

Georgia - Survey Takeaways and Initial Reactions

GROWTH:

General sentiment is that the town is on the right track in terms of the rate of growth and development that it has been experiencing, leaning slightly toward having some room for more growth.

Protecting Water Quality, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Small Town Character are the most important considerations as the town continues to develop.

- Lakeshore, Arrowhead Lake, Silver Lake, wetlands and streams were popular answers for protection.
- Lake Champlain / Georgia Shore Road were popular answers for viewshed protection.
- [Follow up question - would you support the establishment of additional local regulations such as water quality protection, viewshed protection, farmland protection or design standards for new development?

In terms of what type of growth people wanted to see, new industrial business was most preferred, followed by growth in South Village. Increasing residential or rural development was not well supported.

- Include in presentation cost of community services studies, commercial vs. residential growth.

South Village continues to be deemed the most appropriate location for new commercial growth, however there is a lot of concern about traffic congestion, and that continued development could make this worse.

The potential for establishing water or sewer service in South Village was generally supported, however a majority felt more comfortable with the idea of a special district which would pay separately.

There is some concern about the potential impacts of short-term rentals, an issue which is not addressed in the current Town Plan.

Initial Considerations:

- ❖ Town Plan could be strengthened to better recognize priority policy of protecting natural resources, and small town character. Could recommend specific policies or strategies which could advance these goals.
- ❖ Town Plan should have general policy of working to direct new growth in and around the already established growth centers for Industrial and South Village and away from the rural areas to reduce sprawl. This is generally covered in the current plan but could be strengthened.
- ❖ Town Plan needs to recognize and respond to the traffic congestion issue in South Village, and how the town may be able to use this plan to help leverage the State VTrans to assist in addressing this issue. This issue is not directly addressed in the current plan.
- ❖ The Town Plan should include a review of the South Village plan and zoning to identify recommended changes.
- ❖ Plan could recommend continued effort to advance a private or municipal wastewater sewer system which would allow additional growth potential in South Village, provided that concerns of traffic and costs are adequately addressed. This topic is only covered peripherally in the current Town Plan. This topic supports the protection of rural areas/resources as well as economic strength, and this should be highlighted in the plan.

- ❖ Consider adding language in the Town Plan that the town should monitor the ongoing growth of short-term rentals and their impacts to see if any action is warranted. This issue is not covered in the current plan.

HOUSING

There is general sentiment that Georgia doesn't really provide the types of housing people in the area need, and the housing available isn't very affordable.

- Single family homes, smaller affordable starter homes, senior apartments and Accessory Dwelling Units were felt to be the most commonly needed housing types.
- Mobile home parks, seasonal camps and tiny houses were considered the least needed.
- While there is recognition that affordability is an issue, people were not very welcoming to the idea of more apartments, which would directly address affordability. In fact, housing affordability ranked very low as an overall priority.
- [Follow up question: Why do you think apartments ranked so low as a needed housing type? What concerns might you have about apartments in the Town of Georgia?

Areas of North Georgia, West Georgia and Georgia Center were identified as the three most appropriate locations for new housing growth, ahead of South Village. (This surprised me somewhat)

This result may be people interpreting new housing as being single family, and not apartments or mixed-use which could be utilized in South Village..

Zoning in these areas could be looked at to identify if there are opportunities for addressing housing needs.

Lakeshore and Rural areas identified as least appropriate areas for new housing.

Zoning in these areas could be looked at to identify if there are any opportunities to help protect their existing character.

Initial Considerations:

- ❖ Town Plan should be updated to better recognize that housing diversity and affordability appears to be a growing concern, even if it is not considered a priority at this time. This is already in line with the current Town Plan policies, however could be adapted, updated.
- ❖ Town Plan should be updated to recognize recent legislative changes such as the HOME Act (Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone) and recommend that local changes be adopted to address the following:
 - Two-family / duplexes should be permitted anywhere single family homes are permitted and must be treated the same.
 - Accessory dwelling units shall be permitted where single family homes are permitted and must be treated the same.
 - Small multi-family (3-4 units) shall be permitted anywhere there is municipal water and sewer.

- Town Plan must look at housing data in general and develop strategies that address housing affordability.
- ❖ Town Plan could recognize ongoing support for accessory dwelling units and senior apartments.

