

# Theme 4: Site Design and Development Scale

High-quality site design and development scale topics are critical to creating an attractive and more-lively community. Purposeful actions in these topic areas promote visual interest, create unique sense of place, and increase residents' pride in their community. It also creates places that are desirable for visitors, which draws more people to the area and supports a sustainable local economy.

Generally speaking, topics considered for site design and development scale in a comprehensive plan include: building form and massing, building location, building architecture, open space, development compatibility, site transitions, and redevelopment of existing shopping centers as mixed-use areas. The topics presented in this section of the document further refine and implement some of the ideas presented for the land use mix and development intensity theme.

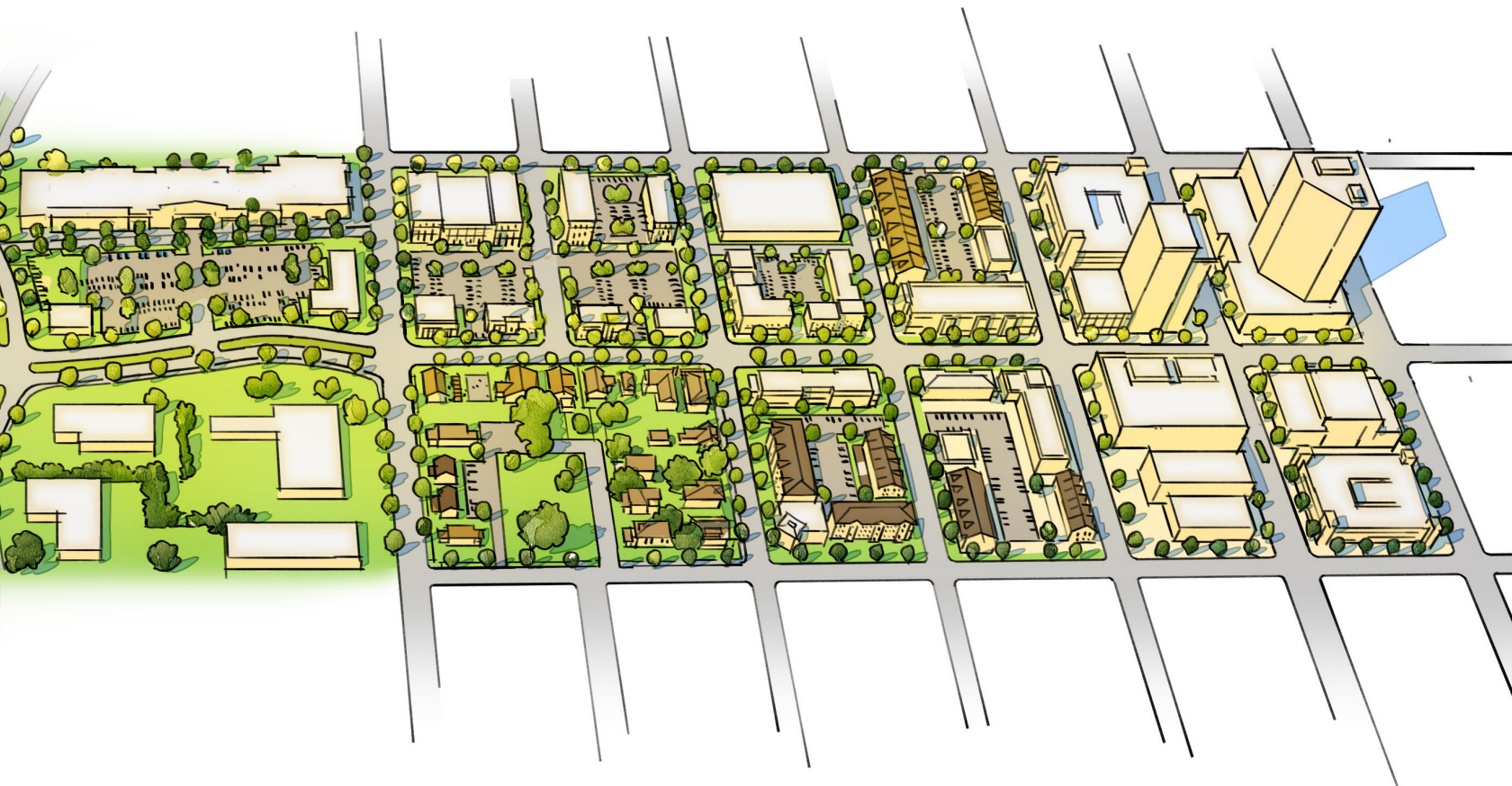
The focus area studies presented in Chapter 3 test some of the themed-recommendations presented for the topic of site design and development scale. Additional considerations, usually more refined, to influence preferred site design and development scale topics are largely addressed in the town's Unified Development Ordinance, including setbacks, parking standards, buffers, parking provisions, landscaping, lighting, and street furniture.

