

City of Senoia, Georgia
2016 – 2036 DRAFT
Comprehensive Plan

Land Use and Housing Policies

This document summarizes relevant policies adopted in the Comprehensive Plan as a guide to the purpose statements of residential zoning districts in the City of Senoia Zoning Ordinance. These policies will shape the development standards established in these zoning districts. This document also comprises Task 1 of the Scope of Work: “Assess the land use and housing policies adopted in the 2016-2036 Comprehensive Plan; incorporate these policies into the purpose statement of the Historic Overlay District.” The Overlay District and remaining residential districts contain brief purpose statements. Sec. 74-74. *Multi-family residential—MR*, for example, states “Multi-family residential district allowing two units per acre for two family dwellings and no more than four units per acre for all others. Multi-family residential is allowed only where water and sewer are provided. The purpose of this district is to accommodate high-density development.” These purpose statements will be expanded based largely on the Comprehensive Plan as a means of informing the public and supporting zoning decisions concerning the assignment of each residential zoning district.

Land Use Policies

The following seven residential zoning districts are incorporated into the zoning ordinance; development strategies assigned to these districts are explored below with the aim being to understand where these districts may be appropriate and the objectives of the City in assigning these zoning districts to various locations. These development strategies are akin to “Purpose Statements.” Note that while the R-20 Residential District is no longer found in the zoning ordinance, this District is found in the Comprehensive Plan. Conversely, the “ICD” Inclusive Community District is found in the zoning ordinance; however, this recently adopted district is not found in the Comprehensive Plan. Finally the “Historical Overlay” is presumably found in the zoning ordinance as the Historic Neighborhood Overlay.

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- R40 – Residential
 - R40 – Open Space
 - R40 – Conservation
 - IIR – In-town Infill Redevelopment
 - HR – Historic Residential
 - MR – Multifamily
 - HN - Historic Neighborhood Overlay

R20 – Residential and R40 – Residential Districts

The following development strategy is associated with the R20 – Residential and R40 – Residential Districts:

“The city intends to protect these areas from incompatible adjacent development, particularly loud or noxious uses. The construction of sidewalks in these subdivisions where there are none. The connectivity of these subdivisions to each other and near to commercial areas via multi-use trails, paths, and sidewalks. The city shall endeavor to construct pedestrian and street connectivity to future developments.”

Connectivity is the dominant element of the development strategy for these residential districts. This connectivity applies to connecting residential land uses to one another and to the town center where virtually all commercial uses are established. The strategy encompasses specific public infrastructure in the form of sidewalks, identifying a public works priority.

Protection of neighborhoods from incompatible development is also a strategy associated with these residential districts. Incompatible development is a term that should be defined as for some residents, incompatible development relative to the low density residential development defining recent residential development may be medium density residential development. However, lot size data for Senoia’s historic neighborhoods, the character that has attracted new residents to Senoia, reveals that these neighborhoods are actually comprised of “medium density” development.

MR - Multi-Family District

Described as “A higher density residential development,” the development strategy of the MR District is to “. . .connect these areas to the GC General Commercial and OI Office Institutional areas of the city with sidewalks and multi-use trails. The City will locate MR developments to avoid incompatible developments and where water and sewer can be provided.” Higher density is couched as a maximum of four dwellings per acre. Mandated open space is frequently a provision of multifamily districts to afford residents of higher density developments an opportunity to enjoy such open space. Sec. 74-99. *Permitted uses* does not address open space.

The area designated on the Future Land Use Map as “Multi-Family” is a very limited area on the west side of Main Street, approximately one-half mile from town center. This would not be considered “easy walking distance.” Higher density residential is often accommodated near commercial centers both as a transition in land use from those centers to lower density residential development and in recognition of a resident population that may be more dependent on walking as one means of transportation.

Sec. 74-2. *Definitions* establishes the following definition for Dwelling, multiple-family or multifamily: “A building designed for and containing four or more dwelling units.” Presumably, this definition allows townhouses, condominiums and apartments. Table 6.1 *Zoning District Area, Yard and Height*

Requirements addresses “MR Multi-family Duplex” and “MR Multi-family All Others.” This would include duplexes or triplexes, encompassing the full range of attached dwellings.

HR – Historic Residential District

The development strategy associated with this zoning district establishes that “The City will endeavor to protect historic properties from demolitions and encourage rehabilitation with appropriate incentives. The City will work and continue to work closely with the Historic Society on these issues. The historic properties should be maintained and/or rehabilitated/restored in accordance with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. All new development in the area should conform to the historic pattern of narrow streets on 425-foot-long blocks arranged on a grid. Pedestrian access and parks should be provided to enhance citizen enjoyment of the area. Linkages by sidewalks and multi-use trails should be encouraged as well.”

