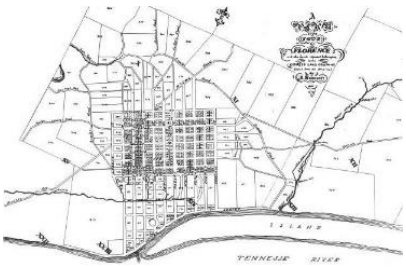
FLORENCE FIRST

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY IN PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

A Comprehensive Plan for Florence, Alabama

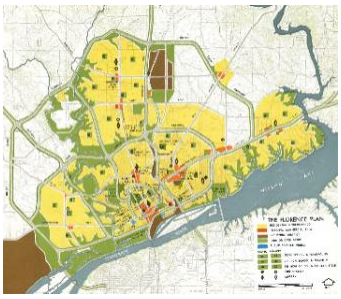
Comprehensive planning provides a systematic approach to thinking about a citywide vision for the future, setting long-range goals for the physical character of the city and devising policies, programs, and projects to move the city toward fulfillment of those goals.

I. Historical Perspective



In August of 1817, on a trip to determine the layout for a military road connecting Nashville, TN, with New Orleans, LA, General John Coffee noted the physical geography of an area on a hill overlooking the Tennessee River as ideal for commerce and living. General Andrew Jackson would arrive in December and he too was taken by the beauty and functionality of the area. Coffee, Jackson, and future Supreme Court Justice John McKinley formed the Cypress Land Company. General Coffee was charged with creating the master plan and hiring Italian surveyor Ferdinand Sannoner, who impressed the trio so much that they gave him naming rights for the new "City on the Hill." Sannoner chose "Florence," paying homage to his favorite city in Italy. Cypress Land Company inked the charter for Florence on March 12, 1818.

As Florence grew over the next century and a half, the patterns of logical streets and neighborhood-style development continued to be reflected in our master planning efforts. The mid-1960s brought city planning to the forefront as Florence established its first department dedicated to ensuring the senior city of the quartet would move forward in an orderly, citizen-engaged manner.



The City of Florence has established itself as a leader locally, regionally, and across Alabama in thoughtful planning for the built and natural environment. The citizens of Florence continue to embrace planning and community development with the understanding that while growth is inevitable, their acceptance of all growth at any cost is not required. Education and outreach efforts through citizen participation, open door policies, and common sense governance serve as a reminder that planning allows communities to "get what they want" from growth rather than "take what they get". Solid planning yields choices.

II. Introduction to the Plan

The purpose of municipal planning is to provide communities with the means to manage change. In the urban setting, change is inevitable. It is a decision making process that can be compact and orderly when occurring with planning, but sprawled and uncoordinated when occurring without planning.

The City of Florence Comprehensive Plan recognizes the value of the city's underlying natural resource base and its history and traditional community values. The plan will guide development by balancing growth and conserving critical natural resources. The city's activity centers concentrate on diverse functions at appropriate locations, structured by citywide open space and

accessibility systems. Land uses located, planned, and designed to be compatible with this system of critical environmental resources will be supported and encouraged to provide opportunities for creativity, efficiency, stability, image, and diversity.

The Florence Comprehensive Plan is an attempt on the part of city officials to:

- *Illustrate the ways in which the city should develop over time.*
- *Provide a guide to development decisions and a basis for making and revising zoning and other regulations regarding type, intensity and timing of development.*
- *Ensure that as development occurs, the city's most significant natural features are preserved or enhanced.*
- *Protect the property values of all citizens.*
- *Provide a pattern for land use and development that strives for a sustainable community with a diversified tax base to support desired facilities and services.*
- *Coordinate land use recommendations with those for infrastructure improvements.*

In response, the City Council, Planning Commission and the citizens of Florence intend to continually refer to this document in order to:

- *Visualize what may be reasonably expected to occur in Florence by providing some assurance regarding development investment decisions.*
- *Review and evaluate development proposals to test the fit with Florence's vision and expectations.*
- *Review rezoning requests as an essential part of determining appropriateness.*
- *Provide guidance regarding adoption of development regulations and amendments.*
- *Identify and provide advisement regarding priorities for infrastructure investments such as roads, greenways, parks, schools and other public facilities.*

A. Intent of the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan illustrates and provides an overall strategy for how Florence intends to shape itself over time. The city has prepared this plan as a guide to making decisions regarding land use, development and conservation, zoning and capital improvements.

The plan is also intended to help Florence residents, property owners, merchants, builders and developers invest in the city by providing a reasonable expectation of the city's future. Throughout the planning process, Florence has aimed to inform and guide decisions that will help to bring about the desired future state of the city. The plan is long-range, general, and focused on physical development. It is meant to be a guide to decision making. Consequently, residents today may be assured that the plan is a living document to be updated as needed to maintain its relevance even as circumstances change.

B. Using the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan combines vision, maps, development policies, and growth, development, and conservation guidelines. It provides a framework for guiding public and private decisions

affecting Florence's growth, development, and redevelopment. The plan is based on the community's vision for its future - a long-term vision that may not be achievable in the lifetime of those drafting the plan or even the next generation. Nevertheless, the plan looks ahead, focuses on the city's physical form, and strives to shape the development of public and private properties within Florence's planning area.

C. Implementation, Monitoring, and Updating the Plan

As noted earlier, the plan provides a general, long-range guide to future development to assist public officials and private citizens in making investments that may have long-term implications for the community. The plan must be continuously monitored and renewed as physical, social, political, and market changes occur.

The plan will be implemented by developers and other private citizens, city staff, the Planning Commission, other boards and commissions, and the City Council. Significant public actions supporting plan implementation will include adopting, revising, and enforcing various parts of the city's growth management system: development regulations, the capital improvement programming process and its relation to the city budgeting system, and decisions about the appropriateness of development proposals. Guidance provided by this monitoring and renewal process will assist the city in refining and detailing the Comprehensive Plan by considering amendments as needed.

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a living document, evolving and growing in response to changes in public values and to market and physical conditions. Only through continuing use, evaluation, detailing, reconsideration, and amendment can the plan fully serve Florence, and only then can the people of Florence use it wisely as a creative tool as they seek to achieve its comprehensive vision for the community.

III. Florence Development Concept

Comprehensive planning provides a systematic approach to developing a citywide vision for the future, setting long-range goals for the city's physical character, and devising policies, programs, and projects to achieve those goals.

Florence's choice is not one of growth vs. no growth. The city has become attractive and desirable, attracting more residents, visitors, and private investment each year. The choice, then, is how development should be channeled in a manner compatible with the vision the people of Florence have set for themselves and their community. This is the role of Florence's Comprehensive Planning process.

A. Citizen Dialog

The focal point of this process in Florence is a dialog between citizens and elected and administrative officials to reach a consensus on policies, programs, and projects relating to that physical character and the city government's responsibilities and areas of influence.

Citizen dialog is continuous and cumulative. It occurs in many different forms at different times in different situations, for example:

- *Town hall-style meetings*
- *Public meetings*

- *Public hearings*
- *Surveys*

Specific themes tend to emerge when soliciting comments and suggestions from Florence residents. A summary of the main points is provided, including assets, issues, outside forces, and reasons for choosing to live and work in Florence.

1. Assets

Residents present very positive attitudes about Florence. The small city atmosphere and leadership position relative to other cities in the Shoals are often touted. The local school system, number and variety of local churches, parks, and open space resources are praised.

Florence's "hometown" feeling is very important to residents. Downtown is well cared for and thought of, and its attractive condition and consistent public and private investments provide a clear indication that Florence takes pride in its central core. Visitors are immediately impressed with the city's historic districts and the presence of the University of North Alabama and the medical center at the edges of downtown.

Florence is a river city with a port and industrial facilities on the Tennessee River. It also has Wilson Lock and Dam, one of TVA's multi-purpose installations. Immediately downstream is the Wheeler Lock and Dam, with Pickwick Lock and Dam upstream. Additionally, the diversification in the industrial park on the northern side of the city is noted.

2. Issues

On the other hand, participants in the Town Meeting were clear that work remains to bring the city up to the standards they would like to enjoy throughout their hometown. For example, despite its overall quality, the city lacks clearly defined, attractive gateways and corridors from its edges into downtown and the university. There are structures in disrepair and too many vacant homes, businesses, and properties, concentrated primarily in the older parts of the city to the east and west of downtown. Sprawling development to the city's northwest side, while gaps remain available for infill and reinvestment, is an issue. The lack of physical access to West Florence, one of the traditional lower-income parts of the city, is also a problem.

Florence has a good road and street system, but industrial access and heavy traffic on certain roadways were cited as an issue. Participants noted the lack of sidewalks and facilities suitable for bicycles in many areas. They also noted the lack of adequate senior and youth activity facilities. Despite the city's leadership and success in bringing major conference and meeting facilities to the Shoals, no major indoor event facilities remain.

3. Outside Forces

There are always factors not subject to local control—forces that operate at county, regional, state, and national levels—that affect every community, each in its own way. That is certainly the case with Florence. Participants noted the lack of coordinated planning among the several cities in the Shoals area and the lack of control over highways under the Alabama Department of Transportation jurisdiction.

The participants were concerned about national and regional demographic trends, including the aging of the population in general. They cited the growing movement of retired people to the Shoals area, the impending growth of retirees from the "baby boomer" generation, and the greater employment opportunities in other areas that are drawing their younger people away from the area.

Announcements of new or expanding industries and businesses are common in the Shoals and its surroundings. Certainly, not all those to be employed as a result of such investment decisions will choose to live or shop in Florence. Nevertheless, out-of-area forces are important for this community, which should be prepared with a balanced plan for growth and development.

Residents are concerned about the potential impacts of growth and development—and the influx of new residents—not only on the sense of community they enjoy but also impacts on the city's land resources and physical environment, utilities such as water and sewer systems, civic and cultural facilities, schools and public safety facilities.

4. Why People Choose Florence

Location, accessibility, and open space are not the only opportunities afforded by Florence. The list grew quickly when those at the Town Meeting were asked to share their reasons for living, working, or investing in Florence. Their responses can be organized into three groups:

First, Florence is a small city with all the positive, personal attributes associated with that status—hometown pride in heritage, traditions, and safety—buttressed by such intangibles as strong personal values and a relaxed attitude toward the pace of life.

Second, the city provides a high quality of life in an affordable, pleasant, clean environment with a gentle climate. Florence is an affordable, safe place to live, work, and invest. Recreation and medical attention are nearby.

Finally, some residents reported moving to Florence because of their jobs—they have lived elsewhere and prefer where they are now. Others were born here or came here (and remain here) because they found it a good place to raise their families.

B. Citizen Vision for Florence

Building from the discussions of assets, issues, outside influences, and the reasons people are drawn to the city, the Town Meeting participants were asked to envision Florence as they would like it to be a decade or so from now. Following a few moments to think about those desired future conditions, each person was asked to share one significant physical aspect of that future community that is absent from Florence as it exists today. The responses are organized into several types but not presented according to priority.

First, local people want a unified vision for the city—an overall strategy for achieving their own, individual visions of the future. In accordance with such a strategy, the city would utilize all its resources to create and seize upon a variety of opportunities. Florence would have legible, welcoming entrances and an improved image overall, including significant infill and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized lands in the older sections of town.

