



## SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOPS

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### PURPOSE

Community members previously provided input to help inform the County's Comprehensive Plan update, at the April 2016 Visioning Workshops and May 2016 Design Workshops, as well as through other forms, such as surveys and interactive tools. The insight community members provided to date on issues related to economic development, housing, transportation, and land use was distilled into a set of draft community priorities and more detailed character area visions and policy statements, which were vetted at the Implementation Workshops in June. The workshops updated residents on the outcomes of the planning process to date and provided interactive opportunities to ask questions, provide written feedback, and engage in group discussions. Participants' evaluation of the presented material is being used to help refine the direction of the content and create an initial draft of the Comprehensive Plan, which will be reviewed by the public in August.

### DATES, TIMES, AND LOCATIONS

Two in-person Implementation Workshops were held to gather community feedback:

- Monday, June 13, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.: Forsyth County Administration Building, Commissioners' Meeting Room
- Wednesday, June 15, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.: Central Park Recreation Center, Banquet Room

Each meeting had the same agenda and lasted two hours. Following the in-person workshops, a modified, online version of the workshop was made available on the website from June 16 to June 23, giving residents who could not attend an in-person meeting the opportunity to respond to the same material, in a modified online format.

### OVERALL NUMBER OF ATTENDEES

There were a total of 90 participants at the two in-person meetings as well as 160 participants in the Virtual Implementation Workshop following the in-person workshops.

## **AGENDA FOR MEETINGS**

The agenda for both meetings is detailed below.

### **6:00 SIGN-IN & INPUT ACTIVITY (ALL)**

Upon arrival, attendees participated in input activities, voting for their preferred vision statement and indicating their degree of support for the set of draft goals for the Comprehensive Plan.

### **6:10 ACHIEVING OUR VISION (PROJECT TEAM)**

The project team and County staff gave welcoming remarks and an overview of the Comprehensive Planning process, the goals for the workshop, recent survey highlights, the results of the design workshop, and a framework for understanding levels of development intensity and the defined character areas.

### **6:25 GUIDING OUR GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT PART II (ALL, FACILITATED BY PROJECT TEAM)**

Participants circulated through a series of boards explaining and depicting the 11 defined character areas, evaluating them for accuracy and clarity by placing a sticker along a development intensity scale to indicate the type of development they felt was appropriate and adding specific comments with sticky notes.

### **7:05 FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS (ALL, FACILITATED BY PROJECT TEAM)**

Attendees were divided into smaller discussion groups, facilitated by project team members, to vet a list of economic development, housing, and transportation priorities, as identified throughout the planning process to date. Groups then had an opportunity to complete a mapping activity to clarify their preferred vision, drawing proposed transportation improvements and attaching icons representing various housing and active transportation developments.

### **7:55 REVIEW/WRAP-UP**

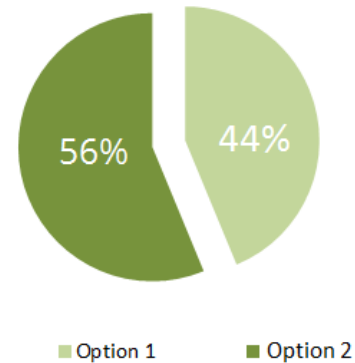
### **8:00 ADJOURN**

## SUMMARY OF WELCOME ACTIVITIES

Attendees signed into the meeting and were directed to a series of posters soliciting their feedback on two draft vision statements:

- *Option 1:* Forsyth County will continue to be a community of choice by promoting responsible use of our natural assets while advancing a thoughtful growth management strategy that strengthens and sustains quality of life for all generations.
- *Option 2:* Forsyth County will be a community of choice by advancing a balanced growth management strategy that strengthens our quality of life, respects our natural assets, and accommodates the needs of all generations.

**Preferred Vision Statement**



Meeting attendees voted strongly in favor of Option 2 (74 percent). Virtual Implementation Workshop participants were presented with the same choices, and the majority voted in favor of Option 1 by a slight margin (55 percent). Overall, participants voted in favor of Option 1 (56 percent).

