AMERICUS SUMTER COUNTY

Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard/Highway 19 Corridor Report

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CREDITS

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd./Highway 19 Corridor is a major gateway into and out of the greater Americus-Sumter community. The MLK Corridor often acts as the community’s first and last impression. Currently, the county section of the MLK Corridor has a distinct rural character, feel and charm. The city section was developed in a post 1950’s automotive centric fashion with a wide range of building designs, site plans, and competing signage. Developing a type of corridor overlay, over time, will act as a visual unifier, improving the aesthetics and safety of the corridor. Ideally, the county section of Highway 19 will remain rural in its appearance along the roadway. Likewise, the city section will continue to be redeveloped, but in a fashion that evokes the charm of Americus’ historic district.

To achieve an aesthetically pleasant and safe corridor, it is essential to create two distinct character areas: (1) a county section; and (2) a city section.

1. A county section that is rural and in tune with the natural environment. In the south, the project boundaries of this section are from Little Bear Branch Road to the city limit; in the north, from the city limit to Honeysuckle Hill Road. The county overlay section will be developed so that it could be applied from the county line to the city limits.

2. A city section that is commercially focused. The project boundaries of this section are Highway 19 within the city limits.

Fanning recognizes that for the report recommendation to be implemented local decisions will need to be made on how to proceed. The report is designed so that both the local attorneys for the city and county would draft the final legal ordinance as either overlays or amendments to their current zoning codes.

Figure 1: the map above shows Highway 19 in Sumter County and the City of Americus.
The vision for Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd./U.S. Highway 19 Corridor is one that has been developed through a collaborative effort of citizens of Americus, community leaders, Fanning Institute, and the Archway Partnership. The Americus vision encompasses both a beautiful and safe corridor that also helps travelers feel a sense of arrival once they get to Americus.

Simple improvements include greening of the medians, such as planting crape myrtles and other plants allowed by the Georgia Department of Transportation. Pages 6 and 7 illustrate how this simple improvement can have a great visual impact on the corridor.

To improve safety and pedestrian access along the corridor, sidewalks should be added. A green buffer with trees should separate the sidewalk from the main road to improve safety and provide shade for pedestrians on the sidewalk. Greater connectivity through sidewalks will also improve access to businesses along the Corridor. Illustrations on pages 8, 9, and 10 show the addition of sidewalks and trees.

Also included in the vision for the corridor is appropriate infill design. The hospital is a major element of the corridor and has an appealing architectural style. Building on what could become a medical district, infill in this area should complement the character and architectural style of the hospital to produce a cohesive district. Illustrations on pages 8, 9, and 10 display appropriate infill for this area, along with sidewalks and trees along the corridor.

Lighting along the corridor can also be improved. The illustration on pages 8 and 10 show more attractive light poles with telephone wires buried underground.

Finally, additional landscaping in front of businesses will produce a more attractive business district. Curb cuts can be reduced to improve safety. The illustration on page 11 shows the improvement of one such property.
This median is easily improved by planting crape myrtles. Crape myrtles are a good choice because they are approved by the Georgia Department of Transportation and also add to the aesthetic appeal of the MLK Corridor.

Another example of the corridor from far away.

1. Median on the MLK, Jr. Corridor with Plantings (close-up view)

2. Median on the MLK, Jr. Corridor with Plantings (distant view)
4. Median Improvements

The illustration below shows this median after weeds have been removed from the concrete and crape myrtles have been planted in the center. The result is a cleaner, more beautiful corridor.
### 4. Sidewalk & Green Buffer

This illustration shows a new sidewalk along the corridor. A green buffer separates the sidewalk from the main thoroughfare. This gives pedestrians a sense of safety and provides a place for attractive plantings. Again, a crape myrtle is shown as a good choice. This tree also provides shade to pedestrians on the sidewalk. With better connectivity, pedestrians have better access to businesses along the corridor.

4 - 8 feet wide

### 5. Corner Infill

This illustration shows one example of appropriate infill for this corner. Across from the hospital, this infill should continue the architectural characteristics of the medical buildings. This building also faces the corner.
6. Medical Office Infill Design

This is an example of how infill could look on the corridor. The illustration above shows an office park that would be designed to match the architectural character of the existing hospital using the same materials and color palette.

The illustration to the right shows this property with a sidewalk, green buffer with trees, and landscaping separating the parking lot and the main thoroughfare.
The property shown above in the “Before” image has no sidewalk or landscaping. With these simple improvements illustrated in the image to the right, this property along the corridor is greatly improved.

The illustration to the left shows this property with appropriate infill, sidewalks with a green buffer, more attractive lighting, and landscaping in and around parking lots. Also, adjacent parking lots are shared to reduce the number of curb cuts.
The business shown above in the “Before” photograph has no landscaping and curb cuts that are confusing to drivers. By greening the parking lot with trees and reducing curb cuts, the property is now more attractive and safer to both pedestrians and drivers. Additionally, the parking spaces could be turned diagonally and entry and exit could be changed to one-way, therefore increasing safety even further.
This section of the corridor is important because it serves as a gateway from the bridge to Highway 19. Simple landscaping would really improve the overall appearance of this section.
The following illustrations show how the design guidelines may be applied (though there are many ways in which they may be applied that are not shown here, these are just examples).

**PARKING**

A landscape buffer strip at least ten (10) feet wide around parking areas, densely planted with shrubs and trees of a type that possesses growth characteristics of such a nature as to produce a dense, compact evergreen planting screen.

