

FORSYTH

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Village of Forsyth adjoins the City of Decatur on the north side of I-72. Beginning as a small rural rail stop, Forsyth was a small rural community until the construction of I-72 and the interchange with Route 51. As is often the case, interest in commercial development was spurred due to the high accessibility of the interchange. The Hickory Point Mall was the result of this and set in motion growth in Forsyth. The mall changed the entire character of Forsyth, both physically and economically. The Village has transformed from a rural village; little changed in decades, to a growing suburban area that is one of the Decatur metropolitan area's most attractive communities.

The Village is attractive for several related reasons. The first is the small-town atmosphere, with well-kept homes and a pleasant suburban character. The park system and linkages give the community a strong sense of belonging. The economic health of Forsyth, primarily the sales tax generated by the Hickory Point Mall, has enabled the Village to provide quality services to its residents. This is reinforced by the general quality of the Maroa-Forsyth School District.

Sound planning has been important to Village officials and citizens of Forsyth. In 1990, when it had a population of 1,400, the Village adopted a comprehensive land use plan that recognized the need to protect its existing rural character, while accommodating population growth. Over the next ten years, Forsyth succeeded in maintaining its distinctive qualities and improving its community facilities – while growing in population to 2,434. The community recognizes the importance of planning into the 21st century by reaffirming its original goals and objectives and by addressing new challenges.

This comprehensive plan update sets forth the Village of Forsyth's vision for its future development.

HISTORY

The Village of Forsyth has always been a place where history and culture are cherished. David Forey, the first permanent white settler, settled in the area in 1825. Forey built a log cabin in the woods on the west branch of Stevens Creek. Later arrivals in the township were numerous members of the Church of God, and this denomination established the first church there in 1852.

In 1854, the Illinois Central Railroad was built through Macon County. Soon after the main track was built, sidetracks were constructed at proper intervals for the passing of trains. One of these sidetracks was just south of the present site of the station at Forsyth. The construction of the Illinois Central Railroad and the Forsyth railroad station was one of the first major events that encouraged

development in and around Forsyth. Forsyth then continued to exist over 100 years before incorporating as a village in 1958.

The original town consisted of eight blocks, bounded on the north by what is now known as the Oreana Road, on the east by the Illinois Central right of way, on the south by Cox Street, and on the west by Elwood Street. The Village was laid out in 1864 by Edward O. Smith and derived its name from Colonel Robert Forsythe, a landowner of the region and first general freight agent of the Illinois Central Railroad. Colonel Forsythe built his house to the east of the Illinois Central and south of the Village. The place attracted attention because of the number of evergreen trees – the first evergreens ever planted in this vicinity.

In 1975, the construction of I-72 brought a large increase in traffic to the area. At that time, the population of the Village was less than 500 persons. The regional Hickory Point Mall, opened in 1978, has also added much to the prosperity of the Village. Hickory Point is the region's biggest and busiest shopping mall. It consists of a J.C. Penney's, VonMaur, Kohl's, Bergner's, Sears, and over 70 specialty stores. Forsyth changed from being largely a rural railroad community to a residential community with a shopping center focal point. This shift has added influences that could significantly change the character of the community.

The Village of Forsyth continues to build toward the future while honoring its past.

PUBLIC INPUT

The comprehensive planning process took place between June 2000 and May 2001, with a series of presentations and open discussions at special meetings of the Forsyth Long-Range Planning Commission. Following a public hearing, the plan was adopted on June 8, 2002.

SIGNIFICANT AREAS OF COMMUNITY INTEREST

Several areas of significant community concern emerged during the planning process. These areas included:

1. The preservation and enhancement of the Village's community character (see Chapter 3).
2. The accommodation of new commercial development while creating a "village center" focal point (see Chapter 3).

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3. The protection of the Village's natural resource features particularly the natural drainageways in undeveloped areas (see Chapter 4).
 4. The relief of congestion on Route 51 and the improvement of traffic circulation through development of supplemental arterial streets (see Chapter 5).
 5. An economic development program that attracts a variety of new job opportunities (see Chapter 6).
 6. The adoption of a growth and annexation policy that reflects the community's goals and objectives (see Chapter 7).

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH FACTORS

POPULATION CHANGE

The 2000 census indicates that Forsyth has a population of 2,434 which indicates a 91% increase in population from 1990. Over the past ten years, the Village has been growing at an average of about 30 units per year, reflecting the strong economy of the 1990s. There is no indication of anything on the horizon in the way of significant employment expansion in the region that would dictate a more rapid growth. To the contrary, the potential end of the long economic expansion of the 1990s at the national level could result in a slower growth rate over the next decade.

The real factors in Forsyth's growth are largely out of the Village's control. Between 1990 and 2000, Macon County's population declined from 117,212 to 114,706. Based on this trend, it is clear that much of Forsyth's growth has been due to movement within the County, rather than regional growth. As long as Macon County's population is stagnant or declining, there will be no real growth in retail and service sectors of the economy. What will occur is development moving within the region or new development replacing older uses. In addition to the uncertainty about the national economy, the County's economic prospects show no signs of shaking off decades of relative stagnation. Table 2-1 compares the Decatur area with three other nearby Illinois metropolitan areas. It shows that others are growing, while Decatur is largely static.

**Table 2-1
Population and Employment Trends, 1970-1998**

County	Variable	1970	1980	% Change 1970-1980	1990	% Change 1980-1990	1998	% Change 1990-1998
McLean (Bloomington/ Normal)	Population	105,073	119,354	14%	129,609	9%	143,366	11%
	Total Employment	49,339	63,377	28%	80,513	27%	101,509	26%
Macon (Decatur)	Population	124,905	131,205	5%	117,212	-11%	113,675	-3%
	Total employment	61,590	67,407	9%	65,419	-3%	69,648	6%
Champaign (Champaign/ Urbana)	Population	163,275	168,880	3%	173,040	2%	169,835	-2%
	Total employment	78,600	95,410	21%	113,390	19%	116,481	3%
Sangamon (Springfield)	Population	162,099	176,062	9%	178,749	2%	191,487	7%
	Total employment	86,799	100,138	15%	123,198	23%	131,148	6%

FORECASTED GROWTH

There are many methods of making projections of future growth. For smaller communities, the unpredictable elements result in large uncertainties. For this reason, straight-line projections based on the 1980-2000 and 1990-2000 period are shown in Figure 2-1 extended to the year 2020. The 1980-2000 period (labeled in Table 2-1 as projection 1) had an initial decade of mixed economies and second decade of prosperity. The 1990 to 2000 period (labeled in Table 2-1 as projection 2) should be considered the higher portion of the projection because it had no economic downturns to frustrate the home building industry.

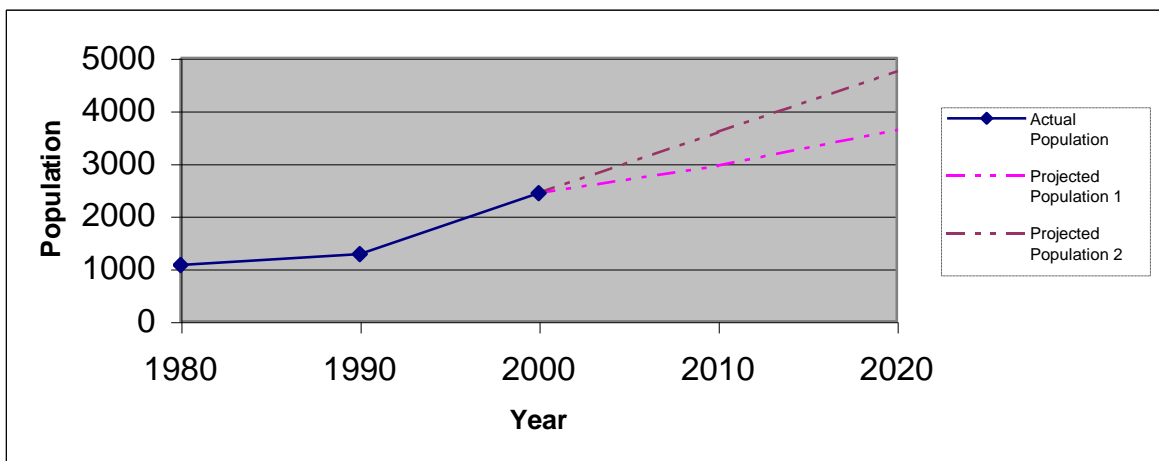


Figure 2-1
Population Forecasts based on 1980-2000 Rates

Based on the information on past growth rates and current economic prospects, projections have been made that are shown in Figure 2-1. Given the economic prospects, the projected growth rate has been lowered slightly. The 1990-2000 rate is used as a high growth rate and a low rate assumes a prolonged economic downturn or other event depressing the housing market in the Decatur area.

**Table 2-2
Population Forecasts**

Percent Change	Year			
	1980-2000	1990-2000	2000-2010	2000-2020
*Projection 1	127.0522	90.90196	21.432484	49.41112
*Projection 2	127.0522	90.90196	47.617091	95.234182

Note: Projected data was predicted by using existing values. The new value is predicted by using linear regression. Projected population 1 is based on actual data for years 1980 to 2000. Projection population 2 is based on actual data for years 1990 to 2000.

All forecasts are subject to error. For that reason, a range is provided in Figure 2-1; however, based on current trends; it is reasonable to anticipate a 2020 projected population for Forsyth of between 4,000 and 5,000. The 2000 census data on dwelling units was not available at the time of preparation of this plan. This data is more important than the population data because dwelling units are a better measure of land consumption than population. Family size has a significant impact on population that may not show up in dwelling units. We recommend that forecasts be revised once the complete census data is available so those forecasts of dwelling units parallel the population forecasts. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that a population growth of 1,800 to 2,500 through the year 2020 will result in the demand for 600 to 800 additional dwelling units.

The 2001 Plan includes six additional chapters: Community Character, Natural Resources, Detention and Open Space, Transportation, and Summary Goals and Objectives, Economic Development, and Growth Policies, Annexation, and Intergovernmental Cooperation. These chapters represent the major issues facing the Village. If Forsyth implements these elements, other issues should easily fall into place.

CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITY CHARACTER

INTRODUCTION

Residents of Forsyth value its family-oriented, midwestern feel. Residents enjoy friendly neighborhoods that are clean, well maintained, and connected by a planned system of bike and walking paths. People cite traditional values and friendly neighbors as important components of their community's character. Residents feel that Forsyth is a special place to live and raise a family. Forsyth's comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance must translate these intangible values into a realistic land use and planning strategy so that future decisions strengthen, not weaken, these values. In part, these values are the result of good planning by the Village; in part, they are reflective of the fact that Forsyth is a small town.

Forsyth is a growing community. As it continues to grow, there must be a clear articulation of the design elements that can help promote Forsyth's small-town character. Planning for residential and commercial areas must reflect and reinforce Forsyth's sense of itself as a family-oriented, small-scale, friendly place to live, shop, and perhaps work. Once the comprehensive plan clearly sets these goals, the Village's zoning ordinance can be reviewed to ensure that new development is consistent with the plan's vision.

Future land use must continue to build the Village's strengths. The Village's park system and small-scale residential neighborhoods are a strong reinforcing element of the desired character. The commercial area and Route 51 are potential negatives. The highway is a major barrier for residents and the commercial along Route 51 does not reflect the Village's residential character and could be anywhere in the nation. Design and circulation needs should focus on linking the two sides of the Village more closely. The design should promote a clear center; not a highway oriented strip, as its focus. The character and quality of the view from Route 51 that should better reflect the Village's character. The community character element calls for building on the Village's strong points and upgrading areas of weakness.

Even with very strong design and land use controls, there still remains a threat to Forsyth's small-town character. Growth itself will eventually force an alteration of this character. Residents have commented on the fact that they recognize other residents and meet at Village events. There will clearly come a time when the sheer size of the Village's population alters the small-town character. The community desires to maintain a small village character and currently has had a modest growth rate of about 30-40 dwelling units per year; a rate based on growth in good economic terms over the past decade. If that rate were projected for 20 years, there would be 600 to 800 new dwelling units.

This growth can generate as much as a doubling in Village population by the year 2020. If, in two decades, the Village grows as projected to almost twice as large as its current population, we must acknowledge the fact that people may no longer know everybody by sight. The Village will have become a small town with different neighborhood attributes.

Forsyth has identified its vision as a residentially oriented, family-focused, small-town community. The preceding image is instantly understood as being an appropriate future for Forsyth. To implement this vision, there needs to be a means of converting these generalized statements to meaningful land use and development regulations. To gain a better understanding of its character, the Village uses a **community character** analysis (see Community Character and Community Scale Shown on next page) to observe and document its built form in a manner that is replicable, with a clear understanding of the components that make the character of different areas of the Village desirable. This allows the Village to set standards for achieving strong community character so that positive elements of its built fabric are reinforced and negative elements are eliminated or mitigated.

The Village has a common vision, but is, in fact, composed of areas having several different community characters. Residential areas within the Village are suburban in character, which is one of the strengths of the Village. All the commercial areas are auto urban in character, with few redeeming features. Rural areas surround the Village and enhance its character. The following goals and policies seek to guide the Village's growth and decisions on its community character.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1. Residential area whose character is suburban, with a family- and children-friendly environment that encourages families to seek out Forsyth as a place to live:*
 - Require development to respect the landscape and site planning elements that promote a suburban character
 - Encourage an atmosphere conducive to raising a family by providing adequate and accessible recreation opportunities
 - Strengthen connections between neighborhoods
 - A lower density residential choice should be made available on the Village's periphery encouraging residents to stay in the community
 - Promote the use of common open space and larger lots to increase the open-space feel of the Village
 - Provide for diversity in housing choice
 - Plan for a transition from suburban areas to areas of high-density to protect the suburban

character

2. ***Create an urban center for the Village using the Hickory Point Mall and area to the east:***
 - Provide for greater intensity in the mall area
 - Expand and convert the gridded residential streets of the east side for urban character commercial and office use
 - Improve architectural design, materials, signage, landscaping, and lighting to create a pedestrian-friendly environment
3. ***Improve the auto-urban character of the Route 51 corridor and ensure high quality character for business park development:***
 - Improve architectural design, materials, signage, landscaping, and lighting along Route 51
 - Provide for business park development with a high character appearance on the exterior streets.
4. ***Provide clear boundaries of rural land uses, particularly agriculture, to maintain a small-town image:***
 - Maintain green belts at the edge of the community
 - Do not extend services into rural areas unless conservation easements are in place to prohibit sprawl

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Broadly speaking, the Village's four goals should be: to continue residential development in a high quality **suburban** character; to create a village center in an **urban** character; to upgrade the character of the **auto-urban** commercial area along Route 51; and to maintain a clear edge of town and a transition to surrounding **agricultural** areas.

Community Character Types

There are currently two character types in the Village: suburban and auto-urban. If the Village wishes to create a village center, it should have an urban character. The following is a list of community character types and their functions.

Urban: Urban areas, unlike the urban core, may be the center of a wide range of communities from a small, rural hamlet or village to large cities. Historically, commerce, cultural opportunities, and

industry concentrated in cities. The centers of older small towns in America exhibit an urban character. Shops and homes alike are oriented to the pedestrian walking on the sidewalk to his or her destination. The urban environment is designed to bring people into close contact and maximize personal interaction. Congestion and high encounter levels are essential. As in urban core areas, pedestrian congestion should be viewed, in part, as an indicator of a successful urban environment. In fact, “pedestrian precinct” may be a better name for street level activity of urban areas. Retail activities thrive on intense pedestrian activity. If there is no pedestrian activity or crowds, there is little interest in what the urban environment is offering. Commercial and residential buildings are ordinarily located in close proximity to public ways, with little or no building setbacks.

Urban spaces are “architectural” – that is, they are enclosed by buildings adjacent to the street and are likely paved (see inset photo, right). Therefore, the distance across a space in relation to the surrounding building height is critical to providing a comfortable, urban environment. If this ratio (distance across the space to the height of the surrounding buildings, or the D/H ratio) exceeds four, enclosure is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. When designing streets and pedestrian precincts, people and activities must be concentrated in an area where the enclosure encourages large amounts of interaction. In some areas, the skyline may frame such spaces. The skyline is determined by the architectural roofline of surrounding buildings.



Auto-urban: This character type’s most visible form is that of automobile-oriented commercial and business strips (see inset photo, right). Modern retail, office, and industrial uses often function in the auto-urban environment. Fast food restaurants, gas stations, and shopping centers are the dominant commercial images of auto-urban character, but higher intensity residential uses, such as attached and multi-family housing, can also have this character. Several committee members felt that there were no longer affordable “starter homes” for young families in Forsyth. Condominiums, townhouses, and the like may be able to meet this need. Such areas can be designed in the traditional urban character or in the auto-urban character. The difference between urban and auto-urban is the role of the automobile in the design. Buildings in an urban area will be oriented to a street or pedestrian precinct, with enclosure to stimulate interaction. In auto-urban environments, parking fields frame the buildings and pedestrian areas, if they exist at all, are internalized.



Placing higher-density residential uses in close proximity to commercial areas is strongly encouraged because this provides additional support for the commercial area, without requiring additional auto

trips. Residents can enjoy the proximity and concentration of social, cultural, and other activities. These areas should, however, be designed with adequate pedestrian walkway, landscaping, and open space standards to upgrade these types of development to suburban, or even urban, quality.

Although development intensity of auto-urban areas is usually less than that found in urban environments, this is frequently a function of land economics and design preferences, rather than governmental regulation. Auto-urban uses need space for the high levels of automobile dependent interaction. As a result, buildings frequently are constructed some distance from the public way, while parking lots and driveways occupy much of the setback. The impact of accommodating the automobile determines the character of an auto-urban environment. With very few exceptions, auto-urban areas (particularly commercial areas) consume more land for parking, driveways, and roads than is covered by buildings. This ratio can exceed 2 to 1. Such design diminishes the importance of architecture and encourages the elimination of natural features. Missing are the well-defined enclosures, pedestrian access, and human scale of classical urban design.

Buildings, most only one-story, are widely spaced, obscuring any sense of place. The automotive dependence of people constrains urban design. Once out of their cars, pedestrians do not enjoy walking more than about 600 feet. Therefore, most parking is within 300 feet of building entrances. To accommodate the large number of workers and shoppers that arrive by car, parking must be integrated into the design to minimize walking distances. The area consumed by parking limits the degree of enclosure and creates barriers to pedestrian movement between buildings. Overall, the orientation of buildings, parking, and roads destroys the sense of spaciousness, lack of congestion, and privacy typical of sub-urban areas. Designers are now exploring ways to improve the design of commercial corridor areas and use landscaping to soften and screen the impacts of automobiles.

Suburban: The suburban character type is very different from the urban character type. All urban spaces are enclosed or partially enclosed by buildings, while some are filled with cars. In suburban areas, sufficient open space and vegetation exists between or within developments to provide effective contrast and balance to the buildings. The urban area has buildings enclosing space, while suburban areas have buildings that are balanced by tree masses, a balance between green masses and building masses. The pedestrian is likely to feel enclosed or sheltered by trees, rather than buildings. Unlike urban space, suburban space must be landscaped; trees are a critical compositional element. The physical distinction between suburban and urban character is backed by a functional difference. Suburban character types are family living areas, seen as a place of escape from the more intensive activities of the urban work place. People seek out a suburban environment for such values as privacy, peace, and quiet. These attractions contrast with the desire for action and multiple activities in urban communities.



