team worked with the community's citizens during an open workshop on Monday, June 30, 2008 to identify the ideas, needs and issues of the areas. These discussions will help determine an overall vision for the study areas.



Georgia's Quality Community Objectives

Quality

Community

Community Development Patterns

Sense of Place

In 1999 the Board of the Department of Community Affairs adopted the Quality Community Objectives (QCO) as a statement of the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve its unique cultural, natural and historic resources while looking to the future and developing to its fullest potential. These objectives are grouped around the broader concepts of:

- Community Development Patterns
- Resource Conservation
- Social and Economic Development
- Government Relations

Because The Constitution of the State of Georgia embraces the ideals of Home Rule, each of our local governments has the power and responsibility to make land use and planning decisions within its jurisdictional boundaries. The Department's Quality Community Objectives may serve as guiding principles for elected and appointed leaders in our communities, as they strive to foster and create communities that Georgians are proud to call home.

Traditional Neighborhood



Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, compact development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity

Infill Development

Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.



Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community, or for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.

Transportation Alternatives

Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.

Regional Identity



Each region should promote and preserve a regional “identity,” or regional sense of place, defined in terms of traditional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.

Resource Conservation

Heritage Preservation

The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community’s character.

Open Space Preservation



New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors. Compact development ordinances are one way of encouraging this type of open space preservation.

Environmental Protection

Environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or the quality of life of the community or

region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.



Social and Economic Development

Growth Preparedness

Each community should identify and put in place the pre-requisites for the types of growth it seeks to achieve. These might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities and managing new growth when it occurs.

Appropriate Businesses

The businesses and industry encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, long-term sustainability, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skilled job opportunities.

Employment Options

A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.

Housing Choices

A range of housing size, cost and density should be provided in each community to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community (thereby reducing commuting distances), to promote a mixture of income and age-groups in each community, and to provide a range of housing choice to meet market needs.

Educational Opportunities

Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

Governmental Relations

Regional Solutions

Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, resulting in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.

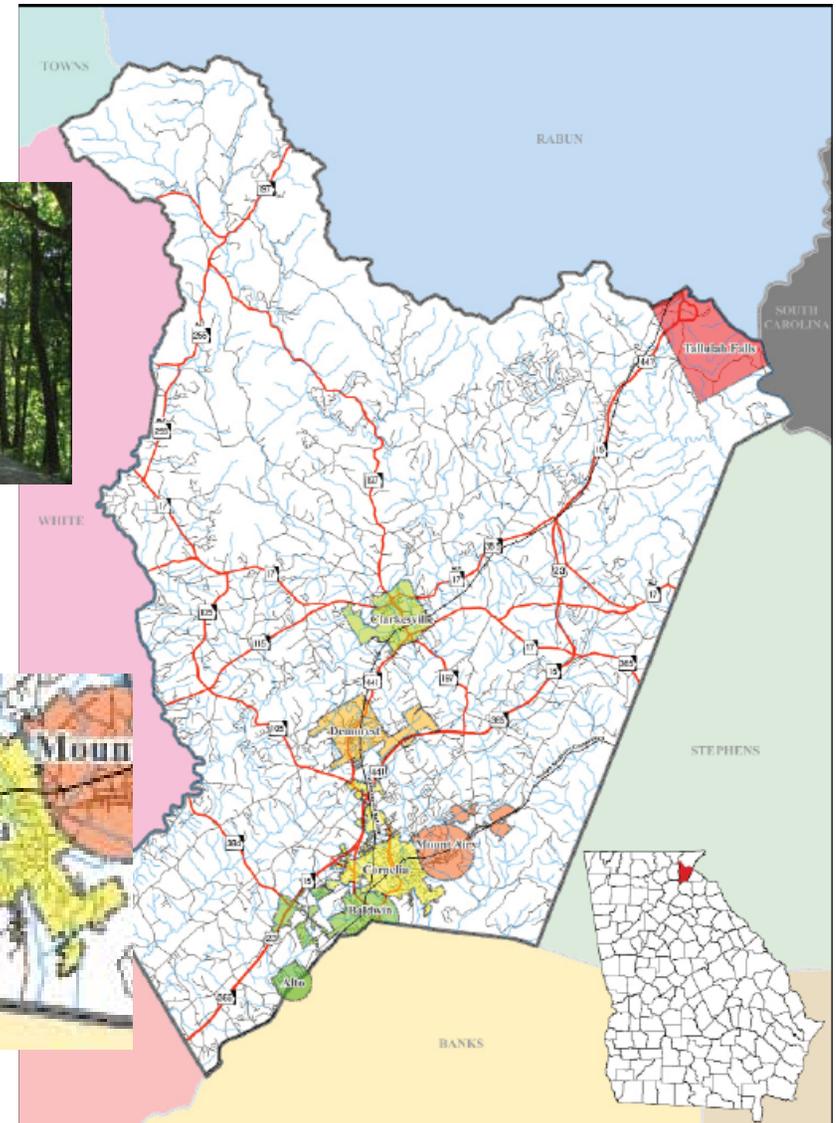
Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly

where it is critical to the success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources or development of transportation networks.

Regional Context

Habersham County is located in northeast Georgia at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. The cities of Baldwin and Cornelia are located in the southern portion of the county. About 25% of the County is made up of the Chattahoochee National Forest. Historic places and mountain culture are apparent throughout the county. Approaching Baldwin and Cornelia from the south affords the traveler with some of the first views of the Appalachian Mountains in Georgia. One of Georgia poet Sidney Lanier's most famous poems, "The Song of the Chattahoochee" describes the beauty of the "Hills of Habersham and Valleys of Hall." The Cities of Baldwin and Cornelia have an opportunity to maximize their mountain heritage through careful and thoughtful development in the 21st century.





Growth Preparedness

Each community should identify and put in place the pre-requisites for the types of growth it seeks to achieve. These might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities and managing new growth when it occurs.

Quality Community Objectives to Address:

Growth Preparedness
Regional Cooperation
Regional Identity

Issues to Address

- The City of Baldwin should complete its comprehensive plan by the required date: October 31, 2009.
- The City of Baldwin does not have a planning staff and has limited financial resources.
- Neither the City of Baldwin, nor the City of Cornelia's current zoning ordinances, promotes all of Georgia's Quality Community Objectives.