One primary goal for recommendations under this theme is to create "highly-sociable" places for the community. It is a difficult quality to instill for some places, but once accomplished, it is hard to undo and the places become highly-desirable destinations. Finding opportunities for people to see friends, meet neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers creates a strong sense



of place and attachment to the community. Creating spaces that are comfortable and present well provides the framework for creating highly-sociable places in Garner — places that are safe, clean, energized, accessible, and with enough capacity to accommodate formal or informal events at the location.

The recommendations that follow under the topic of site design and development scale provide clear targets and expectations for shaping the built environment, including certain criteria or expectations that reinforce a coordinated character and unique sense of place for locations in the community.



## Build support in Garner to use design and development standards that enhance community appearance and maintain a unique sense of place.

Town officials should create a more predictable environment for development in terms of size, scale, orientation, landscaping, and general aesthetic using new rules or standards in the local unified development ordinance (UDO). In essence, it will be the process of implementing many of the policies and recommendations presented in the comprehensive plan as laws. It would change phrases in the comprehensive plan using “should” or “would” — noting recommendations or desired outcomes — to phrases with reference to “shall” or “will” in the UDO — indicating requirements or absolute standards — that would significantly influence a development application.

Specific to community appearance, the UDO should adopt new rules, requirements, or standards that address topics important to community character:

- Signature building architecture unique to specific districts, neighborhoods, or corridors in the community.
- Preferred building façade details, building materials, building heights, and building setbacks in the community.
- Design standards for mixed use activity centers that achieve high-quality building architecture, public spaces, and mix of land uses within the same building or block.



- Design standards for employment or retail areas that achieve high-quality building architecture, open spaces, and parking solutions.
- Design standards for standalone multifamily development that achieve high-quality building architecture, public spaces, parking solutions, orientation of buildings to streets, and potential mix of home types in the same development.
- Compatibility standards for infill development or redevelopment projects that recognize existing development adjacent to the site.
- Land use and design relationships between buildings, streets, and open space (location and orientation) that contribute to a high-quality public realm for the community.
- Clear and predictable relationships between land use, design, massing, and orientation statements for the character areas in the comprehensive plan and zoning districts for the UDO.
- Open space requirements that require minimum size, location, and design qualities to integrate open spaces within a development and activate spaces with people. Most open spaces in the town should be accessible to the public.
- Landscaping and streetscape improvements that instill a shared sense of place in the public realm, and that helps transition between different land uses or development intensities.
- Connectivity between adjacent development, and the importance of block size and shape for influencing direct routes between complementary land uses.

Alternatively, town officials may prefer to implement one or more of the items in the list above as design guidelines, or a pattern book, that is referenced by the UDO. This approach does not codify intended outcomes for an area as law like an ordinance, but it does instill clear expectations for investments in specific areas.

In addition, town officials should consider resolutions that communicate formal positions or opinions about community character that may influence the work of other public or quasi-public agencies in the future. This includes separate town resolutions stating the importance of, and town preferences for, the appearance and aesthetic of railroad or highway bridges and water towers in the community.

Above all — town officials should recognize that high-quality design and development standards for the community will create additional costs to the town and their partners for public projects and additional costs to developers or quasi-public organizations for private projects. A consistent message and application of the policies and recommendations in the comprehensive plan is critical to realizing a vision for high-quality development, with high-quality finishes, in the community. Everyone must be held to the same standard.

Financial or policy incentives may be needed to reach the town's aspirations for community character in some cases until minimum expectations in the market are established (e.g., density or intensity bonuses to offset development costs; town-funded building façade, landscape, or signage grants; or outside funding opportunities from non-profit organizations or advocacy groups).



### **Amend the town's Unified Development Ordinance to strengthen design standards for non-residential development.**

Suburban-scale, non-residential development in Garner generally follows the same principles:

Buildings are placed at the center or rear of a site and surround with fields of surface parking and drive aisles. It is not an environment that promotes walking between offices or businesses in the same center. Furthermore, open space is limited and not a prominent feature of the development. Landscaping is typically used at the edges of the development to buffer or screen office or business activities from nearby neighborhoods.

New or redeveloped non-residential development in the town should include a common green or other public space throughout the development to encourage community gathering, outdoor dining, employee breaks, product demonstration areas, or people-watching. Cross-access between buildings and destinations should also be provided via internal roads with provisions for pedestrian mobility access between buildings that support a park-once mentality (or walk-to, bike-to environment from surrounding residential neighborhoods). Building architecture in a reimagined centers should reflect a unique and consistent character for the development.

