

# **Guiding Quality Growth**

## **Making the Right Regulations and**

## **Using Innovative Methods**

### **Rockdale County's Salem Road Corridor**



**March 3, 2006**

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# “The Painful Truth”

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### OUR OPINIONS

## ‘Smart growth’ must go beyond talk to succeed

What’s so smart about “smart growth”? Plenty.

But to understand why, it’s important to examine the ongoing and unintended consequences of maintaining the status quo.

For years, residential and commercial development in metro Atlanta has expanded outward unchecked by man-made or natural boundaries. In the process more land was consumed as more roads and sewers were built to support all those shiny new homes, office parks and strip malls.

As Atlanta sprawled, people became more and more dependent on their cars, worsening traffic congestion and pollution. Because growth was neither controlled nor predictable, school systems that were already strained to the limit were forced to educate students in makeshift trailers.

These haphazard growth patterns have often been aided and abetted by outdated zoning codes that fail to account for the impact that private development can have on already overburdened public resources. In the heated race to compete for elusive tax revenues, municipalities often sacrifice the long-term interests of their communities for short-term gain.

And while this formula has been a boon for some real estate developers and their investors, it has also slowly eroded the region’s overall quality of life and now threatens its economic vibrancy.

The tenets of smart growth, which often include mixed-use communities, building more sidewalks, green space preservation and prudent mass transit investments, offer a partial solution to the mess. In fact, local business groups are starting to advocate smart-growth principles, echoing a message once voiced only by city planners and environmentalists.

The Regional Business Coalition, which comprises 16 chambers of commerce from 13

counties, represents a welcome example of this trend. The organization recently conducted a “Quality Growth Audit” that scrutinized zoning codes for 26 municipalities. It found that only 10 of those areas have adopted land-use rules and regulations that would allow willing developers the flexibility and guidance they needed to build better, more functional communities.

The audit hailed smart-growth policies that incorporate apartments above street-level shops and businesses, developments that encourage pedestrian traffic by requiring sidewalks on both sides of the street, and projects with diverse lot sizes that offer consumers a wider range of choices from townhouses to more traditional detached, single-family homes.

The prospective benefits of smart growth can be applied to older intown neighborhoods on the cusp of redevelopment as well as fast-growing suburban communities where residents are waking up to the hidden costs of sprawl.

Booming Rockdale County rated dead last on the coalition’s audit, mostly because the county’s zoning codes prevent smart-growth projects from being built in the first place. County officials now seem determined to change that and have designated two districts where higher-density, mixed-use developments that also preserve green space will not only be allowed but required.

Simply invoking the term “smart growth” does nothing. In principle and in practice, no single set of land-use policies works in every situation; those who enjoy the quiet seclusion of their cul-de-sac needn’t be frog-marched into a high-rise condo near a MARTA station.

But when done right, the approach offers alternatives to the one-size-fits-all development patterns that metro Atlanta has clearly outgrown.

“Booming Rockdale County rated dead last on the coalition’s audit, mostly because the county’s zoning codes prevent smart-growth projects from being built in the first place. County officials now seem determined to change that and have designated two districts where higher-density, mixed-use developments that also preserve greenspace will not only be allowed but required.”