- Cornelia's growing Hispanic and elderly population will need affordable housing that is within walking distance to goods and services.
- Lack of code enforcement is an issue in all three character areas studied.

Opportunities

- Both Cornelia and Baldwin have the opportunity to include upper floor residential units in downtown areas to promote foot traffic downtown.
- Both Cornelia and Baldwin are surrounded by beautiful natural resources that should be promoted to tourists, as well as local residents.

Recommendations:

Baldwin should complete its comprehensive plan.

The Qualified Local Government Recertification deadline for the City of Baldwin is October 31, 2009, which means that the City must complete and adopt its Comprehensive Plan per Georgia's Local Planning Requirements by this date to maintain its Qualified Local Government status as described by Georgia law. More importantly,

the plan should serve as a guidance document for the city's development decisions for the next ten years.

Coordinate development regulations in Cornelia and Baldwin along Historic 441.

Cornelia and Baldwin should work together to coordinate development regulations for consistency along the Willingham Avenue/Main Street Gateway Corridor. Consideration should be given to the adoption of joint standards and guidelines, as well as the idea of a joint planning commission.

Improve code enforcement. During the team's visit, citizens voiced their concerns regarding the shabby appearance of properties and lack of code enforcement in all three character areas. Cited specifically were the poorly maintained rental housing around Fieldale Farms Corporation Processing Plant off Level Grove Road and Wayside Drive and the unkempt appearance of the motels along the Willingham Avenue/Main Street Corridor. One reason buildings fall into disrepair and communities decline is the failure of local governments to enforce housing and zoning codes. The cities of Cornelia and Baldwin should make code enforcement a priority in these character areas. Citations should be issued and followed with applicable fines or penalties if the

Growth Preparedness

individual responsible for the code violation does not correct the situation or comply with the current codes. The Department's Construction Codes and Industrialized Buildings Section provide technical assistance and information regarding code enforcement. For more information, refer to this webpage: <http://www.dca.state.ga.us/development/constructioncodes/programs/codes2.asp>

Work with the Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center to update the existing zoning ordinance. Both cities of Cornelia and Baldwin should work with the Georgia Mountains RDC to revise their zoning ordinances, to ensure that the codes will promote the state's Quality Community Objectives (outlined on pages 2-6 of this document). The cities may also refer to the Department's Alternatives to Conventional Zoning at www.dca.state.ga.us/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/programs/modelcode.asp



Join the 441 Heritage Highway Tourism Promotion group. Georgia's historic highway

441 stretches from north to south 367 miles through the state's mountains, piedmont, and coastal plains, linking some of Georgia's most historic towns and beautiful scenery. The U. S. 441 Heritage Corridor, Inc. was formed in 2000 for the purpose of preserving the history and natural beauty of 441 through the use of tourism as an economic development tool. Habersham County is a member, however, Cornelia and Baldwin should become active members of this non-profit group in order to promote their communities on the 441 Heritage Highway website and brochure. For more information, refer to www.441heritagehighway.org/index.cfm



Promote upper floor residential units in the downtown area. Both Cornelia and Baldwin should encourage upper floor residential uses in their downtowns to create a 24-hour

city in which residents can patronize nearby businesses.

Create an annexation plan to guide the city's future growth. During the team's time in Cornelia, city officials spoke of annexing additional land located to the northeast and northwest of the city. In the Habersham County 2029 Comprehensive Plan, the Future Development Map for the City of Cornelia shows this land as "Developing Residential." Since converting large portions of farmland or timberland into single-use, residential neighborhoods has proven to be a drain on any city's tax base, (see University of Georgia Professor Jeff Dorfman's studies at <http://jdorfman.myweb.uga.edu/>) it would be wise to create a plan that researches potential issues associated with annexing large amounts of land for residential development. In order for the city to maintain its current tax structure and levels of service to existing citizens (as well as new), it should analyze future annexation requests based on this written, agreed-upon plan.

- Consider the availability of city services to the property (including water, sewer, telecommunications, police, fire, and professional city services)
- The Georgia Municipal Association provides a foundation for annexation

Growth Preparedness

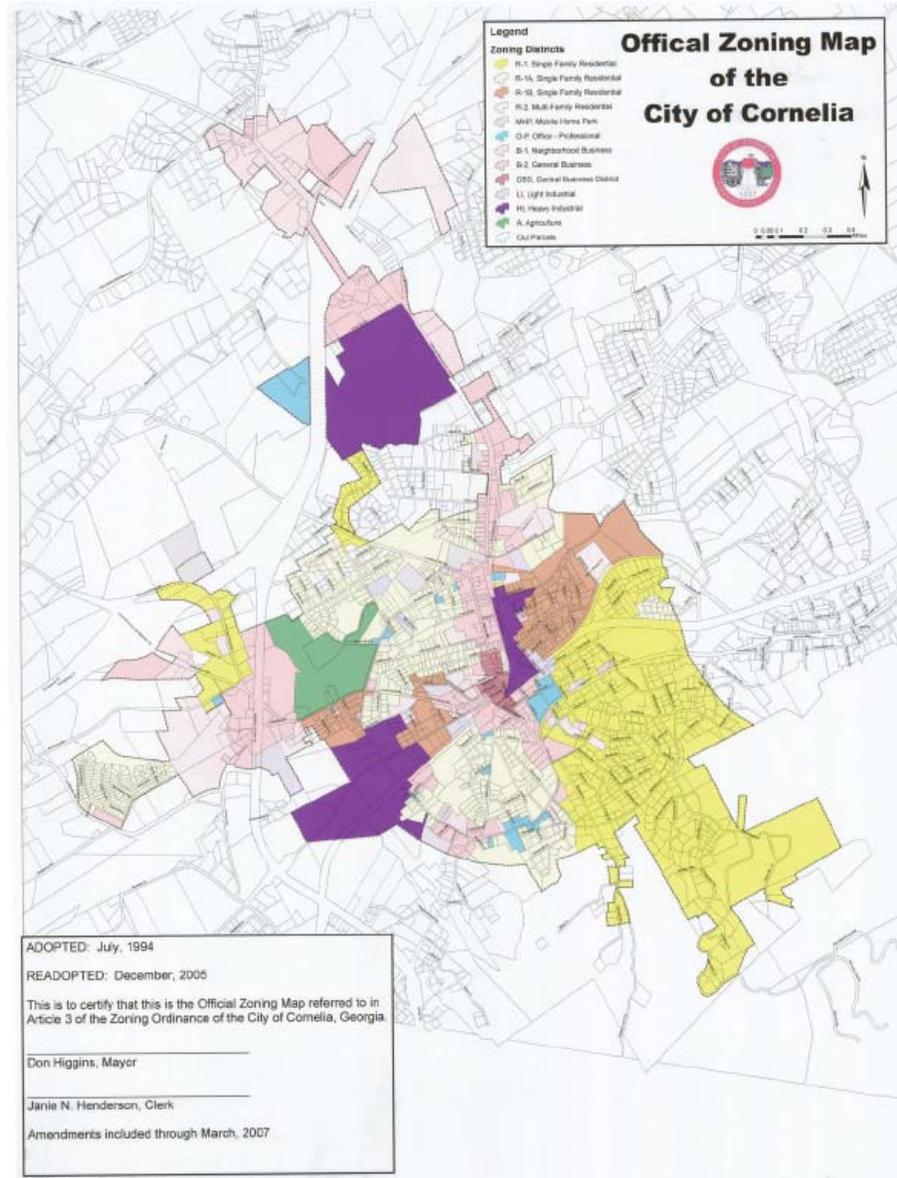
decisions: <http://www.gmanet.com/Assets/PDF/Publications/annexation.pdf>