A data base identifying residential lot sizes has been generated to identify median lot size and the number of lots that can be established in prospective 425-foot blocks consistent with historic platting. This data will aid in setting minimum lot area, lot width and building setbacks, among other parameters. Opportunities for extending the historic platting into adjacent areas will be explored. The motivation for that would be to expand the traditional character, increase residential density where appropriate and duplicate the architectural styles that contribute to the charm of Senoia’s historic neighborhoods.

IIR – In-town Infill Redevelopment District

This zoning district is designated as a land use west of and adjacent to the town center with additional designations on Main Street, well north of town center, and nearly to Rockaway Road. The development strategy associated with the IIR District states, “The City intends to provide development incentives to encourage redevelopment of specific areas of the city. The areas will be connected to other areas of the city by sidewalk and multi-use trails, be compatible with neighboring areas.” Presumably, land use compatibility will be a priority, resulting in incentives for commercial development where such development is established and residential development compatible with the historic development pattern. As incentives often include more intense commercial development in the form of greater building heights and bulk, reductions in parking and reductions in building setbacks and greater yield in residential development in the form of reduced lot size, balancing of future development with the established pattern will be a priority.

R40 – Open Space and R40 – Conservation Districts

These districts are described in the Plan as “Compact residential development designed to protect open space including wetlands, floodplains, stream corridors, conservation areas and natural buffers.” As such districts are typically assigned a minimum tract size, they may be relegated to newly developing areas outside the town center. The “Existing” Land Use Map bears out this assumption as these districts are indicated primarily at the periphery of the city.

The development strategy identified for these districts states, “The City will encourage preservation of more greenspace. Conservation areas should be as connected as possible. Conservation subdivisions are an essential policy tool for preserving and linking areas. In some cases, conservation areas also are planned to function as passive parks and/or greenways. Coordination and collaborative work with the Coweta County on open space plan and PDR or TDR program as critical.” A development standards found in the R40 districts is a minimum restricted, greenspace reservation of 40 percent. This is in exchange for relatively small lots sizes that yield compact development featuring shorter utility runs and preservation of greenspace.

The R-40 Conservation Subdivision District features an extensive list of Purpose Statements which adequately address this ordinance provision. The “R40 – Open Space District” found in the Comprehensive Plan does not appear in the zoning ordinance.

Historical Overlay

Sec. 74-75. *Historic neighborhood overlay* of the zoning ordinance establishes that “This overlay provides protection for the City of Senoia's historic neighborhoods from incompatible development and to advance long term plans for these areas. In the event regulations in the overlay and regulations for the underlying district are in conflict the more stringent shall apply. As expected, this overlay encompasses a slight majority of the original “Circle” incorporating the City of Senoia. The Plan acknowledges that the Overlay applies to “areas of the City that are included in and immediately surrounding the Nationally Registered Historic District of Senoia. “ The associated Development Strategy states “The City intends to continue infill and redevelopment that is compatible and with existing development and in accordance with the Historic Preservation Guidelines.” This indicates the importance of architectural guidelines that capture the dwelling typology and the need for a “pattern book” that will guide plan review for development within the Overlay.

Housing Policies

The following Comprehensive Plan excerpts have been compiled as guidance to housing demand in Senoia:

Page 52: "Most housing units within the City have 3 to 4 bedrooms, with all units having complete plumbing and kitchen facilities. This would indicate that the majority of the households are couples, a parent or parents with a child or children, or roommates."

Page 52: "The 2010 U.S. Census data indicates that 75.6% of occupied units within Senoia are owner-occupied housing units, with the remaining 15.5% renter-occupied housing units."

Page 56: Table 19 indicates that 29.9 percent of households with a mortgage pay 30 percent or more of HH income on housing. Therefore, 30 percent are cost burdened, a justification for affordable housing. Affordability can be achieved by smaller lots and smaller dwelling sizes.

Page 56: Table 20 indicates that a majority of renter-occupied households in Senoia are cost burdened, as based on gross rent as a percentage of household income (GRAPI) 51.7 percent of rental households spend 35 percent or more of their incomes on gross rent." The figure is actually 63.8 percent if you use 30 percent as the cost burdened ratio as does the Plan and the U.S. Census.

Page 56: "Housing for senior citizens is and will continue to be an important issue for every community. The senior citizen population is expected to continue to grow as the baby boomer generation ages." Despite that finding, the percentage of the population 55+ in 2014 was only 16.1.