There shall be one (1) tree with a two and one-half (2-1/2) inch diameter planted for every eight (8) parking spaces in the parking lot.

Limited parking in the front is allowed, but parking at the sides and rear of the building is strongly encouraged.

Curb cuts shall be kept to a minimum to prevent problems with vehicular and pedestrian traffic and shall be shared between neighboring properties. Parking lots shall connect with adjacent parking lots.

Parking lots in excess of fifty (50) parking spaces shall incorporate pedestrian walkways between parking aisles that lead to the building’s entrance. Plantings shall be included on either side of the walkway.
CONNECTIVITY

All properties shall build sidewalks along the corridor. Development should strive for a pedestrian environment.

Connectivity

The illustrations above show appropriate sidewalk designs with plantings separating the street and sidewalk by a distance between fifteen (15) to thirty (30) feet.
SETBACKS

Setback means the distance from the right-of-way line of the street to the nearest point of a building; the building shall be out of the right-of-way.

(A, B, & C) Illustrating three options for appropriate setbacks:

There shall be a setback zero to fifty (0-50) feet from the edge of the road and landscaped buffers shall be used to separate structures from primary thoroughfares.

Structures shall front primary thoroughfares.

No structure other than signs shall be placed between the front property line and the building’s façade.
ORIENTATION AND SCALE

For corner lots, buildings shall be oriented towards both roads by addressing the corner as the primary façade and the minimum front yard setback shall be observed on both street frontages.

The proportions of a structure shall be such that a sense of human scale is established. That is, the size of architectural elements shall not be overpowering and shall relate to pedestrian circulation.

The illustration above shows appropriate orientation of a building facing the corner. The proportions of the buildings are at human scale, therefore inviting human circulation on sidewalks and crosswalks in the area.
**ROOF SHAPE**

Roof lines shall be articulated to provide visual interest and minimize large expanses. This may be accomplished through the use of gables, parapets, hip-roof design, or changes in the height of the roofline along the course of the building.

Offsetting a building’s front walls with a variety of depths also creates visual interest. Overhangs of sufficient depth and in proportion to the façade height can be important to roof form.

Flat roof designs generally should not be used unless concealed with another roof or other architectural element. Structures with a flat roof shall have a parapet along the roofline so that mechanical equipment on the roof is concealed on all sides of the structure.

The illustration above shows rooflines of adjacent buildings that vary in height and style, therefore creating visual interest.
MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT, UTILITIES, RECEPTACLES, ETC.

Any outdoor storage, utility services areas, or mechanical equipment must be screened by: a fence or wall of the minimum height of six feet, opaque and constructed of masonry, stone, wood or some other material approved in the permitting process.

Any dumpster, trash, grease or waste receptacle shall be located at the rear of the property. Any such receptacle shall not be visible from the public right-of-way and shall be enclosed (i.e., not seen from front, sides, or rear) by a wall.

APPROPRIATE SCREENING:

Mechanical equipment, dumpsters, HVAC systems, and utilities located at ground level shall be screened from pedestrian and vehicular traffic through use of fencing and vegetation. All fences used for screening shall be constructed using brick, wood, stone, or Hardiplank®.

SIGNAGE

Freestanding signs shall be no more than seven (7) feet tall and ten (10) feet wide and shall be a pedestal-type sign.

Appropriately scaled sign with downward facing illumination
The following signs in this section of the report are signs which are designed to reflect the rural character of Memorial Mile and inform travelers along the corridor about the existing businesses located along Memorial Mile.

The following businesses are located on Memorial Mile: Al’s Auto Care, Inc., Ernie’s Heating and Air Conditioning, Mobile Mechanic, Stanfield Electric, and Tom’s Construction.

The illustration to the right shows a singage concept that includes the blue star (a star often associated with war veterans) and rustic wood. These elements would be complemented by modern sign slots that display business names and could be interchanged when necessary.
MEMORIAL MILE SIGNS (CONTINUED)

Signage Options 2 and 3 are shown to the left and below. Like Option 1, the individual business slots can be interchanged.

Option 2: “Country Chic” signage concept with white painted wood and a magnolia emblem.

Option 3: “Americana” signage concept using red, white, and blue. This concept and color scheme is based on patriotism to honor the veterans for which the corridor is named.
Typically, signage along highways stands out and competes with the natural and built environment, creating visual clutter. It also tends to compete with other signage, and before long there is an overwhelming amount of information.

Our idea is to create context-sensitive signage on Memorial Mile by using elements that are found in the rural landscape and simply reappropriating them for signage. Thus, we create unique signage that is eye-catching, whimsical, but also functional without taking away from the beautiful rural landscape and sense of place.

TRUCK SIGN
The following truck signage concepts were taken from an existing old truck that is parked along the side of Highway 19. Its rustic character is both whimsical and unique. The truck signage concepts are shown below and on the following page.

This concept uses the truck bed to hold bales of hay and a rustic wooden sign with an old-fashioned hand pointing the way down Memorial Mile.
This signage concept uses the bed of an old truck as a planter for colorful flowers and an old-fashioned sign pointing the way down Memorial Mile.

This signage concept simply shows an old truck painted on the side to direct travelers along Memorial Mile.
This signage concept uses an old windmill to direct travelers toward Americus. Its rustic character and height offer a good signage option.

