

Growing with Nature

From Sprawl to Stewardship
Agrihoods and Conservation Villages

Georgia Planning Association Conference 2026

Jon Tuley | Kimley-Horn
Daron “Farmer D” Joffe | Farmer D & Co.
Greg Ramsey | Village Habitat Design

Kimley»Horn



Farmer D&Co.



THE CHALLENGE

Why the Pattern of Growth Matters

Georgia is growing.

The pattern we choose will shape its land, communities and quality of life for generations.

Farmland under threat

Georgia is among the states projected to lose the most farmland to development by 2040.

800,000

acres of Georgia farmland could be lost to suburban, urban and low-density conversion by 2040

≈ 10% of the state's farmland

American Farmland Trust · Farms Under Threat 2040

Why planners should care



Protecting farmland keeps food production close to home and sustains the farmers who feed our communities.



Healthy farms and forests absorb rainfall, filter runoff and protect the water our communities depend on.



Once farmland is developed, it rarely returns—taking rural character and opportunities for future farmers with it.



Walkable communities give children, seniors and everyone in between more freedom to move, connect and belong.

The problem is not growth. It is the pattern of growth.

CONVENTIONAL SPRAWL



fragmented land • disconnected uses • more infrastructure per household

VILLAGE CONSERVATION



connected landscape • compact mixed-use village • shared infrastructure • preserved rural character

Familiar models, a more complete community

Conservation Villages combine useful elements of established approaches and extend them.

CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION

Cluster homes Protect open land

A foundation for reducing land consumption
and fragmentation

Increases village density and preservation, daily
destinations, housing choice or funded
stewardship

