

## **CONSERVATION ELEMENT**

### **MAJOR ISSUES**

East Gainesville enjoys many natural features that give the area its special character and great potential. Many of these resources have experienced impacts from urban development that has impacted water quality in the adjacent Payne’s Prairie and Newnan’s Lake. The Plan provides many opportunities to improve environmental quality while improving access and visibility of these assets. Specific issues and opportunities include seeking to expand greenways utilizing existing canals and utility easements, preserving and connecting natural parks and centers, and improving water quality. Protecting and promoting the natural environment while encouraging economic development presents a unique challenge for East Gainesville.

### **CONSERVATION VISION**

The natural areas of East Gainesville can become its greatest asset, creating a sense of place and community that will help redefine the area’s image. These features can be showcased through creating greenway connections, enhancing their visibility, and restoring their environmental quality, particularly for the Sweetwater Creek and Lake Forest Creek. Improving access and visibility of Newnan’s Lake with a greenway is one of the highest priorities to achieve this goal. This vision for the Conservation Element expresses the critical role that greenways and open space play in creating a cohesive community as follows:

*Celebrate and protect natural resources as integral to the community by promoting enhanced access and awareness and integrating them into the fabric of the community using a network of greenways. Use environmental features to help shape land use patterns and define the community’s image.*

### **RECOMMENDED PLAN**

The recommended plan proposes a unique interconnected greenway system that will serve several inter-related purposes. Greenways provide access to and connect the area’s

environmental resources, enhancing their visibility. Improvement of water quality and control of stormwater through enhancement of canals and creeks will provide additional environmental benefits. Greenways also provide transportation mobility and access by connecting neighborhoods with business centers, shopping areas, schools and parks. Acquisition of conservation land is also a secondary strategy where needed to enhance existing public lands and acquire lands needed to complete the greenway system.

### **Proposed Greenways**

The proposed greenway system incorporates three functional types of corridors. The system uses environmentally sensitive conservation areas and riparian corridors, existing or proposed transportation corridors and existing roadways identified as multi-use trail opportunities. The function of these greenways is dependent on the surrounding land use. Typically, the greenways that traverse environmentally sensitive lands can be considered “rural greenways” and corridors surrounding roadway networks can be considered “urban greenways.” The multi-use trails will incorporate bicycle and pedestrian supportive design elements. The intersection of each greenway and multi-use trail should create a “sense of place through pocket park facilities or a commercial node.” With a significant focal point, each intersection will serve as a destination point.

There are several proposed greenways which link critical conservation lands and riparian corridors. These include Newnan’s Lake Greenway, Lake Forest Creek Greenway, Southern Greenway and East-West Connector Greenway (see the Recommended Master Plan and Priorities map below). Newnan’s Lake Greenway, the Lake Forest Creek Greenway and the East-West Connector Greenway are considered to be priorities in the plan. These greenways should function as wildlife corridors, habitat linkages, passive recreational destination opportunities and support water quality improvement. This type of greenway is the most critical in preserving rural land or acquiring public land to link significant habitats and essentially preserve a corridor.

### **Newnan’s Lake Greenway**

The Newnan’s Lake Greenway will provide a regional connection from the Gum Root Swamp generally along the western shoreline of Newnan’s Lake. The greenway will connect

with the Southern Greenway and the Gainesville-Hawthorne Rail Trail, which are located along the northern portion of Paynes Prairie. It will also provide a water quality enhancement component much needed in the Newnan's Lake basin. Development around the lake and surrounding wetland habitat has reduced the water quality and habitat value from untreated stormwater runoff and the greenway will serve to filter pollutants and sediments before reaching Newnan's Lake. In addition, acquisition of conservation lands in this area have the potential to provide a critical linkage for wildlife from the Gum Root Swamp south to Paynes Prairie. Other enhancement opportunities include a boardwalk and multi-use facility along parts of the lake to enhance public access, and a wildlife crossing under SR 20.

### **Lake Forest Creek Greenway**

The Lake Forest Creek Greenway is another top priority. This greenway connects the NE 27<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway with the Newnan's Lake Greenway to the east, with proposed connections to East Side High School and Lake Forest Elementary School.

Lake Forest Creek has been degraded by channeling and untreated runoff from surrounding properties. It flows into Newman's Lake, contributing to the lakes' very poor (and declining) water quality. In portions of the creek, concrete has been used to alter the flow of water. The plan will propose restoring the creek to a natural free-flowing system through revegetation and stabilization along the shoreline. Shoreline enhancement will allow for more volume while slowing flow. A stormwater park is also proposed near the beginning of this system in the Duval neighborhood to enhance water quality by pretreating flow entering this system. This greenway will provide a significant riparian corridor for animal movement and water quality improvement. A natural trail along the shoreline will also provide passive recreational opportunities and transportation access from neighborhoods to the Five Points commercial center. However, access to the creek should remain limited.

### **Southern Greenway**

The Southern Greenway will extend from the eastern end of SE 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue to the east along the northern edge of Paynes Prairie to the Newnan's Lake Greenway and Gainesville-Hawthorne Rail Trail. This greenway will use an existing utility right-of-way corridor and

provide a buffer between residential properties and Paynes Prairie. It will also provide another shorter recreational route from the SE 27<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway to the Newnan's Lake Greenway.