**CEN** **T** **RAL** ** TUR** **N**  
**IRRIGATION SIGN**

Using an out-of-service pivot irrigation turn, the letters that spell “MEMORIAL MILE” are hung so that drivers can read this context-sensitive sign as they travel toward Americus.
Memorial Mile is a beautiful rural corridor. Using an old tractor and the same old-fashioned sign used on the truck signage concepts, context-sensitive signage is achieved. By using objects that would normally be found in this rural area, we are adding to the rural landscape’s unique character rather than detracting from it.
To create a sense of arrival, gateway signage and landscaping is necessary. The illustration below shows this gateway to downtown Americus with banners on new light fixtures, a brick gazebo with a digital sign, crosswalks, and beautiful landscaping.
The design of the proposed entry to Americus Tower takes cues from the existing architecture of the Sumter County Courthouse. The repetition of material, style, and form creates an architectural continuity to further increase the brand appeal of the city of Americus.

The design concept above is shown in elevation view and is not drawn to scale but is entirely conceptual. The Viaduct Welcome Sign will be positioned according to existing DOT right-of-way laws.
ZONING STRATEGY
It is recommended that the City of Americus create a new corridor zoning district, which would be based on the general commercial neighborhood district, but would incorporate the zoning language presented in the MLK Jr. Blvd./Hwy 19 Corridor overlay section of the report. This new zoning district would apply to MLK Jr. Blvd./Hwy 19 Corridor as well as all major gateways/corridors into and out of Americus.

Moreover, it is recommended that the county update their zoning by creating a similar corridor district for the MLK Jr. Blvd./Hwy 19 Corridor but with one significant change. The county should have a large vegetative setback of 200 feet to keep the rural feel and look.

Currently, the Fanning Institute is collaborating with students in the UGA Land Use Clinic to develop a draft commercial corridor zoning ordinance.

BILLBOARD STRATEGY
Currently, enacting a ban on new billboards is legally problematic in Georgia, particularly due to a recent Gwinnett County Superior Court case where the court enjoined the enforcement of a sign ordinance because the court found a ban on new billboards to be unconstitutional. (Another Superior Court in Cobb County upheld a similar ban, but until this split is resolved it is risky for a county or city to ban billboards.) If the County chooses any option that allows billboards, the overlay zone should regulate size and height. For example, standard billboard sizes are 20’ x 60’ (1200 square feet), 14’ x 48’ (672 square feet), and 10’6” x 36’ (378 square feet). Height restrictions can vary, but should not exceed twelve (12) feet in order to preserve the scenic environment. Generally, height and size restrictions are a good compromise to allow some billboard use while maintaining the aesthetic of the community. For more detail on the issues surrounding billboard regulation, Georgia Municipal Association’s “Guidepost to Municipal Sign Regulation” is an excellent guide.

MLK JR. BLVD./HWY 19, CITY SECTION IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY
Currently, MLK Jr. Blvd./Hwy 19 within the city limits is a quilt-like pattern of small lots and roadside commercial buildings. A vast majority of these properties have continuous curb cuts, little to no vegetation and limited sidewalks. With new development or redevelopment site improvements will be made. However, because of the economic realities all communities are currently facing this redevelopment of this corridor will take many years to occur. In order to help improve the gateway in the short term, the community should create a program to assist property owners with planting improvements. For instance, the community could approach property owners on a volunteer basis and offer to close off part of the continuous curb cut with a vegetated island of crape myrtles and install a sidewalk. This would accomplish a significant change in a relatively short period of time. The reduction of curb cuts would create a much safer corridor for vehicles and pedestrians. Having a continuous sidewalk would be much safer for pedestrians and create connectivity. The addition of crape myrtles would soften the look of the corridor and also act as a unifying element; thus making Highway 19 into gateway.

MLK JR. BLVD./HWY 19, COUNTY SECTION IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY
The county section of MLK Jr. Blvd./Hwy 19 is a quintessential rural parkway. It has the look and feel of rural Georgia. Effort should be placed on keeping the corridor as natural looking as possible. This can easily be accomplished by adopting more stringent zoning criteria as discussed previously. In the short term, the idea of planting crape myrtles in the center medians at entrance points to Americus would add a sense of arrival and beautification. Also, if the city plants crape myrtles along the side of the road and the county has them planted in the medians, the crape myrtles act as a unifying element that ties the entire corridor together.
ZONING ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The UGA Land Use Clinic has drafted zoning ordinances that would regulate a commercial overlay district within both the City of Americus (“City”) and Sumter County (“County”) along the US 19 corridor and its intersection with US 280. The goal is to create a series of zoning regulations within the district that harmonizes and improves existing permitted uses, requirements and restrictions in order to induce consistent growth and site development within both the City and the County as the area develops. This section of the report compares and contrasts the area’s regulations for signage, off-street parking, landscaping, trees and other screening, and accessory structures.

ANALYSIS

I. SIGN REGULATIONS

County
All signs within Sumter County must be “erected, constructed, or maintained in accordance with” the County’s Sign Regulations provision as well as the Sumter County Building Code. The County ordinance prohibits the erection or continuation of any signs that may hamper traffic safety by, for instance, obstructing sight distances along public right-of-ways, obstructing traffic signs or signals. Signs that might be confused with emergency vehicles’ flashing lights, thereby confusing traffic or creating potential traffic hazards due to their nature or moving parts, or that employ admonitions similar to those found on common traffic signs are also prohibited. The ordinance additionally prohibits the posting or painting of signs on various types of poles and natural objects and provides that illuminated signs must be appropriately located and shielded so as not to create a nuisance to “neighboring dwellings and/or approaching vehicles.” The County also sets forth various maximum area restrictions for signs based on the type of sign and the district in which it stands. While the erection, hanging, placement, or alteration of a sign typically requires an application to and issuance of a permit from the County’s zoning administrator, certain types of signs, such as those regulating traffic, warning signs, and qualifying temporary real estate signs, among others, are allowed without a permit.