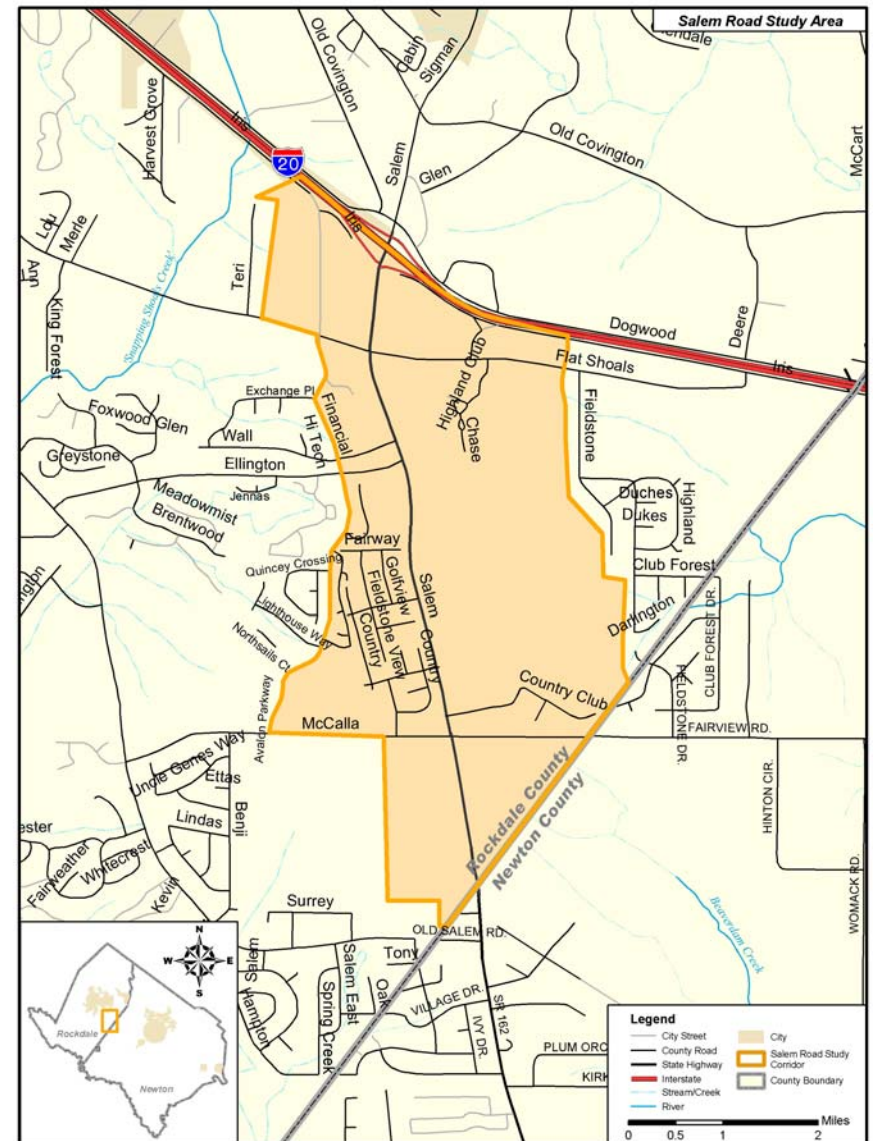


# Salem Road Study Area

## Why Salem Road?



- 3 square mile area
- 28,000 ADT – 2-ln SR162
- +30 yr.old single-family homes
- Abandoned strip centers
- Typical commercial strip center development and practices
- Corridor is just plain ugly!





# Salem Road Corridor Plan

## *Design Charrette*

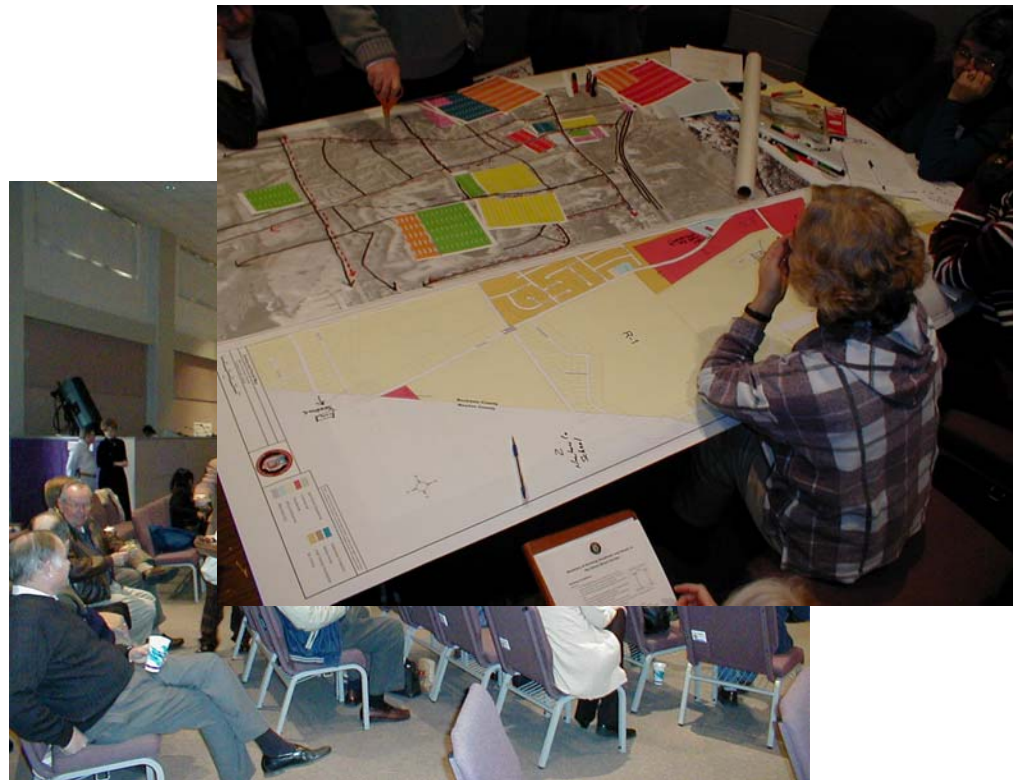


**January 24-25, 2003  
Grace Tabernacle**

# Salem Road Workshop Process

January 24 –25, 2003

- **Visual Preference Survey**
- **Transportation System**
- **Land Use**
- **Urban Design**
- **Master Plans**
- **Synthesis**



