

A VISION FOR MABLETON

The story behind the Mableton Improvement Coalition and the call for intelligent planning for quality growth and conservation





TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
Our History.....	3
Our Vision	3
Our Community.....	4
Development Standards	5
Corridor 1	5
Corridors 2 & 3.....	6
Residential Development	6
Commercial Redevelopment.....	7
Schools & Other Local Infrastructure	7
Parks, Recreation and Other Community Activity Centers.....	7
Annexation and Self-Governance	8
Conclusions	8
MIC’s Principles for Sound Development.....	10



As an advocate and voluntary civic association representing members and homeowners of Mableton, the Mableton Improvement Coalition ("MIC") hereby provides our vision for the future of Mableton to the Cobb County Board of Commissioners, potential developers and other interested parties.

Our History

Like many similar organizations, MIC's roots grew from neighborhoods standing up to fight unsuitable zoning applications submitted by developers looking to build denser than appropriate subdivisions in areas with already overcrowded schools, roads and other essential infrastructure elements. Additionally, it seemed that many developers had targeted Mableton as ripe for poor quality development in terms of types of business, quality of structures or willingness to meet the needs of neighbors. As a result of these growing numbers of zoning applications occurring in 2001, the Mableton Improvement Coalition was formed to be a single voice on behalf of residents to the various parties involved in requesting and granting zoning applications, to truly bringing "community thinking" to an incorporated area of Cobb County.

At the same time, MIC recognizes something that many other civic groups have taken years to recognize - that being a "community" is about more than just fighting zoning, it is about creating an environment that encourages residents to make Mableton there home, not just a stopping place. It is about inspiring residents to become active in their community. It is about creating ways to promote local business and invites new business to areas that had been neglected for years. It is about improving the public schools so that residents didn't feel the need to move once their children reached school age. It is about changing perceptions, that Mableton is a convenient, friendly, up-and-coming community, not a run-down, tired area.

So our purpose for the entire community of Mableton came to be: to promote intelligent planning for quality growth and conservation; to protect and promote the best interests of the residents; to promote and strive for the improvement and betterment of all public facilities and services by pressuring County government in a cooperative manner; to promote and encourage a better sense of community and civic spirit; to foster good will and friendship between and among all the residents; to collaborate with other civic and public organizations for the general welfare and benefit of the entire community of Mableton.

