

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Please check back occasionally for updates to this Frequently Asked Questions list. Questions about street projects, flooding, parks, etc. that are specific to a particular location will be forwarded to the appropriate city department.

The questions below are divided into the following topics.

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### PLAN CHATTANOOGA PROCESS

#### *What is Plan Chattanooga?*

*Plan Chattanooga* is an ambitious process to create a comprehensive plan for the entire City of Chattanooga. As the population of this region grows, the neighborhoods, commercial centers, parks, and natural areas in our city should become even more livable and reflect a healthy balance of development with conservation.



To ensure that issues unique to each part of the city were addressed, the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency (RPA) divided Hamilton County into 13 areas. Eight of these areas are within the city of Chattanooga and five are in the unincorporated parts of the county. More detailed plans will be created for each of the eight city areas as part of *Plan Chattanooga*. A parallel effort, called *Plan Hamilton: Our Communities, Our Growth*, is underway for the areas in the unincorporated portions of the county.

#### *What is a Comprehensive Plan?*

A comprehensive plan is a long-term citywide policy guide to inform local decision-making (with a focus on physical development). Our comprehensive plan will also contain detailed area plans that guide how, when, and where new growth, redevelopment, and preservation should occur in each part of the city. These plans:

- Serve as general policy guides for physical growth.
- Inform capital projects.
- Inform zoning decisions.
- Inform decisions about the location of private development.
- Help residents build support for improvement projects.

These plans do NOT:

- Guarantee funding for community improvements.
- Automatically change the zoning of property.

### ***Why is this process needed?***

A countywide Comprehensive Plan, created in 2015, included broad goals and recommendations for different levels of development intensity across all of Hamilton County. Numerous other plans and studies have focused on specific neighborhoods, but most of them are now 10 to 20 years old. Additionally, many areas of the city have no plan and lack clear policy about growth, conservation, and development. Once adopted, the new plans will replace those old neighborhood plans, providing coverage for the entire city, and becoming the new policy guides for physical development, land use, and transportation. Planning is about good stewardship, and there is never a better time than now to prepare for the future.

### ***How can the public get involved?***

The website, [www.PlanChattanooga.org](http://www.PlanChattanooga.org) provides information on upcoming public meetings, surveys, and other ways to get involved. Individuals can also sign up to receive email updates.

### ***Who else is involved?***

In addition to public input, the *Plan Chattanooga* process will involve input from:

- **Stakeholders.** Various groups including business leaders, neighborhood associations, real estate professionals and developers, educators, outdoor enthusiasts, and students, will be convened to get their input.
- **Staff.** All city departments will be involved in the plan development and will serve as sounding boards for proposed recommendations. Additionally, Hamilton County officials and other governmental partners—including the Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport, Chattanooga Housing Authority, and Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA)—will be engaged throughout the process.
- **Elected Officials.** The mayor and each individual Council member will provide input into these plans.
- **Consultants.** Planning NEXT and Mend Collaborative will facilitate the process. Kimley-Horn, Croy Engineering, and Ninigret Partners are providing technical and subject matter expertise.

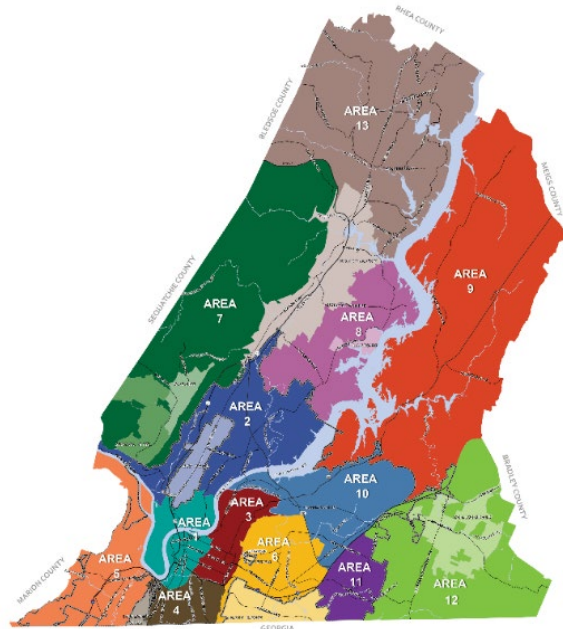
### ***When will the plan be completed?***