They also gave their input on a set of overarching goals by placing stickers to indicate the level of importance they assigned to each one, using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being of low importance and 10 being of high importance. The overarching goals presented were:

### **A) ENHANCE COMMUNITY CHARACTER**

*As new growth and development occurs, maintain rural character while establishing a high standard for quality design in private developments, streetscapes, and other initiatives.*

### **B) EXPAND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT FURTHERS OUR VISION FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

*Ensure water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure plans and programmed investments further our community's future development vision and keeps pace with community needs.*

### **C) ATTRACT PROFESSIONAL JOBS**

*Facilitate job opportunities that create a better match between the County's workforce and nearby employment opportunities. By attracting more employers to the County, the tax base will become better balanced and more sustainable.*

## **D) INVEST IN OUR QUALITY OF LIFE**

*Continue to invest in quality schools, parks, and access to amenities, as well as protect natural and cultural resources.*

## **E) GROW COMMUNITY TOWN CENTERS**

*Support the development of town centers of activities of varying scales as identified by the Character Area Map. Typically, a town center will serve multiple purposes, such as a place for shopping, entertainment, community gatherings, and recreation. Depending on the location and scale, town centers may also contain residential units, professional offices, and other places of employment.*

## **F) IMPROVE MOBILITY**

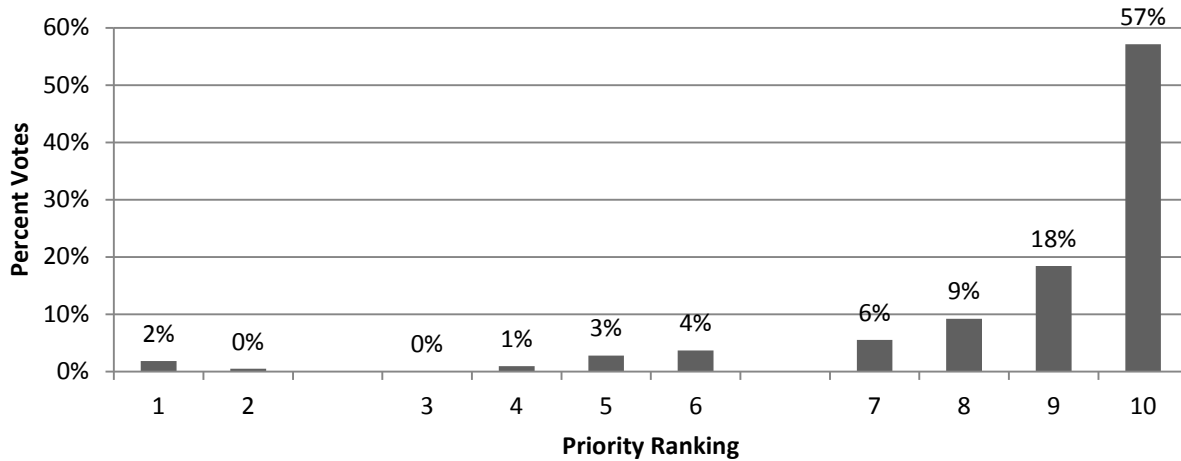
*Make getting around Forsyth County easier by improving existing roadways, adding opportunities for walking and bicycling, and advancing opportunities for transit and new transportation technologies to serve the long-term transportation needs of residents and businesses.*

Virtual Implementation Workshop participants were presented with the same activity. The average number of both in-person and virtual workshop respondents for each priority was 217. The full breakdown of the results is shown in the graphs below. Participants largely reaffirmed the stated overarching goals for the Comprehensive Plan, with 80 percent or more ranking four of the six goals to be of high importance, as indicated by a score of 8, 9, or 10. These included:

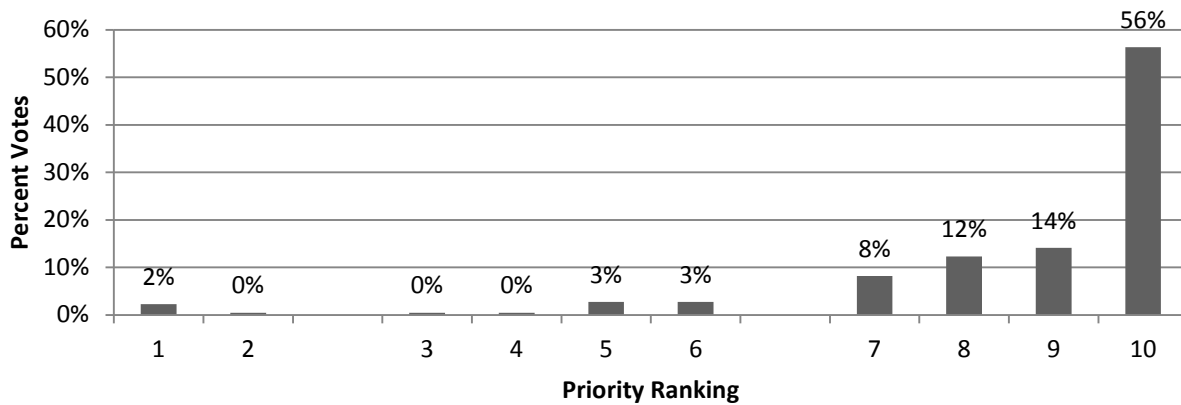
- A) Enhance community character (85 percent);
- B) Expand infrastructure that furthers our vision for growth and development (83 percent);
- E) Invest in our quality of life (85 percent); and
- F) Improve mobility (81 percent).

Two goals saw greater variability in perceived importance: C) Attract professional jobs, and D) Grow community town centers. Participants largely found the attraction of professional jobs to be favorable, with most ranking it to be of high importance (68 percent), a noteworthy number of participants judging the goal to be of medium importance (25 percent, as indicated by a score of 4, 5, 6, or 7) and a few finding it to be of low importance (6 percent, as indicated by a score of 1, 2, or 3). Participants were nearly equally divided amongst those who found the development of town centers to be of high importance (33 percent), medium importance (32 percent), and low importance (35 percent).

