

# City of Milton

2008-2028 Comprehensive Plan



## Community Assessment

### Part A: Issues and Opportunities

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## A. Issues and Opportunities

The City of Milton crafted the following Vision Statement for the City: *Milton is a distinctive community embracing small-town life and heritage while preserving and enhancing our rural character.* The vision statement serves as a reminder that the City is a singular and unique community within the larger Atlanta Region and that it seeks to hold onto and maintain the pastoral and lower density character of the historic agrarian community. The City was created with the idea that the rapid pace of urban development since 1990 would displace the rural-based assets that attracted the City's current citizens to Milton, and that the City should establish and adhere to its own resources to balance future development and services with the City's vision for preservation of existing lifestyles and community character. Maintenance of the unique agricultural elements, lower density development patterns, lifestyle, and character of the existing community is central to the wishes of many local citizens.

A list of potential issues and opportunities was created by the State of Georgia Department of Community Affairs as a tool to assist in the local government comprehensive planning process. The list of issues and opportunities was presented to the City of Milton Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC) in a worksheet format for discussion. The CPAC began by working in small groups and reviewing each issue to consider how the issue applied to Milton and to identify any potential priorities, opportunities, or threats that might affect the City's health, safety, and welfare.

The CPAC ranked each issue or opportunity as "Not Important", "Important", or "Very Important", and identified six issues as "Very Important". Most of the other issues were identified as "Important". The City should emphasize these "Very Important" and "Important" issues as key elements of concern in preparing the Comprehensive Plan and in considering recommendations for future capital investments, transportation, land use, zoning, development, and construction codes. Each of the "Very Important" and "Important" issues discussed by the CPAC is described below.

The CPAC noted that the majority of the City is outside the Georgia 400 "mega-corridor" and only the easternmost areas of the City are able to accommodate the types of urban development intensities anticipated along the expressway corridor.

*Sidebar: The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) identified the Deerfield development as part of the northern "mega-corridor" for growth along Georgia 400 in the ARC Unified Growth Policies Plan draft map prepared in 2007. The remaining area south and east of State Route 9 and south of Bethany between Hopewell Road and the Deerfield area was identified as "urban residential" by ARC while the remaining majority of the City was designated as "suburban residential" in the ARC Policies Plan. The nearest "rural areas" were located north of Ball Ground in Cherokee County.*

### 1. Development Patterns

#### a. Development Patterns Issues

**(1) Unattractive sprawl development/visual clutter along roadways (Very Important)** - The Atlanta Region has the reputation of a sprawling consumer of land for the development of subdivisions ever further out and away from the region's urban core. Development sprawl adds to the length and number of automobile trips, creates additional congestion and pollution, and consumes



attractive land for suburban residential and related uses rather than preserving the existing rural character of the small communities like Milton that surround the central urban area of the region.

Subdivisions (mostly new developments created since 1990) are the dominant form of development throughout the City and are not likely to be changed. Local zoning, site plan, and permit review procedures have been important mechanisms to preserve the existing character of the community and guide development towards compatible land uses and an attractive mix of urban, suburban and rural forms along the City's road corridors. However, as attractive natural vistas or rural agricultural scenes are eliminated by new development, developers need to provide attractive visual alternatives to replace the lost scenic opportunities. Safe, sustainable developments minimize unattractive views and add trees, vegetation, attractive walls, or buffer space to enhance transitions and eliminate intrusions (intended or unintended) into floodplains, steep slopes, and other sensitive areas that cannot sustain more intensive development. Attractive road corridors must also be able to be adequately supported by local community services (fire, police, et al.).

Buffers along scenic highways, preservation of tree cover, and consideration of environmentally sensitive areas remain important. Development patterns and actual site plans and their appropriate fit into the rural landscape remain important, too. As an example, rural design may emphasize a specific separation between houses to meet rural design expectations rather than placing them on a condensed site. Embracing the existing topography will help to protect the rural character. Another example is to recognize that Community Unit Plans (CUP's) may not be the best approach for residential development patterns in this more rural, agricultural area as they tend to force more houses to the road and next to each other. In other words, urban design concepts are not likely to be successful for creating a rural place.

As new residential and non-residential development occurs along major highways, arterials, and collector streets, the City desires to identify and create appropriate requirements to minimize obtrusive signage and undesired visual clutter along roadways. The visual appearance of a prosperous, well-groomed, pastoral community demonstrates that Milton is a highly desirable place to live, work or play as has been identified in the City's current vision statement. Existing methods to protect the City from visual clutter include buffers for residential and commercial development, and the careful use of the tree preservation ordinance, the historic preservation ordinance, and the overlay zoning districts for Northwest Fulton, Birmingham Crossroads, Crabapple Crossroads, and the Highway 9 Corridor. The combined review process through the City Council, the Planning Commission, the Design Review Board, and the Zoning Board of Appeals provides oversight and structure for considering development and site design, but the visual results may be difficult to understand without better means to engage visual appearance and finishes.

**(2) Unattractive commercial or shopping areas (Very Important)** - Some of the commercial retail uses along State Route 9 were developed when the Milton community was still rural and the population was still small. These older facilities are being replaced by new commercial development constructed to service the population that has come to the area since 1990. The target population for this non-residential development is based on the social and economic character of the projected population within the community. Commercial development has been based on an automobile-



oriented society with the assumption that there would be little or no transit or other alternatives for access.

Low density commercial development also assumes that walking or bicycle ridership may be less viable as an alternative to the automobile although they provide an alternative that is desired for quality of life and a means to reduce vehicular travel for short trips.

There is little strip commercial development in the City except along the Highway 9 corridor although this issue may also need to be addressed for the State Route 140 corridor (Arnold Mill Road). Strip development along major corridors is linear, automobile dependant and very mobile. A business may occupy a storefront location within a strip center for a short period and then close or move if the business is not successful at that location or if the business needs more space or wants to pay less for another location.