Second, local people want development organized and served by the city's "green infrastructure." They want the city to be more focused than scattered or sprawled along the main roads. Most daily

commercial needs would be met close by. Residential growth would be organized as neighborhoods rather than merely as subdivisions. Growth would be channeled to balance expansion with the infill of vacant properties bypassed as the city has grown in the past few years. Mixed-use village centers of various sizes would serve neighborhoods, the city, and the region.

Third, the significant open spaces now enjoyed by city residents at arm's length, so to speak, would grow in number and size even as they become more accessible. Downtown would continue to be upgraded to remain the heart of the community, and the university would become an integral part of the city's life. Adjacent land uses would be compatible, requiring an expanded development management system with systematic code enforcement to include design review and architectural guidelines.

Fourth, Florence would be even easier to get around in and to get to—with access to an Interstate highway. It would be a truly walkable city, with upgraded sidewalks within and between neighborhoods and nearby commercial centers. Greenways and trails would interconnect parks and, recreation areas and schools. Much of the city's traffic congestion would be resolved through selected street improvements and access management on key collector streets and arterial routes. There would be public transportation opportunities.

Fifth, Florence would become more of a city for people "to come home to," with more significant employment opportunities for all ages and the ability to grow and maintain an extended family nearby over the generations. There would be fewer vacancies, more diversity of entertainment and restaurants, and more variety and a sense of focus on commercial development. There would be an indoor arena or civic center for significant events to complement the city's ability to host conferences.

C. Major Elements of the Concept

Creating and seizing upon opportunities community-wide begins with the city's core and major institutions and activity centers. It builds on the overall image of the city and the value of its physical setting. The strategy places commerce, industry, recreation, and institutions in locations accessible to people living and working in the community and its trade area, as appropriate. It accounts for the need to improve accessibility of all kinds while protecting the city's traditional streets and continuing to build accessibility networks. Moreover, the strategy focuses on upgrading the city's civic and recreation facilities and expanding its public safety facilities and services.

The development concept builds upon the collective vision for Florence by enhancing the physical organization of the city with a series of activity centers that support, and are supported by, the city's neighborhoods. The various types of activity centers—commercial, industrial, civic, institutional, and recreational—included in this concept are intended to serve as magnets for activity and development to support the city core and the residential neighborhoods of Florence in ways that will positively affect the quality of life, the natural environment, and the local and regional transportation networks.

The significant elements of the concept are:

- *An overall global strategy will guide planning and design for the development and conservation of Florence.*

- *Florence will be a legible city. Its edges and districts will be transparent, and visitors can find their destinations quickly. Gateways to the city will be well-defined, and the main corridors through town will reflect an appropriate overall image.*
- *Downtown will remain the acknowledged city center and home to its best retail and office addresses, as well as the civic heart of the community.*
- *Sweetwater will be developed into a regional entertainment district.*
- *The University of North Alabama will continue to be an essential partner with the city in its growth, development, and conservation even as it is recognized and supported as an integral part of the Florence community.*
- *Neighborhoods across the city will be planned, designed, and built to provide a strong sense of place and focus. They will display the positive results that may come from a high degree of interaction and communication among residents and their elected officials.*
- *The city will have a plan and program to annex adjacent territory that supports its planned image, health, safety, and welfare.*
- *The Comprehensive Plan will guide decision-making by managing development and conservation planning and design using an overall system of regulation and public investment.*
- *The city's commercial development will be organized chiefly into activity centers at or near logical intersections of arterials, collector streets, and corridors designated for such uses. Access to all arterial and collector streets will be managed carefully to conserve their capacity.*
- *Industrial development will be directed primarily to the existing industrial park and toward the redevelopment of sites used previously for industrial purposes.*
- *Residential development, supported by neighborhood centers, will be encouraged toward vacant property and infill and redevelopment sites within the West Side and East Florence to take advantage of existing infrastructure.*
- *Northwest Shoals Community College will be encouraged and assisted to expand to provide broader educational opportunities to students from the regional trade area to prepare people with entry-level job training and encourage them to continue with higher education.*
- *The city's water and sanitary sewer systems will be extended to support growth and development in all planned community areas.*
- *Public safety facilities will be expanded and located to meet the needs of a growing population.*
- *Arterial and collector streets will be upgraded to meet the needs for mobility and accessibility while conserving public resources through careful management.*
- *Improvements to selected intersections and pedestrian crossings will upgrade the quality and capacity of the city's street system.*

- *The city's pedestrian network will be expanded by constructing sidewalks to provide access between neighborhoods and nearby activity centers and a greenway and trail system to interconnect neighborhoods with the city's schools and significant park and recreation facilities.*
- *The city's "green infrastructure," consisting of its park and recreation system, in combination with the river and the city's lakes, ponds, streams, and floodplains, augmented by steeper slopes and significant portions of its tree cover, will be conserved and respected by the development management system.*
- *The city's park and recreation system, including passive and active parks and outdoor recreation facilities, will be enlarged, expanded, and focused on the needs of neighborhoods to meet the needs of the city's growing population.*
- *Florence will have an indoor Arena/Civic Center to meet local needs and to draw participants from the region to the heart of the Shoals.*

D. Conclusion

The strategic development concept is designed to capitalize on the spirit of the people of Florence, their history, and their successes. The intent is to capitalize on the city, to build upon its traditions embodied in Downtown Florence and in its institutions, in combination with the physical advantages of the city's location and setting. The concept gives physical expression to a consensus citywide vision and provides a general, overall framework for the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use and Transportation elements.

IV. Major Development Components

Planned overall development patterns for Florence are composed of several major components, all supported by and coordinated with plans for the city's transportation system and other infrastructure. *Activity centers* are nodes or concentrations of people, activity, and development that should affect urban form, environmental quality, and the transportation network in a positive way. Residential *neighborhoods* surround and support these activity centers and should be planned, designed, constructed, and maintained to do so in ways that balance development and conservation and provide places to live. The overall, community-wide balance of population and land consumption should be structured by and compatible with the city's *green infrastructure* of critical environmental resources.

To convert the Strategic Development Concept to a future pattern of land use and development, Florence has strategically focused population concentrations upon commercial and employment centers, supported by residential neighborhoods and interspersed with and structured by green corridors, all interconnected by a variety of accessibility options that will require less automobile travel, provide better opportunities for future transit, and decrease adverse environmental effects. The city intends that development should be planned, sited, and designed to be compatible with the city's green infrastructure as a first step in providing for development creativity, efficiency, stability, image, diversity, and control.

A. Green Infrastructure

Florence and its surrounding area enjoy a wealth of natural resources critical to human well-being, whether the particular resource affects the economy, overall quality of life, or the health and safety of residents. These resources vary from place to place around the area, but they have one thing in common: as they are surrounded, diminished, or depleted, the Florence community suffers.

Natural resources have limits and development decisions typically affect far more than the property owner and the immediate neighborhood. The type and intensity of development ultimately affect the surroundings. Some land uses are inherently incompatible with others, and many development decisions, once made, are practically irreversible.

Depending upon the approach to development, the land itself can present varying opportunities and hazards. For example, steeper slopes may provide opportunities for views but may also be challenging to build on. In combination with erodible soils, such slopes can be hazardous. As floodplains are filled in and built upon, flooding is shifted to other locations, and little can be done to eliminate the problem. Once cut, forests may take decades to grow, but they may return. However, prime agricultural soils paved over are removed from production forever, and extinct species cannot be replaced.

Consequently, Florence's public officials and citizens take the quality of the natural environment seriously. As part of the planning process, they have carefully reviewed the mutual impacts of development and natural resources on one another for purposes of protection, production, health and safety, and parks and recreation. They have also considered how these natural resource opportunities form a logical green infrastructure of open space and natural resource areas that may provide a framework or structuring system to organize, locate, and interconnect urban development.

1. Green Infrastructure Components

One of the essential foundations of the Florence Development Concept is that healthy green infrastructure is critical to the community's continued quality of life. The city's green infrastructure is not and will not be simply the land and water areas left over after all the development and building is done. What is required is a guided, sensitive balancing of conservation and development.

The first step is to discern the pattern of the city's green infrastructure and its constituent parts—the resources, sites, and areas that may be critical to the community. These are the environmental conditions associated with surface water, slopes, public and semi-public parks, and open space.

Florence's open spaces - which may appear to be simply the city's "undeveloped" lands - include many vital resources to the community's character and well-being. Others may appropriately be set aside for health and safety reasons, managed production of farms and forests, parks and recreation, and protection or preservation. The pattern illustrated on the Green Infrastructure map generally depicts these resources and places.

Surface water resources are the Tennessee River, Shoal and Cypress Creeks, and other streams, plus small ponds, all noted in dark blue, scattered across the city. Several of these surface water resources have associated areas that are often wet and others that are intermittently flooded. The map indicates wetlands in a light green and floodplain areas in a light gray (those mapped are so-called "100-year floodplains" or areas with a 1% chance of flooding in any given year). Encroachment into floodplain areas reduces the flood-carrying capacity of the drainage system

and increases flood heights upstream and scouring from stormwater downstream. The floodway is the stream channel and adjacent portions of the floodplain that must be kept free from encroachment to allow the 100-year flood to be carried without substantial increases in flood heights.

Steep slopes are not common in Florence, and few may actually preclude development. Nevertheless, the impact of slopes on safety and construction costs increases with steepness and soil erosion. Thus, increasing slope steepness should raise what might be considered "green flags" to property owners and city officials alike as they consider proposals for development and construction in the areas mapped in light green.

Florence has several major parks and recreation areas, indicated on the green infrastructure map in dark green. Many incorporate or are adjacent to some of Florence's most important water resources. Others include small yet nevertheless significant areas of steep slope.

2. Green Infrastructure Policies

a. Conserve green infrastructure and landscape form

The river's edge, natural woodlands along all of the city's watercourses and the rural landscape within and surrounding Florence are some of its greatest assets. The city hosts rather diverse landscape features. Streambeds, wooded stream banks, and floodplains are linear elements of the landscape that should be conserved. Development should be planned and arranged within the landscape.

b. Organize development to capitalize on critical open spaces

The city's most important and scenic locations should be reserved for public open space. These places and their interconnections should be accounted for as part of a citywide open space network. Once key areas are selected, appropriate public uses should be determined—be they greenways, community parks or regional parks. These should be linked together insofar as possible into an overall citywide open space system, and development should be planned and designed so that buildings look into these areas rather than back up to them.

B. Activity Centers

Significant nodes or concentrations of people, activity and development are designated in this plan as *activity centers*. Each of these centers should be located, planned and designed to relate to, support and positively affect urban form, environmental quality, adjacent residential neighborhoods and the transportation network in a positive way.

1. Activity Center Characteristics

Activity centers come in a variety of types and sizes with the following characteristics:

a. Anchor or center of activity

The center contains some activity or function for which it is primarily, integrally known in the region, community or neighborhood, as appropriate.

b. Compact, densely developed core

There is a relatively high density of development of the types essential to the character of the place, with greater density of development toward the center and less toward the edges.

c. Internal vehicular circulation

Once having arrived by vehicle at most any location within the center, a motorist may, without undue effort or extraordinary wayfinding abilities, visit most any other location, on the same side of the major street, without having to re-enter that street.

d. Pedestrian accessibility

The place is readily accessible by pedestrians from surrounding areas without exertion of undue effort or extraordinary traffic-dodging abilities.

e. Pedestrian oriented (overall)

The place demonstrates through pedestrian density throughout that it was planned and designed with the overall needs of pedestrians given priority over those of motorists and automobiles.

f. Positive sense of place

The average person has a good feeling about the overall character of the center - the overall image of the place and its relation to the surrounding environment, feelings of safety, sense of arrival and departure.

g. Vehicular accessibility

The center is readily accessible by motor vehicle to any licensed driver without having to evidence extraordinary driving skills.

h. Visual coherence

The average person senses that things fit together in the center—signage, landscaping, the way the parking supports getting to one's destination, the way most of the buildings seem to fit together.

i. Well-defined edge

It is clear to everyone where the place begins and ends without having to resort to walls or signs.