All too often, the open spaces, which provide these suburbs with their character, are simply areas that have not yet been developed. Often natural open spaces or views borrowed from adjoining land, this vacant land is referred to as "borrowed open space" (see photos above).

Consequently, as suburbs develop, they can move from the Sub-urban character class to the urban character class as the previously "open" spaces are replaced with development. This is a very important issue for Forsyth as the Village expands.

In residential subdivisions, up to one-third to one-half of the homes currently look out on and enjoy "open space" across the street or behind their lots. Further, the Village is surrounded on three sides by miles of farmland. Unfortunately, much of this space is only open until the next subdivision comes in – residents are really "borrowing" open space for a short time. The development of a farm field often leaves many residents dissatisfied. Here, Forsyth is fortunate as the Village Park provides permanent protection of a key central open space. Residential neighborhoods need to find a means to incorporate the borrowed open space into each development. One such means is the use of cluster design for new subdivisions.

COMMUNITY SCALE

Community Form and Scale

There are two basic forms of communities. The first is the *freestanding community*, isolated from its nearest neighbors by a substantial area of rural character. This provides the community with a clear edge so those visitors are provided with a clear sense of identity. The second is the composite community in which a number of communities are interrelated and comprise a larger whole. In the composite form, each village becomes a component of a larger metropolitan area. As communities grow together, preserving an individual character becomes difficult. Viewed in this perspective, municipal boundaries may or may not make any statement about community identity other than a Village limits sign. Providing a sense of identity, while being viewed as components of a larger community, presents a challenge.

Each of the two forms progresses in scale from the smallest community to the largest (see Figure 3-1, next page). Freestanding communities are divided into four types: hamlet, village, town, and city.

Composite communities also have four types: cluster (or block), neighborhood, sector (or community), and region. The two forms merge at the metropolis level, where there is likely to be a matrix of freestanding communities shading into areas of composite communities.

As with community character types, the various scale units have particular functions. The smallest, hamlets and clusters represent the scale at which neighborly relationships take place. Rural hamlets may have some commercial function in which the hamlet is a node for a larger rural community. Villages and neighborhoods are complete units. Planning theory indicates such areas are large enough to support convenience types of retail, a small elementary school, and, perhaps, some service jobs. Towns and sectors are collections of neighborhoods. Such areas are likely to have a central neighborhood that serves as the community core. Cities and regions are even larger and, typically, will be net importers of jobs. They are large enough to have urban cores that serve as regional employment centers.

In 1970, Forsyth was a freestanding community. The development of the mall resulted in a commercial strip linking Forsyth and Decatur as a composite community. That does not mean that Forsyth should plan to be surrounded. It is quite possible that to the east, west, and north, the Village could seek to maintain rural land around its borders.

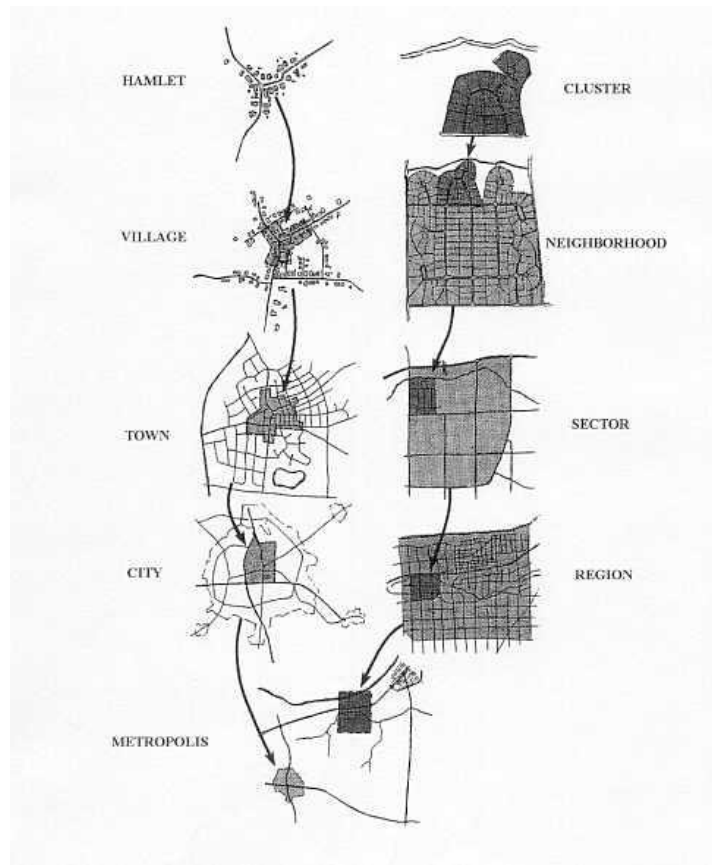


Figure 3-1: Community Form and Scale Progression

EXISTING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Forsyth’s existing character is a suburban residential mixed with auto-urban commercial, which includes Hickory Point Mall and the commercial strip along Route 51. The 13 square mile planning area is predominantly agricultural, which greatly enhances the Village’s small-town character. Table 3-1 provides the character types used for existing and future land use. In the existing land use, agriculture/vacant is used to address both the rural areas outside the Village limits and the vacant land parcels within the Village that may or may not be in cultivation. Map 1 illustrates the existing character and Table 3-3 compares the existing land use with future land use.

Table 3-1 Community Character/Land Use Districts		
Districts	Community Character Types	Description
Village Center	Urban	The district should permit a substantial increase in intensity over the current uses.
Auto-Urban Commercial	Auto-Urban	This district would permit auto-oriented retail, service, office, and highway service types of uses.
Business Park		This district is an all-purpose office/industrial district allowing for supportive retail or service.
Commercial/Business Park		This is a combination designation that would provide for either commercial or business uses.
Auto-Urban Residential		Apartments, townhouses and other higher intensity uses would be permitted in this district.
Suburban	Suburban	This district is similar to the residential areas that currently make up the Village.
Estate	Estate	This district has a much lower density, but provides significant open spaces to create a distinct edge appearance for the Village.
Agriculture/Vacant	Rural	The existing character map uses this category to cover both agriculture and vacant land. The Future Community Character map uses only the agricultural designation.

FUTURE COMMUNITY CHARACTER PLAN

The community character types have been discussed and illustrated. These types have then been used to map the Village's existing character (Map 2 - Future Land Use). Table 3-2 provides the data on the existing Village land use as of the year 2000.¹ The overall character of the Village was Suburban in 2000.

¹The land use is determined from interpretation of an aerial photograph taken in 2000.

Table 3-2 Existing Community Character and Land Uses				
Districts	Developed Area		Planning Area	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Auto-Urban Commercial	216.8	14.5	216.8	2.4
Business Park	16	1.1	32.7	0.4
Commercial/Business Park	15.0	1.0	15.0	0.2
Auto-Urban Residential	8.4	0.6	8.4	0.1
Suburban	481.3	32.3	481.3	5.2
Agriculture/Vacant	753.0	50.5	8445.8	91.8

The future growth of the Village must be controlled to maintain a strong suburban character. That does not mean that the entire Village will be a suburban character. The current auto-urban of the commercial is to be changed. A more intense urban character is desired to create a true community center. Hickory Point Mall should have the opportunity to reinvent itself in a more intense and pedestrian-oriented urban character. This urban character would carry across Route 51 in the corridor of Lucille Avenue, Highland Avenue, and Barnett Avenue. The three streets provide the ability to handle considerable traffic on two-lane roads. Pedestrian access is good and developers can develop on a small-scale, lot-by-lot basis or on larger parcels. The three roads are extended east to Elwood Avenue. This area is considered to provide a wide range of commercial development activities (retail, service, and office), or even very high quality industrial uses or flexes space.

To the south of the urban corridor the land is planned for business park. The business park designation is intentionally used, rather than industrial park. The modern business park is a mix of office, industrial, and flexes space uses, often with supporting restaurants and commercial lodging. The business park is far more marketable than the traditional industrial park that mixed industrial uses with lower quality warehousing and contractors' storage facilities.

Commercial will continue to be the primary use along the Route 51 corridor, and an auto-urban character is anticipated. However, the Village desires to upgrade the visual character of the corridor. It should embark on a landscaping and tree planting program in cooperation with landowners and the Illinois Department of Transportation. The landscaping would enhance the corridor's appearance. Signs should all be low monument signs less than eight feet high or be mounted on the building walls. These two actions would substantially change the character of the corridor and give the Village a different image from the highway.

The petroleum product storage area occupies the north end of the Current Village. This area is a very poor entry to the Village. The plan recommends acquiring land to the north as a park area. The park would be landscaped using berms with heavy landscaping designed to screen the tanks from the north. The park would connect the Route 51 corridor to the old Illinois Central Railroad right-of-way, which the plan calls for to be acquired for park purposes. This would be an ideal north south pedestrian and bicycle trail that would connect to a future park and sports complex on Village land. The pedestrian link would extend from commercial/business park area on the south and the river located between Forsyth Road and Wise Road. On the west side of town, the existing Village Park should be extended north along Stevens Creek. This would provide a continuous park system. On the east side, floodplain along Spring Creek would serve a similar function, although the residential land use is lower intensity. However, not all the floodplain land should become public park. There should be a continuous pedestrian and bicycle trail system through the area, but the Village should exercise discretion in acquiring all the land unless a significant portion is to become a forest preserve that is left in a natural condition.

The majority of the Village's residential development is envisioned to be of a suburban character similar to the present residential areas. In general, the area between Janvrin and Sawyer will be suburban, low-density residential. The northerly limit is one-half mile north of Shellabarger and the proposed linear park. Land to the west, north and east to the edge of the planning area is planned as estate.

Higher intensity residential of an auto-urban intensity with high quality landscaping and design is concentrated near the existing or proposed commercial areas where at least some trips might be made by foot or bicycle. The one exception to this is on the west side, north of Forsyth Road, where a small neighborhood commercial with higher intensity residential is shown between the two arms of Stevens Creek.

Throughout the Village, landscaping needs to be improved. This includes minimum street tree requirements and on-lot landscaping of front yards in both residential and commercial uses. A third component is buffers or bufferyards. Bufferyards are landscaped areas that separate two land uses. The bufferyard or buffer is treated as open space. It is land that is open space; that is, it is not part of the minimum lot area and is landscaped to provide a visual barrier between two uses or residential and busy highways. The Village needs to revise its zoning and subdivision regulations to provide for the landscaping and buffers.

Table 3-3 provides data on the proposed future character of the Village. The plan provides for more land than needed to accommodate the Village's projected future growth through 2020, assuming the current growth rates remain relatively constant.

Table 3-3 Future Community Character and Land Uses				
Districts	2000		Future	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Village Center	152.4	10.2	152.4	1.7
Auto-Urban Commercial	252.3	16.9	289.4	3.1
Business Park	242.1	16.2	242.1	2.6
Commercial/Business Park	0	0	110.8	1.2
Auto-Urban Residential	8.4	0.6	142.5	1.5
Suburban	656.9	44.1	3886.9	42.2
Estate	0	0	3885.9	42.2
Agriculture/Vacant	178.7	12	490	5.3

IMPLEMENTATION

The setting of goals and description of the character desired by the Village will not get developers to build in a manner that achieves these goals. Ultimately, the Village regulations will need to be amended or other actions taken by the Village to achieve the goals.

Urban - Village Center

The Village Center includes the Hickory Point Mall and the area east of Route 51 along Lucille Avenue and Barnett Avenue. A new zoning district is needed for this area. It would permit not only the normal commercial, but also a significant range of mixed uses. The mixed uses would allow buildings to five stories and parking structures on large planned developments, those in excess of ten acres. This would allow mall owners the flexibility to increase the intensity of use at Hickory Point, making them able to greatly increase the total feasible area of the center and, thus, remain competitive well into the 21st century by providing great flexibility to redevelop the property to meet changing retailing practices.

East of Route 51, the properties are small. It is desirable to create a pedestrian-oriented development pattern that will permit individual properties to develop or encourage the assembly of property to build larger commercial uses. The development of strong streetscape regulations is needed to ensure that a quality environment is created. It provides for a wide range of commercial and mixed-use

opportunities. It also considers an overpass over Route 51 which would have air-rights buildings that would assist in paying for the crossing and would provide interest for the pedestrian. The span is so long that traditional overpass and underpasses do not make sense.

Auto Urban

Most people see Forsyth from Route 51. The commercial uses along the road do little or nothing to suggest the character of the Village's residential areas. The main task is to upgrade the quality of the auto-urban commercial, office, or business park development so that it makes a statement consistent with the Village's overall character.

Landscaping. The Village has allowed commercial development without always mandating appropriate landscaping and buffering. The ordinance should be amended to require landscaping and buffers for all newly developed or redeveloped properties. The Village should use some of its land to provide a nursery with canopy trees, understory trees, and shrubs that are tolerant of roadside conditions and should give away these trees to commercial owners willing to plant them in parking areas or around their buildings. In addition, the Village should work with the Illinois Department of Transportation to provide landscape on the edges of the Route 51 right-of-way. Programs with local groups (i.e. Boy Scouts, Kiwanis) and the Village's participation in the "National Tree City" program could encourage donated labor. (See following photograph.)



**Photographs show the difference in auto-urban character with landscaping.
The strip center on the right is almost suburban in character.**

Signs. Forsyth has a sign ordinance, which became effective April 15, 1993. Currently, there is no real control over signs. Currently, there are several very tall pole signs (McDonald's and Shell) which do not enhance the aesthetic quality or character of the Village (see photo below). These signs were constructed before adoption of the sign ordinance. All freestanding signs should be

monument signs between six and eight feet in height. All the pole signs should be eliminated. There is no reason for the very tall pole signs. The interstate contains signs for gas, food, and lodging before each interchange and, thus, there is no need to pollute the landscape with pole signs.

Photographs: Pole Signs = Poor Character



Allowing commercial development on small frontage lots results in a “strip” commercial center. The Village can amend the zoning ordinance to require a larger minimum lot size, and developers will have to take control of several lots before they can propose a project. This will meet with some resistance from the development community, but we feel that it is a change that will, in the long run, make the commercial area a more desirable one in which to locate.

Outdoor Storage. Outdoor storage visible from the main street of the Village is unacceptable and presents a poor image to the public. The Village zoning ordinance can be amended to regulate outside storage better. The storage outside of the Lowe’s and the Toys’R’Us is excessive and potentially unsafe.



Photographs: Excessive outdoor storage in two locations

Suburban

The suburban environment is based on a balance between vegetation and buildings. The building must also be in scale with the lot. In recent developments, the homes have come to dominate the lot and create a sense of crowding and enclosure factors that are negatives in suburban areas. The mature areas of the Village are set off by large trees that overarch both the buildings and the roads. This is the ideal character. When building in open land or old corn fields, as will be the case in Forsyth, this balance must be created.

Lot and Floor Area. There are a number of methods of ensuring that buildings are in scale with the lots. The most straightforward approach is to have a maximum floor area associated with the base zoning lot. The current minimum single-family lot size (with water and sewer) is 7,500 square feet with a minimum frontage of 60 feet. The zoning setback lines would allow a building coverage of 2,760 square feet. Table 3-4 provides information on the current minimum lot standards and recommended changes. The shaded areas indicate the controlling regulation (pad areas or FAR).

Table 3-4 Lot and Bulk Standards					
Condition	Minimum		Floor Areas		
	Lot Area	Frontage	Pad Area	Maximum Floor Area	FAR
Existing	7,500 sf	60 ft.	2,760 sf.	5,520 sf.	0.736
Alternatives					
7,500	7,500	65 ft.	2,550 sf.	2, 250 sf.	0.30
8,000	8,000	65 ft.	2,958 sf.	2,400 sf.	0.30
10,000	10,000	80 ft.	3,840 sf.	3,000 sf.	0.30
12,000	12,000	85 ft.	4,757 sf.	3,600 sf.	0.30
15,000	15,000	90 ft.	5,934 sf.	4,500 sf.	0.30
20,000	20,000	100 ft.	7,875 sf.	6,000 sf.	0.30

Building a two-story house that fills the current pad created by the setbacks would result in a 5,500 square foot house on a 7,500 square foot lot. This is way too large for a lot this small. A large house on such a lot is about 2,200 square foot having a maximum FAR of 0.3. The FAR, rather than setbacks, should control the maximum building size. Lot sizes that produce units up to 6,000 square

feet are shown. Note that where the FAR controls, as indicated by the gray tone, it is possible to build to the maximum FAR using a ranch style house. If the taller two-story unit is built, building coverage will be reduced.

Suburban Landscaping. First, suburban residential areas should require three types of landscaping: street tree, on-lot, and open space. Mature street trees do a wonderful job of defining a pedestrian environment and should be required in all new residential subdivisions, i.e. “2 or 3 canopy trees per every 100 linear feet of frontage.” If the homeowner is allowed to move the tree back into their yard, the neighborly sense of a shaded, common walkway is lost.

Second, the front yards of homes need more landscaping, particularly near the streets. The increased front landscaping provides a sense of privacy. Buffers along major roads that screen developments are also important, whether they are required bufferyards or simply rear lot-line landscape treatments.

Third, the open space area can be natural, maintained as active recreation land or designed as more formal village greens. Wherever possible, open space landscaping should provide substantial tree masses that assist in maintaining landscape volumes that are larger than building volumes. Preserving stream corridors and planting trees is also a desirable strategy in natural areas.

Estate

Currently, the Village has no estate areas. An estate area would provide an upscale option to the Village’s standard residential zoning. This is important because it would provide opportunities to move up in housing within the Village and metropolitan area. Because areas suitable for this strategy are currently being farmed, the landscaping is even more important than it is in suburban areas. The estate areas will be at the edge of the Village and, thus, should be used to create a very different image. We recommend permitting only clustered developments that have over 40% open space.

Density and Open Space. The Village needs to contain itself and should avoid the sprawl that often characterizes suburbs. The estate area should provide for larger dwelling units and use common open space to create the desired character, while still providing full urban services. Clustered developments of 15,000 and 20,000 square foot lots with 45% and 55% open space, respectively, can achieve these goals. Both cluster options would permit 0.85 dwelling units per acre, a higher density than would be achieved with one-acre lots (0.69 dwelling units per acre). At 60% open space, 12,000 square foot lots could be used. With this extreme form of clustering, it is possible to provide sewer and water.

Landscaping. Vegetation is even more important to character in estate areas than it is in suburban. Historically, estate areas almost always had vegetation on the property's edge, greatly enhancing privacy. More recently, all the vegetation has been planted near the home. This changes the estate

character to a more suburban character, losing a distinctive environment. Landscape design techniques, such as horse fences and hedgerows, can promote a more rural character. While the techniques can be used independently by each property owner, they are clearly more effective when a development has uniformity across each lot. Uniformity becomes even more important if the rural area is to separate freestanding communities. Fences of very similar appearance and style along the road boundaries can provide a rural characteristic; but, if homes are crowded near the road, fences become simply cosmetic. Scenic easements along roads, particularly arterial and collector roads, provide a uniform character and increase building setbacks. Scenic easements should be at least 100 feet in width.

