

MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

COLUMBIA COUNTY PLANNING & ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIVISION

OCTOBER 12, 2010



Walden Glen Apartments, Evans

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Executive Summary

In order to meet market demand and offer a variety of housing types to residents, Columbia County should pursue a well-balanced mix of housing. One element of this mix is multi-family housing, which benefits the County by enhancing housing options and making efficient use of land. Household size in the U.S. has been shrinking since the 1970s as couples are having less children, baby-boomers are aging and more Americans than ever choose to live alone. Young professionals, skilled laborers, childless couples and senior citizens are among the groups who could be served by multi-family housing. Multi-family housing is also a key component of smart growth, which aims to limit urban sprawl and reduce traffic. Compact developments occupy less land, require less investment in public infrastructure expansion, and generate both fewer and shorter automobile trips than single-family housing. When such developments are located within the County's designated nodes, they also foster retail growth by providing a convenient customer base.

In 2009, the County passed a moratorium on the rezoning of property for multi-family housing. Resolution 09-787 put forth the basis for the moratorium:

The Board has received expressions of concern from various elected officials and citizens concerning the substantial increase in multifamily housing in the County and feels that it needs to review and study the situation in order to protect the best interests of Columbia County. The Sheriff has pointed out that law enforcement calls per multi-family housing resident are 42% higher than law enforcement calls per single family housing residents and stated that additional personnel will be required as additional multifamily units are constructed. The Columbia County Board of Education has advised the Board that the construction of multifamily housing complexes has a substantial impact on the schools in the area and can result in overcrowding situations. Citizens have complained that the concentration of apartment homes in these complexes will contribute to traffic congestion which is becoming an ever increasing problem in the County as its growth continues.

On the issue of density, some jurisdictions have a maximum limit on the PUD (planned unit developments) which is the same as their zoning classifications for multi-family. Columbia County has a maximum density of 8 units per acre for townhouse developments and 14 units per acre for apartment developments. In the PUD zoning, there is currently no maximum density in the ordinances and the requested density is reviewed, approved or denied, or determined by the Board of Commissioners during the zoning process. If the County wanted to operate as the comparable jurisdictions, then a maximum density could be set for the PUD zoning district that is equal to the townhouse and apartment zoning categories. Furthermore, if the County decides to lower the maximum density allowed for any new apartment rezoning, then 10 units per acre would be consistent with benchmark jurisdictions.

It is recommended that the County consider an annual review of multi-family development and maintain a count of units built, units under construction, and of undeveloped acreage zoned for apartments. This information would be presented to the Planning Commission and the Board of Commissioners for review at the start of each calendar year.

Introduction

At the request of the Board of Commissioners, the Columbia County Planning & Engineering Department has prepared an assessment of the County's multi-family housing stock. This report documents how the County's housing has changed over the years, compares local housing figures to those of similar jurisdictions, examines the use of zoning to regulate housing density, and makes recommendations for the future. Apartments and their role in the County are given particular attention. For the purposes of this report, "multi-family" includes any building containing more than two residences, more commonly known as townhouses and apartments, regardless of whether the unit is rented or owned.

At the request of the Board of Commissioners, the Columbia County Planning & Engineering Department has prepared an assessment of the County's multi-family housing stock. This report documents historical data looking at population growth and types of residential development. The report examines the use of zoning to regulate housing density, compares local housing figures to those of similar jurisdictions, and makes recommendations for the future.

Columbia County has grown rapidly from a population of about 22,000 in 1970 to well over 100,000 by 2005, emerging as an upper-middle-class suburb of Augusta and being highly desirable due to its excellent school system and high quality of life.

With regards to the housing mix, the percentage of single family homes has remained steady at 79% over the last 25 years, and the percentage of apartments has also remained steady at 3% of the total housing stock. However during the same time, the percentage of townhomes has increased and the percentage of mobile homes has declined.

For owner-occupied housing, Columbia County had the highest rate at 86% compared to all the other benchmark jurisdictions. The closest jurisdiction by location is Augusta-Richmond County and that had the highest rate of renter-occupied housing at 43%. This data illustrates a strong personal investment by the community in Columbia County.

This report includes charts giving numerical data on the multi-family developments as existing, under construction, and rezoned land awaiting development. There are 1,430 existing apartments (i.e. renter-occupied), about 600 units under construction, and zoning has already been approved to build over 1,300 more apartment units on currently vacant land. With reference to townhome developments (i.e. owner-occupied), the County has over 2,000 existing units, about 230 units under construction and rezoned land for over 1,500 units.

Definitions

Relevant Definitions from Section 90-9 Columbia County Code of Ordinances

Dwelling means a building or portion of a building arranged or designed to provide living quarters for one or more families on a permanent or long term basis.

- (1) **Single-family detached dwelling** means a residential building, whether site-built, a manufactured home or an industrialized building, designed for or occupied by one family, including:
 - a. *Site-built single-family detached dwelling* means a single-family detached dwelling constructed on the building site from basic materials delivered to the site, and which is constructed in accordance with all requirements of the building codes adopted by the county, and meets or exceeds the standards for single-family and two-family dwellings under section 90-131(a)(7).
 - b. *Type A single-family detached dwelling* means a one-family manufactured home or a one-family industrialized home that meets or exceeds the standards for single-family and two-family dwellings under section 90-131(a)(7).
 - c. *Type B single-family detached dwelling* means a one-family manufactured home or a one-family industrialized home that does not meet the standards for single-family and two-family dwellings under section 90-131(a)(7).
- (2) **Two-family dwelling** means a residential building designed exclusively for occupancy by two families in separate dwelling units living independently of each other, including:
 - a. *Site-built two-family dwelling* means a two-family dwelling constructed on the building site from basic materials delivered to the site, and which is constructed in accordance with all requirements of the building codes adopted by the county, and meets or exceeds the standards for single-family and two-family dwellings under section 90-131(a)(7).
 - b. *Type A two-family dwelling* means a two-family manufactured home or a two-family industrialized home that meets or exceeds the standards for single-family and two-family dwellings under section 90-131(a)(7).
 - c. *Type B two-family dwelling* means a two-family manufactured home or a two-family industrialized home that does not meet the standards for single-family and two-family dwellings under section 90-131(a)(7).
- (3) **Group dwelling** means a building or portion of a building occupied or intended for occupancy by several unrelated persons or families as their normal place of residence, but in which separate cooking facilities are not provided for such resident persons or families. This term includes, but is not limited to, the terms "roominghouse," "apartment hotel," "fraternity house" or "sorority house." A hotel, motel or tourist home shall not be deemed to be a group dwelling.
- (4) **Multifamily dwelling** means a dwelling on a single lot, designed for or occupied by three or more families living independently of each other, with the number of families in residence not exceeding the number of dwelling units provided.
- (5) **Townhouse or row house dwelling** means one of a series of three or more attached one-family dwelling units on separate lots which:
 - a. May or may not have a common roof;
 - b. Shall not have a common exterior wall;
 - c. Are separated from each other by fire restrictive party wall partitions extending at least from the lowest floor level to the roof.

Dwelling unit means one or more connected rooms constituting a separate, independent housekeeping establishment for use on a basis involving owner occupancy, rental or lease on a weekly, monthly or

longer basis, with provisions for cooking, eating and sleeping, and physically set apart from any other rooms or dwelling units in the same structure.

High density residential zoning district means a zoning district established to provide for the development of townhouse or apartment residential units which shall include the T-R and A-R districts.

Low-moderate density residential zoning district means a zoning district established to provide for the development of single-family and two-family residential dwellings which shall include the R-A, R-1, R-1A, R-2, R-3, R-3A and R-4 districts.

Manufactured home means a dwelling fabricated in an off-site facility for installation or assembly at the building site, bearing a label certifying that it is constructed in compliance with the National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Act of 1974, 42 USC § 5401 et seq., which first became effective on June 15, 1976. This term includes a structure, transportable in one or more sections, which, in the traveling mode, is eight body feet or more in width, or 40 body feet or more in length, or, when erected on-site, is 320 or more square feet in floor area, and which is built on a permanent chassis and designed to be used as a dwelling with or without a permanent foundation when connected to the required utilities, and includes the plumbing, heating, air conditioning and electrical systems contained in the manufactured home; except that this term includes any structure which meets all of the requirements of this definition except the size requirement and with respect to which the manufacturer voluntarily files a certification required by the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and complies with the standards established under the National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Act of 1974, 42 USC § 5401 et seq.

Mobile home means a dwelling manufactured prior to June 15, 1976, and not subject to the National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Act of 1974, 42 USC § 5401 et seq., transportable in one or more sections, which, in the traveling mode, is eight body feet or more in width, or 40 body feet or more in length, or, when erected on-site, is 320 or more square feet in floor area, and which is built on a permanent chassis and designed to be used as a dwelling with or without a permanent foundation when connected to the required utilities, and includes the plumbing, heating, air conditioning and electrical systems contained in the mobile home.