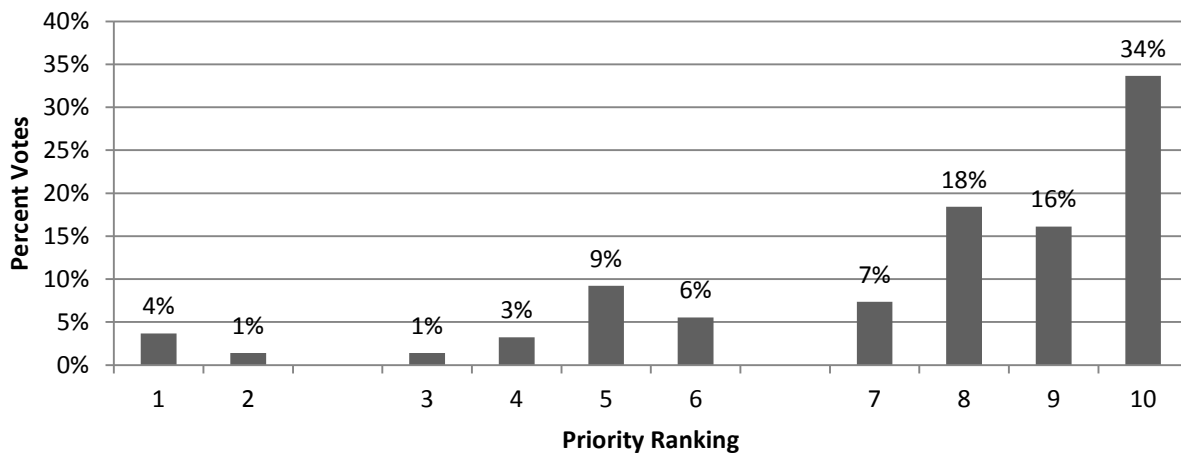
### A. Enhance Community Character



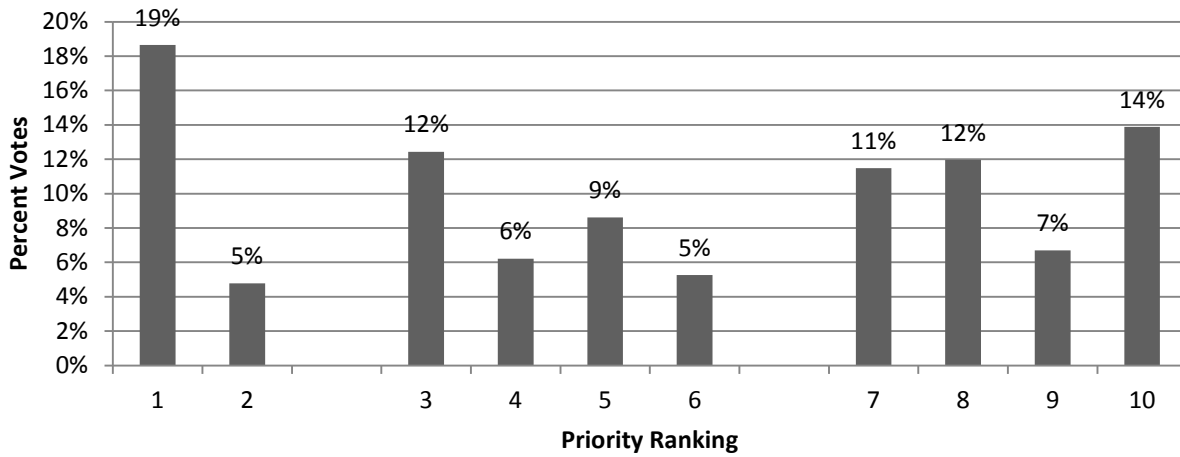
### B. Expand Infrastructure that Furthers Our Vision for Growth and Development



