

# Calera, Alabama Comprehensive Plan 2009

Adopted by the  
City of Calera Planning Commission  
on August 11, 2009

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# BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)

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# BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)

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# Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan illustrates an overall strategy for how Calera intends to shape itself, through public and private investment, over time. The city prepared this plan as a guide to making decisions regarding land use, development, growth management and capital improvements. The plan is also intended to help Calera residents, property owners, merchants, builders and developers invest in the community by providing a reasonable expectation of the city's future. Throughout the planning process, Calera considered and made informed decisions to establish and bring about a desired future condition of the city. The plan is long-range, general, and focused on the physical development of the community. It will be a living document whose relevance will continue even as circumstances change over time.

Through the Calera Comprehensive Plan, city officials wish to:

- *Illustrate the ways in which the city should develop over time.*
- *Coordinate land use recommendations with those for transportation and other infrastructure improvements.*
- *Provide a guide to development decisions and a basis for making and revising zoning and other regulations regarding type, intensity and timing of development.*
- *Ensure that as development occurs, the city's most significant natural and historic features will be conserved and enhanced, while property values are protected.*
- *Provide a pattern for land use and development that strives for a sustainable community with a diversified tax base to support necessary and desired facilities and services.*

In response, the City Council, Planning Commission and the citizens of Calera intend to continually refer to this document in order to:

- *Visualize what can reasonably be expected to occur in Calera—to provide some assurance and security regarding development investment decisions.*
- *Review and evaluate development proposals and rezoning requests—to test the fit with Calera's vision.*
- *Provide guidance on improving and updating the City's development regulations.*
- *Identify priorities and strategies for making infrastructure investments—roads, greenways, parks, schools and other public facilities.*

The Calera Comprehensive Plan recognizes the value of the city's underlying natural resources and its history and small town values. The plan will guide development in order to balance growth with the conservation of important natural resources. It is intended that the activity centers identified in the plan will concentrate a diversity of functions at appropriate locations, structured by a citywide open space network and accessibility system. It is also intended that development be located, planned and designed in such a way as to be compatible with this citywide organizational system. And, development will be supported and encouraged by the city in order to provide opportunities for creativity, efficiency, stability, image and diversity.

## USING AND REFINING THE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is a combination of vision, maps, development policies and design guidelines. It provides a framework for guiding public and private decisions that will affect new development as well as reinvestment in existing neighborhoods and business areas. The plan is based on the community's vision for its future—a long-term vision that may extend beyond the lifetime of those participating in drafting the plan. Nevertheless, the plan looks ahead, focusing on the physical form of the city, and strives to shape Calera's future development in a sustainable, fiscally responsible pattern consistent with the community's vision.

As noted earlier, the plan serves as a general, long-range *guide* to assist public officials and private citizens as they consider investments that may have long-term impacts on the community. To do this, the plan must be continuously reviewed and updated as changes occur in physical, political, and market conditions.

The plan will be implemented through the actions of developers and other private citizens, by city staff, the Planning Commission, other boards and commissions, and the City Council. Major public actions in support of plan implementation will include adoption, revision and enforcement of various parts of the city's growth management system: development regulations, capital improvement planning and budgeting, and decisions regarding development proposals. Guidance provided by this monitoring and renewal process will assist the city in refining and detailing the Comprehensive Plan through consideration of amendments as needed.

As noted above, the Calera Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a living document, to evolve and grow in response to changes in community values and to market and physical conditions. Only through continuing use, evaluation, detailing, and updating can the plan fully serve Calera, and only then can the people of Calera use it wisely to achieve the community's aspirations for its physical development.

# Strategic Concept

The choice for Calera—as it is for most cities—is not one of growth vs. no growth. Calera draws to it more people and private investment every year. The choice is *how* growth should be channeled – in a manner compatible with the vision the people of Calera have set for their community. That is the role of Calera’s continuing planning process and the task of this Comprehensive Plan.

Comprehensive planning provides a systematic approach to determining a citywide vision for the future, by setting long-range goals for the physical character of the city and devising policies, programs, and projects to move the city toward fulfillment of those goals. The focal point of this process is dialog between citizens and city officials. Its purpose is to reach consensus on policies, programs, and projects relating to that physical character and to the responsibilities and areas of influence of city government.

## CALERA TOWN MEETING

The planning process got underway when residents, property owners, developers and city officials came together to discuss the future of the city during the Town Meeting on February 17, 2009. Attendees were presented a series of questions intended to elicit comments that would help the Planning Commission and City Council as they considered the future of their community and its planning area. What follows below is a summary of the main themes of the responses (see Appendix for complete listing) in each of several categories.

### Assets

Those attending the Town Meeting were asked first about what they considered assets of Calera—those special features they hold in especially high regard and that set the community apart from other places.

Calera is highly accessible and conveniently located within the state and region, providing convenient options for living, working, shopping and playing. For the last decade the city has attracted a strong rate of growth. The community offers several unique amenities and special destinations including the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, two vineyards, and the Timberline Golf Course. Last, and certainly not least, Calera has a small town feel, including its low crime rate and good schools.

### Issues

Town Meeting participants were asked to identify physical conditions that are not up to the standards they would like to enjoy throughout the community and in Downtown Calera.

Attendees consider the city’s rapid growth an issue (though also considered an asset) – expressing concerns over clear cutting and high density residential development. Others felt more parks, gathering places, and events were needed. Participants are anxious for a bypass to remove heavy truck traffic from downtown and listed other traffic woes as important

issues, including state and county control over major roadways. The lack of a compelling reason(s) for visitors to stop or to return to Calera was also emphasized. Other issues included the lack of a recycling program. Many noted a physical and social disconnect between the tight knit core of the community and the more spread out neighborhoods developing to the north and east of Interstate 65.

Downtown issues are similar to those identified for the city overall – the need for a truck bypass, state control of Highway 31, and the absence of a strong reason for visitors to stop or return. Frequent rail traffic on the line crossing Highway 25 regularly stops traffic coming in and out of downtown. Parking is limited; and not enough reinvestment is taking place in Downtown Calera.

## Outside Forces

There are always factors not subject to local control—forces that operate perhaps at county, regional, state or national levels—that affect every community, each in its own way. Local residents agreed. The downturn in the national economy has all but halted residential development in Calera. Because of their location within the community, the CSX and Norfolk Southern Railroads have a significant impact well beyond the control of the city. And, as mentioned above, many area roads are controlled and maintained at the discretion of the Alabama Department of Transportation or Shelby County.

## Why People Choose to Live/Work/Invest in Calera

When those at the Town Meeting were asked to share their reasons for living, working or investing in Calera, responses seemed to relate to one central point. Calera is a small town with quiet neighborhoods. Even with its rapid growth in the last ten years, there is still abundant open space. To many, Calera is more than where they live or where they work, it is their chosen home. It is their family, their community.

## Visions for Calera

Building upon these discussions, Town Meeting participants were asked to imagine Calera as they would like it to be in ten or fifteen years. Afterward, each person was asked to name one significant physical aspect of that future community that is absent from Calera today.

Participants envision Calera as a community with a broad tax base with greater employment and shopping opportunities, especially downtown, which will be revitalized and become one of the best reasons for visitors to stop and enjoy the community. Residential growth in Calera will be carefully managed, and the community will reflect a strong, attractive image. Calera's residents will have great opportunities for community fellowship supported by parks, facilities, and activities for the young and old. New facilities and parks will be located convenient to all neighborhoods. Residents will be able to travel easily from one part of the city to another.

Downtown will grow beyond its remaining historic core. Heavy truck traffic will be abated along Highway 31, which will be improved to better complement downtown activities. Existing businesses will be successful encouraging new businesses to emerge. There will be adequate parking for customers and employees; and a greenway trail will connect Downtown to the neighborhoods east of Interstate 65 and westward to Oliver Park and the High School.

## CITYWIDE STRATEGIC CONCEPT

Creating and seizing upon opportunities community-wide begins with the core elements of the city's physical development today – its downtown, neighborhoods, major institutions and activity centers, and its infrastructure. It builds on the image of the city and the inherent values of its physical setting. The strategy supports commerce, industry, recreation and institutions in locations that will be accessible to people living and working in the community and its trade area. It protects the city's neighborhoods while improving connectivity throughout the community through upgraded motor vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle accessibility networks. And the strategy focuses attention on expanding and upgrading the city's civic, recreation, and public safety facilities and services.

The community-scale activity centers and corridors—commercial, industrial, civic, institutional and recreational—support, and are supported by, the city's neighborhoods. Each of the neighborhoods will have a center or focal point of a type and size appropriate to its place in the community and the desires of its residents.

The intent of this strategic concept is to capitalize on the city's resources, to build upon its history, traditions and institutions and the physical advantages of the city's location and setting. The concept expresses the consensus citywide vision that emerged from the Calera Town Meetings and sets out a foundation for the city's Comprehensive Plan. It provides an overall strategy:

- to accommodate and encourage development while conserving the city's green infrastructure
- to guide the location, planning and design of new development in ways that maintain and strengthen the community's small town character and quality of life;
- to direct public and private investments, which are necessary to support the community's desired image, health, safety and welfare, in a fiscally responsible and sustainable fashion; and
- to improve the city's growth management standards and decision-making processes in accord with the community's vision for its physical development.

This is a general, long-range plan for the city. Thus, the locations of certain proposed activity centers and community facilities shown on the Strategic Concept map are not meant to be precise. Rather, the symbols for each of these should be considered “placeholders” until more specific planning may be undertaken to determine detailed needs and locations for each. In

many cases, the “floating” symbol on the map will come to rest, a specific site identified, when either a public agency has determined to invest in a facility or a private development triggers the need and means for such a decision.

### Major Elements of the Concept

- The city’s “green infrastructure” will be conserved and respected. Intensive development is directed away from areas with critical environmental features.
- Designate major gateways and image corridors for public and private investment essential to ensure positive experiences for residents, investors and visitors.
- Calera’s gateways will be well-defined; the design of its arterial and collector streets and development alongside them will reflect a positive image.
- Design each gateway, activity center and image corridor to take advantage of the most desirable characteristics of its surroundings (natural and man-made).
- Enhance existing activity centers and establish locations for new ones. They should be compact, legible and designed for accessibility. Continuous strip development should be avoided.
- Downtown’s historic architecture will be preserved and reinvestment will reflect the heritage of the community.
- Intensive commercial and industrial development will be directed toward the interchanges at the city’s edges and to intersections of major streets.
- Develop new streets to interconnect parts of the community divided by I-65, railroads and other barriers
- Access to all arterial and collector streets will be managed carefully to conserve their capacity.
- The city’s park and recreation system will be enlarged, capitalizing on environmentally-constrained areas to create new passive and active parks.
- A neighborhood or community park should be in walking distance of most neighborhoods.
- The city’s pedestrian network, including a greenway and trail system, will interconnect neighborhoods with activity centers, schools and park and recreation facilities.
- Encourage synergy among local destinations, through intensified coordination, to attract visitation and enhance business opportunities throughout the city.
- Neighborhoods should have a strong sense of place, each with a focus area of appropriate function and scale.
- Residential density should increase with proximity to activity centers and with availability of interconnected street networks.

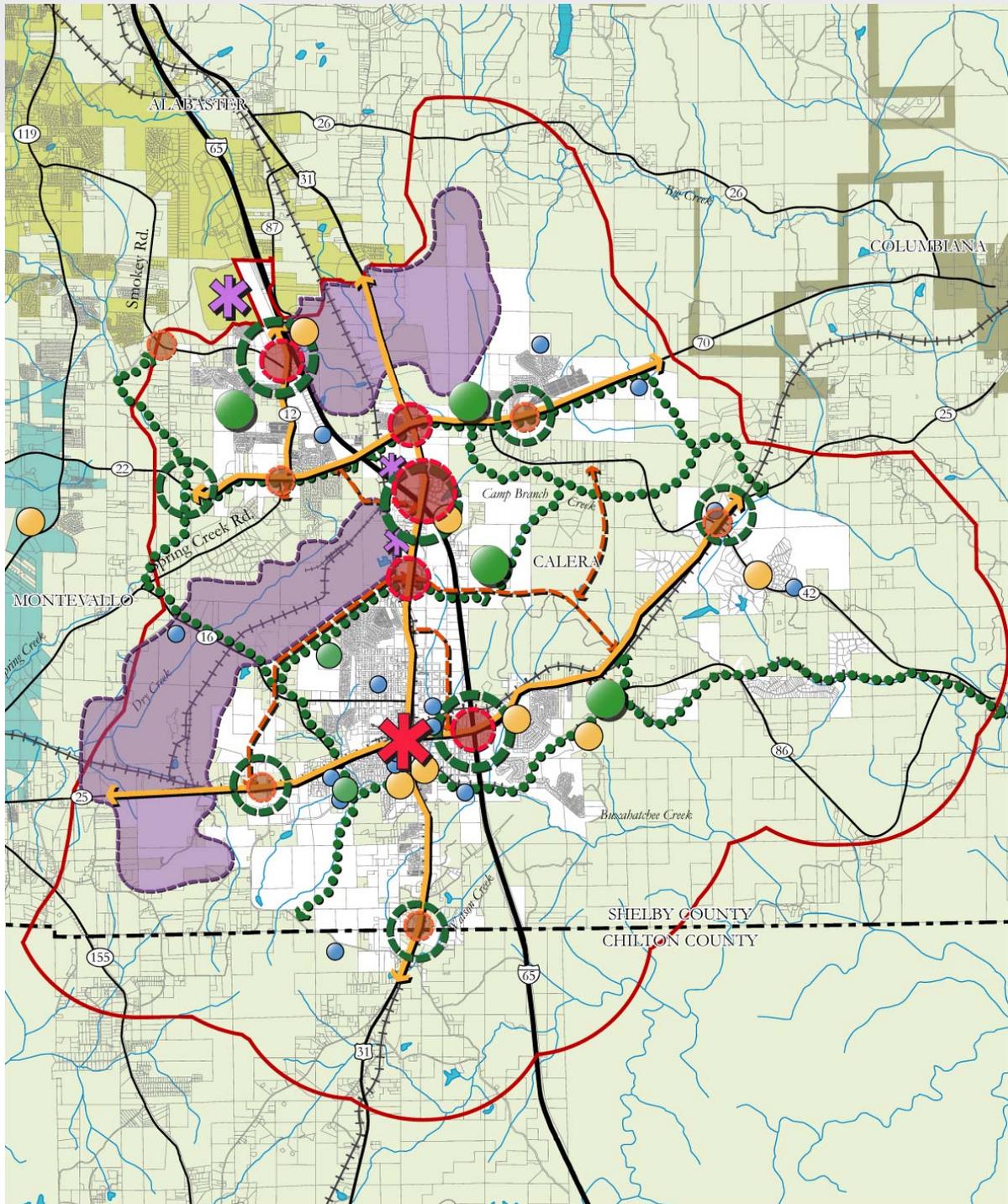


Figure 2.1: Strategic Concept

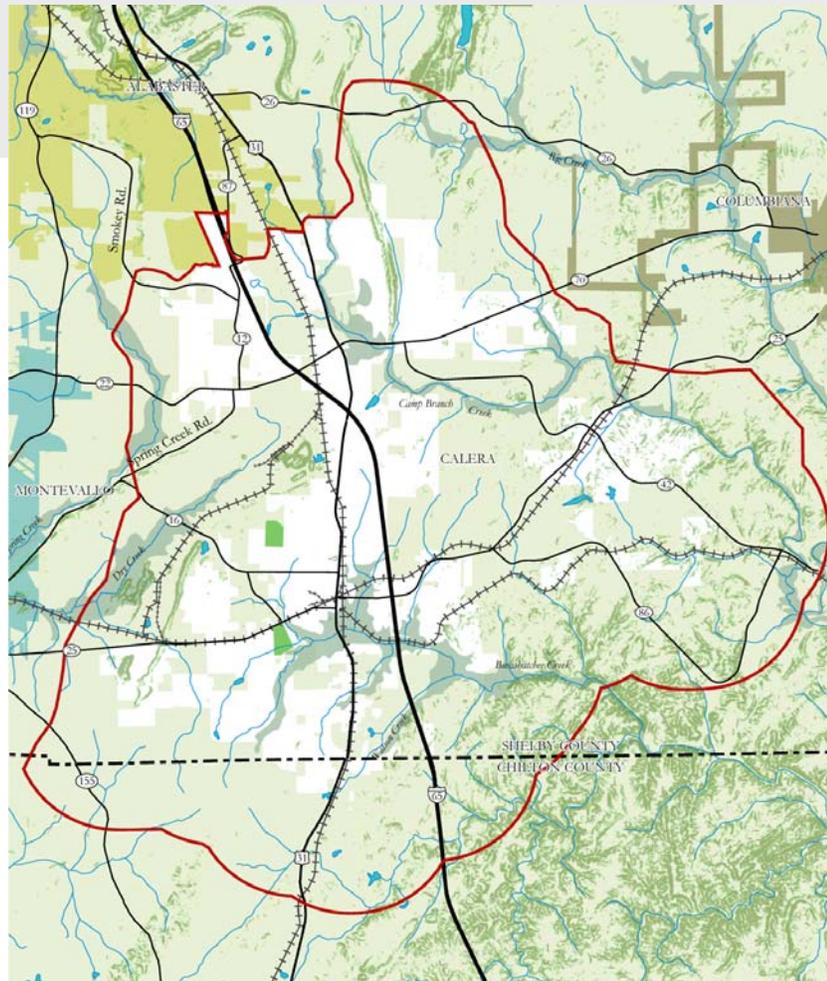


Figure 2.2: Green Infrastructure Map

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Calera’s environmental resources affect the economy and quality of life of residents. If the city’s green infrastructure is not respected—if its critical elements are allowed to be diminished or depleted—the health, safety and quality of life in the community will suffer. Natural resources have limits, and development decisions typically affect far more than the property’s owner and immediate neighbors, because use, type and intensity of development ultimately affect the surroundings, and depending upon the approach to development, the land can present varying ranges of opportunities and hazards. For example, steeper slopes may provide opportunities for views, but they also are difficult to build on. When slopes are graded, natural drainage systems are altered, which can have significant impacts well beyond the site. As floodplains are filled in and built upon, flooding is shifted to other locations and little can be done there to eliminate the problem. Once cut, forests may take decades to return. Wetlands, when filled and paved, are likely gone forever, and extinct species cannot be replaced.

Consequently, the public officials and citizens of Calera take the quality of their natural environment seriously. As a part of the planning process they have carefully reviewed the mutual impacts of development and natural resources on one another. They have also considered how these natural areas together form a logical green infrastructure that may provide a framework or structure within which to organize, locate and interconnect development. The pattern illustrated on the Green Infrastructure map generally depicts these resources and places.

## Green Infrastructure Policies

### *Conserve green infrastructure and landscape form*

The city hosts rather diverse landscape features: steep slopes, woodlands, stream corridors and floodplains. Development should be planned and arranged within the landscape with these elements in mind.

### *Organize development to capitalize on critical open spaces*

The city's most important natural resources and scenic locations should be reserved for public and semi-public open space greenways, community or neighborhood parks, or simply conservation areas. These should be linked together insofar as possible into a citywide open space system. Development should be planned and designed so that buildings look into these areas rather than back up to them.

### *Preserve or create new green infrastructure elements through new development*

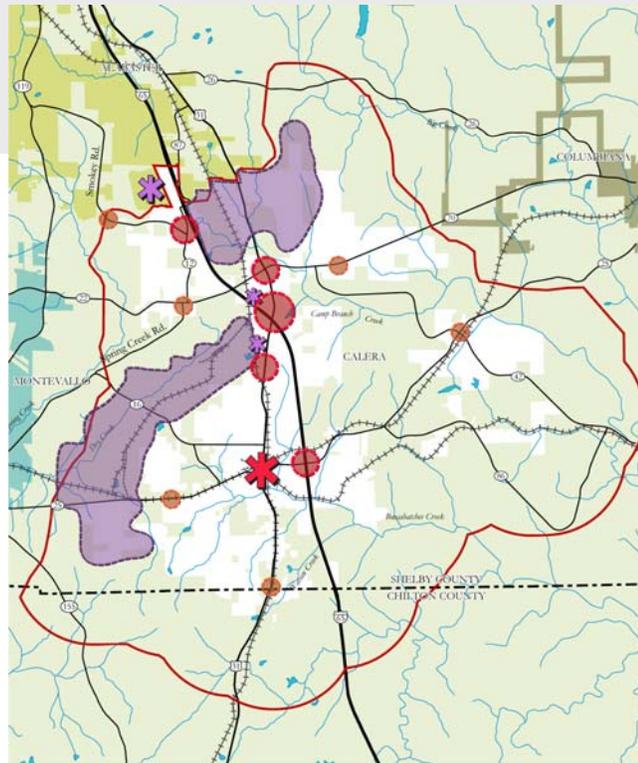
Development ultimately displaces natural features. In lower intensity development, whether residential or not, it is possible to conserve or even preserve environmental elements. In high intensity development areas, it is necessary to incorporate man-made green spaces, including civic spaces and tree-lined streets, to account for the loss of natural green space.

### *Ensure public access to open space*

The city's green infrastructure should be accessible. Parks and conservation areas with public access should be provided. Parks and open spaces should accommodate both active and passive recreation uses. Walking trails, play areas, and picnic facilities should be staple components of recreation parks.

## ACTIVITY CENTERS

Significant nodes or concentrations of activity and development are designated in this plan as *activity centers*. These include existing nodes – Downtown Calera, industrial centers, community and regional commercial centers – and several proposed neighborhood centers. The intent is that each activity center be located, planned and designed to support the community’s desired form, adjacent neighborhoods, the transportation network, environmental quality and the efficient provision of infrastructure and services.