Much of the County’s Sign Regulations provision is focused on the standards for off-site advertising signs or billboards. Billboards are permitted only within the County’s C-2 (Highway Commercial) and I (Industrial) zoning districts and their principal frontage cannot be established within “100 feet of any church, school, cemetery, public park, public playground, or residential districts including, AG, R-1, R-2 and C-1 zones.” The maximum sign surface area for billboards is 750 square feet per face, with a maximum number of two signs per sign structure, neither side of which may span more than 750 square feet. If situated along an arterial street, the maximum height for billboards is 45 feet, whereas those located within any other location cannot exceed 18 feet in height. The minimum clearance required is 10 feet, with a minimum
setback of five feet from the nearest right-of-way line and 10 feet from the right-of-way line intersection point measured at any angle. Additionally, the County requires that a minimum distance of 300 feet separate billboards.

Consistent with the restrictions governing other types of signs, while illuminated signs containing customary public information, such as the date or local temperature, are permitted, billboards are not allowed to emit light in a manner that resembles emergency light devices, nor are they allowed to direct light onto streets. Any illuminated sign within 100 feet of an AG, R-1, R-2 or C-1 zone must be diffused or made indirect to prevent direct rays of light from shining into those zones.

City
The City’s signage regulations tend to be more particularized and restrictive than those of the County. They focus not only on the placement of signs, but also on limiting the size and scope of various other types of signs besides billboards. Like the County, the City ordinance requires that all signs be constructed and maintained in accordance with the provisions of its building code and prohibits illuminated signs from casting light in such a manner as to cause traffic interference.

The City distinguishes between signs in residential, historic, and commercial districts, and provides restrictions and requirements for each. In residential zoning districts, signs other than subdivision entrance signs are not permitted to have an aggregate sign area greater than four-square-feet. However, those signs indicating the name of institutions such as churches or other places of worship, civic associations, lodges, and social and recreational centers may have a sign with an aggregate sign area not exceeding 20-square-feet. Those signs with a height "greater than five feet above the grade level of the adjacent street to which the parcel on which the sign is located" are not to be located in residential zoning districts. As for residential subdivisions consisting of more than two parcels, one monument sign not exceeding five feet above the grade level of the adjacent street and with a sign area less than 25-square-feet is permitted at each entrance to the subdivision. Such signs do not count toward the maximum allowable signage on a residential parcel.

The City maintains certain height requirements for all signs located in nonresidential zoning districts. In particular, no sign shall exceed 25 feet in height at the highest point on the sign, monument signs must not exceed six feet in height, and hanging or shingle-type signs must not have any portion hanging less than seven feet eight-inches above the sidewalk surface below. Such signs must not be located closer than two feet from the outside edge of a sidewalk and, in the absence of a sidewalk, a seven-foot setback is required from the street or curb, except when located in a C-3 downtown general business district. The size and location requirements of nonresidential signs are organized by type of sign. No freestanding sign may be located within 30 feet of the intersection of street right-of-way lines extended, and no sign is to be located on any building, fence, or other property belonging to another person without the consent of the owner.

The City’s billboard requirements are more stringent and precise than those set forth by the County. The City’s billboards must not exceed 250-square-feet in sign area and must neither exceed 14 feet in height nor 48 in length, irrespective of the type of road upon which they are situated. While, like the County, the City permits billboards in commercial and industrial zoning areas, it further stipulates that they must be located on parcels adjacent to designated state or federal highways. Billboards in the City must not be located within 1,500 feet of one another, whereas in the County they can be spaced apart at 300-foot intervals on the same side of the road. In the City, billboards must not be located within 500 feet of residential zoned parcels, and must be at least invisible to public parks, forests, recreation areas, cemeteries, and the like if within 500 feet, whereas billboards in the County may be visibly located no fewer than 100 feet from such zones. The City further sets forth requirements for stanchion, monument, wall and awning signs, and signs located within historical districts. Discussion of these types of signs has been omitted for the purposes of this report.
II. OFF-STREET PARKING REGULATIONS

County
The County’s Code of Ordinances does not contain a chapter dedicated to off-street parking, nor does its Zoning Appendix contain a provision discretely addressing the issue. Rather, oblique references are made throughout, somewhat sporadically, such as the statement that C-2 (General Business District) zones “will require more off-street parking” than the less concentrated C-1 (Local Business District) zones. There are further, albeit limited, countywide restrictions concerning the allotment and location of off-street parking in certain types of residential areas, however.

City
The City’s off-street parking requirements are, comparatively speaking, robust and cover a variety of residential and commercial uses, as well as mixed uses. For instance, the City provides particular parking requirements for such residential uses as single-family and multiple-family dwellings, hotels and motels, housing for the elderly, fraternal organizations, and upper floor residential use in multistory buildings located within C-3 (Downtown Business District) zones. For commercial uses, the City’s parking requirements are organized on a square footage basis with those uses generating a higher concentration of customers generally having the lowest ratio of square footage to parking spaces, and so on. Parking requirements for an enumerated list of miscellaneous uses are provided, as well as a prescription for determining the requirements of unenumerated uses, rounding fractional spaces, addressing mixed uses, and calculating building area.