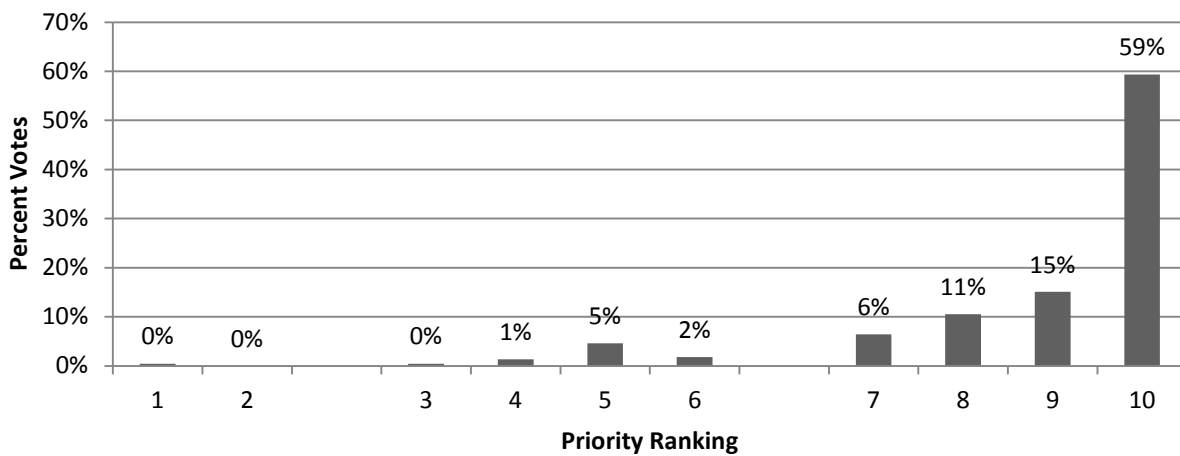
### C. Attract Professional Jobs



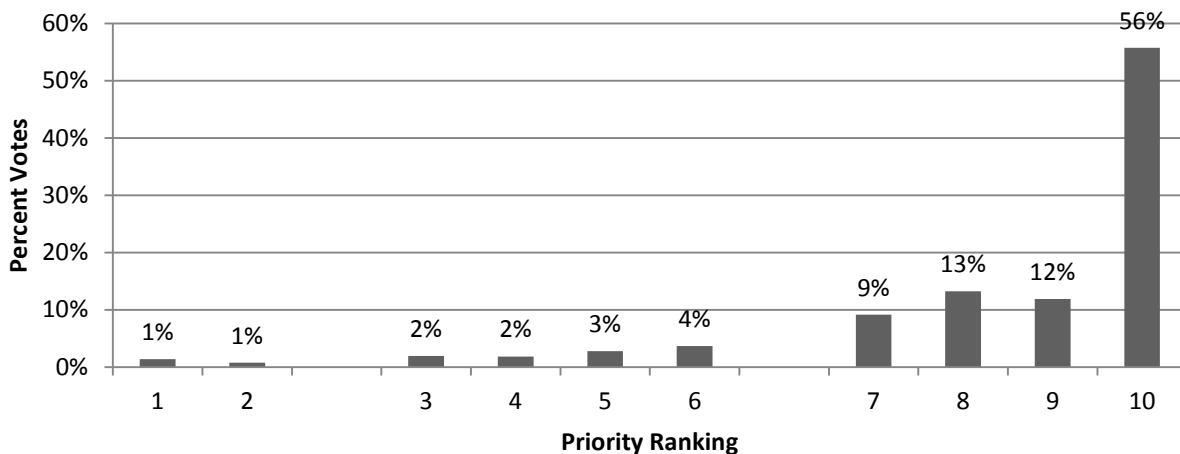
### D. Grow Community Town Centers



### E. Invest in Our Quality of Life



### F. Improve Mobility



## SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

Amanda Hatton, the consulting team project manager, began the presentation by reviewing the goals of the workshop, the Comprehensive Planning process framework, upcoming outreach activities, and highlights from a recent community survey. Eric Bosman, the project's land use lead, then presented the results of May's Design Workshops, including the appropriate locations and intensities thus far identified for town centers and mixed-use, business and industry, and residential. He explained how the input from previous involvement activities had been translated into revised character area boundaries, descriptions, and development intensity levels, and how attendees would be engaging with this information in the next activity. At the end of the opening presentation, the floor was opened to questions.

## QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSIONS

After the presentation, attendees asked the following questions:

Q: Lake Lanier seems to be an opportunity for redevelopment, and to have a hospitality destination.

A: Yes, that's a good point. The exercise doesn't really allow for other specialized types of uses, but a hospitality destination is something that we've heard in other meetings for this area.

Q: Can we be sure any meeting you had outside of this will be documented and published?

A: A summary of involvement and communications would be published as an appendix in the Comprehensive Plan, and additional materials would be made available to the public upon request.

Q: Can you clarify the boundaries of the character areas?

A: Mr. Bosman pulled up the character area map slide and pointed out key roads to clarify boundaries.

Q: You said you can't affect Cumming. Can you explain the relationship between Cumming and the County?

A: The City is an incorporated area and has its own jurisdiction and regulations. While we can voice residents' vision for the future of Downtown Cumming within the plan, the County is unable to directly regulate land uses within city limits.

## GUIDING OUR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT PART II

### IN-PERSON DEVELOPMENT INTENSITY BOARDS

*Purpose:* To determine the intensity of residential, town center/commercial, and business/industry development in each character area in Forsyth County.

*Materials:* Eleven intensity boards containing categories for business/industry, town center/commercial, and residential development.

*Summary:* The exercise was structured to help community members visualize the level of development intensity of each of the selected images. Based on the results of the design-based table exercises and individual maps collected at the Design Workshops as well as guidance from the Steering Committee, the planning team created baseline development intensity “sliders” to present to the community. Essentially, these sliders were scales that corresponded to the projected intensity of development. Implementation Workshop participants placed dots at the intensity level they felt was most appropriate for each character area; each participant was given one dot to use for every development category in each character area (three per board).

*Results:* The following data represents how the public’s response was concurrent with or differed from the planning team’s baseline intensity sliders (either Increase, No Change, or Decrease).

#### ***Town Center and Commercial***

*Increase:* McFarland, Haw Creek, Chestatee/Jot Em Down, and Sawnee Mountain

*No Change:* South GA 400, Lanier, Campground, and Northwest Forsyth

*Decrease:* South Forsyth, The Village, and North GA 400

While several areas increased or decreased slightly, the only considerable deviation was the increased intensity in Haw Creek. The increase in Sawnee Mountain also was slightly above the average change in comparison to other character areas.