In addition, buildings over 20,000 square feet in footprint, or two stories in height, should include design features that make the building more interesting in appearance. Considerations for more interesting building architecture may include, but is not limited to, façade articulation that brings the focus of the building to the first floor, upper-story step backs that limit the presence of taller buildings, or building materials that break up the façade of a building. Landscaping, paving, and street furnishings may also help enclose spaces on the site and reduce the expanse of land between buildings.

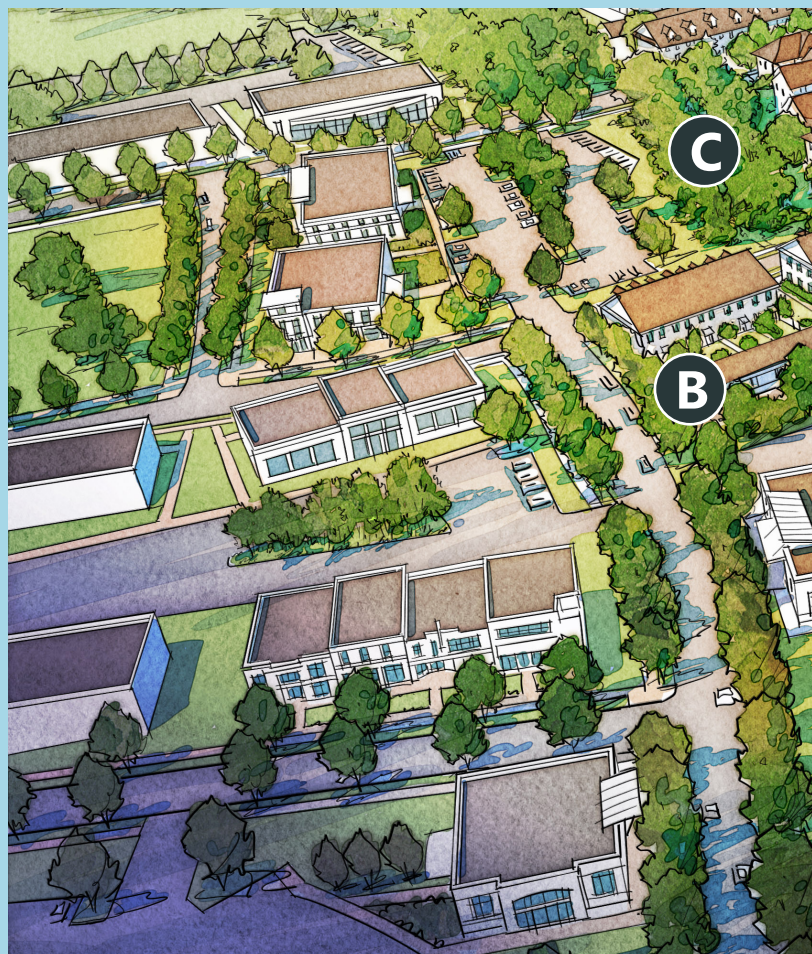
# Spotlight on: Development Compatibility & Site Transitions

The Town of Garner will have opportunities to support infill development and redevelopment in the future. And, it is important new buildings, open space, parking lots, landscaping, or outdoor facilities in new neighborhoods or activity centers complement existing development intensities and patterns to avoid incompatible adjacencies. Areas to prioritize new rules, requirements, or procedures that address development compatibility or site transition issues should include the “Areas to Transform” presented on the General Growth Framework Map.

On smaller infill or redevelopment sites where existing development patterns are established and expected to remain in the future, the massing and scale of new buildings should be similar to nearby surrounding buildings. On larger infill or redevelopment sites, new lots or buildings that are significantly different in mass or scale from adjacent development should be located toward the center of the site, with lots and building sizes near the perimeter graduating to transition to the massing or scale of existing surrounding development.