The project is anticipated to be completed around summer of 2024. Each Area Plan will be presented to the Chattanooga City Council for adoption. Due to constant changes in housing and retail markets, fluctuations in the economy, and major new development projects, the RPA will try to update these plans every five to seven years.

### ***What are the boundaries of the Area Plans?***

Hamilton County was divided into 13 geographic areas for planning purposes. Eight of these areas (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 11) are in the City of Chattanooga. See [www.planchattanooga.org](http://www.planchattanooga.org) for an enlarged map and links to each Area in the city.

The remaining five areas (7, 8, 9, 12, and 13) are in unincorporated Hamilton County where a similar, but separate, planning process is underway called *Plan Hamilton: Our Communities, Our Growth*.



### ***What happens next in this process?***

The consultants and staff are currently studying different growth scenarios and the impacts that different ways of accommodating new development will have on the natural environment, transportation, schools, and other infrastructure. (See **Growth Scenarios** for more information.) That analysis will be presented to the community this spring for your feedback. The *Plan Chattanooga* website will be a good source for tracking progress, as it will be updated periodically.

[www.planchattanooga.org](http://www.planchattanooga.org)

### ***Are you open to individual one-on-one meetings?***

Yes. Anyone who would like to meet with us individually should send an email to [areaplan@chattanooga.gov](mailto:areaplan@chattanooga.gov) or call Karen Hundt at 423-643-5913.

### ***Will the elected officials who represent my area be involved in the community meetings?***

We always keep local elected representatives – both city and county - informed about upcoming community meetings in their district, but it's up to them to choose which meetings they will attend. These meetings are always hosted by the RPA staff, however, elected representatives may choose to speak during some meetings, or just attend and listen to the discussion.

### ***Do these plans address issues like education, social equity, or health?***

Not directly. Typically, comprehensive plans and area plans do not address education, social equity, or health, which were topics that were included in the recent *One Chattanooga* plan. Instead, these plans focus on physical development. However, the way we build cities certainly has some indirect impacts on education, social equity, and health. For instance, the general health and equity of citizens can be improved by creating more walkable communities, with a mix of uses near neighborhoods, and by providing a variety of convenient and affordable transportation options, including sidewalks, bike lanes and transit. However, other agencies are responsible for directly addressing education, social equity, and healthcare.

## HOW ARE PLANS USED? WHAT IMPACTS DO THEY HAVE?

### ***Will Plan Chattanooga result in the rezoning of my property?***

This process will not automatically change the zoning of any property. However, these plans will influence decisions about future rezoning requests. For example, any property owner has the legal right to request a different zone for his/her property at any time. When that happens, City Council members refer to these plans to help inform their decisions about rezoning requests.

Additionally, the current zoning does not align with the community's vision in some areas. In these cases, a zoning study may be requested by the City Council representative. The city's zoning regulations are currently being updated, and new zones are being created that better align with the recommended vision and Place Types. These new zones may be recommended for some locations.

All rezoning processes require public hearings before the Planning Commission and the Chattanooga City Council.

### ***Will the Plan recommendations be followed by the City Council and city departments?***

Several City departments, and other agencies who provide services in the community, are involved in this planning process, but they each make their own decisions based on many different factors, including how to best distribute their limited budgets across the entire city.

Once adopted, these plans become policy documents, meaning they will be used as a guide by elected officials, government staff, service providers, and private developers when making decisions about where to locate new infrastructure or development. It does not guarantee funding for such projects. However, having an adopted Plan provides better guidance for setting priorities on how and where to spend limited public funds.