Over time competing strip centers may siphon occupants away from each other especially if there are too many commercial storefronts and not enough customers. Unsuccessful centers may not bring in the revenues to justify reinvestment in maintenance or in updating the center to meet new trends in marketing and customer interest. Whereas these strip centers are on the major roadway corridors, they help form and define an image of the City by the people who travel these corridors. Therefore, the community should try to maintain a balance between commercial structure demand and supply to encourage adequate maintenance or replacement of older shopping areas by appropriate new facilities to meet local needs. Commercial shopping areas also may require enhanced architectural standards to help ensure design quality and sustainability. Curb cuts, vehicle parking, and outside display elements should be included in the design review process to enhance the physical and visual elements that control appearance and desirability.

**(3) Unattractive subdivisions and subdivision entrances (Very Important)** – The rural mix of farms and woodlands that made up Milton prior to the rapid growth of the community has meant that a number of subdivision developments that have been built in former pasture lands or in areas where the former woodlands have been stripped away to create home sites that have little or no character. One acre minimum lot sizes were promoted with the intention that developers could leave adequate space for houses to be located on lots that retained some woodland vegetative cover and to protect streams and steep slopes as interesting site design assets on the property. Open lots without natural vegetative cover require more landscaping and man-made design elements such as farm fences and new tree plantings to promote site interest.

The design and aesthetics of subdivision entrances contribute to the long-term desirability of the subdivision. Poorly-designed entrances may create visibility problems or provide too little space for school buses and other service vehicles to operate within the neighborhood effectively. Subdivision



entry areas need better designed spaces for children and parents waiting on the school bus. Signage should be easy to read and safe for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians to maneuver.

Residential buffers establish and protect the visual impact of new development along scenic roadways. Development standards within the development are important to establish separation between housing units, recreation areas, and unattractive elements such as stormwater detention facilities or an electric power substation.

Detention facility design should consider location, services provided, and opportunities to blend the design into the surroundings. Earthen structures present a much less severe appearance than concrete structures. Detention facilities also should be located away from entrances and heavy traffic areas within the neighborhood and screened to reduce visual impacts.

**(4) No mix of uses or neighborhood centers to serve adjacent neighborhoods** – Subdivision development is predicated on segregation of unlike land uses. The CPAC and Council members have made it clear that the community wants to maintain the existing residential and rural character of Milton and do not want sprawl. However, development of residential one-acre lots in the AG-1 zoning district continues to increase the number of low density residential units in the City, and the fear that a neighborhood use like a corner grocery or drugstore in the neighborhood will eventually turn into a larger commercial intrusion into the community has made it difficult to site neighborhood facilities into these large areas of subdivision activity.



By design, the Birmingham Crossroads Community area is specifically limited regarding the uses allowed within the overlay area and the size of the commercial area to serve the rural residential neighborhood that surrounds it and the areas in Northwestern Milton adjacent to State Route 372 (Birmingham Highway) and the Birmingham and Hickory Flat Road corridor.

The Bethany Road intersection with State Route 9 provides a similar opportunity for a neighborhood intensity center in the northern third of the State Route 9 overlay area. The Publix shopping center is at the nexus of the east/west crossing and is close to denser housing to the east and the less dense (unsewered) areas to the west. The intersection also provides a location that appears to be ideal for equestrian based commerce serving Milton and Forsyth County.

The Crabapple Crossroads Community Plan addresses another neighborhood center that has received much attention, but there is still heated debate regarding how the center will develop and what limits to development can be provided to ensure that the neighborhood node does or does not expand into a larger commercial center.



There may be additional opportunities elsewhere in the City, but these sites deserve careful discussion and attention regarding how and to what extent they should be developed before they can be identified as a neighborhood or community center. In addition, the City of Milton does not have an established primary center for downtown services such as the City Hall or related development.

**(5) Development patterns don't encourage interaction with neighbors** – The majority of Milton is developed as residential in subdivisions with one-acre minimum lot sizes to provide septic tank wastewater treatment. The one-acre minimum lot size is recommended to allow builders to identify the location for and construct a septic tank field that could meet Fulton County environmental standards. Sewer services to collect and take wastewater to advanced treatment plants downstream were limited to a portion of the Big Creek drainage basin that covers only the eastern 20% of the City's land area.

Houses are located much farther apart in one-acre minimum lot size subdivisions than in more urban areas recommended in current planning literature and in the State and Regional planning guidelines. Added distances between houses reduce the likelihood that opportunities for interaction can be provided, especially as a neighborhood gets older and different age groups with different interests occupy the housing units. However many new residents have made a recent decision to locate in Milton and did not consider smaller lots as affecting neighborhood interaction. In addition, the overwhelming pace of recent development and the similarity of housing construction and sizes within a subdivision tend to attract buyers with similar interests (children in school, golf and country club activities) that can foster interaction.



Although it is not a problem with a new community, the continuing relationships found in schools, churches, social clubs, and neighborhood organizations may be constrained by limited access to automobile travel in the future as communities and neighborhoods age. Mobility for all elements of the population is expected to be required to maintain these relationships and offset the greater distances in the future.

**(6) No clear boundary where town stops and countryside begins** – The City of Milton intends to establish the City as being unique among the cities of northern Fulton County by nurturing its equestrian agricultural and rural residential community to set the City apart from the surrounding cities.



To establish and maintain the City's identity as a meaningful *“place”*, Milton should establish and maintain gateways to the community to provide a visual feel that you have entered a distinct new



“place” and as a means of promoting citizen pride, commitment and visitor awareness. Once in Milton, the community should continue to protect, preserve and enhance the unique features and characteristics that attracted residents to the City.

**b. Development Patterns Opportunities**

**(1) Unique equestrian-oriented development** – Milton has established an image of black-painted four-board fenced equestrian development that makes a statement that the community intends to preserve the quality of life and support the existing horse-based, socioeconomic culture that celebrates the rural nature of the City. The theme is based on an existing culture that can be defined and used to help determine when the design of a new subdivision might hurt or harm the existing character of the City.

**(2) Plentiful scenic views and natural and agricultural land uses** – Preservation of the attractive agricultural and rural character of the Milton countryside, and the conservation of existing rural, agricultural, and natural areas located throughout the City require a balance between two philosophies regarding the best use of existing land – preservation and development. The scenic views of pastures, barns, corrals, equestrian exercise rings, and other farm outbuildings, woodlands, stream valleys, ridgelines, and the attractive man-made structures provide resources that are important to maintaining the aesthetic atmosphere of the City and the quality of life.