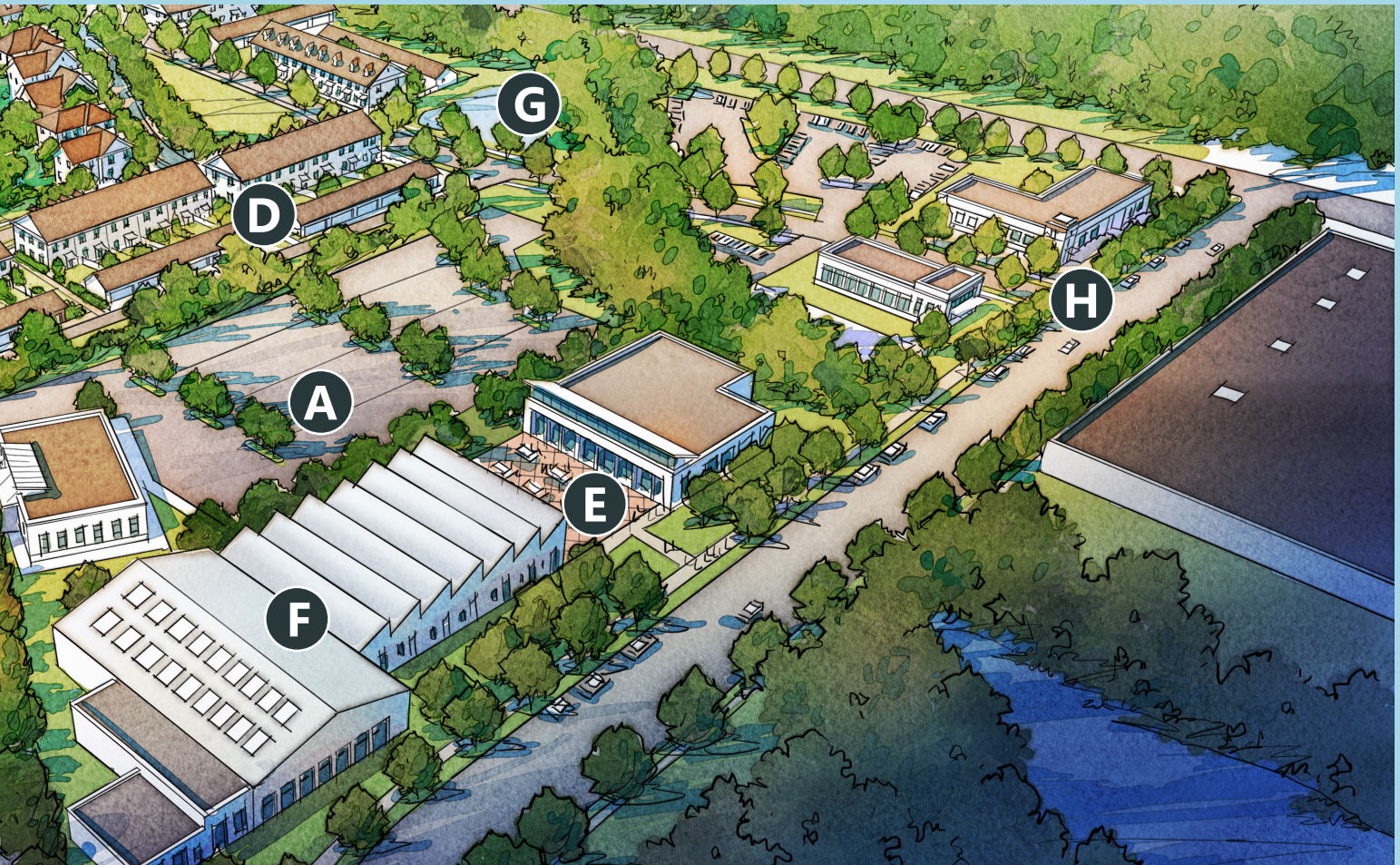
New commercial, light industrial, or flex space developments in close proximity to residential areas should limit their operations to those considered low-intensity, unobtrusive, or at a scale and design compatible with nearby neighborhoods. The design of new activity centers should also transition effectively between residential and non-residential uses, and include safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access for nearby residents. Future development in larger activity centers should focus density and intensity around existing or new street intersections on or adjacent to the site, and provide appropriate transitions to less intense edges of the site compatible with existing development.

New development across the street from existing development should be complementary in lot size, building mass, and placement. Development in the Town’s identified Areas to Transform should specifically follow a “like vs. like” approach, where buildings facing each other are similar in scale and massing. Changes in scale or massing may take place along the face of a street.



For example, taller, more dense buildings may occur at one end of the street (like in a town center), with medium, less dense buildings in between, and smaller, low-density buildings further away from the town center (as a transition to adjacent neighborhoods). Transitions may also take place at the rear lot line (especially in a site with alleyways), where one side of a block may have a different character and intensity than the opposite side of the block.

Architectural elements should also serve as important transitional features for new infill development or redevelopment sites. Where a clearly established building character is expected to remain in an area of Garner, new buildings and site design elements should be similar in size and architectural detail, including roof types, windows, doors, awnings, arcades, cornices, façade materials, outdoor furniture, or other building and site details.



- A** An interior parking lot provides separation between light industrial or flex space uses in the buildings along the primary street and nearby townhomes interior to the site.
- B** Rear-facing garages serving the townhomes provide a physical and visual barrier between private home space and the parking lot.
- C** A community green with an abundance of trees (potentially a tree save area from the site's original condition) provides separation between single-family detached homes and a parking lot and adjacent low-profile office buildings.
- D** Bicycle and pedestrian access between buildings provides safe and efficient connections between destinations in the activity center and nearby homes.
- E** Public space is integrated into the overall design of the activity center, providing connected "outdoor rooms" for employees, residents, and visitors.
- F** Architecture for non-residential buildings in the development (in this case flex space/makers space) is interesting and complements more historic elements from older building periods.
- G** Stormwater features on the site are designed to be community amenities and include green space or walking trails adjacent to activate the space.
- H** Building heights in the new activity center reflect the condition of existing development across the street.