Page 57: "Housing costs are largely dominated by moderately priced housing. There could be a need for a larger diversity of housing choices for middle class individuals." Table 15 shows that housing in the \$200,000 to \$299,000 grew from 246 units in 2010 to 436 units in 2014. Construction in recent years appears to exceed that range; however, "moderately priced housing" is likely to be in the lower end of that range. When data from Table 18 2014 Selected Monthly Owner Costs, which indicates that 63.2 percent of homeowners are paying \$1,500 a month in total housing costs, there may be a need for "moderately priced housing. This is somewhat reinforced by figures in Table 19 which shows that 29.9 percent of homeowners spend 30 percent of household income or more, meeting the definition of "cost burdened housing."

Page 57: "There is also a lack of multi-family housing for renters. Census data indicates that most of the rental population is cost-burdened." This reinforces the finding that affordable rental housing is needed.

Page 57: "The last piece of housing is senior housing. Since many individuals in need of senior housing suffer from a lack of mobility, there is a need to encourage accessible housing in walkable mixed-use development nodes. This will allow for challenged individuals to have easier access to goods and services. This sort of lifelong community also has the potential to attract wealthier empty-nesters to the city for their later years." This may represent an opportunity for senior housing, affluent seniors, in the town center.

Page 57: One of the “NEXT STEPS” as concerns housing policies set forth in the Plan addresses senior housing: “Since many individuals in need of senior housing suffer from a lack of mobility, there is a need to encourage accessible housing in walkable mixed-use development nodes. This will allow for challenged individuals to have easier access to goods and services. This sort of lifelong community also has the potential to attract wealthier empty-nesters to the City for their later years.” As not all seniors are affluent, but still benefit from walkable mixed-use development, a focus on opportunities for market rate and perhaps, subsidized housing in town center geared toward seniors, may prove desirable and necessary.

Community Goals

Page 17: “*Resource Management*: Senoia will promote the efficient use of natural resources and identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas of the community. This may be achieved by promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy generation; encouraging green building construction and renovation; preserving historic structures; utilizing appropriate waste management techniques; fostering water conservation and reuse; or setting environmentally sensitive areas aside as green space or conservation reserves.” This goal argues for more conservation subdivision development.

Page 17: “*Sense of Place*: Senoia will protect and enhance the community’s unique qualities. This may be achieved by maintaining the downtown as focal point of the community; protecting and revitalizing historic areas of the community; encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community; or protecting scenic and natural features that are important to defining the community’s character.” Residential development should be guided by strong architectural standards that can ensure that new development is compatible with the traditional features of the community which are largely determined by Senoia’s historic dwellings.

Page 17 & 18: “*Local Preparedness*: Senoia will identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of future the community seeks to achieve. These prerequisites might include infrastructure (roads, water, and sewer) to support or direct new growth; ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired; and leadership and staff capable of responding to opportunities and managing new challenges.” Senoia has used the availability of sanitary sewer infrastructure to direct growth. The compact development of town center and historic neighborhoods has yielded a walkable community. Infrastructure and service costs are minimized by such development. A focus on higher density housing in and around town center may be appropriate to address affordability and life cycle housing demand.

Page 18: “*Transportation Options*: Senoia will address the transportation needs, challenges, and opportunities of all community residents. This may be achieved by fostering alternatives to transportation by automobile, including walking and cycling; employing traffic calming measures throughout the community; requiring adequate connectivity between adjoining developments; or coordinating transportation and land use decision-making within the community.” This Community Goal can be advanced by investing in the sidewalk and bicycle network. This Goal also suggests that site plan review

and standards within the zoning districts require such connectivity. As suburban development has in the past created the quiet cul-de-sac, connectivity should apply to vehicular connectivity. This would not be a popular policy, but does, like the traditional grid network, deliver a superior transportation system.

Page 18: *“Efficient Land Use:* Senoia will maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the costly conversion of undeveloped land at the periphery of the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the traditional core of the community; designing new development to minimize the amount of land consumed; carefully planning expansion of public infrastructure; or maintaining open space in agricultural, forestry, or conservation uses.” This goal actually conflicts with conservation subdivision development which helps maintain open space. Given market demand, it is possible Senoia can foster both development models.

Page 18: *“Housing Options:* Senoia will promote an adequate range of safe, affordable, inclusive, and resource efficient housing in the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development of a variety of housing types, sizes, costs, and densities in each neighborhood; instituting programs to provide housing for residents of all socio-economic backgrounds; or coordinating with local economic development programs to ensure availability of adequate workforce housing in the community.”