# Residential Preferences

**Want this...**



**Not this.**



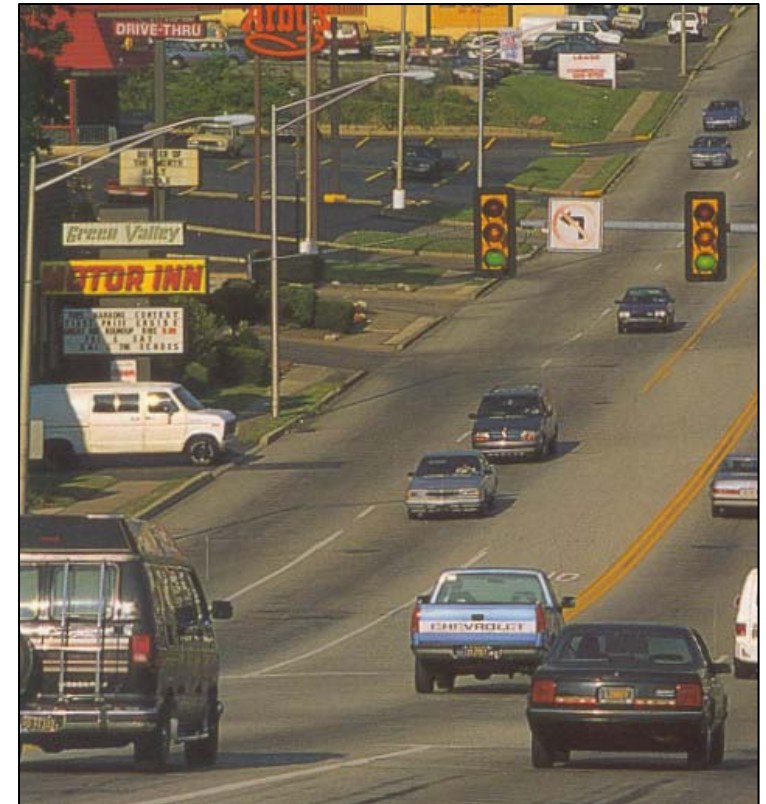


# Streets and Sidewalks

Want this...



Not this.



# Streets and Sidewalks

Want this...



Not this.





# Land Use Recommendations



- **Plan for a walkable community on Salem Rd.**
  - sidewalks connecting s/d's to businesses
  - public open space and greenway connectivity
  - screened and shared parking lots.
- **Identify neighborhood commercial nodes.**
- **Plan for new houses surrounding golf course while protecting existing natural resources and adjoining existing homes.**
- **Require open space conservation.**