- Downtown Calera, located at the intersection of Highways 31 and 25, less than a mile west of exit 228, is the heart of the community and provides opportunities for work, shopping, dining and civic interaction.
- Calera’s industrial centers include the Shelby County Airport Industrial Park and two city industrial parks on Highway 31 north and south of Exit 231 of Interstate 65. Two large zones of heavy industrial activity occur west of Calera and north of Highway 70 along Highway 31.
- Calera’s commercial centers include the three interchanges along Interstate 65 and two along Highway 31. The activity center at exit 231 serves as a Regional Commercial Center, a growing destination for shopping and dining within the south Shelby-north Chilton Counties area. The centers at Calera’s other interstate interchanges currently provide convenient goods and services for commuters and interstate traffic. The emerging centers on Highway 31 (at Highway 70 north of I-65 and near Whippoorwill Lane south of I-65) provide goods and services primarily to those who work or live in the Calera area.
- Six neighborhood centers are proposed in locations convenient to existing and emerging neighborhoods. They may include a variety of land use functions limited to a size compatible with the surrounding neighborhood(s). They may be as simple as a neighborhood park; or they may include a cluster of small businesses that provide for the day-to-day needs of nearby residents.

Calera's activity centers vary in function and size, but most are intended to display at least several of the following characteristics:

- *Anchor or focus of activity:* Regardless of its type, every center contains some activity or function with which it is primarily associated in the region, community or neighborhood.
- *Compact, densely developed core:* There is a relatively high density of development, of those uses for which it exists, toward the center and less toward the edges.
- *Internal vehicular circulation:* Once having arrived at most any location within a center, a motorist may easily access most other locations within the center on the same side of a major street without having to re-enter that street.
- *Pedestrian and bicycle accessibility and orientation:* The center is readily and safely accessible by pedestrians and cyclists from surrounding areas. The center is planned and designed with the overall needs of pedestrians in mind, as appropriate to its type. Downtown Calera and neighborhood centers reflect the highest integration of pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Industrial centers will tend to have the least.
- *Positive sense of place:* The visitor has a good feeling about the overall character of the center—overall image of the place and its relation to the surrounding environment, feelings of safety, and sense of arrival and departure.
- *Vehicular accessibility:* The center is readily accessible by motor vehicle. Regional commercial centers have the highest degree of access due to their location near interstate interchanges and along major arterials while neighborhood centers will tend to be located on minor arterials and tend to be much further from an interstate.
- *Visual coherence:* Things fit together—signage, landscaping, the way parking is provided supports getting to one's destination, the way most buildings seem to relate to one another.
- *Well-defined edges:* The arrangement of uses and the design of the streetscape, buildings and landscaping make it clear where the center begins and ends.

## Activity Center Policies

*Concentrate commercial development around important intersections; discourage strip development*

To maximize visibility and access, activity centers, in which the primary function is commerce, are located along major roads, ideally at intersections with other major roads. Retail, services and lodging (where appropriate) are highly concentrated at the core of the activity center. Offices, other business support uses and high-density residential flank the core or are located in upper stories of mixed use buildings.

Commercial uses are not intended to be developed as a continuous strip along Calera's primary roads (e.g., Highway 31). This linear form of commercial development congests

such corridors (even with reasonable access management practices in place), has undesirable impacts on community character, and tends to increase the distances residents must drive to accomplish errands. These corridors are common throughout the region, but few are regarded positively. Over time, these commercial strips have earned reputations for congestion, poor aesthetics, excessive signage, and oversupply and vacancy of commercial property.

*Like uses should face like across a street*

To assure cohesiveness and minimize land use conflicts, like uses should face one another across streets. This applies in activity centers as well as throughout the community and is further addressed in Chapter III. It is easier to mitigate incompatibilities through buffers along rear lot lines than between front doors. This also helps to provide recognizable transitions between activity centers and neighborhoods.

*Provide access to multiple locations with less travel on major road(s)*

Cross streets and local streets, frontage drives, shared driveways and alleys and interconnected parking lots allow local traffic to flow within and around activity centers without bogging down through traffic on arterial streets. Vehicular access should be designed to allow motorists access to adjacent centers and neighborhoods, yet discourage through

traffic while still accommodating service access and delivery.



*Design activity centers with the pedestrian in mind*

Good planning and design can greatly influence the number of people willing to walk or ride as an alternative to driving. This is especially true in Downtown Calera and in community commercial centers and neighborhood centers. Complete streets and other pedestrian (and/or bicycle) linkages between residential and nonresidential areas should be provided. The distance between sidewalks and business entrances should be kept to a minimum. Human scale should be created through the massing and detailing of buildings. Building location, setbacks and orientation should support rather than discourage pedestrian activity, as should lighting and landscape design.

*Create discernable, compact activity centers*

Each activity center should be planned and designed to have a sense of place, as Downtown Calera does. Sense of place helps brand and distinguish one activity center from the next. Activity centers should be compact and densely developed and their edges well-defined. Each center, regardless of scale, should look and feel as if it has been designed, or at least considered, as a whole, in context with its surroundings. Elements, such as building setbacks, height, scale, materials, landscaping and signage should be consistent within each center. Differences should provide interest and variety but not be abrupt and overwhelming.

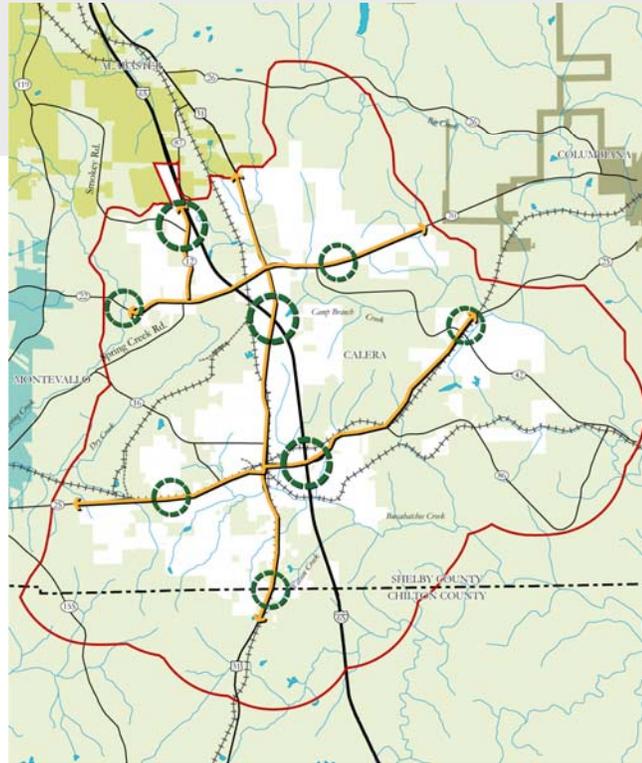
# Activity Centers

The following highlights fundamental characteristics of the activity centers indicated in the Strategic Concept. More detailed descriptions are included in Chapter III.

Downtown Calera	Regional and Community Commercial Centers	Industrial/Employment Centers	Neighborhood Centers
<b>Typical Appropriate Uses</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential: Adjacent (horizontal) Integrated (vertical) Diverse type and ownership</li> <li>• Retail commercial</li> <li>• Office / service commercial</li> <li>• Hospitality: Dining and Lodging</li> <li>• Institutional/Civic</li> <li>• Passive recreation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail commercial: Shopping centers Wide variety of goods Serve regional and community trade areas</li> <li>• Service commercial: Regional services Auto services and dealerships</li> <li>• Hospitality: Dining and Lodging</li> <li>• Residential, Institutional, and Recreation adjacent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office and services</li> <li>• Warehouse and distribution</li> <li>• Wholesale commercial</li> <li>• Retail uses, as specified</li> <li>• Residential, where specified</li> <li>• Light industrial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail commercial limited to that serving adjacent neighborhood(s)</li> <li>• Limited office or service commercial</li> <li>• Small restaurant</li> <li>• Residential Adjacent (horizontal) Integrated (vertical)</li> <li>• Small Institutional/Civic</li> <li>• Passive recreation</li> </ul>
<b>General Development Principles</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive sense of place</li> <li>• Visual coherence</li> <li>• Compact, dense core</li> <li>• Mixed uses</li> <li>• Civic spaces</li> <li>• Pedestrian oriented</li> <li>• Pedestrian accessible</li> <li>• Internal vehicular circulation</li> <li>• Access management</li> <li>• Intense center of activity</li> <li>• Well-defined edges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive sense of place</li> <li>• Visual coherence</li> <li>• Compact, dense core</li> <li>• Intensive mixed use</li> <li>• Civic space(s)</li> <li>• Pedestrian accessible</li> <li>• Internal vehicular circulation</li> <li>• Access management</li> <li>• Intense center of activity</li> <li>• Well-defined edges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive sense of place</li> <li>• Visual coherence</li> <li>• Compact, dense core</li> <li>• Pedestrian accessible</li> <li>• Internal vehicular circulation</li> <li>• Access management</li> <li>• Intense center of activity</li> <li>• Well-defined edges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive sense of place</li> <li>• Visual coherence</li> <li>• Limited in size</li> <li>• Pedestrian oriented</li> <li>• Pedestrian accessibility</li> <li>• Internal vehicular circulation</li> <li>• Access management</li> <li>• Moderately intense center of activity</li> <li>• Well-defined edges</li> </ul>
<b>General Design Guidelines</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required build-to lines</li> <li>• Street trees</li> <li>• Off-street parking to rear or side of buildings</li> <li>• Avoid drive-in/drive- through uses</li> <li>• Intensity/density decreases to edges</li> <li>• Greenway connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street trees</li> <li>• Intensity decreases to edges (and/or)</li> <li>• Landscape buffers at edges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street trees</li> <li>• Intensity decreases to edges (and/or)</li> <li>• Landscape buffers at edges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required build-to lines</li> <li>• One or two stories</li> <li>• Off-street parking to rear or side of buildings</li> <li>• No drive-ins or drive- through uses</li> <li>• Street trees</li> <li>• Intensity/density decreases to edges</li> <li>• Greenway connections</li> </ul>

## GATEWAYS AND IMAGE CORRIDORS

During the initial town meeting, attendees expressed a desire for the city to develop in a way that encourages visitors to stop in Calera or to return. Improvements to the community's outward appearance is an important step in achieving that desire. The city's major streets act as gateways to its activity centers and neighborhoods, conveying a lasting image to residents, businesspeople, and visitors. Highways 31, 25 and 70 and County Roads 12 and 22 serve as these important *image corridors* for the community. Calera's major gateways include the three interchanges with Interstate 65 and five strategic locations along the community's major roads.



The economy of the city is tightly linked to its physical character, and its image must be enhanced to remain competitive. Calera's gateways and image corridors should be treated as irreplaceable assets to be enhanced and taken advantage of. The city's image at each gateway is a result of the combination of the private development along the corridor as well as public investments in and maintenance of signage, the roadway, landscaping and lighting. By taking appropriate care with development along these corridors and adjacent to its major gateways, Calera will set itself apart and further ensure marketability and prosperity.

## CONNECTIVITY

Calera desires a better connected community. Due to topography and waterways, the location and arrangement of railroads and Interstate 65, and where development has occurred (and where it has yet to occur), Calera is not as interconnected as the community would prefer. This manifests itself in a few ways, but none clearer than its transportation network.

Calera's primary north-south roads are Interstate 65 and Highway 31; its primary east-west routes are Highways 25 and 70 (County Road 22). However, other than these major roads there are very few convenient routes by which to move about the community. This lack of connectivity is especially problematic between Interchange 234 and central and southern Calera.

## Gateways and Image Corridors

The planning and design of development should incorporate the following strategies to assure that Calera will reflect a positive image by providing easily recognizable transitions from outside to inside the city:

- Land use patterns for each corridor and gateway should be coordinated and cohesive.
- Sense of place should be enhanced with well-designed development that is easily visible from the roadway. Appropriate lighting and tree plantings should be used.
- Public investments in gateway signage and improvements need not be at city limits but at a close-by location on the corridor that provides the best sense of arrival, which may be enhanced by topography and views, natural features alongside the road, buildings, landmarks or other man-made improvements.
- Individual developments should be designed to form part of a larger composition. Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.
- To provide human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into multiple volumes, both horizontally and vertically.
- Buildings should face and be relatively close to the street, with most off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.
- Development should be planned and designed to maximize street frontage of buildings and minimize street frontage taken up by parking lots.
- Pedestrians should be able to walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.
- Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should be provided for through street and site design and connected to the citywide system of sidewalks and trails.
- When possible, driveway access to major roads should be limited. Parking lots of adjacent business along major streets should be connected through shared access, alley or frontage roads.
- Signs should be appropriate to context. In denser, pedestrian-friendly areas, building signs should be encouraged. In more vehicle-oriented locations, such as near the interstate, freestanding signs are appropriate, though their size and spacing should be managed to avoid visual confusion.

Therefore, the Strategic Concept intends the development of a series of interconnecting roads to provide greater accessibility throughout Calera. The proposed roads, shown in the Strategic Concept Map (Fig. 2.1), incorporate recommendations from the previous U.S. Highway 31 South Access Management Study, a proposal for a truck bypass for Highway 25, a north-south route between Highway 25 and Highway 70 (east of I-65) and a link between County Roads 84 and 22.

Vehicular access and the overall sense of interconnection between the various parts of the community should also be supported by interconnecting future developments with local streets, greenways and trails.

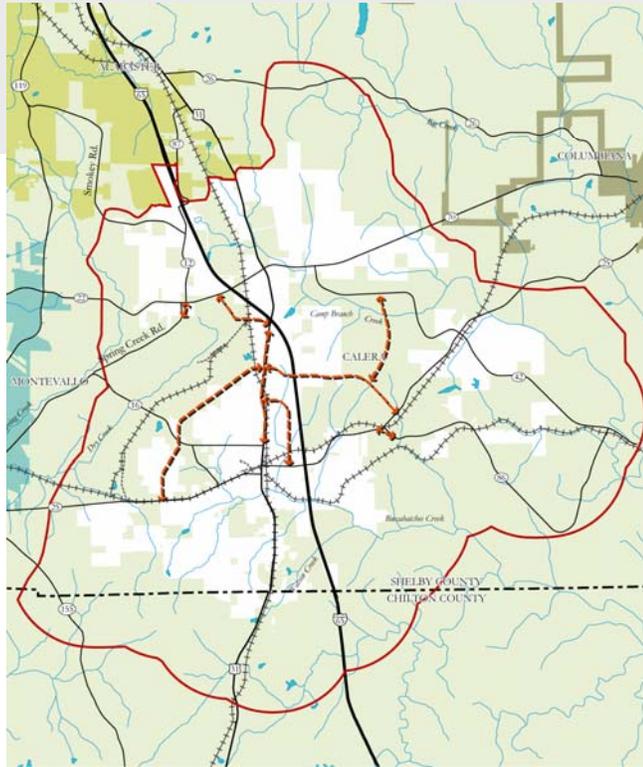
## Connectivity Policies

### *Develop a safe, convenient citywide street network*

Residents and visitors should be able to travel *conveniently* throughout the city by other than I-65 and Highway 31. Through both public and private investment, the road network will be expanded to increase connectivity throughout the city.

### *Provide route alternatives*

There should be multiple ways in and out of subdivisions to disperse traffic and support emergency response. Similarly, residents should be able to accomplish local errands with as little travel on major roads as possible. This requires street connections between neighborhoods and nearby activity centers to create localized street networks.



### *Design neighborhood streets to connect but calm traffic*

Street networks in subdivisions should, *by design*, discourage through traffic while still providing interconnectivity. Cul-de-sacs are the typical approach to discouraging through traffic; but a preponderance of dead-end streets exacerbates connectivity issues and can increase response times for fire and police services. There are a number of design tools available to reduce and calm through traffic that should be implemented and the number of cul-de-sacs in future development reduced.



## ATTRACTIONS

Calera has several local attractions of which the community is quite proud and which have the potential to enhance the city's economy. These include the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, Akridge Arboretum, the Rolling Pines Conference Center, Timberline Golf Course, two vineyards, a Confederate Cemetery and Downtown Calera. And, in nearby Montevallo, American Village is another facility of which Calera and its local attractions can take advantage. By coordinating the promotion of these individual sites as a group, area governments and business organizations can encourage greater visitation among and between them and enable business endeavors that take advantage of these cultural assets.

## Attractions Policies

### *Organize and promote area destinations*

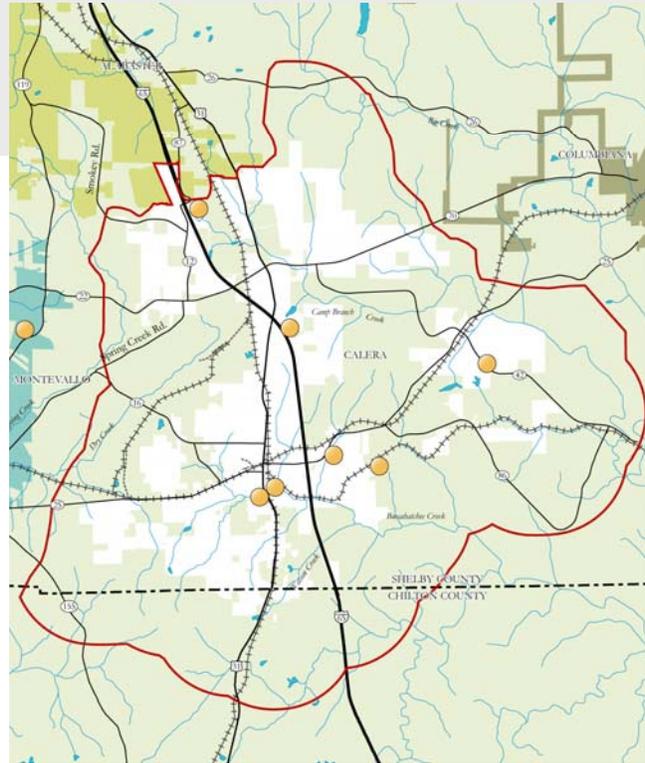
Calera, Montevallo, Shelby County, the Alabama Tourism Department and local economic development organizations should coordinate (and intensify where needed) promotional efforts to create greater synergy among area attractions. By advertising the area's cultural sites together, greater visitation, longer stays and more local spending by visitors may be accomplished.

### *Encourage supportive business development*

With stronger visitation to its local attractions, opportunities for business development will improve and become more diverse. Visitors will seek shopping, dining and lodging in locations convenient to their destinations. This should include authentic local establishments, especially in Downtown Calera, in addition to franchises that will tend to develop near the interstate.

### *Enhance wayfinding*

The city should support visitation to local attractions by developing public wayfinding signage at key points along major roads to assist visitors in finding their destinations easily. This should include signage along the interstate and intersections of major roads.



## PARKS, GREENWAYS AND TRAILS

During the planning process, community participants reflected on the need for more public facilities in the northern and eastern areas of the city, where so much new residential growth is occurring. The community also desires more and different types of park space. Calera's Strategic Concept calls for the development of both public and private green spaces to provide opportunities for recreation and social interaction, as well as greenways and trails that support conservation and enhance non-vehicular connectivity throughout the community.



## Parks, Greenways and Trails Policies

### *Reserve usable open space in new developments*

As new development occurs, especially medium and high density residential projects, *usable* open space should be reserved and provided for the recreational use of residents. Land areas that are too steep, wet or inaccessible or that have inadequate sizes or shapes should be avoided for neighborhood recreational space, although they may be appropriate for conservation purposes or to complement community open spaces.

### *Provide public park spaces convenient to neighborhoods*

There should be a neighborhood or community park within walking distance of *most* neighborhoods. This can be achieved by reserving land in new residential development proposals for dedication to the city. Passive recreational uses are the most advantageous function for land less suitable for development, such as land located in floodplains but that are not normally inundated with water. Parks can be connected to neighborhoods by sidewalks and/or trails.

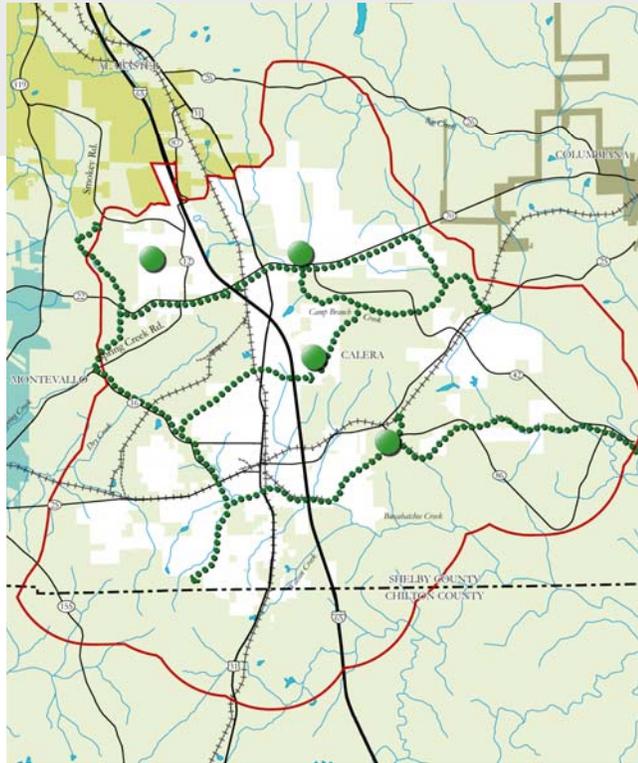
### *Create a green infrastructure network*

Through careful planning of new development, Calera's green infrastructure should evolve into a system of greenways, or natural corridors, that preserve plant and animal habitat, support watershed protection and lend opportunities for passive recreation.