While adopted Area Plans do not guarantee a particular outcome, they are used by the RPA, the Planning Commission, and the City Council to inform monthly rezoning requests.

### ***Will my property taxes be impacted by this Area Plan?***

Comprehensive and area plans do not directly impact property taxes. Property taxes are based on the use of, and improvements to, the property. Any physical improvement to land or buildings may increase its value and therefore taxes. Tax assessors use market data, including recent sales of comparable products, how much the replacement costs of the property would be, and the desirability of a neighborhood to determine the property value for taxing. Although no one wants to pay higher taxes, those tax revenues finance public services and infrastructure projects including fire and police protection, roads, schools, and sewer facilities.

### ***How do Plans impact private property rights?***

Today, and even after a plan is adopted, you can apply for a subdivision or building permit based on the zoning of your property. Also, a property owner always has the legal right to request a different zone for his/her property. Such requests are always vetted through a public process.

Every month, when someone applies to rezone their property, the RPA staff makes a recommendation on whether to a) approve, b) deny, or c) approve the request with conditions. *Plan Chattanooga* will be used to inform those staff recommendations. The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission (a body of volunteers appointed by the County and City Mayors) also makes a recommendation. Those recommendations are then presented to the Chattanooga City Council which makes the final decision, based on the recommendations they receive, the adopted plan, and citizen input. Therefore, the plan can influence the rezoning of property, but while important, it is only a guide and only one part of the decision-making process.

### ***Will the Plans address how existing single-family neighborhoods will be protected?***

Protecting existing single-family neighborhoods from the encroachment of commercial or higher-density residential development is a concern for many property owners. We do not anticipate changes to most existing single-family neighborhoods, however large vacant parcels could see higher density development.

Encouraging new moderate- or high-density housing around commercial centers and along corridors is a primary focus of *Plan Chattanooga*. Similarly, clustering new commercial development in designated centers has many advantages over “stripping out” our corridors with new stores. We refer to this clustering of more intense uses as a “Centers and Corridors Approach.” It is an organizing theme for *Plan Chattanooga* and the growth scenarios that are being studied.

## **GROWTH SCENARIOS**

### ***What are Growth Scenarios?***

Our future is not fixed. We can make choices about how, when, and where development occurs. Scenario Planning is a way of testing different choices about the way our community grows. Scenario Planning allows us to create hypothetical options—or scenarios—and then test each one to better understand the outcomes of our choices. For instance, how does growing in one area more than another impact traffic, schools, emergency services, and the preservation of open space and rural character?

*Plan Chattanooga* will test three different growth scenarios, evaluating each for impacts on these, and other, factors. That analysis will then be presented to the community and our elected officials to choose

a preferred path or combination thereof. The funding of public improvements, zoning and other city policies can then be aligned to reinforce the community’s preferred path.

## PLACE TYPES

### What are Place Types?

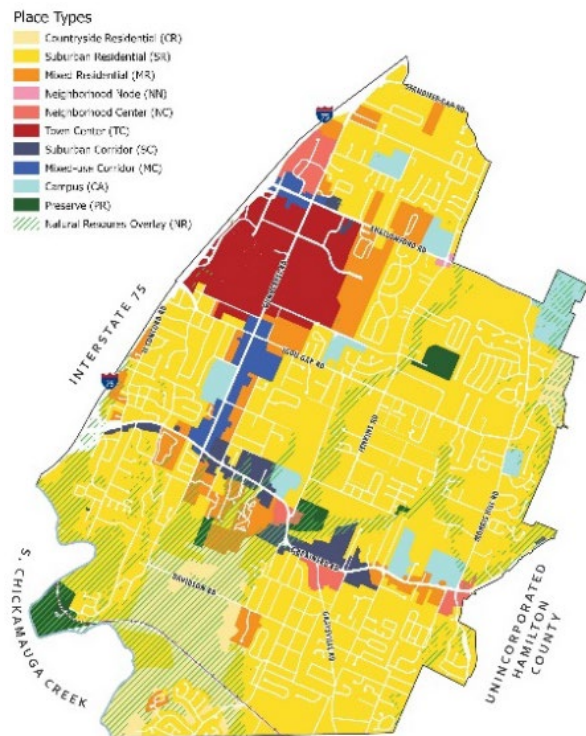
Place Types provide a general description of the mix of uses, development form, and associated transportation facilities that collectively create distinct “places” across all of Hamilton County - from the most urban downtown core to the most rural parts of the city. These Place Types do not necessarily describe what exists today, but rather the desired future vision for what a place is to become. Place Types are used in plans to illustrate a vision of the intensity and type of development desired in each part of the city.