Preserving Rural Character. On the edges of the planning area, the plan calls for the retention of rural uses such as agriculture. This land will remain in Macon County and, thus, out of the Village's control. The Village should work with Macon County to preserve agriculture on the its fringes. The Village could require special buffers near agricultural land to protect the farmers and reduce nuisances associated with agricultural operations.

Community Size and Rural Character

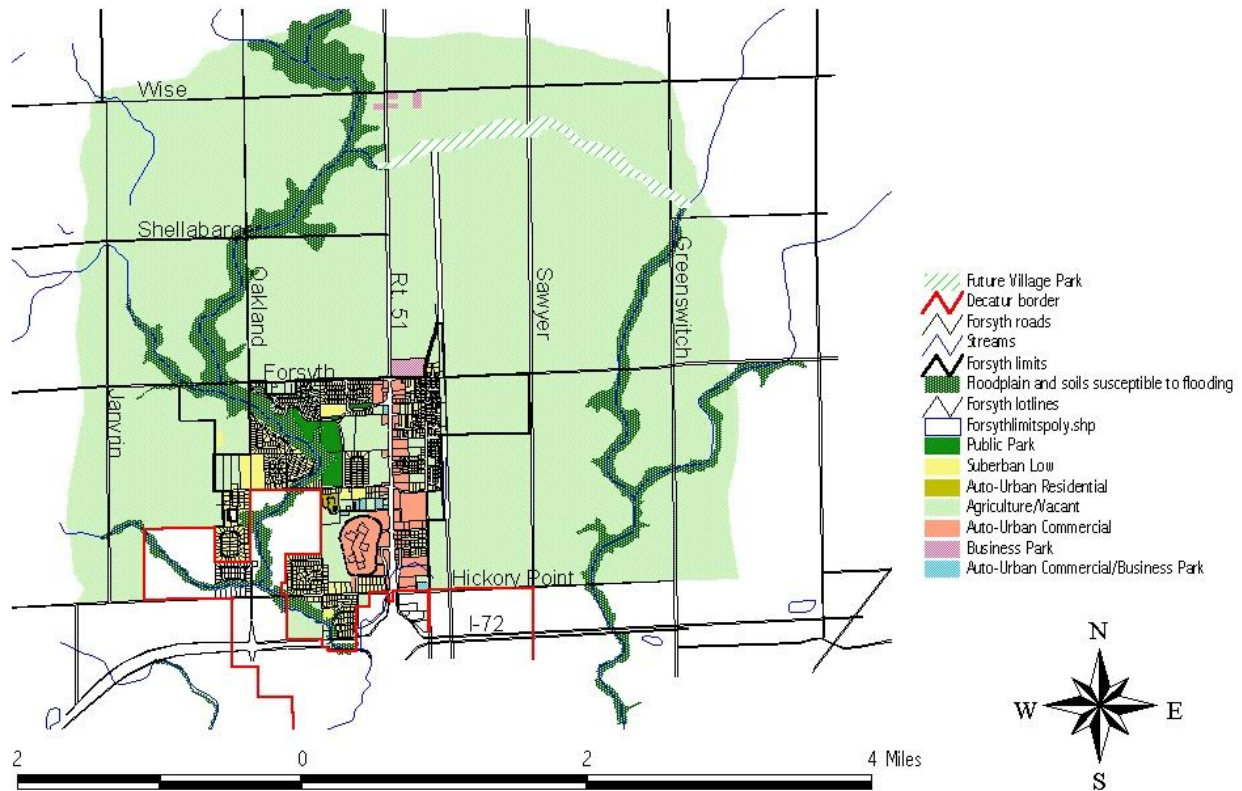
Decatur and Forsyth share a common boundary that is exceedingly irregular. It is, thus, too late to keep Forsyth a freestanding community. However, creating a green belt of rural land along its eastern, northern, and western boundaries will help maintain Forsyth's identity as separate and distinct from the Decatur area. Decatur, too, would benefit for having rural land within the metropolitan area. The rural land provides a strong sense of character and identity to the suburban and urban community within.

Spring Creek provides a natural eastern growth boundary for Forsyth. A greenbelt around the creek will protect natural resources, provide for additional passive recreation area, and help define Forsyth as a village.

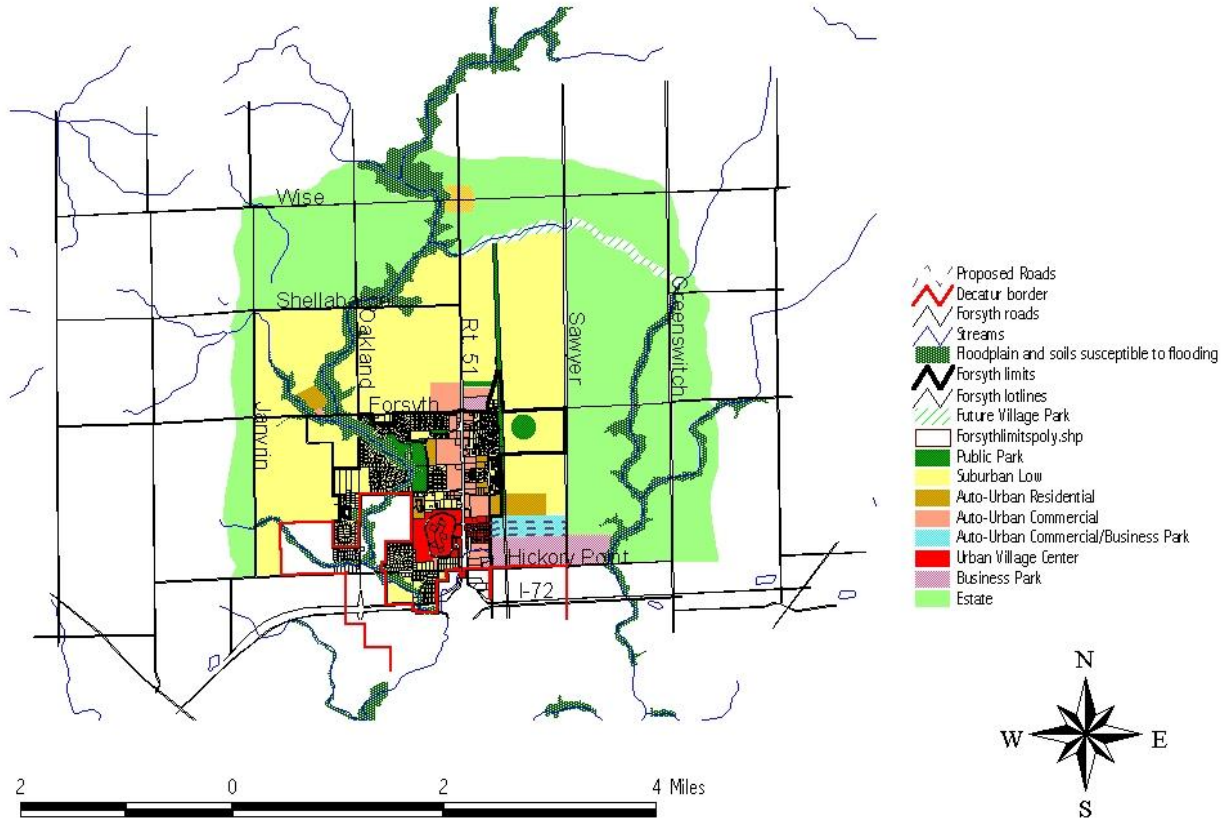
Implementation – Commitment

Successful implementation will depend upon the willingness of Village government to stick by its regulations. This includes limiting variance requests when there is no benefit to the ommunity and the developer is just trying to “get out of” a requirement that is understood to be an important comprehensive plan implementation tool. It includes turning down projects that do not further the goals of the comprehensive plan in terms of quality, amenities, location, or other goals. It includes avoiding inconsistent decisions that try to accommodate a specific project, but which set a bad precedent for the community. Lastly, this commitment includes prohibitions on building in floodplains or floodways.

Map 1 Existing Land Use 2000



Map 2
Future Land Use



CHAPTER 4: NATURAL RESOURCES, DETENTION AND OPEN SPACE

Natural resources preservation and recognition is an important part of sound planning. The flooding that occurs in Forsyth can be blamed largely on ignoring natural features in the planning of those subdivisions. Some of the most attractive areas in the Village are those where the homes were carefully built in a forested area so as to maintain the forest cover. There are few opportunities for such action in the future because nearly all of the growth area is farmed. However, there are other resources that need to be respected, particularly those involved in the movement of water, floodplains, drainageways, and wetlands.

The movement of water and detention are a central element of the Village's plan for the future. While detention has been provided in many new developments in Forsyth, it has often been done in a manner that creates problems for both the Village and the homeowners. Small, dry detention basins are difficult to maintain, particularly when they are located on private lots. All detention facilities need periodic maintenance, and numerous small basins are more difficult to monitor and maintain. For the homeowner, these facilities also present a problem.

The Village's public park system is a major contributor to the area's character. The plan is to build on the current park system and continue to provide recreation land along the floodplains and drainage areas. Continued protection and acquisition of natural resources areas can encourage active and passive recreation and maintain the open space feel of the Village.

Forsyth has identified several strategies to improve the Village's community character through good management of natural resources:

Natural Resources, Drainage and Open Space Goals

The following are the goals for the protection of natural resources, drainage, and open space:

1. ***Continue to protect floodplain, drainageway and resources through appropriate zoning and development ordinances:***
 - Require high-quality, well-designed wet detention basins in residential subdivisions
 - Encourage open swale drainage to improve the area's character and decrease flooding
 - Plan for large-scale detention to serve multiple developments

2. ***Continue the planned park, trail and bike system:***
 - Create north/south trail systems on the east and west sides of the Village

-
- Plan for a east/west connector in the far north when growth reaches that area
 - Plan for a greenways buffer to the east of the Village

NATURAL RESOURCES

Historically, Forsyth has had some forested areas, steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, and drainageways as natural resources. In the future, as the Village expands into surrounding farm land, there will only be floodplains, wetlands, and drainageways. Flooding has been a significant problem in the Village due to developers ignoring the floodplain in developing some early subdivisions. The photo inset below shows a house in the floodplain protected by a dyke.



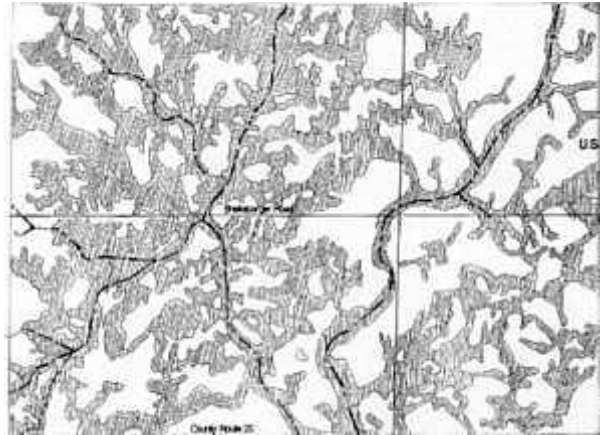
House In Floodplain at Stevens Creek

The current Village limits lie entirely within the upper reaches of Stevens Creek, a minor tributary to the Sangamon River. The growth area calls for expansion into the Spring Creek watershed. All the land in these two watersheds has had its drainage pattern dramatically altered since settlement. According to the Soil Conservation Service's *Soil Survey of Macon County, Illinois*, loess, or wind-deposited silty material, is the most extensive parent material in Macon County.

The loess was deposited during the Woodfordian glacial substage 22,000 to 12,000 years ago.² Forsyth's flat, poorly articulated drainage pattern is easily seen on the soil maps that portray the pre-settlement drainage system. That drainage system was established over thousands of years. In pre-settlement times, the Village's planning area was a web of wet and dry prairie. A review of the soils map indicates that a majority of the land was wet for a period of the year, with the water table at or near the surface. The system was radically altered as farmers drained the land to increase yields.

Figure 4-1: Drainageway soils upstream of Forsyth

Instead of streams, the upper reaches of the pre-settlement watershed was drained by a system of wetlands and subsurface drainage through wide, flat grass and reed drainage corridors that had enormous storage capacity and released water very slowly. Instead of quickly reaching a channel and flowing rapidly away, as is the case in steeper topography along the bed of the Sangamon River, water spread horizontally and built up only to drain slowly away over a prolonged period of time. Figure 4-1 is a map taken from the soil manual for the Forsyth area that indicates the streams and drainageway soils in the area immediately upstream (northwest) from Forsyth. Those drainageway soils were, in all probability, mesic prairies in pre-settlement times. Today, the mesic prairie would be at the fringe of wetlands or part of a wetland. This represents the pre-settlement drainage system and would contain floodplains.



The first settlers, farmers, installed ditches in the drainageway creating new stream channels with ditches, tiles, or erosion. This provided for the the rapid removal of the water and allowed water to concentrate more quickly in stream channels and flow away more rapidly. As long as nobody was located near a stream downstream, the consequences of this action went unnoticed. That is not to say that there were no consequences. The modification of the drainage system through farming increased the rate of run-off from a storm event. The drainageways were replaced with a stream channel that carried higher volumes of water in a given time period. The increased rate of run-off resulted in erosion, sediments deposited, and a loss of species habitat. In pre-settlement times, water ran off very slowly so flood peaks were low and flat. The ditches greatly altered the flooding profile, increasing peaks because of more water running off more swiftly.

²U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. *Soil Survey of Macon County, Illinois* (National Cooperative Soil Survey, 1990): page 101.

The regime of the stream is also changed. The natural system of wetlands and drainageway soils ensured that most streams were perennial, fed by ground water flows. Ditching or erosion lowers the point at which ground water enters the stream, speeding run-off and lowering the watertable. The new stream channels were mostly ephemeral.³ The more rapid run-off and lowering of water tables causes a habitat modification and species loss in the streams as portions of the streams are converted from perennial to ephemeral. The conversion of prairie to crop land also alters the hydrograph by increasing total run-off and decreasing recharge and transpiration.

Given that most of the upstream area of the watershed is farmland, the current floodplain illustrates the extent of the drainage system although it does not show the presence of roadside ditches or storm sewers (see Figure 4-2). Note that this floodplain covers less area than the original drainageways. The drainage ditches drained upstream storage and increased the depth of both the floodplain and floodway. The homes that have been built in the floodplain and roads that cross them have also enlarged the floodplain.



Figure 4-2: FEMA floodplain area (dark color) over soils map shows that floodplain does not match original drainageways

When development occurs, impervious surfaces replace pervious soils that permitted water to percolate into the earth and recharge the ground water. Roads, roofs, drives, and patios are impervious surfaces associated with development. The increased run-off caused by the impervious surfaces causes a dramatic alteration of the hydrograph and stream regime.

The greater run-off means more total run-off and less ground water recharge, higher peak flows, and lower low flow conditions. The prairie (or even more so, a woodland) provides a natural surface that minimizes run-off. In a light rain, nearly all the water is trapped by the plants or absorbed by the loose soil in which they grow. The plant litter enhances this ability. With increased impervious surfaces, even a very light rain creates run-off on a street or roof. If the development uses storm sewers, the water is sped to the streams even more rapidly. Few people realize the change that occurs through urbanization. A measure of flooding is the flood of a “100-year storm.”⁴ The area is shown on flood maps (Figure 4-2) and often appears to be a static measure. As a watershed urbanizes, however, the area of floodplain needed to accommodate the 100-year flood increases

³Ephemeral streams flow only during rainy periods and go dry for a period of the year. Perennial streams flow all year round except in extreme droughts.

⁴The 100-year storm is one whose frequency is expected to occur once every 100 years.

because the impervious surfaces generate more run-off. This is because more water runs off the land more quickly after a storm. In order to calculate the amount of run-off in an area, engineers and soil scientists use a run-off “curve number.” This number is very low for meadow and forest cover in areas with well-drained soils; this means that a low percent of the rainfall runs off. The rest infiltrates the soil or evaporates. In areas with poorly-drained soils (or the urban equivalent, pavement), the run-off curve number increases dramatically, meaning that a much higher percent of the rainfall runs off the land, rather than being absorbed or evaporated (see Table 4-1). The more urban a watershed becomes, the more stormwater run-off there is across larger areas. The degree to which the run-off increases is dramatic. Since much of Forsyth’s future growth is upstream of the current Village, there is real potential to increase the level of the 100-year floodplain.

There are several things the Village should add to its flood management strategies. Forsyth already has regulations that keep development out of the floodplain and require detention. The first of these focuses on the detention design wet basins. Additional strategies should focus on natural drainage as an alternative to storm sewers, dechannelizations, and revegetation.

Watershed Condition	Curve Number (CN)	Acre Feet of Run-Off	Inches of Run-Off	Change in Run-Off From Farmland
Prairie (pre-settlement)	61	8.3	0.10	-83.3%
Farmland	81	50.0	0.60	-
Urbanization 10% impervious	82.7	54.2	0.65	8.3%
Urbanization 30% impervious	86.1	68.3	0.82	28.3%
Urbanization 50% impervious	89.5	83.7	1.05	75.0%
Urbanization 70% impervious	92.9	100.0	1.20	100.0%

Source: Sheaffer et al., *Urban Storm Drainage Management*. New York: Marcel Dekker Inc. (1982), Chapter 6

Wet Basins. Forsyth should require wet detention basins for water quality, aesthetics, management, and economic reasons. Currently, the Village has permitted dry detention basins covered with grass that are drained out after a rain. Wet basins have a permanent pool of water so that they do not go dry. This is better for water quality in the streams and rivers since the wet basin traps much of polluted, first flush run-off water from streets and parking areas. Because the wet basins have a permanent pool elevation, all storage is above that level so maintenance is much easier, particularly if natural plantings are used. The bottoms of dry basins become swamps in the spring, grass cannot be mowed, and the ground ruts easily making management difficult and often resulting in the basin becoming an eyesore.

Wet basins have the advantage of increasing property values. Developers can get 10-20% increases in lot prices for lots that look out over a wet

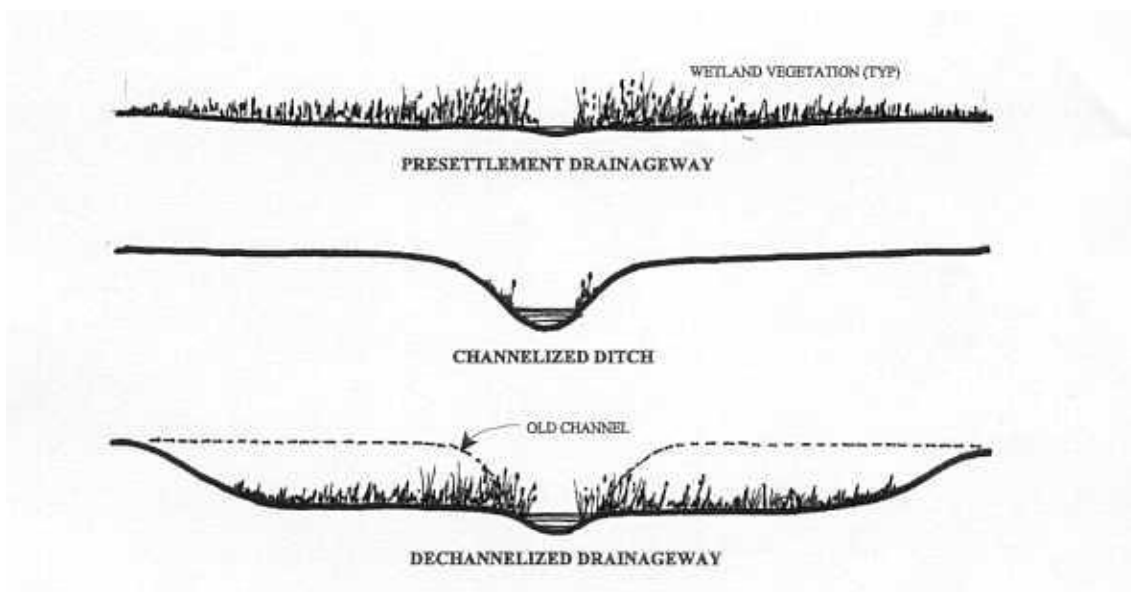
basin or pond. The lots have a “waterfront” image which is why they are more valuable. Sound site planning maximizes the number of lots that back to wet detention facilities. While care is needed to landscape the ponds and protect the pond edges from erosion, the costs are more than returned by the increased value of the lots. Farmed wetlands and drainageway soils are natural locations for the building of wet detention facilities.