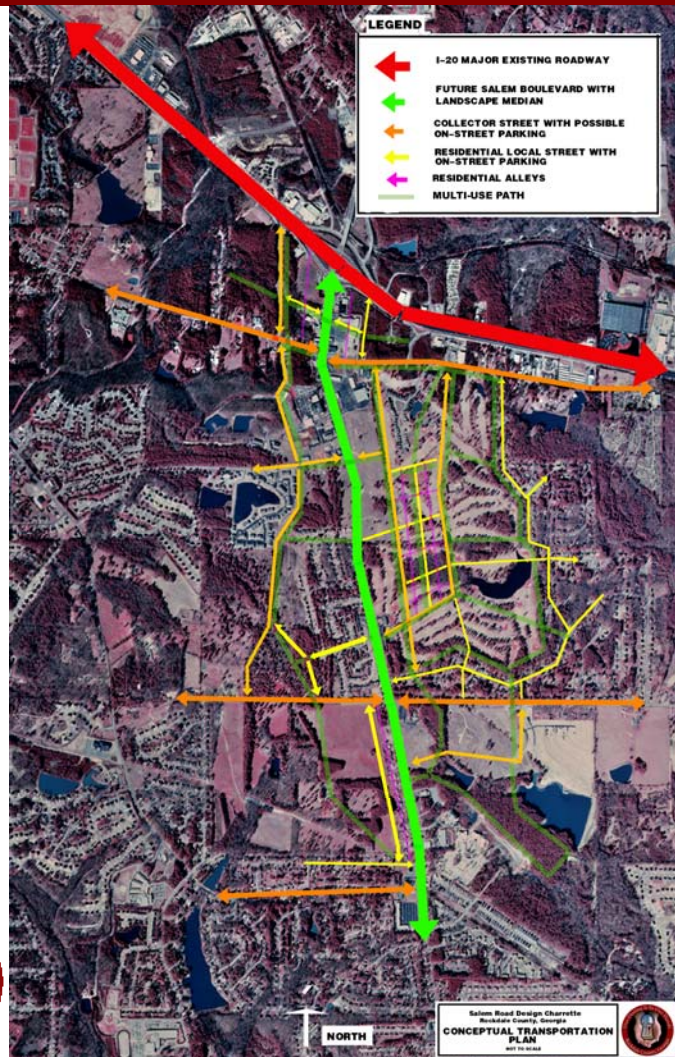
# Land Use Recommendations

**Detailed Site Plan  
Developed from  
Charrette input**





# Transportation Recommendations

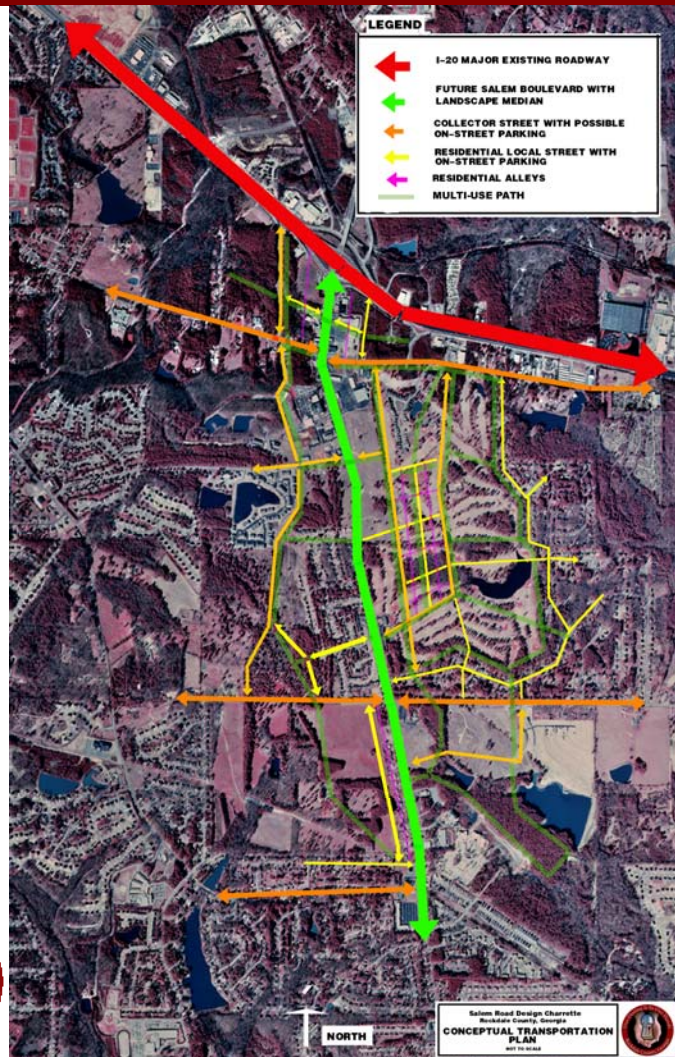


- Four lanes is enough on Salem Road!
- Need new parallel streets
- Use “Context-Sensitive Design” Standards – balance between safety and mobility utilizing design flexibility to meet needs of the community
- Incorporate multi-modal transportation system; sidewalks, greenspace and trails





# Transportation Recommendations (continued)



- Enhance neighborhood connectivity (through required trail interconnectivity and sidewalks and minimal use of cul-de-sacs)
- Require access management (reduce curb cuts)
- Mesh future transportation investments with land use and zoning districts
- Coordinate and solicit input from Newton Co. (MOU on SR162)



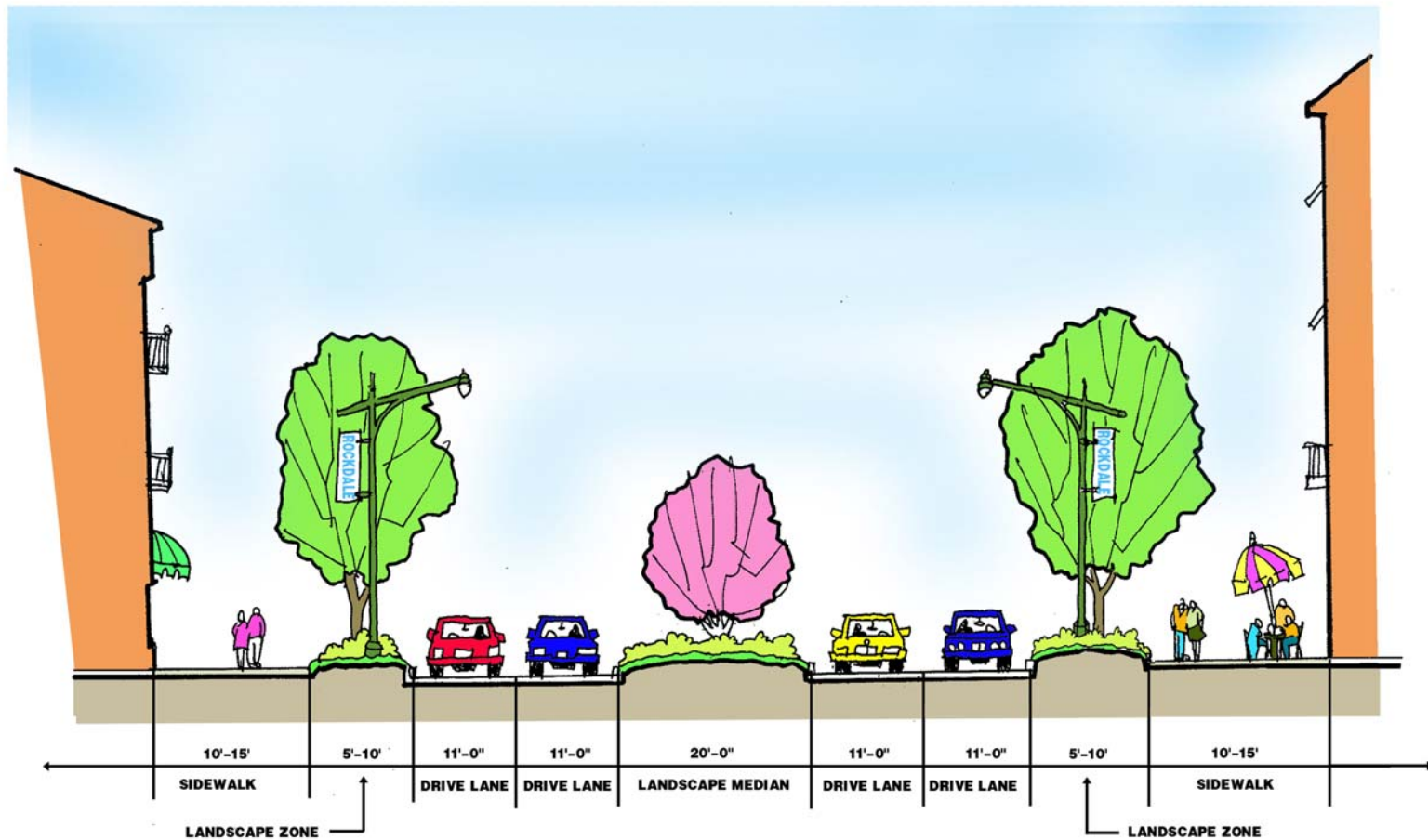
# VISION: Transform Salem Road...