This Community Goal supports rental housing, smaller lot and smaller floor areas. The ordinance now prohibits the rental of ADU’s, Accessory Dwelling Units, and currently prohibits “Tiny Homes.” Each could address affordability. The designation of Multi-Family development on the Future Land Use Map may need to be re-evaluated as the property identified as such is far from the walkable town center, services and employment. Senoia is sufficiently compact that many employees who may be residents of these apartments should have that housing option and a convenient commute available to them.

Community Policies

Page 20: DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

“We will encourage development that is sensitive to the historic context, sense of place, and overall setting of the community.”

Another Plan argument made for of architectural standards reflected in a “Pattern Book” and application of such standards in the plan review process.

“We are committed to creating walkable, safe, and attractive neighborhoods throughout the community, where people have easy access to schools, parks, and necessary services (grocery store, drug store) accessible to multi-use trails and sidewalks. Creation of recreational facilities and set-aside of greenspace

are important to our community. We are committed to providing pleasant, accessible public gathering places, golf cart access and parks throughout the community.”

These multifaceted policies can be achieved through connectivity in all residential development, set-asides of greenspace in all multifamily developments, site amenities in conservation subdivisions and traditional subdivision development, and density allowances surrounding town center.

“We support appropriate residential and non-residential in-fill developments and redevelopment in ways that complement surrounding areas.”

Relatively higher density may be achieved immediately outside town center, with mixed use building accommodating residential uses on the upper floors within town center that can be a transition from commercial uses to lower density, single family detached neighborhoods. A recent townhouse development appears to have successfully blended into the fabric of town center.

“We encourage mixed-use developments that are human-scale and less auto-oriented.”

Vertical mixed use represented the development pattern across America at one time. While this may not have characterized Senoia, given the attractiveness of Senoia’s town center, the relatively limited opportunities for such development, which would bring into play surface parking that could be incorporated into building design as parking structures could further this Policy.

“We support increases in residential density in areas where community design standards, environmental constraints and available infrastructure capacities can satisfactorily accommodate the increased density.”

The findings of the lot size data review already indicate and the City has begun to consider a reduction in minimum lot size in the HR – Historic Residential and HN - Historic Neighborhood Overlay, yielding opportunities for relatively higher density. Multifamily density limits should be reconsidered as the current four dwellings per acre will likely not prove financially feasible for most developments. As written previously, multifamily developments in similar communities should be inventoried to **identify a density** that will attract development while protecting the traditional character of Senoia. This can be achieved through buffering, open space reservation and appropriate rezoning of property.

“We support new land uses that contribute to protecting the environment and preserving meaningful open space.”

The Conservation Subdivision District appropriately addresses this policy for developments at the periphery of the city. Introduction of open space preservation in multifamily development and a “Tiny Home” subdivision concept could further advance this policy.

“We support new land uses that enhance housing options in our community.”

Without belaboring the point, policies that seek affordable housing options cannot be fully realized with the limit of four dwelling per acre enforced by the MR Multifamily Residential District. Tyrone held to this density for many years and did not see one such development. Other options such as Tiny Homes and even shipping container projects may be debated to enhance housing options.

Page 21: RESOURCE CONSERVATION

“We will minimize inefficient land consumption and encourage more compact urban development in order to preserve green open space and natural resource areas.”

Senoia has achieved two objectives by expanding the sanitary sewer system. Firstly, this infrastructure strategy allows the City to direct growth, and secondly, this infrastructure accommodates higher density residential and commercial development. Increased density on land already served by infrastructures and public services furthers this policy. The Conservation Subdivision acknowledges the seemingly inevitability of development, but yields permanent protection of usable open space. One issue that should be addressed is “Should such open space be available to the general public?” If a multi-use trail, path, and sidewalk network is to be of maximum utility, site design must at a minimum accommodate public access to such networks.

“We will promote low-impact development that preserves the natural topography and existing vegetation of development sites.”

Low Impact Development” (LID) approaches should be incorporated into the subdivision and site plan review processes. Limits on mass grading and severe site grading that eliminates the original site topography should be evaluated.

Page 22: COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

“We will protect existing infrastructure investments (i.e., already paid for) by encouraging infill redevelopment, and compact development patterns.”

This Policy can be advanced by adopting standards addressed throughout this document such as allowing smaller lot sizes such as those found in the Inclusive Community District and increasing the allowable density of multifamily developments.

“We will create affordable housing opportunities to ensure that all those who work in the community have a viable option to live in the community.”

Re-examination of the limited designation of “Multi-Family on the Future Land Use Map and consideration of multifamily uses in and around town center can advance this policy. Smaller lot sizes and dwelling floor areas, allowing the rental of ADU's, subject to strong architectural and building materials standards could also advance this Policy.