Existing agricultural land uses and scenic views should be documented to allow the community to consider whether they should be maintained. Knowledge regarding the potential loss of view sheds, historic sites, or iconic images of Milton’s past provides the opportunity to demand that future development limit its impact on the aesthetic nature of the community before the losses occur by promoting appropriate development that enhances the scenic views and pastoral feel of the community instead of development that detracts from the existing landscape.



**(3) Extensive green space still available** – Most of the existing development within the City of Milton is still relatively new and stable, and numerous opportunities remain for the continuing infill of residential development on one-acre lots to allow builders to include elements of the existing woodlands, pastures, stream corridors, and steep slopes when they site streets, housing, and amenities. Unfortunately, large parcels are disappearing and being replaced by the one-acre lot subdivisions that maintain some green space but limit accessibility to private property owners.



Natural stream corridors and some existing gravel road corridors that have been maintained by choice are assets that require cooperative decisions between property owners and City services to sustain access, services, and maintenance of green spaces. The 2007 Milton Trail Plan proposes to use some of these corridors to provide opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle activities. Steep slopes provide opportunities to integrate areas unusable for development into sustainable green space.

## **2. Community/Sense of Place**

### **a. Community/Sense of Place Issues**

**(1) Not enough green space or parkland** – There are four parks located within the boundaries of the City of Milton.

**Providence Park** is located just off Providence Road in south central Milton. Existing facilities include a park center building, a pavilion, hiking trails, an outdoor amphitheater, grills, picnic tables, overnight camp sites, a lake, a rappelling and rock climbing area and climbing walls. The 40-acre Park was closed in 2004 following the discovery of numerous 55 gallon drums is not usable at the current time due to pollution of the lake and stream that must be cleaned up prior to re-opening.

Numerous compounds were detected in the soil and groundwater samples including lead, tetrachloroethene, trichloroethene, vinyl chloride, benzene, xylenes, phenols, PCBs, pesticides and herbicides. More than 40 private drinking water supplies were identified within a one mile radius of the site.

An environmental services firm was contracted by Fulton County to provide environmental consulting services and the removal and disposal of several dozen drums and other materials visible at the surface. A subsequent initial assessment of the park included collecting surface soil samples, sediment sampling at the lake, the installation of monitoring wells, and a receptor survey. A Compliance Status Report (CSR) was prepared for submittal to the Georgia EPD Hazardous Site



Response Program, and an expanded assessment has been initiated in order to provide the complete horizontal and vertical delineation of the impact to soil and groundwater.

A tentative plan for the City of Milton to buy the Park from Fulton County after the environmental cleanup is completed is under consideration. Both parties are sensitive to the potential liabilities for the environmental contamination at the site, and negotiations are expected to continue until a satisfactory conclusion allows the City to assume ownership and be indemnified from any future legal action or fines created by the existing contamination.

**Birmingham Park** on the northwestern side of Birmingham Crossroads was recently acquired and is not developed or usable until planning is completed and access is constructed. The park encompasses 203 acres and three ~~has a~~ master plan alternatives identify ~~with~~ equestrian and pedestrian trails, picnic pavilions, soccer/lacrosse/football fields, basketball/tennis/volleyball courts, a skate plaza, a mountain bike trail, and a habitat overlook. Decisions regarding the plan and access and egress for the Park will be considered by the City in the development of the final master plan for the design of the Park.

**Bell Memorial Park** is currently open and includes four baseball fields, a concession stand, a community house, and picnic pavilions. The Park is operated by the Hopewell Youth Association as a baseball facility.

**North Park** is a City of Alpharetta park that is located in a City of Alpharetta enclave on Cogburn Road, completely surrounded by the City of Milton. Alpharetta's North Park includes a community activity center and seniors' center, among other amenities. City of Milton residents may use the park, but are considered non-residents of the City of Alpharetta.

**The Crabapple Crossroads Community Plan** identified the need for pedestrian-oriented green space development in the Crossroads area but did not guarantee that any of the land would become publicly owned. The Master Plan identified a recommendation that approximately 41.5 acres of land in the Crabapple Crossroads area be set aside and maintained for green space. The John Wieland low density residential development left approximately 10 acres along the stream corridors as green space. Other projects also have provided green space along the edges of the properties to meet the greenspace requirements. However, these areas have not created any new park lands, and a proposed "town green" at the intersection of Mayfield Road and Mid Broadwell Road is yet to be programmed or built.

**No sense of place (Visitors do not sense that they've arrived at an activity center)** – As a rural place, Milton does have a number of attractive natural and scenic vistas and many of the equestrian farms and suburban estates are very attractive places. However, Milton does not have a unique "town center" with the sense of a downtown focal point for community activities. City Hall is located in a non-descript office building along Deerfield Parkway.

Although the Crabapple Crossroads Community was identified as a unique location with rural character that contributed to and helped promote the idea of the City of "Milton", Crabapple is at the edge of the City on the border with the City of Alpharetta. An Alpharetta Community Center building is located on the southwest corner of the intersection. The western half of the Crabapple



Crossroads area is being developed at a very fast rate with suburban commercial structures and town homes replacing the former rural housing and farmlands along Crabapple Road. Three schools are located immediately to the northeast of the Crossroads activity area. East of the intersection, the older agricultural commercial buildings and rural housing still provide rural charm, but they are impacted by heavy peak hour traffic volumes and narrow rights of way that would require removal of some of the iconic buildings to accommodate additional road lanes.

The Birmingham Crossroads activity center in northwest Milton is (intentionally) small and compact. The 27-acre site includes old commercial buildings and infill by new shopping, restaurant, and office facilities clustered closely around the crossroads. Institutional uses nearby include Birmingham Park to the northwest, a fire station and a church to the west, and two churches to the south. These facilities help frame the commercial village.

The State Route 9 Corridor Overlay Area is also being developed at a very fast rate with new strip centers and “big boxes” replacing the some of the older rural highway-oriented structures on the Cumming Highway that were typical of rural corridors throughout northern Georgia. The intersection of Bethany Road and State Route 9 provides local neighborhood commercial services and the commercial development at the intersection at Windward Parkway seems to serve a larger community level function spawned by the growth of Alpharetta north of Old Milton Parkway and the development of Deerfield and other employment centers on the western side of Georgia 400.