FARMS AND GARDENS

Grow food and build relationships

Places for participation, learning and local
food

Does not by itself shape the wider development
pattern

CONSERVATION VILLAGE

Integrate land and village life

Connected conservation with walkable,
mixed-use neighborhoods

Add mixed-income housing, local enterprise and
lasting stewardship

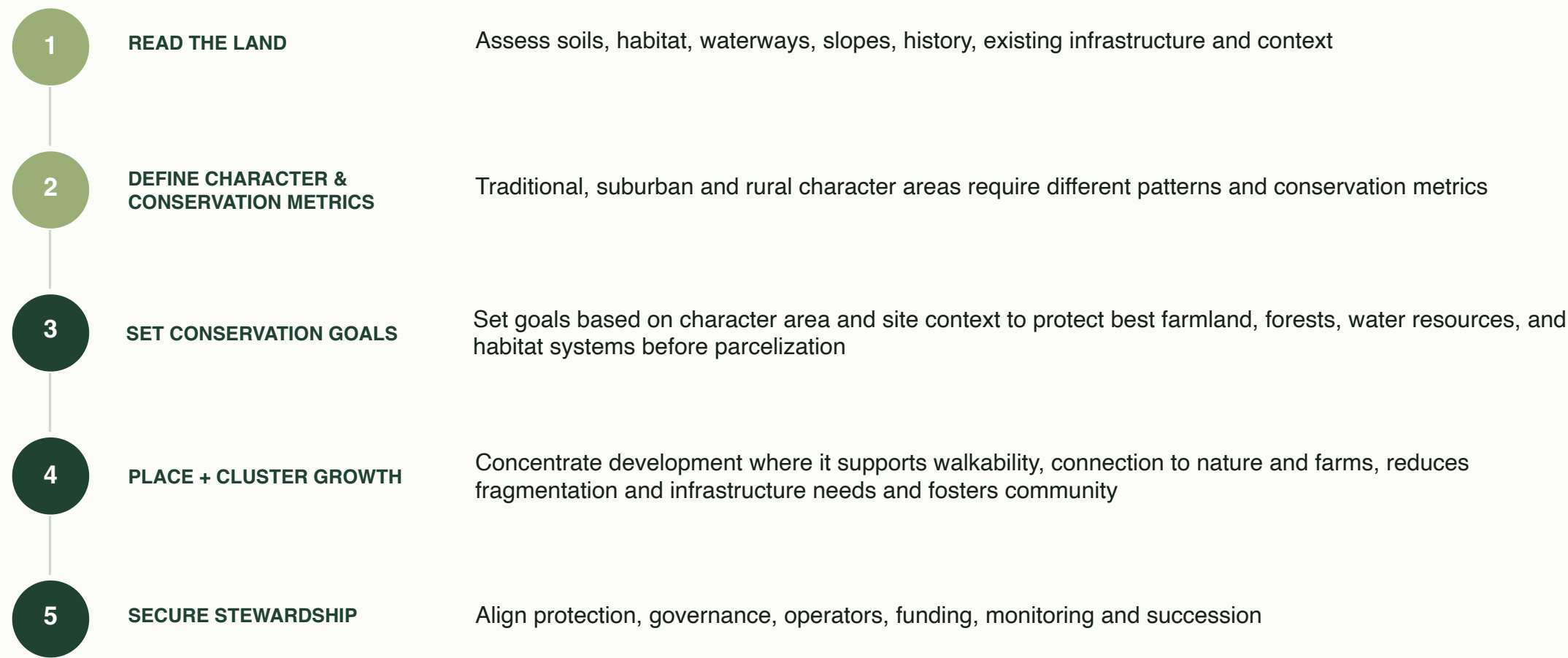
THE METHOD

How Conservation Villages Work

Conservation and Character First.
Designed for walkability, stewardship, and long-term village life.

Conservation determines the plan

Reverse the usual sequence: start with understanding the best land to preserve before deciding where development belongs.