2. Activity Center Types

There are several activity center types provided for in this plan. Each should be developed in accord with principles appropriate for center location, size and type.

3. Activity Center Policies

a. Preserve and enhance the city's open space system

All activity centers should be carefully planned, organized and placed appropriately within the city's green infrastructure. They should be strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources. The natural environment should

continue to be valued as an important ingredient of all activity centers, which in turn should be designed to conserve and utilize natural systems to assist in filtering stormwater drainage.

b. Design each activity center to relate to its context

Each activity center should have an appropriate scale and mix of uses defined by its type and the population it serves - regional, citywide or neighborhood. Each of these centers should be integrated into the community, with appropriate connections and transitions made to adjacent uses. Streets and service drives should be located and designed appropriate to the user, mindful of the impact on roadway capacity and safety. Vehicular access should be designed to allow for user connections to adjacent centers and neighborhoods, but discourage through traffic while accommodating service access and delivery.

c. Create discernable, compact activity centers

Each activity center should have a sense of identity and place, distinguishable from one to the next—perhaps by including a unique feature or activity. Activity centers should be compact and densely developed. Their edges should be well defined. Each center, regardless of scale, should look and feel as if it has been designed, or at least considered, as a whole, in context with its surroundings. Continuity of major design elements, such as building setbacks, height, scale, materials, landscaping and signage should be evident. Differences should not be abrupt and overwhelming, but rather provide interest and diversity.

d. Design each activity center to maximize accessibility

Design can greatly influence the number of people willing to walk or ride as an alternative to driving. Appropriate linkages between residential and nonresidential uses should be provided. Pedestrians and vehicles should be separated from one another insofar as practicable, with the length of pedestrian crossings of parking areas kept to a minimum. Human scale should be created through building mass and form, as well as scale and detail. Building location, setbacks and orientation should enhance pedestrian comfort.

C. Existing Activity Centers

1. Downtown Florence Activity Center

a. Description

Downtown is the most complex and complete of the city's activity centers. A well-integrated mixed-use center, it is the result of a very successful revitalization effort. It supports the mission and vision of the city and, as a result, remains the symbolic heart of the community, the center of city and county government, of major cultural, educational and medical institutions and of specialty retail and service businesses.

Downtown Florence has a highly positive image region-wide, due largely to a strong organization that has steered public and private sector investment in good design in combination with a commitment that downtown should continue to meet essential and

clearly identified market needs. Continuing commitment from both the public and private sectors will remain critical to maintaining public understanding of what must be done *throughout the city*—not simply within downtown itself—to keep the heart of the community up to the standards expected by consumers throughout the extensive trade area Downtown Florence has built for itself.

Downtown remains a high priority for Florence, and continually seeks reinvestment. Of necessity, such reinvestment will always be an open-ended process: after all, anything as complex as Downtown Florence will always require continuing effort. The key to continued success will remain attending to *all* the factors of downtown's success together, rather than just some of them individually.

One of the strong sentiments expressed during the planning process is that the city's core should remain its symbolic heart and the primary focus of community energy and activity. The following are general policies toward the physical conditions supportive of such a vision. Fully fleshed out through a complete specific planning process dealing with the downtown area, this preliminary framework can help citizens and merchants and government officials make decisions that support downtown. After all, everyone should know the actions that, taken together, will improve and maintain the quality of the symbolic heart of Florence.

b. Objectives

- *Promote and maintain an attractive image*
- *Provide and maintain high quality public facilities.*
- *Provide and maintain an appropriate appearance and use of open, vacant and unimproved properties.*
- *Encourage the use of attractive and effective commercial displays and signs.*
- *Support and maintain a vital commercial environment*
- *Promote citywide land use patterns that contribute to commercial vitality.*
- *Promote activities that contribute to a healthy business environment.*
- *Assemble an appropriate and suitable mix and pattern of uses, businesses and activities in the downtown area.*
- *Build and promote a desirable image of downtown and its access corridors.*
- *Make downtown easily accessible*
- *Maintain and support legible traffic patterns for safe and efficient travel throughout the city.*
- *Minimize conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians to enhance the safety and efficiency of the street system.*
- *Provide adequate, clearly visible downtown area parking facilities.*
- *Provide adequate loading zones for service and delivery vehicles.*

- *Provide safe sidewalks and other pedestrian ways that are convenient for pedestrians to keep them away from their cars as long as possible each trip.*

c. Development Policy

Downtown area revitalization—like planning in general—will be a continuing and open-ended process. As progress is made, policies, programs and actions will require adjustment and amendment to continue to meet the needs and desires of the local merchants as well as the people in the trade area. For revitalization to be successful, the right things must begin—and continue—to happen in the right places at the right times all over the community.

Every public action should be part of an attempt to solve existing problems—*and* to avoid causing new problems at the same time. This is the reason for taking an overall approach to planning for downtown: everyone involved must get used to looking beyond their pet problems and solutions, and focus instead on a comprehensive view of how downtown supports—and its supported by—the whole community.

Downtown is the city's primary mixed-use activity center. It is the heart of the community and should be treated with respect due its age and position. It should have a wide range of uses and activities that are compatible with its civic importance and its distinction as the most pedestrian-friendly location in the city.

- *Retail uses should be placed at street level and office and residential uses should be placed in upper stories where appropriate.*
- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed three stories. Buildings should be placed at the back of the sidewalk, with all off-street parking situated to the rear.*
- *Street intersections are important, and deserve taller structures. Parking, loading or service functions may not be located at an intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*

d. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Residential
    a. Adjacent (horizontal)
    b. Integrated (vertical)
    c. Diverse type and ownership
2. Retail commercial
3. Office / service commercial
4. Hospitality:
    a. Restaurant

b. Accommodation

5. Institutional/Civic
6. Recreational

e. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Compact, dense core
4. Intensive mixed use
5. Civic space
6. Pedestrian oriented (overall)
7. Pedestrian accessible
8. Internal vehicular circulation
9. Intense center of activity
10. Well-defined edges

f. General Design Guidelines

1. Required building line
2. Street trees
3. No parking lots fronting sidewalks
4. No drive-ins from Court Street
5. Density decreases to edges

2. Specialty Mixed Use Centers

a. Description

Specialty Mixed Use Center are typically commercial areas with strong edges and a historic focus. They should be highly accessible. Parking should be on street and to the sides and edges rather than in front of the buildings, which should be set up to the back of sidewalks. Infill development should be placed at the street edge to screen the parking lots and provide human scale for pedestrians.

These are relatively small, mixed-use areas, each with a specialty such as arts, or entertainment. Each should respond to its surroundings, support pedestrian activity and allow for maximum pedestrian access.

b. Development Policy

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition of the area within which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed two stories. Buildings should be close to the street, with off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.*

- *At street intersections, place the main building right up next to the corner. Parking, loading or service may not be located at an intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the area and site layout so buildings frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, and pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Streets should be designed with sidewalks and street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement the face of the buildings and shade the sidewalks. Residential streets should provide for an appropriate canopy, which shades both street and sidewalk, and serves as a visual buffer between the street and the home.*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Small retail / office / service
2. Hospitality / entertainment
3. Residential: adjacent and upstairs
4. Small civic / open space(s)
5. Recreational nearby

d. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Intensive mixed use
4. Pedestrian oriented overall
5. Pedestrian and bicycle accessible
6. Well-defined edges

e. General Design Guidelines

1. Required building lines
2. Street trees
3. Parking mostly to the side or rear

3. Community Commercial Centers

a. Description

These are relatively small, primarily single-use shopping areas. Predominantly auto-oriented at present, these centers and their surroundings should support pedestrian activity and allow for greater pedestrian access.

These commercial areas have typically been developed at street intersections with large areas devoted to parking. While these centers are currently oriented to the customer traveling by auto, pedestrian activity is appropriate and should be a part of any

redevelopment or infill development plans. Infill development should be placed at the street edge to screen the parking lots and provide human scale for pedestrians.

Typical appropriate uses would include a large grocery store, supporting retail and service commercial, office, restaurant and institutional uses. Residential uses should be close by and easily accessible to these centers, which in turn should present a positive face to adjacent neighborhoods.

b. Development Policy

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition of the area within which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed two stories. Buildings should be close to the street, with off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *At street intersections, place the main building right up next to the corner. Parking, loading or service may not be located at an intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the initial site layout. Organize the site so that the buildings frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, and so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Commercial streets should have trees that complement the face of the buildings and shade the sidewalk. Residential streets should provide for an appropriate canopy, which shades both street and sidewalk, and serves as a visual buffer between the street and the home.*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Retail commercial
2. Office or service commercial
3. Hospitality:
    a. Restaurant
    b. Accommodation
4. Residential:
    a. Adjacent (horizontal)
    b. Diverse type and ownership
5. Institutional/Civic
6. Recreational

d. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Compact, dense core
4. Intensive mixed use
5. Pedestrian oriented (overall)
6. Pedestrian accessibility
7. Internal vehicular circulation
8. Intense center of activity
9. Well-defined edges

e. General Design Guidelines

1. Stores serving the community
2. Required building line
3. Parking in the rear or to the side
4. Street trees
5. Density decreases to edges

4. Commercial Corridors

a. Description

The primary purpose of the city's arterial street system is to enable the efficient movement of vehicular traffic. Safety and accessibility to property are also important, as should be accommodations for bicycle and pedestrian travel. Nevertheless, infill and redevelopment should be managed with a "can-do" attitude in mind.

Typical appropriate uses include large grocery and other anchor stores, supporting retail and service commercial, office, restaurant and institutional uses. While retail and other uses should address the street, they should not simply turn their backs to adjacent residential areas: the commercial corridor should be easily accessible to adjacent residential areas. Over time these corridors should be encouraged and assisted to mature in form to provide focal points or nodes of activity at selected locations along the corridor.

b. Development Policy

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the area in which it is located. Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, both horizontally and vertically.*
- *Buildings should face and be close to the street, with off-street parking behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Development should be planned and designed to maximize street frontage of buildings and minimize street frontage of parking lots. Parking lots fronting streets should not be wider than half of the frontage of the associated building(s).*

- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the corridor so that buildings frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation along the street and building fronts rather than solely across parking lots and driveways.*
- *When possible, direct arterial street access should be limited through use of parallel road systems and by limiting the number of access points.*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Retail commercial
2. Office or service commercial
3. Hospitality:
    a. Restaurant
    b. Accommodation
4. Residential:
    a. Adjacent (horizontal)
    b. Diversity of type and ownership

d. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Pedestrian accessibility
4. Internal vehicular circulation
5. Well-defined edges

e. General Design Guidelines

1. Street trees
2. Density decreases to edges
3. Transition to adjacent housing

5. Regional Commercial Centers

a. Description

These are large centers, typically dominated by regional (and citywide) retail and service uses. Primary vehicular access should be directed to local collector streets that intersect the arterial road network. Direct access to and from arterial roadways should be strictly limited to promote a safe street network and protect street capacity.