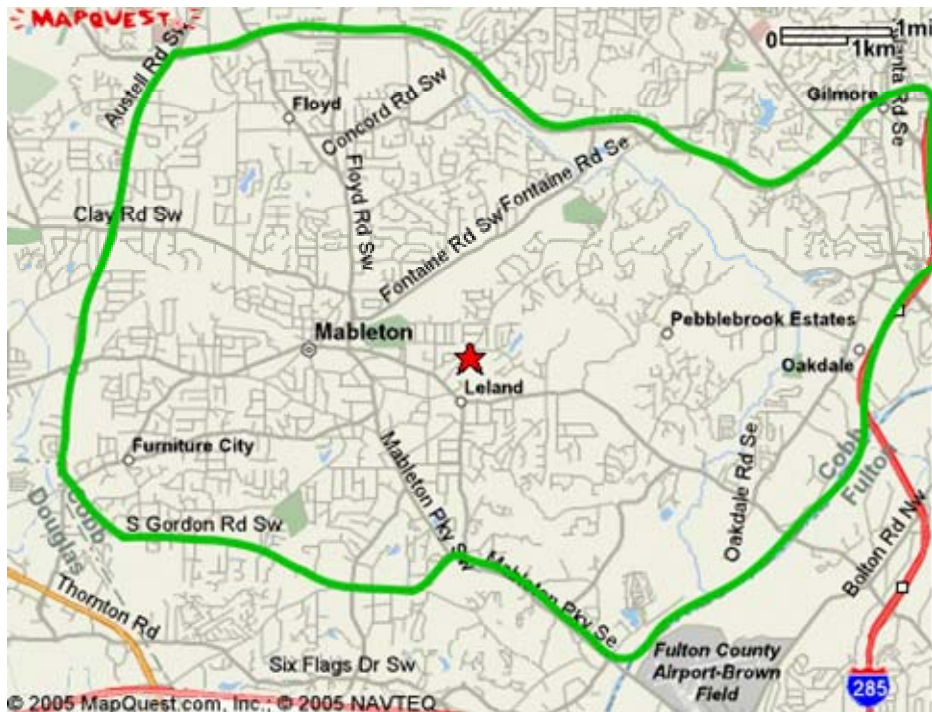
Our Vision

MIC has a vision to ignite a passion in the hearts and minds of residents of Mableton to improve their own community, not just accept "what is" as "what can be." All communities need a purpose and a focus. This document outlines MIC's purpose and focus as well as explains how we anticipate facilitating positive change in Mableton.



Our Community

Mableton consists of much of the southeastern quadrant of unincorporated Cobb County. To date, MIC has focused its activities on zoning applications, schools, economic development and community affairs within an area roughly bounded by the East West Connector & South Cobb Drive to the north, I-285 and the Chattahoochee River to the east, South Gordon Rd to the South, and Austell Rd to the west.





Development Standards

MIC has established the following initial, voluntary standards for developers to use in contemplating new developments in Mableton. These standards focus on three primary major arteries and all the local corridors intersecting and interconnecting those arteries. Ultimately we want these voluntary stipulations to become mandatory, similar to what the East Cobb Civic Association's did for their area in the early 1980's.

Corridor 1 is Floyd Rd between the Hicks Rd and Veterans Memorial Highway and including the four corners of that intersection). Corridor 2 is the Mableton Parkway from Veterans Memorial to the Cobb County border. Corridor 3 is Veterans Memorial Highway from the Cobb County line to Austell Rd.

Corridor 1

Floyd Rd is the main collector from the East West Connector to Veterans Memorial Highway (the primary "central Cobb" and "south Cobb" thoroughfares) and the main driveway into historic downtown Mableton, the Mable House Amphitheater and the new regional library. MIC would like to see the same vision sought for downtown historic Mableton applied to this corridor. That is one of a pedestrian friendly, old-town "village" style. This style relates to any new development (retail and other) throughout this area, not just in "Historic Downtown Mableton," which has been the primary focus of Cobb County to date.

We would like to see the look and feel tie into one of two architecture styles:

Style 1 "Traditional Southern Colonial Style" (Similar to Mable House Cultural Center)

- White siding with accents of brick or stacked stone
- Porches and porticos
- Gabled roof lines
- Independent buildings (no in-line construction)



Style 2 "Georgetown" (similar to the Mable House Amphitheater)

- 4 sided, dark brick with Georgetown accents and effects
- Gabled roofs
- Covered entrances
- Minimal in-line construction



In both architectural styles, we would also like to see the following stipulations:

1. "Close to street" entrances with parking in rear or back
2. Ground-based, monument signage not to exceed 5 feet (consistent with look and feel of architecture)
3. Fountains or sculpture whenever possible
4. Oversized sidewalks (tying into the Silver Comet Trail plan)
5. Considerable green space with seasonal landscaping as applicable
6. Pedestrian and bicycle accessibility
7. Establishments to be "Class A" type (i.e. restaurants, professional offices, boutiques, retail)



Corridors 2 & 3

We recognize that Veterans Memorial Highway and Mableton Parkway are more likely to see higher density developments than Floyd Rd. However, we would like to see Cobb County and developers approach all new development with a similar "community" approach. We envision mixed-use development in all cases where pure single-family residences or pure commercial use is not planned.