Three Essentials of a Conservation Village

A simple framework for protecting land and clustering growth

01

CONSERVE + STEWARD THE LAND

Protect connected forest and farmland with conservation metrics based on character areas beyond required buffers and 100 year flood plain. Fund long-term stewardship and place conservation easements on preserved land.

02

MIXED-USE, MIXED-INCOME VILLAGES

Cluster homes and local enterprise beside farms and forests. Include farmer housing, gathering spaces and career opportunities.

03

WALK, BIKE + TRANSIT CONNECTIONS

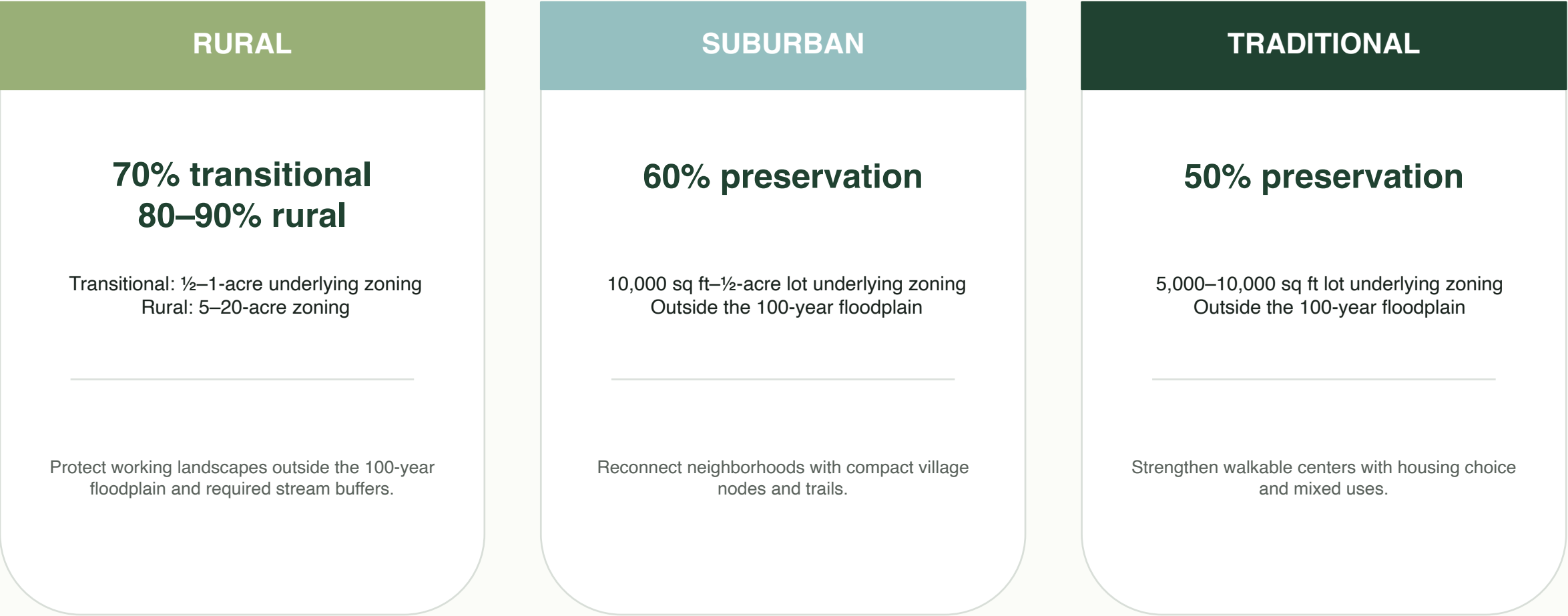
Daily needs within a ¼-mile walk. Link 1–2-mile pedestrian recreation routes and local shuttles, with secured access easements.