III. LANDSCAPING, TREES AND OTHER SCREENING REGULATIONS

County
While the County’s Code of Ordinances does not address trees and landscaping issues within a separate chapter, it does contain some language regarding lot frontage, landscaping, trees, and protective screening within its zoning ordinance. Some basic requirements are that every lot front a public road, and that certain site-line requirements be met. Also, lots may not be reduced in size so as to fail to comply with zoning-specific yard, lot width, area, or other requirements, except when the size of a lot of record is reduced as result of public action, such as dedication or condemnation. The County also employs landscaping and buffering requirements to maintain adequate screening between residential and non-residential areas that are adjacent to one another.

Generally, the County requires landscaping buffers when property “zoned for office, commercial or industrial uses” abuts, along its rear or side property lines, or abuts an alley across from a residential district. However, this requirement is subject to waiver if the planning commission determines that it would “serve no good purpose.” Buffers may consist of existing or new vegetation and should extend at least four feet in height. Landscaped strips are required on land zoned R-3 (Multifamily Residential), commercial property abutting an industrial zone and vice versa, commercial or industrial zoned property abutting a residential zone, or land containing conditional commercial or industrial uses. The County provides non-exhaustive lists of acceptable trees, which should be native to the region and not deciduous, and shrubs, which must also not be deciduous, that would create screens of at least six feet in height. Other potential screening materials are allowed. Maintenance of buffers and landscape strips is required. There are also provisions regarding the administration and enforcement of such requirements, and general language concerning the types of structures, such as service areas, refuse containers, air conditioning units, and the like, that must be screened, either by natural screening or walls and fencing.

City
The City’s regulations concerning trees, landscaping and buffer requirements are more thoroughly delineated than the County’s, set forth not only within the zoning ordinance but also within other chapters of its Code. Like the County, the City provides guidelines for landscape buffering whenever “the zoning ordinances require,” includ-
ing regulations for natural and landscape buffer strips, as well as landscape buffer walls, which, like those in the County, must be at least six feet in height. And, as required by the County, within the City, “each lot shall front upon a public street or road that is not less than 50 feet in width.” In addition to these requirements, the City requires installation and maintenance of landscaped areas for off-street parking facilities and areas dedicated to other vehicular uses, applicable in all areas with the exception of single and two-family dwelling units and agricultural use areas. For the purpose of consistency, the City has established development standards, covering topics such as off-street parking and vehicular use perimeter requirements, material requirements, and visual screening guidelines, outdoor storage area screening standards, and screening standards for utility service areas. And, unlike the County, the City has dedicated an article of its Code to such topics as the various permitted types, spacing, and maintenance of trees within its confines. From a design standards standpoint, the more thoroughly particularized landscaping requirements, particularly as they pertain to parking, receptacle and utilities screening, that are contained within the City’s Code may be a preferable starting point when drafting the overlay’s regulations.

IV. ACCESSORY STRUCTURES

County
Within the County, a structurally attached accessory building is generally subject to the same regulations as the principal building and a detached accessory building must not be located closer than 15 feet to its principal building. With the exception of garages, accessory buildings must only be situated in side or rear yards and must not be situated fewer than 10 feet from any adjoining side lot line or rear lot line. Such buildings must not exceed one story or 14 feet, “and shall not exceed the ground floor area of the principal building.” Lastly, the County mandates that, “[i]n the case of corner lots, accessory buildings…observe front yard requirements on both streets.” Because the drafters are attempting to foster aesthetic consistency within the commercial overlay district, analysis concerning residential accessory structures has been omitted from this report.

City
Although the City’s definition of nonresidential accessory buildings only describes those which are detached from the principal use or structure, like the County Code, it requires that all such buildings “be constructed in accord with requirements of the City building code” and “all existing building setback requirements of [its] Code.” While further dimensional and location requirements are not provided, the City merely suggests that nonresidential accessory buildings be “constructed of material similar to the principal structure or compatible with surrounding architecture, and which would not be obtrusive to the area, adjoining property owners, or from any street.” Because both the County and the City appear to have generally relaxed standards with respect to such structures, the overlay drafters may wish to consider introducing a new ordinance in lieu of utilizing existing language within the respective codes.

CONCLUSION

As anticipated, the City’s Code is more particularized and restrictive than that of the County. Though drafting a new ordinance would probably best effectuate the goal of prohibiting billboards to the greatest degree within the district, if such an option did not exist, adopting the City’s regulations related to off-site advertising signs within the overlay district would be preferable, due to its requirements for size, location, and spacing. Likewise, because the County only mentions off-street parking requirements in oblique terms and appears to leave much to the discretion of the
zoning commission, the City’s square footage approach, which seems to be pegged to any given lot’s concentration of customers, is preferable.

While both the County and the City discuss much of the same criteria in addressing landscape buffering and screening, once again, because its Code covers these topics with greater specificity, the City’s ordinances will likely be incorporated in the drafting process. As to accessory structure regulation, greater specificity might need to be culled from other municipalities’ ordinances since current County and City codes lack specificity.
ZONING LANGUAGE FOR
MLK, Jr. BLVD/HWY 19 OVERLAY

PARKING

Off-street parking must not be planned or designed where vehicles ingress or egress from a parking space which enters or exits directly onto any street; a physical division must be provided between the street and parking area. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-239)

A landscape buffer strip at least ten (10) feet wide around parking areas, densely planted with shrubs and trees of a type that possesses growth characteristics of such a nature as to produce a dense, compact evergreen planting screen. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-194)

In addition to a planted buffer, trees and shrubs shall be at least three (3) feet high at the time of planting and capable of growing to a height of at least six (6) feet within three (3) years. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-194)

There shall be one (1) tree with a two and one-half (2-1/2) inch diameter planted for every eight (8) parking spaces in the parking lot.