At present, the neighborhood and community centers at Birmingham Crossroads, Crabapple Crossroads, Deerfield, and the SR9/Bethany Road intersection appear to provide local focus rather than a focal center to serve the entire City of Milton. The City’s Community Agenda planning process needs to identify which of these centers should be identified as the focal center for the City or if another location may be more appropriate as the core location for City government and services.

**(3) Unattractive commercial or shopping areas** – Attractive commercial centers tend to draw people into the center to shop or visit the stores located there. The more unattractive, the less desire there is to visit the development. Well-run commercial centers try to encourage customer visits by providing unique and attractive developments that maintain occupancy by updating the look, amenities, and accessibility of the center and improving the mix of occupants in keeping with the changing tastes of the surrounding community. Too little competition may result in empty stores as the businesses go else where. Too much competition may result in empty stores as centers try to compete by lowering rents and end up attracting less desirable tenants. The City supports the creation of well-designed, sustainable commercial centers by ensuring that new construction meets or exceeds local standards that satisfy community expectations to balance the short term costs of construction with the long term costs of maintaining operational sustainability.

**(4) No mix of housing sizes, types, and income levels within neighborhoods** – The mix of housing sizes, types and income levels in the City of Milton is significantly one-sided favoring more expensive homes due to the very recent amount of development that has occurred in the City (there are no older neighborhoods or subdivisions) and the significantly high value placed on parcels of residential property in the City. The lack of sewer services throughout most of the City presents few opportunities to locate lower priced homes on smaller lots with the exception of the Crabapple Crossroads Community Area or the State Route 9 Corridor Overlay Area where services can be provided in close proximity.



**(5) No pleasant community gathering spaces** – The two community centers at Bethwell and Crabapple are both in very old inadequate buildings that need to be renovated. The City of Alpharetta’s Crabapple Center does provide a resource but with limited availability. Bell Memorial Park provides outdoor space and the facilities at Milton High School, the two Middle Schools, the three Elementary Schools, and several local churches may provide additional space for meetings. The Crabapple Crossroads Community Plan specifically points out the need for a public “green” space to serve as the center for a pedestrian walkway system to serve the neighborhood center.

**(6) Development patterns don’t encourage interaction with neighbors** – A community that is spread out community over a larger land area may reduce neighborhood interactions. As the neighborhood grows older, it is more likely that interaction between neighbors will be reduced as different age groups find different interests. As a family ages and children move away, family activities give way to different individual interests, and continuing interaction and relationships may be reduced by reduced personal mobility or fewer incidental contacts in the neighborhood. A smaller area creates more opportunities to meet and interact on a continuing basis, but larger communities may require maintenance of personal mobility to succeed.



**(7) No mix of uses or neighborhood centers to serve adjacent neighborhoods** – The location of a local neighborhood use like a corner grocery or drugstore into an area where there were no previous services may be regarded as a harbinger of change that allows additional uses to become an intrusion into the community. The past inability to limit intrusive uses in a community once one has been introduced has made it difficult to locate any neighborhood facilities into residential areas because of the fear that they would be followed by other similar uses and competitors that expand beyond the



level needed. Also, there are conflicting concepts regarding whether the use is needed or what size the facility should be, especially in a highly mobile community where auto travel is easily available. Milton's recent history of development appears to indicate that this is not a current problem and it may take a significant change in economic conditions before this is significant problem for local citizens.

**(8) Not enough affordable housing** – Milton did not immediately gain every aspect of a complete city when it was chartered. The existing community includes the former unincorporated northernmost parts of Fulton County including the rural farms and equestrian estates, new subdivisions, a rapidly developing commercial corridor section of State Route 9 immediately to the west of Georgia 400, and a planned unit development (PUD) adjacent to Georgia 400 that was intended to emulate the success of the Windward development project located east of Georgia 400 with updated ideas based on 1990s ideas regarding planning and development opportunities. The economics and demographics of Milton are a slice of the region rather than a self-contained economy.



The extremely quick pace of development and the high asking prices for both raw land and developed land made providing “affordable” housing in northernmost Fulton County more difficult. Average income in Milton in 1999 was \$93,620.81 per household, approximately double the national average and more than 112% of the Fulton County average. Average sales prices of residential real estate in the Milton zip code rose from \$368,541 in 2004 to \$449,060 in 2007. Average home prices in the Atlanta region in 2007 were about \$272,716 in Fulton County and \$148,021 in Georgia (Source: HomeGain website).

Townhouses and apartments in the City are concentrated in the State Route 9 Overlay area where they do provide some opportunities for affordable housing. Milton also has a number of older homes built in the era between 1950 and 1980 that provide opportunities for a wide segment of homebuyers.

Milton needs to address affordable housing as part of the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that the work force for the City (the teachers, police and fire fighters, staff for companies within the office parks, personal service providers, and equestrian support workers) have the opportunity to live in Milton or close by. The provision of affordable residential alternatives also may provide enhanced opportunities for current residents to remain in the community as they go through different life stages. As residents age, they may desire to maintain the close relationships they developed when they lived in the community.

**(9) Not enough places for arts activities and performances** – The City has many residents that may have time and interests in the arts or in community activities. There are few places where



performances can be held although some of the equestrian facilities and golf and country clubs may be open to considering this need as an opportunity. Churches and schools also have facilities that may provide opportunities for community activities that can enrich the lifestyles of Milton's residents. Milton High School provides one such venue. Other opportunities are available in nearby Alpharetta and Roswell.

#### **b. Community/Sense of Place Opportunities**

**(1) Attractive residential development and housing stock** – The existing housing stock in Milton is generally very good although there was some concern expressed at the CPAC meetings about some of the older rural homes that were built prior to the 1990s that may have not been maintained as well as the community would like. These older homes provide some of the “unique” character of the City. Many of the older properties include “flag” lots where the only access into the home site is by a shared driveway that provides access to more than one homeowner. .