We envision the style to transition from the Floyd Rd intersection (which would follow the style of the Floyd Rd corridor) outward toward a style more in line with the Cobb County Fire Station #27 at 477 Veterans Memorial Highway or Mount Harmony Baptist Church, similarly located on Veterans Memorial, (from a standpoint of color of brick and architectural style):

1. Dark, 4 sided brick, with brick accents
2. Gabled roofs, or at a minimum gabled facades hiding flat roofs
3. Off-setting facades (no in-line construction)
4. Oversized sidewalks
5. Considerable green space with seasonal landscaping as applicable
6. Ground-based, monument signage not to exceed 10 feet in height (no pole mounted signage)



We also envision that all development and zoning variances are accomplished intelligently, not haphazardly (i.e. residential development mixed in with industrial mixed in with commercial) or strip malls built on the back of the property and small out-parcel stores built in the front hiding the back stores.

Residential Development

We believe that the future land use map, if enforced and modified where appropriate based on recent zoning variances, is for the most part, correct for Mableton from a residential standpoint. We envision a quality mixture of various density and price point residential development built in a community concept (sidewalks, interconnectivity to retail, access to bike trails, etc). However, there are certain limitations to medium and high density developments that must be considered. Medium and high density multi-family attached developments built in or adjoining existing, single-family residential areas are not appropriate. Medium or high density, multi-family attached developments built without direct access to a major arterial road are not appropriate. Medium and high density multi-family attached developments along the main thoroughfare frontage property must maintain the architectural standards set forth below and should be hidden from view as much as possible through appropriate landscaping. Mixed-use developments (mixture of low and medium/high density) should be considered as a primary option as opposed to net-new pure medium or high density developments. In mixed-use developments, commercial uses should dominate the frontage property. If and when attached homes are visible from the main thoroughfares, they need to comply with the following stipulations:

1. No more than 4 units in a row before a break;
2. Minimum of 2,300 sq. ft. per unit livable space;
3. Two car garages (residential parking on street is not appropriate);
4. No more than 15% hardiplank siding visible from the main road (the rest of the visible surfaces to be brick, stone, or other hard surface materials);
5. Considerable landscaping to buffer the main thoroughfare as much as possible;



6. Green space throughout the complex, not just on the unbuildable areas (i.e. floodplains), with seasonal landscaping at front entrance if possible;
7. Maximum 10% leased or rented units and no leases less than 1 year;
8. Mandatory homeowner's association, and conformance with the requirements of the Georgia Condominium Act (O.C.G.A §CGA 44-3-70, et. seq.);
9. All other stipulations as previously mentioned

Commercial Redevelopment

We believe that the future of Mableton resides in the redevelopment of existing commercial structures. We support any efforts Cobb County can provide to create an environment in which developers are encouraged to redevelop land versus build on previously undeveloped land. Additionally we encourage Cobb County to pass commercial standard requirements that are retroactive and to be enforced within 5 years. In this we mean, businesses that have been "grandfathered in" over the years and don't have to comply with current commercial standards (paved parking, curbs and gutters, water detention facilities, sign ordinances, etc) should be required to meet minimum standards applied to new businesses. Without these new ordinances, Mableton and many other parts of the County, risk turning away viable new businesses that have to compete at much higher costs than older businesses that don't have to meet current standards.

Schools & Other Local Infrastructure

MIC encourages Cobb County officials and our local state-elected delegation to proactively encourage modification or revocation of existing state laws, as applied under the Steinberg Act, that prohibit local jurisdictions from considering local infrastructure concerns in their contemplation of zoning application. We believe the Steinberg Act has helped create the current overcrowding situations we find in our schools and on our roads with no concerns for the needs of local residents. We believe that as developers continue to request higher density zoning options, our County officials must have the ability to consider infrastructure as a reason to deny a zoning variance petition.

Additionally, MIC encourages our local state-elected delegation to introduce legislation requiring schools to apply for zoning variances as any other business. Currently, the local school boards can acquire land and build schools with minimal or no input from the County zoning officers or community residents. The schools need the right to grow, but the community should be able to offer insights into where would be most appropriate.