Natural Surface Drainage. The drainage way soils provide the opportunity to redesign developments to use natural surface drainage systems, rather than storm sewers, for much of the development. On larger lots, those in excess of one-half acre, it may be possible to eliminate storm sewers all together. The drainageways are locations where wide, shallow drainage areas of wetland and mesic prairie can be re-established. This is less expensive than storm sewers and superior in capacity. Most storm sewers are designed for 5- to 10-year storms; the naturalized swale can be designed for the 100-year storm without the cost. Most of these areas can be fully vegetated until the channel becomes a perennial stream. Water moves more slowly, recharge is increased, and the water is cleaned of many nutrients and pollutants. Such areas can be landscaped to become attractive assets to the community. They are also ideal areas for pedestrian and bicycle trails.

Dechannelization. The farmers often channelized streams to lower water tables and increase yields. By digging a ditch or deepening a stream channel, the water was moved faster than was the case in overland flow conditions in a mesic prairie, wetland, or natural channel. The water was concentrated so that less recharge took place. De-channelization is a mitigation concept that seeks to return the stream to a more natural condition, increases flood storage, increases recharge potential, and slows the movement of water. In this concept, earth on either side of the ditch or altered channel is removed so that there is a broad, relatively flat stream bottom where flood waters spread out into overland flow instead of rising sharply in the channelized stream.

Figure 4-3 shows the plan and cross-section of the natural stream condition, the channelized stream, and the dechannelized stream. The initial channelization slightly lowers the floodplain. The process of dechannelization lowers the floodplain dramatically. If the fill is placed outside the original floodplain line and the current 100-year flood boundary is retained, the dechannelization results in a protected floodplain that can handle a much greater flood.

**Figure 4-3
Drainageway Cross Sections.**



The natural approach to storm drainage is to have homes drain to the rear to surface stormwater channels that are natural in appearance. If these areas are landscaped with trees that like wet soil conditions (such as swamp white oaks, sycamore, red maple, birch, cottonwood, and quaking aspen), then they create a major landscape feature. The planting of trees in these areas has beneficial environmental effects in slowing run-off and filtering pollutants out of both surface and sub-surface flows. They also have an important design objective -- they create green corridors that increase the market value of adjoining lots. They also break up the flat open landscape with treelines that enhance the area's character by providing solid masses of vegetation.

Given the relatively flat topography and farmed land of the watershed, it may seem that drainage and natural resources are unimportant to the Village's planning. However, this is not true. The central natural resource problem associated with development in Forsyth is flooding and drainage.

Large Scale Detention. The Village should consider larger scale detention facilities that will serve hundreds of acres, rather than small basins in every small subdivision. The larger facilities are more easily maintained and, if they can be done prior to development in a watershed, they are the best solution. These, too, should be wet basins, almost small lakes. If the Village goes in this direction, the design should seek to provide the opportunity for waterfront views or recreational opportunities so that the investment provides value in a number of different areas.

PARK, TRAIL AND BIKE SYSTEM

The Village park is a major contributor to the quality of life in Forsyth. As Forsyth grows, this system needs to be expanded. Access to the park system needs to be convenient to all residents. Currently, the east side of the Village is cut off from access by Route 51 which represents a significant barrier for children. While the existing park is within easy bicycling distance for nearly all the Village's residents, the crossing of Route 51 is dangerous. The acquisition of land on the east side of the Village in 2000 provided an opportunity to expand the park system. This land is tentatively programmed for a variety of sports fields. The community character and land use plan map calls for additional lands to be added. The Illinois Central railroad right-of-way should be acquired by the Village as a pedestrian and bicycle trail. There may even be rails to trails money available to assist in this.⁵

There are two streams in the planning area -- Stevens Creek and Spring Creek. It is important to consider these creeks' floodplains as the backbone for a linear park system. In the northern part of the Village, two unnamed drainage swales or minor creeks should be used to link the Stevens Creek and Spring Creek corridors. The majority of this connection will involve following the existing drainage pattern, and then connecting it across the ridgeline that separates the two watersheds. The Village is currently protecting the floodplain. When new development comes in along these creeks, Forsyth should seek to have the land dedicated to the Village. At a minimum, the Village will want an easement of access along these creeks for pedestrian and bicycle trails.⁶ The majority of the floodplain should be maintained in a natural condition to ensure there is not a maintenance cost that is burdensome.

As the Village grows, there will be requirements for other, more active, recreational facilities. Ideally, these will be located so they connect to the linear system and have access to at least a minor collector road. There is no point in seeking to locate these areas so far in advance of development.

One additional park acquisition target is set forth in the plan. This is a park area a few hundred feet in width between Route 51 and the north-south pedestrian bicycle trail. This park area has two purposes. First, it is to provide a green area to screen the gas tank farm. The intent of this park is to provide an area that can be bermed and landscaped to screen the tank farm from the view of travelers coming south on Route 51. Currently, this is a very unattractive entrance to the Village. Landscaping on the public rights-of-way on other sides of the gas tank farm is also needed, but this will have to be

⁵The Village should look into cooperating with the County and Decatur on a rails to trails grant that would assist in acquisition of the land, clean-up, and trail construction.

⁶The easements or gifts should be secured when the land is annexed. A standard condition of all annexation should be the provision of all the trail easements or outright dedication of the land. This is important because the annexation is totally discretionary on both the landowner and the Village. Thus, things can be asked for by both parties that might be difficult to achieve in zoning or subdivision regulation.

done in the public rights-of-way. When the commercial area develops on the west side of Route 51, a bufferyard should be required between it and the residential. This is an area where a trail easement should be acquired so there is a second east-west linkage.

Figure 4-4 is the current plan for a pedestrian and bicycle system. As development occurs, this will need to be expanded to provide a complete network. Part of this need is met by requiring sidewalks in all new developments. The second part of this can be achieved by installing a pedestrian/bicycle trail system along the natural drainage system.

Figure 4-4

Spring Creek is the eastern boundary of the planning area. It is intended that this area serves not only as a pedestrian and bicycle trail area, but also as a greenbelt. The desire here is a broad expanse of rural land separating Forsyth from any development that might ultimately occur to the east. All developments along this area should be cluster developments where a majority of the open space is located adjoining Spring Creek.

CHAPTER 5: TRANSPORTATION

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter addresses Forsyth's transportation system. Aside from safety and convenience for residents, good access to major transportation facilities is a key to attracting new business. Absence of a good transportation system can inhibit internal circulation and stymie growth. Good transportation planning will be key to maintaining and enhancing Forsyth's community character as the Village grows.

In terms of access to major transportation routes, Forsyth is in an excellent position. Proximity to an intersection of an interstate and major regional highway affords an outstanding transportation asset. Except for the largest of heavy industries, modern commerce is looking first for access to an interstate within a 10-minute drive or for very cheap land and labor.

The Village needs to plan for a sound arterial network running east-west and running parallel to Route 51. Forsyth also needs to plan for the accommodation of growing traffic without disrupting residential neighborhoods. Currently, this is not a problem because the developed portion of the Village is small, and traffic from the east and west is mostly local traffic. As Forsyth and the region grow, more subdivisions will be developed, adding traffic to roads that may be under capacity.

Transportation Goals

- 1. *Promote fully connected east-west arterial and collector system within the Village:***
 - Provide access to Hickory Point Road from Route 51 and alter ramps from I-72 to Route 51
 - Extend Barnett, Highland, and Lucille to the east as a major commercial corridor
 - Improve access to Hickory Point Mall

- 2. *Provide a full north-south transportation system of arterials and collectors:***
 - Provide parallel access to Route 51 so residents and in-Village, north-south trips are not required to use Route 51
 - Plan for a north-south road parallel and east of Route 51 that crosses I-72
 - Require connections between subdivisions to facilitate internal circulation and to promote Forsyth's identity as a place where everyone knows everyone
 - Provide additional crossings of I-72

BACKGROUND

The more closely-spaced arterial and major collector streets are, the better. These roads should not provide direct residential access to single-family homes in order to preserve the transportation

network's function.⁷ Unfortunately, normal transportation planning looks at existing (not planned) traffic volumes to classify roads. Thus, only I-72 and Route 51 are considered arterials or collectors. The traffic volumes north, east, or west of the Hickory Point Mall are trivial. However, all the existing roads that extend into the County from the Village should be viewed as future arterials or collectors. They should be planned as such, and land uses need to relate to this decision. Ideally, no residential units should take direct access to collectors or arterials. This avoids complaints about the volume of traffic.

Transportation networks work best when they are highly interconnected. This is difficult to see in a community as small as Forsyth. Developers make it more difficult by marketing projects, rather than neighborhoods. One should be able to reach all other homes in a neighborhood without going on an arterial or collector. The cul-de-sac mentality of developers in Forsyth is not good. In 20-30 years, when traffic volumes are much higher, having to go out to a major road to reach a home that is only a block away is problematic.

All of these issues can be talked about in terms of the importance of connection: of residents to each other, to their recreation, park and shopping areas, and to Route 51 and I-72. Good transportation planning has the potential to reduce some of the "splits" in the community between east and west and between pedestrians and cars.

PROBLEMS

Forsyth suffers from a lack of connection within and throughout the area. This lack of connection is compounded on Route 51 by the presence of a regional destination, the Hickory Point Mall. The Mall gathers almost all its traffic from the south along Route 51. This means that the majority of the entering Mall traffic must make a left turn. Related to this lack of access to the Mall is what can only be considered excessive access control to many properties fronting Route 51. On either side of the interstate interchange, there is nearly a mile of land with high-intensity commercial uses (generating a lot of traffic) that cannot easily access Route 51.

Discontinuous Area Roads. Normally, farmland would be parceled into a road grid of about a mile between roads, such as the distance between Janvrin Road, Oakland Avenue, Route 51, Sawyer Road, and Greenswitch. In Forsyth, the three possible major east-west collectors (Hickory Point Road, Weaver Road, and West Forsyth Road/Shafer Street) are about 4,000 feet apart. Barnett Avenue, which is the Mall's main entrance, is about halfway between Hickory Point and Weaver Road and could also be an important collector. That would be fine if they were continuous. However, Hickory Point Road has no access to Rt. 51. Hickory Point Road was continuous at Route 51 before I-72 was built. Weaver Road does not continue to the west, but loops north to West

⁷When single-family residents take direct access to an arterial or major collector, they want stop signs and low speeds which adversely affects the capacity of the road.

Forsyth Road, and it does not go east of the old rail line. Barnett Avenue is currently only three blocks long. This creates a major problem of moving traffic within Forsyth today and will get much worse as development continues north of I-72. On the west side, it would have been logical for Oakland Avenue to continue north to West Forsyth Road. Unfortunately, a subdivision now sits where the road should have continued north, and one must zig-zag north on Hundley, Justins Way, and Jordans Way.

The discontinuity of roads is also evident in the lack of feeder roads paralleling Route 51. The only access from the Mall to northwest Forsyth is via Marion Avenue through a residential neighborhood, and Marion Avenue does not align with Forsyth Parkway. The east side does not have a Mall, but it also lacks a clear circulation pattern and does not connect the commercial corridor. Elwood Street is continuous from Shafer to Weaver, with various easements or “paper” (platted, but undeveloped) streets continuing south to Hickory Point only as a bicycle path. While extension of this road might be feasible, it is two blocks east of the commercial and runs through residential areas throughout its length. Other than Route 51, no road provides the ability to get from the north end of the Village to the south.

The residential street pattern has excessive cul-de-sacs. On the western side of the Village, there are 14 subdivisions, eight of which are functionally cul-de-sacs with no interconnection. Children in adjoining subdivisions have no easy access to their neighbors. As Forsyth grows, this will cause problems because people will have to wait in traffic to get out of their subdivisions to drive one block over.

Access Control on Route 51. While it is good planning to control access on major roads so as not to congest the road with too frequent curb cuts, it is also critical that there be adequate access to ensure that turning movements are not so restricted as to create back-ups. In Forsyth, the access to Hickory Point Mall is a serious transportation problem. South of Forsyth, the majority of the traffic is bound for the Mall or other nearby commercial uses. During peak Mall hours, particularly during high-volume sales periods such as Christmas, the majority of traffic must make a left turn into the Mall. The problem is illustrated by the aerial photograph taken April 24, 1999. In this daytime shot, there are 14 vehicles stacked waiting to make a right turn out of the Mall, which is about 55% of the capacity of the stacking lanes. This situation is highly undesirable.

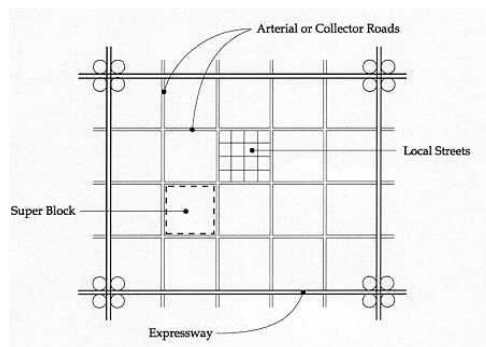
From Barnett south, there are no turn opportunities (left or right) for over a mile, excluding I-72. Mound Road, which is just over a mile south of I-72, isolates development in Decatur, just as has been done in Forsyth. Clearly, IDOT’s rationale was to maintain free flows of traffic from the interstate with a high-speed cloverleaf design. Unfortunately, this design does not function well in the commercial corridor that has developed on both sides of the interstate. It was not wise to design this interchange as a connection to two high-speed roads when it was likely that there would be intensive commercial use in the area. Many of the ramps to the toll road and major arterials in the more heavily-traveled Chicago area are diamond interchanges that use far less land. When Route 51 is congested during the holidays, no high-speed movements are possible. There needs to be an

additional access south of the main Mall entrance at Hickory Point Road. In addition to the access from Route 51, a better system of north-south access is needed to keep as many internal Forsyth trips off of Route 51 altogether.

Traffic data is not available in an ideal form. However, the traffic counts south of Barnett Avenue during the Christmas and Thanksgiving season are nearly double that of traffic count north of the Village.⁸ The traffic data is daily counts, so peak hour conditions are not available. However, it is clear that access to the Mall is highly concentrated at Barnett Avenue. The two stacking lanes for left turns are about 600 feet in length. This is a very long distance and means that excessive traffic is attempting to turn at this point. While there are access points to the north, it is human nature to use the first entrance.

Basic Arterial Network. All communities need a clear and well-functioning arterial network (see Figure 1). An ideal network would consist of arterials or major collectors at a spacing of one mile or less. This does not exist in and around Forsyth. The north-south network would consist of Route 51, a road about a mile east of Route 51, a road roughly a mile west of Route 51, and commercial access roads on each side of Route 51. Sawyer Road could serve as an eastern north-south road, but does not extend across I-72 and, thus, would only serve as a collector. To the west, Janvrin and Needle Roads might be one possibility, but alignments of this and other roads are not conducive to an arterial traffic volume. East-west network roads would be Hickory Point Road, Weaver Road, and West Forsyth/Shafer Street, plus Barnett Avenue running east from the Mall. Unfortunately, although all the named roads are present, they are cut-off or dead ended. Sawyer Road ends shy of I-72 and, thus, it cannot serve as secondary access from Decatur to Forsyth. Only the northern two east-west roads, Weaver Road and West Forsyth/Shafer Street, are continuous. It is clear that the plan must establish a clear and functional street system.

Figure 1: Hypothetical Network



⁸The traffic volume south of the Mall during the Christmas shopping season is 20,400 to 24,400; north of Forsyth Road it falls to 11,200 (1995 Traffic Map). This means that nearly 50% of the traffic on Route 51 is bound for a Forsyth destination. Unfortunately, we do not have data at both locations taken at the same time.

If Forsyth is to grow properly for the next 50 years, it is essential that this arterial grid be completed. This is not to say that some improvements in north-south traffic in the commercial corridor are unimportant. Those improvements are largely a means of reducing local traffic that must use Route 51. The major grid must be established now.

Transportation planning typically rates roads as arterial, collector, or local based on current traffic volumes. This is a major failure of long-range planning. As the Village plans for growth over the next 20 to 50 years, it must plan for the traffic that will be present at the end of the period. If that growth takes place (as is highly likely within a mile or so of I-72), then the arterial network described will be essential.

This means that long-range plans must show Weaver Road being extended to the east and west from its current termini. Barnett Avenue should be extended east, at least to the first north-south road linking Decatur and Forsyth across I-72. These improvements are entirely within the power of the Village to achieve. The second major east-west improvement is for Hickory Point Road to be reconnected. This will be very difficult because of the proximity to the I-72 ramps, topography, and drainage. An eastbound movement provides access to some commercial areas, access that is badly needed. However, allowing increased access to the Mall's southern entrance is also critical to reducing the congestion on Route 51 during the peak shopping periods.

Parallel Access to Route 51. The majority of traffic to the Mall is coming from outside the Village, mostly from parts of Decatur south of the interstate. Nevertheless, there is some traffic moving around in the Village or from the commercial areas along I-72. Every trip that can move north and south in the Forsyth area without entering Route 51 is an improvement in traffic flow. Such trips will most likely involve at least one left turn on or off of Route 51. The left turns are the worst movement for maintaining traffic flows on Route 51.

A clear system of movement through the entire Village on both sides of Route 51 is needed. Currently, there are too many discontinuities. In some cases, the Village can plan improvements and then require developers to follow the approved transportation improvement plan. In other cases, there will need to be direct action on the part of the Village because there will be no developer or condemnation may be required.

Interconnection of Streets. Arterials and collectors often form (as they do in Forsyth) a series of rectangular blocks of land that are subdivided. These are called superblocks. Efficient transportation planning requires that the properties in a superblock be interconnected so that a person making a trip within the superblock is not required to use the arterial or collector – these roads are intended to move regional traffic. In addition, most trips to an adjoining superblock should only require the driver to cross the arterial, not to use it.