**(2) No pre-existing areas in decline** – The “new” quality of the City resulted in there not being any significant areas that are in decline. Although some individual properties may be declining, the area of the City as a whole is stable and continuing to fill in.

**(3) Interest in maintaining unique equestrian places** – The City of Milton has stated its vision and its intention to remain a “rural” community with open space and opportunities to own and maintain horses throughout much of the City. There are some existing conflicts between agricultural uses and adjacent residential uses that need to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan including noise, odor, and other potential nuisance factors that may be applicable when the concentration and location of equine activities is too large or too close to adjacent properties. Also, the existing zoning category for agricultural uses needs to be redefined to eliminate some incompatible uses that may be allowed in the current AG-1 zoning category.



**(4) Crabapple Crossroads is providing test bed for implementing density in a localized area** – The Crabapple Crossroads Community Plan was adopted in 2004 to identify a specific level of development tailored to a “neighborhood node” with plans for development in one of the few areas of what is now the City of Milton where some sewer wastewater collection could be provided. The



Crabapple Crossroads Community Plan was adopted by Fulton County as an overlay to the *Focus Fulton County 2025 Comprehensive Plan* and the Northwest Fulton County Overlay to the Fulton County Zoning Ordinance. These instruments were adopted by the City of Milton as the current plan and the current zoning regulations for the City upon its formation.

A review of the Plan and the current status of the zoning ordinance show that the development opportunities that were allowed by the Fulton County Crabapple Crossroads Community Plan Zoning Overlay were consumed in two years in a rush to develop non-residential and higher density (more than one unit/acre) within the Crabapple Crossroads area after adoption by the County. When the responsibility to provide planning and zoning was transferred to the City of Milton, the proposed capacities for development in the area had been permitted (although only about 20% of the proposed development was constructed as of January 2008).



An interim plan for the Crabapple Crossroads Community Area was considered as part of the Community Assessment for the Comprehensive Plan to guide the Milton City Council during the planning period. The analysis of the existing zoning and permits provided an improved understanding of the status of development in the area. Although improvements to local streets can be required to be made by developers to ensure appropriate access and egress to their properties and reduce the creation of additional congestion on the existing road network, road improvements that would need to be created by the public realm are limited until the City can develop its Comprehensive Plan and the Short Term Work Program (including the City's Capital Improvements Plan).



The recommendations of the interim plan were to defer or limit the addition of any additional non-residential permits until the Comprehensive Plan could establish a vision for the City (including Crabapple Crossroads), define the City's Short Term Work Program, and create new guidelines for development and permits in the Crabapple Crossroads Community Area. Future development opportunities in the Crabapple Crossroads Overlay area should be considered in appropriate context with the real concerns regarding density beyond the current levels of density already planned and permitted in the Crabapple Crossroads Overlay Area. The City's new Comprehensive Plan should serve as the initial point for this discussion and this area should be considered as a unique character area.



### **3. Zoning Process/Government Regulations**

#### **a. Zoning/Regulations Issues**

**(1) Regional and multi-jurisdictional coordination and cooperation (Very Important)** - Milton is a new city that hopes to continue working with Fulton County to allow the County and its successors to provide some services and for the City to deliver other services. The level of government that can best provide the best cost and level of services desired by Milton's citizens should be the level of government that provides that service. The City also will work with adjacent municipal jurisdictions (Roswell and Alpharetta) and with Forsyth and Cherokee Counties to provide mutual support for establishing local services and back-up responsibilities.



Other cooperation agreements will be maintained with utility providers, planning agencies, and regulators such as Georgia Power, MARTA, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District, the Atlanta Regional Commission, GRTA, GDOT, and other elements of State and Federal agencies to ensure that information and decisions regarding infrastructure are shared to the benefit of the public.

**(2) Developers complaining about local development approval process, especially for innovative projects (Very Important)** - The City of Milton understands that unanticipated delays created by the development process cost the developer additional money in the design, development, construction, and sale of improved property. The City wants to make the process flow more efficiently to help developers achieve their projects on time as long as the process accomplishes the goals of the City to result in the best and most appropriate development possible. As a new city, Milton has adapted the rules of Fulton County and may have had some delays in expediting some of the initial applications submitted by developers as new reviewing organizations and boards were set up and new procedures and application deadlines were developed in the first year of the City's existence.

Developer comments regarding the process should be answered by clear instructions and terminology explaining the requirements and the process that should be provided to make sure that both the City and the developer have a consistent understanding regarding what is expected, when it must be provided, and how to work together to allow innovative projects to fit in with the process. The Plan should also consider how to provide design flexibility for innovative projects that may be brought to the City by creative developers.



**(3) Neighborhood opposition to higher density** – More opposition to increased density (residential or non-residential) should be expected as neighborhoods seek to protect the investments of homeowners in their residences. When a project is presented by a developer, information should be provided that makes it easy for residents to understand exactly what is proposed, how it will be implemented, the appropriate sequencing of development, and what actions are included to minimize impacts on adjacent communities. The City should provide support to facilitate meetings between developers and homeowner groups and insist that meetings take place prior to creating “all or nothing” scenarios at the stage where the proposal is presented to the Planning Commission and the City Council. The maintenance of an open dialog between the developer and the community is to protect the intent and the policies of the Comprehensive Plan as expressed by the Future Development Plan element of the Comprehensive Plan and any adopted Zoning Overlays or Future Land Use Plans.

**(4) Local officials or neighborhoods are resistant to new or innovative development ideas** - The zoning process is continuously changing as new development ideas are created to allow development to move forward in accordance with local zoning and development codes and procedures. Techniques to support, encourage, or control development in one jurisdiction may require a different approach in another jurisdiction in order to enjoy success. The extent of control provided by an existing rule may be reduced by a new process. Gaining favor for innovative approaches often requires the education of the applicant, the planning staff, the appointed officials making up the Planning Commission, the Variance Review Board or the Zoning Board of Appeals, the elected Council, the plan and building inspection officers, and other interested citizens.