### *Connect community destinations with greenways and trails*



The development of greenways and trails through both public and private investment supports conservation while also increasing recreational opportunities and connectivity between neighborhoods, activity centers, parks, schools and other destinations. A key project will be constructing a greenway trail along Buxahatchee Creek and the Heart of Dixie Railroad line that connects the museum, Downtown Calera, Oliver Park, local schools and further east, the Shelby Iron Works Park.



# Land Use and Transportation

The physical and functional organization of the city has been carefully considered throughout the planning process. The major land use and transportation recommendations result from analysis of existing land uses, environmental and man-made conditions, Calera's vision and the principles illustrated in the Strategic Concept. Plans for land use and transportation are included together in this chapter to reinforce that these issues are integral to one another and must be evaluated and planned for simultaneously. Different land uses and densities require different levels of transportation infrastructure. Conversion of one type of use or density to another will have direct impacts on street design and capacity, property access, connectivity and pedestrian facilities.

The Future Land Use map illustrates *generally* how different parts of the community should function and relate to one another. The map portrays a pattern of various activity centers, their relationships with each other and with the city's neighborhoods. These centers and the interconnections between them are critical to integrating the city's land use, transportation, community facilities and infrastructure. Building on this structure, Calera intends to invest, reinvest and develop so that new growth is suited to the capacity of the land and to the city's ability to economically provide infrastructure and quality services and facilities.

The Transportation Plan map illustrates how the city's street network must develop to accommodate the types, intensities and extents of development portrayed in the Future Land Use Map and as further detailed throughout this document. In addition to proposing improvements to resolve or improve existing transportation issues, the map identifies recommended major streets that, as development occurs in various locations throughout the city, must be provided to address Calera's primary transportation concern – connectivity.

## LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION CONCEPT

The integrated land use and transportation concept is built around the following policy themes:

### *Protect Calera's Green Infrastructure*

Calera intends to protect and enhance important and fragile ecosystems within the developed portions of the city. The city will strive to conserve and use its natural and open lands for agriculture, parks, and trails.

### *Grow as a City of Neighborhoods Supported by Activity Centers*

Calera intends to grow in ways that support its existing neighborhoods and activity centers. Generally, this means that Calera intends to:

- Maintain and enhance Downtown Calera as the heart of the city.
- Concentrate regional-scale commerce into a highly accessible activity center adjacent to Exit 231 of Interstate 65.

- Direct community-oriented commerce to Downtown Calera and in the community commercial centers indicated on Highway 31.
- Direct traveler-oriented commerce into well-designed, compact clusters at the three I-65 interchanges.
- Locate high employment industries and businesses in existing activity centers including Downtown Calera and the city's industrial parks.
- Concentrate high density residential development around activity centers.
- Guide residential development in ways to form true neighborhoods.
- Plan for and support public and private investment in civic, educational, recreational, and neighborhood commercial functions in future neighborhood centers located strategically around the city.

#### *Maintain and Enhance Community Character*

Maintaining and enhancing the physical qualities of the community – its natural and man-made environments – is an overarching consideration, incorporated in all parts of this plan. Calera intends to reinvest in Downtown and in its older neighborhoods and commercial areas. Calera intends to improve its unique natural setting as well as its existing streets, parks and public facilities to encourage and sustain private reinvestment in already developed portions of the community.

#### *Expand Connectivity and Accessibility*

Calera is as much divided by its transportation infrastructure as it is connected by it. Two active rail lines and an interstate traverse the community, creating large gaps in access and street connectivity. Outside of the city's historic core, most development has occurred with too little consideration given to pedestrian access or street interconnectivity. To improve connectivity and access, Calera intends to:

- increase overall connectivity throughout the community
- Connect Calera's neighborhoods to business areas, parks, and institutions with a combination of streets, sidewalks and off-road trails
- assure rapid emergency response through increased street connectivity
- provide connectivity while calming traffic in activity centers and neighborhoods

## FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The essential *functions* of the city are presented in the Future Land Use map as they are now and as they are planned to be in the future. The land use categories indicated on the map *should not be interpreted as zoning districts*, but rather as general guidelines indicating desirable land use patterns for Calera. The map is intended to serve the following purposes:

- Avoid and resolve land use conflicts
- Identify and sustain desirable land use patterns
- Forecast infrastructure needs
- Provide a foundation for zoning

The designation of land uses on the Future Land Use map should not be interpreted to propose, approve, deny nor preclude any specific action without full consideration of all policies, principles, standards or intentions expressed in this plan document and its implementing regulations. Specific site conditions, such as topography, geology, soils and hydrology, must be considered when choosing sites for new developments, especially those of larger scale, and planning and designing their uses and densities. These realities, plus attitudes toward development on the part of public officials, other agencies, area residents, property owners and developers will play a large part in determining appropriate development location and design. Similarly, adequate community facilities and infrastructure – streets, parks, fire protection services, and water and sewer systems, should be assured before making any significant development proposals or decisions.

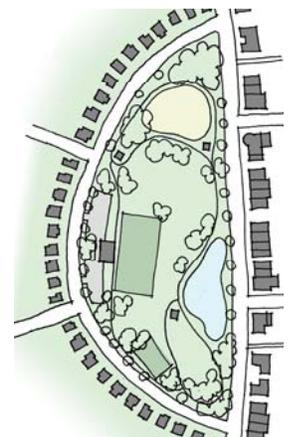
The industrial, commercial and neighborhood centers and future parks identified in the Strategic Concept are intended to serve as magnets for the types of development described in the Future Land Use Plan. These elements are included in the Future Land Use map for reference.

### Land Use Types and Characteristics

#### *Recreation*

Recreational uses include privately held open space and recreation uses as well as the following types of public parks:

*Community Parks*, such as George Roy Park, serve a range of passive and active recreation needs appropriate to their location and context. They may provide a mixture of activities and uses such as active sports fields; play areas, trails, informal practice fields, picnic areas, outdoor classrooms and gathering places such as a community center. They should be carefully integrated into the natural environment, ideally with a significant portion of the land area held in a natural, tree-covered condition. Park facilities and buildings should foster a positive community image, and sense of pride.



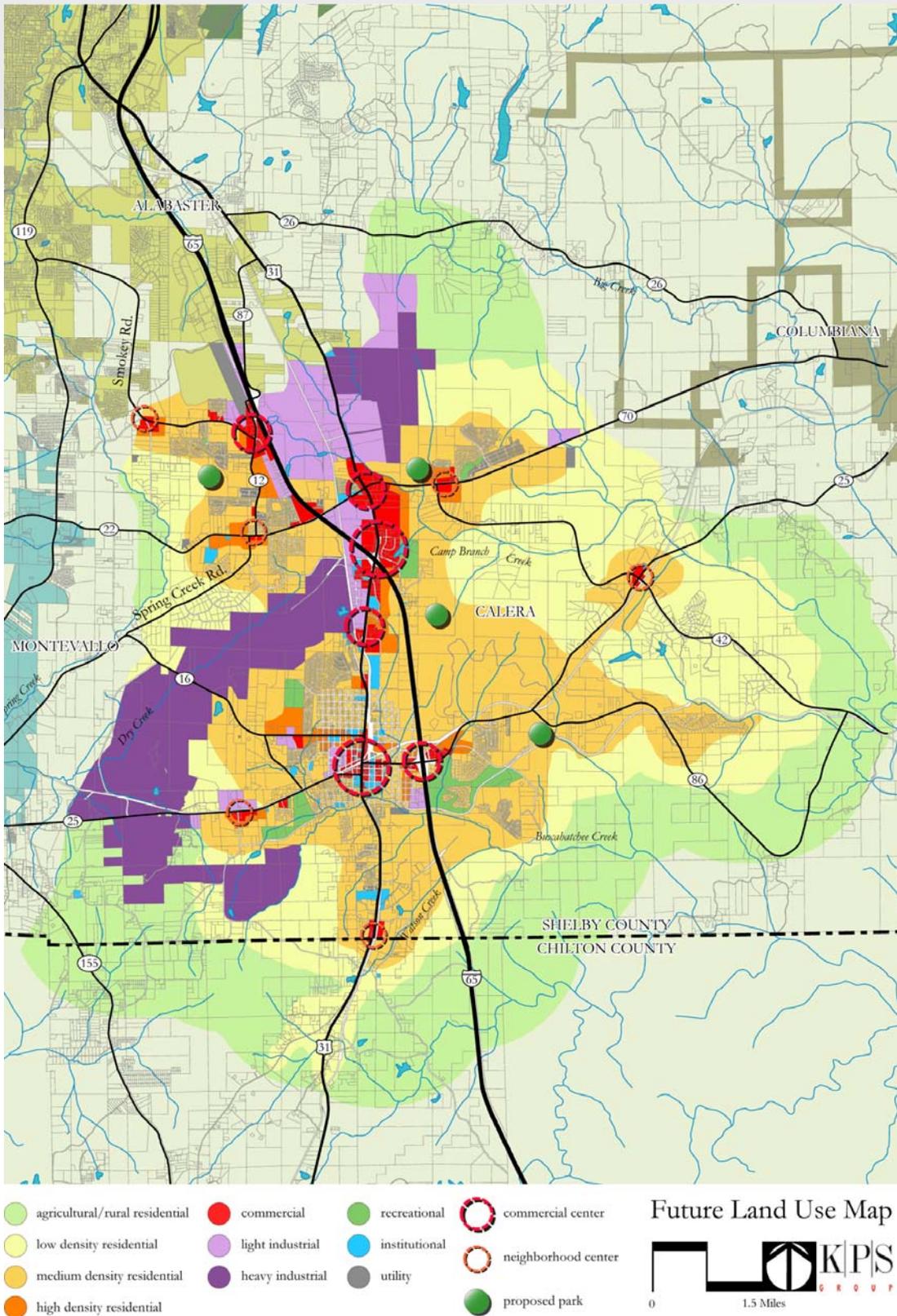
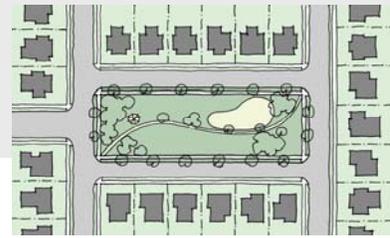


Figure 3.1: Future Land Use map

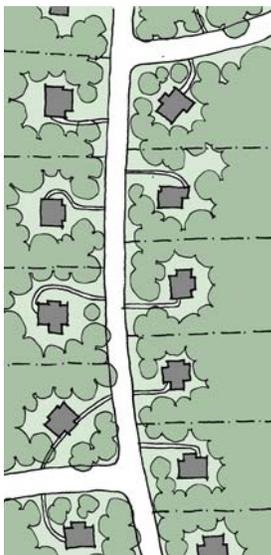
*Neighborhood Parks* provide residential areas with opportunities for active and passive recreation. Neighborhood parks provide a place for unstructured, informal gatherings and neighborhood events, and may include features such as shaded paths, playground structures and open space for active play.



*Sports Parks*, such as Oliver Park, provide sports and practice fields and similar facilities for use by the community. They may include area for passive recreational uses as well. They should be located in areas with a high level of vehicular access but should also be accessible by foot to nearby neighborhoods. Because of the amount of traffic they tend to draw for sporting events and requisite field lighting, these types of facilities should be carefully located and arranged to cause as little disruption to adjacent neighborhoods as possible.

### *Residential*

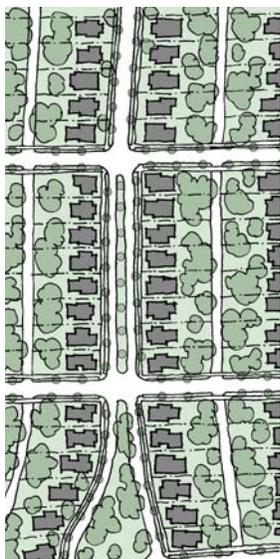
Residential uses are distributed on the Future Land Use map according to relative gross density—the relation of numbers of dwelling units to property devoted to those uses. Residential gross densities are noted on the map as: High Density at more than 5.5 units per acre; Medium Density at 2-5.5 units per acre; Low Density at 1-2 units per acre; and Very Low Density at less than 1 unit per acre.



*Agricultural and rural residential uses* are located along the city's edges, in remote locations with limited access. They include small farms and single family detached houses on lots larger than one acre. Farms, especially those that raise crops or livestock for commercial purposes, will require greater land area. Conservation of green infrastructure is a primary consideration in these areas, making use of special development techniques, such as conservation subdivisions, large lots and very low overall impervious surfaces. With deep front setbacks and dominated by generous amounts of open space, the character of these areas varies from estate subdivisions to more rural residential areas. Rural residential areas are characterized by long block lengths and limited connectivity. Streets will include swales to address runoff, rather than curbs. These areas need not contain sidewalks but may be connected to the surrounding community through pedestrian and/or bicycle trails.



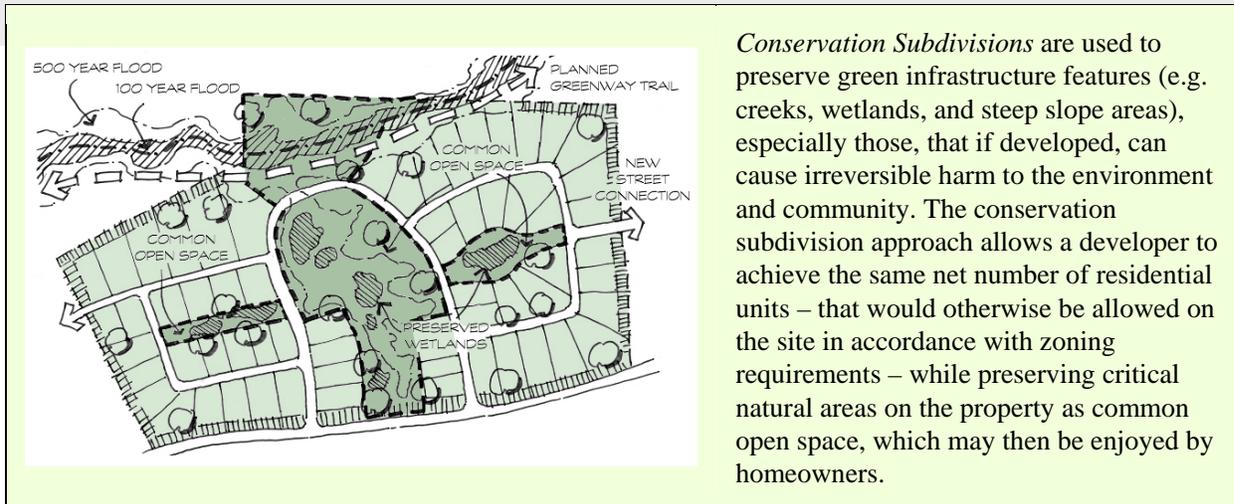
*Low density residential uses* are single family detached houses on relatively large lots (1-2 homes per acre) and are planned for development in closer-in locations compared to the *rural residential uses*. This development type and density should take careful account of various components of the city's green infrastructure, including steep slopes, flood plains, wetlands and heavily wooded areas. Conservation subdivisions and low overall impervious surfaces should be used to preserve green infrastructure elements and to ensure access to natural open space. Development in these areas include moderately deep front yards. Blocks are generally 500 ft or greater in length, providing a moderate level of connectivity with the city street network. Sidewalks of five feet in width should be provided on at least one side of each street and placed five feet or more from the road edge. Stormwater runoff should be addressed by vegetated swales, valley gutters or raised curbs. Local streets may be designed to accommodate occasional on-street on one side (note: raised curbs are recommended wherever on-street parking is expected).



*Medium density residential uses* are single family detached housing on moderately sized lots (2-5.5 units per acre) and are located around activity centers in relatively close-in locations. Front and side yards are modest. Green space is provided in common open spaces, neighborhood parks, and in the streetscape, replacing green elements that may be displaced through development. These neighborhoods are highly connected to the city street network and have short block lengths (400 ft or more). Local streets accommodate occasional on-street parking. Five foot wide sidewalks are provided on both sides of streets, separated by a buffer strip of similar width planted with regularly spaced street trees. With higher densities, alleys are encouraged for access to the rear of lots and also to provide a discrete location for utility lines and garbage pick-up. This also allows lots to be narrower while still meeting the desired lot size with additional open space in the front or back yards.

*High-density residential uses* are intended to occur within or at the edges of the activity centers and neighborhood centers shown on the map. High-density residential uses include small lot single-family detached homes, townhouses, and multi-family housing. These provide a logical transition between activity centers and the medium and low density residential uses beyond. Green space is provided in common open spaces and within the streetscape, replacing green infrastructure elements that may be displaced through development. High-density residential areas have a high level of connectivity to the city street network, featuring short block lengths. Local streets should be designed to accommodate on-street parking and sidewalks on each side of the street. Sidewalks are generally separated from the street by a tree lawn of five feet or more in width. Mid-block

alleys provide access to internal parking areas and a discrete location for garbage pick-up and utility lines.



### *Commercial*

Retail, office, dining, entertainment and lodging accommodations. These are to be concentrated in Downtown Calera and in the commercial centers and neighborhood centers identified in the Strategic Concept and Future Land Use maps. Shopping and dining uses should be concentrated at the heart of each commercial center with other appropriate uses located in upper stories of buildings or flanking the core uses. High density residential and institutional uses are also appropriate in commercial areas. Dwellings may be mixed horizontally or vertically within commercial areas.

By focusing shopping, dining, and in some cases entertainment uses at the core of each commercial center, those who live and work in or adjacent to the center will be attracted to the convenience and variety, especially if they can get to multiple destinations within the center easily – by having to drive less (especially on busy, major roads), being able to park in one location and accomplish multiple errands, and having a safe and attractive environment in which to walk. Otherwise, workers and residents are just as likely to get in the car and drive somewhere else.

### *Industrial*

*Light industrial uses* include assorted smaller industries including light manufacturing, storage, research laboratories and similar uses that tend to be less land intensive and more compatible with non-industrial uses. These uses are intended to be located in and around Calera's industrial parks and Shelby West Corporate Park. They also provide logical transitions between heavy industrial areas and activity centers.

*Heavy industrial uses* include resource extraction, heavy manufacturing and regional-scale storage, warehousing and distribution facilities. Due to the scale of operations, heavy industrial use tend to be land-intensive. These include existing extraction operations in north

and west Calera as well as the various industrial activities along Highway 31 north of Highway 70/22.

### *Institutional*

Institutional, academic, medical, governmental and community service uses and lands. More recently, the trend toward larger places of worship and major medical centers (as opposed to older, freestanding hospitals and neighborhood churches) has expanded the traditional definition. Only property currently developed for institutional uses is shown in the Future Land Use map. New institutional uses should be located in high visibility places where access is suitable and adjacent land uses are compatible. Smaller scale institutional uses may be located in neighborhood centers. Larger institutions are appropriate at the edges of commercial centers.

## TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The use of land and access to that land are both critical to the well-being of Calera, its residents and the community's quality of life. The city's streets serve two essential purposes: the transport of people, goods and services from one destination to another *and* access to private property. Streets that attempt to serve both functions equally tend to fail to live up to one or both of those expectations. The challenge is to provide a street network that supports planned development patterns, balances access and mobility, moves vehicles efficiently and lends a sense of community to neighborhoods.

Local and regional traffic are both expected to increase in the future. Local traffic will increase moderately in response to the locations and types of development described in this plan. At current levels, traffic at the Highway 31/I-65 interchange is already a major concern. This Transportation Plan is intended to guide the future development of the city street network to accommodate desirable growth, to relieve and avoid greater congestion on existing streets and to better connect the various neighborhoods and community destinations in Calera.

### Transportation Network

To facilitate proper planning and decision-making, Calera's streets have been classified as arterials, collectors, or local streets based on their relative importance and function within the transportation network, as follows.

**Arterial.** Provides high mobility (typically long distance trips at relatively high speeds), by controlling access to adjacent properties. Serves as part of a network providing interstate, intrastate, intercounty and intercity service. On-street parking is generally prohibited, but bike paths and sidewalks are encouraged. Access management favors mobility over direct property access, meaning curb cuts and median cuts to serve other than street intersections are allowed only where absolutely necessary. Similarly, traffic signals should be spaced as far apart as practicable.

**Collector.** Collects traffic from local streets to feed the arterial system. Balances land access and mobility. Serves urban areas and other important traffic generators that do not have direct access to arterials. Links these places with nearby towns and cities, or to arterials. Also connects local traffic generators with the less developed parts of the city. On-street parking is generally discouraged, but bike lanes and sidewalks are encouraged. When a collector passes through a commercial center or neighborhood center

**Local.** Provides highest degree of land access (short trips at lower speeds), and thus limited mobility, discouraging through traffic. Comprise all facilities not designated as arterials or collectors. Parking, cycling, walking and other transportation functions are encouraged. Through traffic on local streets is not encouraged, nor are trucks, except those destined for local deliveries.

## Mobility and Accessibility

Mobility is, in part, a function of providing options for movement through the city, and that requires interconnection of most streets. Gaps in the existing local street network require individuals to increase the length of their trip and travel more on higher order roads to travel only short distances. This, in addition to poor access controls, can congest arterials and collectors unnecessarily.