**Require multiple buildings on the same lot or parcel be architecturally-unified.**

Quality, cohesive building design in site development helps enhance community character and improve quality-of-life. Promoting architectural unity on a site ensures quality projects, lends credibility and professionalism, and often promotes a unique brand identity in the area.

Requiring architectural unity in large site developments allows developers and staff the opportunity to consider the interplay between buildings, ultimately preventing inconsistencies and the uncoordinated feel that arises from ad hoc development. It is recommended that all new development and redevelopment in the planning area consisting of two or more buildings on a single lot or parcel be required to construct architecturally unified buildings and use compatible quality and type of building materials.



**Promote adaptive reuse of existing non-residential buildings that are abandoned or in decline.**

Adaptive reuse represents a change in use or activity for an existing building that was previously used for something different. It is generally credited with being faster, more cost-effective, and more sustainable for bringing new or expanded businesses online in a community compared to constructing new buildings on undeveloped land. Old shopping centers, old school sites, and old warehouses are all candidate locations for adaptive reuse. In Garner, the former K-Mart building on

Fayetteville Road is currently being reimagined as INQ 4300, a new life science building.

Reuse of an existing site or building provides the opportunity to reinvest in building architecture, parking lot design, landscaping, or open space that addresses potential eyesores in a community. It furthers the belief that an active property will always create more value in a community compared to an inactive property.

Town officials should encourage adaptive reuse of existing non-residential buildings in the planning area, and incentivize such actions using its policies and ordinances.