**b. Zoning/Regulations Opportunities**

**(1) Local interest in application of design with new development including sustainability** – The Comprehensive Plan and zoning, development and building code ordinances are inherently restrictive documents, but the City of Milton seeks to develop these in a way which will benefit the City, apply consistent application of the land use and development policies, and reassure developers that the process will be fair. If the restrictions are onerous, there may be opportunities which will allow more to be done with using design to limit a negative impact or to create a positive tone for the development that results in a “win-win” scenario in which all parties are satisfied.





#### **4. Preservation, Protection and Conservation**

##### **a. Preservation/Conservation Issues**

**(1) Not enough green space or parkland** – AS stated previously, there are three City-owned parks in Milton, but only one of those, Bell Memorial Park, is usable at the current time. It is operated by the Hopewell Youth Association as a youth baseball facility. Providence Park is waiting for the required environmental cleanup of pollution found at the site, and Birmingham Park is still undeveloped. Some elements of the Master Plan for Birmingham Park are needed prior to opening the area for public access. Both Providence Park and Birmingham Park provide a balance of active and passive recreation facilities.

The City must determine what are its priorities for parks and recreation? This includes determination if the development of the three existing parks or if the acquisition of additional green space to preserve the land before it is absorbed by development is a higher priority. The absorption of green space into residential developments since 2000 has been widespread, and many aesthetically-attractive parcels are being acquired for development, leaving only remnants for the community.

**(2) Disappearing rural scenery** – The maintenance of a rural lifestyle was identified as a major force in the creation of the City of Milton as the City was being hemmed in by new subdivisions in which former pastures and woodlands were being converted to home sites. While many of these developments are attractive and have left green space around the edges or along undevelopable streams, they do not provide the pastoral feel of their former appearance. The removal of old barns, outbuildings, orchards, and specimen trees to provide more housing sites exchanges the rural quality for a suburban image and feel resulting in the loss of the primary low-density “rural lifestyle” driver that encouraged people to move to the City.

**(3) Inadequate protection of historic resources** – There are not many nationally or regionally significant historic resources in the City of Milton although there are up to 200 or more sites that were identified in a historic structures database for the area including Milton. For most of its history, the area was a quiet backwater to major events. However, the City does have locally significant resources that are being lost or obscured by new development. Older churches and farmsteads are scattered throughout the City. Many of the churches include small cemeteries that have existed in the area since it was on the Cherokee frontier in the early 1800s. There also are some older houses, barns, and outbuildings that provide local landmarks that remain to identify former rural communities at Fields Crossroads, Bethwell and other locations.





The Crabapple Crossroads and Birmingham Crossroads communities are noted as neighborhood activity centers, but their appearances may be drastically changed if the existing context of the historic buildings and the boundaries of the defined activity centers are not protected along with the buildings. The context of location and setting also provide important elements regarding the successful preservation of historic structures.

**(4) New development locating in areas that should not be developed** - The community assessment identified several areas of woodlands and farmland that appear to be potential resources for the City to use as exemplar properties that demonstrate the City’s commitment to maintaining the rural nature of the City. However, the review of permit records identified that plans to develop some of these properties are already underway. Portions of Pritchard Mountain and some of the environmentally sensitive areas along the Little River and its tributaries are being developed as home sites on large lots. Although careful site development, preservation of specimen trees, design of structures to blend with sites, and strong standards to meet environmental requirements during construction can be used to ameliorate negative impacts, they cannot totally prevent the structure and its accompanying site development from intruding into and replacing wildlife habitat with human development. The ideal is to minimize intrusion through proactive mechanisms to protect critical wildlife areas, especially when planning, zoning, site plans, or design controls cannot completely block the intrusion of impacts created by development into these areas.

**(5) Too many trees have been lost to new development** – Clear cutting trees for new development may provide a short-term benefit for the builder in allowing access to the site for the house and for the septic field, but it also provides a long term disadvantage for the buyer. Trees can provide shade for the southern or western side of the house, reducing air-conditioning costs in the summer. Trees intercept water, store some of it, and reduce storm runoff and the possibility of flooding. Trees also moderate the heat-island effect caused by pavement and buildings in commercial areas resulting in cooler temperatures in the vicinity of trees.



The leaves on deciduous trees also absorb or deflect radiant energy from the sun during the summer and allow the sun to shine through in winter. The indirect economic benefits of trees are even greater providing lowered electric bills when power companies use less water in their cooling towers, build fewer new facilities to meet peak demands, use reduced amounts of fossil fuel in their furnaces and fewer measures to control air pollution. Communities also can save money if fewer facilities are required to control storm water. Although the individual savings to each person may be small, reductions in these expenses may save thousands of dollars for the community.

The “Milton Grows Green” Committee expresses the desire to designate Milton as a “Green Community” which includes protection of the trees, and a commitment to being a “city of trees”.



**(6) Environmental pollution problems & contaminated properties** - The protection of the existing quality of the stream systems in the Coosa (Etowah) River basin is needed to ensure that the water quality of the Little River and Lake Allatoona are not affected by development and/or erosion. The drought of 2007 resulted in severe restrictions in water use emphasizing the fact that the Little River, Chicken Creek and Cooper Sandy Creek in the Coosa River basin and Big Creek in the Chattahoochee River basin are at the uppermost extents of their drainage basins and that the Highway 9 corridor provides the general location of the ridge between the Coosa and Chattahoochee River watersheds.

The contamination at Providence Park has illustrated the significant environmental and financial costs of dealing with contaminated properties. In addition to the costs to Fulton County for the environmental cleanup, the issue has significantly delayed the City of Milton's proposed acquisition and use of the park's recreation facilities.

#### **b. Preservation/Conservation Opportunities**

The City has the opportunity to consider what rational standards should be applied to meet recreation needs for public parks and recreation facilities. The unique nature of the community and the large number of private equestrian operations, golf courses, and community pools and tennis courts provide significant existing facilities that probably should not be duplicated by public facilities. Even youth soccer fields have been developed by private interests on land that is unusable for residential development.

**(1) Birmingham Park** – The new park is undeveloped, and the planning process can be used to help define what local intentions for the area and whether its development should have a higher or lower budget priority relative to other recreation or local infrastructure needs. Should the Master Plan prepared by Fulton County be adopted to serve Milton, or are other opportunities preferred by the City.