Most streets should connect to at least two other others. This disperses local traffic, reducing congestion on major roads and thereby preserving their capacity. This also minimizes delays in emergency response by providing more direct routes to various parts of the city as well as a larger number of ways to get to any one location. Thus, culs-de-sac and dead-end streets should occur only where significant environmental constraints, such as severe slopes, impede connectivity. Moreover, internal vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections should be provided in existing and new development areas and between adjacent land uses. Developers should be required to plan for and effectively address the need for internal connections (roads, pathways, open space, etc.) between adjacent land uses, including residential subdivisions and commercial developments, to provide primary *and* secondary means of emergency access. Mobility planning and design should incorporate the following strategies for planning, designing, constructing and retrofitting streets citywide:

- Require street connections between new and existing developments to create an interconnected roadway system throughout the community.
- Landscape the edges and medians of major roads to frame development and create a more positive image for the entire city by adding color, shade and visual interest.
- Require streets be planted with street trees appropriate to the function of the street and the type of development alongside it.
- Discourage non-residential traffic from travel on primarily residential streets. This is best accomplished through a combination of network planning and use of street designs that slow vehicular speeds.

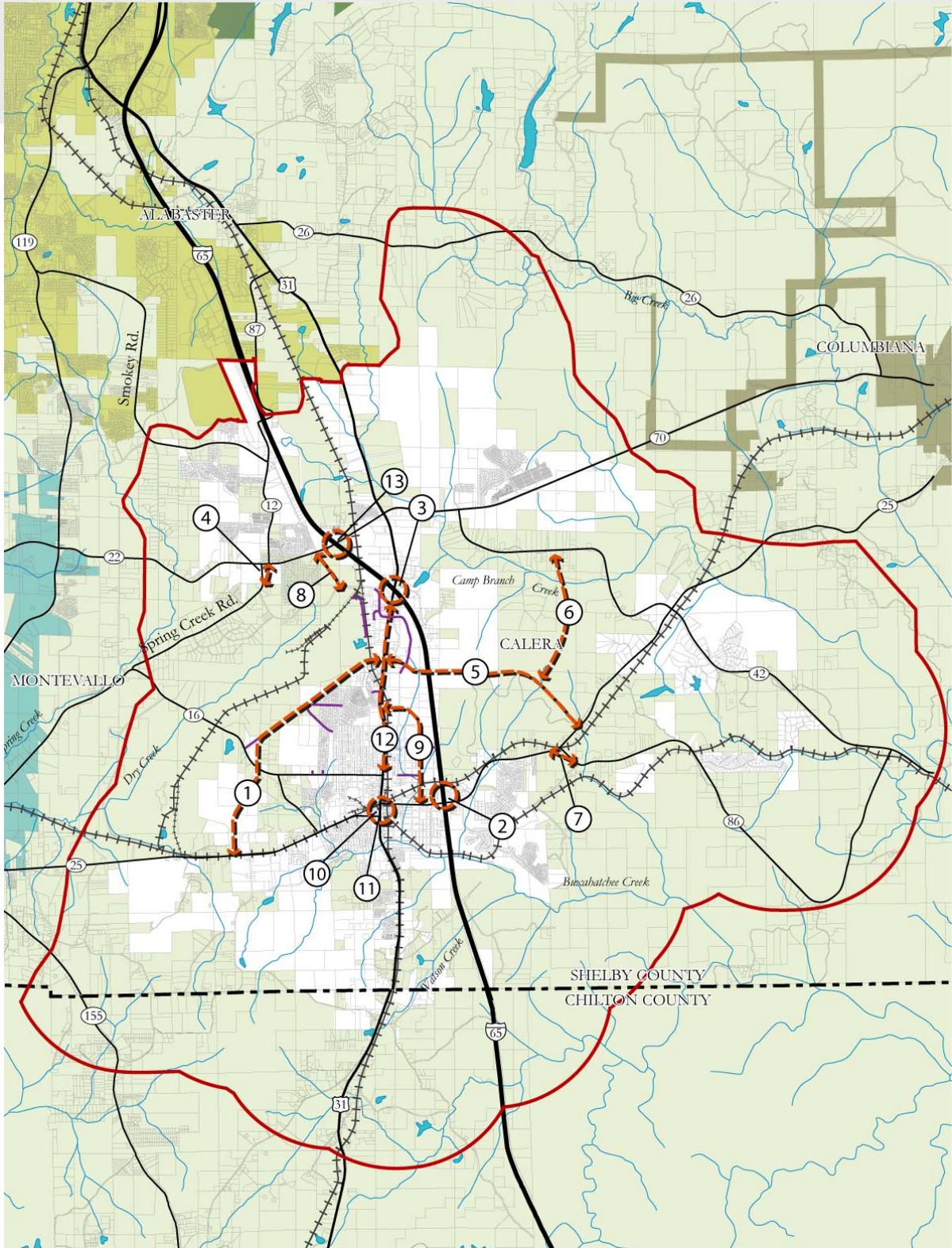


Figure 3.2: Transportation Improvements Map

## Access Management

An essential way to maintain safe and reliable access and street capacity is to manage access to side streets and driveways to and from the parcels that line arterials and major collectors. Approached properly, an access management program can enhance property values while safeguarding past and future infrastructure investments. Accessibility and access management should incorporate the following strategies for retrofitting and constructing new arterials and major collectors:

- *Separate conflict points:* The distance between intersections of arterials and collectors and driveways should be regulated. Generally, driveways should be located as far from intersections as practicable.
- *Restrict turning movements at unsignalized driveways and intersections:* The use of full directional unsignalized streets and driveways should be limited. Full movement intersections should serve multiple developments through joint use driveways or cross access easements. Landscaped medians can improve safety and road capacity along arterials and collectors while also enhancing their visual character.
- *Establish and implement design standards:* Design standards that address access spacing, the length of turn lanes and tapers and driveway dimensions should be developed for application throughout the city on arterials and major collectors and adopted as part of a Public Works Manual.
- *Traffic signal spacing:* Signals should only be installed when appropriate studies indicate their spacing and interconnection can be accomplished without significant impacts on corridor capacity.
- *Turn lanes:* Left and right turn lanes should be required for all collector and arterial streets and major access points to activity centers.
- *Shared driveways and/or inter-parcel access:* Joint use driveways and inter-parcel interconnections, including alleys, should be required to reduce the proliferation of driveways in order to preserve the capacity of the corridor.

## Transportation Improvements

The following recommendations are shown in Figure 3.2: Transportation Improvements Map. They are not listed in order of importance or priority:

1. *Highway 25 Truck Bypass:* This is intended to remove heavy truck traffic from Downtown Calera. Trucks traveling on Highway 25 will be diverted northward to Highway 31 where they may then access I-65. This will reduce maintenance and noise issues on Calera's main street while improving safety for downtown workers and shoppers. The bypass will also allow trucks to avoid delays at the two rail crossings downtown.

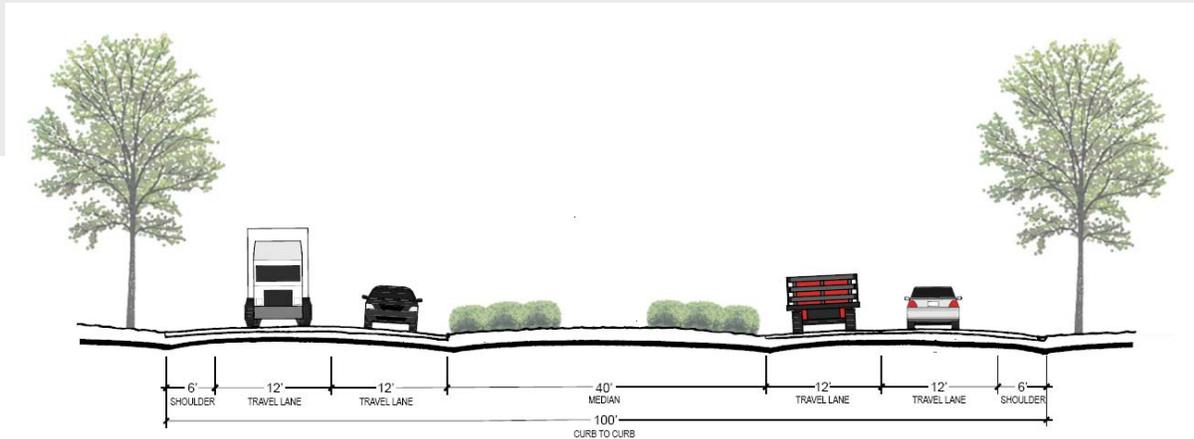


Figure 3.3: Cross section for Highway 25 Truck Bypass

2. *Extend northbound on-ramp:* The length of the on-ramp at Exit 228 is too short for cars to safely merge onto I-65 northbound. Immediately north of the interchange the interstate crosses over the CSX rail line, requiring the on-ramp to be shorter than standard.
3. *Increase capacity of interchange bridge:* At the time of the US Highway 31 Access Management Study in 2005 over 15,000 cars per day crossed the Highway 31 bridge over I-65 (exit 231). Increasing commercial and residential growth served by the interchange has increased traffic levels since then, overwhelming the two-lane bridge. The bridge should be widened to include a five-lane cross section, accommodating left-turn lanes at the northbound and southbound on-ramps.
4. *Intersection realignment:* The southern leg of the intersection of County Roads 12 and 22 will be modified to align with the northern leg. This will improve safe access between south-central Calera and the neighborhoods in the northern part of the community. This may be facilitated as a part of the development of parcels along the south side of County Road 22. See Figure 3.4.
5. *Future collector:* The proposed future road would serve as a major collector connecting from Highway 31 (at its intersection with the proposed Highway 25 truck bypass) to Highway 25 east of I-65. This new road would support possible residential development east of Highway 31 and I-65 and serve as an extension of the truck bypass. This would facilitate trucks traveling between the Montevallo/Calera area and the Columbiana/Wilsonville area. Future private development should facilitate the development of this road.
6. *New collector:* The proposed future road would serve as a minor collector between County Road 42 and the future collector road planned described in Item 5 above. This would provide greater north-to-south access for Calera on the east side of the interstate. Future private development should facilitate the development of this road.

## CR 22- CR 12 Intersection

The illustration at right depicts one concept through which the intersection of CR 22 and CR 12 may be reconfigured together with development of a neighborhood center and integrated residential development. Higher density residential uses, such as multi-family or attached single-family dwellings, provide a transition between the commercial/mixed-use neighborhood center and the medium density single-family to the south. The street network weaves together the development and surrounding neighborhoods. Access along the two major roads is provided but with adequate spacing between each intersection. Street stubs are included to connect to future development. Parking in the neighborhood center is at mid-block to present an attractive front (including a public green space) to surrounding neighborhoods and to assure a pedestrian-friendly development pattern. Small neighborhood open spaces are also provided as focal points and amenities.

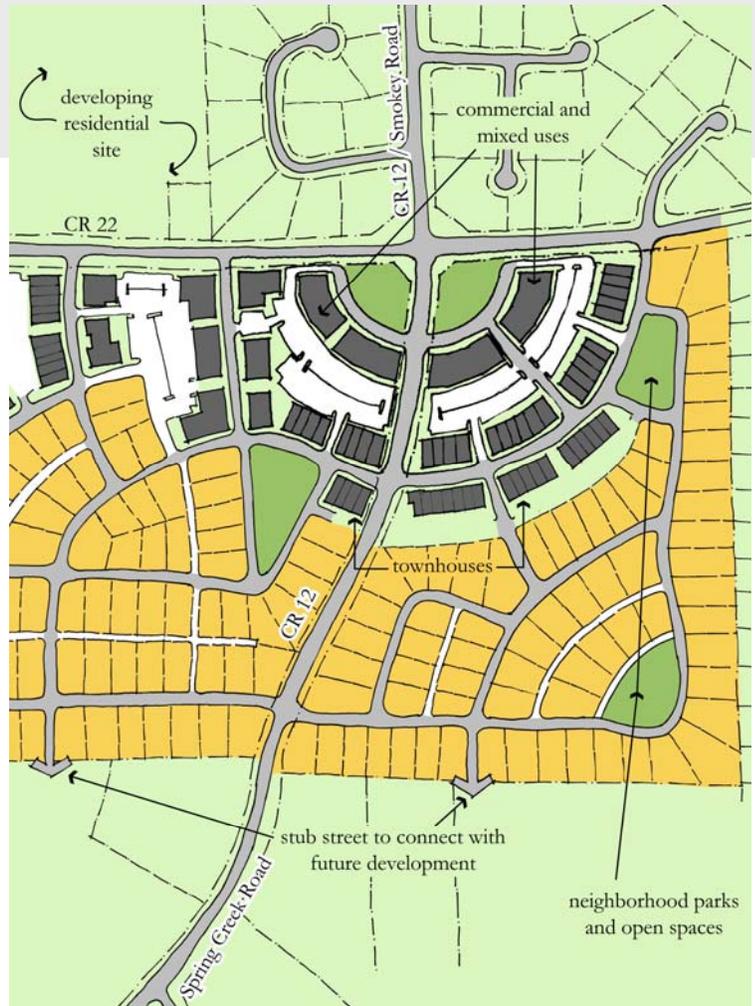


Figure 3.4: Intersection Realignment, neighborhood center concept

7. *Intersection realignment:* County Road 86 intersects Highway 25 immediately southwest of a Highway 25/CSX rail crossing. The improvement may also improve sight distance issues due to the curvature of Highway 25 and the angle at which the rail line approaches the intersection.
8. *New local street:* This improvement will connect County Road 22 (at George Roy Parkway) southward to County Road 84, providing another route between north and south Calera. The street alignment should take advantage of the existing power line easement. A roundabout may be desirable to accommodate the angle at which the new street would approach the intersection. See Figure 3.5.

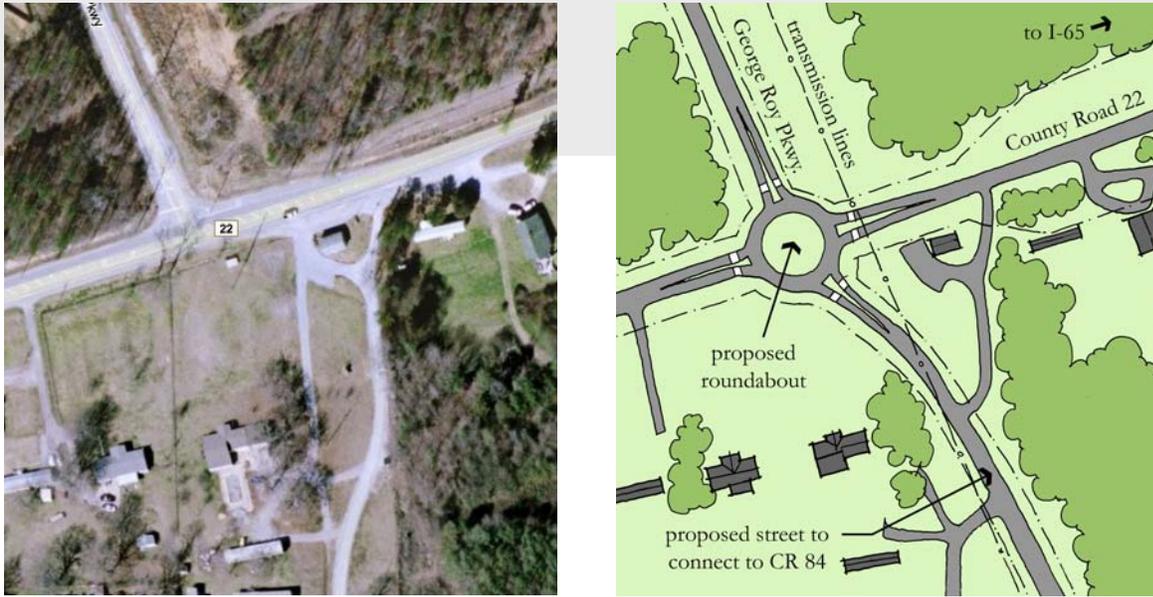


Figure 3.5: New Local Street. At left, existing intersection and at right, proposed configuration. A roundabout configuration allows the proposed street to approach the intersection at an angle, which may prevent disruption to existing development on adjoining properties.

9. *Local street network development:* This includes the creation of several new streets and extension of existing ones to create an interconnected street network between Highway 31 and the interstate. These improvements were conceived as a part of the US Highway 31 Access Management Plan and will support future development in the area, providing access to Highways 31 and 25 as well as multiple emergency response routes in an area otherwise landlocked by the interstate and two rail lines.
10. *Highway 25 rail crossing improvements:* Due to the frequency of trains on the north-south CSX line paralleling US 31, traffic regularly backs up on Highway 25. This is not solely an issue for downtown traffic but for all drivers needing to get from central and southern Calera to parts of the city east of the CSX line and vice-versa. A grade-separated crossing is needed. The nearest grade-separated crossing is 1.5 miles north on US 31. The city previously extended Whippoorwill Lane to intersect with the highway north of this grade-separation to provide better access (including for emergency access to the elementary school). However, Whippoorwill Lane is ill-suited as an alternative route between, for instance, Oliver Park or the High School and just about any part of the city west of downtown. Using the most direct route – over the at-grade crossing on Highway 25 – a trip from the High School to the Timberline subdivision is about 2.2 miles. Going by way of US 31 and Whippoorwill, to avoid the at-grade crossing, extends the same trip to 5.7 miles. Resolving this access and connectivity issue will require detailed study of alternative designs, including the preliminary concepts shown in Figure 3.6.

11. *Highway 31 Streetscape Improvements:* To enhance the walkability and visual character of Downtown Calera, Highway 31 will be improved with newly designed sidewalks and crosswalks, landscaping and lighting. Consideration should be given to coordinating these streetscape improvements with the schedule for completion of the truck bypass. This type of project is eligible for the Federal Transportation Enhancement Grant program.
12. *Highway 31 widening:* Highway 31 should be widened from two to four lanes from 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue northward to the interchange at Exit 231. Left turn lanes will be needed at specific intersections, such as at the future intersection with the Highway 25 truck bypass and at the interchange.
13. *New interstate interchange:* This long range improvement is desired to provide increased access to the residential growth occurring along the CR 22/State Highway 70 corridor and to the nearby commercial and industrial centers along Highway 31. The additional interchange would also reduce congestion at Exit 231.

In addition to the above, there are other improvements needed along Calera's existing streets, which vary from maintenance and repair to correction of sight distance problems. The City must develop and maintain a prioritized list of these local road improvements, incorporating road projects into the City's capital improvements program. Objective criteria should be used to determine priority levels with correction of safety hazards the most critical type of improvement.

### Traffic Calming

Residents are often concerned about the potential for personal and property injury as a result of speeding traffic. The potential for cut through traffic and inappropriate vehicular speeds increases when streets and street networks are not constructed or retrofitted properly to address these issues proactively. Often, stop signs or speed bumps are requested to address these

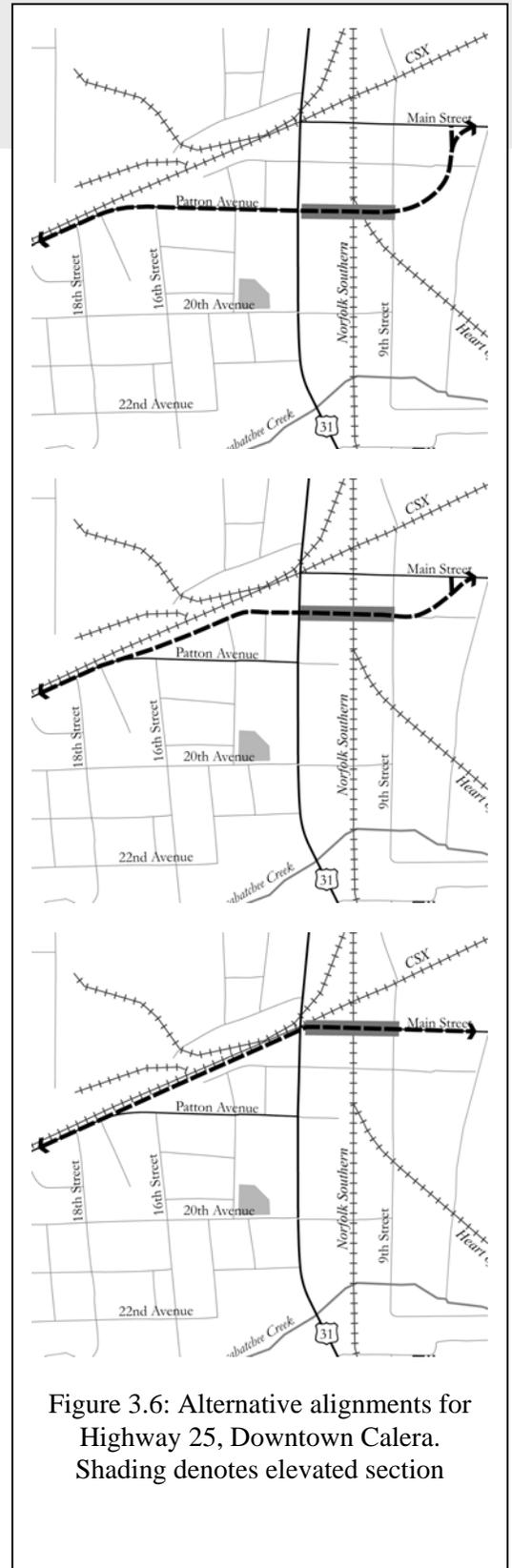


Figure 3.6: Alternative alignments for Highway 25, Downtown Calera. Shading denotes elevated section

problems after a new street or street connection has been completed. The following describes traffic calming techniques and issues and describes strategies appropriate in varying situations.