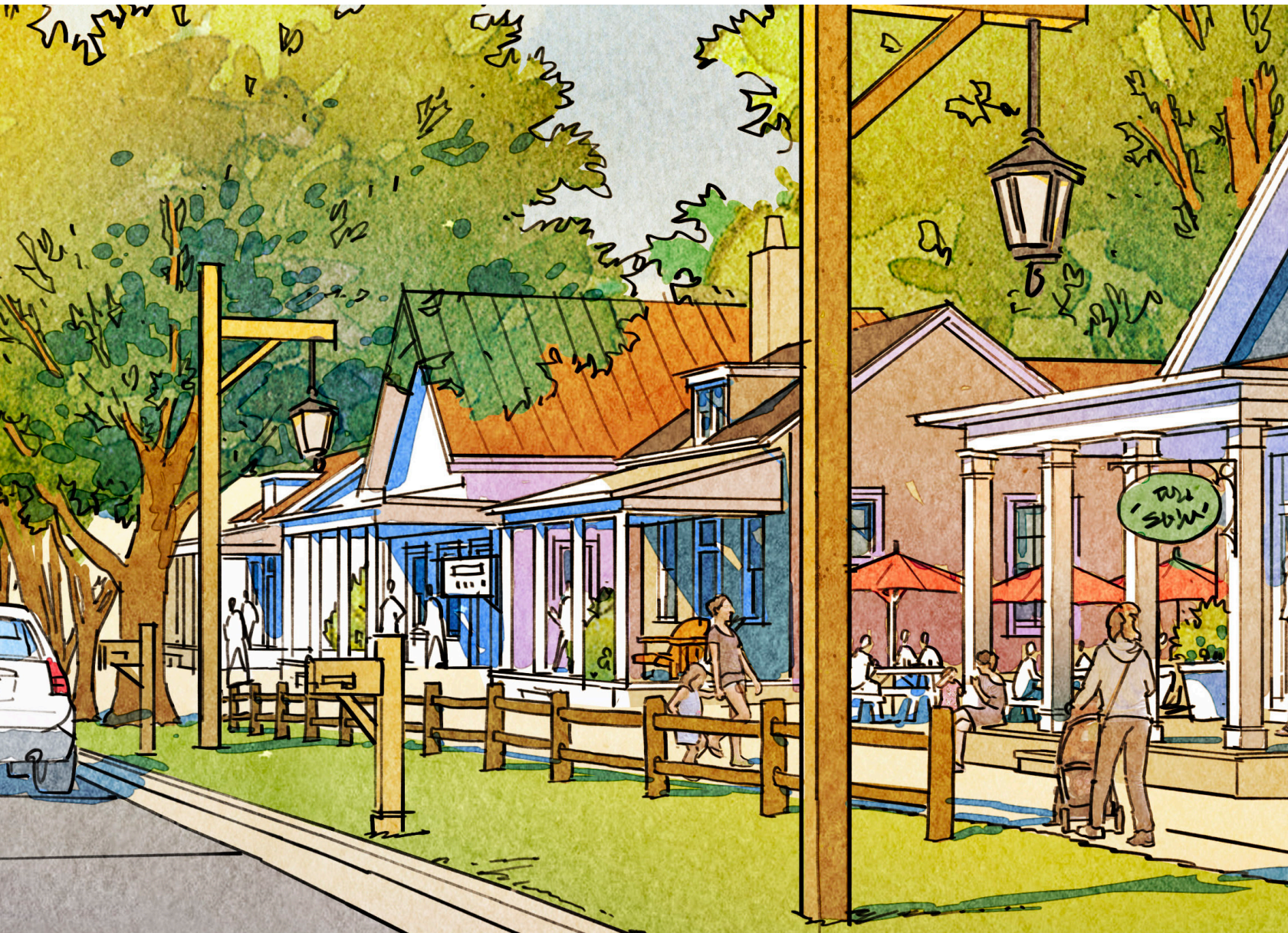


**Encourage retrofit and adaptive reuse of existing residential structures for commercial uses in some portions of the planning area.**

In some areas, existing residential homes fronting a busy street will be negatively impacted when transportation officials decide to widen the street, which will encroach on the front yards of existing homes if-when-where additional right-of-way is needed to accommodate the widening. Allowing these areas to transition from residential uses to small-scale commercial or office uses provides homeowners with opportunities to maintain or increase their property values.

The town should consider the following topics before allowing non-residential uses in former residential homes:

- Implementation of an overlay district in the local Unified Development Ordinance to expand the range of permitted uses in a specific area along the street being widened.
- Adjustments to parking requirements for the corridor to recognize the small-scale nature of commercial and office uses in structures previously used as a home. Solutions may include shared-use parking agreements or credit for on-street parking nearby.