“We will accommodate our diverse population by encouraging a compatible mixture of housing types, densities and costs in each neighborhood.”

The approaches listed above and in this document can be employed to expand the mix of housing types, densities and cost to accommodate Senoia’s diverse population. These approaches can also address the complete life cycle, allowing senior residents to age in place.

“We will encourage housing policies, choices and patterns that move people upward on the housing ladder from dependence to independence (homeownership). “

Homeownership is said to be the greater opportunity for Americans to accumulate wealth. As mortgages are paid off and residents are able to relocate to a higher valued house or apartment dwellers can save the necessary down payment residents can move up the housing ladder. A diverse mix of housing types, including those addressed here, can facilitate realization of this policy.

“We will increase opportunities for low-to-moderate income families to move into affordable owner-occupied housing.”

Senoia has already begun this process by partnering with a national non-profit and exercising creativity in new infrastructure funding accommodated by adoption of the Inclusive Community District. Additional such opportunities may become available on city-owned property. Other initiatives featuring smaller lot sizes and floor areas, perhaps even new construction approaches such as shipping container homes seen in Atlanta and across the globe can advance this policy.

“We support dispersion of assisted housing throughout the community in order to diversify neighborhoods and eliminate pockets of poverty.”

One approach to creation of workforce housing is building marginally smaller dwellings featuring identical architectural designs and exterior finish materials without the interior upgrades that drive up housing

costs. Examples are forgoing granite counter tops, premium cabinetry, and tile flooring. This allows such dwellings to blend into the neighborhood without the costs of interior amenities.

Habitat for Humanity is proving itself as one means of implementing this Policy through smaller lot sizes and smaller homes.

See Page 25: NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

“We would like to increase the mix of housing (by size, type, and price range) in our city.”

This Policy has been addressed in this document.

Page 71: Additional Planning Information

Housing

“1. The City needs to look at housing needs for the aging populations, as well young professionals.”

These two polar opposites have one trait in common; they make few demands on public services. Housing for the elderly can come in the form of smaller dwellings and smaller lots. Townhouse and condominium developments can remove the unwanted responsibility of yard and building maintenance. Apartments can achieve the same objective.

“2. The need for short and long term housing for the film industry.”

Participants in this economic sector may benefit from Bed & Breakfast Inns and Airbnb operations. B&B's may be allowed as a Conditional Use in the R-40 Residential District, subject to among other standards being, “a single-family dwelling occupied by the owner as his/her principal residence.” The Airbnb and “Short Term Vacation Rentals” business model does not accommodate such occupancy requirements as far as I know. That STVRs tend to drive up nearby housing costs is one reported downside.

“3. The need for more diversity in the size and price ranges of single-family houses.”

A reduction in minimum floor area can deliver more diversity in housing size and accordingly, but not always, housing prices. For example, a poorly designed vinyl box having a floor area of 2,000 square feet may sell for \$150,000. A well appointed 1,200 square foot bungalow may sell for \$300,000. But, generally smaller sized homes in compliance with appropriate architectural design, limits on design repetition to deter “cookie cutter subdivisions” can be brought to the market and welcomed by the community.

One caution concerning floor area involves “tear downs” and replacement with McMansions. Sec. 74-85. - Residential Historic District—RH of the ordinance establishes that “The minimum size of the primary dwelling shall be based on the average of the primary structures immediately adjacent and on the same size of the road.” Two dwellings as representative of the neighborhood context may prove insufficient. In addition, a number of cities have acted to control dwelling sizes. This consideration is critical in an historic context as the more new, outsized dwellings that replaced historic c dwellings, the more of a threat such market dynamics create. An ordinance that references the context to “dwellings within 1,000 feet of the proposed dwelling on both sides of the street” in determining maximum floor area may yield more control over market forces. A factor of 150 percent or even 200 percent has been used to place reasonable limits on new construction while allowing the market some flexibility in addressing demand.

Page 71: Community Facilities and Services

“5. Develop sidewalks and multi-use trails to reduce congestion downtown and connect areas of the city.”

This Policy suggests that dedication of land for development of sidewalks and multi-use trails should be built into every residential development. Individual, residential lots, not involving a subdivision would be exempt from such a requirement.

“6. Continue to invest in quality of life enhancements for the citizens which include, but not limited to: multi-use trails, parks and other community gathering spaces such as the feasibility of an amphitheater.”

Such an investment in parks, community gathering spaces and amphitheaters is likely limited to a role by the City or Coweta County. Set asides for multi-use trails in private development is a reasonable standard.

The Development Impact Fee Ordinance adopted by the City may be the best vehicle for construction of trails in the public rights-of-way.