- The Carl Vinson Institute at UGA provides technical assistance on a variety of topics to local governments: <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/>.

Create a Capital Improvement Plan. The city should determine when and where its capital investments will go over the next ten years. The city should examine, outline and map its public expenditures in the following areas:

- Public water
- Public sewer
- Stormwater
- Roads and Sidewalks
- Infrastructure for Police, Fire and EMS
- Parks and Recreation
- Public buildings including libraries and city administration

The Office of Planning and Quality Growth created a Capital Improvement Program tool to assist with plan development available on the Georgia Planning website at this link: www.dca.state.ga.us/intra_nonpub/Toolkit/Guides/CIP.pdf



Downtown Baldwin 2

Downtown Baldwin

Background



The study area for Downtown Baldwin is bound by the Highway 441 bypass, the Norfolk Southern Rail Line, Willingham Avenue and Williams Street. This area is larger than that encompassed by the current Downtown Development Overlay District.



Downtown Baldwin is west of Highway 441 Bypass and is en route to the City of Helen, a popular mountain destination. In the early 20th century, Baldwin was a frequent stop for travelers and downtown was the commercial and social heart of the City, complete with shops, restaurants, a bank, train depot and a community well. Now, the bank is gone, one restaurant sits where the peach packing plant once stood, the depot is gone and the community well is a memory only to very few.



Although Baldwin's downtown appears to have declined over the years from transportation projects that shifted traveling routes and changes in local and national economics (among other reasons), the city has evolved to take advantage of its place within the region and the greater transportation network. Baldwin is home to

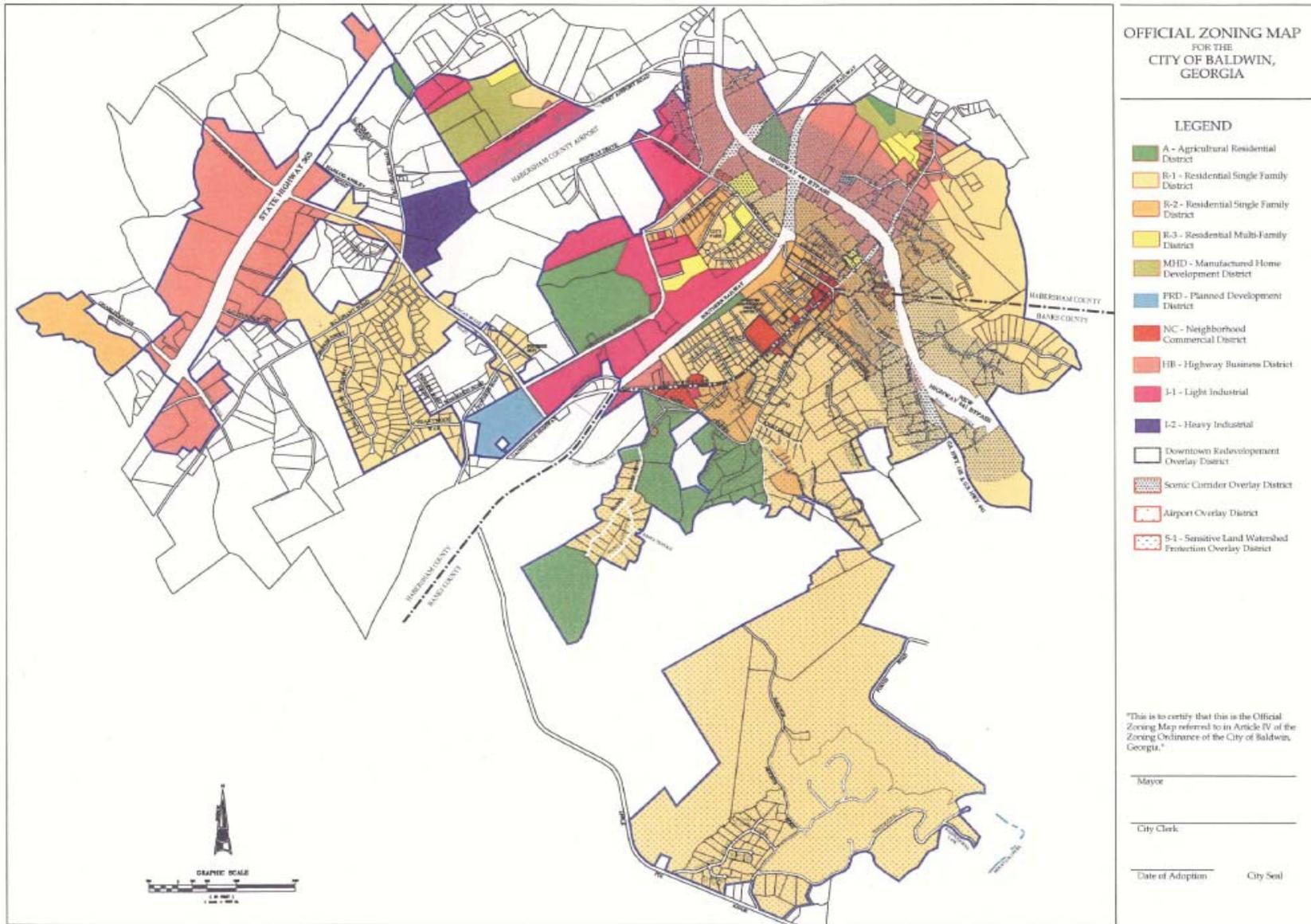
the international headquarters of the Fieldale Farms Corporation as well as several large manufacturing businesses. The Habersham County Airport is located just outside the city limits. Several potentially historic buildings remain, which could help define the character of downtown Baldwin. Most importantly, the City Hall remains in the Downtown.