..into a Walkable Street



# Street Design Standards



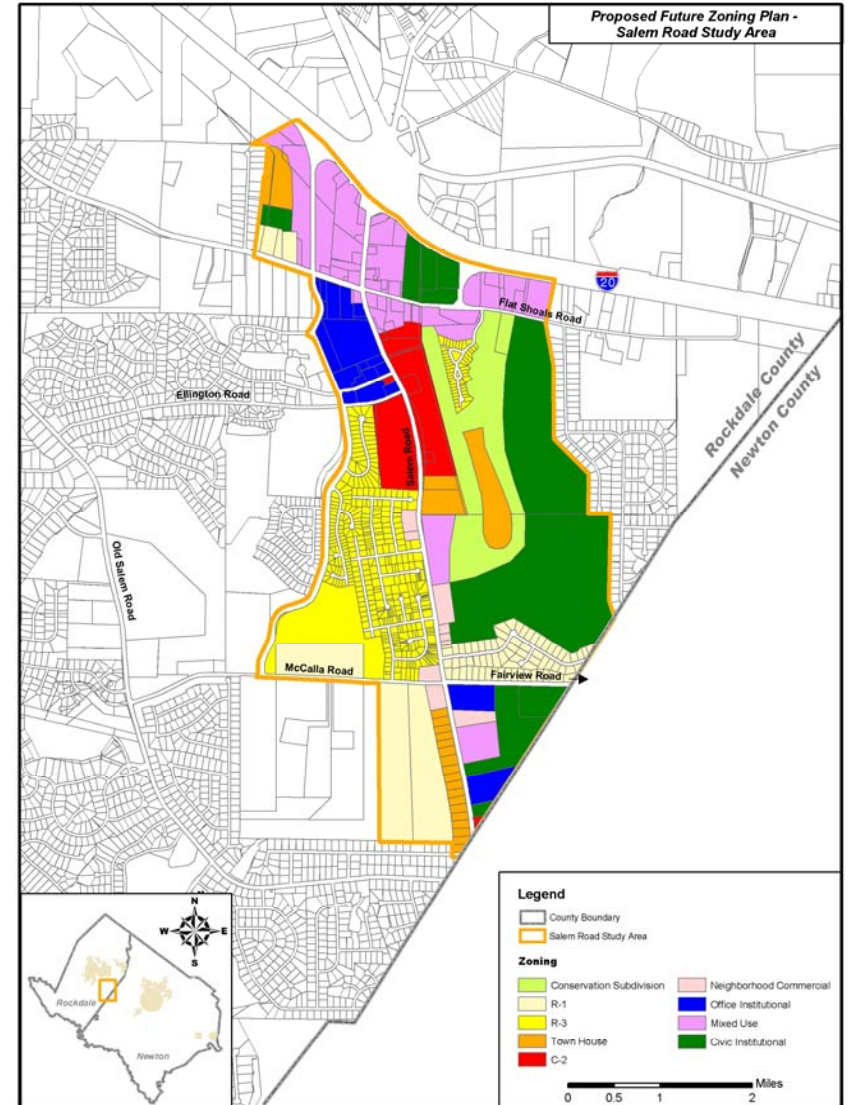
**SALEM ROAD "BOULEVARD"**





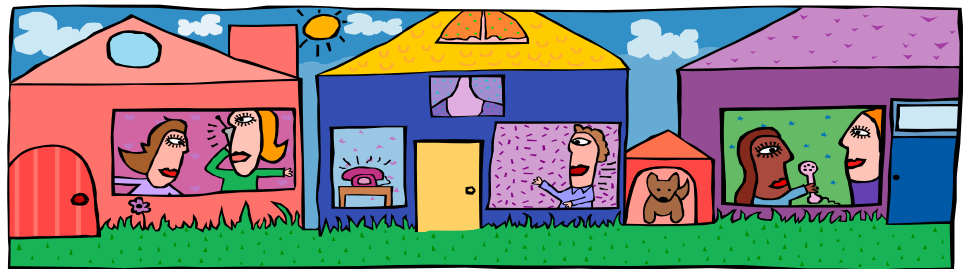
# Implementation Tools

- Interim Control Ordinance
- Overlay Zoning District with Design Standards
- New zoning districts and zoning map