Multi-family dwelling means a dwelling on a single lot, designed for or occupied by three or more families living independently of each other, with the number of families in residence not exceeding the number of dwelling units provided.

Residential zoning district means a zoning district established under article II of this chapter for the development of single-family, two-family and multi-family dwellings which shall include the R-A, R-1, R-1A, R-2, R-3, R-3A, R-4, T-R and A-R districts.

Recommended Definitions to be added

Key to text changes:

apartment text to be added

Apartment unit means an individual unit, each of which has separate cooking facilities, that is located within an apartment house that is intended for occupancy by a single family where the unit may be rented, leased, or owned and where there may or may not be ownership interest in common areas and facilities of the property on which the unit is located.

Apartment house means a residential building designed or used for three or more dwelling units.

Condominium means a single dwelling unit in a multiunit dwelling or structure that is separately owned and may be combined with an undivided interest in the common areas and facilities of the property.

Sec. 90-49. A-R apartment residential district.

(a) This applies to property already zoned A-R apartment residential district only and no new A-R rezoning applications will be accepted from December 31, 2010.

(b) *Established.* The A-R apartment residential district is established for development of multifamily residential dwellings at a density of not greater than 14 units per acre, which have ample open space, recreational areas and off-street parking. Uses in the A-R district must be served by public water and sewer. It is intended that the A-R district be located along arterial streets and be adjacent to existing commercial zoning districts or high density residential uses, or adjacent to areas designated for commercial or high density residential development on the growth management plan. The land uses permitted in the A-R district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53.

(~~b~~ c) *Special requirements.* A minimum of ten percent of the site approved for a development under the A-R district shall be set aside as usable open space, a portion of which shall be improved with active recreation facilities, including play equipment suitable for children.

(Code 1979, § 2-16-27)

A-R 10 apartment residential district.

(a) *Established.* The A-R 10 apartment residential district is established for development of multifamily residential dwellings at a density of not greater than 10 units per acre, which have ample open space, recreational areas and off-street parking. Uses in the A-R 10 district must be served by public water and sewer. It is intended that the A-R 10 district be located within the Tier 1 and Tier 2 nodes on the growth management plan. The land uses permitted in the A-R 10 district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53.

(b) *Special requirements.* A minimum of ten percent of the site approved for a development under the A-R 10 district shall be set aside as usable open space, a portion of which shall be improved with active recreation facilities, including play equipment suitable for children.

Code of Ordinances Article II. Residential Districts

Sec. 90-41. R-A residential-agricultural district.

The R-A residential-agricultural district is established to provide for rural farm or very low density, nonsuburban development in areas where intensive land development is not desired due to limited ability to provide public services and facilities. The minimum lot size in the R-A district is 2 1/2 acres, with the exception of legal lots of record existing at the time of the enactment of this chapter. The land uses permitted in this district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53. (Code 1979, § 2-16-20)

Sec. 90-42. R-1 single-family residential district.

The R-1 single-family residential district is established to provide low density, suburban development on lots served by public water, but that may not have access to the public sewer. The R-1 district is designed to serve as a transition between R-A and R-1A districts. The minimum lot size in the R-1 district is 30,000 square feet if served by the public sewer and 40,000 square feet if sewer service is not available. The land uses permitted in the R-1 district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53. (Code 1979, § 2-16-21)

Sec. 90-43. R1-A single-family residential district.

The R-1A single-family residential district is established for the development of low to medium density single-family residential uses. The R-1A district is designed to serve as a transition between the R-1 and R-2 districts. Uses in the R-1A district must be served by public water and sewer. The minimum lot size in the R-1A district is 20,000 square feet. The land uses permitted in the R-1A district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53. (Code 1979, § 2-16-21.1)

Sec. 90-44. R-2 single-family residential district.

The R-2 single-family residential district is established to provide for the development of medium density single-family residential uses. Uses in the R-2 district must be served by public water and sewer. The minimum lot size in the R-2 district is 10,000 square feet. The land uses permitted in the R-2 district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53. (Code 1979, § 2-16-22)

Sec. 90-45. R-3 single-family residential district.

The R-3 single-family residential district is established to provide for high density single-family residential development. Uses in the R-3 district must be served by public water and sewer. The minimum lot size in the R-3 district is 7,500 square feet. The land uses permitted in the R-3 district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53. (Code 1979, § 2-16-23)

Sec. 90-46. R-3A single-family and two-family residential district.

The R-3A single-family and two-family residential district is established to provide for high density single-family and two-family residential development. Uses in the R-3A district must be served by public water and sewer. The minimum lot size in the R-3A district for single-family development is 7,500 square feet, and for two-family development, the minimum lot size is 10,000 square feet. The land uses permitted in the R-3A district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53. (Code 1979, § 2-16-24)

Sec. 90-47. R-4 recreational residential district.

The R-4 recreational residential district is established to provide for low density residential development related to Clarks Hill Lake for residents to maintain summer or weekend homes. The R-4 district is intended to permit only those residential and related recreational uses of land and structures, and to exclude all those activities not compatible with the character of recreational-residential areas. The minimum lot size in the R-4 district is 40,000 square feet, with the exception of legal lots of record existing at the time of the enactment of the ordinance from which this chapter is derived. The land uses permitted in the R-4 district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53. (Code 1979, § 2-16-25)

Sec. 90-48. T-R townhouse residential district.

(a) *Established.* The T-R townhouse residential district is established to provide for the development of townhouse residential units at a density not greater than eight units per acre. Uses in the T-R district must be served by public water and sewer. It is intended that the T-R district serve as a transition between single-family detached houses and existing commercial and apartment zoning districts, or areas designated for a commercial and apartment development in the growth management plan. The land uses permitted in the T-R district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53.

(b) *Special requirements.* A minimum of ten percent of the site approved for a development under the T-R district shall be set aside as open space, a portion of which shall be improved with active recreation facilities, including play equipment suitable for children.

(Code 1979, § 2-16-26)

Sec. 90-49. A-R apartment residential district.

(a) *Established.* The A-R apartment residential district is established for development of multifamily residential dwellings at a density of not greater than 14 units per acre, which have ample open space, recreational areas and off-street parking. Uses in the A-R district must be served by public water and sewer. It is intended that the A-R district be located along arterial streets and be adjacent to existing commercial zoning districts or high density residential uses, or adjacent to areas designated for commercial or high density residential development on the growth management plan. The land uses permitted in the A-R district shall be as set forth in section 90-50, and lot and structure requirements shall be as set forth in section 90-53.

(b) *Special requirements.* A minimum of ten percent of the site approved for a development under the A-R district shall be set aside as open space, a portion of which shall be improved with active recreation facilities, including play equipment suitable for children.

(Code 1979, § 2-16-27)

Visualizing Density : Columbia County Examples

R-A RESIDENTIAL-AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT WITH A MINIMUM LOT SIZE OF 2 1/2 ACRES



Aerial showing properties on Walton Mill Road, off Tubman Road



Zoning map for R-A is light green

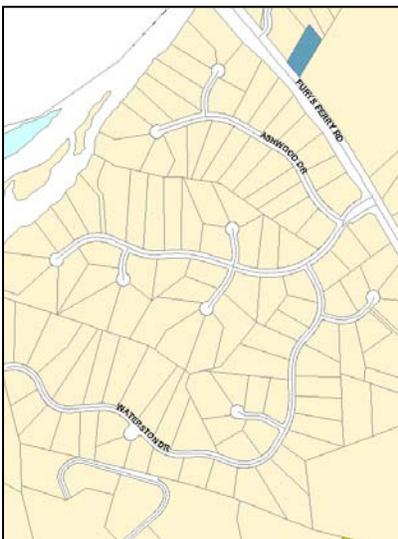


A typical house in R-A zoning district

R-1 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT WITH A MINIMUM LOT SIZE OF 1 ACRE



Properties in River Chase Subdivision, off Furys Ferry Road



Zoning map for R-1 is a tan color



A typical house in R-1 zoning district

R-2 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT WITH A MINIMUM LOT SIZE OF 10,000 SF



Properties off Rhodes Hill Drive and Rhodes Hill Court, Martinez



Zoning map for R-2 is light yellow

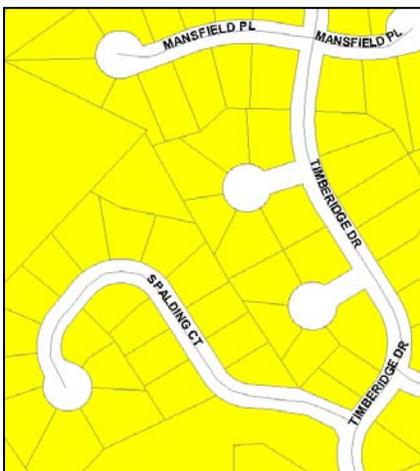


A typical house in R-2 zoning district

R-3 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT WITH A MINIMUM LOT SIZE OF 7,500 SQUARE FEET



Aerial showing properties off Timberidge Drive, Martinez



Zoning map for R-3 is dark yellow



A typical house in a R-3 zoning district

R-4 RECREATIONAL RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT WITH A MINIMUM LOT SIZE OF 40,000 SQUARE FEET



Properties off Keg Creek Drive, Clarks Hill Lake area



Zoning map for R-4 is bright green



A typical house in R-4 zoning district

T-R (TOWNHOUSE-RESIDENTIAL) ZONING DISTRICT AT MAXIMUM 8 UNITS PER ACRE



Steeplechase Townhomes started construction in 2006 and are located off Evans-to-Locks Road. There will be 74 lots on completion and the density will be low at 3.6 units per acre due to the informal site configuration that includes a common area in the center.