Downtown Baldwin is lacking several key elements that make traditional town centers viable, including a lack of convenient retail and restaurant establishments; and a lack of a well connected system of sidewalks. Although there are sidewalks along Willingham Avenue and several other streets, they do not connect throughout the downtown.



The residential and commercial density appears to be low, making traditionally

Downtown Baldwin



Downtown Baldwin

scaled businesses less viable. This lack of density is not unique to Baldwin. Many smaller communities suffer from a lower density in the downtown, creating more appealing environments for larger commercial developments well outside of the city limits to take advantage of a larger trade area accessible by larger highways.

Although the buildings do not look like they once did, the economic drivers have changed and the town has spread out away from the center of town, the Downtown's bones are still intact, giving the downtown the structure it needs to rebuild itself to its former character as an interesting small town in the foothills of Appalachia. The traditional street grid, which is the foundation for most American downtowns, is evident in Downtown Baldwin. By improving and expanding this foundation, Downtown has the potential to become, once again, the beating heart of the community.

Quality Community Objectives influencing Downtown Baldwin

Sense of Place

Traditional downtowns typically provide communities their sense of place. Downtowns are the places that communities show off to visitors and highlight in tourism publications.

Downtown Baldwin appears not to be the showcase for residents and visitors. According to community members, the downtown was once a thriving district and the heart of the community. At some point in the past, the economy changed and downtown Baldwin suffered. The community recognizes that the downtown is important to the well being of the city and therefore desires improvements to create the sense of place that Baldwin citizens have known.

Transportation Alternatives

In any downtown, a person should feel comfortable and safe walking from place to place. Currently the pedestrian and bike facilities may appear adequate due to the limited automobile traffic throughout the downtown, but with any increase in traffic due to development, walkers and cyclists will need better accommodations. Traveling anywhere outside of the downtown, especially along Willingham Avenue, does not seem like a safe, or comfortable, experience on foot or a bicycle. Connecting to areas outside of the downtown, such as schools, parks, neighborhoods and other commercial districts by means other than an automobile is a need mentioned by many community members.

Traditional Neighborhoods

Traditional neighborhoods are typically those that are older (pre-WWII), closer to the downtown or considered part of a downtown. In addition to the age and location, traditional neighborhoods often contain a variety of uses, including commercial nodes and a variety of housing choices as well as ample sidewalks, street trees and on-street parking. Downtown Baldwin currently contains a small amount of commercial space, including City Hall. The residential development is predominantly detached single family, which is not typically consistent with neighborhoods adjacent to or within a downtown. A fairly large portion of the residential buildings in Downtown Baldwin are manufactured houses that are showing a good amount of age and wear.

Heritage Preservation

Within Downtown Baldwin there are quite a few potentially historic structures. Despite some maintenance issues, these resources contribute significantly to the character of Baldwin's downtown. Several positive contributions to the downtown have been lost, including the train depot, a community well and city parks (that are now vacant lots covered in kudzu). Capitalizing on the positive features of the downtown such as its historic structures, its traditional street network and

Downtown Baldwin

its long-gone public structures and parks, Downtown Baldwin may grow into the vibrant heart of the City that the community desires.

Infill Development

Filling in the gaps in the downtown is a straightforward and financially responsible way to increase the tax base while not sprawling out into the areas outside of the city. Downtown Baldwin has quite a few opportunities to fill in the gaps by developing currently vacant lots and redeveloping those parcels not used to their full potential. Renovating the former Carwood Manufacturing building, subdividing large, vacant parcels into more appropriately sized pieces of property to increase the density of downtown and making use of existing (but improved) rights-of-way that may not be improved to take full advantage of the gridded street network would help Baldwin maximize its downtown potential.

Housing Choices

The single-family detached structure is the most prevalent form of housing within the downtown study area. Based on comments from the community and visual surveys of the downtown, it appears that manufactured housing makes up a good portion of those detached structures. In order to provide its

citizens with a variety of housing options, the city may choose to pursue a housing strategy that would foster the development of several types, sizes and prices of future residences.

Issues to address in Downtown Baldwin

- Many parcels in downtown display an apparent lack of property maintenance, creating an overall sense of limited community pride. Poorly maintained properties can reflect negatively on the character of Downtown Baldwin.



- Dilapidated housing and older manufactured houses appear to dominate the Downtown landscape. Downtowns typically have a mix of housing types beyond single family detached houses.
- There appears to be a fairly large number of mobile homes in the downtown. Although these units provide some less expensive housing options, this type of housing often does not weather, or age, as gracefully as other forms of housing. Manufactured homes tend to depreciate at a faster rate than conventional stick-built housing. Opting for a more conventional stick-built form of housing over mobile homes can be better source of tax revenue for the community. Mobile homes are taxed under the ad valorem

Downtown Baldwin

tax, instead of the property tax. The city must provide the same level of service for all residential dwellings, although tax revenue for mobile homes is significantly less than that of a conventional residential structure.

- Downtown lacks necessary pedestrian and cycling facilities such as bike lanes and sidewalks. Willingham Avenue appears to have the only continuous sidewalk in the area. There are sidewalks on other streets but no continuity and connectivity and no apparent bicycle facilities in the area.