Planted islands with trees are encouraged and should not be smaller than nine (9) feet by eighteen (18) feet.

Limited parking in the front is allowed, but parking at the sides and rear of the building is strongly encouraged.

Curb cuts shall be kept to a minimum to prevent problems with vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Parking lots shall be shared between neighboring properties.

Parking lots shall connect with adjacent parking lots.

Curb cuts shall in no case, except in residential districts, be greater than thirty (30) feet in length, nor closer than two hundred (200) feet to another curb cut. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-215)

Parking lots in excess of fifty (50) parking spaces shall incorporate pedestrian walkways between parking aisles that lead to the building’s entrance. Plantings shall be included on either side of the walkway.

Parking lots with twenty-five (25) or more parking spaces may allow one quarter (1/4) of the required spaces to be of an area of eight (8) feet by sixteen (16) feet and marked for compact vehicles. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-242)
CONNECTIVITY

All properties shall build sidewalks along the corridor.

SETBACKS

Setback means the distance from the right-of-way line of the street to the nearest point of a building; the building shall be out of the right-of-way. (Americus 94-1)

The setback shall be thirty to fifty (30-50) feet from the edge of the road. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-161; C-2 General Business).

Structures shall front upon primary thoroughfares. No structures other than signs shall be placed between the front property line and the building’s façade.

ORIENTATION AND SCALE

Each lot shall front upon a public street or road that is not less than fifty (50) feet in width. (Americus, Ga. Code § 82.60)

For corner lots, buildings shall be oriented towards both roads by addressing the corner as the primary façade and the minimum front yard setback shall be observed on both street frontages.

The building shall cover fifty percent (50%) of the site width. When measuring site width, only buildable portions of the site shall be included.

The maximum gross lot coverage of the building shall not exceed forty percent (40%) of the lot. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-148)

The proportions of a structure shall be such that a sense of human scale is established. That is, the size of architectural elements shall not be overpowering and shall relate to pedestrian circulation.

The traditional style of buildings in downtown Americus demonstrates appropriate scale. Architectural elements such as trellises, canopies, or terraces at grade level are important to consider in achieving human scale.

ROOF SHAPE

Roof lines shall be articulated to provide visual interest and minimize large expanses. This may be accomplished through the use of gables, parapets, hip-roof design, or changes in the height of the roofline along the course of the building.

Offsetting planes with a variety of depths also creates visual interest. Overhangs of sufficient depth and in proportion to the façade height can be important to roof form.
Rooflines shall be an appropriate termination of the building façade.

Rooflines shall be broken up such that the roofline shall not go for more than sixty (60) feet without changing height on all sides of the building.

Cornices shall be utilized on all four (4) sides of the building.

Structures with a flat roof shall have a parapet along the roofline so that mechanical equipment on the roof is concealed on all sides of the structure.

**MATERIALS**

Exterior building finishes and materials shall be compatible with that of downtown Americus. Buildings in downtown Americus are characterized by the use of primarily brick with stone or wood accents or trim.

Fifty percent (50%) of the front façade shall be constructed using brick or stone. The remainder of the façade shall be constructed using brick, wood, stucco, stone or Hardiplank©. Trashcans and benches shall be constructed using brick, wood, stucco, stone, metal, or Hardiplank©.

Roofing materials must be consistent with the pitch of the roof, form of the structure, and its use. Some appropriate materials include standing seam metal, asphalt shingles, and slate. Exposed storm drainage devices such as gutters and downspouts should be consistent with the roofing system and building forms, with references to Americus’ historic built design.

**FENESTRATION**

All types of structures shall have regular fenestration. The length of façade without intervening fenestration or entryway shall not exceed twenty (20) feet.

Fenestration shall begin not more than two (2) feet above the floor and shall extend to a height not more than ten (10) feet above the floor.

Fenestration shall be provided for a minimum of seventy percent (70%) of the length of street frontages. Entryways may be counted towards fenestration requirements.

**ACCESSORY STRUCTURES**

Accessory structures shall be constructed of material similar to the principal structure and compatible with surrounding architecture, and of material that would not be obtrusive to the area, adjoining property owners or from any street. (Americus, Ga. Code § 94-1)

Accessory structures shall have consistent architectural detail and design elements to provide a cohesive project site. Accessory structures shall be integrated into the design of the site so that they...
are unified with the other structures and landscaping on the site rather than standing out from the rest of the site.

Trashcans and benches shall be free from advertisements and shall be constructed using metal, wood, brick, or stone.

**MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT, UTILITIES, RECEPTACLES, ETC.**

Any outdoor storage, utility services areas, or mechanical equipment must be screened by: a fence or wall of the minimum height of six (6) feet, opaque and constructed of masonry, stone, wood or some other material approved in the permitting process; (Americus, Ga. Code 14-136) Natural evergreen plant materials at a minimum height of six (6) feet at planting spaced at least five (5) feet apart and planted in staggered double rows; (Americus, Ga. Code 14-136)

Utility entrances shall be located at the rear of the building. To the greatest extent possible, utilities are to be run underground. Items such as electrical transformers, water meters, and other devices are preferred to be underground. If that is not feasible, these utility devices are to be screened.