This project is in the Evans-to-Locks/ Furys Ferry Road Node Protection Overlay District and the variety of townhouse types and the use of different materials and colors give more interest to the streetscape.



T-R (TOWNHOUSE-RESIDENTIAL) ZONING DISTRICT AT MAXIMUM 8 UNITS PER ACRE



Harris Ridge Townhomes, off Wrightsboro Road, is zoned T-R (townhouse-residential) and was started in 2005.

The completed project will have 190 attached units, there are no amenities planned and each unit is practically the same design. The density averages to 7.1 units per acre.



Zoning map for T-R is a dark green color.



A-R (APARTMENT-RESIDENTIAL) ZONING DISTRICT AT MAXIMUM 14 UNITS PER ACRE



Brookwood Townhomes, off S Old Belair Road, zoned A-R (apartment-residential). These townhomes were started in 1995 and completed in 1999 and include a community pool for the residents.

The density is 11.8 units per acre and the typical unit is two stories with one story end units. This gives some height variation in roofline and improves the streetscape.



Zoning map for A-R is a dull green color.



A-R (APARTMENT-RESIDENTIAL) ZONING DISTRICT AT MAXIMUM 14 UNITS PER ACRE



Wedgewood Park Apartments are located off Old Evans Road, Evans and amenities include a swimming pool and a playground.

The apartment buildings are three stories high, and the density is 10 units per acre. There is some variation in the building materials to give a little interest to the elevations.



A-R (APARTMENT-RESIDENTIAL) ZONING DISTRICT AT MAXIMUM 14 UNITS PER ACRE



Ansley at Town Center Apartments, Evans, were completed in 2009 and amenities include a swimming pool, a clubhouse and a fitness center.

There are a total of 242 apartment units and the density is 14 units per acre. This project is located in the Evans Town Center and the required quality of design and materials was achieved.

The main photograph shows the Ansley at Town Center Apartments with an R-2 residential zoning district towards the front of the image.



Visualizing Density outside of Columbia County



Madison on the Green Apartments is located on River Ridge Drive, Augusta, and amenities include a clubhouse, pool and fitness center.

The density is 18 units per acre.





The Greens on Washington Apartments are located in Augusta and amenities include a clubhouse, pool, fitness center and playground.

The density is 23 units per acre.





St. Johns Towers is located in downtown Augusta and is the home of the Wesley Woods Senior Living community. The amenities include activities, a wellness program, dining and transportation.

The density is 160 units per acre.



The following two pages show examples selected from a book titled *Visualizing Density* by Julie Campoli and Alex S. MacLean. This book was commissioned by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy to help planners, designers, public officials and citizens better understand the concept of density as it applies to the residential environment. It is important to understand that the scale of the buildings in relation to the site arrangement can be very different but still achieve the same density, as illustrated in the last two images on this page.



Mtn. View, CA 16.3 units/acre



Salt Lake City, UT 20.6 units/acre



Boston, MA 27.6 units/acre



Phoenix, AZ 31.5 units/acre



Boulder, CO 33 units/acre



Detroit, MI 33.9 units/acre



Oakland, CA 44 units/acre



Los Angeles, CA 60 units/acre



Cambridge, MA 71 units/acre



Cupertino, CA 85 units/acre



Kansas City, MO 96 units/acre



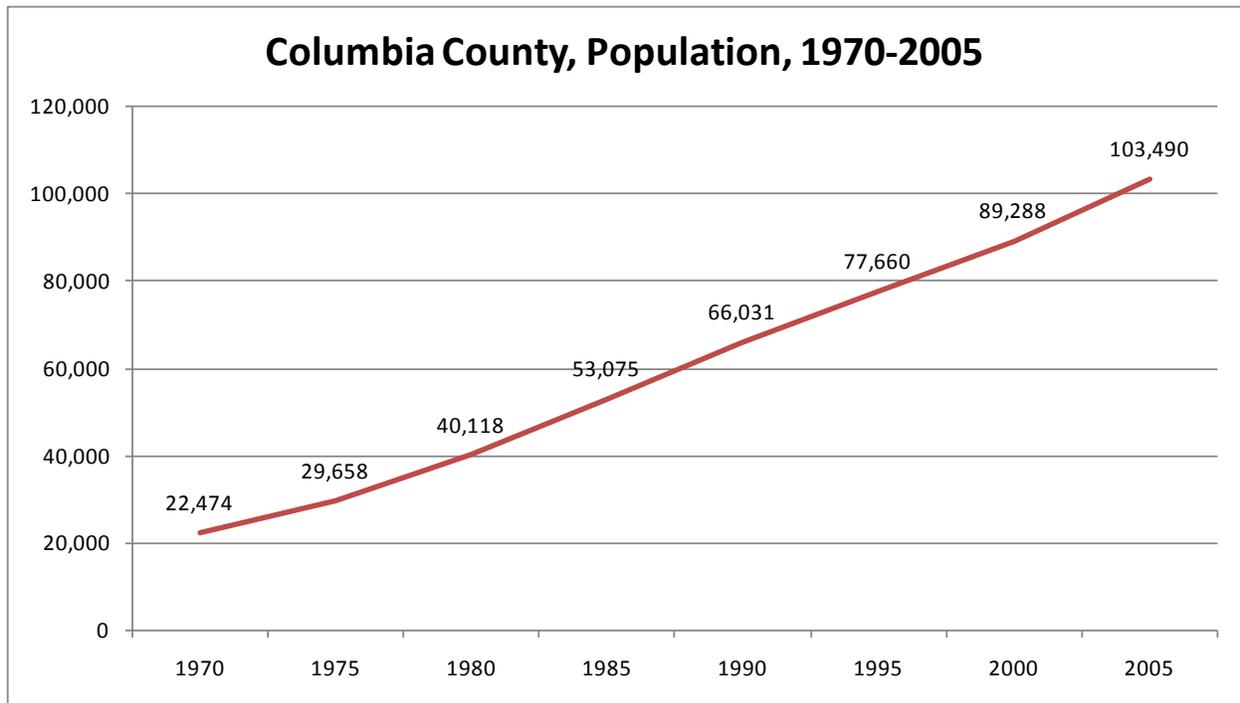
New York, NY 296 units/acre

This selection of photographs represents a broad range of density at many levels. They illustrate that building and site design, much more than density, is what shapes the physical character of a place.

Historical Background

Prior to 1970, Columbia County was a rural community of less than 20,000 people with an economy dependent upon agriculture; therefore, little demand existed for multi-family housing. Rapid growth ensued in the 1970s as Columbia County emerged as an upper-middle-class suburb of Augusta, highly desirable due to its excellent school system and high quality of life.

Chart 1 (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005)