- The current City Hall is located in cramped quarters. As Baldwin grows, the number of employees will likely

increase, necessitating more space for administrative offices.

Opportunities to take advantage of in Downtown Baldwin

- Downtown Baldwin appears to have the beginnings of a street network system that lends itself to compact, pedestrian-friendly, urban development. Parcel maps of the area indicate available right-of-way to expand the grid system to provide greater connectivity as well as permitting mid-block alleys for rear access to properties.
- Quite a few potentially significant historic structures and sites exist in and around Downtown Baldwin. The site of the former train depot, Sweet Pea Plantation, Carwood Manufacturing plant, and the former bank at the five-points intersection of Willingham Avenue, Airport Road and Stonepile Road are a few potential significant sites. These resources help define the character of Baldwin and should be utilized in the revitalization of the downtown.



The City is home to several parks and former parks which are located in and around downtown. The proposed park at the new Police and Fire complex outside of downtown is the latest addition to the city's recreational facilities. The former park on Stonepile Road should be revitalized as both a natural and historic treasure.



The former Carwood Manufacturing plant is a great opportunity for

redevelopment. All over the country, these types of buildings are being converted to residential or mixed-use spaces with commercial uses on the ground floor and residences on the upper floors.

- The natural resources in the area are an asset to the areas that the City should recognize and promote, such as Baldwin Falls and the numerous mountain vistas throughout the City.
- Prior to the development of Highway 365, Downtown Baldwin was on the main route to Helen from Highway 441. This gave the City of Baldwin the opportunity to take advantage of the increased traffic. Today, it appears that travelers by-pass the route through Baldwin in favor of the Highway 365 route.
- Along with the gridded street network in the downtown there are terminated vistas that the City could take advantage of to create bold statements. This means that there are streets that dead end, leaving opportunities for important buildings or monuments or some other structure

that could draw the eye down the street. Airport Road demonstrates the terminated vista concept.

- There are no State Routes through Downtown Baldwin. The city may have the opportunity to create streets per its own designs.

Recommendations for Downtown Baldwin

Short Term Recommendations

To address property maintenance issues the City should increase its code enforcement capabilities to promote community pride and economic development potential. The following options are possible:

- Hire additional staff to perform code enforcement duties
- Give authority to current staff to issue code violation citations.
(Note: The City code may require updating to give authority to additional staff to issue citations)
- Review the current property maintenance code to ensure that it meets the aesthetic goals of the city. The community may consider prohibiting overgrown grass, outdoor storage, and play equipment in front

yards, etc.

- Cooperate with the County or adjacent municipalities, Cornelia and Mount Airy, to share code enforcement duties which may require revising property maintenance codes in cooperating jurisdictions so that each shares common requirements.

The city should perform a Historic Resources Survey to inventory the existing significant structures and sites that are potentially historic and/or are worthy of preservation. The city may find assistance with this survey process from the University of Georgia's FindIT program (<http://www.uga.edu/sed/psd/programs/findit.html>). There may be historic resources information found at <https://www.itos.uga.edu/nahrgis/>

To address the issue of dilapidated housing, update the City Code to include Demolition by Neglect provisions to require that property owners demolish or repair structures that are deemed by the City's Building Official to be unfit for habitation.

Downtown Baldwin



The proliferation of mobile homes could be addressed by prohibiting new ones and any that may relocate into the city. The Zoning Ordinance could be updated to make manufactured homes within the downtown area a nonconforming use and/or a nonconforming structure. A mobile home could be defined further to include the type of foundation and location of the main entrance so as not to prohibit all types of manufactured structures, in case there are some that are more appropriate for downtown and may age more gracefully than a conventional mobile home. Katrina Cottages are one type of structure that may fit into the downtown area more appropriately. This house plan may be built using a variety of construction methods including stick-built and pre-manufactured. (<http://katrinacottagehousing.org/index.html>). Development standards regarding manufactured homes in the

Department's Model Code can be found here: <http://www.dca.state.ga.us/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/programs/documents/Part6SpecificUseRegulations.pdf>.

To ensure a form of development more suitable to a small town, the City should consider updating its zoning ordinance including but not limited to the following:

- permit upper-story residential by right throughout the downtown study area, not just along Airport Road and Willingham Avenue
- eliminate autocentric types of development including surface parking lots and drive-thru options for business
- permit more high-traffic, pedestrian friendly types of uses, including office and institutional uses above ground-level commercial
- institute build-to lines rather than building setbacks
- create design standards to assist developers and designers with the mass, scale, and height of buildings, the amount and location of windows and doors and appropriate building materials

Long Term Recommendations

Address the lack of transportation alternatives by creating a master sidewalk plan and a master bikeway plan. These plans should illustrate how sidewalks and bike paths would connect throughout the downtown area as well as lead to areas outside of the downtown. Consider making this process a joint effort with the City of Cornelia. With a master plan, the City could include implementation measures associated with the zoning ordinance to get assistance from the development community.

The city should create a master plan that will, over time, revitalize the streets in and around downtown and create a safe and comfortable environment for all citizens. In addition, revitalizing the city's streets will help create a village or small-town feel for Baldwin. A master street plan should address the following:

- narrowing drive lanes
- installing on-street parking
- widening existing sidewalks
- planting street trees
- installing street lights
- burying or relocating overhead utility lines.

The five-point intersection of Airport Road,

Downtown Baldwin

Willingham Avenue and Stonepile Road in downtown Baldwin offers a unique opportunity to create a vibrant downtown center. Many communities use this type of intersection to create pedestrian-oriented commercial centers due to their built-in traffic calming characteristics. They require more time and thought to traverse; therefore traffic slows down, thus creating a more comfortable environment for pedestrians (if designed correctly).

In addition to creating a vision for the streets and private development with an urban design master plan for the Downtown, the plan could also determine how public sector development could occur. The City should take advantage of the terminated vista at the end of Airport Road for a possible location for a civic use, perhaps a new City Hall when necessary, leaving prominent space at the Airport Road/Willingham Avenue intersection open for private development.