Stop signs are high-level traffic control devices, and should only be used where warranted by traffic volumes and/or extenuating roadway geometric factors. Consequently, it is the general policy of the City that stop signs should not be used for speed control. Overuse of stop signs leads to general public disregard of stop signs. Furthermore, the city's general policy is to adhere to provisions of the Federal Highway Administration Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (latest edition).

The most effective means of reducing speeds and cut-through traffic on local roadways is proper design and engineering prior to construction, both in terms of the design of the street network and the individual street. Motorists tend to drive faster on long, straight streets. This must be taken into account when planning and designing a new street network or when connecting adjacent ones. The use of short block lengths, subtle curves and offset intersections can help reduce both speeding and cut-through traffic (note: Offsets should only be considered for local streets and offset distances should be in keeping with access management guidelines to prevent safety concerns).

Motorists tend to drive at higher speeds on wide streets but drive more slowly on narrower ones. Therefore, in the design of each new street, its width should be kept to the minimum necessary, taking into account lane requirements, sight distance issues, dimensional requirements of emergency response vehicles, and whether on-street parking is to be accommodated. Buildings built close to the street, on-street parking, vertical curbing, sidewalks, street trees, and other streetscape elements provide visual cues that encourage motorists to drive slower and more cautiously. These streetscape characteristics are most appropriate in medium and higher density neighborhoods and in activity centers. In lower density neighborhoods, not all of these streetscape elements are appropriate and therefore other measures, such as network configuration, must be taken to affect desired driving behavior.

In the case of existing streets, a combination of greater enforcement and traffic-calming interventions may be required. Proper posting of the speed limit and enforcement is generally the most effective means of reducing speeding. But, it is not feasible to enforce the posted speed limit at all times of the day on a consistent basis. To overcome this, traffic calming devices may be installed to limit vehicle speeds and reduce cut-through traffic.



Bulb-outs can be used to retrofit existing streets or to design new streets to slow vehicles. They slow traffic by narrowing the actual or perceived width of the travelway. They can be used at intersections or at mid-block. At crosswalks, they reduce pedestrian crossing distance and encourage drivers to take right turns more carefully. These extensions are often used on blocks with on-street parking and can be used to add landscaping in the design of the street. Bulb-outs are also referred to as “curb extensions” and “neck downs.” These traffic calming devices may be used along Highway 31 through Downtown Calera to calm traffic and make the street environment safer and more comfortable for pedestrians.

Traffic calming involves changes in street alignment, installation of barriers, and other physical measures to reduce traffic speeds and/or cut-through volumes, in the interest of street safety, livability, and other public purposes. Traffic calming includes a wide array of techniques, including:

- Roundabouts and neighborhood traffic circles
- Diagonal diverters
- Median barriers
- Bulb-outs
- Chicanes
- Speed tables

## CONCLUSION

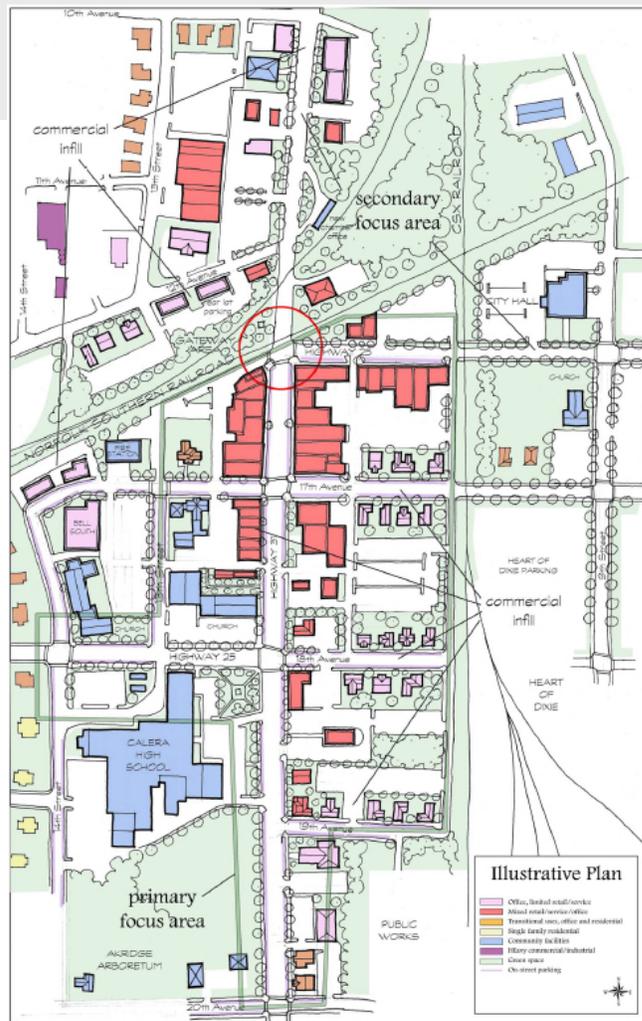
Calera intends to direct land uses toward lands suitable for them in accord with the Future Land Use map and the policies of this document. The city intends that development should be planned and designed in a manner compatible with the city’s green infrastructure and consistent with the city’s existing infrastructure and its economic extension. The city’s transportation network will be extended to support this land use pattern and achieve greater connectivity throughout the community with streets that are designed to suit the land uses they serve.



# Downtown Revitalization

The City of Calera prepared and adopted a plan for the revitalization of Downtown Calera in 2003. That plan established a series of goals and objectives to guide revitalization efforts by the public and private sectors. At the time, the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum was a relatively new addition to the city; and one of Downtown Calera's most formidable problems – heavy truck traffic on Highways 31 and 25 – seemed insurmountable. Today, the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum has grown into a major tourist attraction in central Alabama; and a plan to resolve the bulk of the traffic problems in Downtown Calera is ready to be constructed.

This chapter of the Calera Comprehensive Plan has been prepared as an update to the adopted 2003 Downtown Calera Revitalization Plan. During the process of preparing the Comprehensive Plan, residents, business owners, city officials and other stakeholders took the opportunity to review the goals for Downtown Calera, check the status of revitalization efforts over the last six years and evaluate the changing condition of the city and how those changes may impact future endeavors to improve and sustain the heart of Calera.



Illustrative Plan from the 2003 Downtown Calera Revitalization Plan

It became clear during city planning meetings, including those specifically focused on Downtown Calera held on May 12 and June 16, 2009, that Downtown Calera is more than a center of business to the community. Residents of both older, more central neighborhoods and those of newer neighborhoods far from downtown agreed that Downtown Calera is important symbolically and culturally to many stakeholders throughout the city. It is a physical representation of Calera's small town heritage, which many residents cited as the reason they live in Calera. The historic downtown is a common ground – a place for social and cultural interaction. This is further expressed by the value that residents place on community and civic events held in Downtown Calera, such as the Christmas parade. It is hard to imagine another location in the city that would be more appropriate to host such occasions. Therefore, it is essential that both public and private stakeholders strengthen their resolve to physically and economically revitalize Downtown Calera.

## **DOWNTOWN GOALS**

Since the adoption of the 2003 plan several steps have been taken to improve Downtown Calera, including the development of the Highway 25 Truck Bypass plan, creation of a downtown zoning district and the designation of the Downtown historic district. The following goals and objectives have been updated through public meetings held during the Spring and Summer 2009:

### *Preserve and improve historic business district; keep Calera's small town appeal*

- Apply for preservation tax credits for building rehabilitation (property owners)
- Apply for 50% property tax reduction (property owners)
- Establish a façade improvements program
- Relocate overhead utilities

### *Reduce truck and rail transportation conflicts*

- Develop truck route plan to reduce truck traffic remaining after construction of Highway 25 truck bypass
- Identify and implement solution for traffic delays at Highway 25/CSX rail crossing

### *Increase business development opportunities*

- Improve streetscape along US 31 and cross streets
- Improve appearance of buildings and properties
- Promote Downtown Calera as a central link for the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum and other regional attractions
- Recruit businesses to infill, redevelopment and reinvestment sites
- Develop public parking facilities

### *Strengthen connections between public facilities, neighborhoods and businesses*

- Improve streetscape along US 31
- Develop a greenway along Buxahatchee Creek
- Install and/or improve sidewalk on local streets

### *Support the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum as a regional attraction*

- Improve street and sidewalk connections between Downtown and the museum
- Support development of year-round recreational amenities
- Recruit types of businesses that benefit from proximity to the museum
- Develop promotional campaigns involving the museum, Downtown Calera and other regional attractions

## REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

The overall strategy for downtown revitalization should be a grassroots initiative led by the business community and property owners and supported by the city. The following strategy areas follow and expand on the Four-Point Approach™ created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street program. The themes addressed include: organization, economic structure, design, promotion and community connections.

### Organization

Organizing downtown stakeholders is probably the most important task to undertake early on to assure consensus, coordination and success of subsequent efforts. It will not be easy. Support will be needed from the entire community. While there may be a strong desire among many local people to improve downtown, there will also be those who are not enthusiastic about downtown revitalization or whose agendas may, at times, conflict or compete with efforts to improve the downtown. An effective downtown organization can help address these issues and advise other groups and agencies whose support and cooperation are needed, such as the City Council and Planning Commission.

Merchants, service business organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum and the city government should all be actively involved. Whatever the make-up the downtown organization, it should be broad-based and effectively managed and coordinated. This ensures that a unified strategy guides the wide variety of efforts that must be taken to improve Downtown Calera. An organizational orientation will help those involved be more effective in taking on, often, long-term efforts. Responsibilities must be clearly defined and balanced. In creating an effective downtown organization, the following should be kept in mind:

- Agreement on downtown goals and objectives is essential, but strong and clear communication among members is even more critical.
- Members must be expected to accept and carry out their responsibilities.
- Improving Downtown Calera, as a whole, is more important than the agenda of any one person. Mutual support is essential to success.
- Compromise may be necessary for the general benefit of downtown

### Get Organized

Some will worry about the cost of investing in revitalization, when the greater cost would result from doing nothing. When it comes to organizing and supporting a successful revitalization program, most resources are going to be local. There are very few grants of sufficient size to transform the downtown economy. And, downtown's revitalization is too important to wait for someone else to pay for it (and perhaps take control by attaching strings to relatively small amounts of money).

The downtown organization should be a non-profit. The organization may receive financial support, cooperation or other help from the Chamber of Commerce, the Shelby County Tourism Department, the City of Calera, the Regional Planning Commission and others. Private individuals and corporations may also provide funds for the non-profit and receive tax benefits.

Most of the continuing effort to revitalize Downtown Calera will come from individuals and groups willing to volunteer their time and energy to achieve success downtown. To maintain a strong and effective volunteer base – both within the organization and throughout the community – leaders must provide direction and responsibilities, understand and take advantage of the strengths and interests of individuals, and recognize their efforts.

## Economic Structure

To be successful, new and more appropriate business types must be considered for Downtown Calera as well as how to improve the effectiveness of existing businesses and how they relate to one another, and how to enhance the merchandising efforts of area businesses. An effective approach to competition with other markets is needed, and that approach should be based upon the inherent assets of downtown. Offering goods and services that are not otherwise available in the city or region can be a successful strategy for dealing with competition as it helps often locally-owned downtown businesses avoid *direct* competition with retail giants, such as Wal-Mart and Publix.

To fully inform this update to the downtown plan, retail marketing specialist Dr. Arthur W. Allaway evaluated conditions in and around Calera and prepared a series of recommendations regarding Calera's unique business development opportunities. The primary objective in refining Downtown Calera's business structure should be to create a broad mix of unique and interesting retail, personal service, craft and hobby, and dining options for locals and visitors, all situated within a pedestrian-friendly environment.

An important revelation that emerged during the planning process and market analysis is that Downtown Calera and the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum lie at the center of a collection of unique destinations – from American Village in nearby Montevallo to the George Washington Museum in Columbiana. This greatly impacts downtown business opportunities and influenced the study, which highlighted three market segments to which the mix of businesses in Downtown Calera can be tailored to attract:

- The thousands of people per year who visit Downtown Calera every year to visit the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum;
- The nearly 120,000 residents of the area within a fifteen mile radius of Downtown Calera, thousands of whom are new-to-the-area families with children, shopping needs, a high interest in culture, and plenty of money; and
- The 40,000 travelers per day who pass along Interstate 65 only a mile from downtown and



The Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum brings several thousand visitors to Calera during special events, such as Day out with Thomas™ and the Polar Express. The museum runs excursions on weekends and holds special events throughout the year, including Father's Day, Easter, Halloween and Steam Days (in May).

the over 1.5 million people who live within a 90 minute drive from Calera who could be drawn to the area for potential day-trips or weekend visits. A wealth of historic and cultural attractions within a fifteen mile radius of Calera could make Downtown Calera the center of excursion weekends which would include side trips to such historic places as Columbiana, Shelby, Montevallo, and Brierfield Iron Works.

### *Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum Visitors*

The market report recommended the following business types to better target and serve day-trip visitors to the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum and other daily or weekend visitors to Downtown Calera:

- An additional lunch restaurant similar to Donna’s Calera Café (now Michael’s Diner), which in the past has had an excellent reputation among customers.
- A solid, non-chain restaurant that is open for lunch and dinner and that has a unique menu. Italian dining has been successful in several other downtowns. The Vizzini Farms Winery advertises occasional Italian dinners and catering. Such a restaurant could be opened downtown by or in association with the winery.
- A bakery and coffee shop with outside seating that would bring early morning visitors downtown and serve visitors staying overnight in Calera.
- A general store that connects with the nostalgic interests of Calera residents and that would attract frequent visitors from the fifteen mile market area. An authentic general store would also appeal to excursion or “escape” visitors, such as those visiting cultural and heritage attractions in the area.
- Several antiques and architectural collectibles stores to create critical mass and draw hundreds of shoppers each weekend. A railroad collectibles shop would create more synergy between the Railroad Museum and the downtown business area. Saturday morning auctions or antiques appraisals could attract the types of visitors that would also be interested in the Railroad Museum.

## Regional Attractions and Local Amenities

The following attractions and amenities represent potential links in an overall network of activities that can bring more visitors to Downtown Calera and encourage longer stays:

- Akridge Arboretum Park
- Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum
- Shelby County Museum & Archives
- Karl C. Harrison Museum of George Washington
- Women’s Missionary Union
- Historic Shelby Iron Park
- Aldrich Coal Mine Museum
- American Village
- University of Montevallo
- Ozan Vineyard and Cellars
- Vizzini Farms Winery
- Timberline Golf Course
- Rolling Hills Campgrounds
- Oak Mountain State Park
- Verizon Wireless Music Center

- A unique nursery and plant business that specializes in greenery, hardware, and statuary items would tap into national trends and regularly attract visitors from the fifteen mile market area. Selling locally made birdhouses, plant stands, hanging baskets and similar items would add to the appeal of such a business and draw customers from a larger market area.
- Women's apparel and accessory stores that draw a desirable demographic group into Downtown, complementing restaurants and other types of downtown businesses.

### *Tourists and Escape Visitors*

The report also recommended the following businesses to attract cultural excursion visitors, who may be traveling on Interstate 65 while on a vacation or day trip or visiting cultural attractions in the Calera area:

- A “regional offerings” store that specializes in locally-made or regionally-made food and wines, unique gifts, candies, and clothing. This type of business would expand downtown offerings and serve visitors to the area as well as those passing through on Interstate 65. Such a store could partner with local producers of wines and foods to sponsor wine-tastings, music events at the wineries, special dinners, and other special events. This type of business would be a great magnet if advertised on Interstate 65.
- A historic, or similarly unique, hotel and perhaps two or three bed and breakfast inns. These types of lodging accommodations would be attractive to Railroad Museum visitors and other cultural tourists and weekend “escapees” from larger cities. The keys to the success of such businesses will be promoting regional attractions to encourage overnight stays and promoting Calera's proximity and convenience to those attractions.
- Studios and workspaces of local artisans and craftspeople. Local products made and sold downtown, along with antiques and collectibles offered in nearby shops, would attract travelers and area visitors. If arts and crafts classes were offered during weekends, perhaps in conjunction with a stay in a historic hotel or bed-and-breakfast, visitors could be drawn from even further away.

A unique combination of such offerings would provide Downtown Calera with a marketable identity, provide a focus for economic development, and support area businesses by helping attract and serve weekend visitors and special occasion visitors. This of course will also help improve and sustain Downtown Calera as an attractive, interesting and active town center for the community.

Some immediate actions should be considered. Consumers generally prefer to shop during the evening. Therefore longer store hours may help boost business. Extended hours need not be every night of the week but should be consistent. Thursday, Friday and Saturdays would be the most appropriate evenings for extended hours based on consumer shopping patterns. Downtown merchants should also, as a group, coordinate store hours.

## Downtown Future Land Use

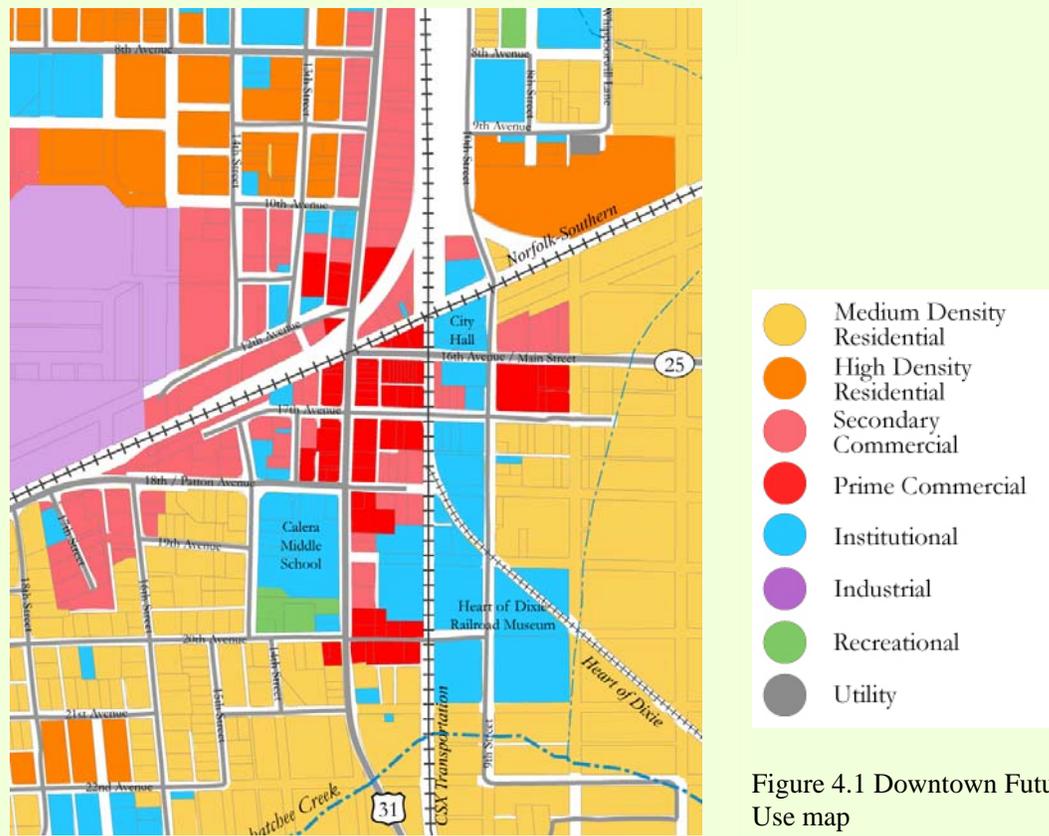


Figure 4.1 Downtown Future Land Use map

The downtown land use pattern must support the economic structure and physical design of Downtown Calera. Prime commercial uses, such as the retail and dining uses recommended in the market analysis, should be clustered in and around the historic district along US 31. There are also opportunities for antiques, studios and work spaces, and bed and breakfast inns along 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Avenues, the side streets connecting to the railroad museum. Retail uses on 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue will be more likely to succeed with proper physical connections to the railroad museum and an anchor business at the US 31 intersection.

Secondary commercial uses, such as offices and service businesses, and a variety of existing institutional uses flank the prime retail locations adding customer traffic needed to support overall downtown business activity. However, some existing uses are ill-suited to the overall land use and economic strategy for downtown revitalization. The city and downtown organization should work with these businesses to find suitable locations for them, perhaps north of downtown, along US 31 or immediately west of the highway.

Medium and higher density residential infill development at the edges of downtown will also create demand for downtown businesses. Live-work units for artists and craftspeople are another option for downtown living that would take advantage of existing buildings on US 31 and along side streets.

Relocation of the public works department, now located between 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Avenues adjacent to the CSX line, would allow room for more private development (and parking) in the future.

## Design

The visitor's impression of any place of business is important to its success. What is less obvious is that this impression is not limited to just the building or property. The customer's mental image is influenced by surrounding development, how well streets and other public spaces are maintained, how accessible a location is, whether it is easy to find, if the route is congested, safe or attractive, etc. All of these conditions are a matter of community design. In downtown in particular, the physical design and maintenance of the place is of even greater importance, because its visitors spend more time on foot, a perspective from which all sorts of blemishes become much more apparent.

As discussed in public meetings, improving the appearance of Downtown Calera will require effort on behalf of the city government, merchants and property owners. For the City to fulfill its responsibilities in that regard, public tax dollars must be invested. Therefore, there must be a commitment from the business community to fulfill its own duties by improving buildings, facades, parking areas, signs, etc. The following improvements are recommended to improve the physical design and character of downtown's public realm:

### Signage

- Directional signage on Interstate 65 and Highways 25 and 31 should be installed. This will require approval by the ALDOT (see ALDOT Administrative Code, Chapter 450-10-1-.05) and should be initiated by the City. Interstate signage should include markers in advance of Exit 228, both north and south. Signage should also be installed at the top of interstate interchange ramps at Highway 31 and 25.
- Gateway Signage should be installed along Highway 31 and 25 at locations that provide a good visual introduction into Downtown Calera. These may be landscaped monument signs or they may be provided as district banners.
- District Banners are decorative signs attached to light poles, traffic signal poles or freestanding fixtures. They can visually enhance and tie together the various streets in Downtown Calera.