Regional commercial centers serve both citywide and regional markets, and should present a positive image to the visitor and resident alike. While these centers rely primarily on customers arriving by car, pedestrian access and activity should be designed for and encouraged.

Typical uses include major retail businesses, grocery and other “big box” stores and support retail and services businesses, including gas and service stations, restaurants and car dealerships. These should be organized into centers having a clear focal point rather than extended along the city’s arterial corridors

b. Development Policy

- *There should be buildings close to the street, with off-street parking behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the area within which it is located*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes, both horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed two stories.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the site. The buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the center and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Retail commercial
    a. Largest shopping centers
    b. Wide variety of goods
    c. Serve regional trade area
2. Service commercial
    a. Regional services
    b. Auto services and dealerships
3. Hospitality
    a. Restaurant
    b. Accommodation
4. Residential adjacent
5. Institutional/Civic
6. Recreational

d. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Compact, dense core
4. Intensive mixed use
5. Civic space(s)
6. Pedestrian oriented (overall)

7. Pedestrian accessibility
8. Internal vehicular circulation
9. Intense center of activity
10. Well-defined edge

e. General Design Guidelines

1. Street trees
2. Density decreases to edges

6. The Port of Florence

a. Description

This is a large, highly visible site, with freestanding industrial and support operations. It is imperative to maintain good vehicle accessibility and relative isolation from adjacent uses. The primary goal should be to continue reinvestment to maintain the port as a regional employment and service center.

Regardless of its need for relative isolation from the rest of the city, the port should convey the image of Florence as an accessible, desirable community in which to work and invest.

b. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. River-oriented industrial uses
2. Mixed industrial support
3. Warehouse and distribution
4. Limited retail commercial
5. Support offices and services

c. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Internal vehicular circulation
3. Well-defined edges

d. General Design Guidelines

1. Isolated from neighborhoods
2. Landscape buffers at edges

7. Employment Support Centers

a. Description

These are large employment centers, dominated by office, technology, light industrial and other job-generating land uses but containing relatively few retail and service uses except those concentrated near major gateways and at other strategic locations.

Each of these employment centers should convey the image of Florence as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should

be strengthened by imparting a strong sense of community to these centers especially for those who work or live near them. It is also important to maintain physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.

b. Development Policy

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the center and of the area in which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *Street intersections are important, and deserve taller structures located close at hand. Parking, loading or service functions should not be located at an intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function.*
- *Buildings should face the street, with off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the site. The buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the industrial support center and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Light industrial
2. Warehouse and distribution
3. Wholesale commercial
4. Retail commercial—limited
5. Support office and services

d. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Compact, dense core
4. Pedestrian accessible
5. Internal vehicular circulation
6. Intense center of activity
7. Well-defined edges

e. General Design Guidelines

1. Street trees

2. Landscape buffers at edges

8. Institutional Support Centers

a. Description

These are large institutional centers, dominated by major government, educational, medical and civic uses but containing relatively few other uses except those that may be accessory to the primary uses.

Each of these centers should convey the image of Florence as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work, and invest. This image should be strengthened by a strong sense of community relationship, especially for those people who work or live near them. It is also important to maintain physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.

b. Development Policy

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the center and of the area in which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the center and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*
- *At street intersections, place the main building right up next to the corner. Parking, loading, or service should not be located at an intersection.*
- *Street intersections are important and deserve taller structures.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Institutional support center streets should have trees that complement the adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Off-street parking should be placed behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the center. The buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings.*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Governmental buildings

2. High Schools
3. Colleges
4. Civic Centers
5. Support services

d. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Compact, dense core
4. Pedestrian accessible
5. Internal vehicular circulation
6. Intense center of activity
7. Well-defined edges

e. General Design Guidelines

1. Street trees
2. Landscape buffers at edges

9. Major Recreational Centers

a. Description

Large recreational centers are mostly open space but often contain significant structures. They are often somewhat isolated from neighborhoods due to the need for large spaces. Their relative isolation often renders them inaccessible except by automobile, so access and parking are critical.

It is especially important for the city's major recreation centers to help convey an image of Florence as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should be strengthened by imparting a strong sense of community to these centers especially for those who live near them. It is also important to maintain physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.

b. Development Policy

- *A citywide park or recreation center should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the area in which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings and structures should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger structures should be broken down into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically as appropriate.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings or sports fields.*

- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the center. Pedestrians should not be forced to walk through parking lots and across driveways and traffic to reach their destinations.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the park or recreation center and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

1. Parks
2. Swimming Pools
3. Recreation Centers
4. Sports Fields

d. General Development Principles

1. Positive sense of place
2. Visual coherence
3. Pedestrian accessible
4. Internal vehicular circulation
5. Intense center of activity
6. Well-defined edges

e. General Design Guidelines

1. Street trees
2. Overall landscape concept
3. Transition to adjacent housing

D. Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods, together with citywide open space and transportation systems, and the various activity centers, form the city. Several types of corridors—they include streets, greenways and streams—should interconnect neighborhoods. Among the city's neighborhoods, a range of housing types and price levels should bring together a diversity of people into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds that are essential to this community.

1. Characteristics

Good neighborhoods place an emphasis on community, livability, appearance, diversity, transportation opportunities, convenience and safety for all residents. To achieve this, the most successful neighborhoods generally exhibit characteristics that are typically missing from most conventional subdivisions as they have been developed over the past few decades. The following are several principles intended to guide planning and design for all Florence neighborhoods.

2. Planning and Design Principles

a. Preserve and enhance the citywide open space system

Neighborhoods should be carefully planned and organized within and in relation to the city's green infrastructure. Neighborhoods should be located in appropriate areas, sensitively sited in relation to or strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources. Conservation subdivision techniques, through which a neighborhood is designed to conserve its natural systems and thereby require less capital investment for earthwork, clearing and drainage, streets and utilities, can add to a healthy, appealing community. Such techniques may be used to maintain allowed gross densities without negatively affecting the natural environment, which should be an important ingredient of neighborhoods.

b. Design each neighborhood appropriate to its context

The scale and density of a neighborhood should reflect its location in the community. Denser development should be focused toward commercial centers and corridors, if nearby. Less-intense neighborhoods should be the rule away from such focus areas.

c. Create a focus appropriate to the needs of the neighborhood

A neighborhood focal point of a type and size appropriate to the needs of residents should be included to add a sense of place to the neighborhood—for example, a park or usable community facility or open space. The focal point should be pedestrian oriented and provide for easy vehicular access, but there should also be places for neighbors to venture out into the public realm without their vehicles. Places for children to play safely should be a staple item of all neighborhoods, because open spaces add to the value of the property and help to create a more livable community. Each neighborhood should have one special gathering place, such as a neighborhood green, near its center.

d. Design the neighborhood with walkable, interconnected streets

Neighborhood planning and design should accommodate the access needs of motorists while also providing a convenient and safe environment for pedestrians. Sidewalks should provide the framework for the pedestrian system insofar as possible. The pedestrian network can be greatly improved and walking distance and infrastructure costs substantially reduced through the use of mid-block connections and cul-de-sac linkages, as well as trails within greenways or other open space systems. Creating interconnected neighborhood streets and providing alternate routes will help to diffuse automobile traffic, thus lowering traffic volumes on many city streets.

e. Design streets appropriate to the scale and character of the neighborhood

Neighborhood streets should feature driving surfaces of appropriate width, at the same time providing ample sidewalks, street trees and houses that offer front porches. Neighborhood streets should be "calm" environments in which drivers realize that driving fast or aggressively is inappropriate. Sidewalk investment is modest in comparison to long-term value. When neighborhoods include street trees, sidewalks and front porches, they become a more welcoming place for residents and visitors, and add significant value to the whole community.

V. Land Use and Transportation

The functional organization of the city has been carefully considered throughout the planning process. The major land use recommendations and the key locations throughout Florence that are planned for major investment result from analysis of environmental, physical and economic conditions, combined with the vision for Florence and the principles illustrated in the Florence Strategic Development Concept and outlined in the Major Development Components of Chapter III.

The Future Land Use map illustrates how different parts of the community should function and relate to one another—in other words, the overall physical structure of the city. The map portrays a pattern of various activity centers by type, their interrelations with each other and with the city's neighborhoods. These centers and the interconnections between them are critical to integrating the city's land use, transportation, community facilities and major infrastructure. Building on this structure, Florence intends to continue to grow and develop as a community where public life is encouraged and quality urban design is maintained.

A. Major Development Themes

Florence has recast its visions and a wide range of community values expressed during the Town Meeting and planning work sessions into a Future Land Use map to guide the growth, development and conservation of the city. That map projects an arrangement of land uses, in recognition of the ways in which land is presently used and the essential pattern of the city's green infrastructure. The map presents the essential *functions* of the city as they are and as they will be.

The Future Land Use Map notes areas that may be generally suited to development and where sensitive environmental features may limit development capability. The land use categories indicated on the map should provide general guidelines indicating desirable land use patterns for Florence. The map is intended to serve several related functions:

- *Avoid and resolve land use conflicts*
- *Identify and sustain desirable land use patterns*
- *Forecast infrastructure needs*
- *Provide a foundation for zoning decisions*

1. Activity Center and Neighborhood Relationships

It is important to consider how the city's various activity centers should be planned and designed in relation to the city's *neighborhoods*—where people live and come together away from work and commerce to form a community with one another.

2. Future Land Use Policy

The **Future Land Use element** of the comprehensive plan is based on the community's own evaluation of its assets and opportunities. It is organized into **five major policy themes** to recognize and capitalize on those assets and opportunities for the community at large.

These themes outline the rational framework that was used to convert the Florence Strategic Development Concept into the city's Future Land Use map to allocate public and private resources for development equitably and in a manner through which cost effectiveness of city services may be achieved.

a. *Policy Theme #1: Protect Florence's Green Infrastructure*

Florence intends to protect, preserve and enhance important and fragile ecosystems within developed portions of the city. It will strive to use its natural and open lands for parks and for passive and active recreation.

b. *Policy Theme #2: Build a City of Neighborhoods Supported by Activity Centers*

Florence intends to grow by replicating the best characteristics of its traditional neighborhoods in selected locations around the city. Florence envisions its population growth living in neighborhoods that focus upon and complement the city's green infrastructure that reflects the human scale and pedestrian orientation of the community. Generally, this means that Florence intends to:

- *Support, maintain and enhance Downtown Florence as the heart of the city.*
- *Organize residential development into true neighborhoods.*
- *Disperse civic, educational, recreational and community commercial functions in strategic locations areas around the city.*
- *Focus citywide and regional commerce into concentrated, highly accessible activity centers served by its highest-capacity arterial roadways.*
- *Focus industry, office uses and recreational and institutional support services into activity centers served by arterial and collector streets.*

c. *Policy Theme #3: Maintain and Enhance Community Character*

Florence intends to conserve its special qualities, including its green infrastructure, historic buildings, pedestrian scale, and the best of its existing streets and parks and recreation areas. Maintaining and enhancing the physical qualities of the city is an overarching consideration, incorporated in all parts of the plan.

d. *Policy Theme #4: Expand Transportation and Accessibility Opportunities*

Florence intends to reduce the dominance of the automobile in development decisions and reduce the impacts of automobiles on the environment by encouraging development that will improve accessibility options for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Florence will place great emphasis on improving its pedestrian and bicycle facilities citywide.

e. *Policy Theme #5: Protect and Reinvest in the Community*

Florence intends to reinvest in Downtown, its traditional neighborhoods and the portions of its commercial arterial corridors that are not up to the standards of the community.