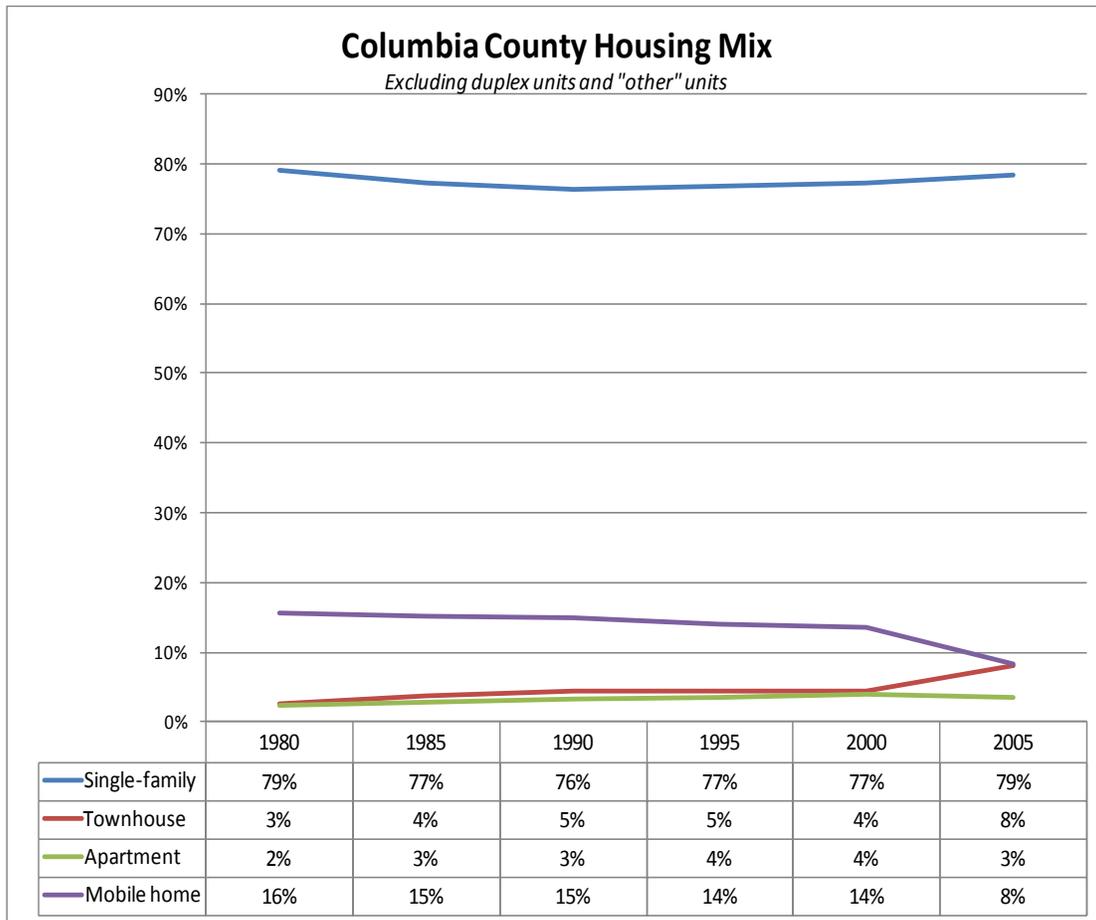


As the population grew, more affluent, suburban-style development became prevalent. By 1980, single-family homes made up 79 % of the total housing stock. Manufactured homes were also a large segment of the County's housing, constituting 15 %. Apartments totaled about 320 units and accounted for less than 3 % of the total.

By 2005, the County’s residential subdivisions were complimented by significant economic growth in the retail and professional sector. Despite associated urbanization, the latest figures from the U.S. Census show relative consistency in the County’s housing mix. In 2005, single-family homes still accounted for 79 % of County’s total, and apartments were just over 3 % and totaled approximately 1,365 units. The number of apartments increased four-fold in 25 years and the increase in single-family homes nearly kept the same pace.

Chart 2 (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005

Categories condensed by Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department)



The only housing types to see significant changes were in manufactured homes, which decreased by half to just 8 % and townhouses which increased from 3 % in 1980 to 8 % of the total by 2005. It would appear that townhouses are replacing manufactured houses as the preferred type of affordable housing. The demand for townhouses could also be attributed to demographic shifts toward smaller households. Nationwide, the population is expected to continue this trend as baby-boomers enter retirement and young couples wait longer to marry and have children. Since 1970, married couples with children have been declining in number and now account for only one quarter of America’s population. In Columbia County, the average household size fell from 3.1 in 1980 to 2.7 in 2005 and is projected to decrease to 2.5 by 2025 according to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

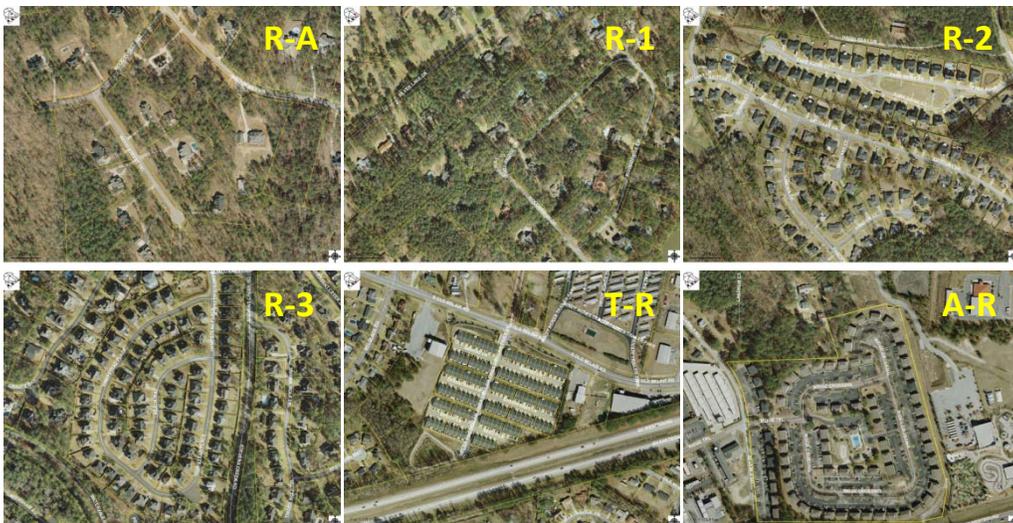
Current Conditions

In Columbia County and similar jurisdictions, residential density is controlled through zoning. The County’s zoning code also specifies housing types within districts.

Chart 3 (Source: Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department, 2009)

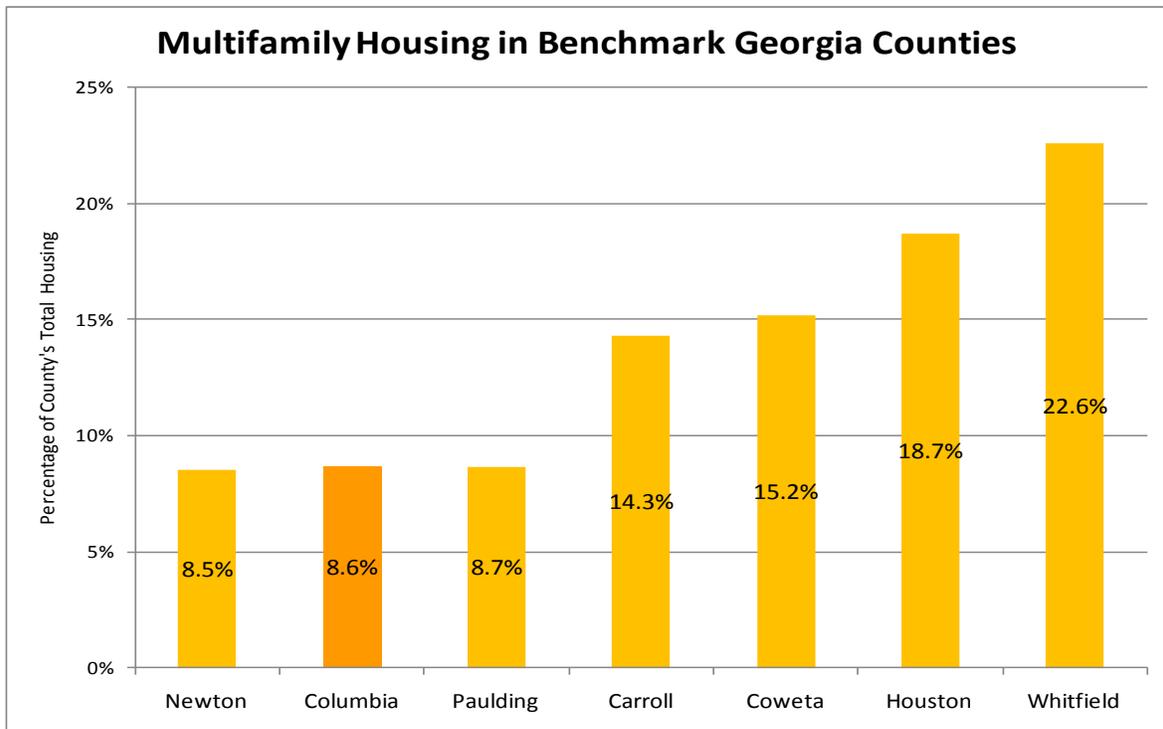
Columbia County Zoning Code, Density & Housing							
Zoning District	Density		Permitted Housing				
	Maximum Units Per Acre*	Minimum Lot Size	Single-Family	Mobile Home	Two-Family	Townhouse	Apartment
R-A	0.4	2.5 acres	✓	✓			
R-4	1.1	40,000 sq. ft.	✓	✓			
R-1 no sewer	1.1	40,000 sq. ft.	✓				
R-1 with sewer	1.5	30,000 sq. ft.	✓				
R-1A	2.2	20,000 sq. ft.	✓				
R-2	4.4	10,000 sq. ft.	✓				
R-3	5.8	7,500 sq. ft.	✓				
R-3A	8.7	7,500 sq. ft.	✓		✓		
T-R (townhouse)	8.0	N/A	✓		✓	✓	
A-R (apartment)	14.0	N/A	✓		✓	✓	✓
PUD	as approved	N/A	✓		✓	✓	✓

*For single-family housing, the zoning code requires a minimum lot size, but the overall density limit is also shown here for comparison. (1 acre = 43,560 sq. ft.)