#### ***Business and Industry***

*Increase:* Haw Creek, Lanier, Campground, Chestatee/Jot Em Down, and Sawnee Mountain

*No Change:* South GA 400 and Northwest Forsyth

*Decrease:* McFarland, South Forsyth, The Village, and North GA 400

Although several areas slightly increased or decreased in intensity, the only considerable deviation was the increase in Haw Creek and Chestatee/Jot Em Down.



### ***Residential***

Increase: Haw Creek, Lanier, Campground, Chestatee/Jot Em Down, and Sawnee Mountain

No Change: Northwest Forsyth

Decrease: McFarland, South Forsyth, The Village, South GA 400, and North GA 400

While several areas increased or decreased slightly, considerable deviations were only found in the decreased intensities in South Forsyth, South GA 400, and North GA 400 paired with the increased intensity in Haw Creek and Chestatee/Jot Em Down.

## **CHARACTER AREA INPUT FROM ONLINE IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOPS**

The method in which data was collected online differed slightly than the in-person workshops. Each character area board had two questions asking participants to decide where they agreed and disagreed with the intensities placed on the sliders. These results were quantified along with the results received at the in-person workshops.

### ***Residential Development***

The majority of responses indicated a general intolerance for residential intensities higher than two to three units an acre. There was a strong contingent of participants who wanted little to no residential development in the McFarland and South Forsyth character areas. The majority felt that any new residential should be placed generally north of Highway 20 at a density of 2 units and acre or less.

### ***Business and Industry Development***

Generally, across the board, the presented business and industry development intensities were received well with the caveat that they should not include new residential development to support them.

### ***Town Center and Commercial Development***

The online participants did not form a consistent middle ground on commercial development. One large group of participants agreed with the intensities of commercial development as long as the residential density was lowered, while the other group felt there was no need for additional commercial development.

## SUMMARY OF SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Participants broke into three smaller groups for a discussion of the identified priorities for economic development, housing, and transportation. Project team members facilitated the discussion and documented comments on chart paper. The input received from this session will be used to refine the priorities for the Comprehensive Plan and focus topics for policy recommendations. The draft priorities were numbered for the sole purpose of creating ease of reference):

### **Economic Development Priorities**

1. Decrease the County's dependence on residential taxes by attracting more businesses.
2. Increase the amount of cultural arts and entertainment opportunities in the County.
3. Leverage and expand the fiber optics network.
4. Establish a more formal role for economic development as a part of the County's administration.
5. Facilitate the clustering of tech businesses in the southern portion of the County.
6. Work with the Chamber of Commerce to increase and enhance opportunities for visitors to enjoy Forsyth County.
7. Enhance and improve local shopping opportunities.
8. Encourage the development of town centers as nodes of economic activity.

### **Housing Priorities**

1. Allow for and support development of workforce housing to accommodate school teachers, police officers, hospital workers, entry-level professional workers etc.
2. Allow for and encourage housing that facilitates aging in place.
3. Update the residential zoning districts in the Unified Development Code to reflect the vision for future housing identified in the *Comprehensive Plan*.
4. Pursue diversification of number of bedrooms per housing unit in new developments to support a multi-generational community.
5. Establish high standards for the design of new housing developments.
6. Ensure that new housing developments pay their "fair share" of associated infrastructure costs.

### **Transportation Priorities**

1. Increase road capacity to address current needs and anticipated growth.
2. Improve east-west connectivity.
3. Expand alternatives to GA400 for north-south connectivity.
4. Add active transportation improvements in appropriate locations.
5. Provide alternatives to single occupancy vehicles for traveling to and from jobs both by County residents and workers.
6. Increase multi-modal connectivity within town centers where jobs and commercial uses are concentrated.
7. Maintain road quality through ongoing maintenance activities.

8. Ensure that transportation investments are implemented in a way that maximizes benefits to the community, such as the incorporation of streetscape design and improved aesthetics.
9. Create value by encouraging development that reduces dependence on frequent car trips.