Parks, Recreation and Other Community Activity Centers

Recently, Mableton and south Cobb have benefited from several County/State/Federally funded activity/recreation centers including the South Cobb Aquatic Center, the regional library, the Mable House Amphitheater, the Mable House Cultural Center, the Silver Comet Trail and Heritage Park. And for these, we are appreciative.

Furthermore, we believe that with the addition of a few other key, activity centers, Mableton could be uniquely positioned as one of the leading recreation centers in metro-Atlanta, significantly increasing sales tax revenues from this part of Cobb County. This will only occur through the collaborative efforts of the County and State governments, the organizations that run these facilities, civic groups like MIC, community residents and the local business establishment. This would be a similar effort put forth in East Cobb with the purchasing of land and development of



the East Cobb Park. Multiple disparate groups worked together to bring that dream to fruition. The same can happen in Mableton and this would benefit not only local residents but all of Cobb County.

As mentioned, there are several additional environments that could be added to the Mableton cultural experience to the benefit of all of Cobb County. Specifically these include the Nickajack Greenway the Johnson River Line Park and the viable historic elements existing in these areas. Currently, Cobb County already owns many acres of these areas, however due to budgetary constraints, the County is not in a position to solely develop these areas and turn them into true public use lands. However, their distinct history, their geography within the county and the draw they could provide to families and history aficionados can't be overlooked. We believe that if the county, state and other groups as mentioned earlier collaborated, the preservation and renovation of these historic areas could become a reality.



Further, there are NO public playgrounds in Mableton and only one, very old, baseball field. It is unfathomable that an area with as many families and as many natural environments for such, has none of the above. The addition of the historic areas listed above with preservation of some of the lands for historic purposes and the renovation of other parts for true public use as mentioned here solves to very tough dilemmas simultaneously and again uniquely positions Mableton as a distinct recreation destination in metro-Atlanta.

Annexation and Self-Governance

We believe that Mableton's ideal future depends upon it remaining as part of unincorporated Cobb County. Any and all attempts on the part of any local municipality to annex any part of Mableton will be met with the most severe opposition. We encourage Cobb County and our local state-elected delegation to take a proactive stance to remove the restrictions on county governments to oppose annexation of unincorporated areas by local municipalities.

Additionally, MIC is interested in the concept proposed in the 2005 state legislation in Senate bill 605 (introduced by Senator Mitch Seabaugh) that would grant unincorporated communities, like Mableton, partial municipal powers as long as they meet certain criteria in order to prevent runaway growth and annexation.

Conclusions

We believe that Mableton has a very real opportunity to continue the momentum we have witnessed over the past few years in terms of our revitalization. However, this future could easily be diminished if the community does not work together to continue that advancement. As Mableton continues to age and new community's and neighborhoods develop within our borders that aren't focused on quality growth, Mableton could easily see its opportunities dwindle then disappear. It is incumbent on the residents to not let that happen and to insure that we lead the charge for intelligent planning for quality growth and preservation. To that end, we provide the following Principles for Sound Growth that will help everybody understand what it will take to continue the momentum and turn Mableton around into a bright city for the future.





MIC's Principles for Sound Development

Principle 1: Safeguard the urban & rural quality of Mableton by providing a quality mixture of all housing densities by utilizing similar development standards regarding architecture, accessibility and focus on the community.

Mableton is at a crossroads. Historically, Mableton has been a much ignored part of Cobb County with many areas still seeming rural due to the very low density zoning. Being ignored has unfortunately also meant being neglected. Much of Mableton is showing signs of age, poor zoning and a long drought on quality development. Mableton was viewed as an inexpensive place to develop, bringing a large number of lower income housing, apartments, and industries that have since become neglected. This neglect is now apparent on many of the major arteries through Mableton. Today, developers and realtors see the potential of the area due to proximity to 3 major interstates, downtown Atlanta and the airport. While this "potential" brings a great deal of excitement and opportunity, if left unchecked, growth can easily get out of control, be of diminished quality with higher and higher densities and ultimately spoil the sense of community we are working to build.

Principle 2: Preserve historic assets.