Administering urban design master plans and ordinances is a challenging task for communities with limited resources and staff. As mentioned in the Growth Preparedness section, the City of Baldwin and the City of Cornelia (and Mount Airy) could share staff and citizen committees to accomplish similar

goals of better land use and urban design. The adjoining communities could form citizen boards such as a planning commission, design review board, tree board and zoning appeal board. Also, as mentioned above, this may require working together to revise each community's zoning ordinance for easier administration; or the communities could create a joint zoning ordinance.

Create a vista protection master plan. The City should locate the prized mountain vistas on maps and determine ways to protect the views such as limiting building heights within the viewsheds, prohibiting development in those areas, controlling outdoor lighting, and preserving the view origination points for public access. This plan may be part of an urban design master plan.

Create an open space and recreation master plan. The City should map the environmentally sensitive areas and recreation opportunities and determine means of preservation and public use. One sight in particular could be Baldwin Falls. This plan may be part of an urban design master plan.



Willingham Avenue/South Main Street 3

Willingham Avenue/South Main Street

Background



The Willingham Avenue/South Main Street corridor is one of the primary entranceways into Downtown Cornelia and Downtown Baldwin, and includes the commercially-important intersection with the US Highway 441 Bypass. This two-lane route connects the downtowns of the two cities. Once a critical part of the regional transportation network, and hub for commercial activity, this roadway provided travelers on Highway 441 a route through Downtown Cornelia. Willingham

Avenue/South Main Street appears to have deteriorated in recent years, both physically and economically, perhaps due to the creation of the Highway 441 bypass.



This corridor was originally developed solely for automobile access with few or no accommodations for pedestrians or other non-motorized modes of transportation. Although the City of Baldwin has provided sidewalks along Willingham Avenue from approximately King Street to the Elementary School, the sidewalk does not extend to Highway 441, or to Cornelia city limits. With no pedestrian accommodations along Main Street within the City of Cornelia, the corridor does not appear to be friendly, or safe, for pedestrians. The worn paths on the side of the road indicate a considerable number of pedestrians using this roadway. Anecdotal data suggests that most pedestrians are

walking to and from their homes to the Fieldale plants in Cornelia and Baldwin, as well as to banks, laundry facilities, restaurants, grocery stores and retailers on the Highway 441 Bypass and the Marathon convenience store on Main Street (Business 441/105) in Cornelia.

In addition to the lack of sidewalks, the businesses along the corridor are designed for automobiles, not people. Auto repair shops, used car sales, and convenience stores with fuel pumps seem to dominate the corridor. Those uses not specifically related to automobile sales or repair are designed to be accessed by automobiles. Large expanses of asphalt with no delineation between the street and the parking, and no landscaping are typical.



Willingham Avenue/South Main Street

Many of the parcels along the corridor contain abandoned buildings or are vacant. It is not a hospitable place to be outside of an automobile, a concern voiced by the community many times.

Recognizing the importance of this corridor to the success of Downtown Cornelia and Downtown Baldwin, the community sees the need to work together to improve the area by creating an overall vision and redevelopment strategy for the corridor.

Quality Community Objectives influencing Willingham Avenue/South Main Street

Appropriate Businesses

As we, across Georgia and the nation, rediscover our downtowns, and their importance as community centers, we, too, discover the importance of a “business mix” in each of our communities. Not only do we seek to diversify our local economies to prevent an over-dependence on a sole employer, we should seek a diverse mix of businesses to create vibrant downtown areas. As the corridor that connects the downtowns of Cornelia and Baldwin, Willingham Avenue-South Main Street has the potential to serve as a useful, useable, and important section of both communities.

Heritage Preservation

As the recognized southern end of Appalachia, Baldwin and Cornelia can serve as the gateway to one of the Southeast’s main tourist draws. Historically, Highway 441 has served as one of the routes of choice between the northeastern states and Florida, and has provided a scenic alternative to the interstate system for many, many travelers. Maintaining and enhancing the scenic, historic nature of these communities, and of Highway 441, can help restore Cornelia and Baldwin to vibrant, active communities in northeast Georgia.

Sense of Place

The Willingham Avenue-South Main Street corridor provides the first and last impressions of both communities, yet its design as a typical suburban thoroughfare detracts from these communities’ true Sense of Place, rather than adding to it. Currently, the character of the road is defined by automobile-oriented, single-story strip commercial developments. The commercial uses are often set back from the street, typically behind an expanse of parking and large signage. Promoting the spirit of Appalachia along the corridor, as well as promoting continued and expanded commercial uses, will enhance the overall beauty of both communities. Many of the parcels along the corridor provide sweeping

views of the mountains, which contribute significantly to the notion that one has arrived in Appalachia.

Infill Development

The corridor area has many vacant lots, and many underutilized commercial parcels, both of which provide opportunities for infill development. For this study, those lots that are used primarily for a single use and developments that did not contribute successfully to the traditional character of Baldwin, Cornelia, or the communities’ visions were considered underutilized or underdeveloped.



By changing the uses and designs of the vacant and underdeveloped lots within this character area, the cities can take advantage

Willingham Avenue/South Main Street

of existing water, sewer and other utilities as well as the street network and existing residential development adjacent to the area. Filling in these gaps will also contribute to the walkability (and bicycle friendliness) of the corridor and provide a stronger sense of place for both communities.

Transportation Alternatives

The definition of “alternative” is a choice limited to one of two or more possibilities, as of things, propositions, or courses of action, the selection of which precludes any other possibility: *You have the alternative of riding or walking.* When a human cannot “choose,” the subject of “alternative” is moot. Currently, safe and pleasant transportation in Cornelia and Baldwin is limited to automobile transportation. The Willingham Avenue/Main Street corridor currently provides no pleasant “alternatives” to an automobile. With no public transportation in Baldwin or Cornelia, if one does not own an automobile, walking or cycling are the only alternatives. Given the lack of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, these modes of travel are dangerous and unpleasant. Despite these hazards, many citizens of the cities walk along the road on a daily basis, resulting in a series of footpaths along both sides of the corridor.

Regional Cooperation

The corridor spans the two cities of Baldwin and Cornelia, with the city limits line bisecting one of the motels on the corridor. Development review, maintenance and corridor management are shared between the two communities, which provides an opportunity to share resources and regulations in order to create a cohesive, economically viable gateway for both communities.