LOCAL SHOPS AND SERVICES

There is fairly strong support for the idea that new local shops and services are desired in town.

- The most desired local commercial businesses are a casual restaurant, bakery/cafe, and take-out/delivery restaurant. Notably, all of these are food service.
- Notably, chain / drive-thru restaurants are NOT desired.
- [Follow up question: What is it about a chain/fast-food/drive-thru restaurant that you DO NOT like?]
- Concern about the area population not being enough to support a local restaurant may be offset by South Village proximity to the highway and visitor traffic.

Initial Considerations:

- ❖ Town plan should reflect desire for certain shops and services, with potential recommendations on how Chain/Fast Food business could be discouraged or managed, and how these results could be used by the town to help market/recruit a local restaurant to the area.
- ❖ Should review zoning for potential recommendations related to child care, ag/farm support and other moderately desired businesses.

COMMUNITY AMENITIES & SERVICES

Police presence and law enforcement, vacant property/junk cleanup, and town office communication were identified as the areas needing the most improvement among the services listed.

- [Follow up question: What are the specific concerns with vacant property/junk that need to be prioritized]

Initial Considerations:

- ❖ The Town Plan should be updated to recognize that these are areas for improvement desired by the community.
- ❖ There were many written suggestions on how town office communication might be improved, and we can review these to identify potential recommendations in the plan which work well with the office management structure.
- ❖ The plan could recommend the adoption of a vacant property / junk ordinance.
- ❖ The plan should identify ways in which the town may be able to secure better police presence support from the County Sheriff/State Police [Note: for discussion with the PC, I assume these services are contracted out to these offices?]

There was general sentiment that local services from the town office and library would not be improved if they were to be relocated to a centralized location in future South Village development.

There was strong agreement in the idea of supporting diversity and addressing discrimination.

- ❖ The Town has recently adopted a statement about this. The Town Plan could be updated to include this statement and describe how this fits into the overall vision of the town.

Off-road recreational walking/biking paths were identified as the most desired community amenity among the options listed.

- ❖ It was noted that there are already a number of such trails and connections within the town, and that people may not be aware of the options available. As an initial step, recommendations can be provided in the plan for how to improve public awareness of these existing recreational options before new trails are planned or built. As a longer term effort, a trails master plan may be considered.

Sidewalks and on-road bicycle trails and infrastructure was not strongly supported among the options provided, and ranked relatively poorly among overall priorities. There was also not a clear consensus on which roads would be the best targets for such improvements either, however Georgia Shore Road was generally most popular (though this may likely be the most difficult road to do this on?)

- ❖ The plan could recommend as a longer-term strategy, as part of any future trails plan, that Georgia Shore Road be looked at as part of a larger recreational trail network. However, perhaps more realistically, priority roads may want to be looked at in terms of how they could potentially connect other off-road trail segments which are otherwise fragmented.

The maintenance or upkeep of the existing park facilities ranked generally higher than the option for adding new park facilities.

- ❖ The plan could recognize a general sentiment that the maintenance of existing facilities should be prioritized above adding new facilities, or that the town should be sure it has the capacity to maintain and upgrade them before adding new elements.
- ❖ In the longer term, specific suggestions for new activities or facilities were provided in the survey, which could be identified as future ideas to work towards.

Local cellular phone service was generally regarded as being insufficient to meet daily needs, whereas high-speed internet service was rated more favorably.

- ❖ The plan should be updated to reflect this status, and identify a goal/policy of continuing to work toward the improvement of local cellular service where possible.

There was very strong support for the town working to coordinate with adjacent municipalities on a shared system of community and recreational amenities.

- ❖ The plan should be updated with a goal or policy of working toward this effort, including outreach to neighboring towns to discuss how this could be accomplished before this update is completed. If possible, specific suggestions for how to get this conversation started should be included in the plan recommendations.

There was general agreement in support of the town pursuing more sustainable energy solutions, as well as helping to support local homeowners and business owners with available options to do the same.

- ❖ The plan language already supports this initiative, however could be updated.

OVERALL PRIORITIES

The top priority identified by respondents was the preservation of town character and natural resources, which was notably higher than other options provided.

- ❖ The current plan already supports this, however the plan language and policies could be updated to strengthen this goal. This effort should be highlighted as an overarching strategy and reflected in the overall vision throughout the document.