Developers often oppose interconnection because they feel that it reduces the identity of their subdivision. Residents of a subdivision that has installed a connecting road often oppose the connection because they do not want traffic in their subdivision. The purpose of the interconnections is to carry trips within the superblock; thus, they are as likely to use the connection as the people in the neighboring subdivision. Another reason that people do not want interconnections is that they

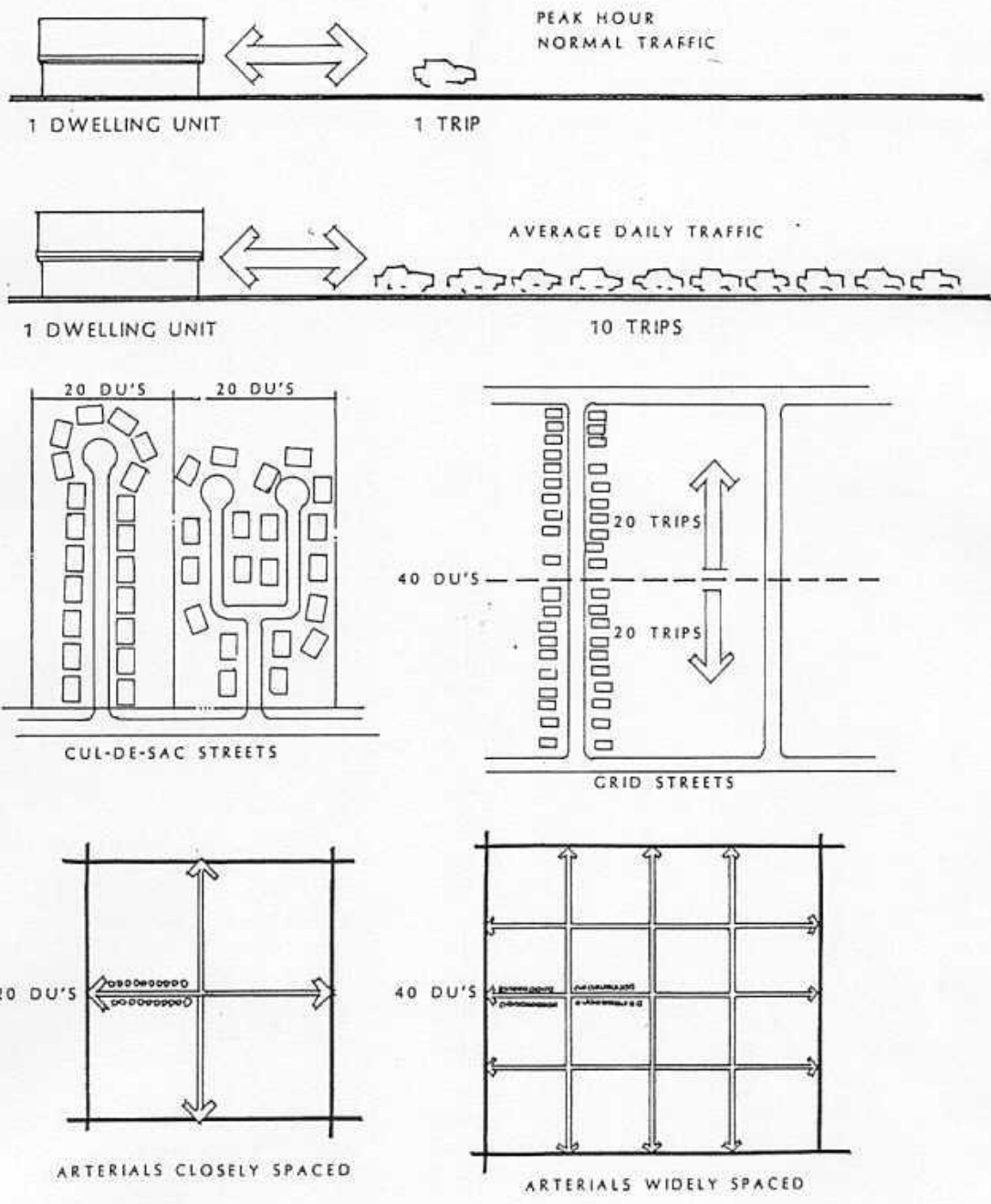
fear “cut-through” traffic – vehicles that cut through a residential neighborhood to avoid congestion at arterial or collector intersections. The subdivision can have good internal circulation and make cut-through traffic unattractive. All this requires is to avoid using short loop systems at the corners of the superblock. A more important question is whether the volume of traffic is a safety hazard in a residential neighborhood.

The average single-family dwelling generates ten trips per day or one trip during the peak hour⁹. All these trips use the local network for at least part of the trip. How does one measure the impact of these trips? Few true local streets reach levels of service greater than the highest level -- A¹⁰. Thus, the normal means of measuring traffic volumes with regard to efficiency and safety is meaningless.

It is possible to evaluate the issue mathematically and develop a standard. If a cul-de-sac has 20 homes, 20 trips during the peak hour will occur regardless of the density or street configuration. For the person nearest the collector or arterial, this fact means one car will pass every three minutes during the peak hour. In a connected grid, a street connecting two arterials would need to have 40 homes to reach the same level of traffic (see Figure 2). The actual number of trips on a segment of a connected grid may vary when there is significant directionality in commutation patterns.

⁹Institute of Traffic Engineers. Trip Generation, 6th ed., Vol. 1 of 3 (1997). Data given for Single-Family Detached Housing. Per Day averages: 9.57 weekday; 10.09 Saturday; 8.78 Sunday. Per Hour averages: 0.75 and 0.77 weekday AM peak hour; 1.01 and 1.02 weekday PM peak hour; 0.94 Saturday; 0.86 Sunday.

¹⁰The relationship of traffic volume to the capacity of the road is determined by the level of service. The levels are A through F. A means there is little traffic and a lot of capacity. At level of service F, the road is a slowly moving parking lot. Cite Traffic manual.



At what level does residential traffic on a residential street actually annoy citizens? The answer

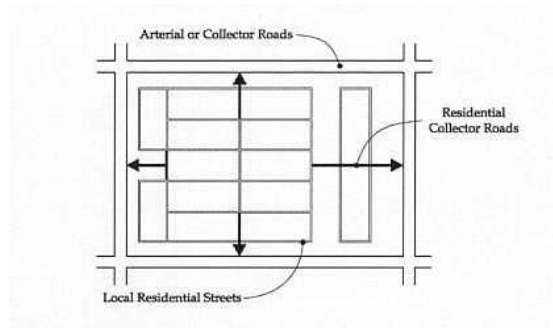
depends on the perception of safety, visual disruption, noise, or difficulty backing out onto the street. No industry standards exist for these factors on local residential streets. The most crucial element will be the perceived safety of children. No matter how much parents preach, children will play or ride bicycles in the streets. A determination of the level of traffic appropriate to a residential street is necessary.

Table 1 shows the salient facts on several possible volumes of traffic. There is a one-to-one correlation between dwelling units and trips based on one trip per hour during the peak hour. The trips per minute portrays the number of cars per hour and minute going past the home closest to the arterial or collector. The maximum travel time is for the residence furthest from the arterial. It is calculated on the normal residential speed limit of 25 m.p.h. and assumes that driver frustration and speeding does not occur. Frustration is directly proportional to the length of time it takes the homeowner to reach the arterial. The longer it takes, the higher the frustration and the more tempted the driver will be to speed, thus decreasing safety.

Table 1 ALTERNATIVE MAXIMUM RESIDENTIAL STREET LOADINGS			
Dwelling Units	Trips in Peak Hour	Trips per Minute¹	Maximum Trip Time²
20	20	0.33	23 seconds
30	30	0.50	34 seconds
45	45	0.75	53 seconds
60	60	1.00	1.16 minutes
90	90	1.50	1.74 minutes
120	120	2.00	2.32 minutes
180	180	3.00	3.48 minutes
240	240	4.00	4.64 minutes
¹ Average during peak hour. ² Assumes an average speed of 25 m.p.h. and a double loaded street with 85-foot front yards.			

Forsyth must determine the maximum travel volume or trip time for a residential street in the Village. Whenever the level exceeds that maximum, a residential collector is needed (see Figure 3). A residential collector constitutes a second level of street within a superblock to which no homes should take access. The same analysis may be used to determine when a local residential street has so much cut-through traffic that it is carrying traffic volumes appropriate to a residential collector.

Figure 3: Residential Collector



IMPLEMENTATION

The first element of successful implementation is having a long-term transportation network as part of the plan. This is particularly true for a small village like Forsyth where existing traffic volumes on most roads are low. If there is no congestion on the streets, there is a tendency to believe there is no traffic issue. A large number of traffic problems are self-created early in a community's development. The Forsyth Estates subdivision began by stripping the frontage on West Forsyth Road. This was inexpensive for the developer; there were no road costs other than culverts for each driveway. West Forsyth Road runs for miles through farmland, so the traffic volumes were extremely low; thus, no one considered the potential for safety problems. In 30 or 40 years, West Forsyth Road could be a real collector or arterial with traffic volumes that annoy the residents and make getting out of one's driveway very difficult. Across the nation, residents seek to lower the speed limit, which they think brings greater safety; however, this only increases congestion on the arterial road and increases frustration levels of drivers. Residents also call for stop signs to further slow traffic on regional roads. The community can avoid self-created traffic problems easily by planning the network early in their development cycle.

A second element is essential. The transportation plan **must** be followed. The system must be built as planned or, perhaps, with enhancements. Variations to so the neighbors, accommodate developers, or save money will ultimately degrade the system and create problems. There needs to be a real understanding that variations create problems that can be very expensive or impossible to solve in the future.

Basic Network. In most communities, the arterial network's basic pattern is created by the farm road system. In the midwest, this is often a series of roads on one-mile spacing. Before I-72 was built, there was an existing network of north-south roads at one-mile spacing and a weaker east-west road system with roads at one-half to one-mile spacing with numerous discontinuities. As long as the land was farmland with very low residential densities, the discontinuities were of little consequence. The situation was exacerbated by the construction of I-72 which made several more roads discontinuous. For some reason, the rural road grid that was mostly a one-

mile grid was not carried through the Decatur-Forsyth area. This area will ultimately develop, and a network without discontinuities is essential.

The current network is shown in Figure 4. Note the major discontinuity at Hickory Point Road. The fact that traffic can use a parallel access road to go north to Barnett Avenue to cross Route 51 simply adds to congestion at that intersection. What is created is a superblock that has 3,983 acres, or about 6.2 square miles, that is bisected by I-72 so that there is no circulation within the superblock from north to south. The future network, Figure 5, shows this superblock is divided into more manageable superblocks.

Figure 4: Existing Road Network

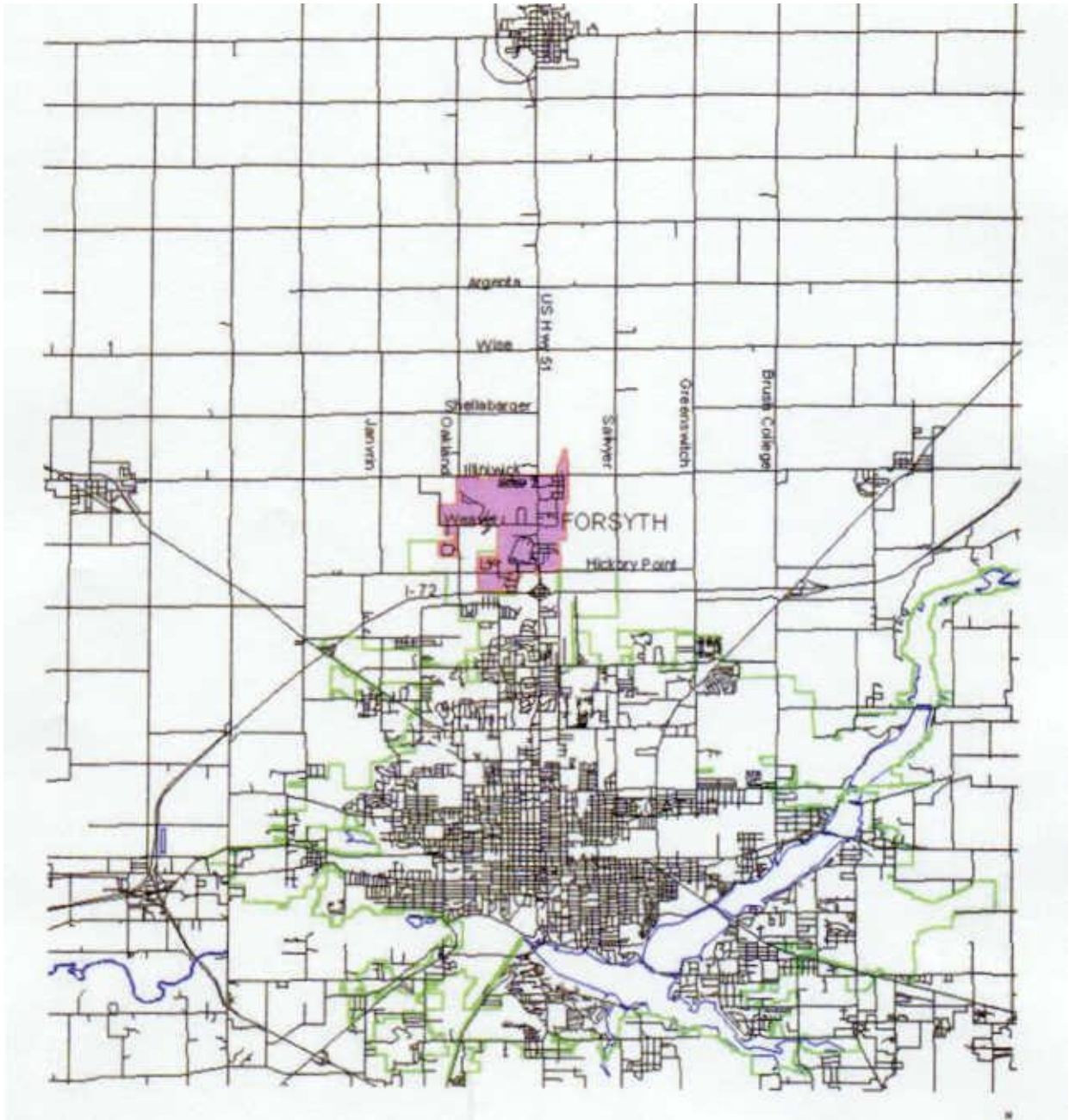
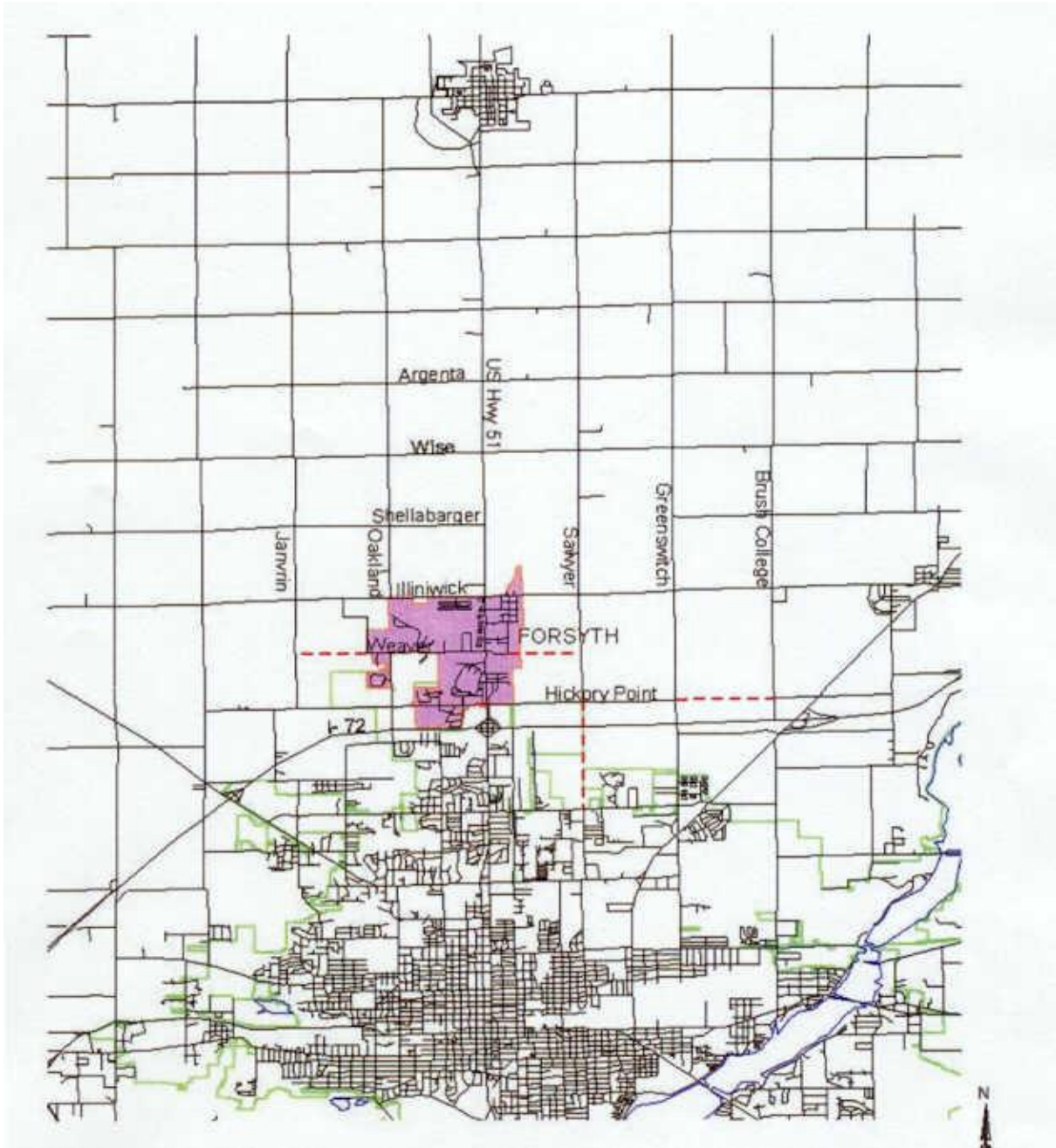


Figure 5: Future Road Network (Gaps Connected in Red)



In doing this, it is strongly recommended that an overpass be created over I-72 to provide an additional north-south connection between Decatur and Forsyth. The Martin Luther King Drive proposal on the old Illinois Central rail right-of-way offered one potential solution. The Village should support the Greenswitch Road proposal for an interchange. However, Greenswitch Road is too far to the east to provide any benefit to the lack of a road system in Forsyth.

Extending Weaver Road to the east is a viable project, although the residents of Eagle Ridge subdivision will likely oppose it because it places a major road in their back yard. The Village should provide street trees at 3 per 100 feet and evergreens for the residents' rear yards to temper this concern. Forsyth must create a long-term arterial and collector network or it will cut off growth to the east.

The greatest challenge is getting Hickory Point Road across Route 51 and providing access. There are several problems: the taper of the merge from the ramps from I-72, the topography, and the location of the parallel access roads. The design of the I-72/Route 51 interchange is a high speed interchange with long curves to promote a rapid transit. The ramps consume four times the land that the access to Routes 47 and 48 consume. The cloverleaf leaves only 500 feet from the merge point to the intersection, nearly all of which is used for tapering the merge lane. The intersection was designed with the idea that Route 51 would have a high speed limit north of the interstate. That was wishful thinking on the part of IDOT. This was clearly the logical location for a shopping center,¹¹ and the network should have been designed to accommodate this fact. The speed limit is 45 near the I-72 interchange, increasing to 55 as one drives northward; however, when the roads are congested, the flow may be stop and go.