There was also an opportunity to give feedback on issues not directly related to the content of the Comprehensive Plan, but which had come up repeatedly throughout the public involvement process and will be documented in the plan. These issues were termed Quality of Life, and the identified priorities were:

### **Quality of Life**

1. Preserve Forsyth County's cost of living.
2. Enhance and expand the park system.
3. Create joint use opportunities among the schools, parks, and other institutional uses.
4. Create greater unity between northern and southern portions of Forsyth County.
5. Accommodate needs and preferences of new residents as they move to the County, including an increased diversity of ethnicities.
6. Protect and provide access to our County's unique natural assets, including Lake Lanier, Sawnee Mountain, Chattahoochee and Etowah Rivers, etc.
7. Ensure that every new initiative in the County contributes positively to developing a strong sense of place.

After the discussion, participants were invited to take part in a mapping activity to tie their comments to specific locations in the County. They were asked to focus on issues related to housing types and active transportation, topics that had not been resolved in previous meetings and warranted additional discussion. They placed icons and drew on the map to indicate appropriate locations for mixed-use with housing (the exact type of housing was unspecified), townhomes, multi-family housing, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and multiuse trails. The participant input from all discussion groups is combined and illustrated in Figure 1 below.

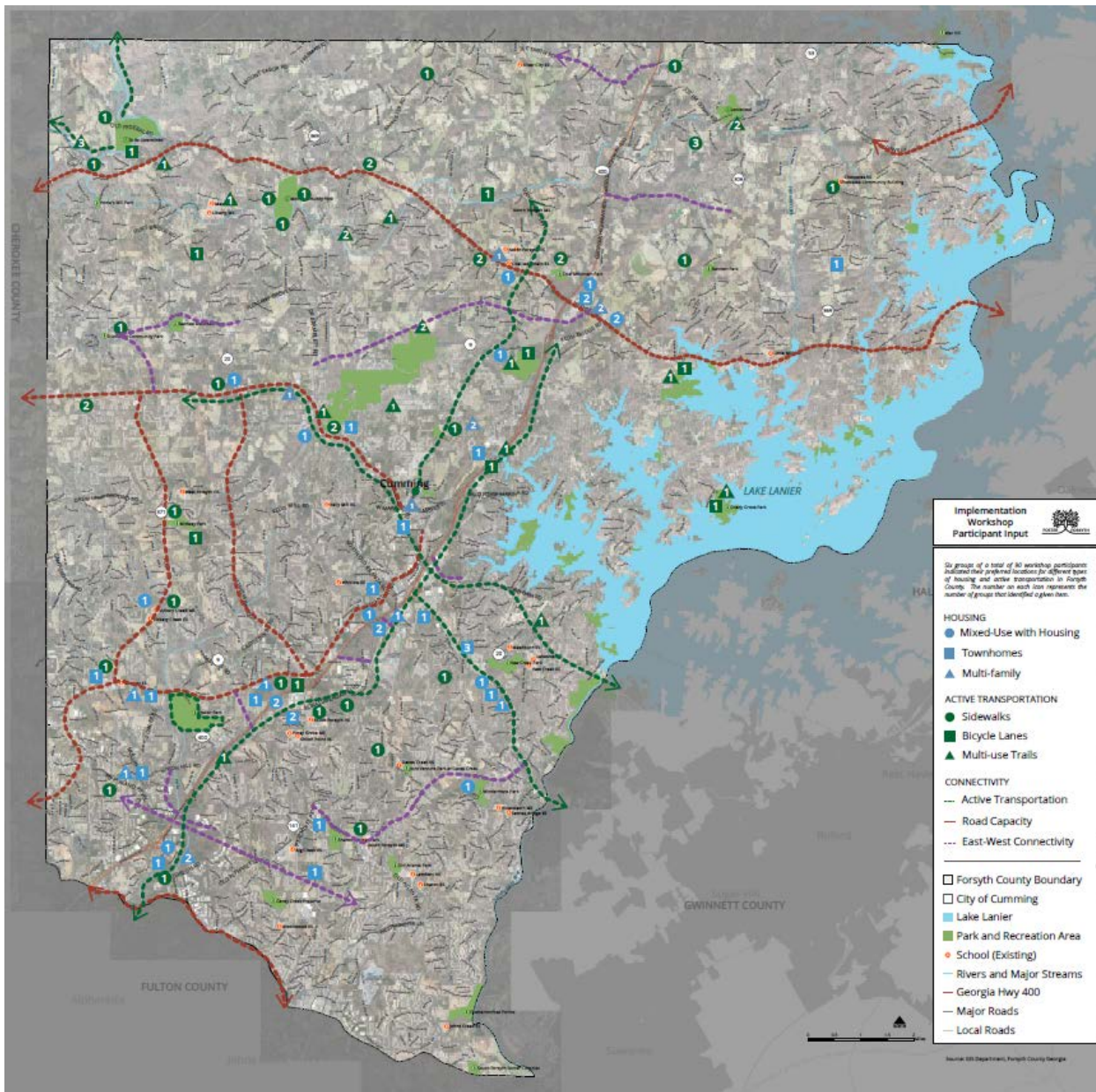


Figure 1. Mapping activity participant input

## MEETING CONCLUSION

Participants were dismissed and comment forms were collected at the end of the discussion group sessions. Project team members and County staff remained to discuss additional questions from participants.

## ONLINE IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

Following the in-person Implementation Workshops, an online version with comparable material was made available through the Foster Forsyth website. Participants were briefed on the meeting content, and then gave their feedback on the same topics that were discussed in person. They indicated their preferred vision statements and ranked the importance of the economic development, housing, and transportation priorities; online results were calculated in conjunction with in-person votes. (*See Welcome Activities section above*). Next participants gave feedback on character areas; input is summarized on page 9. Finally, participants reviewed the drafted priorities and indicated if there were any priorities they would add to the list or any they would recommend modifying or removing from the proposed set. Prevalent themes from participant comments are listed below:

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

#### ADD/AFFIRM

- Emphasize high-paying jobs, not retail industry
- Continue to encourage a limited amount of industrial use
- Focus on infill and reducing vacancies before constructing new development
- Promote responsible growth
- Require impact fees to finance new residential and commercial development
- Favor low-density development
- Attract and support the tech industry
- Promote the County as a destination for large, youth sporting events
- Expand dining opportunities
- Discourage strip commercial development
- Support local stores over chain retailers
- Encourage local food sourcing, such as farmers markets or mini-farms
- Consider SPLOST funding as an alternative to generating revenue by attracting businesses

#### REMOVE/MODIFY

- Do not limit the tech cluster to the southern portion of the County
- Do not recommend an independent Department of Economic Development for the County; the Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce already provides economic development services

### HOUSING

#### ADD/AFFIRM

- Maintain rural living choices
- Prohibit clear cutting and embrace the natural topography
- Slow the development of residential subdivisions
- Embrace aging in place
- Maintain areas with predominantly large lot, single-family homes

- Improve transparency of Board decisions and limit ties between commissioners and developers

## REMOVE/MODIFY

- Prioritize low-density, single-family residential
- Minimize multi-family development
- Do not prioritize workforce housing
- Preference for affordable, single-family homes rather than apartments
- Require residential impact fees to pay for schools and transportation improvements
- Exercise greater scrutiny when considering variance requests
- Establish standards for design quality
- Consider establishing an urban growth boundary or another mechanism to protect natural areas

## TRANSPORTATION

### ADD/AFFIRM

- Reduce congestion throughout, especially on Highway 9
- Increase emphasis on sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails connecting to recreational areas and town centers
- Expand the Big Creek Greenway
- Complete projects underway before beginning new ones
- Identify a funding structure for recommended improvements
- Require developers to pay transportation impact fees
- Improve traffic law enforcement
- Create more alternative routes through a redundant street network
- Time traffic signals to improve efficiency
- Reduce speeds
- Bring MARTA up GA 400

### REMOVE/MODIFY

- Clarify the meaning of multimodal transportation and active transportation
- Do not bring MARTA into the County

## QUALITY OF LIFE

### ADD/AFFIRM

- Focus on safety and education
- Preserve rural areas
- Increase open space and opportunities for outdoor recreation

### REMOVE/MODIFY

- Do not adopt a policy of diversification, allow the market to decide