### Street and Sidewalk Improvements

- Pedestrian Improvements – Local streets connecting downtown to nearby neighborhoods and to the Railroad Museum should be improved, including adding curb and gutter where needed and installing sidewalks and pedestrian-scale lighting fixtures. Connecting the museum with downtown along 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Avenues will help encourage visitors to the museum to explore downtown. Figure 4.2 illustrates the many destinations in and around Downtown Calera that should be linked with adequate pedestrian facilities, including a greenway trail along Buxahatchee Creek. Pedestrian facilities connecting neighborhoods to schools (including the greenway) may be funded in part through Safe Routes to School grants from the ALDOT.

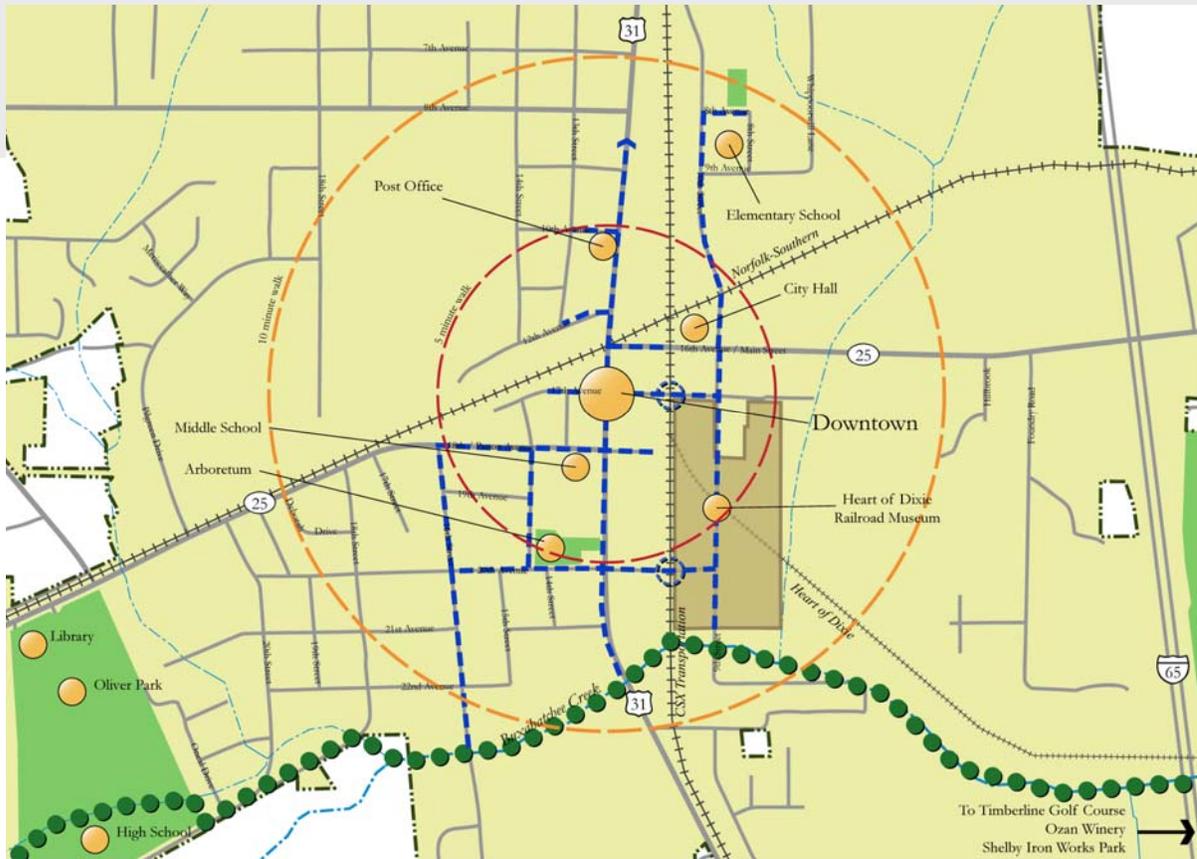
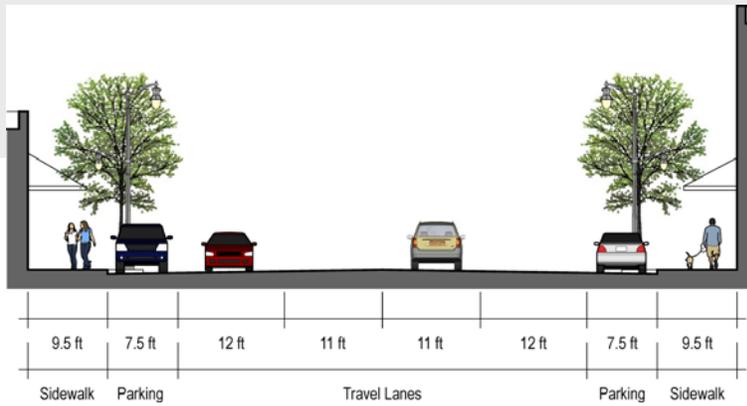
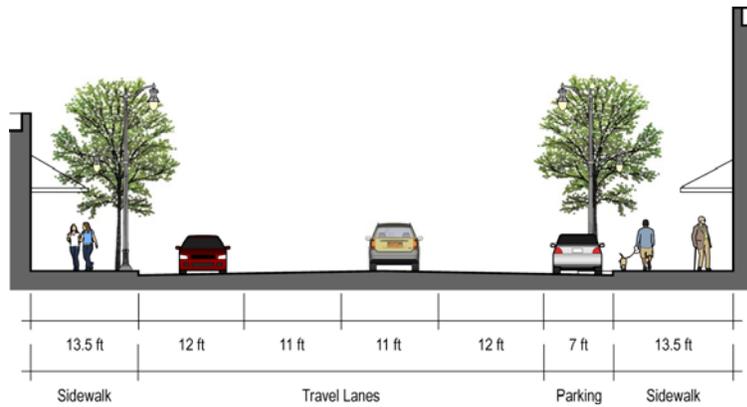


Figure 4.2: Downtown Pedestrian Linkages, with 5 and 10 minute walking radius shown from the downtown historic district. Recommended sidewalk improvements are shown in blue.

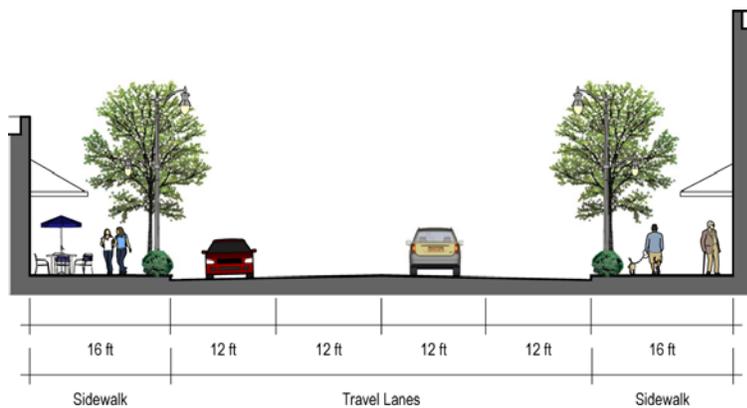
- **Truck Bypass** – The City has prepared a plan to construct a truck bypass from Highway 25 west of Downtown Calera to Highway 31 immediately south of Exit 231 at Interstate 65. Funding for construction is being sought through the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Upon construction, the bypass will remove industrial-related truck traffic from Highways 31 and 25 in downtown.
- **Grade-separated Crossing, CSX Rail Line** – See description in Land Use and Transportation Plan, page 32.
- **Highway 31 Streetscape Improvements** – This project should not wait on completion of the truck bypass, which may not be constructed for 5-10 years. Instead, the city should prepare a conceptual plan and estimate for the work and apply for a Transportation Enhancement grant to help fund it. If the grant is approved, construction may not begin for at least two years from the time of application. There are several options, shown in Figure 4.3 on the next page, for how Highway 31 may be improved to better support downtown revitalization. The primary goals should be increasing sidewalk width and adding lighting, trees and other landscape improvements. As a part of this streetscape project, overhead utilities should be moved to the back of properties or buried, whichever is more feasible.



Option 1: Narrow travel and parking lanes, extend sidewalks and add curb extensions at corners and mid-block to reduce pedestrian crossing distances and provide space for landscaping.



Option 2: Narrow travel and parking lanes, remove on-street parking on west frontage, extend sidewalks on both street frontages, and add landscaping in tree wells and curb extensions.



Option 3: Remove on-street parking on both street frontages and extend sidewalks, add landscaping in tree wells along both sidewalks.

Figure 4.3: US Highway 31 Streetscape Improvement Options. Cross-sections looking north from 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue

## Existing and New Development

- Building improvements – Merchants and property owners must invest in the appearance of downtown buildings, especially storefronts, to be successful. This can be fostered by a local façade grant or loan program funded and administered by the city. And within the nationally-registered historic district in Downtown Calera, owners rehabilitating historic buildings may apply for preservation tax credits. With these credits, up to 20% of the cost of a building renovation (if meeting Secretary of the Interior Standards) may be written off of the owners' income tax responsibility that year. Also, owners of contributing historic buildings may apply for a permanent property tax reduction through the County Tax Assessor. The savings may then be redirected to improving the property. This is also an incentive for owners of non-contributing buildings to renovate them, as needed, to become “contributing” and receive the property tax reduction.



### Façade Improvements and Reinvestment Renderings from 2003 Downtown Plan

- Downtown Design Guidelines – Design guidelines are a strategic tool used in many successful downtowns to ensure that façade treatments, signage, and other individual improvements reinforce the attractiveness and unique character of the overall district. Such guidelines may be drafted as a part of a façade grant/loan program. Only those taking advantage of the program would be subject to the guidelines. An advisory design review process can be created, requiring any project requiring a building permit to be reviewed by a locally-established design review board. Another available option is local designation of the historic district. This requires passage of a historic preservation ordinance by the Council, which establishes a preservation commission and creates a mandatory design review process for all projects in the historic district.
- Zoning Ordinance – The regulations of the downtown zoning district should be modified to better suit the types of uses desired downtown and to also assure development that is consistent with the attractive, pedestrian-oriented historic pattern. Changes would include requiring buildings be located near the sidewalk (or front

property line), maintaining a public entrance on the sidewalk, placing on-site parking to the side or rear of buildings, and reducing off-street parking requirements for downtown businesses.

### Public Parking

- Land should be acquired (or leased) for development of public parking to support existing and desired downtown businesses and to improve the convenience and overall experience of customers and other businesses. As described in the original downtown plan, the city may take on this initiative. Potential locations for public parking are shown in Figure 4.4.

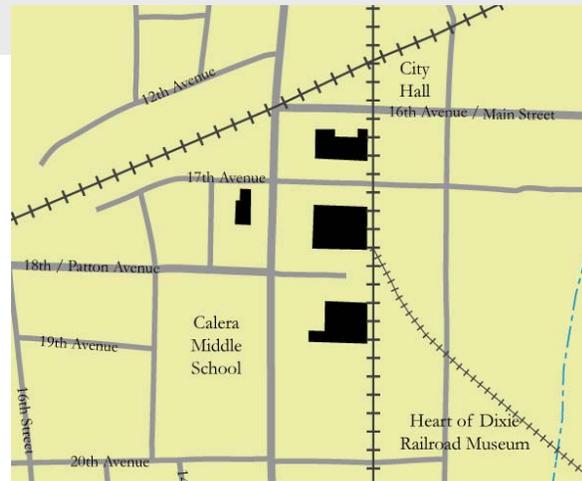


Figure 4.4 Potential public parking sites

### Buxahatchee Creek Greenway

- Development of a greenway trail along Buxahatchee Creek would help connect Downtown Calera to Oliver Park and the High School, the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, Timberline Golf Course and points eastward. A conceptual plan for the greenway is included in the Appendix.

### Promotion

Downtown Calera needs a well-organized campaign to promote downtown as a single, unified destination for retail, service and recreation. An annual promotional schedule should be initiated and kept up-to-date on a monthly basis. Promotional activities should include image promotion, joint merchandising promotion and special events.

- *Image promotion* concentrates on increasing consumer awareness of downtown as an attractive place for shopping and services. This includes projecting a desirable image of the community throughout the trade area. As physical improvements are made, customers, residents, and potential investors should be made aware. A downtown logo may be created for use in various media, including ads, T-shirts, signs and shopping bags. A directory of downtown stores and services should be prepared and updated often. And of course, articles in local newspapers and word-of-mouth can help. A downtown organization website would be a highly effective and inexpensive method of advertising. This can be especially helpful in reaching non-locals, who, after learning more about the exciting things to do and see in and around Calera, may choose to add Downtown Calera to their next travel itinerary.
- *Joint merchandising promotion* involves merchants and other businesses getting together to jointly advertise and promote what Downtown Calera has to offer. The effect will be greater activity in *all* downtown businesses. Joint advertising is not

intended to replace individual proportions. But, by engaging in joint advertising, downtown businesses and services will have far greater impact throughout the trade area. Joint promotion can include coordinated sales events in addition to joint advertising.

- *Special events* are strategic opportunities to bring people downtown. The by-product is that they can increase sales and draw potential customers, who might not otherwise shop downtown. They are also an opportunity to show off new businesses or physical improvements. Not all special events need to be driven by the business community. Festivals, parades and other community events can bring hundreds of people to the doorstep of downtown businesses. Whoever the organizer, the downtown business community should take advantage of and support each event. And, there should be several events each year. Downtown Calera should be the preferred venue for most citywide events.



Farmers' markets have been successful – as recurring events – in bringing locals and area visitors to downtowns in communities large and small throughout the nation. Keys to success include fresh, local produce and a consistent schedule. Calera can take advantage of renowned Chilton County peaches and products from local vineyards to draw seasonal crowds.

## Community Connections

Every influence the community has should somehow be positioned to support downtown revitalization. Not all of the causes of downtown decline or revitalization occur downtown. This is why it is advantageous to consider downtown revitalization in the context of this citywide Comprehensive Plan. It is essential to recognize and account for the effects that different types of public and private decisions can have on downtown's sustainability.

An obvious example is heavy truck traffic on Highway 25 and US 31. The trucks neither originate from nor are destined for Downtown Calera. Nevertheless, they have a tremendous impact downtown. The city had to look beyond downtown to develop a solution. Likewise, private development decisions outside downtown can affect revitalization efforts. Citywide policies and regulations can have effects, sometimes unrecognized, on efforts to revitalize downtown. The following are a few ways the community may better coordinate citywide issues with downtown revitalization:

- The Chamber of Commerce is concerned for all of its members and acts generally in its business promotion efforts. Good communication with the downtown organization, can help ensure that Chamber activities support, or at least, do no harm to downtown improvement activities.
- The City's capital improvements plan and annual budgets should reflect some level of commitment to downtown revitalization. If the community is serious, then local tax

dollars should help carry out plans for revitalization—or at least not interfere with them.

- Citywide land use policies should support downtown revitalization. If stores and services are allowed to be scattered throughout the community, they will be – and residents will criss-cross the city to accomplish just a few errands, or they will go elsewhere where shopping is more convenient. Because of its compact, pedestrian-friendly environment, downtown can become a place to shop, dine and accomplish multiple errands with only the driving necessary to get there. The city should be frugal in its allocation of commercial zoning and use all its influence to direct business investment downtown and to other already established activity centers. Residential development should also be encouraged around downtown so that there are more potential customers nearby.

## CONCLUSION

This update to the Downtown Calera Revitalization Plan is designed to build on the spirit of the people of Calera and their commitment to downtown as the heart of the city. The intent is to capitalize on:

- the physical charm of Calera’s traditional, historic downtown;
- residents’ desire for downtown to serve as a center for community interaction and as an integral symbol of Calera’s small town appeal; and
- downtown’s central location within a larger economic market represented by American Village, the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, Shelby Iron Works Park and other cultural attractions.

Revitalization efforts must be organized and must be a grassroots effort – *led* by merchants and property owners and *supported* by the city. Success of these efforts will rely on physical, economic and organizational efforts within downtown as well as acknowledging and improving downtown’s connections to the broader community and region. The effects of citywide policies and investments on downtown revitalization must be considered even when such decisions may not be directly related to downtown. And finally, downtown businesses and revitalization accomplishments must be touted, both within and outside of the community, through special events and promotional campaigns.

# Implementation

The major theme of this Comprehensive Plan is to take charge of growth and the character of the city. The city has prepared this plan to guide decisions regarding land use, development and conservation, zoning and capital improvements. The plan is also intended to help residents, property owners, merchants, builders, and developers invest in the city by providing a reasonable expectation of its future physical layout and character.

The Comprehensive Plan is to be carried out through a combination of direct public and private investment, decisions by the City Council, Planning Commission and other public boards and commissions. The plan's recommendations will continue to be translated into action through revision and enforcement of the city's development regulations; through an Access Management Program in cooperation with the Shelby County Roads and Transportation Department (county roads) and the Alabama Department of Transportation (state highways); through city budgeting and capital improvement programming and through public and private decisions in support of planned, cost-effective annexation.

## Implementation Strategy

1. Keep the public sector focused
2. Get the private sector interested and involved
3. Get other agencies playing on our team
4. Take direct action with our own money
5. Shape the actions of others with good laws
6. Provide incentives for others to take the lead
7. Use every power and dollar to support the plan

Calera is a municipal corporation, formed under powers granted by the State of Alabama. The city has used this police power to enforce growth and development regulations. The city has used its taxation power to plan for and implement a budgeting system that includes capital investments for infrastructure facilities and services that it uses to help shape growth and development. All of these tools will continue to be used together to shape Calera in accord with this Comprehensive Plan. The Implementation Schedule provides an outline of short-to-medium term actions essential to carrying out the Comprehensive Plan.

## PUBLIC INVESTMENTS

Throughout the planning process, the need for specific public investments to support implementation has been reinforced. These public investments include several categories, including: greenways and sidewalks; parks and open space; municipal facilities and services; transportation; and downtown revitalization. Following are brief descriptions of the overall intent for each category and a list of the specific actions to be taken. It should be noted that project lists will change from year to year as implementation continues. These lists will be updated regularly for use during the City's annual budgeting process. Citywide recommendations are shown in Figure 5.1 Public Investments map.

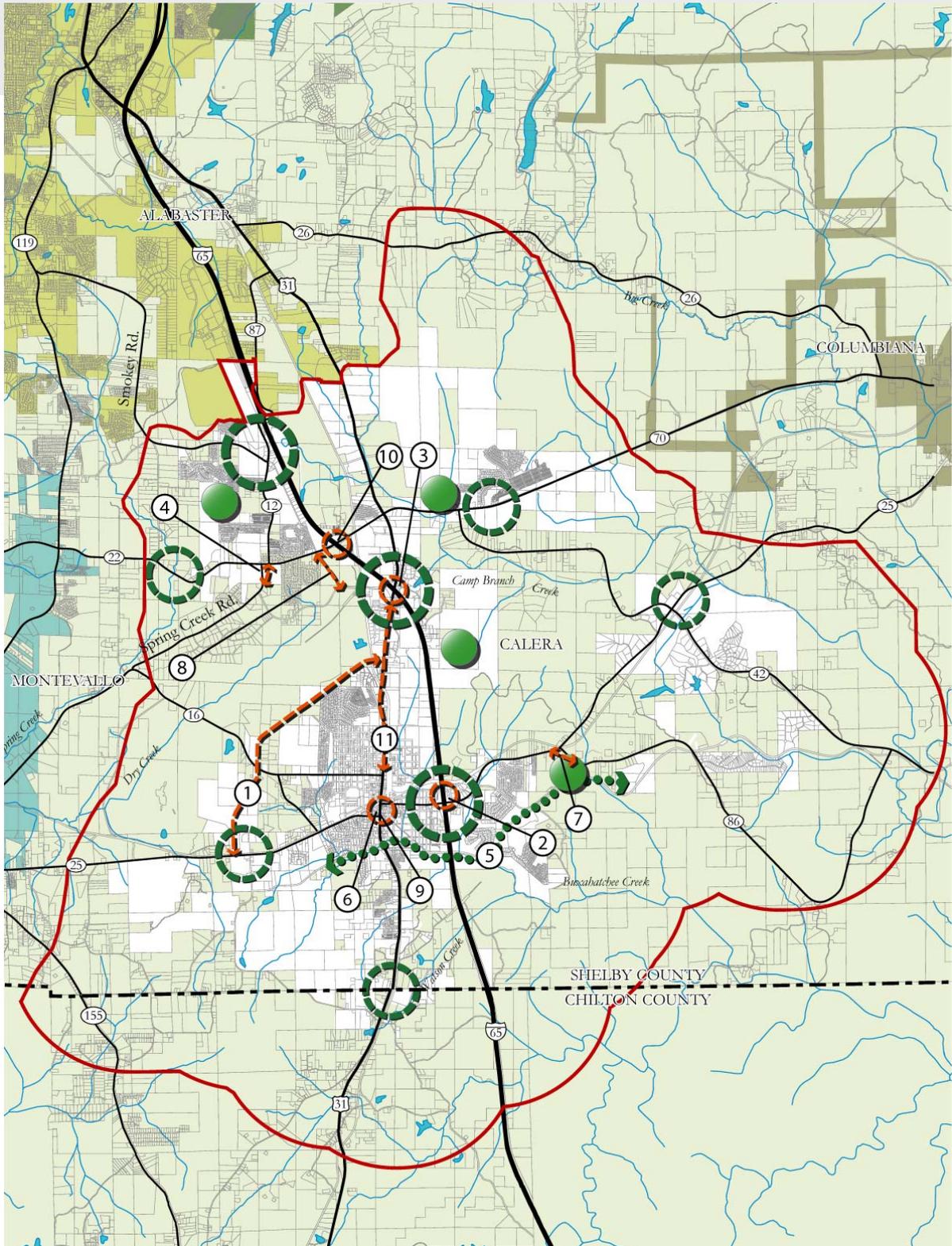


Figure 5.1: Public Investments map

## Gateways

Physical improvements are recommended at the entrances into the community as described in the Strategic Concept. Attractive gateway signage at the three interstate interchanges will have the most impact and should be considered top priorities for this type of public investment. Similar signage and landscaping improvements are recommended along Highway 31 (to the south), along Highway 25 (to the east and west) and the other locations identified in the Public Investments map. The scale and extent of design improvements should vary from location to location, appropriate to their context. Gateway improvements along the interstate and along Highways 31 and 25 should receive careful attention and a relatively high level of investment, given the number of visitors who pass by these locations. Improvements at the interstate interchanges may incorporate wayfinding information directing visitors to the historic downtown business district or other important locations, such as the Railroad Museum or Shelby Commerce Park.