Issues to address on Willingham Avenue/South Main Street

- Many buildings along the corridor are vacant and deteriorated



- The corridor needs new directional and welcome signage for both Cornelia and Baldwin
- The public right of way is in need of maintenance and significant improvements, including:
 - Sidewalks along both sides of the

road

- Pedestrian crosswalks at regular intervals (even without corresponding crossroads) and signalization
- Street trees and landscaping
- Hardscape improvements including streetlights and street furniture
- Two of the three motels on the corridor seem to provide a haven for criminal activity
- The current zoning regulations for Baldwin and Cornelia will promote a sprawl pattern. In order to build a walkable community, the cities will need to consider revising its zoning code and other land development regulations.

Opportunities to take advantage of on Willingham Avenue/South Main Street

- The City of Cornelia has proposed a new soccer park along South Main Street, and is seeking grant funds to build this park. The property includes an historic home (circa 1905) which could be rehabilitated for use as a welcome center. The grounds surrounding the house have several large trees, and would function well as a picnic area.

Willingham Avenue/South Main Street



Recommendations for Willingham Avenue/ South Main Street

Create an urban design master plan for the Willingham Avenue/Main Street Corridor. This plan should determine the future of the corridor by including, but not limited to the following:

- Redevelopment of vacant and underutilized property, including the dilapidated motor lodges.
- Building design standards that could be implemented through a joint overlay district between Baldwin and Cornelia
- Streets and sidewalk designs for the corridor and crossroads
- Landscaping for the streets as well as for private development

The cities should make a statement at the intersection of Willingham Avenue and the Highway 441 bypass, which marks the primary gateway from the south into Downtown Baldwin and Downtown Cornelia. Issues to address:

- Development at the Highway 441 bypass/Willingham Avenue intersection should address the streets appropriately. Direct access from the Highway 441 bypass on a parcel-by-parcel basis should be prohibited.
- The existing topography of the area should be maintained., as it creates spectacular mountain views throughout the area.
- Mass grading of property for development should be prohibited

in the zoning and land development ordinances for both Cornelia and Baldwin.

- The ordinances should require special review procedures for commercial development to ensure that development is appropriate to the community's terrain and will enhance some of the areas greatest assets - its mountain vistas.

Level Grove Road 4

Level Grove Road

Background

Level Grove Road is a primary northern gateway from Highway 365 into downtown Cornelia. Currently a two-lane road, it extends from downtown into an older residential area and then to a burgeoning commercial area of the city at the SR 365 and nearby Highway 441 bypass intersections. The community expressed a concern about the road's continued viability as a residential street and the prospect for future expansion of commercial development toward downtown from SR 365 along the road.

Quality Community Objectives influencing Level Grove Road

Sense of Place

Cornelia and Baldwin command a prominent location along the front-range of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The character of Level Grove Road captures much of the mountainous feel of the area, in its winding turns that wrap around and through the area's hilly terrain. Some of the existing features that help create the mountainous sense of place are tree canopied sections of the street, older houses that perch on the hillsides along the road, the sharp inclines of streets that intersect with the road. Being a two-lane

road adds to the rural, small-town ambiance characteristic of roads that enter other mountain towns.



The character of much of the development at the intersections of Level Grove Road with SR 365 and US 441 is typical of franchise development found in Anywhere, USA. There is little distinctive character to cause tourists along these routes to become curious enough about what the area has to offer to explore Cornelia and Baldwin. Most travelers probably think of this area as more of a quick stop for food and fuel than as a destination or place to invest.

Transportation Alternatives

As a small-medium-sized community in the foothills of the mountains, Cornelia is exactly the kind of place in which one of

the most appropriate alternative forms of transportation is walking and biking. One can envision how well a comprehensive and complete network of sidewalks and off-road bike trails would not only help mitigate traffic, but also allow residents and tourists to enjoy the local scenery, exercise, and spend less money on rising fuel costs.

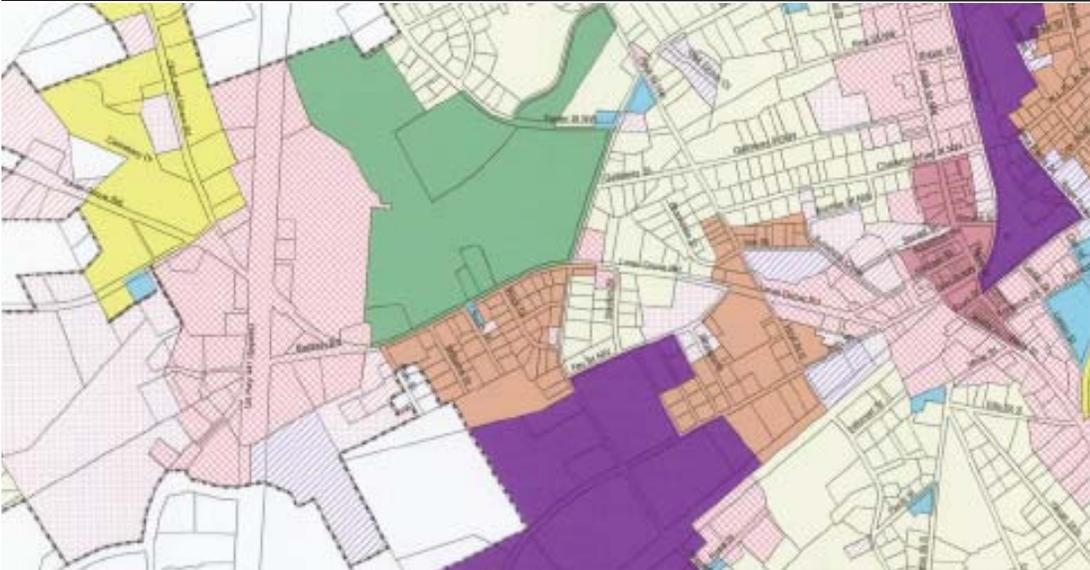
Traditional Neighborhoods

Level Grove Road already contains basic characteristics of traditional neighborhoods. The gridded street network that connects Level Grove Road with the local school and with residential neighborhoods creates the kind of site plan conducive to pedestrian activity.