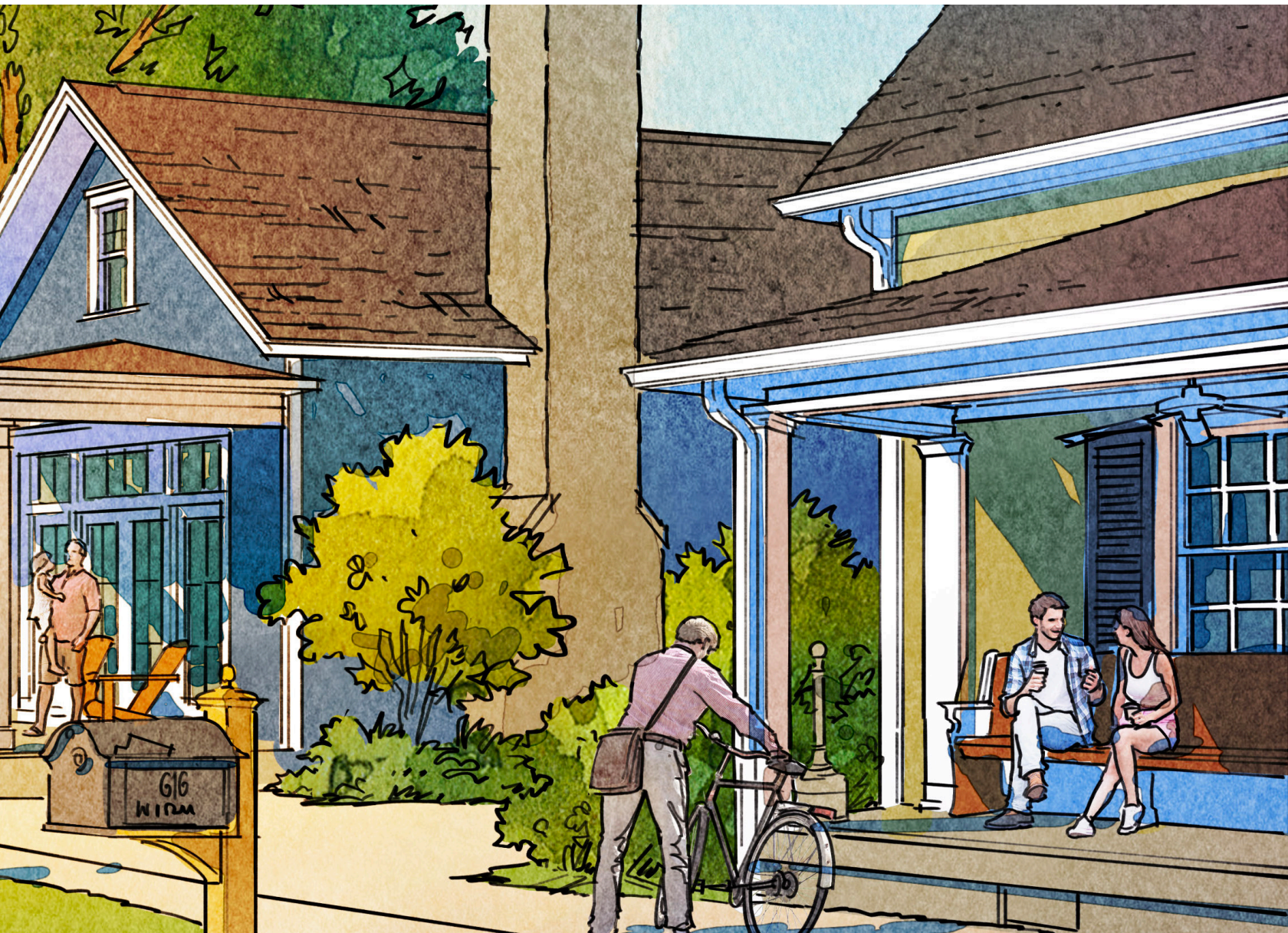


- Reductions in setback requirements to support adaptive reuse of existing buildings. Front yard setbacks could be used for outdoor dining or merchandise displays associated with the business. Side and rear yard setbacks could be used for parking, driveways, or small-scale ancillary uses. (Note: building code requirements for fire safety topics would need to be met).
- Impervious surface requirements could be relaxed to accommodate surface parking lots needed for the business.

Specific rules, requirements, or standards to address the list of topics for retrofit or adaptive reuse of existing residential structures for commercial uses should be included in the town's Unified Development Ordinance.



*Existing homes and the sites on which they are located can be converted to commercial uses to adapt to the changing corridor conditions, when they are no longer conducive to residential living. Parking, setback, and pervious area standards need to be addressed to allow such conversions to occur.*



**Establish compatibility and transition standards that respect the spaces between existing and future development.**

The town will have opportunities to realize infill development and redevelopment in the future. New buildings, open space, and parking lots should respect existing development types, patterns, and intensities to avoid incompatible land uses or buildings.

On smaller infill or redevelopment sites where existing development patterns are established and expected to remain the same in the future, the massing and scale of new buildings should be similar to nearby surrounding buildings. On larger infill or redevelopment sites, new lots or buildings that are significantly different in mass or scale from adjacent development should be located toward the center of the site, with lots and building sizes near the edge of the site designed to transition to the scale or massing of existing surrounding development.

New commercial, light industrial, or flex space developments in close proximity to residential areas should limit their uses to those considered low-intensity, unobtrusive, or at a scale and design compatible with nearby neighborhoods.

New neighborhood, community, or employment activity centers should transition effectively between residential and non-residential uses and include safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access for nearby residents. Future development in larger activity centers should focus density and intensity around existing or new street intersections on or adjacent to the site. It should also provide appropriate transitions to less intense edges of a site more compatible with existing development.

New development across the street from existing development should be complementary in lot size, building mass, and placement. Similar building types should face each other on a public street to protect the character of the streetscape. Land use transitions are preferred in alleyways, the abutment of two rear yards, or across a large common green.

Architectural elements should be transitional features for new infill development or redevelopment sites. Where a clearly established building character is expected to remain in an area of town, new buildings or site design elements should be similar in size and architectural detail, including roof types, windows, doors, awnings, arcades, cornices, façade materials, outdoor furniture, and other building or site design details.



### Establish a discernible structure for new neighborhoods in the town's planning area.

New neighborhoods in the town should contain a discernible center and a clear edge. This is an organizational concept that provides a clear identity to the neighborhood. While it may be more difficult to have well-defined edges surrounding a neighborhood, it is imperative that its center be well-formed. The center of the neighborhood should include a civic open space such as a park, square, or plaza, depending on its location within the range of contexts from suburban to urban.

Neighborhoods should be organized around a pedestrian shed, or a circle with a radius approximately one-quarter mile in length, which represents a five-minute walk distance from the center to the edge. The pedestrian shed concept ensures that all residents are within a short walk of a meaningful destination. These destinations may include mixed-use areas or other civic open spaces. In the case of corridor development, the pedestrian shed may be linear.



### Create recognizable entrances (gateways) into Garner.

One of the first ways to establish a defined character for the town is to announce that it is different and new. Public investment in gateway treatments should be considered to reinforce the brand identified for the town and stimulate private investment in the corridor consistent with the new brand.

Next steps for bringing gateway treatments to the planning area should include: identify appropriate locations for new signage, prepare design concepts, reach out to local property owners for easements, develop construction documents, and identify available funding sources.