## Greenways and Sidewalks

During the planning process, Calera residents expressed a desire for more pedestrian accessibility throughout the city. Developing a citywide greenway and sidewalk system maximizes both on- and off-road pedestrian access between the city's neighborhoods and destinations such as Downtown Calera, schools, business areas and parks and recreational facilities. Greenways that include off-road pedestrian trails will be an important element in meeting the community's accessibility goals in locations far from the heart of town, especially in connecting already developed residential areas that do not have sidewalks. The idea for a Buxahatchee Creek Greenway Trail emerged in the previous Comprehensive Plan. The proposal continues to have community support. A concept for the trail has been prepared for this plan update and is included in the Appendix.

Sidewalks and trails are more than just amenities for exercise and recreation. They contribute to a safer environment. Adequate pedestrian facilities provide a safe alternative to children driving or being driven to school or sports and recreational activities, which also has the added benefits of lessening congestion on local streets, reducing driving demands on parents (scheduling and fuel costs), and promoting a healthier, more active lifestyle.

Because there are only intermittent sidewalks outside the historic core of the community, the city must act strategically to begin developing an effective citywide pedestrian system. Priorities must be established to facilitate construction of sidewalks and trails, initially, that will have the greatest benefit. Important connections, such as sidewalks adjacent to the schools, should be identified and a Pedestrian Master Plan prepared by the Public Works Department with community involvement. Local monies should be used to leverage Safe Routes to School, Congestion Mitigation-Air Quality (CMAQ) and Transportation Enhancement grants and similar funding sources. Meanwhile, streets built as part of new subdivisions and commercial developments should be required to include sidewalks when they are of medium or higher density and/or are located close to activity centers, schools or

parks. The city may require easements or dedications in new subdivisions that support development of an interconnected greenway trail network.

## Transportation Projects

To achieve the city's desired levels of access and connectivity will require implementation of the transportation improvements noted in Chapter 3. These improvements, also shown on the Public Investment map, should be included in the city's capital improvements plan and funding sought through Transportation Enhancement grants and other applicable sources.

The city will be responsible for initiating the following transportation improvements, several of which will be eligible for state or federal transportation funds. The projects are not listed in order of importance or priority but are numbered to correspond with the symbols shown in Figure 5.1 Public Investments map:

1. Planned Highway 25 truck bypass
2. Extension of northbound on-ramp (Exit 228, Interstate 65)
3. Capacity improvements to bridge at Exit 231
4. Realignment of CR 12 and Spring Creek Road
5. Buxahatchee Creek Greenway
6. Downtown street improvements (Highway 31 and side streets)
7. Intersection improvement (CR 86 and Highway 25)
8. New local street (from CR 22 to CR 84)
9. Grade-separated crossing over CSX rail line (in or near downtown)
10. Construction of Interchange at Highway 70/22 and Interstate 65
11. Widening of Highway 31 (between downtown and Exit 231)

Additional street network improvements are described in the Transportation Plan in Chapter 3 and are intended to be provided as a part of the private development of the areas in which they are located. Therefore, they are not shown in the Public Investments map. However, this does not exclude the private sector from contributing to the projects above where such partnerships with the city in implementing this plan would be of mutual benefit. For example, the realignment of CR 12 and Spring Creek Road (Item #4 on the map) will have a positive impact for public travel but may also be of great benefit to a developer interested in constructing the neighborhood center proposed at this location.

## Municipal Facilities and Services

In addition to its parks, Calera's municipal facilities include city hall, the public works department, the Calera library, the planning and building inspections department, fire

stations, a senior center and municipal water and sewer facilities. As the city continues to grow, additional staff will be needed, in the police force, fire department and in other departments. This may create a need for additional space or buildings.

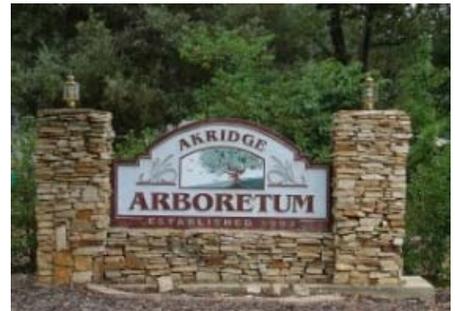
Fire stations will be distributed throughout the city to provide rapid emergency response and maintain a good Insurance Service Organization (ISO) rating; and thereby keep fire insurance rates low.

The city intends to maintain its administrative functions in Downtown Calera. Water and sewer facilities are well distributed geographically to support existing development and continued growth in accord with the Comprehensive Plan.

Utilities will be extended and their capacity increased to support the types and intensities of development described in the Future Land Use plan in Chapter 3.

### *Parks and Recreation Facilities*

The City maintains three park and recreation facilities. Oliver Park, George Roy Park and the Akridge Arboretum. George Roy Park, developed in 2004, will be expanded in the future according to a master plan prepared for the Parks and Recreation Department. As the population grows, the community will need more parks and open space for passive recreation and sports. A combination of exactions from new development and capital improvements by the City will be necessary to meet community goals. The Strategic Concept map in Chapter 2 identifies general locations for future neighborhood or community parks.



As development occurs in these areas in the future, the city must coordinate with subdividers to set aside land for park space. These general locations, also shown in the Public Investments map, are intended to locate city parks within an equitable distance of most neighborhoods. This will help achieve an important plan goal – to have more public facilities accessible to the growing northern portion of the city. Finally, park and recreation sites should also be considered with regard to how they can be physically connected to adjacent development through sidewalks and trails, in addition to public streets.

Early in the planning process, residents conveyed a desire for a recreation center, YMCA or similar multi-purpose center. Should the city develop a public recreation center, a relatively central and highly accessible location should be sought. Co-locating such a facility with a community park would provide some conveniences and efficiencies but is not necessary.

### *Community Center*

The Calera Community Center is located on US 31 next to Akridge Arboretum immediately south of the middle school and downtown historic district. A larger facility will likely be needed in the coming years to accommodate a greater variety of community activities and events. Locating a new, larger facility in or adjacent to downtown will support its revitalization and will foster community interaction in the heart of the city.

## GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Key elements of the city’s growth management system include the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations and sign regulations among others. These elements address land use, site planning, the size and location of buildings and other structures, aesthetics and signage. Each of these protects the health, safety and welfare of the community – the “valid public purposes” of the municipality. Each must also respect the principles of due process, non-discriminatory application, profitable use of land, freedom of speech, and the balancing of individual costs against anticipated public benefits.

### Zoning Ordinance and Map

Calera enforces a Zoning Ordinance to regulate the types of uses that may be permitted within various zoning district, as well as, building heights and setbacks, residential densities, parking and similar development characteristics. The Comprehensive Plan and its Future Land Use Map should not be confused with the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. The Comprehensive Plan has been prepared as a *guide* to public and private investment in land development and infrastructure. In contrast, the Zoning Ordinance is a *regulatory tool* used by the city to influence and direct development of the community in ways that reflect the direction and desired form of the community called for in the Comprehensive Plan.

Comprehensive Plan	Zoning Ordinance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides general policy guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides specific regulations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describes conditions desired in the long term – not necessarily existing or recommended use(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describes what is and what is not currently allowed today</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes recommendations that involve other agencies and groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with development issues under city control</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intentionally flexible to allow responses to changing conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairly rigid, requires formal amendment to change</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General land use categories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoning districts</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General land use locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parcel-specific designations</li> </ul>

However, there is an important and general, though not precise, relationship between the city’s land use plan and its zoning districts, regulations and map. The following is a list of the land use categories described in Chapter 3 together with the existing zoning districts to which they are most comparable:

<u>Future Land Use Designation</u>	<u>Zoning District</u>
<i>Agricultural, rural residential uses</i>	A-1 Agricultural District E-1 Single family Residential Estate District
<i>Low density residential uses</i>	A-1 Agricultural District E-1 Single family Residential Estate District
<i>Medium density residential uses</i>	R-1 Single family Residential District R-2 Single family Residential District R-2-A Single family Residential District R-3 Single family (Affordable Housing) Residential District R-3-A Mobile Home Subdivision District
<i>High density residential uses</i>	R-3-B Mobile Home Park District R-4 Multi-family Residential District RG Residential Garden Home District RT Residential Townhouse District
<i>Commercial</i>	O-1 Office Building District B-1 Local Shopping District B-2 General Business District B-3 Historical Business District
<i>Light Industrial</i>	M-1 Light Industrial District
<i>Heavy Industrial</i>	M-2 Heavy Industrial District M-3 Heavy Industrial District

It should not be assumed that a property designated within a particular category in the Future Land Use map may necessarily be rezoned to any of the existing zoning districts that are *generally* comparable, as shown above. Rather, the city, in reviewing rezoning applications, intends to consider all other related policies and practices recommended throughout this plan, together with the Future Land Use map and an evaluation of the particular site and its surroundings, to make such decisions.

As a part of plan implementation, Calera intends to revise the Zoning Ordinance to reflect and incorporate the land development policies of this plan. The following elements are recommended to enhance the Zoning Ordinance to better implement the land development policies of the city:

- Update terminology and definitions
- Reduce the abundance of special exceptions in commercial districts
- Limit the variety of uses permitted in the A-1 District and increase its minimum lot size

- Revise the B-3 Historical Business District to assure reinvestment is consistent with the established urban character and desired uses of the area
- Establish an institutional zoning district
- Establish a planned development district for “traditional neighborhood developments”
- Include “conservation subdivisions” as permitted uses in single-family zoning districts
- Update landscape requirements (buffering, screening, and parking lot landscaping requirements) in the Zoning Ordinance
- Update parking requirements for uses and include additional provisions for shared parking in developments with a mix of uses
- Provide alternative dimensional requirements in non-residential and higher density residential developments to allow development patterns that foster walkability



## Subdivision Regulations

Calera intends to revise the city subdivision regulations to reflect and incorporate the land development policies of this plan. Alabama courts have long recognized the importance of subdivision regulation as a tool in implementing comprehensive plans. The Calera Comprehensive Plan establishes a means for achieving the city’s goals to create more walkable, interconnected neighborhoods and activity centers with distinct, lasting character.

The Land Use and Transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan identifies standards for public improvements most suitable for a variety of land uses, densities and locations within the city – whether the development is centrally located and relatively urban like Downtown Calera or whether it is further out and relatively rural. For example, in the case of street networks, the right-of-way width, alignment, number and size of the travel lanes and edge treatments – including drainage improvements, lighting, sidewalks and planted buffers between the sidewalk and street – should vary according to differences in land use, intensity and location. Similarly, appropriate levels of connectivity may be assured in new development through the regulation of block sizes or, more specifically, connectivity requirements that are also suited to the type of development and its location within the community.

Through updates to the subdivision regulations, the city will better be able to conserve green infrastructure elements. One important change will be preventing grading and clearing of land to be subdivided and developed prior to review of preliminary plats and approval of land disturbance plans by the City Engineer. Through this adjustment to the subdivision review

process, the city can encourage greater conservation of topography, natural drainage patterns, and existing vegetation. To the extent practicable, existing vegetation should be preserved so that it may be used toward requirements for landscaping or buffers – a potential cost-savings for developers that also supports green infrastructure.

All open spaces are not equal. Open space should not be viewed simply as the space left over once development is complete. There should be a function for each open space, strong access and good connectivity of its parts for the benefit of the public. This argues strongly for placing open space and natural resource protection standards in the subdivision regulations rather than relying solely on zoning requirements, for it is at the time of subdividing land that open space may be secured or lost. By placing concerns for green infrastructure and open space early in the process of planning and design of new development, the intentions of the Comprehensive Plan more likely will be met. Open space can be used to improve natural drainage and infiltration, which better protects resources when incorporated as the preferred strategy, prior to property being set out for development.

The following elements are recommended to enhance the Subdivision Regulations in order to better implement the land development policies of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Use narrow residential streets to provide an attractive, calm and safe neighborhood environment
- Improve street connectivity to disperse traffic, avoid congesting major streets, assure adequate routes for emergency response and provide a variety of vehicular and pedestrian routes for residents to move about the community.
- Conserve natural drainage patterns to reduce the need and added costs of earthwork, clearing and drainage improvements
- Sidewalks should be required in activity centers and medium and high density neighborhoods and any neighborhoods close to parks, schools or other community destinations.
- Plan and design streets to discourage speeding.
  - *Design elements that calm traffic include: short block lengths, street curvature, roundabouts, narrow streets, on-street parking, vertical curbs, street trees, sidewalks and pedestrian-scale lighting.*
  - *Streets should be designed so that after-the-fact traffic calming interventions, such as speed bumps, are not needed.*
- Require property owner association management of common open space.
- Incorporate additional development review criteria (on the following page) to assist review of applications by the Planning Commission



## Additional Development Review Criteria

Development criteria for activity centers and neighborhoods may be added to the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations for use in review by the Planning Commission and city staff. The following guidelines should be included as a part of Calera's growth management system:

### *Green Infrastructure Management*

The Planning Commission and city staff, to conserve Calera's green infrastructure (see Figure 5.2), can employ a checklist, such as the following, during the review process for all development projects requiring plat, site plan or similar approvals:

- Favor citywide low gross density, but with appropriate areas designated for higher densities, to gain useful open space and watershed protection with no net loss of development opportunity.
- Design relatively narrow residential streets to reduce impervious surface coverage.
- Require approval of preliminary plat and engineering plan prior to grading and clearing. Limit clearing and grading to the minimum needed for construction and access purposes.
- Limit impervious parking area to that actually required for the intended use to help make shared parking solutions attractive. Reduce overall imperviousness of parking lots by permitting pervious materials in spillover parking areas.
- Encourage the conservation of naturally vegetated buffers along streams, floodplains, steep slopes and wetlands.
- Incorporate existing vegetation into community open spaces, streetscapes, parking lot landscaping, buffers, and other open spaces, to the degree practicable. In intensive development areas, replace "lost" vegetation by incorporating new landscaping into the streetscape, community open spaces and parking lots.
- Maintain all "blue line" streams at least at their current lengths.
- Prohibit new stormwater discharge of unmanaged stormwater into wetlands, aquifer recharge areas and critical water bodies.

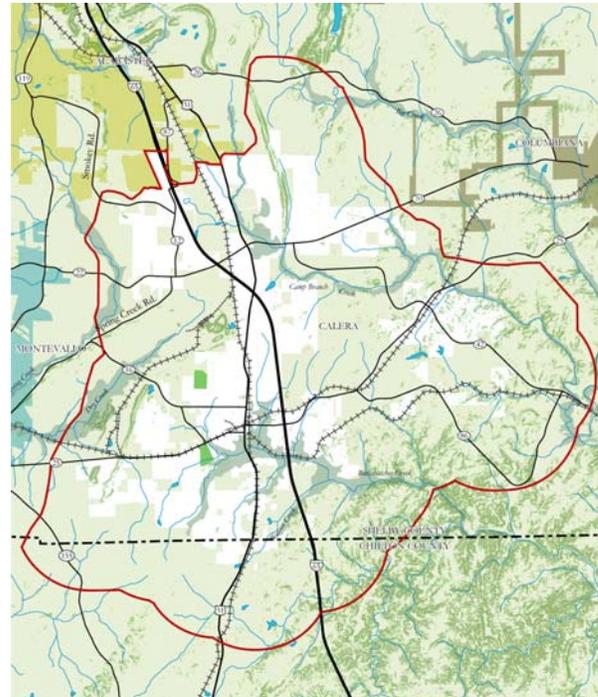
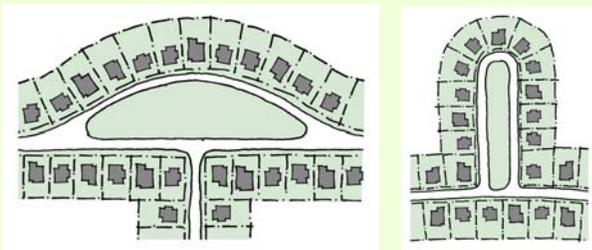


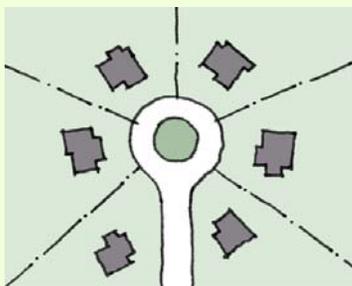
Figure 5.2: Green Infrastructure

## Greening the Cul-de-Sac

While dead-end streets should generally be avoided for the sake of maintaining connectivity, in some circumstances, the use of culs-de-sac is unavoidable. Because there can be increased density and impervious surface cover as a result of residential culs-de-sac, alternative designs that can preserve vegetation and other natural features should be encouraged, such as eyebrows and closes. Conventional culs-de-sac can also be “greened” by incorporating a planting circle in the cul-de-sac bulb. These options also afford opportunities for useable green space for neighborhoods as well. A close, for instance, can form a neighborhood green, a desirable amenity that also boosts neighboring home values.



Above left: Using *eyebrows* in residential subdivision layouts can avoid grading without losing developable, accessible lots. Above right: Short *closes* may be designed as relatively narrow streets, requiring less pavement. Longer closes must have sufficient street width for fire trucks.



A planting circle in a conventional cul-de-sac must be designed to accommodate moving trucks and emergency vehicles, including the use of a mountable curb.

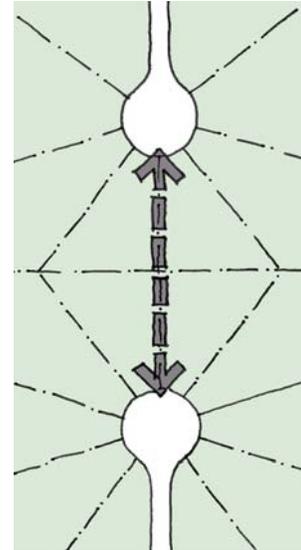
- Require slopes be planted to prevent erosion.
- Incorporate native species into landscaping to reduce irrigation and maintenance requirements.

### *Residential Development and Neighborhoods*

As another example of using the policies of the Comprehensive Plan as an overall guide, the Planning Commission should consider use of a checklist such as the following during the development review process for any *residential* development requiring a master development plan or site plan approval to encourage the development of distinctive, quality neighborhoods:

- Neighborhoods should be planned and designed appropriate to their context—to reflect their location in the community and their relation to the natural environment.
- Neighborhoods should be planned to conserve topography and natural drainage systems, thereby reducing development costs while maintaining the natural beauty of the site.
- Density should be lowest furthest from activity centers, arterial roads and major collector streets.
- Outdoor places, other than private yards, should be provided so that children have somewhere to play safely away from their own homes, yet nearby.
  - o *At least 15% of the total site should be dedicated to pedestrian-accessible, usable open space that is convenient to residents.*
  - o *Neighborhood recreational spaces should not be dominated by steep slopes nor be prone to regular inundation.*

- o *Neighborhood open spaces should be of a shape and size to be usable for a variety of passive recreational activities. They should be at least forty feet wide in the narrowest dimension.*
- o *There should be at least one special gathering place, such as a neighborhood green or other usable community open space, near the center of each neighborhood.*
- The street layout should provide appropriate access for motorists while assuring convenience and safety for pedestrians.
  - o *Neighborhood sidewalks should be buffered from the street by a planting strip at least 4-5 feet wide.*
  - o *Pedestrian accessibility should be enhanced through off-road linkages between culs-de-sac and adjacent streets, as well as trails within greenways or other open space systems, as appropriate.*
- Neighborhood streetscapes should be designed to create an attractive, appropriately-scaled and interactive public space for residents.
  - o *Overhead utilities should be placed at the rear of lots, either in easements or alley rights-of-way, rather than in the streetscape. Otherwise, utilities may be placed underground. Overhead utilities, however, are more acceptable in rural or low density areas.*
  - o *For streetscapes that foster more community interaction and that retain property values longer, streets should be lined with trees and porches rather than garages and large driveways.*
- Light fixtures—generally twelve feet in total height—should be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians. Taller street lights should be avoided or shielded to avoid glare on adjacent homes and minimize light pollution.