B. Citywide Development Patterns

The future development pattern of the city has been organized in support of the Florence Development Concept with appropriate recognition given to the city's green infrastructure, its street and utility infrastructure and major existing uses of land. The various types of commercial, employment, civic, institutional and recreational activity centers serve as magnets for activity and

development. These, in turn, are intended to support the city core and the residential community of Florence in ways intended to positively affect environmental quality and the transportation network. Any significant modifications of these existing patterns on the land could place substantial costs on both the public and private sectors.

It should be noted that designation of land uses on the Future Land Use map should not be interpreted to propose, approve, deny nor preclude any particular action without full consideration of all policies, principles, standards or intentions expressed in this plan document and its implementing regulations. Site considerations relating to topography, geology, soils or hydrology will be of major importance when locating any particular new commercial center and planning and designing its uses and density. These realities, plus attitudes toward development on the part of public officials, other agencies, area residents, property owners and developers will play a large part in determining appropriate development location and design. Similarly, the presence of adequate streets as well as schools, parks and other community facilities, including water and sewer systems, should be assured before making any significant development proposals or decisions.

The locations of several proposed schools, parks, community facilities and institutions shown on the Future Land Use map and described below are not meant to be precise. Rather, the symbols for each of these should be considered as "placeholders" until more specific planning to determine detailed needs and locations for each. As such, each of these symbols may be likened to a ball in a more or less enclosed court, in which the players, within defined limits, agree to move the ball around until the game is concluded. In the case of most of these, the "ball" will come to rest only when either a public agency has determined to invest in a facility or a private development project triggers the need and means for a location decision, acquisition and construction, development plans have been approved, property negotiations and construction plans have been prepared and financed, as appropriate.

C. The Uses of Land

The following descriptions of the designations shown on the Future Land Use map proceed generally from least to most intensive uses and functions, beginning with parks and protected areas, proceeding through various types and densities of residential uses. These are followed by commercial, office and other employment uses, and are rounded out by civic and institutional uses. Activity centers and neighborhoods are to be planned and designed in accord with policy and characteristics as presented throughout this plan document.

1. Parks, Recreation and Protected Areas

Florence intends to enlarge its holdings on behalf of the public to include at least the following:

a. Greenways

To provide opportunities for walking and bicycling, act as wildlife corridors, development buffers, and stormwater recharge areas and to provide links in the chain of the city's public park system. Ideally, they should eventually include all significant streams and appropriate portions of their floodplains. The use of greenways for multi-purpose trails should avoid redundancy with sidewalks and bikeways, but should strive to interconnect public parks and open space areas.

b. Citywide Parks

To preserve the natural character of the city while providing both active and passive recreation opportunities. They may be important for the protection of historical sites, significant land features, watersheds and wildlife and as outdoor recreation centers. Park facilities and buildings should foster a positive community image, and sense of pride, which should be evident in the use of local materials and respect for local context.

c. Community Parks

To serve a range of both passive and active recreation needs appropriate to their location and context. They may provide a mixture of activities and uses such as active sports fields; play areas, trails, informal practice fields, picnic areas, outdoor classrooms and gathering places such as a community center. They should be carefully integrated into the natural environment, ideally with a significant portion of the land area held in a natural, tree-covered state. Park facilities and buildings should foster a positive community image, and sense of pride, which should be evident in the use of local materials and respect for local context.

d. Neighborhood Parks

To provide relatively small residential areas with opportunities for appropriate levels and types of both active and passive recreation. Neighborhood parks provide a place for informal community gatherings and neighborhood events, and may include such features as shaded paths, playground structures and open space for active play.

2. Residential

Residential uses come in many sizes, shapes, types and densities. They are noted on the Future Land Use map according to relative gross density—the relation of numbers of dwelling units to property devoted to those uses. Residential use gross densities are noted on the map as Medium Density at 5 to 10 units per acre; Low Density at 1 to 5 units per acre and Very Low Density at less than 1 unit per acre.

Very low-density residential uses are planned for several parts of the city, especially those characterized by relatively steep slopes and those adjacent to surface water resources and their associated floodplains. This development type should take careful account of the various components of the city's green infrastructure, and should be subject to requirements that may dictate the use of special development techniques, which may include conservation subdivisions, large lots and low overall impervious surface ratios.

Low-density residential uses are mostly larger single-family detached housing that currently exist and are planned for further development, located primarily around the perimeter of the city, taking appropriate account of the various components of the city's green infrastructure.

Medium-density residential uses are mostly smaller single-family detached and attached housing presently located mostly in and near the core of the city. Most future medium-density residential uses are intended to be near the larger commercial, institutional and employment activity centers and in relatively close-in locations.

3. Commercial and Office

This is a broad category of uses that typically includes retail, office, restaurant, hospitality and accommodations, either separately or as part of a mixed-use activity center.

4. Industrial

Industrial uses are freestanding (typically larger or older facilities. These are large employment centers, dominated by office, technology, distribution, industrial and other job-generating land uses but containing relatively few retail and service uses except those concentrated at major gateways to the center and other strategic locations.

5. Institutional

Civic and institutional uses are a traditional land use category typically including institutional, academic, and governmental and community service uses and lands. More recently, the trend toward larger places of worship and major medical centers (as opposed to older, freestanding hospitals) has expanded the traditional definition.

6. Mixed Use

This is a development type in which various primary uses—for example, Office, Institutional, Retail and Residential—may be combined (horizontally and/or vertically) in the same building or within separate buildings on the same site or nearby sites, especially in major activity centers as outlined in the previous chapter.

This sort of mixing has in the past occurred mostly in downtown and adjacent to the University of North Alabama campus. However, the more recent trend is to carefully mix together various appropriate land uses to reduce the need for motor vehicle trips and create more walkable cities. These may include regional commercial, community commercial, institutional support and some employment support activity centers.

This land use type tends to increase the types of spaces available for both living and working; encourage a mix of compatible uses and promote the upgrading of existing developed areas with buildings designed to provide a high quality pedestrian-oriented street environment.

D. Gateways and Corridors

Florence has major entries from most every direction, and a beltway or ring road surrounding much of the city to allow significant traffic to bypass the city core. These corridors form a major part of the image of the city and should be treated as scarce assets to be protected and preserved. By taking appropriate care with development along these corridors and adjacent to its major gateways, Florence can set itself apart and further insure its marketability and prosperity that may come from attracting visitors, residents and investors. Community identity is strengthened by good gateways, which help establish strong edges, foster a sense of pride of place and sense of arrival.

The city's major streets are gateways to its activity centers and neighborhoods, and consequently they convey a lasting image to residents, business and industry, and passersby. They should be safe, comfortable, shaded, calm, connected and interesting. This is not simply a matter of aesthetics; the city's economy is inextricably linked to its physical character, and must continually enhance its image to remain competitive.

1. Citywide Gateway and Corridor Policies

Each gateway to Florence, its neighborhoods and activity centers should reflect the particular characteristics of its setting and provide a welcoming introduction. Development planning and design along important corridors and adjacent to city gateways should incorporate the following strategies to assure that Florence will offer a positive image by providing easily recognizable transitions from outside to inside the city:

- *Prepare and implement an Access Management Plan and Program for all of the city's major entrance corridors in cooperation with the Alabama Department of Transportation.*
- *Promote and maintain commercial development that enhances the gateway function.*
- *Use lighting and tree plantings at major gateways and along corridors to welcome travelers and enhance the commercial uses of the corridor.*
- *Develop attractive and well-located signage, lighting and landscaping that differentiates each gateway from other parts of the corridor it introduces.*
- *Reinforce the concept of "place" with strong, well-designed development that is visible from the road corridor.*
- *Develop a cohesive and coordinated land use pattern for each of the city's major entrance corridors and gateways.*
- *Create a sense of enclosure by build-to lines rather than setbacks along important corridors.*
- *Develop commercial concentrations at major intersections, where they can capitalize on visibility and access from the corridor.*
- *Direct commercial development to important intersections and discourage scattered or strip patterns of commercial development.*
- *Direct most parking away from the major corridors to preserve or enhance the attractive landscape qualities of the corridor.*

E. Traffic and Roadways

The use of land, and physical access to that land, are both critical to the well-being of the community, its residents and the quality of life. Florence's streets serve two essential purposes: access to adjacent property and mobility between destinations. Streets that attempt to serve both functions equally are those that tend to fail to live up to expectations. The challenge is to provide a street network that serves, supports planned development patterns, balances access, and mobility, moves vehicles efficiently and lends a sense of community to neighborhoods.

To no one's surprise, local traffic is expected to increase significantly over the next twenty years in response to development consistent with the pattern of activity centers and residential development shown on the Future Land Use map and the increase in both traffic and vehicle trips typically driven by the typical household during the past decade or so.

Transportation corridors are channels along which people and goods move from place to place. These corridors include not only the streets in which motor vehicles may travel, but also the

sidewalks, bicycle lanes, multi-purpose trails and greenways that should accommodate pedestrians and cyclists. To facilitate proper planning and decision-making, Florence's streets have been classified as arterials, collectors, or local streets based on their relative importance and function within the transportation network. These functional classifications are defined below and shown on the Future Traffic Volumes map, which indicates the traffic expected on area roadways by the year 2025.

a. Types and Characteristics

1. Arterial.
   Provides high mobility (long distance trips at high speeds), but with limited land access. Links cities and towns to form an integrated network that provides interstate, intrastate, intercounty and intercity service. Serves virtually all urbanized areas. Provides an integrated, continual statewide network. On-street parking is generally prohibited, but cycling paths and sidewalks within the right of way are encouraged. Access management favors mobility over direct property access, meaning additional curb cuts are discouraged and only allowed where necessary.

2. Collector.
   Collects traffic from local road and streets to feed the arterial system. Provides a balance between land access and mobility. Serves urban areas and other important traffic generators that are not served by higher systems. Links these places with nearby towns and cities, or with routes of higher classification. Connects the locally important traffic generators with the less developed parts of the city. On-street parking is generally discouraged, but cycling lanes and sidewalks are encouraged.

3. Local
   Provides high land access (short trips at low speeds), but with limited mobility, discouraging through traffic. Provides direct access to adjacent land. Serves travel over relatively short distances compared with collectors and other higher systems. Comprise all facilities not on higher systems. Parking, cycling, walking and other public uses of the street are encouraged. Through traffic on local streets is discouraged, as are trucks, except those destined for local deliveries.

2. Citywide Mobility Policies

Mobility is in part a function of providing options for movement through the city, and that requires interconnection of most streets. Gaps in the existing local street network require individuals to increase the length of their trip and drive through congested areas as they move even short distances through the community.