THE MAIN PLATE

Conserved land + compact village form carry most of the value.

Preservation targets respond to character

Density incentives paired with conservation. Targets require local calibration.



The payoff: more complete communities, less fragmented land

The appeal of village life—walkability, nature, community and choice—can also create a stronger conservation outcome.

LAND + WATER

- Farmland + habitat preserved
- Watershed protection
- Soil health + biodiversity
- Climate resilience

COMMUNITY + HEALTH

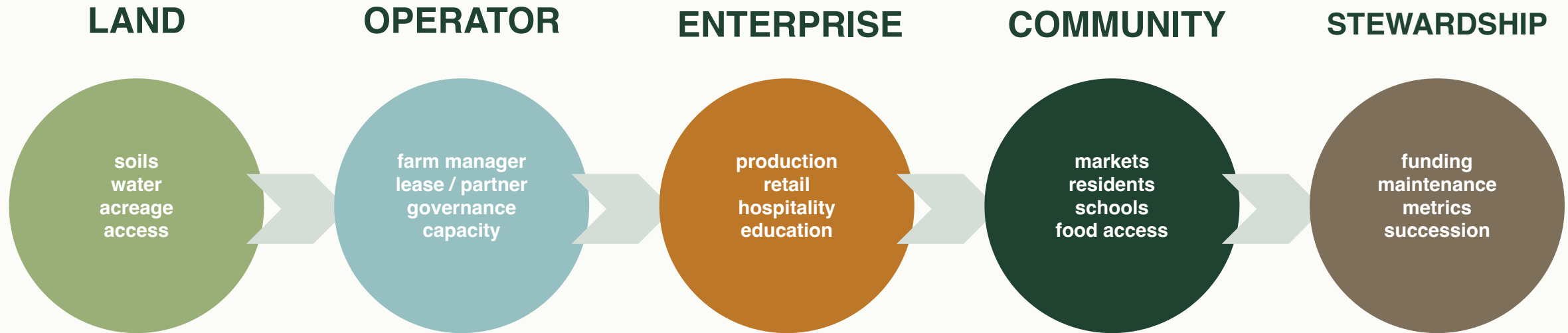
- Walkability + nature access
- Healthy food access
- Social connection
- Education + stewardship

PLACE + ECONOMY

- Rural + local character
- Mixed-income housing choice
- Local farm + small business
- Infrastructure efficiency

Preservation is not enough. Protected Land Needs Stewardship

Working farms, forests and natural systems need operators, infrastructure, markets, funding and long-term stewardship.