Elevation is another major problem -- there is a 20-foot elevation change between the east and west sides of Hickory Point Road. This makes engineering the road a challenge to its alignment. Lastly, there is inadequate distance from the two access roads currently serving the area (Koester Drive and Hickory Point Drive) to provide stacking distance for an at-grade intersection. The problem is greatly increased by connecting to West Hickory Point Road. However, if there is not westbound traffic, then the southern Mall entrance cannot be used to relieve the congestion at the Mall where the major congestion inducer, the left turn lanes, is the problem. The resolution of this particular access problem will require consideration of a major redesign of the northbound I-72 to Route 51 ramp (Figure 6) to allow for a much shorter transition and provide adequate spacing. The speed of traffic on Route 51 makes such a redesign reasonable. Another alternative would be to bring up the northbound lane east of the Village (Figure 7). This would be a limited access road, perhaps one-way, that simply makes left turns easy for the interstate traffic and, for destinations north of Forsyth, avoids the commercial area entirely.

¹¹The intersection of a high volume arterial and an interstate has historically been the site of major commercial development. To think the area would remain rural is to ignore land use history around the nation.

Figure 6: Redesign Northbound I-72 Ramp to Route 51

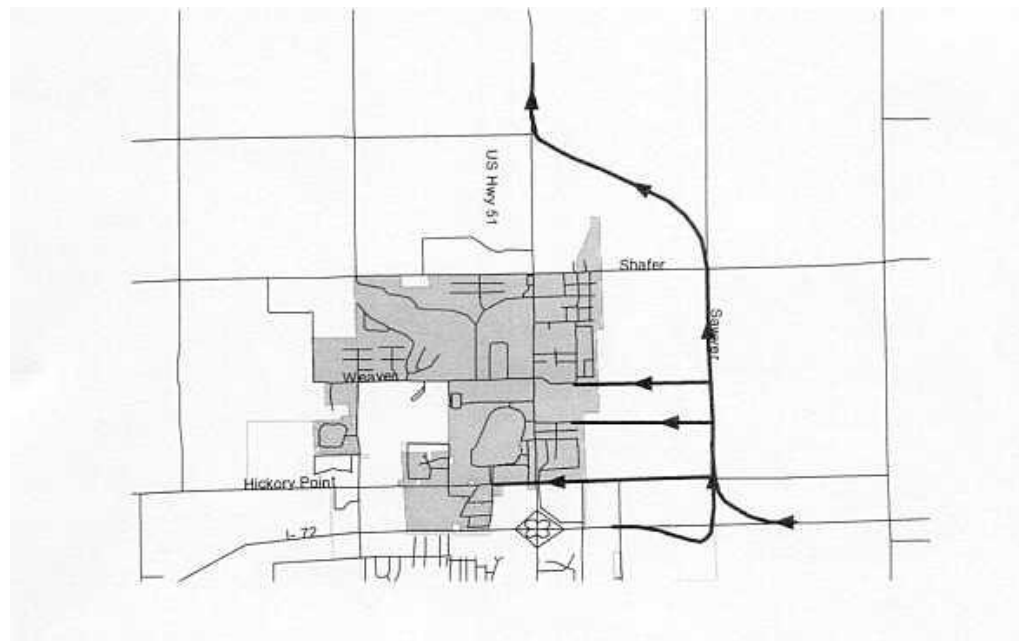
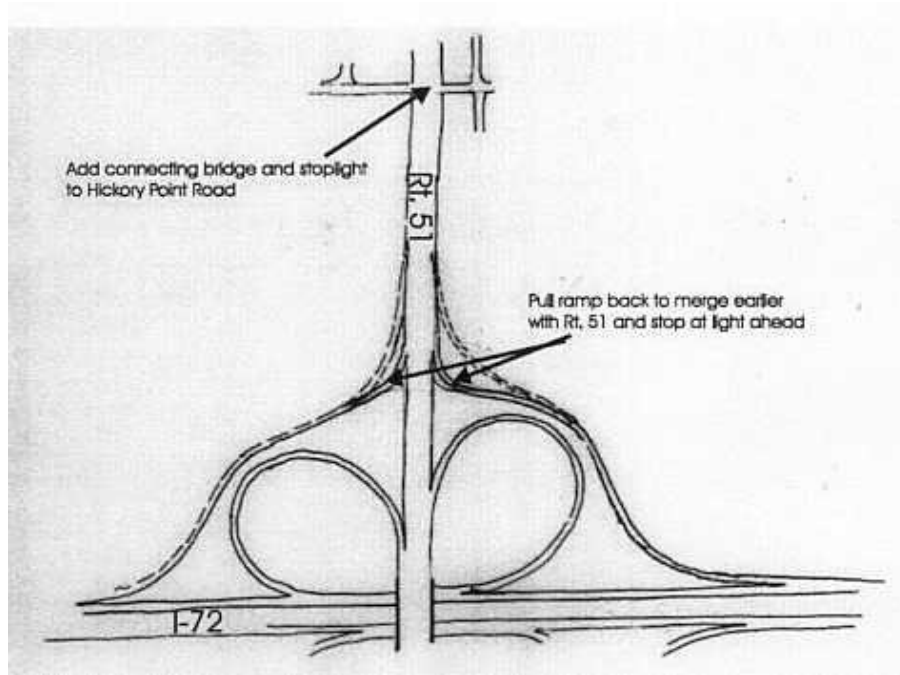
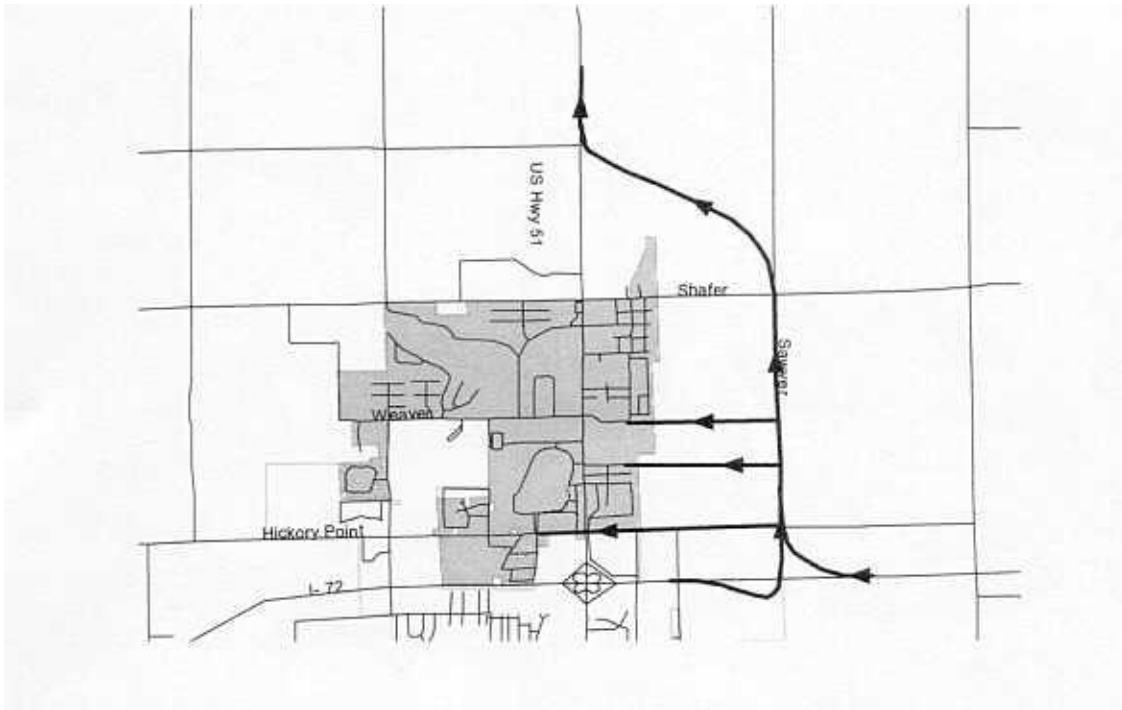


Figure 7: Alternative Access to Route 51



Parallel Access

Ideally, once a person enters a property along Route 51, they should be able to get to any other property without going back out onto Route 51. This would significantly lower the traffic volumes on Route 51. Today, that is impossible. On the east side, only Koester Drive and Commerce Place provide a parallel roadway. There is no clear parallel road on the west side except for a small area south of the main Mall entrance.

One key strip is the link from Koester Drive to Commerce Place. Clement Avenue is 350 feet east of these roads and makes a poor connection. There are relatively new uses that lie in the direct line extension that would connect the two roads, so that is not a reasonable possibility. The best possibility is to swing east about 200 feet to go behind the State Farm Branch Office on Lucille Avenue and Route 51, or swing all the way to Clement Avenue. Both of these alternatives would require Village condemnation of land. From Weaver Road north for 600 feet there is a vacant property that would permit the extension of the access road when commercial development occurs. The next 450 feet is residentially zoned and developed. This area should be planned for commercial conversion and the rezoning permitted only when the land to extend the road is part of the rezoning. This area might ultimately require active Village involvement. From Magnolia to Cox there is some residential and some commercial land, including several larger properties. This area could also easily permit the extension of the access road. North of this point, the land is mostly developed commercially, and there is no easy extension. A detailed plan for this area is needed.

On the west side of Route 51, there is an access road from Hickory Point to Barnett Avenue. It then jogs west into the Mall ring road. There is no real solution to this problem, except to make the Mall ring road a major component of the traffic system. This requires Hickory Point to have full access to Route 51. The ring road connects north to Marion Avenue and dead ends. An extension north to Weaver Road is essential. This connection would go through a PUD and some residential lots, and direct action by the Village is probably needed to make the connection. The vacant parcel north of Weaver Road will make it relatively simple to connect the access road north to Forsyth Parkway. An extension north to West Forsyth Road through the office area seems practical.

The Forsyth plan needs to identify the desired connections. The Village should adopt an official map showing all the proposed connections. Zoning should attempt to provide incentives for the dedication of the right-of-way for the parallel access roads. Forsyth will also need to incorporate land acquisition and improvement money into its long-range capital improvement program.

Interconnection of Streets

The interconnection of streets should be the easiest to achieve of Forsyth's transportation planning objectives. In practice, it is difficult because both developers and landowners have fears. While those fears are generally groundless, they make it difficult for the Village to require the interconnections. Lack of connections between subdivisions will ultimately cost citizens money and time lost due to congestion.

Returning to the concept of how much traffic on a residential street is too much, setting a maximum traffic volume for residential streets provides a sound basis of planning for connections between developments. The Village can use Table 1 to select a desired and maximum traffic volume for residential streets. This ensures landowners that traffic volumes will be kept under control. Currently, the largest number of lots on a cul-de-sac condition, where all units must exit the subdivision at a single point, is 121 lots. If that subdivision was connected to the west at the stubbed cul-de-sac to provide access to the west or north, the traffic would not be anticipated to increase. First, if there were the same number of lots to the west as in the Schroll subdivision, the number of people using the two accesses would likely balance out during the peak hour. If there were multiple accesses, the total load might be reduced for peak hour traffic. A second consideration is trips within the superblock. If there is no tie to the adjoining subdivisions, all trips within the superblock have to access the surrounding arterial and then go into the other subdivision. If there are internal connections, these trips do not go to the outlet; thus, the homes at the beginning of the cul-de-sac experience fewer trips.

There are other strategies that can reduce the total trips. Compare Christopher Drive and Spyglass Boulevard. The subdivision using Christopher Drive has 54 lots; Spyglass Boulevard, 47. The peak hour traffic on Spyglass Boulevard is 47, while it is only 27 on Christopher Drive because Christopher Drive is a loop street, not a cul-de-sac. A combination of good street layout and interconnections can significantly improve circulation within subdivisions without subjecting people

to more traffic. Figure 8 illustrates how a connected system reduces the trip at the highest traffic volume portion of the development.

Based on current developments, Forsyth should be looking to achieve less than 45 trips per street. The maximum trip generation on a residential street should be around 120 to 150 trips. After this point, the developer would have to install a residential collector. Forsyth Parkway serves as a residential collector, but has units whose drives go directly to this road. While this reduces the cost of the development to a developer, it subjects the residents of these units to unwanted traffic volumes. In turn, these residents come in and complain about speeding and traffic volumes; they want speed bumps, stop signs, and limited turn movements. The real problem is best addressed at the platting stage by not putting people in this position. Avalon Boulevard is an example of a residential collector, with the exception that the homes on the east side take access to and front on Avalon, while on the west side they front on and take access to the cul-de-sacs. On collector or arterial streets, no residential development should be permitted.

CHAPTER 6: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Forsyth is a very fortunate community in terms of its tax base. Over the last five years, the Village has averaged \$1,920,000 per year in sales tax and \$283,000 in property tax, with a total budget of \$3,400,000 during the same time period. Thus, roughly 56% of Forsyth's revenue comes from the sales tax; only about 8% from property taxes.¹² In contrast, most municipalities fund the majority of their local government activities with a real estate tax. Low property taxes and a high quality school district make Forsyth an attractive place to live.

Even with the existing tax base, Forsyth would like the retention, improvement, and expansion of the retail base of the Village. Issues raised include: competition with other communities; over-dependence on the regional Mall; attracting new and, perhaps, more upscale commercial developers; and attracting a mix of complementary uses (such as office or townhouses) to commercial areas. These issues are tied to the transportation issue of access, both pedestrian and auto, across and along Route 51. Commercial and transportation issues can also be tied to open space issues if, for example, a walking path with native plantings is used to connect new townhouses to the Mall. These types of questions and Forsyth's overall economic strategy will be considered in this paper.

Hickory Point Mall is the major source of this revenue and is the attraction for all but the interstate service businesses. Without the Mall, Forsyth's 2,800 people could support only convenience-type commercial uses. The revenue from the sales tax has made it possible for the Village to build an excellent recreation system, pedestrian and bicycle paths and to make substantial infrastructure improvements -- all without straining its tax base. The fact that a very high percentage of Forsyth's revenue is derived from non-residential users is of great value. The Village's goal is to maintain this situation and avoid a situation where this tax base is eroded.

The Mall opened in 1978 and is 24 years old. A justifiable concern is that changes in commercial activities could lead to the eventual decline of the Mall. There are strip malls and some anchor malls all across America that have fallen into decline. The opening of the Mall resulted in a severe decline in the fortunes of downtown Decatur. Forsyth rightly seeks to avoid having the same happen to its commercial center. Commercial activity often exceeds demand, with new shopping centers or uses hoping to displace older uses. Often the newest shopping center is able to attract tenants from older centers simply because they are newer. The evolution of commercial sales also has a tendency to work against older centers because there is no place for a new use to go. Forsyth needs to guard against a new regional mall competing with the Hickory Point Mall by reinvigorating the commercial area surrounding the Mall making it a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly destination.

¹²Village audits last 5 years.

Retail is only one element of economic development. It is especially attractive because the sales tax greatly increases the fiscal value of the land use. Given the Forsyth's location, there are two other uses that could be considered in addition to retail: office and industrial. The intersection of Route 51 and I-72 is one of the two best interchanges in the County (the other being I-72 and Route 36). However, the Village has indicated a desire to concentrate on expanding its commercial base. And, although the interstate location is excellent, Forsyth should work with Macon County and Decatur to arrive at a plan for large-scale office and industrial recruitment and retention. Given Forsyth's population and suburban location, dependence on Decatur and surrounding suburbs for jobs is not unusual.

The critical questions are: what types of uses can be attracted to Forsyth and what sorts of amenities will make Forsyth more attractive? Every municipality in Macon County and across the nation has similar goals. Thus, competition is fierce. How does the Village get an advantage in this competition?

Economic Development Goals

The following goals are intended to guide economic development in the Village:

1. To keep or improve the balance of the Village's tax base, with non-residential uses supporting most of the Village's needs.
2. Commercial development is the primary focus of the Village's economic strategy:
 - Maintain the strength of Hickory Point Mall as the region's prime shopping area
 - Support the Mall with a small-scale, pedestrian-friendly commercial seeking to provide additional reasons to stay in the area after shopping at the Mall
3. Office or industrial employment is a secondary focus:
 - Provide a small available area with services to be able to provide a site for interested office, business, or industrial uses
 - Avoid competing for office or industrial users

ANALYSIS

Land Uses. The mix of land uses between residential and non-residential is important because it determines whether or not the homeowner is burdened by taxes. The higher the percentage of the non-residential tax base, the easier it is for the Village to provide services without having to raise the taxes of the voters. If, for example, there is a need for \$1,000,000 in revenue in a community of 500 houses, the share of the tax paid by the homeowner is critical. Forsyth's real estate tax base is 57%

residential and 43% non-residential (42% commercial and 1% farm/industrial/railroad).¹³ In this case, residents would have to fund 57% (\$570,000, or \$1140 per household) of the improvement. If the residential share of the cost increases, more of the burden must be borne by people who vote.

There are three basic land uses – **retail**, **office**, and **industry** – that provide an economic base by providing jobs and property value. These three basic land uses can be further broken down into a number of different economic sectors. It is important to seek to market to those sectors that are growing. It is also important to understand that there is a fundamental difference between retail and the other two land uses. **Retail** and many **service** businesses are totally population-based. A retail or service business chooses to locate in a community based on three factors: population, the population's purchasing power, and the degree of competition with other retail businesses. These three factors are the most critical for a community as a whole and, along with access to larger populations, define where retail uses locate. Forsyth has the advantage of being at an interstate and major regional highway intersection. Forsyth can grow residentially and attract higher-income residents, but there is little else that the Village can do to add to its competitive position. Since the Mall is attracting shoppers from the entire Decatur metropolitan area (and even from Bloomington-Normal, Champaign, and Springfield), growth in the metropolitan area is also important. If Macon County's population does not grow significantly, then new development is simply seeking to compete with existing commercial uses.

¹³Village Clerk.

The factors affecting **industrial** and large-scale service providers (**office**) are much more complex. There is still a relationship to the population -- having a good work force and available employees is an attractor for major employers. Employers want to know they can get the work force they need. Major employers were historically able to attract people to move to an area; high national employment growth resulted in employees moving to other communities for jobs. However, fewer industries are able to attract people to move, except for high-tech industries, and quality-of-life factors are increasingly important to employees.

A look at economic data for downstate Illinois communities shows that Macon County has been lagging behind "competitor" counties in terms of population, income, and employment growth. Macon County has actually suffered from a population drop since 1970, while McLean (Bloomington-Normal), Champaign (Urbana-Champaign) and Sangamon (Springfield) Counties enjoyed population growth. Macon County's total full- and part-time employment figures and per capita personal income have also not enjoyed the growth that McLean, Champaign, and Sangamon Counties have since 1970. McLean County's total employment figures rose from 49,339 to 101,509 from 1970 to 1998 (a 106% increase), while Macon County's total employment figures rose from 61,590 to 69,648 during that time (only a 13% increase). Macon County's per capita personal income rose the slowest of the four counties from 1970 to 1998.