To evaluate Columbia County’s housing situation in a broader context, comparisons to other counties are useful. Six benchmark jurisdictions were selected for the purposes of comparison. Each benchmark county is similar to Columbia County in at least two of three regards; total population, population density, and household income. As of 2005, Columbia County had fewer apartments than any of the other jurisdictions except for Newton County. The average number of apartments for all seven was about 3,800 units and the average number of townhouses for all seven was about 2,300 units.

Chart 4 (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005
Categories condensed by Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department)



Apartments comprised an average of 8.6 % of the total housing units for all jurisdictions, compared to about 3.4 % in Columbia County. As of 2009, Columbia County has about 2,000 apartments built or underway. This total is further augmented by a large stock of townhouses. The County’s current total of over 2,300 townhouses built or underway is virtually identical to the average for all seven comparable jurisdictions in 2005. The following table gives the actual numbers of the different units in the benchmark jurisdictions and shows that the multi-family ranges from 8.5% to 22.6% with Columbia County being close to the lowest at 8.6%.

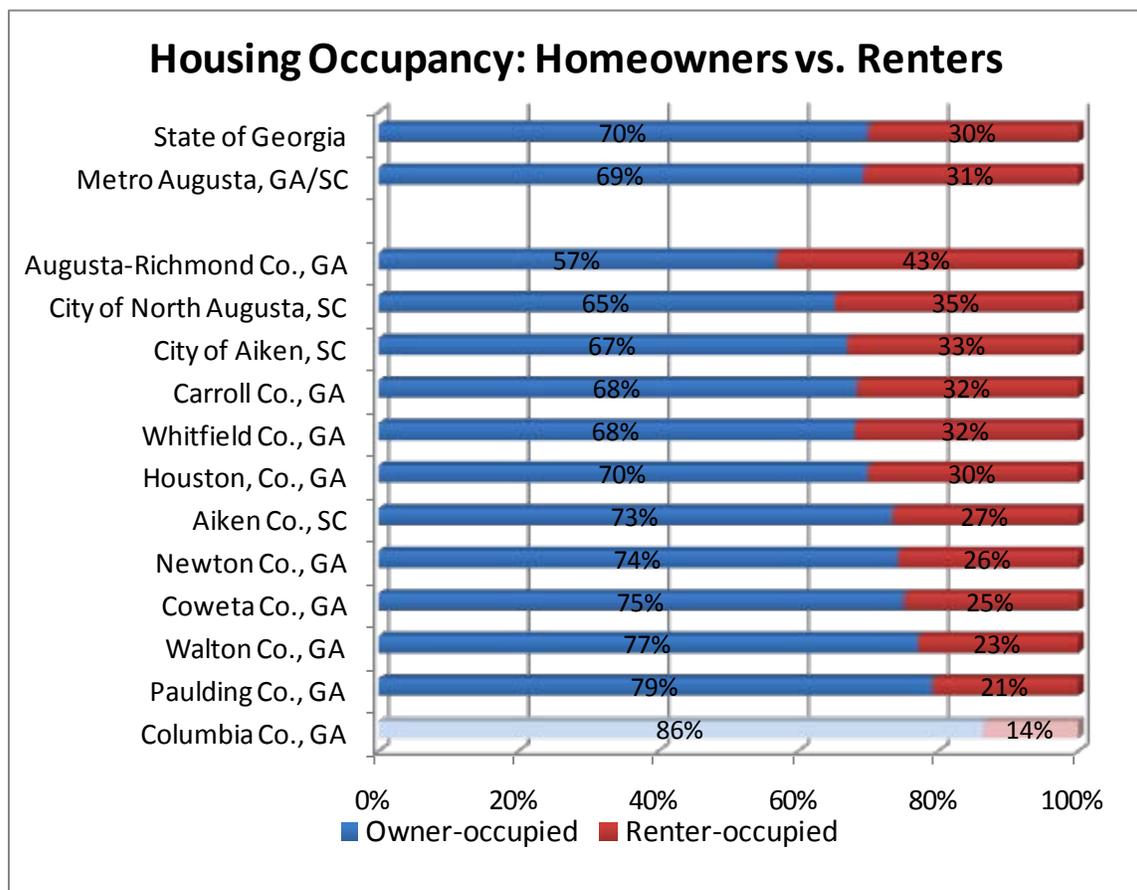
Multifamily Housing in Benchmark Georgia Counties							
	Newton	Columbia	Paulding	Carroll	Coweta	Houston	Whitfield
Apartments	2,340	1,365	3,211	3,965	4,755	6,880	4,311
Townhouses	816	2,080	1,142	2,531	2,231	3,690	3,633
Total Multifamily Units (apartments & townhouses)	3,156	3,445	4,353	6,496	6,985	10,570	7,944
Total Housing Units	36,969	39,919	50,308	45,392	45,989	56,586	35,170
Multifamily Percentage	8.5%	8.6%	8.7%	14.3%	15.2%	18.7%	22.6%

According to the Apartment Association of Greater Augusta, the vacancy rate for apartments in Evans and Martinez has fluctuated between 4 and 7 % since January of 2009, compared to a 7 to 8 % vacancy rate in the entire Augusta metro area. Such a low rate reflects Columbia County’s strong housing market and flourishing economy.

The County’s share of renter-occupied housing units was also lower than all other benchmark jurisdictions. The following chart also includes data for the Augusta metro area and associated jurisdictions. Rental figures include residents of all housing types, not just multi-family units.

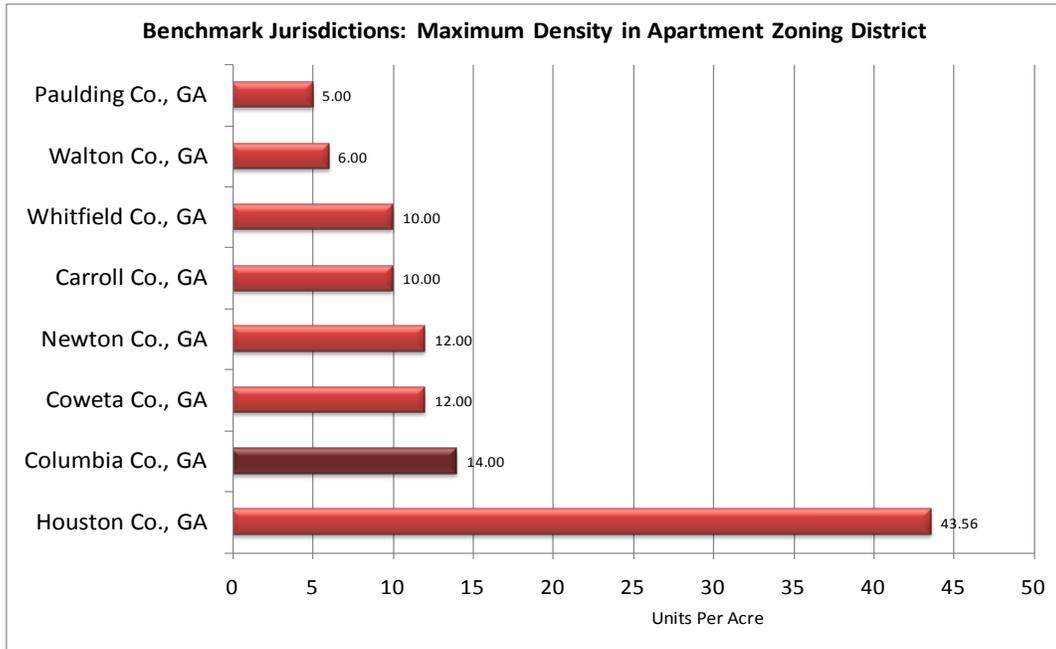
Columbia County had the highest owner-occupied housing rate at 86% compared to all the other benchmark jurisdictions. This illustrates a strong personal investment by the community. It is important to note that the closest jurisdiction by location is Augusta-Richmond County and that jurisdiction has the highest rate of renter-occupied housing at 43%. The overall figures for the State of Georgia is 70% owner-occupied and 30% renter-occupied, so Columbia County has less than half of renter-occupied properties as a percentage compared to the average throughout the State.