A viable conservation community is a living operating system—not just a land plan.

THE GEORGIA PATHWAY

From Farm Belts to Villages

State and small-town farm belts
County conservation districts and suburban infill

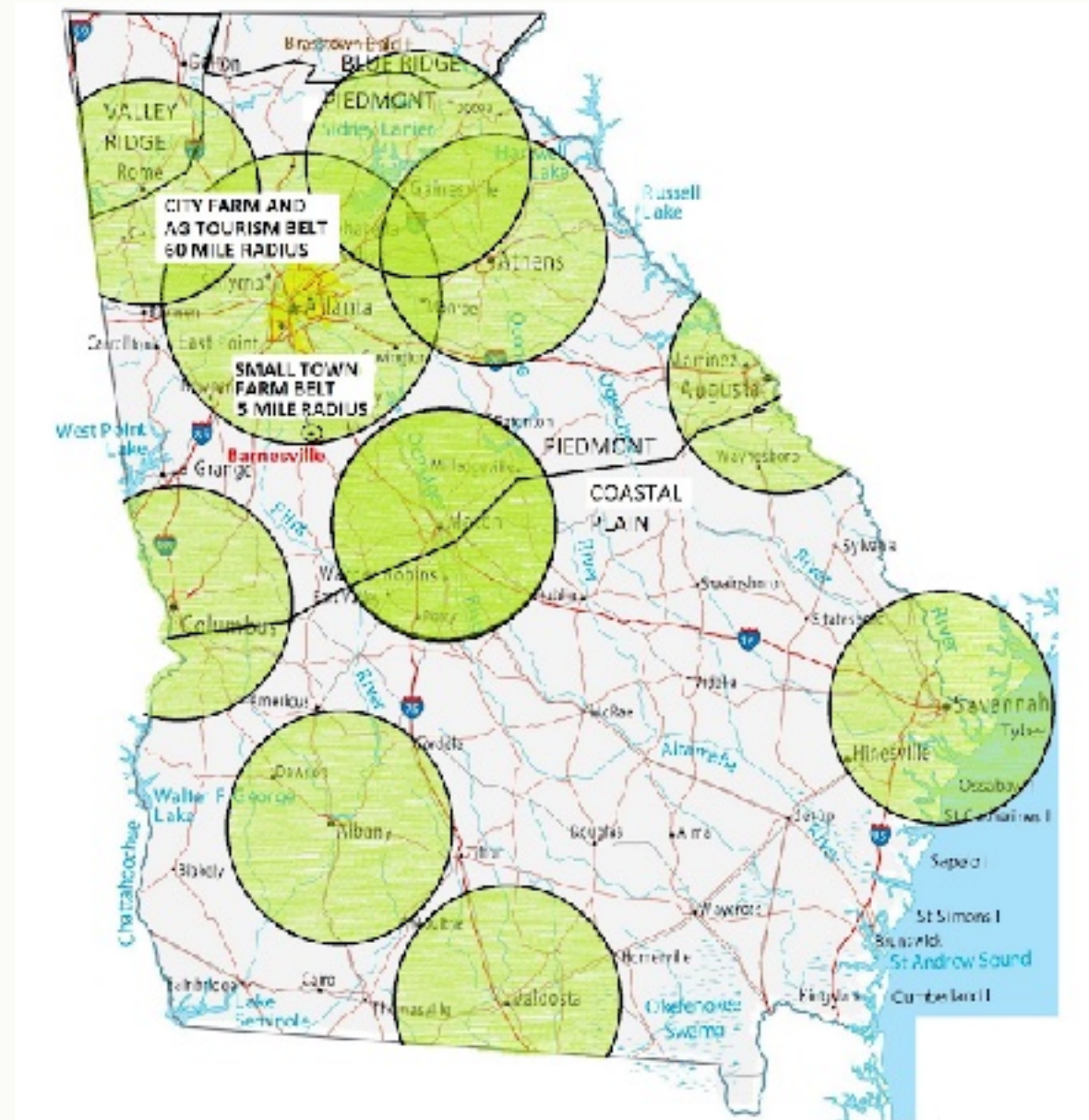
1 | State Farm Belt and policy

Protecting farmland, sustaining rural economies and guiding growth through planning and ongoing work with the Georgia Senate Agriculture Committee.

