

**STAFF ANALYSIS  
OVERLAY DISTRICT PROPOSAL  
GATEWAY CORRIDOR OVERLAY DISTRICT**

**SUBJECT: The request of the City of Dalton Mayor and Council to create the Gateway Corridor Overlay District and accompanying map. The proposed overlay district is independent from the Unified Zoning Ordinance and is only currently proposed to affect the geographic area known as TAD#5 within the City of Dalton.**

**Introduction**

**What is an overlay district?**

Overlay districts are an extension of zoning that focus on specific geographic areas rather than city/county-wide. Overlays come in a variety of types that range from historic districts, neighborhood protection districts, and corridor districts. The nature of the particular overlay district relies upon the community's objective for instituting a new regulation. Community objectives often associated with the desire for overlay districts are typically related to public safety, economic development, and community identity. As with all zoning matters, an overlay district may regulate the potential use of property as well as the potential physical appearance of said property. Often times the intent of an overlay district is to create a consistent character throughout an area. In the absence of design-focused regulation, development will often occur randomly with no continuity from property to property. Overlay districts have the potential to create the overall character for a specific area so that, over time, development appears to be planned rather than intermittent.

**Where are overlay districts applied?**

Overlay Districts are often applied to critical areas within the community such as downtowns, gateway corridors, or other specific areas where specific needs and opportunities are identified. Much like a zoning map, an overlay district is applied to a specific geographic area and only regulates within that specific boundary. Overlay districts, as the name implies, are overlaid on top of the existing zoning map. In other words, the underlying zoning of a property (commercial, residential, etc.) within an overlay district remains as the base land use regulation. Overlay districts are often written to say that the stricter ordinance applies. Dalton already has a historic downtown overlay district. The City of Cartersville Main St. Overlay district and Dawson County GA 400 overlay district are some other examples of commercial corridor overlay districts in North Georgia.

**Why not just amend the zone districts rather than adopt a new ordinance?**

The zoning ordinance, as stated previously, applies zone districts to the entire city/county. Overlay districts are intended to be applied to specific areas where a particular objective is sought. In the case of Dalton, the city is part of the Unified Zoning Ordinance which applies zoning to unincorporated Whitfield County as well as the City of Varnell. Overlay districts give each respective jurisdiction the ability to identify specific areas in need of special attention and to then apply and administer said overlay district locally rather than jointly. Euclidian-style zoning is intended to apply general land use regulation to an entire jurisdiction while overlay districts are intended to apply a greater level of detail for specific areas.

**Analysis**

The proposed Gateway Corridor Overlay District was drafted with one overarching goal, to create a more attractive and higher-functioning corridor. The West Walnut Avenue corridor has been dubbed the primary gateway corridor for many residents and visitors of Dalton. Gateway

corridors are often viewed as the formal entrance of a community. While the intent of this entrance is to appear safe and inviting with the goal of guiding visitors/residents to other community assets such as the historic downtown, the gateway corridor will often be the only impression of the overall community that travelers are exposed to. With the understanding that a community's gateway corridor may be its opportunity to make a lasting impression, one would prefer the impression be that of a positive nature.

The 2018 Joint Comprehensive Plan recommends overlay districts for both commercial corridors as well as interchange areas which would both apply to the proposed Gateway Corridor Overlay District. The focus of the overlay district was based on the needs listed within the 2018 Joint Comprehensive Plan as well as the more recent City of Dalton Redevelopment Plan: West Walnut Avenue Corridor. The underlying foundation of both of these plans is to improve traffic flow, traffic safety, long-term property values, and aesthetics in order to foster economic development as well as bolster community pride.

**Conclusion:**

The staff can recommend approval of the proposed Gateway Corridor Overlay District.

Reasons for approval:

1. This overlay district will guide development/redevelopment in such a way as to improve both the aesthetic and function of this critical area within the City of Dalton;
2. Staff believe the long-term effect of this overlay district will be greater resiliency and equity for this portion of the city.
3. The proposed overlay district would be a significant measure of implementing both the City's Comprehensive Plan as well as the West Walnut Avenue Corridor Redevelopment Plan.

Exhibit A: Proposed boundary of the Gateway Corridor Overlay District