**(2) Providence Park** - The site needs to be assessed to identify costs and responsibilities for cleanup, timing for the environmental process to be completed, and uses which can be accommodated on the site after its cleanup. Existing facilities may be reopened or replaced with different facilities once negotiations with the County are complete.

**(3) Flood Plains** – Protecting existing stream quality is a paramount component of the regional watershed protection plans. Undeveloped floodways provide space for water flow in peak rain events and a continuous corridor from their headwaters to the next larger stream may permit wildlife to travel from one area to another without cutting through human-occupied areas. These areas also add to the natural scenic vistas that are located throughout the City.





These areas and adjacent wetlands provide woodlands and vegetative cover for songbirds and small animals including amphibians, reptiles and mammals that are helpful to the diversity of the vegetation and which provide a filter for pollutants such as oil and gas droppings on roadways and driveways or along lakes and streams. Wooded stream corridors also provide visual barriers for adjacent development with increased privacy.

## **5. Mobility**

### **a. Mobility Issues**

**(1) Traffic problems (Very Important)** - There are few indications that public transit is sought after by the majority of Milton's residents. However, there are strong voices seeking walking trails, equestrian trails and bicycle trails as pointed out in the 2006 Milton Trail Plan. The most immediate local issue affecting mobility is congestion at many of the local intersections and the inadequate design of what were originally rural farm-to-market roads.



The existing roads were designed as rural pathways for light traffic in a rural environment. Poorly angled intersections may have been appropriate for horses and carriages but now are much more dangerous due to high speed automobile traffic with many more vehicles on the roads. Some of these intersections can be improved with local design changes to correct the angle to a 90-degree intersection where crossroads visibility can be significantly improved and where rights of way are more easily discerned. Signalization is needed at some of these intersections to prioritize traffic flow and allow different operations during peak hours when traffic flow is significantly heavier.

Rural road standards that are contextual to Milton are important. Typical rural highway sections emphasize wide rights of way and divided medians to segregate traffic and maintain higher speeds. Milton should adopt its own design standards to help preserve the more rural characteristics of the City. These standards may require some specific design motifs to enhance the existing character and create more elegant solutions for intersections, roundabouts, acceleration/deceleration lanes, peak period stormwater removal, etc.

**(2) No alternatives to using a car to go anywhere** – The rural nature of the community and the larger lots needed to accommodate rural-oriented lifestyles mean there is additional distances between houses than would be found in a more urban community. Therefore, the average trip between houses will inherently be longer and may require a vehicle rather than walking. Schools are more likely to have been developed where a larger parcel of land was available and are not be close to many of the City's residential neighborhoods requiring school buses or parents to transfer students between their homes and the school.



**(3) Not pedestrian or bike friendly** – The longer distances between houses and the few neighborhood centers in the City mean that sidewalks are a desirable asset within a residential neighborhood but that there is a much higher per-residence cost relative to a sidewalk in a more densely developed area. Alternative pathways are desired.

**(4) No public transit except at southern edge of the City** – The City has access to the MARTA bus systems through only two routes (Route 185 and Route 143) that give access to the Deerfield development and Windward Parkway. Access is not available to Milton’s northern or western areas, but previous citizen surveys have indicated that bus service to the City’s interior residential areas is not desired.

**(5) Not enough sidewalks and bike trails** – The City’s Trails Plan identified the need to provide pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle trails across the City and tie them into a regional network to allow improved non-automobile-oriented access for commuting and for recreation. Schools, parks, churches, and activity centers need to be tied together.

#### **b. Mobility Opportunities**

**(1) Use of context-sensitive design to maintain corridor characteristics** – Context-sensitive design for roadway corridors has received support from the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) and would allow additional access albeit more limited than widening the corridor. The intent is to reduce the congestion bottlenecks at intersections, curved sections of roadway, or at locations where better design can create significant improvements to traffic flow. Improvements can include a variety of measures from providing better clues to the driver about what to expect around the next bend to physical reconstruction to allow vehicles to travel safely at design speeds.

Roundabouts may be able to provide an alternative to signalization and maintain traffic flow in peak and off-peak hours with minimal delays

**(2) Localized activity centers concentrate development at specific locations** – The City has adopted the Fulton County overlays for Birmingham Crossroads, Crabapple Crossroads, and the State Route 9 Corridor as the most appropriate areas where the concentration of non-residential and higher density development can be accommodated. The Birmingham Crossroads Overlay District has a prescribed limit to density and the area in which land can be developed. The Crabapple Crossroads Overlay Area also provides limited opportunities for additional expansion and has been permitted for its maximum allowed capacity for commercial development although space does remain for office and residential development. Although the Highway 9 Overlay district is limited by existing development and traffic congestion, it offers the best opportunities for accommodating any additional concentrated development in the Deerfield mixed use development.

**(3) Funding and implementation of the Milton Trails Plan** – The City Council approved the City of Milton Shared Use Trail Plan prepared by the Georgia Institute of Technology City and Regional Planning Program in the fall of 2007. Funding is needed to implement the plan using federal, State, and local financing resources. An annual expenditure of approximately \$200,000 per year is



recommended by the Trail Plan. The Trail Plan provides a means for expanding mobility without increasing the pressures on the existing road network.

## **6. Economic Development**

### **a. Economic Development Issues**

**(1) Not enough innovative economic development taking place** – Milton does not have a large existing commercial economic base established within the boundaries of the City and must identify a unique combination of economic development forms to ensure minimal impacts on the existing residential, pastoral, and rural community while allowing the development of needed access improvements, stormwater drainage, environmental protection, and other elements of local infrastructure. The “rural” lifestyle community provides an ideal that is sought after, but appropriate decisions must be identified and supported to achieve a balance between community desires and the ability to achieve healthy changes without corresponding negative impacts.

The community may be willing to trade off some services normally provided by a “city” in exchange for maintaining the perceived benefits of lower density.

**(2) Not enough jobs or economic opportunities for local residents** – Milton is a bedroom community with most workers leaving the City to attend to work at locations in Roswell, Alpharetta, Atlanta, or other locations. Many of the people that work inside the City commute from other cities and unincorporated Forsyth, Cherokee, or other counties. The development or relocation of more high-paying jobs to locations in the City is desirable as a means to reduce traffic congestion and a method to balance the services needs of residential development with high-value, non-residential development that pays significant taxes with fewer demands for services.