Chart 5 (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007)



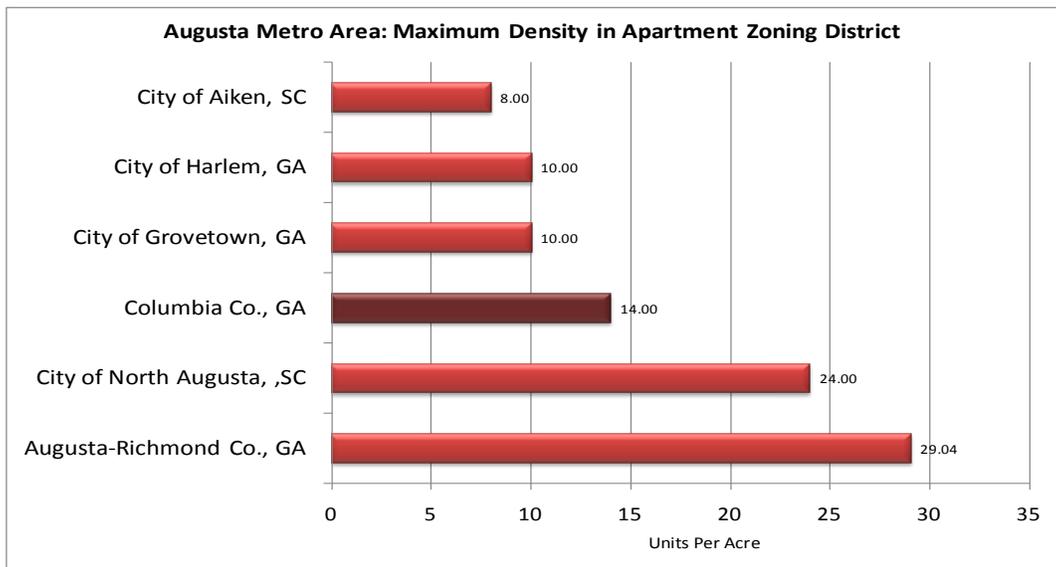
Although Columbia County has relatively few apartments and renters, the County zoning code permits fairly dense apartment developments in the A-R district. The County’s 14 unit per acre maximum density limit is high compared to standards in other jurisdictions, which are typically around 10 units per acre as illustrated in Chart 6. Houston has the highest density at 43 units and is experiencing a rapid growth in population related to the Warner Robbins Air Force base.

Chart 6 (Source: Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department, 2009)



In the Augusta Metro Area, density limits differ substantially between jurisdictions. Columbia County allows a higher density than the City of Aiken, the City of Harlem and the City of Grovetown, while North Augusta and Augusta-Richmond County permit a higher density than Columbia County.

Chart 7 (Source: Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department, 2009)



In PUD (planned unit development) district, the County establishes a maximum density for each development through the zoning approval process. To date, the highest density allowed in PUD has been 14 units per acre.

Chart 8 (Source: Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department, 2009)

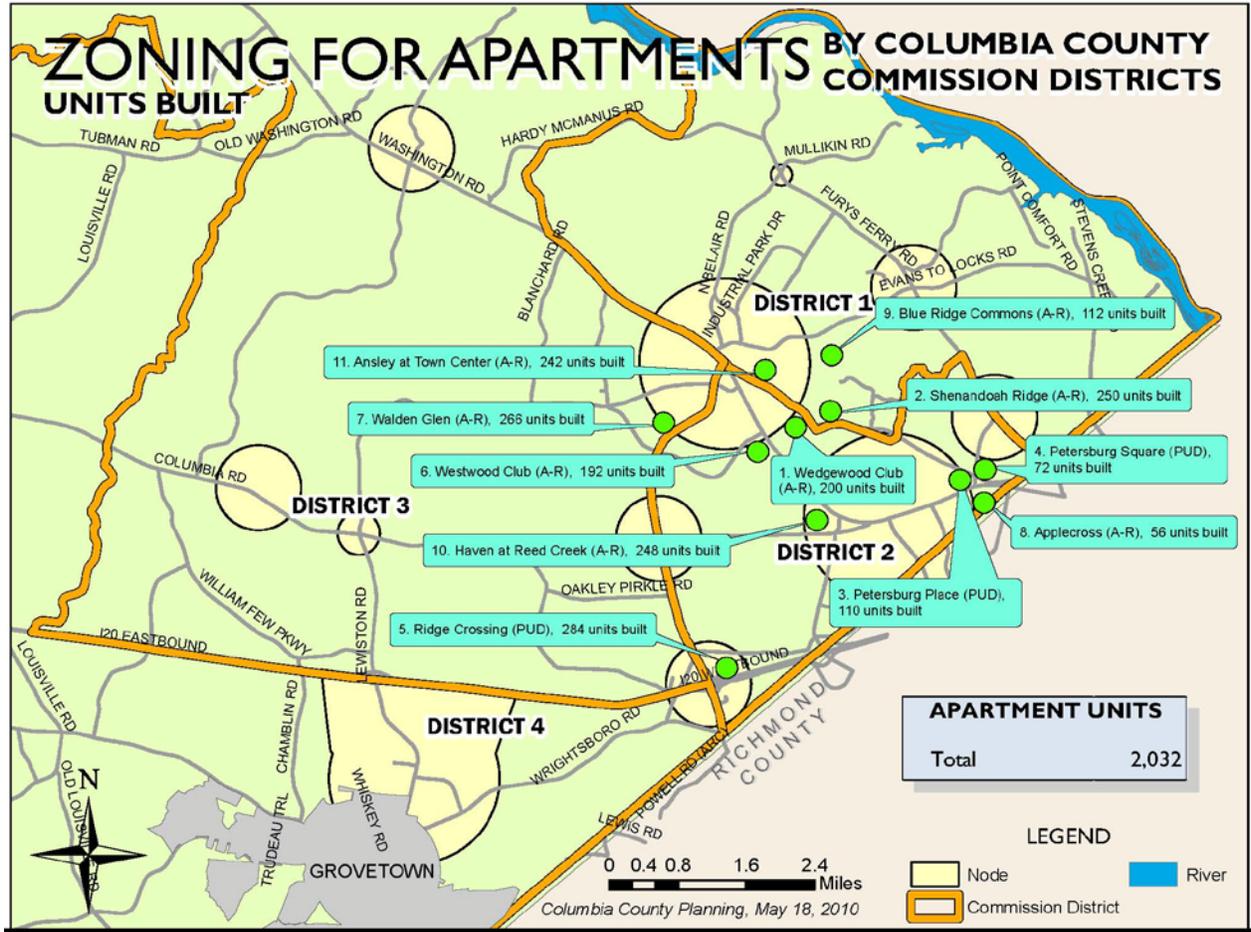
Maximum Density Limit in Planned Zoning District Benchmark Jurisdictions and Augusta Metro Area	
Jurisdiction	Units/Acre
Augusta-Richmond Co., GA	As specified in PUD documents
Columbia Co., GA	As specified in PUD documents
City of Harlem, GA	As specified in PUD documents
Houston Co., GA	43.56
City of North Augusta, ,SC	24
Walton County, GA	20
Newton County, GA	12
City of Grovetown, GA	10
City of Aiken, SC	8
Henry Co., GA	8
Whitfield County, GA	8
Paulding County, GA	5
Carroll Co., GA	4
Fayette Co., GA	4

Many comparable jurisdictions limit the density in their planned zoning districts to the same standard as their apartment zoning district. Nonetheless, apartments are much more prevalent in those jurisdictions than in Columbia County. Therefore, stricter density standards do not necessarily control county-wide apartment growth.

The following maps show the locations for apartments that are built and under construction and those locations that are zoned for apartments but not yet built. The corresponding charts list the name of the apartment complex, the zoning classification, density, and total number of units.

This data shows that most of the apartments are located within or near to the larger nodes and that the average density will be 11.8 units per acre once the units under construction have been completed.

Chart 9 (Source: Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department, 2009)

