

# Comprehensive Plan Update

2016

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## **“Remain Deliberately Rural”**

That is the vision for Chattahoochee Hills hammered out by residents in hundreds of meetings and adopted by the City Council in the 2011 Comprehensive Plan. That Plan outlined in detail how the residents wanted the city to preserve the city’s rural flavor while accommodating the kind of development that would support that goal.

Instead of developing tens of thousands of suburban lots that would consume the landscape and strain public resources, the city chose to adopt a system that would allow the same amount of development on a much smaller footprint while providing farmers and other landowners the opportunity to participate in the benefits of that development without selling their land.

More than three years of work by citizens, city staff, consultants, and elected representatives has resulted in all-new zoning and development regulations that implement this vision and provide for the permanent protection of the majority of the land in the city.

Most of the property in the city today is zoned RL, Rural. The RL district is, and will continue to be, a place of farms and forests, parks and fields, and rural single-family homes. Over the long term it will continue to make up the majority of the city’s land and to embody the rural character of the city.

In order to preserve the rural character of the RL district and the city as a whole, any intense development that comes to the city will take place in a Hamlet, a Village or a Town, where the developer will permanently preserve 60% - 70% of the land and hide most of the non-rural development behind undisturbed buffers. These developments will also contribute to the preservation of land outside of the Hamlet, Village, or Town boundaries by requiring the use of TDRs to increase their density.

TDR is short for Transferrable Development Right. Basically, it allows a property owner who wants to keep his or her property rural to sell off the right to develop that property to a developer who needs additional density in a Town, Village or Hamlet (or to a land bank that can hold those rights for sale to a future developer). The seller has then gained the economic benefit of the development while permanently preserving his or her property, and preserving the right to continue using it as they currently use it.

According to the 2011 Comprehensive Plan, the rural land and the mixed-use hamlets, villages, and town may be complemented by limited development in historic Crossroads Communities and an agricultural/Industrial area. The new zoning ordinance also brings with it the possibility of limited commercial development along South Fulton Parkway, hidden from view by trees or topography.

If the city can stay true to the vision expressed in the Comprehensive Plan, it will remain a unique and cherished place. It will be a place where the metropolitan sprawl stops and the rural way of life endures in permanently protected farms, fields, and forests. It will be a place where residents and visitors have daily contact with the natural world and access to needed services. And it will be a place where the quality of life and the value of property is not eroded by quick decisions for an easy dollar.

## Zoning Districts in the new Zoning

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**RL Rural District:** This is the new version of the current AG-1 zoning district. All the current rural uses are still allowed. Any further subdivision within this district will be limited to minor subdivision lots and Farmette lots.

**Minor Subdivision:** Any lot may be subdivided into no more than three lots as small as three acres. The fourth lot created must then be a Farmette lot.

**Farmette:** The subdivision of rural land into 20 acre lots. A Farmette subdivision of an existing lot may also include up to three minor subdivision lots.

**HM Hamlet District:** Hamlets are visually buffered from the outside and they permanently set aside at least 70% of their land as open space that will never be developed. They come in four forms:

**HM-LDR Low Density Residential Hamlet:** These are residential hamlets where the homes use individual septic systems. The minimum acreage required to create an HM-LDR hamlet is 29 acres and the average lot size is 1.5 acres.

**HM-MDR Medium Density Residential Hamlet:** These are residential hamlets that are more dense than HM-LDR districts and therefore will require some form of sanitary sewer system to be fully developed. 150 acres is the minimum district size and the maximum density is 0.8 units per acre. A very small amount of commercial development (5%) may be permitted.

**HM-MU Mixed Use Hamlet:** These are mixed use districts that must include both residential and commercial development, providing live/work/play opportunities for residents. The minimum district size is 250 acres and the baseline density is one unit per acre. Additional density may be acquired by preserving additional land outside of the district through the TDR program, up to a maximum density of 1.25 units per acre. 10% to 25% commercial development is required.

**HM-SD Special District:** These are special-use hamlet districts designed to give the City Council the ability to accommodate a special use that does not fit into the standard categories. HM-SD districts will include open space and buffering equivalent to other HM districts, but might allow for different beneficial uses.

**PC Parkway Commercial District:** These are very small districts that allow limited commercial development near the corners of South Fulton Parkway. They are buffered like the other districts and require 70% open space preservation.

**VL Village District:** These are larger mixed use districts that also include both residential and commercial uses. The minimum district size is 1000 acres, the minimum density is two units per acre, and the maximum density (which *requires* use of the TDR program) is 3.3 units per acre.

**TN Town District:** These are even larger mixed use districts that include both residential and commercial development. The minimum district size is 3000 acres, the minimum density is two units per acre, and the maximum density (which *requires* use of the TDR program) is 4 units per acre.