When comparing growth in the four counties by industry, an important trend becomes clear. Macon

County's growth from 1990-1998 was the slowest of the four counties in four industries: Mining; Manufacturing; Finance, Insurance & Real Estate (FIRE); and Services. Slow growth in mining and manufacturing is not particularly troublesome -- nationally, mining earnings actually dropped 5% since 1990, and manufacturing was the third slowest growth industry during the same time period. However, being the slowest-growing county among the four counties in the FIRE and Services industries is problematic. Nationally, the two strongest growth industries in the 1990-1998 time period were Services and FIRE. Gross Domestic Product in Current Dollars grew 72% in the Service industry and 66% in the Finance, Insurance & Real Estate Industry.¹⁴ In these two key industries, Macon County growth lagged significantly behind growth in McLean, Champaign, and Sangamon Counties during the same time period. State figures tell a comparable story. From 1990-1998, the fastest-growing industries in the state were Services and FIRE, which grew 76% and 71%, respectively, while Mining dropped 13% and Manufacturing was the third-slowest growth industry.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bureau of Economic Analysis Industry Accounts Data (Gross Product by Industry) downloaded from <http://www.bea.doc.gov/bea/dn2/gpoc.htm> on July 11, 2000.

¹⁵ Bureau of Economic Analysis Gross State Product Estimates downloaded from <http://www.bea.doc.gov/regional/gsp> on October 3, 2000.

We understand that much of the economic development planning needs to be done at the County and regional level. Currently, the Macon County Regional Planning Commission is being reformed to energize a push for a regional planning effort. Forsyth should be involved in this, as well as a much-needed County-wide economic development plan (the most recent Macon County plan dates from 1973). This spreads the costs of economic development planning among all municipalities and may help address tensions between the City of Decatur and its suburbs.

Transportation. Location with regard to transportation is very important for retailers, office, and industrial. Forsyth is very well-positioned. Access to an interstate and regional arterial is highly desirable. The problem is that once one gets on Route 51, it is difficult to get to new land suitable for development. Hickory Point Road, Barnett Avenue, and Weaver Road must be able to distribute traffic to the east and west. This is a critical problem (see Transportation chapter). Nearly all traffic for retail, office, or industrial uses comes into Forsyth from the south; everyone is making left turns into Hickory Point Mall and would have to make left turns into the only site suitable for a large supermarket (south of the Village Hall). This lowers the traffic capacity of Route 51 and creates congestion, which will ultimately limit commercial expansion. The transportation issue is, thus, a serious limiting factor for economic development strategies.

Available Land. It is not enough to have land shown on the Comprehensive Plan as commercial, industrial and office. The land must be in the Village, zoned appropriately, and immediately available for development. There is still a supply of available commercial land, but the Village is running out of available land in this category. It needs to rezone larger residential parcels in the corridor to commercial. No rezoning of small properties should occur unless the needed parallel access roads can be provided. The land that is zoned or suitable to be zoned for commercial uses has

the available infrastructure to be ready to build.

There is no significant Village land zoned for large-scale office or industrial employers. Further, there is no land in Forsyth that is even suitable. A significant portion of employers, both industrial and office, do not reach a decision on a new facility until they are in crisis. Some of the smallest businesses will be looking for existing available space where they can move in within weeks. The larger ones want a site that they can acquire and begin construction as soon as plans are approved. This condition can only be met in a lot in an existing industrial park where all utilities are present. If these conditions are not present, the majority of the employment market is inaccessible to Forsyth's recruiting efforts. A major portion of the planning effort must focus on providing suitable land and infrastructure to attract these uses. Efforts at recruitment will not succeed until there is available land.

Community Character. Another way to attract employers is providing a quality setting. It is often unrecognized, even by economic development specialists, that a large degree of a community's success hinges on their ability to attract residential growth. People making location decisions will be looking for a community in which their managers will want to live. Forsyth has a good community character (see Chapter 3, Community Character). Forsyth is very small compared to the Decatur region, so there are limits to the potential of the Village. However, Forsyth should continue to excel in this area and upgrade in areas where it can make a difference.

Residents of Forsyth understand that the growth and development of Forsyth and Decatur are intertwined. Forsyth needs to work with Decatur to improve the metro area quality-of-life offerings. Compared with similar-sized metro communities in the region, the Decatur metro area does not fare well. When compared with similar sized communities (Bloomington-Normal, Champaign-Urbana, The Quad Cities, Evansville-Henderson [Indiana-Kentucky], Peoria-Pekin, and Terra Haute, Indiana), the Decatur metro area had the lowest rating -- 331 (see Table 1). The rating of the other Illinois cities averaged 157; the overall average was 188. Decatur did very poorly on jobs with a ranking of 353 out of 354. Education, health care, and recreation with scores of 294, 254, and 326, respectively, were also very low. Only in the cost of living category was Decatur above average. It was slightly below average in crime and the arts. While these types of rankings cannot be entirely objective or precise, they are popular measures used by consultants in industrial development. Whether or not the Forsyth/Decatur area feels accurately represented by the rankings, the area can be negatively impacted by "bad press" (as seen recently with the Firestone-Bridgestone difficulties).

Commercial Center. Many communities have a commercial center, often the historic town center. Maintaining these town centers has been difficult during a period of dynamic change in retailing. The department stores have struggled for years against the discount "big boxes" like Wal-Mart and Target. Small owner-operated office, electronic, camera, music, bookstores, and other retailers are being driven out by specialized big boxes. Internet-based electronic retailing will have an impact in coming decades. The challenge in Forsyth is compounded – its "center" is a commercial strip. Other than the Mall, there is not a central commercial space. All the major commercial uses (the restaurants, the Lowe's, etc.) are scattered and disconnected. The strip is a place to visit and leave.

How does Forsyth keep a dynamic commercial economy? One method is to make it a place to come and spend time, not just visit and leave.

One of the faster-growing segments of the economy is the entertainment category. This is a dynamic sector that used to be movies, amusement parks, bowling, mini-golf, and the like. Today, there are also themed-uses, such as the Rainforest Café, which provide entertainment and a meal. Big-box booksellers have introduced cafés and live entertainment, readings, and book clubs. Enhancing the entertainment component of a commercial center has positive elements. It creates a stronger synergy than simply a large collection of retail uses. Entertainment uses need restaurant support. Where there are lots of entertainment and restaurant activity, retail uses that stay open to accommodate the people who are making an evening of it will do better.

The problem with this is that the people want to park and walk to all of these things, which is impossible in a strip commercial area such as Forsyth. Thus, there needs to be a strategy to enhance the viability of the commercial center through pedestrian access and greater diversity and interest. Entertainment or service uses that could be integrated into the commercial core area, for example, are an outlet mall, a bowling alley, and a medical office building. If the Mall is connected to the large vacant commercial area south of the Village Hall, and the elderly housing is connected to the Mall and to a medical office building, a synergy could be started among different uses that encourages people to walk from one site to another and spend more time in the area. Again, the Village should be aggressively attacking the circulation problems, both pedestrian- and auto-related, in this area.

Table 1: Community Rankings

Factor	Bloomington-Normal, IL	Champaign-Urbana, IL	Quad Cities	Decatur, IL	Evansville (IN)-Henderson (KY)	Peoria-Pekin, IL	Springfield, IL	Terra Haute, IN	Nationwide Best (1)	Nationwide Worst (354)
Cost of living (lower rank= less expensive)	150	120	97	108	52	100	74	85	Clarksville (TN)-Hopkinsville (KY)	New York, NY
Transportation	291	93	71	226	124	150	133	256	Chicago, IL	Houma, LA
Jobs	210	227	231	353	257	159	267	330	Phoenix-Mesa, AZ	Steubenville-Weirton, OH-WV
Education	125	141	77	294	151	146	128	109	Raleigh-Durham, NC	Merced, CA
Climate	278	255	283	307	216	288	312	235	Santa Barbara, CA	Sudbury, ON
Crime	30	191	146	188	155	169	240	211	Johnstown, PA	Miami, FL
The Arts	134	156	145	199	89	118	221	255	New York, NY	Houma, LA
Health Care	306	100	236	254	65	214	56	185	Vancouver, BC	New Bedford, MA
Recreation	250	242	115	326	258	103	247	267	New Orleans, LA	Altoona, PA
Overall Rank	174	156	128	331	122	138	191	262	Salt Lake City - Ogden, UT	Kankakee, IL
Source: Savageau, David. <i>Places Rated Almanac: Millennium Edition</i> . Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000.										

FORSYTH ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The Village has one clear economic development goal: to keep or improve the balance of the Village's tax base, with non-residential uses supporting most of the Village's needs. The level of taxes that has to be levied on the residential community is very important. The Village has been able to supply its residents with a high level of services and facilities without having to go to the voters to increase taxes. This is a position the Village wants to maintain. This does not mean that the Village needs to have an aggressive annexation effort for expanding commercial growth or attracting office or industrial growth. It is more important that the Village shore up its existing commercial area by adding new entertainment and service uses and making sure connections, both pedestrian and auto, are present. The Village can also plan for a business park which contains office, service, and industrial uses in a planned (non-residential) subdivision setting. Business parks are supplanting industrial parks across the nation, and the increasing service sector employment trends indicate that this will continue.

Forsyth is already a regional retail area, anchored by the Hickory Point Mall. Its first priority is to enhance this area. This must be done by building more attractions in the immediate area that diversify the offerings. Building new areas is always risky, for those areas' growth may be at the expense of existing businesses. The major retail emphasis should be expansion of uses in the Mall area and upgrading uses in the Route 51 corridor.

With respect to the business park, there are other factors to consider that can dramatically affect the Village's goals. A decision on the community character issue of "how big does the Village want to be?" is important in the annexation strategy for the non-residential tax base. If the Village's goal is to retain a small-town quality of life and community scale, its goals may be far more modest than if it intends to be a very large suburban community. The Village's ability to cooperate with Decatur is also important.

If the Village sets growth limits, its goals for economic development can be relatively modest. The emphasis can be in upgrading the Route 51 corridor and creating an urban center enhancing the character of the shopping Mall, evolving it into a town center. A relatively modest plan for a business park for office and industrial uses would be 100 to 200 acres.

If the Village has no growth limits, it would compete for the maximum amount of business park land it can get. Continual monitoring would be needed to ensure the proper balance is maintained in the total tax base. This strategy may or may not succeed. It will leave Forsyth in direct competition with Decatur, and it is possible that the Village will end up being more successful in attracting residential than industrial or office uses. If this happened, the Village might end up relying more on residential property taxes.

IMPLEMENTATION

There are several levels of implementation. The first level includes elements that are under Forsyth's direct control, where actions taken by the Village are likely to succeed without additional assistance.

However, economic development is a regional issue, as well as a local one, and there are many goals that may not be achieved unless there is some form of regional cooperation. It is also good to have a wide-ranging strategy; a single, narrow focus will result in missing an important opportunity. The best strategy is to have a wide range of targeted strategies so that the Village can react with a well-thought out response to development proposals.

Village Actions

1. *Planned Business Park Area.* The Village could plan for a relatively compact planned office, service, and industrial area. This area would be designed to accommodate a wide range of small to moderate users. This strategy is aimed at attracting businesses that want a quality development site. These are likely to be the buildings with the greatest assessed value. If the Village can get industrial land near I-72, it has a high probability of getting a successful business park. Since business and industry often have no sales, their value is in the property value. Thus, seeking the highest quality business park is aimed at getting quality buildings with high assessed values.
2. *Industrial Park.* Any planned industrial park should have ready on and off access to I-72, but can do without direct visibility. The industrial park, as compared to the business park, is designed to attract heavier industrial users that want low-cost space and outdoor storage. Metal sided buildings or tilt slab buildings are the most common building types in downstate industrial parks. In addition, there would need to be a wide range of parcel sizes. Small companies need to be able to quickly acquire small, developable parcels. There is a bigger market for this type of use than for a high-quality business park; it might develop faster, but will not have the same sort of image as the rest of Forsyth.
3. *Village Business Park.* This may be a way in which the Village could annex and get land near a proposed interchange. The Village has two issues to consider with this strategy. The first is getting land annexed to the Village in the right place. The second is attracting high-quality businesses. Municipally-owned business parks are very common in Wisconsin, where the state, cities, and villages are establishing business parks and aggressively marketing them.

For Forsyth, this strategy has some unique benefits. The Village may be able to condemn land for a public purpose; a business park that attracts economic development can serve this purpose. A voluntary annexation program could be sweetened if the Village were to agree to develop the first phase of a business park alone or in partnership with the landowner. This

would provide the landowner initial cash and make the remaining land's zoning that much more valuable. The second benefit is that by initiating a business park, the Village can immediately become actively involved in business recruitment – it does not have to wait for annexation and private development of large land holdings. The business park can start at a manageable scale. If the Village initiates the business park, it can set the tone for landscaping, architecture, and signage to attract high quality businesses.

4. *Starter Industrial Facility-Incubator.* There is an additional industry sector that is not addressed well by the industrial park -- the start-up industry. The American success story is that of the business that started in a garage or basement. These businesses need places to go and are, for the most part, not able to afford space in a normal business or industrial park. The business incubator is a building with flexible space that caters to small, start-up businesses. Sometimes there are common services, such as secretarial or accounting, that are available to assist new businesses. These are often run by the local economic development authorities who write down some of the costs to provide cheaper rent. The real purpose of the incubator is not to make a lot of money on the uses, but to get them started and hope they succeed and move into more expensive space in the community.
5. *Communications.* The Village needs to work with the phone company and, possibly, cable companies to ensure that the Village is served with state-of-the-art voice and high-speed data communications infrastructure.
6. *Regional Planning.* The Village is small and County growth is quite slow; thus, the image of the Decatur area is critical to attracting development and new businesses to the region. A poor image of Decatur can become a vicious cycle – a lack of good jobs discourages new businesses. In terms of the place rankings mentioned earlier, the area obviously cannot address its ranking for climate. It should, however, be able to work on its ranking with regard to recreation, health care, and education. As discussed in Chapter 2, Growth Management, the Village and Macon County should be seeking ways in which they can assist in raising the region's ranking in areas where the community is particularly weak. This sort of regional effort is essential because Decatur does not have the resources to improve the region's ranking on its own. The region should also work with the state to seek a major state employer or facility that would improve the area's ratings for employment, the arts, recreation, and education. For example, the County could try to attract a university satellite or branch campus affiliated with one of the state universities.

CHAPTER 7: GROWTH POLICIES, ANNEXATION, AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

INTRODUCTION

Three issues are highly interrelated: growth policies, annexation, and intergovernmental cooperation. The Village of Forsyth grows by annexation and, therefore, is in competition with the City of Decatur. This is no different than most other suburban communities in Illinois. The major difference is the degree of bitterness and competition between Forsyth and Decatur. This goes back to Forsyth's decision to annex and permit the development of the Hickory Point Mall. Decatur turned the mall down to protect its downtown, a strategy which it felt was critical to its economic health.¹⁶ When the mall was annexed and built in Forsyth, Decatur's downtown suffered the damage it had been seeking to avoid. This was a bitter pill for the City of Decatur to swallow, because it suffered the feared economic damage and did not receive any tax money from the new mall. The enmity between the two communities is understandable from the City's perspective. However, this is a 25-year old historical event, and things should have subsided by now. The enmity is kept alive largely because the competition for growth continues. During our reconnaissance, Forsyth residents expressed some unhappiness about the loss of an automobile dealership to Decatur, indicating that this is still an active concern to both communities.

As in most communities, growth occurs primarily on the outer edges. Thus, annexation is the vehicle for growth. Developers can seek the best deal from city and suburb. Growth by annexation locks the two communities into competition (conflict). Both would like to see high quality residences built in their community. Both want non-residential tax revenues to be able to offer more services to their residents without raising residential taxes. Commercial growth is the most desirable because it provides sale tax revenues, as well as property taxes. Forsyth's real estate tax rate is very low (.4585) compared to Decatur's (.9713). This is a continual sore spot for Decatur. It is human nature that every community wants to provide more at less cost. This means aggressively pursuing more commercial development and more employment. Thus, the two communities are competing for the same limited growth potential for seemingly identical reasons. The loss of major employers in the past and very slow growth potential makes the situation worse because there are so few opportunities.

Growth in Illinois occurs by annexation, and the Decatur area is no exception. Annexation policy is, thus, linked to the growth expectations of the Village and City. Most planners believe that intergovernmental cooperation is the best means to defuse the battle between a city and its surrounding villages. There are only two options: continue aggressive annexation strategies and maintain the battle and bitterness of the loser of each battle, or find a means to cooperate and reduce

¹⁶This decision was considered in the planning profession to be a sound strategy to protect downtowns and enable them to remain healthy.

the battle to a more manageable level. These issues will be looked at in greater detail. Potential strategies for solutions will then be reviewed.

Growth Policies, Annexation, and Intergovernmental Cooperation Goals

The following goals and objectives are intended to guide the Village's approach to growth, annexation, and intergovernmental cooperation. These three topics are closely linked.

1. ***Limiting expansion of the Village of Forsyth to residential growth and some modest commercial development and to minor employment growth.***
 - Allowing the City of Decatur to accommodate major industrial or office development
 - Keep the Village's small-town character

2. ***Annex only what the Village can serve and concentrate on residential development and minor commercial expansion.***

3. ***Implement a boundary agreement between the City of Decatur and the Village of Forsyth.***
 - Protects the Village's character and maintains buffers with more intensive development
 - Provides Decatur with room to expand employment opportunities north of I-72.

GROWTH

In the introduction, it was assumed that Forsyth and Decatur (or city and suburbs, in general) have similar goals and objectives in a fiscal sense. Local governments are funded locally by real estate and sales taxes to a large degree. None want to raise taxes and all are under pressure from taxpayers for more services at less cost. A key element in the competition is that both seek the same uses. Are Forsyth's and Decatur's growth goals truly the same? If they are identical, then the battle will continue because they each want the same few new uses. If a clear distinction is made between the two, then perhaps the desire for land uses on annexed land can be separated. This can be a first step in seeking intergovernmental cooperation, recognizing separate goals that are not in conflict or which have limited potential for conflict.

Forsyth wants to remain a quality residential community with a small-town atmosphere and sense of community. The committee suggested its growth strategy should be oriented towards planned, steady, moderate growth. Implicit in the notion of a small-town atmosphere is the concept of retaining a scale that is consistent with this atmosphere. Decatur is in competition with Forsyth, Mount Zion and other central Illinois metropolitan areas and is, thus, in a "growth is good" mode. It wants to avoid being hemmed in by the surrounding villages.¹⁷ Because Decatur has relatively few

¹⁷This is a sound goal for the City of Decatur, as history shows that cities or villages that cannot grow by annexation face a much more costly task of maintaining a quality environment for its citizens.

suburbs, there should be methods of ensuring that the City has sound growth corridors available to it and that Forsyth will assist in protecting Decatur's growth corridors if Decatur will assist in protecting Forsyth's character goals.

The apparent desire of the Village to retain a small-town character may be one of the elements around which it could structure an agreement. If the Village has definitive growth limits and leaves a significant growth area for the City where the Village will not seek to compete, this could be a basis for agreement.