An appropriately interconnected street network is one in which every street connects to at least two other streets. Thus, cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets should be used only in areas where environmental constraints impede connections to other streets. Moreover, internal vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections should be required within both existing and new development areas and between adjacent land uses. Developers should be required to plan for and effectively address the need for internal connections (roads, pathways, open space, etc.) between adjacent land uses, including residential subdivisions and commercial developments,

to provide both primary and secondary means of emergency access. Mobility planning and design should incorporate the following strategies for planning, designing, constructing and retrofitting streets citywide:

- *Maintain an aesthetically pleasing street network that helps frame and define the community while meeting the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.*
- *Improve the image of the city's major vehicular corridors by taking charge of them all, regardless of the state of or pressure for development.*
- *Landscape the edges and medians of major corridors to frame development and create a more positive image for the entire city by adding color, shade and visual interest.*
- *Consolidate existing driveways along arterials and collectors and require access for new development from side streets.*
- *Discourage non-residential traffic from travel on primarily residential streets.*
- *Treat residential streets as both public ways and neighborhood amenities.*
- *Seek landscaped medians and appropriate access management along key arterials and collectors for purposes of roadway safety and capacity.*
- *Prepare a citywide street network plan that allows direct connections to local destinations without diverting extra traffic onto the arterial and highway system, to include policies for new subdivisions and a program to retrofit the existing system as needed.*
- *Require street system connections between new and existing developments to promote an interconnected roadway system throughout the community and discourage over-use of cul-de-sacs.*
- *Require streets be planted with street trees appropriate to their function.*

3. Roadway Improvement Projects

To achieve the city's desired levels of accessibility and mobility, given local traffic increases over the past decade and in a manner supportive of the Future Land Use map will require implementation of improvements to the city's roadway system as outlined in Chapter V. Implementation of access management standards on state routes will require cooperative preparation and implementation of an access management plan with the Alabama Department of Transportation.

4. Citywide Accessibility Policies

An essential way to maintain safe and reliable access and street capacity is to manage access to side streets and driveways to and from the parcels that line arterials and major collectors. Approached properly, an access management program can enhance property values while safeguarding past and future public investments in the infrastructure. Accessibility and access management planning and design should incorporate the following strategies for retrofitting and constructing arterial and major collector streets:

- *Separate conflict points – distance between major intersections and driveways should be regulated. As a rule, driveways should not be located within the area of influence of intersections.*
- *Restrict turning movements at non-signalized driveways and intersections – the use of full directional non-signalized streets and driveways should be limited. Full movement intersections should serve multiple developments through joint use driveways or cross access easements.*
- *Establish design standards – design standards that address access spacing, the length of turn lanes and tapers and driveway dimensions should be developed for application throughout the city on arterials and major collectors.*
- *Traffic signal spacing – signals should only be installed when appropriate studies indicate their spacing and interconnection can be accomplished without significant impacts on corridor capacity.*
- *Turn lanes – left and right turn lanes should be required for all public streets and major access points to activity centers.*
- *Shared driveways/inter-parcel access – joint use driveways should be required to reduce the proliferation of driveways and to preserve the capacity of the corridor.*
- *Pedestrian/bicycle planning – specific needs of pedestrian and bicyclist movements should be addressed. Traffic signals should be designed and timed to accommodate pedestrians in areas of significant activity.*

VI. Public Investment and Improvement

The overall land use and development pattern for the city supports and is coordinated with plans for the city's transportation system and other infrastructure. These are based on the overall development strategy, which is built upon the overall image of the city and the value of its physical setting. The concept enhances the physical organization of the city with a series of activity centers that support, and are supported by, the city's neighborhoods.

Florence has strategically focused population concentrations upon commercial and employment centers, supported by residential neighborhoods and interspersed with and structured by green corridors, all interconnected by: 1) a variety of transportation and accessibility options and served by an efficient system of public investments in 2) water and 3) wastewater systems, 4) parks and recreation facilities, and 5) public buildings.

A. Roadway and Intersection Investments

Given local traffic increases over the past decade, achieving the city's desired levels of accessibility and mobility and in a manner supportive of the city's plans for the use of land will require improvements to the city's roadway system. Implementation of access management standards on state routes will require cooperative preparation and implementation of an access management plan with the Alabama Department of Transportation.

1. Completed Priorities: 2007 - 2022

- *Construct the northern approaches to the Patton Island Bridge, including an interchange at Florence Boulevard.*
- *Widen Helton Drive from two to three lanes between Hermitage Drive and Cox Creek Parkway.*
- *Replace the Hermitage Drive Bridge.*

2. Priority: 0-7 years

- *Construct the College Street Bridge and approaches, including pedestrian and bicycle accommodations and a greenway node at Cypress Creek.*
- *Implement the Veterans Drive Corridor Plan*
- *Implement the Pine Street Corridor Plan*
- *Complete the Gresham Corridor Plan*
- *Widen Florence Boulevard from four to six lanes between Indian Springs and Harris Road (under construction – estimated completion 2026)*

3. Priority: 7-15 years

- *Widen Chisholm Road from two to three lanes between E. Rasch Road and Section Line Road.*

B. Water System

The city's water supply, storage and distribution system is operated and maintained by the City of Florence Water Department., which operates and maintains an extensive water system that serves not only Florence but also the majority of Lauderdale County. Of the nine governmental units that own, operate and maintain water lines in the county, Florence has the largest and most comprehensive coverage area.

1. Proposed Improvements

Water system improvements necessary to support planned development as noted on the future land use plan may be divided into five general topic areas: water supply, storage capacity, water mains, inter-system improvements, and system management. Recommendations for each follow in turn.

a. Water Supply

Florence draws its water supply from Wilson Lake, Cypress Creek and several wells. Due to the stringent laws regulating well water and the unreliability of its production, the city is phasing out its wells. To prepare for future water needs and the elimination of wells, the city has maintained and upgraded its Wilson Lake and Cypress Creek water treatment facilities. Currently, only ongoing maintenance and repair are needed to keep these water treatment facilities operational.

b. Interconnections

To assure adequate supply and distribution throughout the system, the following needs may arise to service growth and development.

- *A new booster pumping station at Chisholm Road*
- *A new suction line at Chisholm Road*
- *Upgrades to the existing Village Pines and Gresham Road booster stations*

c. Storage Capacity

The Florence Comprehensive Water Facility Plan calls for the following additions to water storage capacity in the planning area:

- *An additional storage tank at the Chisholm Road Booster Pumping Station*
- *A storage tank near the Burrell Slater Vocational School*
- *A new storage tank adjacent to Jacksonburg Road*

d. Water Mains

The only current project is a new 16" main in Veterans Drive to complete a major transmission loop. The projects listed below will be needed over time as growth continues:

- *16" water main in Railroad Avenue*
- *Additional distribution mains in the Underwood-Petersville area*
- *Conversion of an existing low pressure main to a high pressure main in the Helton Drive area*
- *A new 16" main in Eck Road*

e. System Management

As any water system ages, certain major components require periodic upgrade and rehabilitation. Maintenance of the tanks and related appurtenances should be an ongoing priority for the system. Developing a rehabilitation schedule and budgeting accordingly is a recommended, proactive approach to assure that the system will remain dependable over the long term.

C. Wastewater System

The city's wastewater collection and treatment system is operated and maintained by the city's Water Department. In 2003, the city completed a comprehensive plan for wastewater facilities to plan for projects the city may need over the ensuing 10-15 years. The city has completed, or is in the process of completing, all the first priority projects in the plan.

The following additional improvements were outlined within the wastewater facilities plan, organized by priority for planning purposes:

- *Complete replacement of the Wilson Creek interceptor*
- *Replace the Mars Hill Road interceptor*
- *Replace the Cox Creek interceptor*

- *Construct phase one of the Cypress Creek interceptor*
- *Improvements in the Little Cypress Creek area*
- *Improvements to the Lakeside Highland area*
- *Improvements along portions of US Highway 72*
- *Extend the Little Cypress Creek interceptor to Chisolm Road*
- *Construct an additional Cypress Creek interceptor or an additional lift station and force main*
- *Extend wastewater services into areas of Cypress Creek*

D. Citywide Parks and Recreation System

1. General Development Principles

- *Positive sense of place*
- *Visual coherence*
- *Pedestrian accessible*
- *Internal vehicular circulation*
- *Intense center of activity*
- *Well-defined edges*
- *General Design Guidelines*
- *Street trees*
- *Overall landscape concept*
- *Transition to adjacent housing*

2. Siting and Design Standards

It is especially important for the city's major recreation centers to convey an image of Florence as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should be strengthened by imparting a strong sense of community to these centers especially for those who live near them.

- *The city's park and recreation system, including passive and active parks and outdoor recreation facilities, should meet the needs of the city's growing population.*
- *Citywide parks and recreation centers should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the city as a whole and the area in which they are located.*
- *Physical accessibility should be maintained between park and recreation facilities and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.*
- *Buildings and structures close to one another should relate in scale, height and configuration.*

- *For human scale, larger recreation buildings and structures should be divided into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically as appropriate.*
- *Access and interior streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalk.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings or sports fields.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the park or recreation center and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of park and recreation centers. Pedestrians should not be forced to walk through parking lots and across traffic to reach their destinations.*

3. Major Park and Recreation Activity Centers

Florence considers its larger park and recreation facilities to be major activity centers and thus worthy of special consideration, planning and treatment. Park and Recreation activity centers are largely open space but often include significant structures. Considerable provisions for parking are important given the regional draw of the centers and the programmed activities.

a. Typical appropriate uses for Major Park and Recreation Activity Centers:

- *Large parks*
- *Swimming Pools*
- *Sports Fields, Courts*
- *Site-built Recreation Centers*

b. Current Major Park and Recreation Activity Centers:

c. Future Major Park and Recreation Activity Centers:

In further support of the citywide park and recreation system, it is recommended that the present citywide recreation center and associated facilities be renovated.

4. Minor Park and Recreation Activity Centers

a. Community Parks

Other community parks citywide should be upgraded to serve a wide range of localized passive and active recreation needs appropriate to their location and context. Depending upon their size and location, they may provide a mixture of activities and uses such as active sports fields; play areas, trails, and informal practice fields. They should be carefully integrated into the neighborhood, ideally with a significant portion of the land area held in a natural, tree-covered condition. As with all city facilities, community parks should foster a positive

community image, and sense of pride, which should be evident in the use of local materials and respect for local context.

b. Neighborhood Parks

Florence neighborhoods need a citywide system to provide relatively small residential areas such as individual neighborhoods with opportunities for appropriate levels and types of both active and passive recreation. It is recommended that these be developed incrementally, and especially in association with new residential development. Such facilities can help to convert subdivisions to neighborhoods by providing places for informal community gatherings and neighborhood events, and may include such features as shaded paths, playground structures and open space for active play.

5. Greenways

Greenways are significant to the city's green infrastructure serving as wildlife corridors, development buffers, storm water recharge areas and to provide links in the Citywide Parks and Recreation system. Selected greenways have been designated to be used and developed for multi-purpose trails to interconnect public parks and open space areas. Further, greenways include all of the city's significant streams and appropriate portions of their floodplains.

E. Public Buildings and Institutions

The city's larger public facilities to be major activity centers and thus worthy of special consideration, planning and treatment. Each of these major public investments should convey the image of Florence as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should be strengthened by a strong sense of community relationship, especially for those who work or live near them.

1. General Development Principles

a. Description

b. Development Policy

- *Positive sense of place*
- *Visual coherence*
- *Compact, dense core*
- *Pedestrian accessible*
- *Internal vehicular circulation*
- *Intense center of activity*
- *Well-defined edges*

c. Typical Appropriate Uses

- *Governmental buildings*
- *High Schools*
- *Colleges*
- *Conference and Civic Centers*
- *Support services*

d. General Development Principles

e. General Design Guidelines

- *Street trees*
- *Landscape buffers at edges*

2. Siting and Design Standards

It is especially important for all major public buildings and institutions to convey an image of Florence as an accessible, desirable place in which to live, work and invest. This image should be strengthened by imparting a strong sense of community to these centers, and especially for those who live near them.