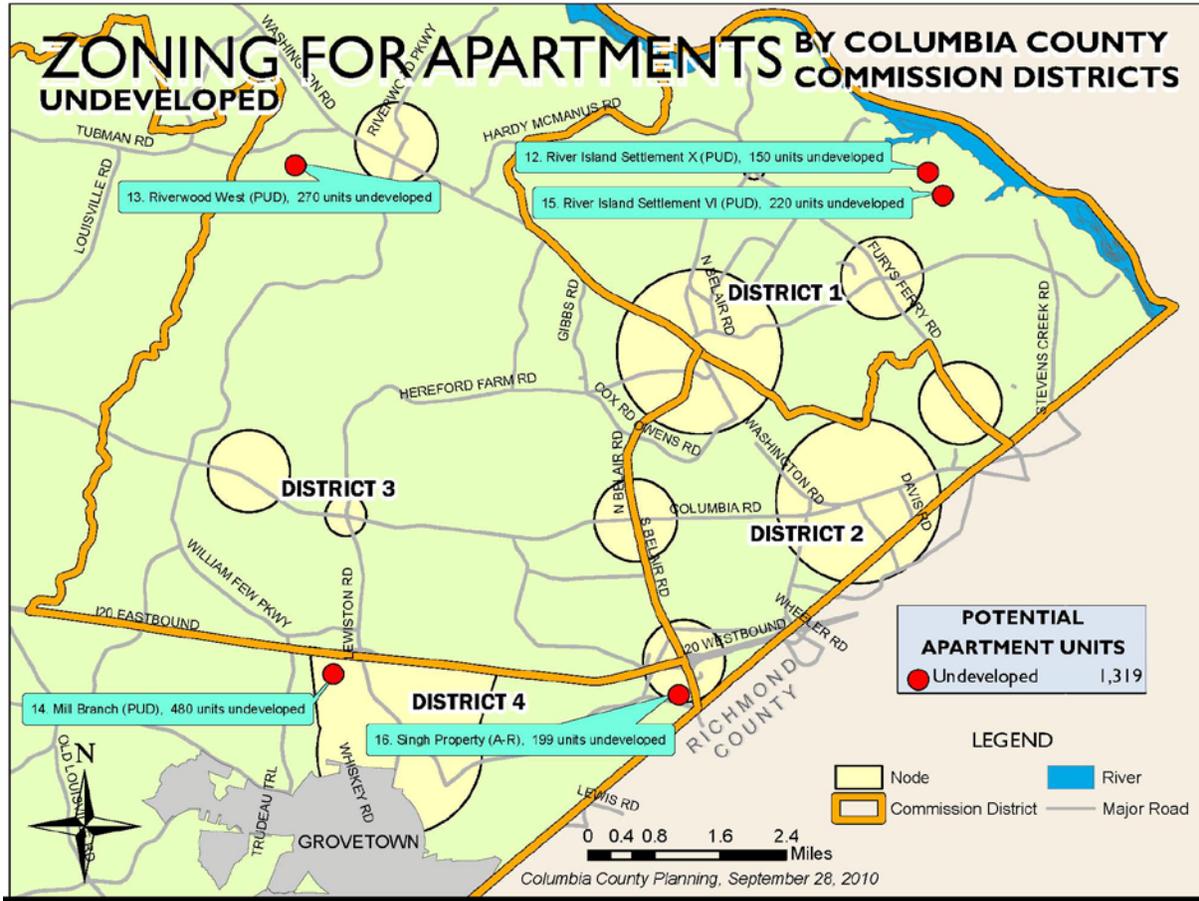


Multi-Family Housing Inventory, Columbia County							
APARTMENTS BUILT							
map i.d.	name	location	zoning	acres	units	units per acre	Node
1	Wedgewood Club	Blue Ridge Dr & Old Evans Rd.	A-R	20.60	200	9.7	n/a
2	Shenandoah Ridge	Blue Ridge Dr & Old Petersburg Rd	A-R	23.97	250	10.4	n/a
3	Petersburg Place	West of Old Petersburg Rd & Baston Rd	PUD	9.93	110	11.1	Martinez
4	Petersburg Square	East of Old Petersburg Rd & Baston Rd	PUD	6.44	72	11.2	n/a
5	Ridge Crossing	Beverly Rd & I-20	PUD	25.00	284	11.4	Interstate Service Area
6	Westwood Club	South of Washington Rd & Owens Rd	A-R	14.61	192	13.1	n/a
7	Walden Glen	North of N Belair Rd & Owens Rd	A-R	19.66	266	13.5	Evans Town Center
8	Applecross Apartments	South of Washington Rd & Baston Rd	A-R	3.98	56	14.1	Martinez
9	Blue Ridge Commons	Blue Ridge Dr at Lakeside Middle School	A-R	10.27	112	10.9	n/a
10	Haven at Reed Creek	Kroger & Washington Rds	A-R	20.66	248	12.0	Martinez
11	Ansley at Town Center	Old Evans Rd & Jamaica Ct	A-R	17.30	242	14.0	Evans Town Center
TOTALS:				172	2,032	11.8	

(NOTE: Some acreage, unit and density figures are estimates calculated using the best available data.)

The following data shows that most of the proposed apartments are located within or near to the larger nodes. The maximum density approved is 14 units per acre for the new developments.

Chart 10 (Source: Columbia County Planning and Engineering Department, 2009)



Multi-Family Housing Inventory, Columbia County						
APARTMENTS UNDEVELOPED (Projections)						
map i.d.	name	location	zoning	acres	units	units per acre
12	River Island Settlement X	Blackstone Camp Rd.	PUD	29.60	150	5.1
13	Riverwood West	Washington Rd & Old Washington Rd	PUD	27.00	270	10.0
14	Mill Branch	Horizon South Pkwy & I-20	PUD	40.90	480	11.7
15	River Island Settlement VI	Blackstone Camp Rd	PUD	18.30	220	12.0
16	Singh Property	Jimmie Dyess & Wrightsboro Rd	A-R	14.19	199	14.0
TOTALS:				130	1,319	10.1

(NOTE: Some acreage, unit and density figures are estimates calculated using the best available data.)

The chart below lists the names, locations, and details for townhouses that are built, under construction, and rezoned but undeveloped locations. The average density for the existing townhouses is 5.9 units per acre, for development underway is 3.7 units per acre, and undeveloped is 6.2 units per acre.

Multi-Family Housing Inventory, Columbia County						
TOWNHOUSES BUILT						
name	location	zoning	total acres	units	units per acre	Node
Applecross Townhomes	South of Washington Rd & Baston Rd	A-R	13.46	93	6.9	Martinez
Bayview/Bayhill	Southern Pines Dr & Industrial Park	PUD	38.60	185	4.8	n/a
Belair Pines	S Old Belair Rd & Belair Pines	PUD	13.00	125	9.6	n/a
Belair Villas	S Belair Rd & S Old Belair Rd	A-R	5.84	59	10.1	Interstate Service Area
Brittany Place	Brittany Way	T-R	3.35	32	9.6	Martinez
Brookwood Townhomes	S Old Belair Rd & Columbia Rd	A-R	9.97	118	11.8	n/a
Cammaron	King Rd & Prince Dr	PUD	10.76	83	7.7	Martinez
Cedar Rock	The Pass & Cedar Rock Dr	PUD	18.90	63	3.3	n/a
Connor Place	Old Evans Rd	T-R	14.80	76	5.1	Evans Town Center
Crawford Mill	S Old Belair Rd & Crawford Mill Ln	PUD	32.80	79	2.4	n/a
Creekwalk	The Pass & Creekwalk Dr	PUD	11.54	65	5.6	n/a
Crown Point	Stephens Creek Rd	PUD	10.35	64	6.2	n/a
Evans Lake	Evans to Locks Rd & Grand Slam Dr	A-R	4.35	32	7.4	Evans Town Center
Faircloth Commons	Washington Rd & Faircloth Dr	PUD	23.00	90	3.9	Evans Town Center
Fox Creek Villas	Old Trail Rd & Fox Creek Dr	T-R	8.90	56	6.3	Martinez
Harris Ridge	4540 Wrightsboro Rd	T-R	26.60	190	7.1	n/a
Hidden Lake Townhomes	Columbia Rd & Oak Ridge Dr	PUD	13.40	70	5.2	Belair
Highpointe/Morningside Village	Greenbrier Ave & Washington Rd	PUD	27.00	301	11.1	n/a
Jones Station	Southern Pines Dr & Manly Way	PUD	14.40	54	3.8	n/a
Joshua Tree Villas	The Pass & Joshua Tree Ln	PUD	8.20	54	6.6	n/a
Reed Creek Villas	The Pass & Furls Ferry Rd	PUD	4.44	25	5.6	n/a
Southern Pines	Long Needle Cir	T-R	5.67	34	6.0	n/a
Steeplechase	Furls Ferry Rd & Full Circle Dr	T-R	20.28	74	3.6	Evans to Locks
Villages At Riverwatch	Old Petersburg Rd & Coach Ln	T-R	3.30	18	5.5	Martinez
Wisteria Place	Blue Ridge Dr & Micah Trace	A-R	1.43	20	14.0	n/a
West Lake Townhomes	Stephens Creek Rd & Prestwick Dr	R-3	9.44	40	4.2	n/a
TOTALS:			354	2,100	5.9	
TOWNHOUSES UNDERWAY						
name	location	zoning	total acres	units	units per acre	Node
High Meadows	Chamblin Rd	PUD	38.00	63	1.7	Bartram Trail
Lazy Acres	Oakley Pirkle & Crawford Creek Pl	PUD	10.34	32	3.1	n/a
Picket Fences	Old Evans Rd	PUD	8.74	115	13.2	Evans Town Center
TOTALS:			57	210	3.7	
TOWNHOUSES UNDEVELOPED (Projections)						
name	location	zoning	acres	units	units per acre	Node
Copper Ridge	4874 Washington Rd	PUD	21.70	90	4.1	n/a
Riverwood Plantation	Washington Rd & William Few Pkwy	PUD	51.00	306	6.0	Greenbrier
River Island Settlement	Blackstone Camp Rd	PUD	47.50	200	4.2	n/a
Serotta	Columbia Rd	PUD	40.00	254	6.4	Bartram Trail
Ivy Falls	Columbia Rd	PUD	8.00	46	5.8	Bartram Trail
Baker Glen	Baker Place Rd & Chamblin Rd	PUD	25.50	203	8.0	n/a
Bacon/Crowell	Furls Ferry Rd & Southern Pines Dr	T-R	3.23	26	8.0	n/a
Mary Barton Hitt	Furls Ferry Rd & Old Furls Ferry Rd	T-R	5.40	43	8.0	Evans to Locks
Sana Ullah	643 Gibbs Rd	T-R	2.00	16	8.0	n/a
Bro-Con	4221 Old Evans Rd	T-R	10.41	83	8.0	Evans Town Center
Jerry Kendrick	336 Old Plantation Rd	T-R	2.00	16	8.0	Martinez
Allen Reece	112 Shaw St	T-R	3.10	25	8.0	Martinez
Regions Bank	4601 Columbia Rd	T-R	10.00	80	8.0	Belair
Welcome South	Wrightsboro Rd & Apostolic Ln	T-R	19.91	159	8.0	n/a
Columbia Co. - Greenspace	Furls Ferry Rd & Southern Pines Dr	T-R	13.47	N/A	N/A	n/a
Home Sites Ltd. - Greenspace	Furls Ferry Rd	T-R	34.46	N/A	N/A	n/a
Crowell Co. - Greenspace	Furls Ferry Rd	T-R	19.76	N/A	N/A	n/a
TOTALS:			250	1,547	6.2	

Future Conditions

In addition to the County's 2,032 existing apartments, zoning has already been approved to build over 1,300 more apartment units on currently vacant land. If all of the aforementioned units are built by 2015 and development of other housing types continues at the post-2000 rate, then it is projected those 3,351 units would constitute 7 % of the County's housing and more closely match the apartment totals and housing mix of similar jurisdictions.