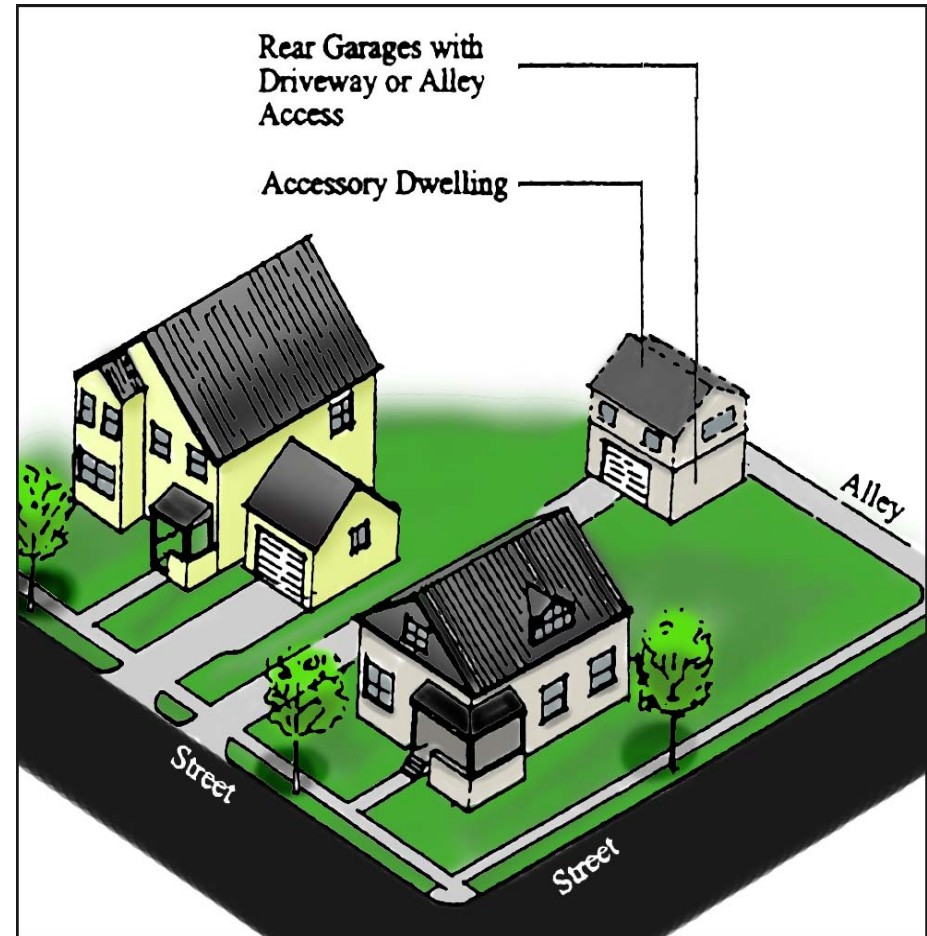
# Implementation Process

1. Enact Interim Control Ordinance (May 16, 2003 – May 16, 2004)
2. Incorporate Salem Road study recommendations in new Comprehensive Land Use Plan
3. Adopt Overlay District with Design Standards
4. Adopt new Zoning Districts
5. Rezone property to new Zoning Districts with Overlay (750 parcels)
6. Resume Development Permitting



# New Zoning Districts

1. Salem Road Corridor Overlay District
2. Conservation Subdivision District
3. Mixed Use Residential
4. Neighborhood Commercial
5. Mixed Use Development
6. Civic/Institutional