### *Commercial Development*

The following criteria should be used in evaluating development in any commercial activity center requiring a master development plan or site plan approval:

- Building façades should be visually interesting and should avoid monotony.
- The street level portion of a façade (the building elevation facing public streets and spaces) should have a minimum of 50% unobscured windows, doors or display areas.
- Buildings should be oriented toward public sidewalks or other pedestrian circulation systems.
- Street frontage on existing roadways should be completed with curb, gutter and sidewalks. Sidewalks may extend to the curb but should be wide enough to include regularly spaced tree wells at the street edge.

- All streets should be designed to promote traffic patterns compatible with pedestrian safety and to provide direct routes between nearby destinations.
- Parking lots should be designed with clearly-marked, through pedestrian paths.
- Five percent of the area of a parking lot should be devoted to landscaping.
  - *Parking lot landscaping should include trees evenly distributed throughout the parking lot to provide shade and to break down the scale and monotony of the parking lot.*

### *Accessibility and Access Management*

The Planning Commission, using the policies of the Comprehensive Plan as an overall guide, should consider use of the following during the development review process to assure appropriate consideration of any arterial or collector streets that may be included in the development:

- The distance between major intersections and driveways should be sufficient to separate points of traffic conflict. As a general rule, the higher the design speed of the roads involved, the further driveways should be located from intersection and from one another.
- Turning movements at unsignalized driveways and intersections should be restricted by limiting the use of full directional unsignalized streets and driveways. Full movement intersections should serve multiple developments through joint use driveways and cross access easements.
- Design standards for access spacing, the length of turn lanes and tapers, and driveway dimensions should be applied on arterials and major collectors.
- Traffic signals should only be installed when appropriate studies indicate their spacing and interconnection can be accomplished without significant adverse impacts on corridor capacity.
- Left and right turn lanes should be required for all public streets and major access points to activity centers.
- Joint use driveways should be required to reduce the proliferation of driveways and to preserve the capacity of arterial and collector corridors.



## KEEPING THE PLAN UP TO DATE

Comprehensive planning is often viewed as an occasional activity overseen by the Planning Commission, while preparing the city budget is an annual responsibility of the City Council. As a result, the comprehensive plan—especially one for a city under continued market pressures—tends to become dated. The danger is that the connection between the comprehensive plan and the city’s capital budget can weaken over time. This can be avoided by coordinating plan updates with the annual budgeting process. This will also ensure that public investment decisions continue to support plan implementation.

Coordinated annual updates may help the Mayor and Council better determine capital budget priorities, consider plan and development regulation amendments, and coordinate public investments toward reaching the vision set out in the plan. To coordinate plan policies and their implementation, each city department, board and commission (and non-city groups that may be eligible for funding assistance from the city) should review the comprehensive plan and submit a report to the mayor that should include the following:

- All tasks essential for accomplishing elements of the comprehensive plan during the coming year that are or should be the responsibility of the respondent.
- Suggested changes in city programs – including but not limited to regulations, capital investments, operation and maintenance, and intergovernmental coordination – that the respondent feels to be in the best interests of overall plan implementation.
- Suggested changes in city policy toward growth and development as described in the comprehensive plan.
- Suggested changes in the respondent's responsibility or authority that would better enable implementation of any parts of the comprehensive plan.
- A preliminary budget proposal, including capital equipment and investments needed to deal with the above, and the portion of those costs it is requested that the city bear.

The mayor’s office would collect this information for consideration in drafting a capital budget and suggested plan amendments for the coming year. After discussions with department heads and others, the mayor’s office would forward a draft capital budget and suggested plan amendments to the Planning Commission, who would review it in light of the comprehensive plan. The Planning Commission would report to the mayor’s office the findings of its review of proposed capital investments, recommendations for plan amendments, and adjustments to development regulations.

The mayor’s office would prepare and present a proposed capital budget and revenue forecast to the City Council. The Planning Commission would take action regarding any recommended changes to the comprehensive plan and/or subdivision regulations and suggest zoning ordinance amendments, as needed, to the Council.

Keeping the comprehensive plan up to date is an important task. Through this process, the plan may be refined and detailed on a regular basis.

# Appendix

## Implementation Strategy

<b>Implementation Schedule</b>					
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Funding*</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Support</b>
<b>Regulatory Improvements</b>					
Update Zoning Ordinance		funded		Zoning Administrator	City Council and Planning Commission
Update Subdivision Regulations		funded		City Engineer	Planning Commission, Zoning Administrator
Develop Public Works Manual		funded		City Engineer	Planning Commission
<b>Gateway Improvements</b>					
Gateway signs and landscaping		City		Public Works	City Council, Chamber
Directional signage at interchanges		City		Staff	City Council, ALDOT
<b>Transportation Improvements</b>					
Grade-separated crossing over CSX rail line		MPO, ALDOT		City Engineer	City Council, CSX
Highway 25 truck bypass		MPO, ALDOT		City Engineer	City Council
Exit 228 northbound ramp extension		MPO, ALDOT		City Engineer	City Council
Capacity improvements to Exit 231 Bridge		MPO, ALDOT		City Engineer	City Council
Realignment of CR 12 and Spring Creek Road		City, Shelby County, developer		City Engineer	City Council, Planning Commission, Developer, Shelby County
Highway 31 Streetscape improvements		TE grant, City		City Engineer	City Council, Downtown organization
Intersection improvement (CR 86 and Highway 25)		City, Shelby County		City Engineer	City Council, Shelby County
New local street (from CR 22 to CR 84)		City, developer		City Engineer	City Council, Planning Commission, developer
Interstate 65 Interchange at Hwy. 70/22		MPO, ALDOT		City Engineer	City Council, Planning Commission, Shelby County
Highway 31 widening (between downtown and I-65)		MPO, ALDOT		City Engineer	City Council, Planning Commission
<b>Greenway and Sidewalk Improvements</b>					
Pedestrian Master Plan		City		Public Works	City Council, Planning Commission, City Engineer, Parks and Recreation
Individual sidewalk projects		City/grants		Public Works	City Engineer
Buxahatchee Creek Greenway Trail		City, grants		City Engineer or Parks and Recreation	City Council, MPO, Shelby County, Railroad Museum

<b>Implementation Schedule</b>					
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Funding*</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Support</b>
Other greenway trail projects		City, developer, grants		City Engineer	City Council, Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation, MPO
<b>Community Facilities</b>					
Community Center		City, grants		City Council	Planning Commission
Recreation Center		City, grants		Parks and Recreation	City Council, Planning Commission
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>					
Land for future public parks		City, developer, grants		Planning Commission	City Council, Parks and Recreation and other staff
Future public parks		City, grants		Parks and Recreation	City Council, Planning Commission
<b>Downtown Revitalization</b>					
Creation of Downtown organization		n/a		Merchants and property owners	City, Chamber of Commerce, other
Downtown events		Downtown Org., City, various		Downtown organization	City, Chamber of Commerce, other
Promotional advertising		Downtown Org., merchants		Downtown organization	Merchants, Chamber of Commerce
Downtown business recruitment		n/a		Downtown organization	City, Chamber of Commerce
Local street improvements (downtown)		City, grants		City Engineer	City Council, Downtown Organization, Railroad Museum
Public parking		City, Downtown organization		Public Works	City Council, Downtown Organization
Downtown banners and beautification		City, Downtown Org.		Downtown Organization	City Council, Public Works
Building and property improvements		Merchants and property owners, Downtown organization		Merchants and property owners	Downtown organization, City
<p>* Many community improvements are eligible for grants from public and private agencies. Public grant sources include Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), ADECA (CDBG, Workforce Development, Health and Human Services, and Law Enforcement-Traffic Safety), Department of Transportation (CMAQ grants, Safe Routes to School grants, and Transportation Enhancement (TE) grants), CAWACO RC&amp;D challenge grants, State Council of the Arts grants, and others. The Non-profit Resource Center of Alabama provides information on private foundation funds.</p>					



# Calera Town Meeting Notes

February 17, 2009

## *Citywide Assets*

- Good access in and out of town
- Highway 31 and Highway 25
- Shelby County Airport
- Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum
- Two wineries
- Small town feel
- Good schools
- Proximity to other places
- Easier commute to Birmingham than 280 corridor
- Proximity to Birmingham and Montgomery
- Golf course
- Low crime rate
- New Senior Center
- City works with developers
- Central location in state
- Fast growth

## *Issues*

- Focus on high density and small lots
- Clear cutting and grading
- Fast growth
- Not enough investment or growth downtown
- More parks needed of all types
- Traffic flow from I-65 and US-31
- Election problems
- Annexation problems
- Signs
- Uncertainty about completion of residential developments
- Street conditions, especially on US-31
- Maintenance, control of County and State roads
- No recycling
- Lack of truck route / bypass
- Need events / festivals
- Need reason to stop or return when passing through
- New residents need “connections”
- Lack of community gathering places
- Disconnect between old Calera and new Calera – north / south and east / west

*Downtown Issues*

- Need reason to stop or return when passing through
- Lack of truck route / bypass
- Railroad crossing at Highway 25 (near Highway 31)
- Highways 31 and 25 controlled by State
- Parking
- Not enough investment or growth downtown

*Outside Forces*

- County / State Roads
- Railroad
- Economy
- Justice Department decision on election, annexations

*Reasons for living, working or investing in Calera*

- Family
- Job
- Elected
- Home
- Small town
- Trees
- Affordable
- Quiet, spacious
- Community
- Own property in town

*What's missing from your vision for the city?*

- More shopping and dining destinations
- Tax base
- Retail
- Jobs
- Community fellowship
- Better regulation of development
- More spacious/low-density residential development
- Reason for people to stop
- Truck traffic gone from US-31
- Downtown businesses
- An image like Fairhope
- Parks
- Family-oriented activities
- Senior activities
- Non-sports activities for youth
- YMCA or similar multi-purpose facility

*What's missing from your vision of Downtown?*

- Need more room to grow downtown
- Parking
- More downtown businesses
- Revitalization
- Truck traffic gone from Highway 31
- Greenway trail to connect Oliver Park / Downtown / Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum / School

*Sacred Cows*

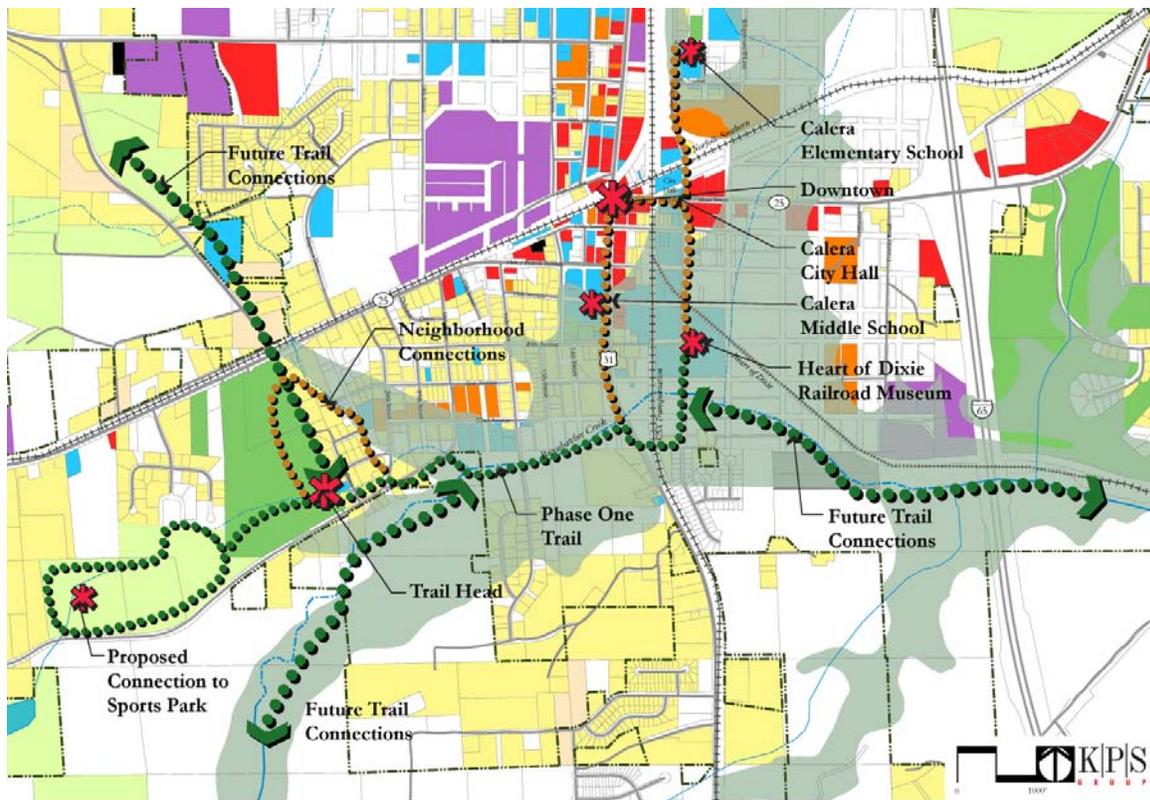
- Historic buildings downtown
- Bank building (southeast corner of Highways 25 and 31)

*WOW Question: In ten or fifteen years from now, what would make you look back and say "Wow, I'm glad we put this plan together and implemented it?"*

- Truck bypass constructed
- Highway 31 bridge over I-65 widened
- Highway 31 streetscape improvements downtown
- Bridge over or tunnel under railroad at Highway 25
- Justice Department decision on election
- Community center
- More facilities on north side of town
- Recreation center
- Implementation of access management plan
- Connectivity between north and south Calera by other than Highway 31 and I-65
- A safer northbound on-ramp to I-65 at Interchange 228

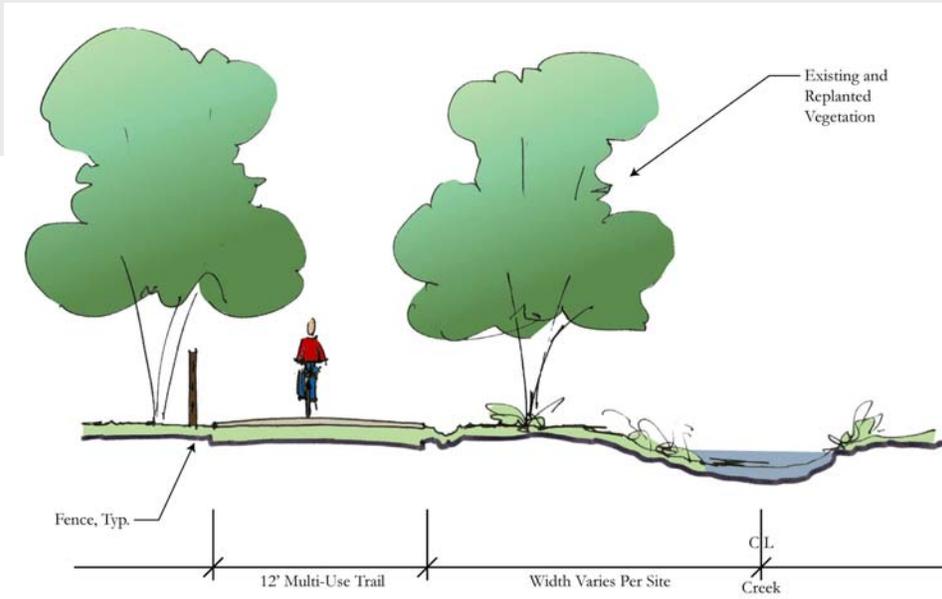
## Buxahatchee Creek Greenway Trail Concept Plan

The idea to develop a pedestrian or multi-use trail along the Buxahatchee Creek came about during the development of Calera's previous Comprehensive Plan. As a part of the 2009 update to the City's Comprehensive Plan, that original recommendation is further explored. Following is a concept for how the trail might be planned and constructed, in phases, to serve as the backbone of a pedestrian network in the southern part of the city. The initial phase of the greenway trail is recommended to extend from the sports complex, now under construction west of Oliver Park and the High School, to Downtown Calera and the Railroad Museum. Installation of sidewalks and localized pedestrian paths in and around downtown and nearby neighborhoods would provide safer, more convenient access to and from the trail. In this way, the greenway trail could serve more than just a recreational function, but also provide area children a way to walk to nearby schools.

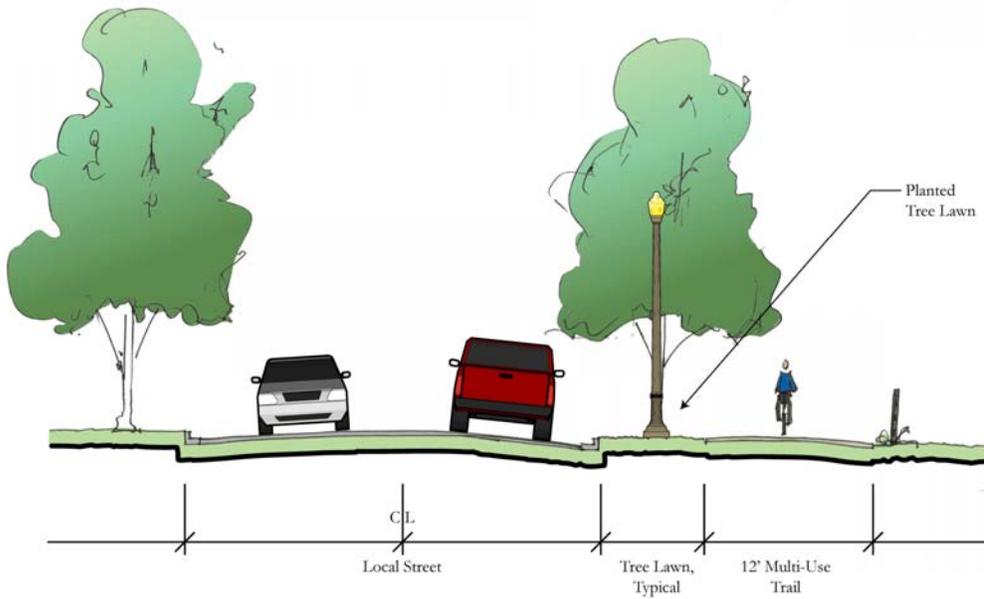


Concept Plan for the Buxahatchee Creek Greenway Trail

A later phase of the trail would extend eastward under the interstate, potentially providing access to Timberline Golf Course, Ozan Winery, and surrounding neighborhoods. As the Heart of Dixie Rail line and the creek diverge east of I-65, a final stretch of the trail could continue alongside the rail line and connect to the Shelby Iron Works Park. And if connected with other future trails in the city or county, the trail could become a regional amenity attracting bicyclists and other users from throughout the state and perhaps further away, considering the unique destinations along the greenway and in and around Calera.



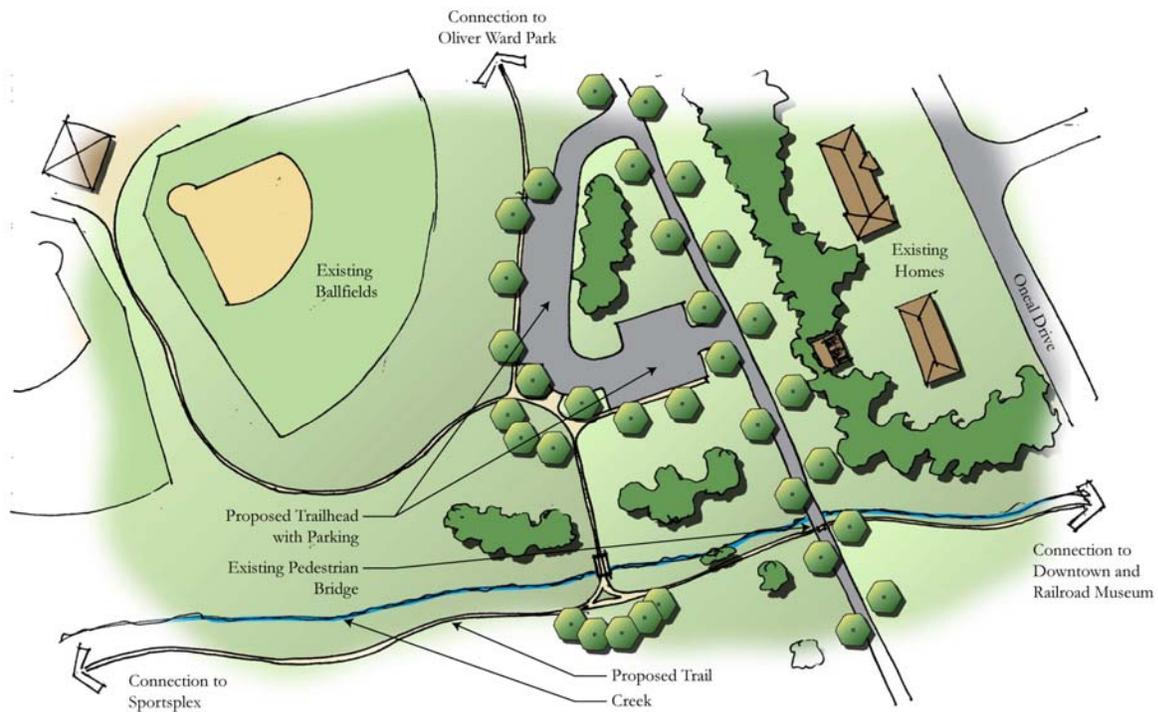
Above: Cross section of the greenway trail alongside the creek



Above: Cross section of the greenway trail alongside a local street.



Perspective sketch



Trailhead Conceptual Plan. At strategic locations along the trail, trailheads provide access or a stopping or resting point. Trailhead may include car and bicycle parking, shelter, water fountains, bathrooms, or other amenities as may be desirable or necessary. The illustration above shows how such a trailhead might be provided at the southeastern corner of Oliver Park.