Any dumpster, trash, grease or waste receptacle shall be located at the rear of the property. Any such receptacle shall not be visible from the public right-of-way and shall be enclosed (i.e., not seen from front, sides, or rear) by a wall.

Doors to the waste receptacle enclosure shall be constructed of wood, metal or plastic made to resemble wood.

**SIGNAGE**

Freestanding signs shall be no more than seven (7) feet tall and ten (10) feet wide and shall be a pedestal-type sign.

Billboard signs shall not exceed three hundred (300) square feet of sign area. Billboard signs shall not exceed ten (10) feet in height or thirty-five (35) feet in length. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

Billboard signs shall only be located on parcels adjacent to designated state or federal highways. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

No billboard signs shall be located within one thousand five hundred (1,500) feet of another billboard sign. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

No billboard sign shall be located within one thousand five hundred (1,500) feet of residential zoned parcels. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

No billboard sign shall be located within one thousand five hundred (1,500) feet in any direction of a
public park, public playground, public recreation area, public forest, scenic area, or cemetery; provided, however that such sign may be located within five hundred (500) feet of a public park, public playground, public recreation area, public forest, scenic area, or cemetery when the sign is separated by buildings or other obstructions so that the sign located within the one thousand five hundred-foot (1,500) zone is not visible from the public park, public playground, public recreation area, public forest, scenic area, or cemetery. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

Wall and awning signs shall not project above the parapet wall. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

Wall signs shall not project beyond the building face. Awning signs shall not project beyond the building face by more than four (4) feet. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

Wall and awning signs are allowed at the rate of one (1) square foot per linear foot of wall building frontage. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)

Wall signs shall only be located on property in commercial or industrial zoned areas. (Adapted from Americus, Ga. Code 74-85)
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Architectural feature**: a detail or element on the exterior of a structure including, but not limited to, the texture of building materials, type and style of all windows, doors, signs, and other architectural features or fixtures. A structure’s features also relate to its architectural style and general design.

**Building massing**: the mass of a building, its three-dimensional form, is evaluated for scale, sizes and relationship to exterior spaces.

**Buffer**: landscape area that forms a linear stretch abutting a property line, paved area or any structure.

**Cornice**: any prominent, continuous, horizontally projecting feature mounted on a wall. A cornice may also divide a wall horizontally for compositional purposes.

**Corridor**: The area abutting the right-of-way along streets, roads, highways or interstates with the depth as established by a boundary line on the zoning map. The area generally consists of the area visible from the road.

**Curb**: a rim along a roadway that may also form an edge for a sidewalk.

**Curb cut**: a small ramp built into the curb of a sidewalk to ease passage to the street, especially for bicyclists, pedestrians with baby carriages, and physically disabled people.

**Exterior Architectural Feature**: refers to a detail or element on the exterior of a structure including, but not limited to, the texture of building materials, type and style of all windows, doors and signs and other architectural features or fixtures. A structure’s features relate also to its architectural style and general design.

**Façade**: the exterior walls of a building exposed to public view.

**Fenestration**: the degree to which the plane of a wall’s exterior surface is visually segmented by articulated features such as bays, entrances and windows. For example, historic commercial buildings have a high degree of fenestration with features that are separated by shorter wall distance; large, modern “big-box” structures an extremely low degree of fenestration with long, featureless exterior walls.

**Interior Landscape Area**: a landscaped area within or immediately adjacent to a pavement area that serves to break up a large expanse of pavement. Interior landscape areas include islands, peninsulas, or combinations thereof.
**Island**: an interior landscaping area surrounded by pavement or structures.

**Landscape, Frontage**: landscape areas between the front of the principal building(s) and adjacent street(s).

**Landscape Perimeter**: landscape area located between the side(s) and rear of the primary building(s) and adjacent property line(s).

**Material**: the substance or substances of which a thing is made or composed.

**Ornamentation**: any and all decorative elements applied to a structure.

**Orientation**: the direction a building’s façade faces.

**Outparcels**: a sub-lot within a planned center or portion of a larger parcel that is reserved during development for future sale and/or future development. For example, in commercial areas outparcels are often reserved along the frontage road for smaller business development.

**Pedestal or Monument type sign**: a sign which is supported by and integrated with a solid base, as opposed to poles, posts, or other such support.

**Rhythm**: the pattern of use and spacing of windows, entranceways, bays or other projections from or depressions in the façade.

**Right-of-way**: an area dedicated to public or private use for pedestrian and vehicular movement and may also accommodate public utilities.

**Scale**: the relationship of a particular project or development in terms of its size, height, bulk, intensity, and aesthetics to its surroundings.

**Setback**: the distance from the property line to the front edge of a building including roof overhangs, awnings, porches, foundations, etc. No structure other than signs shall be placed between the front setback and the building’s facade; spacing the distance between buildings located on adjoining parcels.

**Vegetative buffers**: open spaces, berms, landscaped areas, or a combination thereof used to physically separate or screen one use or property from another so as to visually shield or block noise, lights, or other nuisances or to separate pedestrian walkways from vehicular traffic.
Recently, many municipalities across America have become interested in maintaining a unique sense of place while still incorporating national chains into their community. They have adopted a variety of measures, regulations, and codes ranging from capping the size of retail buildings to mandating specific architectural styles.