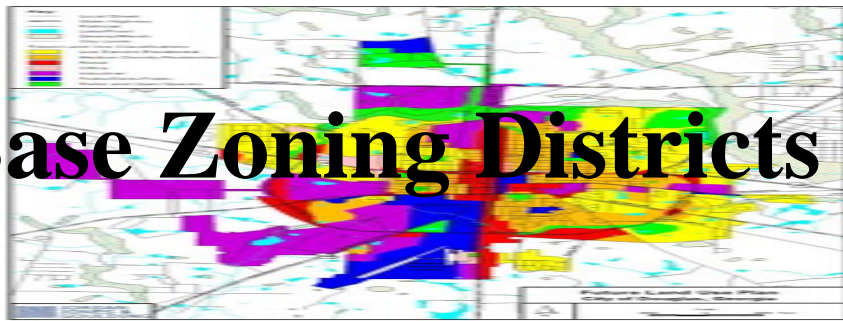


# What is an Overlay District?

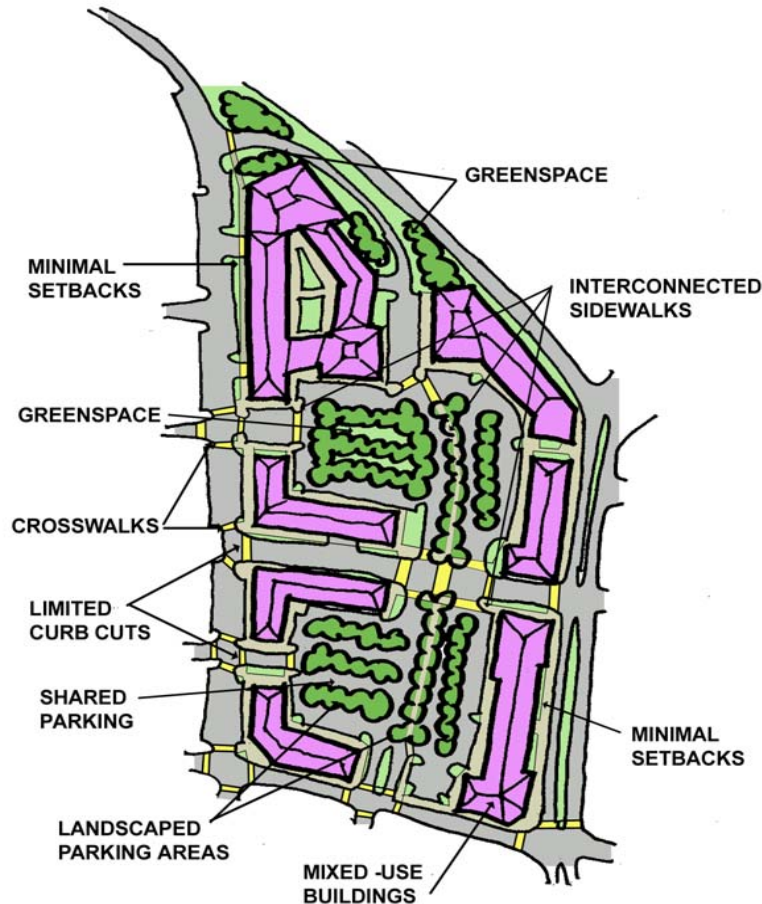
**Overlay Zoning District**

+

**Base Zoning Districts**



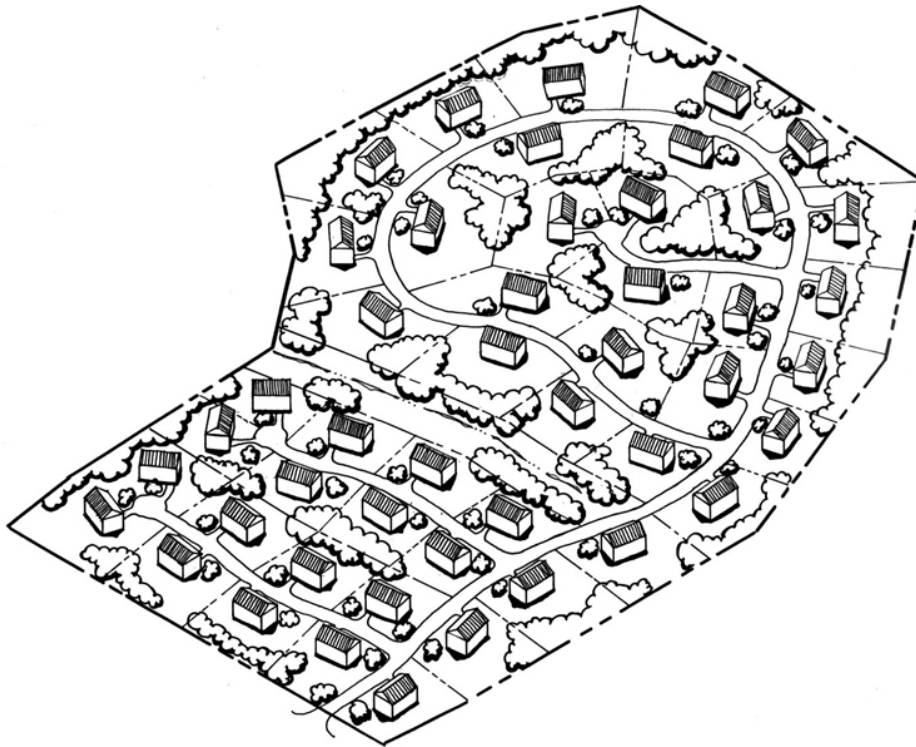
# What is in the Overlay District?



