

AN INNOVATION IN LAND USE AND WATER RESOURCES PLANNING - CHATTAHOOCHEE HILL COUNTRY ALLIANCE

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Abstract. The development concept of the Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance (CHCA) will offer a unique opportunity to carry out the sustainable development and conservation of over 40,000 acres of farmland and mature forests as well as miles of the Chattahoochee River and its tributaries. The goals of sustainable development will be accomplished through a land planning approach known as Conservation Development. Another unique element of the CHCA development concept will be the utilization of Transfer Development Rights (TDR) as a land use management tool. The CHCA has also formulated an integrated water resources management strategy to address water supply, water conservation, wastewater treatment, and stormwater management in a comprehensive, watershed-based plan.

INTRODUCTION

The residents and landowners of South Fulton County, working closely with Fulton County government, have embraced this unique opportunity and collaboratively developed a comprehensive Land Use Plan and Overlay District that received unanimous approval from the Fulton County Board of Commissioners in October 2002. The concept formulated by the CHCA will involve development of three Villages (each approximately 1 square mile in size) and several smaller Hamlets (each at least 200 acres) utilizing Conservation Development design techniques. Unlike traditional subdivision communities, these Villages and Hamlets, with concentrated development, will be live/work communities with an emphasis on preserving natural and environmentally sensitive areas. This will be accomplished via mixed-use development, which will provide for civic, commercial, agricultural and residential uses all within the Village and Hamlet areas while at the same time preserving the unique characteristics of the outlying rural and

environmentally sensitive areas. One legacy of the CHCA approach will be preservation of large greenspace areas for passive recreation, watershed protection and natural resource conservation.

TRANSFER DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

In April 2003, Fulton County became the first jurisdiction in Georgia to adopt a Transfer Development Rights (TDR) Ordinance. The County's TDR Ordinance enables property owners in the sending areas (i.e. future land conservation/protection areas) to sell their development rights to developers in the receiving areas (i.e. future Village areas) at free market rates. Use of the TDR concept ultimately results in permanent protection/conservation of property in the sending areas and increased development density in the receiving areas. The break-through use of TDRs increases landowners' options for the sale, or holding, of their property. Fully implemented, approximately 50% of the existing rural land can be protected through the development of three high density Villages using the TDR approach. Using other conservation tools (i.e. farmland protection, conservations easements, etc.) another 25% of the land can be protected.

WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The guiding principal behind the concept of Conservation Development is that existing natural systems (i.e. streams, wetlands, buffers, etc.) have a uniquely beneficial impact on the watershed, and these existing features should be preserved, restored and enhanced to the extent practicable during development. Conservation Development is accomplished most successfully when site planning incorporates existing natural systems into the design process such that the future development blends/meshes into the existing site features and natural systems. In the CHCA process, the beneficial characteristics of the natural systems are being

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incorporated into the overall greenspace program. Furthermore, CHCA will integrate the concept of Conservation Development with a comprehensive water resources management plan that addresses the issues of water conservation, wastewater treatment and stormwater management.

The CHCA intends to implement a development concept that will be unique to the state of Georgia in terms of innovative land use planning, natural resource conservation, and water resources management.

Water Conservation

Water conservation goals will be accomplished by establishing two water supply sources: 1) potable water and 2) urban reuse water. The potable water will be used for traditional human consumption needs such as drinking, bathing, kitchen/bathroom sinks and washing machines. The urban reuse water supply will be used for outdoor irrigation, toilet flushing, car washing and fire protection. The concept of utilizing stormwater runoff for irrigation in selected areas of the development is also being considered as a part of the plan. In addition, the CHCA will incorporate applicable recommendations from the Long Term Water Supply and Conservation Plan, which was developed by the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (the Planning District).

Wastewater Treatment

Each Village will be evaluated for a site-specific sewage system to address wastewater treatment needs. Each sewer system will be designed to accommodate the Village's population and land use density as well as blend in with the natural conditions. The urban reuse water supply will come from these Village wastewater treatment facilities. The advanced treatment process utilized will result in an "urban reuse quality" effluent that is safe for human contact and suitable for the uses described above.

Stormwater Management

The stormwater management goals will be accomplished by implementing applicable recommendations from the District-Wide Watershed Management Plan developed by the Planning District as well as the design guidelines set forth in the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual. CHCA envisions that future site design of the Villages and Hamlets will encourage the following: 1) site development will mimic the existing natural systems to the extent possible; 2) minimize directly connected impervious areas to promote stormwater infiltration; 3) consider regional detention; and 4) utilize natural and buffer areas for flood control and stormwater quality enhancement.