The future economic health of the County is dependent upon maintaining a balanced mix of housing types. PUD zoning allows a variety of housing options such as single family and townhomes to cater for different price demands. The County needs to consider whether the density in the PUD zoning district should stay unspecified or be restricted to a maximum density comparable to the AR (apartment) and TR (townhouse) zoning districts. These factors have a direct bearing on the quality of life and can help to maintain current living standards that are a great asset to this community and which have been recognized nationally on a number of occasions.

Recommendations

A. Multi-family development should match the pace of population growth and be limited to appropriate sites.

Columbia County has fewer apartments than similar jurisdictions. However, if most of the 140 vacant acres already zoned for apartments are developed by 2015, then the County's apartment total of about 3,500 units will constitute 7 % of all housing, which is comparable to the 9 % average of the benchmark counties. In the meantime, new zoning to allow apartments should match the population growth rate in order to preserve a balanced housing mix. From 2000 to 2008, the County's population increased an average of 2.7 % each year. Therefore, approval of zoning to allow a 2.7 % annual increase in new apartments (in addition to those already approved) could be appropriate for apartment development through 2015. This calculates to about 50 units per year. Since most apartment developments average about 200 units, this could effectively result in only one rezoning over the next four years.

Alternately, if the County opts to maintain the current share of apartments at 3 % of the County's housing inventory, then no new additional zoning to allow apartment development would be needed in the near future. The 140 vacant acres already zoned for apartments would most certainly provide apartment development that outpaces population growth through 2015. If all of the vacant land is developed, then apartments would increase in number by nearly 75 %, while population is projected to increase less than 15 % from 2010 to 2015. The County should monitor the development of the vacant acreage and track the number of apartment units added annually.

With regards to multi-family housing, the County's most important role is limiting apartments and townhouse development to the most appropriate locations, as recommended by the Growth Management Plan (i.e. along major arterial and collector roads, within nodes and near commercial development as a transitional use). These locations minimize traffic, encourage pedestrian-friendly retail development, and avoid perceived conflicts with single-family detached homes. When the GMP is next updated, appropriate locations should be identified even more specifically.

Townhouses constitute about 8 % of the County's housing stock according to the 2005 Census. If most of the 250 vacant acres already zoned for townhouses are developed by 2015 and all other housing types increase at the same rate as recent years, then townhouses would account for about 10 % of all housing in 2015.

Summary: Zoning to allow a 2.7% annual increase in new apartments up to 2015 could keep up with the projected population growth. This calculates to about 50 apartment units per year which could effectively result in only one rezoning over the next four years since most apartment developments average about 200 units. With reference to townhouses, this calculates to about 60 units per year. The County should monitor the development of the vacant acreage and track the number of apartment units and townhouses added annually. When the GMP is next updated, identify specific locations suitable for apartments and townhouses. Any new apartment developments, including those in a PUD shall be encouraged to be located within nodes. Any new townhouse developments, including those in a PUD shall be located within nodes or along arterials. Any townhouse developments shall remain at 8 units per acre.

B. Review density standards in apartment and PUD zoning districts

When considering the density of future apartment zoning, it is important to realize that lowering the maximum density in the A-R district would not necessarily result in fewer apartments, as evidenced by benchmark jurisdictions with lower density limits yet more apartments than Columbia County. Lowering the maximum density could instead create less dense developments covering more acreage. A more effective method to control apartment growth is to approve A-R rezoning applications more selectively.

Nonetheless, if the County decides to lower the maximum density allowed through zoning, then 10 units per acre would be consistent with benchmark jurisdictions. Retroactively lowering the density standard for all land zoned A-R would likely reduce property values for the undeveloped sites. Therefore, any change in the density limit should be applied through a new zoning district. An amendment to the zoning code would be required to create a new district, possibly called "A-R10," and the County could either stop accepting applications for A-R zoning (14 units per acre) or limit approvals of new apartment zoning to A-R10, allowing 10 units per acre.

Another important element of responsible multi-family housing development is ensuring that a high quality product will be built. The County can control elements such as architectural style, building materials, landscaping, and amenities through the approval of PUD zoning. The County has far less control over apartments built in the A-R zoning district, where a developer is free to build apartments with no design restrictions (except where in an overlay district). Therefore, the County could decide to continue to allow higher density developments in the PUD district than the A-R district as act as an incentive to developers to produce higher quality developments.

Allowing a higher density in the PUD district also allows for mixed-use developments. Mixed-use developments that incorporate apartments with retail can create entertainment districts that not only serve as a regional destination for shoppers but also create a unique sense of "place" in otherwise anonymous suburban settings. Developments such as The Village at Sandhill in Columbia, S.C. and Birkdale Village in Huntersville, N.C. act as economic magnets. The GMP recommends urban-style, mixed-use developments in the Evans Town Center, and the emerging Gateway District off I-20's Lewiston Road exit is also a prime location.

It is strongly recommended that the County complete an annual review of multi-family development and maintain an accurate count of units built, under construction, and of undeveloped acreage. This information would be presented to the Planning Commission and the Board of Commissioners for review at the start of each calendar year.

Summary: Review the density in apartment zoning district and consider amending the zoning code to create a new district, called "A-R10," to allow 10 units per acre for any future apartment rezonings. Also, the maximum density allowed in the PUD zoning district will be 12 units per acre. Current undeveloped land zoned "A-R" will remain at 14 units per acre as per the current code.

C. Zoning Code Update

Complete all zoning code revisions before the end of 2010.

D. Adopt the Multi-family Housing Study as part of the new GMP

Adopt the Multi-Family Housing Study as part of new GMP. In the new GMP, permit more zoning flexibility along the corridors between nodes for a greater mix of land uses. The final GMP shall be presented to the Planning Commission and then to the Board of Commissioners in November 2010. The Regional Commission and the State will then have time to review the new GMP and it will be returned to the County by January 2011. Adopt the new GMP prior to the February 28, 2011 deadline.

E. Further Study required for Retirement Communities

Planning staff will carry out further study of retirement communities, looking at concepts and statistics for retirement communities within Columbia County and other examples outside of the County.

Summary of Recommendations

- A. Zoning to allow a 2.7% annual increase in new apartments up to 2015 could keep up with the projected population growth. This calculates to about 50 apartment units per year which could effectively result in only one rezoning over the next four years since most apartment developments average about 200 units. With reference to townhouses, this calculates to about 60 units per year. The County should monitor the development of the vacant acreage and track the number of apartment units and townhouses added annually. When the GMP is next updated, identify specific locations suitable for apartments and townhouses. Any new apartment developments, including those in a PUD shall be encouraged to be located within nodes. Any new townhouse developments, including those in a PUD shall be located within nodes or along arterials. Any townhouse developments, including those in a PUD shall remain at 8 units per acre.**
- B. Review the density in apartment zoning district and consider amending the zoning code to create a new district, called "A-R10," to allow 10 units per acre for any future apartment rezonings. Also, the maximum density allowed in the PUD zoning district will be 12 units per acre. Current undeveloped land zoned "A-R" will remain at 14 units per acre as per the current code.**
- C. Complete all zoning code revisions before the end of 2010.**
- D. Adopt the Multi-Family Housing Study as part of new GMP. In the new GMP, permit more zoning flexibility along the corridors between nodes for a greater mix of land uses. The final GMP shall be presented to the Planning Commission and then to the Board of Commissioners in October 2010. The Regional Commission and the State will then have time to review the new GMP and it will be returned to the County by January 2011. Adopt the new GMP prior to the February 28, 2011 deadline.**
- E. Planning staff will carry out further study of retirement communities, looking at concepts and statistics for retirement communities within Columbia County and other examples outside of the County.**