- *The city's public buildings and institutions should be adequate to meet the needs of the city's growing population and the public workers who support them.*
- *Each public building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the institutional center and of the area in which it is located.*
- *Physical accessibility should be maintained between all public facilities and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the facility and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*
- *Adjacent to street intersections, place the main building close to the corner. Parking, loading or service should not be located at or near the intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Institutional support center streets should have trees that complement the adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Off-street parking should be placed behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the public facility. The buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*

- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings.*

3. Future Improvements

Florence intends to add a fire station in support of its planned growth and development and anticipated increase in population. It is recommended that, in response to suggestions during the planning process, the city consider options for the following civic spaces.

- *Large indoor performance area*
- *New city hall downtown*
- *Parking structure downtown – completed 2024*
- *Upgrades to existing fire stations*

F. Conclusion

Public investments in transportation, water and wastewater systems, park and recreation facilities and public buildings and institutions are critical to realizing the aspirations set out in the city's Strategic Development Concept.

The following chapter deals with plan implementation—the organization, management and actions that must be carried through in order to meet the city's objectives, which were determined through public meetings and considerable discussion throughout the planning process:

- *Preserve and enhance the city's open space system*
- *Build and support strong and vibrant neighborhoods*
- *Create discernable, compact activity centers*
- *Support development citywide with appropriate utilities and infrastructure*

Most land development is accomplished by the private sector, with oversight in most cases from the public sector. Most of the city's infrastructure—the supporting services and facilities without which private development would not be possible in most cases, is provided for by the public sector. The city intends to support planned development with facilities and services appropriate to meet the overall citywide objectives set forth in the Florence Strategic Development Concept.

VII. Implementing the Plan

The Florence Comprehensive Plan presents a long-range view of city development that will be carried out in accord with the city's Strategic Development Concept. This concept for the long-term development of the city is detailed in the chapters of this document dealing with the use and development of land and for public sector investments to support such development patterns over time. The Comprehensive Plan serves as a long-range

framework for fitting together citywide growth and development, and especially the physical elements of Florence. Consequently, carrying out these plans will involve most everything city government does, which must be organized and coordinated carefully.

The city's plans are to be implemented through a combination of direct public and private investment, and through public decisions by the City Council, Planning Commission and other boards and commissions. Plan recommendations will be translated into action through revision and continued administration and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, through budgeting and capital improvement programming, through empowerment of community and neighborhood organizations and volunteers, and through public and private decisions regarding annexation.

Florence is a municipal corporation, formed under powers granted by the State of Alabama. The city has used its grant of the police power to adopt and enforce growth and development regulations. The city has used its power to tax to plan for and implement a budgeting system that includes capital investments for infrastructure facilities and services that it uses to help shape growth and development. Florence has used the power of eminent domain (the power to force sale of private property for valid public use) sparingly to enable various infrastructure investments and redevelopment actions in support of public policy and plans. All of these tools will continue to be used together to shape Florence in accord with the city's Comprehensive Plan.

A. Specific Plans

Keeping the Comprehensive Plan up to date is also an important task. The plan will be refined and detailed from time to time through preparation and adoption of Specific Plans. This will continue Florence's tradition of updating and refining its plans through special area studies and plans as market or physical conditions or level of interest on the part of local citizens or the Planning Commission warrants them. Through this extension of the planning process, city officials and staff, residents, property owners and developers may come together, accompanied by representatives of the county, state agencies and the University of North Alabama, as appropriate, to plan in more detail for the creative development, redevelopment or simply enhancement of such areas.

Plan amendment and refinement are essential to consideration of planning for, designing, enabling and appropriately regulating the orderly development of all activity centers and corridors. It will also be necessary for proper consideration of potential redevelopment areas in accord with Alabama law. Upgrading of various neighborhoods and activity centers, short of redevelopment, would also be appropriate subjects for the Specific Plan process.

Consideration of any rezoning to enable development, redevelopment or expansion of the activity centers and corridors indicated in the plan should first require preparation and Planning Commission adoption of a Specific Plan for the entire area in question. The Specific Plan detailing and refinement process emerges naturally from the need to keep the

plan current and to regulate orderly development and revitalization of the city's designated activity centers and corridors.

Specific Plans would serve to support and detail the Florence Comprehensive Plan. They would be used to guide planning and design of development within an area of interest—thematic or geographic. For example, Florence needs a Street Tree Plan and Program—that need could be filled by a specific plan. Geographic sub-areas of the city could be subject to specific plans to provide needed guidance to development or reinvestment. Sweetwater, Seven Points, West Florence and Veteran's Park areas provide examples.

Consideration by the City Council for rezoning of the subject property should require Planning Commission review and adoption of a Master Development Plan modeled after and compatible with the adopted Specific Plan that includes the area to be rezoned. Preparation of a Specific Plan could be set in motion by direction of the Planning Commission on its own volition, at the request of the City Council, or in response to petition by area residents, property owners and/or developers.

The following Specific Plans have been adopted by the Planning Commission and are considered extensions of the Comprehensive Plan and its guiding principles.

1. **West Florence Neighborhood Plan**
2. **North Florence Business District**
    a. **Pine Street Corridor Plan**
3. **East Florence**
    a. **Sweetwater District**

The following Specific Plans are of priority to their neighborhoods, the community, and the success of the Comprehensive Plan.

1. **East Florence**
    a. **River Heritage District**
2. **Cox Creek District**
    a. **Gresham-Middle Corridor Overlay District**
3. **Midtown District**
4. **Downtown**

B. Growth and Development Regulation

Several of the key elements of the city's development management system—such as the zoning ordinance and map, subdivision regulations, sign regulations and landscape regulations, among others—are based on the police power. Together, the elements of this system address land use, site planning, the size and location of buildings and other structures, aesthetics and signage. Each of these regulations is framed to account for various aspects of the so-called "valid public purposes" of the municipality and the appropriate enabling authority in each case. Each must also respect the principles of due process of law, non-discrimination in their application, profitable use of land, freedom of speech, and the special concerns associated with balancing individual costs against anticipated public benefits.

1. Zoning Ordinance and Map Considerations

Florence has adopted and enforces a zoning ordinance to regulate development within districts as shown on the city's zoning map. This is one regulatory tool among several that may be used to help implement the vision, goals, policies and recommendations of the plan:

- *By directly prescribing permitted land uses and densities, and*
- *By mitigating impacts of adjacent land uses through prescribed joining and/or separation of land uses and development densities.*

The Comprehensive Plan and its Future Land Use Map should not be confused with the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. The Comprehensive Plan is a *guide* to public and private investment in land development and infrastructure. In contrast, the *zoning ordinance* is a regulatory tool used by the city to influence and direct development of the community in ways that reflect the direction and desired form called for in the Comprehensive Plan. The following table highlights these differences:

Comprehensive Plan	*Zoning Ordinance*
▪ *Provides general policy guidance*	▪ *Provides specific regulations*
▪ *Describes conditions desired in the long term*	▪ *Describes what is and what is not currently allowed today*
▪ *Includes recommendations that involve other agencies and groups*	▪ *Deals with development issues under city control*
▪ *Intentionally flexible to allow responses to changing conditions*	▪ *Fairly rigid, requires formal amendment to change*
▪ *General land use categories*	▪ *Zoning districts*
▪ *General land use locations*	▪ *Parcel-specific designations*

In addition, planned developments, requiring preparation and approval of overall master plans and similar modifications in accord with the Comprehensive Plan, are intended to allow innovative approaches to development, in recognition of the fact that livability—and good design—cannot be legislated, but can be encouraged and incentivized.

As a part of the plan implementation system, Florence has during the planning process, and intends to continue to revise the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map as needed, to reflect and incorporate the land development policy of this plan as appropriate. The intent of the ordinance is that, in general, with the intention that all development will be compatible with uses and development criteria specified in the plan.

Corridor overlay districts, including landscape planting standards, may be needed to guide the improvement of each of the arterials noted as Image Corridors on the city's Strategic Development Concept in Chapter II)

Reinvestment and intensification requirements and incentives should be devised for each of the existing commercial corridors and centers as noted on the future Land Use map in Chapter IV. These might include:

- *Consolidation and reduction in parking requirements for shopping centers and related outparcels*
- *Mandatory cross-access easements and consolidation of ingress and egress among and between commercial parcels that front arterial corridors*

As revisions to zoning districts are made to the Zoning Map, consideration should be given to the appropriate location of boundaries between districts of differing uses or significant densities. The most desirable arrangement of such uses would be back-to-back, and would account for parcels placed side-by-side (with perhaps requirements for additional width to allow buffering; and designating districts having significant differences of use, height or density in across a street from one another only under special conditions.

2. Subdivision Regulation Considerations

Florence intends to revise the Subdivision Regulations from time to time to reflect and incorporate the land development policy of this plan as appropriate. This will include the concept of Conservation Subdivisions, especially for use in and adjacent to the city's green infrastructure as identified in this plan.

3. Additional Development Review Criteria

In addition to the general changes proposed above, development criteria for activity centers and neighborhoods—plus some general principles to protect the city's watershed, may be added to the development management system during amendment of the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations.

a. Activity Centers

To provide leverage toward timely completion and application of Specific Plans to new activity centers defined and designated in the Comprehensive Plan, no new commercial development or medium- or high-density residential development should be considered in such locations in the absence of an adopted Specific Plan for the subject area.

To provide leverage toward timely completion and application of Specific Plans to existing activity centers as defined in this plan, approval of any proposed change in land use or density should require completion and approval of a master development plan as defined in the Zoning Ordinance. During the review and approval process for such development plan, the Planning Commission should use the policies of this plan and any applicable Specific Plans for the subject area as an overall guide.

Further, the commission should employ a checklist such as the following during the development review process for all activity center or corridor development requiring a master development plan or site plan approval.

- *All buildings adjacent to a collector or arterial street shall provide a main entrance on the façade of the building nearest to and facing that street.*
- *Building façades shall provide a visually interesting environment and avoid uniform styles.*
- *Buildings shall be oriented toward the pedestrian by providing a direct link between the building and the pedestrian walking system, with emphasis on directing people toward the public street system.*
- *A building's ground floor facing a collector or arterial street shall contain a minimum of 50% unobscured windows, doors or display areas.*
- *Sidewalks shall be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility or safety appropriate to the location.*
- *All streets shall be designed to promote traffic movement conducive to pedestrian safety and to provide direct routes between nearby destinations as called for in the Comprehensive Plan.*
- *Parking lots shall be designed to provide through pedestrian paths, clearly identifiable by changes in material or elevation, from street to building.*
- *Pedestrian-scale light fixtures no greater in height than twelve feet shall be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians.*
- *Street trees shall be planted as specified by the city.*
- *In non-residential areas at least ten percent of the total site area shall be dedicated to accessible, usable, pedestrian sensitive open space. Where feasible, this standard should be fulfilled with plazas, courtyards or other similar public spaces at or adjacent to buildings.*
- *Surface parking lots shall include at least five percent (5%) of the total surface area devoted to landscaping distributed and designed in accord with an overall plan approved by the Planning Commission.*
- *Surface parking lots containing fifty or more spaces shall be divided into smaller areas separated by landscaped areas at least ten feet wide and by a building or a group of buildings.*

- *Parking structures shall be architecturally integrated or designed with an architectural theme similar to that of the main building(s).*
- *Parking structures located adjacent to collector or arterial streets shall have ground-level business uses along the street side(s).*

b. Neighborhoods and Residential Development

To provide leverage toward the development neighborhoods in Florence, no new medium- or high-density residential development, or any residential development that requires site plan review, should be permitted in the absence of an adopted Specific Plan for the subject area. Further, such development should require completion and adoption of a master development plan as defined in the Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Commission should use the policies of this plan and applicable Specific Plan for the subject area as an overall guide.