Although this is not considered a primary goal of the City at this time, the development of a model to compare costs with perceived benefits will be part of the Community Agenda process to ensure that Milton gets the best information available upon which to identify required services for specific costs.

**(3) Not enough affordable housing** – The relatively high existing values for residential land and housing in the City of Milton create a higher average price for a home than in other cities nearby. The City is at the center point for intensive demand for luxury homes by well-paid executives that work in the northern Atlanta region and want a quasi-rural lifestyle relatively close to where they work.



The City's basic work force of teachers, police officers, clerical workers, and many of the personnel in the services jobs in the City provide important services, but the average housing prices in Milton may make it beyond their ability to purchase a local home once the existing resources are depleted. However, Cherokee and Forsyth Counties have substantial stocks of existing homes and there are a few locations within the City where the price of housing can be kept below the regional average (\$272,216).



Given the attractive nature of the community, the City needs to consider how it will change over the next 20 years as lifestyles and families change and how it can provide affordable housing that can accommodate all age groups and productive families within the City (or close by) at the end of the planning period.

**(4) Imbalance between location of available housing & major employment centers** – The City of Milton has one significant employment center in the State Route 9 Overlay district. Smaller employment centers are located at Crabapple Crossroads and Birmingham Crossroads, and there are scattered employment opportunities for a few personnel at the golf and country clubs and some of the equestrian farms located in the City and along State Route 9 in Forsyth County. The offices and healthcare and services facilities in Windward and other centers in Alpharetta and Roswell require much of the traffic generated in Milton to travel through the existing employment centers to the east and south.

Housing located closer to the centers of activity would be one means to reduce the trip length and the congestion in and around these centers. Also, if Cherokee and Forsyth County residents could be diverted to development along Georgia 400 in Forsyth County and Interstate 575 in Cherokee, they would not need to travel through Milton thus reducing the number of vehicles and some of the congestion on Birmingham Highway and on Hopewell, Bethany, and Arnold Mill Roads.



The development of a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) project in Forsyth County along Georgia 400 north of McGinnis Ferry Road should be considered as a potential asset to the City of Milton by reducing thru traffic.

## **b. Economic Development Opportunities**

**(1) Strong market for low density development with high value properties** – The City of Milton is the location of one of the strongest concentrations of high-income individuals in Georgia. The average per-capita income is significantly higher than Alpharetta or Roswell and signifies that the



Milton's location has attracted many wealthy individuals and heads of households to build their homes and live in Milton. Higher income levels of the residential population in Milton may be expected to mean that local residents may prefer to purchase more desired services rather than try to manufacture them locally. Higher disposable income may also allow local residents to purchase more recreation, restaurants, boutique and shopping center goods, and personal services.

Higher income levels also mean that the local population may have more resources to pay for some of these services as may be demonstrated in the number of local stables and golf courses. The survey of local residents and businesses identified by the Community Participation program may be helpful in determining what services are considered most important to the community and the services that are considered less important.

## **7. Financing**

### **a. Financing Issues**

**(1) Excessive cost of providing public services/facilities for new development** – Planning theory states that development on larger lots is assumed to have added costs per household required by the longer distances for the extension of water pipes, roads, driveways, electric and communications cables and other services. Financing options for the expansion of these services should consider how they affect the existing community and if the services can be extended at competitive rates with other communities that will allow homebuyers to determine if they are willing to accept the local tax rates.

There are no expectations or requirements for the City to provide all of the services. However, the Comprehensive Plan is required to identify whether the service is provided and if so, by whom?

**(2) Inadequate public facility capacity for attracting new development** – The City has no room available to add territory or expand the City limits in Fulton County, and legislative approval would be required to expand into an adjacent county. Therefore, financing public products and services cannot be increased by annexation, and there is very little room for expanding physical infrastructure within the City boundaries to attract new development or locate additional public facilities. Therefore, where opportunities exist for additional development, they should be examined in light of the limited growth policies desired by the City Council and the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.



**(3) Financial Institutions are resistant to new development ideas** – Most financial institutions are conservative institutions. They support the development market by making loans to builders and homeowners and are collecting profits to return to their investors or into the business. Many of these financial institutions are suffering from the significant over-construction of housing and other



development products provided since the mid-1990s and the increased numbers of foreclosures where investments did not pay off. In addition, many institutions are resistant to trying new ideas until they can see solid evidence that the market can absorb new development. Fortunately, the high-end market for construction of the more expensive homes has seen much less foreclosure, and the supply and demand for estates of \$1,000,000 or more does not seem to have been significantly affected (yet) by the housing crisis of 2007.

## **b. Financing Opportunities**

**(1) No pre-existing bureaucratic commitments with new City** – The City of Milton was created in 2006, and most of the employees are providing services on a contract basis. This allows the City to start defining financial needs on a “fresh page” without accepting pre-existing financial costs that may have been incurred by past decisions to delay local government costs to a later year that has now come due.

**(2) Financial model will help identify requirements** – A financial model is being prepared for use in the Community Agenda to help identify and compare the City’s anticipated revenue income for different mixes of land use type and development density. The basic model will use existing land use and development as the basis for making assumptions regarding existing property taxes, fees and other revenues to establish a per-unit-revenue in dollars for each land use and its average density. Cost information is more difficult to establish due to the very short history of the City of Milton, but some analysis that can be modeled through comparison with Fulton County statistics and the demand for services stated by the public and other stakeholders to be included in the Short Term Work Program.

Using the costs and benefits defined by the model, the Comprehensive Plan community participation process will form the basis for the “Vision” and the “Strategic Plan” for the City by establishing “What the community wants” and “What the community wants to prioritize.” The scenarios provide the alternatives to determine the City’s recommendations for various land uses as a percentage of the City’s future land uses and the timing for public works projects and expansion of public services.



The model will help identify what assumptions are sustainable and how the mix of land uses and development densities can be accommodated in a community that forms a limited part of a much larger region. However, the original priority of many residents is to continue to preserve the unique rural character of Milton.