For example, Midwest Environmental Advocates released *Big-Box Ordinance and Conditional Use Permit (CUP) Tool-Kit*. This extensive document summarizes many of the strategies being employed across the nation. The following is a brief summary of that document.

I. DEFINITION, SIZE CAPS, AND CONDITIONAL USE

Big-box status has been defined as low as 20,000 square-feet of retail space and up, though many ordinances settle on a value around 80,000. When a store passes the benchmark, it requires a conditional use permit. This means that the developer will be required to present additional site plans and maps related to various topics such as traffic and storm water. Those plans must be approved before the conditional use permit will be awarded.

Size cap restrictions require additional forethought, as some large developers will attempt to skirt regulations by utilizing two adjacent buildings under the cap size. Cap sizes may vary from land use to land use.

II. LINKING TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

Big-box regulations need to be incorporated into existing comprehensive plans and zoning regulations. These linkages ensure consistency in the goals and enforcement of the regulations.

III. SETTING CONDITIONAL USE STANDARDS

Requiring Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) allows for additional public input and planning commission oversight of high impact projects. CUPs allow commissions to require applicants to address specific concerns.

IV. REQUIRING A SITE PLAN

Site Plans can be required to include any number of factors (storm water, parking, landscaping, building design, etc.) and demonstrate the interaction of the site with surrounding area.
V. LIMITING IMPERVIOUS SURFACE

Large shopping centers and big-box retail create enormous impervious areas. Regulations are now requiring developers to minimize impervious surface area and manage storm water on-site. Regulations are also requiring developers to limit impervious surface by utilizing multistory buildings, underground parking, and by limiting overall parking lot size. Mixed-use development strategies are also being utilized to limit overall impervious surface.

VI. LANDSCAPING

Landscaping aids in storm water management and ground water recharging. Landscaping requirements can specify plant choice, number of trees, plant islands, and other features.

VII. LEED CERTIFICATION

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is a system that provides national standards for rating the environmental friendliness of a building. It takes into consideration such things as building materials, lighting, and energy efficiency. Generally, the process requires involvement of a LEED accredited professional. Though still new, LEED accreditation is beginning to be required in some public works.

VIII. IMPACT FEES

New developments cost local governments and impact fees are a method of transferring that cost to the developer. These fees could be associated with infrastructure cost or with environmental impact. Impact fees are especially useful when local government is unlikely to recover costs of expanding infrastructure with tax revenue.

IX. REQUIRING A MANDATORY COMMUNITY IMPACT ANALYSIS

In addition to standard impact analysis, some governments require a wider Community Impact Analysis. Though encompassing familiar topics (environmental and traffic), this type of study investigates the development’s impact on the entire community. These studies are recommended to be performed by an unbiased professional chosen by the community but the developer should pay for the study.

X. REQUIRE A MANDATORY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

Environmental impact studies are a common way for attempting to predict and mitigate negative impacts of new development on public health and local environments.

XI. REQUIRE A MANDATORY TRAFFIC DEMAND MANAGEMENT REPORT

Traffic Demand Management Reports are similar to environmental impact analysis but they look at changes in traffic patterns associated with the new development. Commonly, large developments require road expansions and new traffic control devices to handle the increase in vehicular traffic.
XII. REQUIRE ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

Many communities are trying to encourage pedestrian, bike, and public transportation. Their regulations include requirements that developments include amenities to encourage alternative transportation.

XIII. LIGHTING REGULATIONS

Many people oppose living near large retailers due to the lighting. New requirements restrict the overall output, lower parking lot lights, or require better light covers in attempts to lower light pollution.

XIV. OUTDOOR STORAGE

Concerns about fertilizer, pesticides, and other chemicals often stored outdoors at large stores prompts some communities to pass ordinances requiring that such substances be stored indoors.

XV. REGULATING SIGNS

In order to prevent unsightly signage, overlay districts can regulate the type, size, and number of signs in a particular area.

XVI. ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY TRAFFIC AND PARKING LOT ACTIVITY

Many communities object to individuals using parking lots as unofficial camping grounds and require owners to not allow such camping and post signs against it.

XVII. OUTLOTS

Some communities require that outlots be planned in conjugation with the central lot to ensure internal efficiency for the entire area.

XIII. INCLUDE A SITE VACATION PLAN

A major concern about new developments is vacant old shopping centers. Many communities are now requiring developers to undertake the demolition or reuse of a site after it is vacated.

XIX. HOURS OF OPERATION

Communities respond to complaints of residents neighboring large developments by restricting the hours of operations. This also alleviates power consumption.
NEW BIG BOXES

Cities and communities are not responding to criticisms of big-box and chain development alone; developers and companies are creating new designs for their stores to appeal to modern shoppers.

One major aspect of companies shifting their architectural designs involves moving into more urban areas (Goldberg, 2005). Infill projects often see major retailers refitting old spaces, updating facades, and creating parking solutions to tap into urban markets.

In more rural settings, major corporations are rolling out new building designs to meet stringent requirements and gain public support (see www.paradisecan.org and http://www.walmartinpowhatan.com/).

Walmart has established a variety of architectural designs to match “local character,” while competitor Target has taken similar steps (Evans-Cowley, 2008). McDonalds is putting effort into creating LEED certified restaurants to test “green” technologies. (http://www.mcdonalds.com/us/en/our_story/values_in_action/greener_than_ever.html)