Infill Development

There are a number of vacant and/or undeveloped lots along Level Grove Road in which infill development can either help or hinder the city's appeal as a mountain town. The most appropriate development for these infill lots are small to medium sized structures that resemble or complement the traditional residential character of the street. Some lots may also be appropriate for landscaped pedestrian/bikeway trail offshoots from the street's sidewalk that would link potential development sites in the valley area below

Level Grove Road



Legend

Zoning Districts

-  R-1, Single Family Residential
-  R-1A, Single Family Residential
-  R-1B, Single Family Residential
-  R-2, Multi-Family Residential
-  MHP, Mobile Home Park
-  O-P, Office - Professional
-  B-1, Neighborhood Business
-  B-2, General Business
-  CBD, Central Business District
-  LI, Light Industrial
-  HI, Heavy Industrial
-  A, Agriculture
-  Out Parcels



Level Grove Road

Level Grove Road.

Issues to address on Level Grove Road

- The existing network of sidewalks and trails contains too many gaps to encourage residents near Level Grove Road to walk or bike for some of the trips they need to make to businesses downtown or at the shopping centers.
- The volume and speed of traffic on Level Grove Road currently deters the kind of pedestrian and bicycle activity that make traditional neighborhoods work well for cities and towns.
- Some of the properties along Level Grove Road are already under stress as residential properties, in large part because of the volume and speed of traffic along the road. People are less inclined to maintain their properties when they feel that their streets have lost their sense of residential place or character.
- Contemporary excavation practices, if not done well, can detract from a mountain community's desirability as a place to live, work and play.

Opportunities to take advantage of on Level Grove Road

There are great natural characteristics that give the area potential to draw mountain-bound tourists into town. Level Grove Road is one of the key gateways that can help create the positive first impression that could translate into future prospects for quality growth and development. There are many areas of town with superb mountain vistas comparing favorably to views from many of the more popular mountain resort destinations. Well-designed developments that take advantage of these vistas could spur further investment into this area.



Large amounts of space devoted to parking in the shopping centers around the Level Grove Road intersections offers potential for new development designed to create a greater sense of place which could help grow interest in the Cornelia/ Baldwin area as a place to live, work, and play. Redevelopment here

could easily handle mid-rise development that would offer exceptional mountain views to attract new people and businesses to the community.

Any new shopping center developments envisioned for Level Grove Road should connect to the existing the street network through the existing shopping centers instead of to Level Grove Road.

Recommendations for Level Grove Road

- Identify appropriate areas for new low-to mid-rise development that can take advantage of the mountain vistas. Along Level Grove Road, such development may be most appropriate near the large shopping centers around the SR 365 and US 441 intersections. Here the city should seek opportunities to work with willing property owners to redevelop aging shopping centers into mixed-use commercial/office/residential developments.
- Find a partner with greyfield redevelopment design expertise partner to draw a conceptual redesign of one or more of the existing shopping centers at the gateway

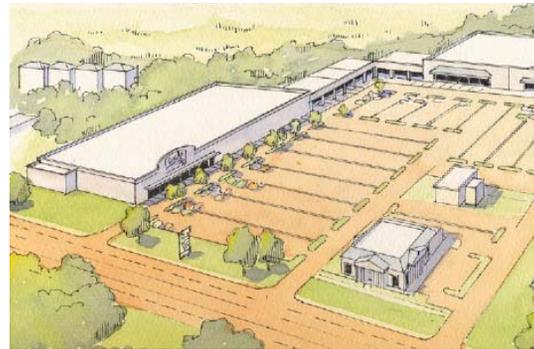
Level Grove Road

intersections. Consider forming or using an existing development authority that can help these property owners redevelop their sites over time.

- The city should create new or modify existing commercial zoning districts to allow form-based development that would eventually result in a more inviting and livable built environment than that occurring under existing zoning regulations.

The images below illustrate the progressive redevelopment of an existing shopping center similar to those around the intersection of Level Grove Road and the Highway 441-Bypass.

Beginning with a detailed master plan for the shopping center, the site is converted from a conventional strip mall with a large expanse of asphalt parking to a traditional “town center” type of place with tree-lined streets, park space and appropriate, mixed-use buildings. These images are from the Boundary Street Master Plan, Beaufort, South Carolina.



Level Grove Road

- Work with the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, or the Savannah School of Art and Design to create architectural style and/or design templates that are appropriate for and complement traditional mountain character of development.
- Revise zoning ordinance to require native plant materials in landscaping, by expanding Table 10.1 entitled “Landscaping Purposes and Materials” in the zoning code to include appropriate native plants.
- Work with the natural terrain along Level Grove Road. Adopt land development regulations that protect the natural terrain and prevent intrusive excavation into the earth.



- Plan now for future traffic calming features along Level Grove Road. Consider lowering the speed limit

and design raised and decorative pedestrian crosswalks at regular intervals that include the existing cross streets of the city’s existing gridded street network where they intersect with the road.

- Continue planning for pedestrian and bicycle-friendly amenities, including sidewalks, off-road trails, seating, landscaping, decorative street lights, etc. Such improvements will help reduce the number of trips required by automobile and relieve pressure to widen Level Grove Road.
- Create or plan for segments of angled parking along the street. The City



should begin seeking opportunities for sites along Level Grove Road where one or more small areas of angled parking



could be developed in conjunction with the sidewalk and bike trail network. Perhaps consider this type of parking close to downtown and close to the intersection of the Highway 441 by-pass initially. By planning for this type of parking along Level Grove Road the City could require private developments to incorporate these designs into site plans through development standards in the zoning ordinance. Such parking would create flexibility for existing properties along the road, to allow conversions, where appropriate, of various residential structures to offices or non-intrusive commercial within the existing structures.

Make Level Grove a prominent gateway entrance into Cornelia. Work with DCA's Office of Downtown Development to design appropriate wayfinding signage for the corridor. Plan for future upgrades to traffic signalization improvements to include consideration of mast head utility poles and internally lit street signage. These types of upgrades will be much appreciated by many of the tourists traveling between Florida or Atlanta to the south and mountain resort areas to the north.

Create an overlay zone for the corridor that will include special requirements for city approval (perhaps via a planning commission) of site design and architectural style consistent with the city's vision of how the street should appear and function during the next 50 years.

Within an overlay zoning classification, the City should permit a variety of uses including residential, commercial, office and institutional uses.