Historic buildings and sites are irreplaceable assets that distinguish this region from many others. One of the most critical steps our community can take is to maintain the 'areas' distinct identity by promoting economic development while preserving its history. We need to move forward intelligently without forgetting the past.

Principle 3: Build to create enduring value and beauty.

The quality and visual appeal of individual projects — whether residential commercial, industrial or public — affect current and future private property values throughout the community. Well-designed, well-sited structures enhance Mableton's beauty, increasing the value of neighboring properties and the community as a whole. As Mableton continues to expand to accommodate new residents and businesses, public and private investors should be encouraged to build structures that will add enduring value and beauty to the community.

Principle 4: Enhance the economic vitality of Mableton through ongoing reinvestment in the downtown core and surrounding areas.

Ongoing public and private investment in the Historic Downtown Mableton core and the surrounding areas is critical to maintaining and enhancing the economic vitality of Mableton. The nature of that investment can be small, like landscaping or community clean-up days, or large, like constructing new structures. Small or large, these public and private investments build a community's economic strength.



Principle 5: Anticipate and address the housing needs of all community residents.

Mableton's growing appeal as a place to live and do business has drawn new residents and wealth to the area. Property values, average personal income and the cost of living have all risen in most of Mableton. At the same time, the diversification of local economies throughout the region has created demand for workers at all wage levels. As Mableton's economy grows, we need to anticipate and address the housing needs of all residents to ensure that employees of local businesses have convenient access to housing they can afford and that our senior citizens can remain in the community without fear of being forced out to make room for development or priced out that they can't afford to stay.

Principle 6: Conserve and showcase Mableton's sense of community and conservation.

In order for Mableton to grow into a truly desirable place to live, work and play, we need to protect our environment; continue to build the sense of community by bringing civic, private and public groups together; and, work to leverage our local assets. Mableton has long suffered from multiple pitfalls: the community lacks a focal point; has an embarrassingly dated central core, and local civic and business groups seldom if ever collaborate to bring dreams to reality. This must change.

Principle 7: Improve the economic productivity of Mableton.

For many people, Mableton is a place to sleep. The lack of quality businesses forces people to go elsewhere to work, shop, eat and play. We must create environments that attract new, quality businesses to Mableton. The more commercial, retail and industrial businesses that call Mableton home, the more residents can meet all of their needs here and won't feel the need to patronize areas outside of Mableton. This will only come through a mixture of private and public initiatives.

Principle 8: Improve the local schools.

Much of Mableton's recent residential growth comes from first time home buyers. Some view Mableton as a great investment, an area where property values will continue to improve. These home buyers come with a 5 year plan: buy first home, stay a few years, sell for a profit and move to an area with better schools. Mableton's success will happen only when residents feel comfortable raising their children here, and that will happen only when the schools improve. Currently the schools (at all levels) serving Mableton are among the worst performing in Cobb County and the State. This has to change. This change will only happen when: residents get active in the schools and the community and forcing the School Board focuses efforts on improving South Cobb. Additionally, state prohibitions on County governments contemplating the impacts of business growth based on local infrastructure must be reversed. Counties must be able to consider the impact that a development will have on the local infrastructure when contemplating a zoning modification request.



Principle 9: Expand local transportation options to reduce traffic congestion and the intensity of public dependence on automobiles.

Because Mableton has long been considered a “bedroom” community, little has been done to create transportation alternatives to private vehicles. That mentality has started to shift with the opening of the Silver Comet Trail and County ordinances for sidewalks with all new zoning requests. We must foster and expand the idea that residents can feel safe and comfortable walking or biking throughout all parts of Mableton. Every new development, residential or commercial, should provide pedestrian and bicycle interconnectivity through sidewalks, pathways and trails. Cobb County should expand the sidewalk ordinances to include wider sidewalks set back further from the roads, and landscaped to make it more inviting. Additionally, the Silver Comet Trail needs to be expanded to include feeder trails down the major arteries into the core of Mableton. All of this can come through a mixture of private and public means.