### **East-West Greenway**

The East-West Greenway is a top priority and begins at Williston Road just north of the Gainesville-Hawthorne Rail Trail. This greenway extends to the east adjacent to the Blueberry Farm and terminates at the SE/NE 27<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway near the Eastgate Low Activity Center. This greenway will provide a recreational opportunity while preserving natural wetlands and a vital part of East Gainesville character, the Blueberry Farm. This greenway would only support non-auto travel linking suburban residential areas in Kincaid Loop with major activity areas in downtown and the University area.

### **NE/SE 27<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway**

The NE/27<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway runs north to south connecting the Regional Airport, and proposed Office and Industrial Mixed-Use Employment Center, to the Gainesville Hawthorne Rail Trail. The NE 27<sup>th</sup> Street section between Hawthorne Road and NE 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue proposed as part of the NE 27<sup>th</sup> Street roadway extension will intersect with the Lake Forest Creek Greenway near Hawthorne Road at the proposed activity center. Fred Cone Park and the Loftan Center will be served by the greenway. This leg has been identified as a priority because there is a unique opportunity to create the greenway before the road will be developed to ensure limited commercial development and limit access to the road. Right-of-way acquisition can occur in advance of funding for the roadway modification.

The SE 27<sup>th</sup> Street greenway connects with the East-West Greenway near the Eastgate Low Activity Center, and the Southern Greenway and Bouleware Springs Greenway at the south end.

### **Bouleware Springs Greenway**

The Bouleware Springs Greenway begins at the intersection of Archer Road and SW 13<sup>th</sup> Street. It follows SW 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the east and follows along a portion of Sweetwater Creek adjacent to Evergreen Cemetery. It provides connections to the Gainesville Hawthorne Rail Trail and Bouleware Springs Park. The Greenway continues east along SE 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue to the SE 27<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway. Several neighborhoods and community facilities, including Prairie View Elementary School, will be connected by this greenway, offering recreational opportunities

and accessibility to residents. As a hydrologic connection to Paynes Prairie, the Sweetwater Creek basin is a critical corridor opportunity. This greenway will provide stormwater attenuation before reaching Paynes Prairie.

### **Multi-Use Trails**

There are three multi-use or roadway enhancement corridors identified in the plan. These include portions of NE 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, East University Avenue and East 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Enhancements include designated bike lanes, wider sidewalks, pedestrian lighting and plantings. These trails are considered to create pedestrian friendly streets and allow an environmental feel in an urbanized area. Designing green infrastructure into the streetscape will enhance transportation choices, improve air quality, filter stormwater runoff and create a more “walkable” close-knit community.

The plan proposes enhancements along NE 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue from East 15<sup>th</sup> Street to the Loft Center. Incorporating bike lanes and pedestrian amenities will create a more livable street. Amenities should include more visible street crossings, transit shelters and pavement treatments to slow traffic.

East University Avenue from Waldo Road to the East 27<sup>th</sup> Street is another multi-use trail opportunity. A stormwater park is proposed in this area that will improve water quality entering the Lake Forest Creek system. This corridor should incorporate a bike lane, pedestrian friendly crossings, wider sidewalks and vegetation plantings.

SE 15<sup>th</sup> Street from East University Avenue to SE 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue has been identified as needing multi-modal enhancements due to the land uses located along the corridor. There are two elementary schools, one middle school and two parks located along SE 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Proposed enhancements include bicycle/pedestrian treatments and traffic calming design elements. Street modifications will provide safe crossings for school children and park users while reducing speed travel. Some suggested enhancements include sidewalk widening, bulb-outs at intersections, recognizable pedestrian crossings, pedestrian signals and pedestrian scale lighting. Planting shrubs and small trees along the sidewalks will help filter stormwater runoff and create a buffer between vehicles and humans.

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## **CONSERVATION LANDS**

Currently there are approximately 10,000 acres of conservation land within the Study area with a large portion of those acres publicly owned. The priority for land acquisition are those parcels that would establish a corridor or habitat linkage with other conservation lands. Available public land was a criterion for designing the greenway system, so acquisition may only be needed for a relatively few number of parcels. Acquisition priorities should include lands within the proposed Newnan’s Lake Greenway, Lake Forest Creek Greenway, and NE/SE 27<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway. Purchasing parcels around Newnan’s Lake will promote water quality and protect the rural character of the area, and create a linkage to publicly owned lands in Payne’s Prairie. Identification of these properties as potential conservation lands is consistent with the lands identified in the Alachua County Forever land acquisition program.

### **Restoration**

The City of Gainesville and Alachua County have policies in place to help restore and preserve surface waters and wetlands. These include vegetative buffers adjacent to development, the creation of environmental districts, erosion control regulations, requirements of mitigation for impacts to surface waters and wetlands, and continuing cooperation with Local and State agency acquisition programs. As priority parcels are identified and slated for acquisition for the greenway system, restoration and enhancement opportunities must be established. The success of the greenways habitat value will depend on a well-designed restoration/enhancement and monitoring program.

Figure K: Government Owned Lands Map