PROPOSED FARM BELT FRAMEWORK

- PRIORITIZE** Identify farmland under the greatest development pressure.
- INCENTIVIZE** Explore conservation incentives and density bonuses that make preservation viable.
- POLICY** Develop policies to encourage preservation of quality farmland around cities and small towns
- GUIDE GROWTH** Concentrate growth in towns and new villages. Combine land protection with farm activation. Optimize existing infrastructure.
- BUILD ACCESS** Support next-generation farmers, education, markets and local food systems.

Proposal: 60-mile radius around metropolitan centers

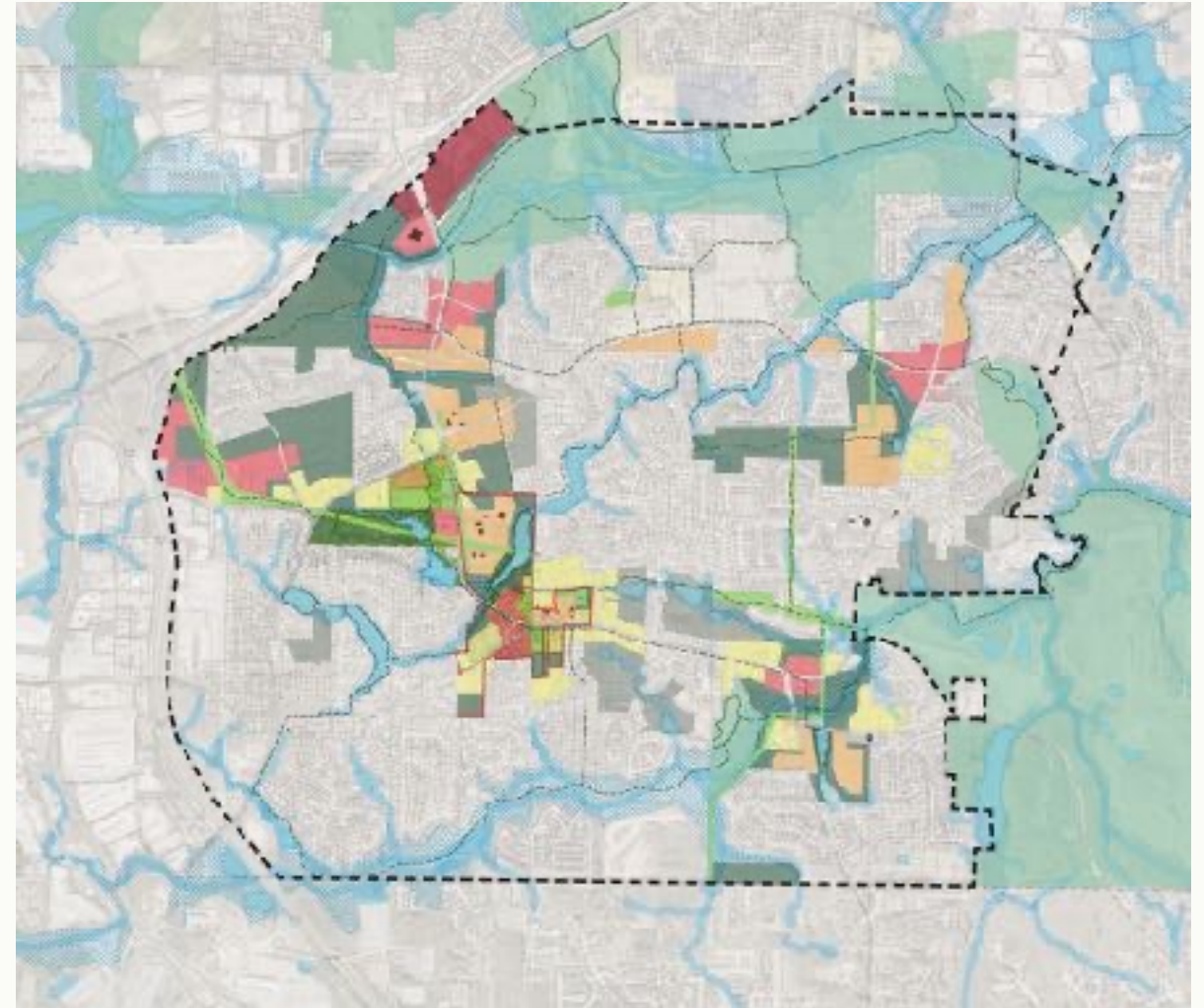


2 | County scale: DeKalb VCD

Planning Objective

Create a Village Conservation District by connecting remaining rural pockets with walkable villages and surrounding subdivisions

- Map 100–200+ acre forest and farm remnants (rural pockets) within suburban county
- Within each rural pocket, preserve 70% forest/farm land areas with clustered neighborhood villages located along thoroughfares
- Connect neighborhood villages to existing forest and farm preserves and subdivisions with pedestrian easements.
- Translate the district plan into zoning, incentives and permanent stewardship



Pink: neighborhood centers | Green: remaining forest land
Bouldercrest Corridor — conceptual development and conservation

3 | Honeywood / Barnesville

Barnesville concept: protect and connect working farm with clustered village to a proposed 5-mile small-town Farm Belt.

A small-town application



Conceptual town connection; pedestrian/bike link proposed.



Honeywood Farm

A landowner-led model for turning family farmland into legacy: 95% preservation for farming and habitat, diversified livestock and market gardens, trails, farm store and cafe, event venue and value-added farm enterprise.



Pendergrast Farm

Suburban infill with conservation

CONVENTIONAL PLAN → CONSERVATION CONCEPT



VILLAGE CONCEPT RENDERING



60%
PRESERVATION

20 homes, an urban farm, woodlands and trails

Cluster homes around working land and shared amenities.

East Lake Commons

Cohousing and a working farm | Suburban infill

COMMUNITY PLAN



BUILT COMMUNITY + GAIA GARDENS



60%

PRESERVATION

Gaia Gardens connects food production with community life

Shared spaces and resident participation support stewardship.

Serenbe / Chatt Hills

Village life in a rural landscape | Rural transitional

SERENBE | BUILT FARM COMMUNITY



RICO CROSSROADS | SKETCH CONCEPT



70%
PRESERVATION

Homes, farm, businesses and trails among forests and meadows

Connect daily destinations and nature through village development.

A local VCC resource group and first pilot

Bring planners, landowners, farmers, conservation partners and developers together around a shared vision and identify opportunities.

01

DISCOVER

Choose place + scale

State, county district, small town, or suburban infill. Identify character area, map land and connections.

02

DIAGNOSE

Find the gaps

Assess zoning, physical and social infrastructure, identify potential VCC appropriate districts, parcels and key stakeholders.

03

SCENARIO

Test alternatives

Develop high level preliminary concepts for VCD and VCC opportunities and engage community stakeholders in educational workshops.

04

ROADMAP

Move to action

Work with landowners, developers, investors and other key stakeholders to work together to activate a VCC project in the region.

**Conserve the land.
Cluster the growth.
Reconnect people with place.**

Q&A

What could this look like in your community?

Kimley»Horn

www.kimley-horn.com


Farmer D & Co.

www.farmerd.com


**VILLAGE
HABITAT
DESIGN**

www.villagehabitat.com