Small-town Character

As has been discussed in the Community Character paper, a community cannot endlessly grow and still retain its small-town character. Part of the charm of Forsyth is the recreation program and central park facility. Another part of the charm is that, at Forsyth's current population and size, the residents have a high probability of knowing or recognizing all the other families. Can Forsyth triple or quadruple in size and retain this small-town character? It can certainly continue to invest in facilities and programs, but as the community continues to grow, the ability of residents to know each other is reduced. Eventually, it will be lost entirely. The comments from the steering committee about the division between the east and west neighborhoods is the first symptom of this. If the Village wants to retain a small-town character, it will have to limit its size.

In terms of community scale, Forsyth is still a village, but has only limited development potential before, in scale terms, it becomes a town. If the Village chooses to remain a small town, it will need definitive boundaries. This means the Village would be planning for 20-year growth, but should set an ultimate Village growth boundary. Should the Village set this boundary, the limitation of growth can give assurance to Decatur that areas of competition are limited. If there are key locations for new roads to cross the interstate, then providing both communities with growth opportunities in these areas can be a manner in which each community is a winner.

Interstate 72 is along Forsyth's southern boundary with Decatur and, because of the location value of the interstate, the competition between Decatur and Forsyth is predictably likely to be the most contentious in this area. Forsyth's land use plan will have to focus on ensuring that it has some high-quality development potential on the interstate near an interchange. If the Village is willing to limit its growth boundaries, it should be possible to agree with Decatur on a boundary such that Decatur can also be assured of development potential in this critical area.

A sticky issue could be Forsyth's desire to not be surrounded by Decatur. A significant portion of the Village's character results from having agricultural or rural uses along its boundaries. This will become a critical issue as the region grows. As growth comes, landowners anticipate selling for ever higher values. In the Chicago area, this has led some cities (such as Aurora, Elgin, and Joliet) to adopt very aggressive annexation strategies, ultimately being unwilling to say no to any development proposal. This has led to adverse impacts on school districts that are the major share of the total tax bill. The second element that can be seen across the nation is that long-term growth destroys the

uniqueness of each community as growth continues outward in the same old pattern. There are benefits to having some areas that are not scheduled for significant development. This steers development to specific areas so total infrastructure investment is limited. In addition, it will make the entire region more attractive (see Chapter 6, Economic Development for a further discussion of this issue).

Tax Breaks

A subset competition for growth is the tax breaks and other incentives offered to attract a use or to raid uses from the other community. Tax and other incentives to the development community are generally undesirable. When a tax break is offered to attract new development, it postpones the advantage of the new development. While this may deny another community the use, it denies the host community the revenue for which it is seeking the use in the first place. It is, thus, a poor governmental strategy. Within the Decatur area, this type of competition is non-productive and should be eliminated so all the communities get maximum benefit from growth. In competition with other cities and regions, this is probably unavoidable, since only legislation at a national or state level can eliminate the practice.

The communities in Macon County should agree that no tax breaks will be offered to developments seeking relocation within the County. Every time a community provides a tax break, it is probably deferring improvements or important maintenance. The loss of tax revenue will not be made up by raising taxes, but by cutting back somewhere. This should be easy for retail types of uses because they cannot threaten to relocate 40 miles away. It may be a bit more difficult with employers, because they may also threaten to leave the area. However, good communications should enable the communities to work together on this.

Other Forms of Cooperation

Flood Protection. Since the Village is in the headwaters and upstream reaches of Stevens Creek and there is flooding in Decatur, a strong Village initiative that provides downstream flood relief is desirable. If the Village develops appropriate standards (see the Drainage and Resources issue paper) that demonstratively will benefit downstream property owners at the expense of developers in Forsyth, this should be attractive to the City. Flooding is a regional problem and one that is linked to growth. It is clear that greatly improved stormwater regulations would benefit Forsyth residents. As Decatur is downstream, significant efforts to improve stormwater regulations and increase flood storage in Forsyth will clearly benefit the City, as well. The Village should take the initiative to develop the region's best stormwater regulations. It should capitalize on this and seek City adoption, as well. Since much of the City is already developed, many of the recommended standards would not have an impact in Decatur, except for new developments on the edge of the City. There, it is likely that the standards would benefit existing residents of Decatur and provide lesser benefits in Forsyth, where the floodplain is less extensive.

Economic Development. It is clear that the entire County would benefit from a more successful economic development strategy. Part of the conflict appears to stem from the fact that the County has not grown at the same rate as other downstate metropolitan areas. In a slow-to-no regional growth situation, most new commercial development is displacing or moving existing retail or service uses, not providing new uses. The “big box” uses (like Wal-Mart or K-Mart) are usually replacing existing uses, rather than exploiting new market potential. Thus, much of the new development does not generate new jobs and new business, but rather involves displacing existing uses. Thus, the new business may result in the loss of a business in another community.

Industrial, business park, or office development, on the other hand, is far more likely to be a new development that does not displace an existing use. The exception to this is relocations. When a company outgrows its current facilities or where the current facilities can no longer provide the needed space and equipment needs, there is a possibility that it will relocate in another community. The office industrial area has great potential for cooperation. The first aspect of this is occurring with Forsyth’s participation in the region’s economic development. One strategy is to move economic development from a City and Village function to a County function. Tax breaks, if they have to be offered, would come from the County where the costs would be assessed against all citizens, not just a single community. This would also prohibit tax breaks for uses relocating within the County. The use of tax breaks should be for businesses recruited from *outside* the County because these are new business that create demand for both housing and new retail and service facilities.

Regional Services. Another cooperation area is in providing regional services. Cities often provide services to the general region that benefit unincorporated residents and the residents of smaller villages, such as museums (The Children’s Museum of Illinois), libraries (The Decatur Public Library), service organizations (Habitat for Humanity–Decatur Area), and the like. These services are provided at the expense of the City taxpayers and, even though non-residents may often pay higher fees, the total operations are supported by the City. One method of gaining cooperation is for the other governments to allocate support to the City for the provision of these services. This represents a recognition of the City’s benefits to the region. Further, the fiscal support reduces the City’s concern about Village growth because it is getting some fiscal support from the Village.

Intergovernmental Cooperation. Coordination between local governments is called intergovernmental cooperation. There are a variety of techniques that can be used to achieve such cooperation. Some communities work together well in a completely informal arrangement. Other communities use some form of binding agreement to achieve the desired results.

Informal Cooperation. This is the simplest form of cooperation. It has the least potential in the case of Forsyth’s and Decatur’s long conflict because there is nothing to bind either party. A number of such efforts have been tried in the Chicago area, and most have failed. Only where both communities are focused on a common objective do informal agreements seem to offer significant potential, a condition that is not present in Forsyth.

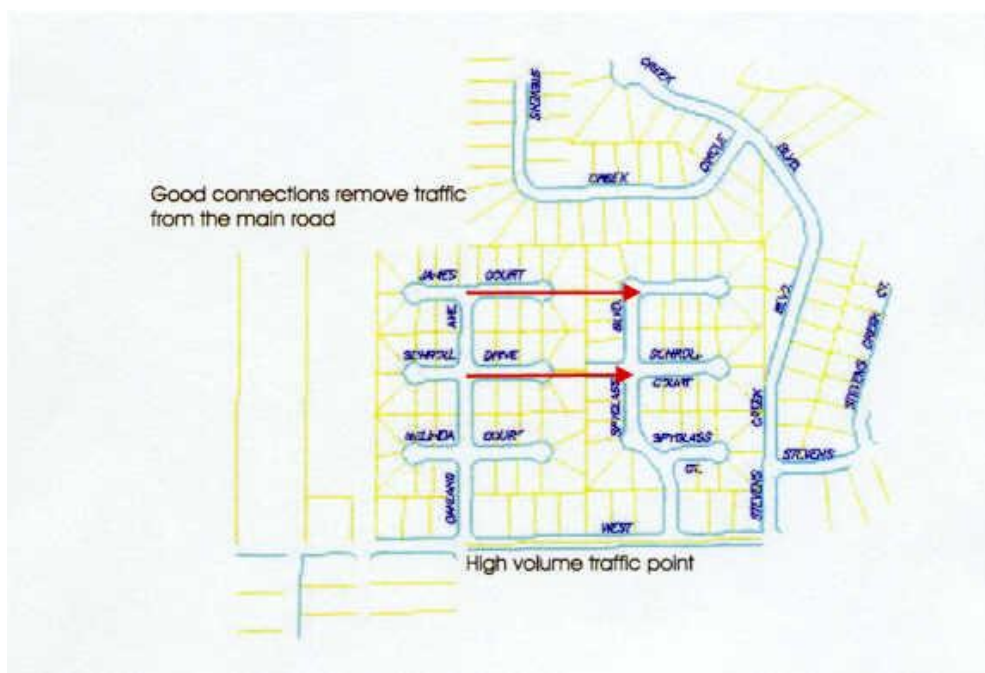
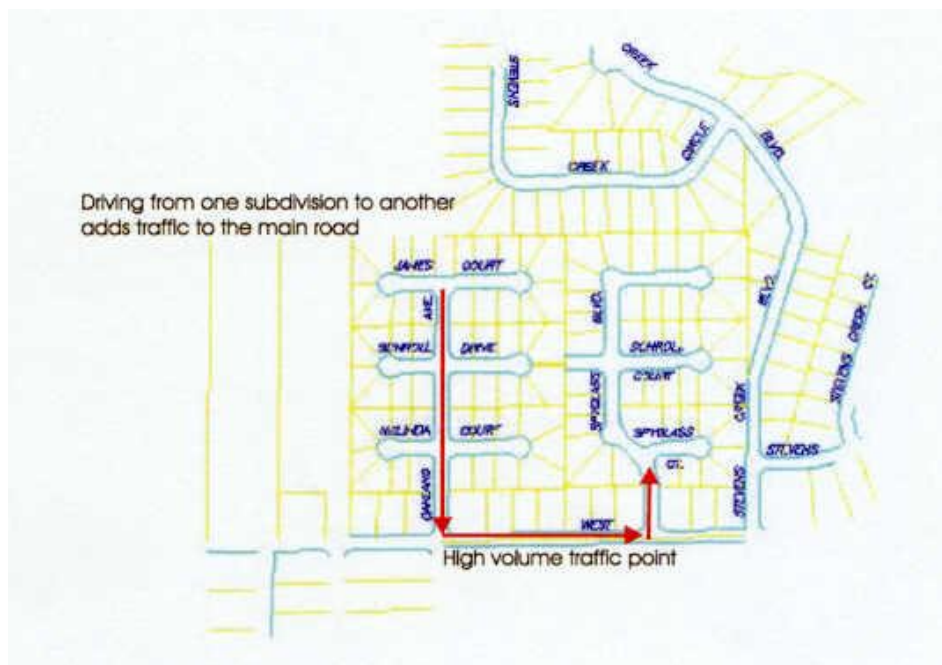
Boundary Agreements. A boundary agreement is a formal legal document that specifically sets limits to the growth of each community in the areas between them. Typically, such agreements are for a fixed time period, usually for 10-20 years. This is a workable form of intergovernmental agreement; it basically eliminates the competition for land that creates enmity between the two communities. Such a boundary agreement would have to provide both communities with a desired share of the market for residential, industrial, and office development. Some communities have had trouble at the time of renewal. A long initial period should be sought and, if the communities update their plans every five years, the agreements can have a long life.

Regional Planning. Regional planning seeks not only to limit urban sprawl and channel growth into desired corridors, but also to allocate fair shares of growth to each community. The land use aspect is critical because the issue between Forsyth and Decatur is about land uses. Sound regional planning would look not only at the issue of new development and growth, but also at the retention and revitalization of existing areas of retail, business, or industrial use. Plans that are designed not only to provide for growth, but also for revitalization can do much to eliminate the fear of one community stealing the economic assets of another. It can also address one of the biggest threats to cooperative planning – the ability of developers to play one community off against another. When there is a common plan for the use and intensity of land, the developer cannot seek to gain concessions from a community with more stringent rules by threatening to go to one with less stringent rules.

Resources Planning Act. This is a state code provision that allows local jurisdictions to cooperatively plan for an area. It would combine the regional planning and boundary agreement approach with other techniques for intergovernmental cooperation. If the city, county, and villages all participate, then there are endless variations on regulatory approaches that could be used. For example, subject to common zoning standards for a boundary agreement, Macon County could concede zoning power in specific areas to the local government. This would be the most powerful tool. It would not only regulate the use of land, but also its intensity, and would permit control of land use to achieve a better regional development pattern.

The answer to the land competition may be inherent in Forsyth's desire to maintain a small-town character and quality of life. This tends to imply a limited size and some separation between it and the larger City of Decatur. If there are some clear limits to Forsyth's growth in areas where there is logical expansion potential for the City of Decatur, this should be the basis for a logical land use and boundary agreement.

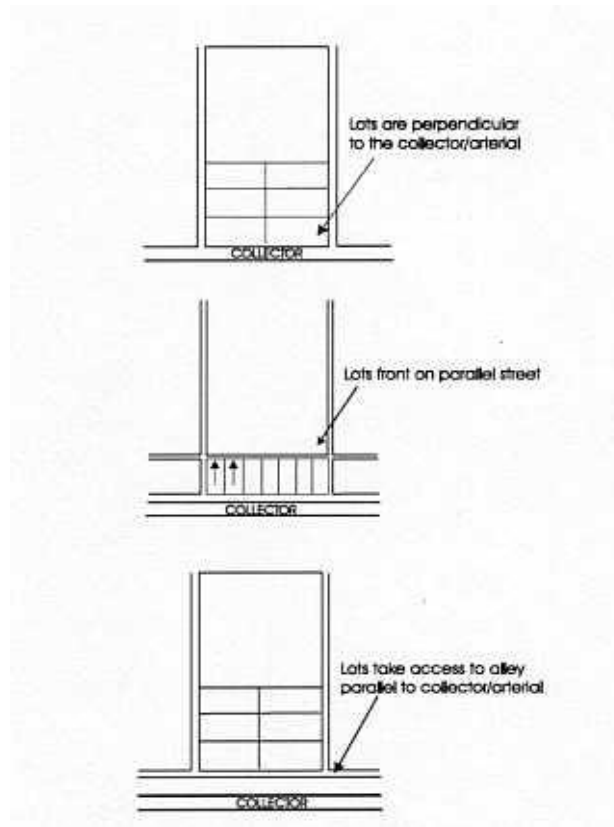
Figure 8: Good Circulation Reduces Traffic Build-Up



How does one prevent access to collectors or arterials? There are three lotting arrangements that

work (see Figure 9). The first is to have blocks that are generally perpendicular to the major road so side lots face the main road, as is the case with Jason’s Way and Christopher Drive. The landscaping and buffer requirements can be used to protect the units from noise. A second design concept that is common in Forsyth is reverse frontage, with rear yards facing the streets. A third solution continues to permit the homes to face the street, but requires an alley so that all access is from the alley. As is the case with the side lots, extra buffering and setback can be required to protect the residents. There are major streets carrying high volumes that use this alternative.

Figure 9: Lotting Arrangements



Follow the Transportation Plan. Forsyth needs a plan and must be willing to follow it, despite opposition. One of the problems with transportation planning is that the consequences from bad decisions are often not felt for 10 to 30 years after they are made. Forsyth is adding about 50 homes per year – at that pace, real traffic problems are a minimum of 10 to 15 years away. That is when a current failure to connect streets will create congestion or access problems that frustrate people. At this point, the solution will certainly be more costly and, in some cases, will be precluded. The Village needs to clearly understand the consequences of failing to plan for a good transportation system.

CHAPTER 8 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This Chapter summarizes the goals and objectives of the plan as a whole. The Chapter headings are in **BOLD CAPITALS** and goals in *italics*. The objectives are indicated in regular type.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

1. *Residential area whose character is suburban, with a family- and children-friendly environment that encourages families to seek out Forsyth as a place to live:*
 - Require development to respect the landscape and site planning elements that promote a suburban character
 - Encourage an atmosphere conducive to raising a family by providing adequate and accessible recreation opportunities
 - Strengthen connections between neighborhoods
 - A lower density residential choice should be made available on the Village's periphery encouraging residents to stay in the community
 - Promote the use of common open space and larger lots to increase the open-space feel of the Village
 - Provide for diversity in housing choice
 - Plan for a transition from suburban areas to areas of high-density to protect the suburban character

2. *Create a urban center for the Village using the Hickory Point Mall and area to the east:*
 - Provide for greater intensity in the mall area
 - Expand and convert the gridded residential streets of the east side for urban character commercial and office use
 - Improve architectural design, materials, signage, landscaping, and lighting to create a pedestrian-friendly environment

3. *Improve the auto-urban character of the Route 51 corridor and ensure high quality character for business park development:*
 - Improve architectural design, materials, signage, landscaping, and lighting along Route 51
 - Provide for business park development with a high character appearance on the exterior streets

4. *Provide clear boundaries of rural land uses particularly, agriculture to maintain a small-town image:*

-
- Maintain greenbelts at the edge of the community
 - Do not extend services into rural areas unless conservation easements are in place to prohibit sprawl

NATURAL RESOURCES, DETENTION AND OPEN SPACE

- 1. *Continue to protect floodplain, drainageway and resources through appropriate zoning***
 - and development ordinances:
 - Require high-quality, well-designed wet detention basins in residential subdivisions
 - Encourage open swale drainage to improve the area's character and decrease flooding
 - Plan for large-scale detention to serve multiple developments
- 2. *Continue the planned park, trail and bike system:***
 - Create north-south trail systems on the east and west sides of the Village
 - Plan for a east-west connector in the far north when growth reaches that area
 - Plan for a greenways buffer to the east of the Village

TRANSPORTATION

- 1. *Promote fully connected east-west arterial and collector system within the Village:***
 - Provide access to Hickory Point Road from Route 51 and alter ramps from I-72 to Route 51
 - Extend Barnett, Highland, and Lucille to the east as a major commercial corridor
 - Improve access to Hickory Point Mall
- 2. *Provide a full north-south transportation system of arterials and collectors***
 - Provide parallel access to Route 51 so residents and in-Village north-south trips are not required to use Route 51
 - Plan for a north-south road parallel and east of Route 51 that crosses I-72
 - Require connections between subdivisions to facilitate internal circulation and to promote Forsyth's identity as a place where everyone knows everyone
 - Provide additional crossings of I-72

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Keep or improve the balance of the Village's tax base, with non-residential uses supporting most of the Village's needs.

- 1. *Commercial development is the primary focus of the Village's economic strategy:***
 - Maintain the strength of Hickory Point Mall as the regions prime shopping area

-
- Support the Mall with a small-scale, pedestrian-friendly commercial area seeking to provide additional reasons to stay in the area after shopping at the Mall

2. Office or industrial employment is a secondary focus:

- Provide a small available area with services to be able to provide a site for interested office, business, or industrial uses
- Avoid competing for office or industrial users

**GROWTH POLICIES, ANNEXATION, AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL
OOOPERATION**

1. *Limit expansion of the Village of Forsyth to residential growth and some modest commercial development and to minor employment growth:*

- Allow City of Decatur to accommodate major industrial or office development
- Keep the Village's small-town character

2. *Annex only what the Village can serve and concentrate on residential development and minor commercial expansion.*

3. *Implement a boundary agreement between the City of Decatur and Village of Forsyth:*

- Protect the Village's character and maintain buffers with more intensive development
Provide Decatur with room to expand employm