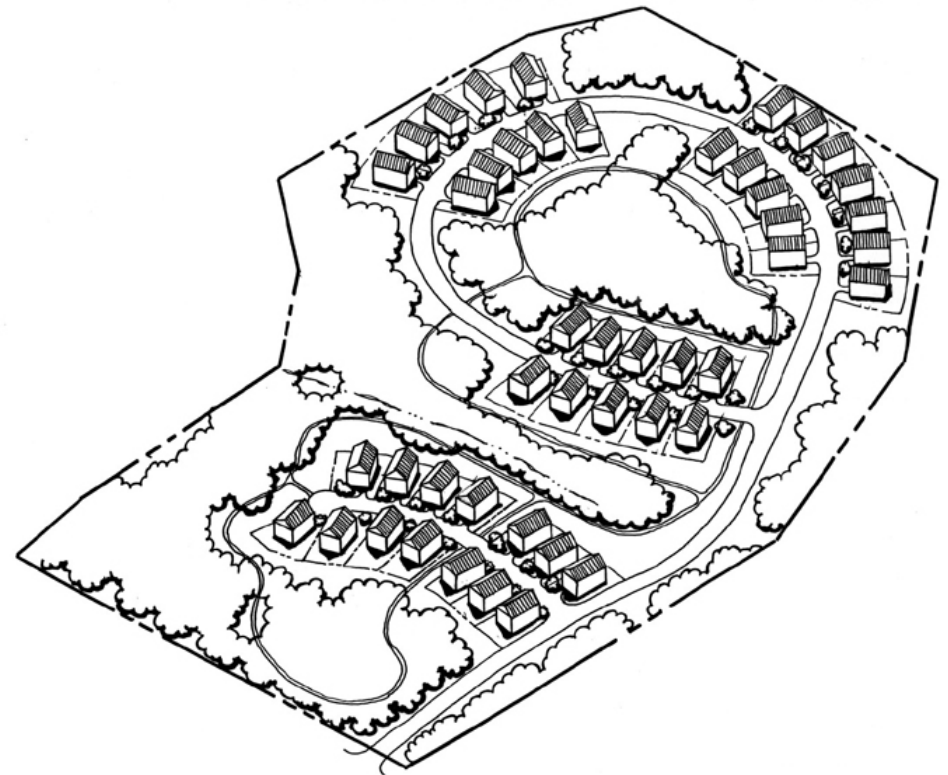
- Procedures
- Street standards
- Access management
- Sidewalks and trails
- Open Space standards
- Environmental standards
- Parking Standards
- Architectural standards

# Conservation Subdivision District

**Conventional Subdivision**



**Conservation Subdivision**





# Conservation Subdivision District



## Development Standards

- **Single Family Detached Units**
- **Minimum Open Space: 25%**
- **Base Density: 2.4 Units /Acre**
- **Bonus Density for > 25% Open Space**



# Mixed-Use Residential District



## Primary Uses:

- Townhouses
- Duplexes
- Single Family Detached
- Zero Lot Line Residential

## Supportive Commercial

(20% of total floor area)

- Convenience Retail
- Restaurant
- Day Care
- Bookstore
- Other Similar Uses



# Mixed-Use Residential District



## Development Standards

- **Residential Density:** 8 Units /Acre
- **Minimum Open Space:** 15%
- **Minimum/ Maximum Parking**





# Neighborhood Commercial District



**Primary Uses:** Convenience Retail, Banks, Restaurants; Professional Services

## Development Standards

- **Maximum Density:** 12,000 sq. ft. /Acre
- **Minimum Lot Size:** 1 Acre
- **Maximum Building Size:**
  - Ground Floor: 7,500 sq. ft.
  - Total: 15,000 sq. ft.
- **Maximum Bldg. Length:** 150 ft.
- **Maximum Front Yard Setback:** 40 ft.

# Mixed-Use Development District



## **Permitted Uses:**

**Retail, Commercial, Services, and Offices  
Single Family, Townhouse, and  
Multifamily Residential,  
(Min. 20 % residential floor area)**

## **Development Standards**

**Base Density: 20,000 sq. ft./ac (14-22  
units/ac)**

**Minimum Open Space: 15%**

**Maximum Bldg. Size: 25 - 150,000 sq. ft.**

**Maximum Bldg. Length: 250 ft./ 450 ft.**

**Maximum Front Yard Setback: 50 ft.**

**Minimum / Maximum Parking**

# Civic-Institutional District



## **Permitted Uses:**

**Public Buildings, Churches, Medical Offices, Hospitals, Education, Recr.**

**Supportive Uses** (15% of Ground Floor):  
**Restaurant, Flower Shop, Bookstore, etc.**

## **Development Standards**

- **Base Density:** 15,000 sq. ft./ Acre
- **Minimum Open Space:** 10%
- **Maximum Bldg. Length:** 150 ft.
- **Maximum Front Yard Setback:** 40 ft.
- **Minimum / Maximum Parking**





# Density Bonuses

## **Open Space** (minimum 30% open space required)

- 31-40% open space = 5 percent more lots/acre
- 41-50% open space = 10 percent more lots/acre
- Over 50% = 15 percent more lots/acre

## **Public improvements**

- 1 acre use for 1 acre dedicated/ improved for streets and multi-use trails



# Current Status of SRCO

- **Litigation**
- **BOC sticking by their principles!**
- **Citizens Advisory Committee (CSD process)**
- **5 developments in various stages of permitting process**
- **Newton Co/Rockdale cooperation**
- **2004 LCI application**
- **Dialogue with GDOT regarding Salem Road**
- **Corridor standards satisfy objectives of the Metro Atlanta Quality Growth Task Force**
- **Annexation issues!**
- **BOC – hard sell with “high density” residential component in MxD (14-22 units/ac)**



# Questions?