Further, the commission should employ a checklist such as the following during the development review process for all residential development requiring a master development plan or site plan approval.

Neighborhoods shall be located sensitively in or strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources

- *Neighborhoods shall be planned and organized carefully in relation to the natural environment*
- *The citywide open space system shall serve as part of the neighborhood edge*
- *Neighborhoods shall be designed to conserve natural systems and thereby require less capital investment for earthwork, clearing and drainage*
- *The neighborhood shall be planned and designed in a manner appropriate to its context—to reflect its location in the community*
- *Dense development shall be located toward activity centers and corridors; less-intense development shall be located away from such areas*
- *There shall be included in each neighborhood a legible, compact center appropriate to the needs of the residents—for example, a park or usable community open space*
- *The neighborhood center shall be pedestrian oriented with easy vehicular and pedestrian access from within the neighborhood*
- *Neighborhoods shall be planned and designed to locate higher density housing to take advantage of neighborhood center amenities*
- *The neighborhood shall be designed and built with walkable, interconnected streets*
- *Neighborhoods shall accommodate the access needs of motorists while providing a convenient and safe environment for pedestrians*

- *Sidewalks shall be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility and safety appropriate to the location—at least one side of local streets and both sides of collector streets*
- *Blocks longer than 500 feet shall provide pedestrian cut-through paths*
- *Pedestrian-scale light fixtures no greater in height than twelve feet shall be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians*
- *Street trees shall be planted as specified by the city.*
- *At least 15% of the total residential development shall be dedicated to accessible, usable, pedestrian-sensitive open space that includes appropriate focal points*
- *Neighborhood pedestrian accessibility shall be enhanced through use of cul-de-sac linkages, as well as trails within greenways or other open space systems*
- *Interconnected neighborhood streets shall be provided to assure alternate routes to every destination to diffuse automobile traffic*
- *Outdoor places shall be provided so that children to play safely away from their own homes*
- *Neighborhood street environments shall feature relatively narrow driving surfaces, ample sidewalks, street trees and front porches*
- *Neighborhood streets shall be planned and designed to provide a "calm" environment where drivers realize that driving fast or aggressively is inappropriate*
- *Buildings shall be sited close enough to streets to spatially define them as public spaces*

c. Green Infrastructure Area Development

The city's green infrastructure, as defined and mapped generally in Chapter III, is critically to the health, safety and welfare of the city and its residents. In response, the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations, as appropriate, should be amended to require a Specific Plan and/or use of a Conservation Subdivision approach in or adjacent to any area defined as part of the city's green infrastructure.

d. Watershed Conservation and Development

As a final example in this series, the Planning Commission, using the policies of the Comprehensive Plan as an overall guide to protecting watersheds as a part of the city's green infrastructure, should prepare and use a checklist such as the following for use during the development review process for all development projects requiring a master development plan or site plan approval:

- *Favor citywide low gross density / focused medium net density conservation subdivision development to gain useful open space, recreation opportunity and watershed protection.*
- *Design and build residential streets at the minimum width necessary for their use.*
- *Minimize the use of cul-de-sacs and set their minimum required radius to accommodate emergency and maintenance vehicles.*
- *Allow use of vegetated open channels in the right-of-way of selected streets serving low-density development to convey and treat stormwater runoff.*
- *Keep impervious parking area to that actually required for the intended use to help make shared parking solutions attractive.*
- *Reduce overall imperviousness of parking lots by permitting pervious materials in spillover parking areas.*
- *Require property owner association management of community open space.*
- *Require use of naturally vegetated buffers, including floodplains, steep slopes and wetlands, and along streams.*
- *Limit clearing and grading of woodland and native vegetation to the minimum amount needed for building areas, access and fire protection.*
- *Manage community open space, street rights-of-way, parking lot islands, and other landscaped areas to promote maintenance of natural vegetation.*
- *Maintain all "blue line" streams at least at their current lengths.*
- *Prohibit new stormwater discharge of unmanaged stormwater into wetlands, aquifers and other critical water bodies.*

C. Annexation

Florence is well positioned to accommodate new residential growth accompanied by the commerce it generates. Generally speaking, more households bring more dollars to be spent in the community. However, residential growth by itself comes at a cost to the city's services and facilities. Residential land uses are usually a drain on municipal finances, for it typically costs more to provide services to a household than it typically pays in *ad valorem* taxes. In contrast, owners of farm, forest and open lands within municipalities typically pay more in local tax revenues than it costs local government to provide services to their properties. However, the critical tax for Alabama municipalities is retail sales tax, which shoulders the majority of municipal finances. Therefore, new residential growth should be balanced with commercial and industrial growth and preservation of farm and open space areas until those areas may be added to Florence in accord with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Future Land Use map outlines areas within which annexations will be given high priority during the planning period. As the city considers annexation of new areas, the ability to protect the city and its fiscal basis, its people and resources, as well as assure the

ability to provide services, present and future, will be prime considerations. Annexation decisions should take into account at least the following questions and criteria, in addition to all elements of the Comprehensive Plan, when considering the appropriateness of any particular annexation.

- *Efficiency of providing services—will the annexation result in demand on public facilities and services that may exceed the capacity of such facilities and services, or will annexation cause or eliminate awkward and irregular boundaries that cause difficulty or inefficiencies in supplying utilities and services?*
- *Fiscal soundness—will annexation of the property significantly add to the revenue base of the city? Comprehensive annexations that "pay their way" by including commercial areas whose taxation may help to cover the cost of necessary support services should have priority.*
- *Image compatibility/enhancement—is the property to be annexed consistent with Florence standards, character and image, or might annexation allow for the elimination of existing or potential land uses and improvements considered a blighting or deteriorating influence, or perhaps prevent untimely or inappropriate development of property?*

D. Coordinating the Comprehensive Plan and the City Budget

City Council budget preparation and adoption is an annual responsibility mandated by Alabama law, whereas comprehensive planning in Alabama is traditionally viewed as an occasional activity overseen by the Planning Commission. As a result, a Comprehensive Plan may quickly become dated. Consequently, the connections between the city's long-range plans and its annual budget—both critical tools of local government—may tend to weaken over time. This problem can be remedied by adding an annual planning component to the budgeting process to encourage all citizens to become more fully involved in determining ways to help the city reach its potential. Fully integrating the comprehensive planning and annual budget processes will increase the likelihood that city staff and private citizens alike will make daily decisions in accord with the Florence Strategic Development Concept.

Specific responsibilities for carrying out city plans must be assigned to individuals, city departments, appointed boards and outside agencies. Consequently, a Comprehensive Plan update included in the annual budgeting process may be used to help the mayor and City Council better determine budget priorities, consider plan and development regulation amendments, and coordinate activities toward the task of achieving city goals.

To coordinate Florence development policies and their implementation, each city department, each city board and commission (and the non-city boards, commissions, agencies and other groups that may be eligible for funding assistance from the city) should be required to review the Comprehensive Plan and submit a report to the mayor. That report should include the following information and recommendations (as the instructions may apply in each case):

- *Current overall responsibilities of the department, agency, board or commission as provided by law and as perceived by the chairperson, department head or executive.*
- *Current specific responsibilities for carrying out city policies and programs.*
- *All tasks perceived to be essential for achieving the city's goals during the coming year that either are or should be the responsibility of the respondent.*
- *Suggested changes in city programs – to include but not be limited to regulations, capital investments, operation and maintenance, and intracity and intergovernmental coordination – the respondent perceives to be in the best interests of overall city plan implementation.*
- *Suggested changes in city policies toward growth and development as those are outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.*
- *Suggested changes in the respondent's responsibility or authority that would better enable implementation of any or all parts of the Comprehensive Plan.*
- *A copy of the department or agency's current annual budget, an annual audit or other appropriate financial statement, and proposed budget for the coming year.*
- *A preliminary budget proposal, including the personnel and capital equipment that should be needed by the respondent to deal with the above, and the portion of those costs it is requested the city bear.*

The mayor's office should incorporate this information in a draft budget and suggested plan amendments for the coming year. Following discussions with department heads and others as appropriate, the mayor's office should forward the draft budget and suggested plan amendments to the Planning Commission, whose members should review it regarding implications for amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission should report to the mayor's office the results of its review that may lead to any recommendations for Comprehensive Plan revisions, development management system ordinance amendments and intra-governmental and inter-governmental coordination.

All proposed budget requests (both from within and outside of city government) should be returned to the mayor, who, with the City Council, should review each budget request for completeness, for compliance with budget instructions, and for compatibility with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended budget priorities. The mayor should consider all budget requests, prepare a final revenue forecast and budget, and present proposed city budgets to the City Council. The Planning Commission should act, as it deems appropriate, regarding recommended amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and subdivision regulations and suggest appropriate zoning ordinance amendments to the City Council. The City Council will hold hearings to discuss proposed city budgets and regulations prior to adoption.

Coordination of the city's continuing planning and budgeting systems as outlined above are likely to produce the following results:

- *The budget will be directed by overall city policies as reflected in the Comprehensive Plan, which will be updated more or less continually.*

- *The Comprehensive Plan and city budget will likely be increasingly targeted toward achieving Florence's visions for itself.*
- *The emphasis upon combining the planning and budgeting processes will help to balance what is to be achieved with who is to benefit, through prioritization and appropriate allocation of financial resources toward achievement of city policies as expressed in the Comprehensive Plan.*

E. Plan Updating and Amendments

Keeping the Comprehensive Plan up to date is an important task. Through the processes described in this chapter, the plan may be refined and detailed on a regular basis through at least annual preparation and adoption of plan amendments. In this way, the plan amendment and refinement process will become virtually automatic. Nevertheless, it will be essential to consider planning for, designing, enabling, and appropriately regulating the orderly development of the city. It may also be necessary for proper consideration of potential redevelopment actions in accord with Alabama law.

VIII. Conclusion

Change occurs in a continuous manner. Neighborhoods, institutions, schools, parks, and commercial and industrial centers are not developed overnight. Hence, the plan does not propose or provide "quick fix" solutions, nor should it be viewed simply as an economic development platform. Rather, this Comprehensive Plan is intended to *strengthen, revitalize and optimize all aspects of life in Florence over the long term.* As such, the plan must remain a living document, able to grow and change as local conditions change. To do so, it must be updated and amended on a regular basis as described in the previous chapter.

Plan implementation will take time and goodwill. Florence must strive to get even more people interested and involved in setting and implementing the community vision. City government must continue to gather other agencies, public and private, onto the same team. The city must continue to prioritize and take direct action on various recommendations of this plan by spending local tax dollars. Further, city officials must help shape the action of others with not just more regulation, but more *effective* regulation. The city must be willing to provide selected incentives to encourage others to take the lead in development activities that would further implementation of the plan's policies. And finally, city officials must strive to use every power they have under the law in concert with every public investment they make to support plan implementation.

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to evolve and grow in response to changes in public values and to market and physical conditions. Only through continuing use, evaluation, detailing, reconsideration and amendment can the plan fully serve Florence, and only then can the people of Florence use it fully and creatively as they seek achievement of their comprehensive vision for the community.