# Spotlight on: Long-Term Financial Stability

Simply stated: attractive building architecture and good site design sells, and sells at a premium, which increases total assessed values for neighborhoods, shopping centers, business parks, and mixed-use areas and the real property taxes they generate for the town. Emphasizing community character in Garner, and increasing minimum building architecture and site design standards to instill a unique brand or identity for the town, has the potential to increase total assessed values in the future.

Some design considerations that promote community character may also have direct impacts on the efficiency of providing town services. For example, some communities find smaller minimum lot sizes increase lot values while lowering infrastructure costs, which results in higher net real property tax revenue for the local government. Other communities observe a premium paid for buildings or lots sold in an area with a strong locational brand or sense of place, which translates to higher total assessed values for the tax roll because assessed value is calculated as a portion of the market (transaction) value.

Below are three topics to consider for improving Garner's overall financial stability when 1) contemplating town-led capital investments in the public realm, 2) deciding whether or not to require high-quality site design, open space, or building architecture for a site or concept plan, or 3) considering the merits of land use mix and development intensity for a private development application.

## Value Capture

The term "value capture" for town planning purposes refers to a belief that local governments or developers can recover some, or in some cases all, of the costs associated with providing public infrastructure or amenities in a specific location because the value of nearby land or real estate increases as a result of the investment. Capturing the value increase from proximity to the investment area generates additional (and reoccurring) tax revenue for the local government and increases sale

or rent prices for the developer to offset the costs of the improvement.

An article published by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) in 2020 (see Note #1) quantified the value capture added for residential development located

near a passive or active park. Citing thirty-three case studies, the authors concluded a premium of eight to ten percent on total assessed value was reasonable as a guide – especially for homes located within 500 to 600 feet of the park. A larger park was generally associated with higher premiums in the case studies. Premiums associated with multifamily buildings or small-lot single-family homes were higher compared to large-lot, single-family homes because nearby access to public open space was deemed highly-desirable by homeowners without large front or rear yards for private open space.

A separate study of residential neighborhoods in Austin, Texas (see Note #2) by researchers from Texas A&M University found a one percent increase in walkability score for a place translated into a \$1,329 increase in total assessed property value. A one percent increase in sidewalk density for a place translated into a \$785 increase in total assessed property value.

Other studies and reports have been published documenting increased values observed in mixed-use developments that are focused on creating vibrant, pedestrian-friendly destinations with a mix of complementary land uses and public spaces. The experiences created for visitors using high-quality and well-thought-out site design, building architecture, and public amenities generally creates desirability for the development and increases total assessed values for homeowners and businesses located within it. Capturing the value increase for properties in desirable locations of town generates additional (and reoccurring) tax revenue for the local government and increases sale or rent prices for the developer to offset the costs of the improvement.

## (Re)development Intensity and Efficient Infrastructure Service Areas

One factor that increases the total assessed value for a parcel is its (re)development potential, which includes the land uses and development intensities programmed for the property. Increasing development potential on a property may significantly increase tax production and the amount of taxes collected for a parcel. Local governments typically update total assessed value for a property at the completion of a construction project, which generates additional revenue for the local government immediately without raising tax rates.

Communities may also experience efficiencies through density when it comes to providing public facilities and services. Certain economies of scale result in cost advantages that are realized in smaller service areas that use capacity fully before extending services to new areas. Cost per unit decreases in these areas, which creates a direct

monetary benefit to the service provider and grows net revenue potential for the local government. The combination of increased tax production and reduced service costs create a strong argument for increasing development density and the mix of uses allowed in specific areas of the community (i.e., the activity centers presented in Chapter 2).

## Active Property Values

Generally speaking, an active property that is well-maintained creates higher total assessed value, and thus more tax revenue to the local government, compared to an inactive or declining property. To this end, some communities are proactively evaluating their development activity and its quality in town, and identifying quickly locations in decline as candidates for beautification grants or infill development and redevelopment initiatives. Reinvesting in these properties eliminates potential blight in a community and maintains strong property values, which generates strong reoccurring real property taxes for the town.



**Note #1:** The information presented was summarized from an article “How Much Impact Do Parks Have on Property Values?” published in NRPA Magazine on March 26, 2020. The author was John L. Crompton, Ph.D. from Texas A&M University.

**Note #2:** The information presented for Austin, Texas was summarized from an article “Assessing Benefits of Neighborhood Walkability to Single-Family Property Values, A Spatial Hedonic Study in Austin, Texas” published in the Journal of Planning Education and Research in 2015. The authors were Wei Li and Kenneth Joh from Texas A&M University. (Walkability = the ability to safely walk to services and amenities within a reasonable distance, usually defined as a walk of thirty minutes or less. [Planetizen Website, 2023]. The study in Austin, Texas used a web application, Walk Score, to quantify the walkability of residential neighborhoods. It can be accessed at [www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com).)