One of the key questions asked during the planning process is, are we seeking an "urban", "suburban", or "rural" place? Urban places tend to have taller buildings, closer to the street with a greater mix of uses, and shared parking behind buildings or in multi-level garages. Suburban places tend to have one- or two-story, single-use buildings, set back far from the street, with large surface parking lots in front of the buildings. Rural places tend to have much more open space with more spread-out development. These distinctions are noted in the prefixes of the names of some Place Types (examples: Suburban Residential, Urban Residential, Countryside Residential).

### How will Place Types be used?

Each area plan will have a Place Types map that designates the different types and intensities of development desired in various locations. (To the right is the adopted Place Types map from Area 11, which will be updated as part of *Plan Chattanooga*.) Place Types will be assigned to each property based on community input, the availability of infrastructure, the presence of natural resources, and existing commercial and residential development patterns.

The resulting Place Types Maps will then be used by the RPA, the Planning Commission, and the City Council to inform monthly rezoning requests, and by City departments to help prioritize capital improvements. They can also be used by private investors who are looking for locations for new development, or redevelopment, projects.





## GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

### ***Why is the city allowing all this new growth?***

The climate, cost of living, and natural resources make the southeast a popular part of the country. The Chattanooga region has been attracting new residents steadily since the 1990s. Last year, the population of Hamilton County grew more than three times as fast as the national average. Since 2022, over 3,665 single-family units and 7,758 multifamily units have been proposed and may now be in some phase of the development approval process.

Looking ahead, Hamilton County is forecast to add nearly 55,000 jobs and 43,000 households between 2023 and 2040. Vacant land, agricultural, and single-family residential lots over three acres all have potential for development. Together, this land amounts to 25% of the city, and most of the vacant land is already zoned R-1 Residential, which allows single-family lots of 7,500 square feet on sewers. (See the Community Profile at <https://planchattanooga.org/documents> for more information.)

All this to say, our region is growing and will continue to grow. The big question is how do we ensure that growth improves the places in our community and the lives of everyone in it? *Plan Chattanooga* will shape policies about where and how to grow, so it is important for everyone to be involved in the process.

### ***Will there ever be any limitations on how many new subdivisions are allowed? Many of our roads were not built for this much traffic. How can we ensure that the roads, sewers, schools, and other infrastructure are adequate to handle new development?***

These plans will recommend locations for, and the intensity of, new development, as well as where to conserve or preserve land. These land use recommendations will be illustrated on a Place Types map that will be part of each area plan. (See the **Place Types** section for more information.) Factors that influence these recommendations include existing and planned road capacity, sewer availability, and the location of sensitive natural resources. Public input also plays a part.

Keep in mind, however, that the plans only guide decisions about zoning and infrastructure investments. The actual zoning of a property ultimately regulates what can be built there, which is why it is important to align our zoning with the adopted plans.

### ***Can the growing number of vacant commercial properties be redeveloped with housing?***

This is a great question, and one the RPA staff have been talking a lot about. The continuing popularity of online shopping has impacted the viability of many brick-and-mortar retail stores, which was accelerated by Covid-19. At the same time, the city has a growing need for more housing, especially a diversity of more affordable worker housing. Vacant commercial properties can provide opportunities for new apartments and townhomes, within walking distance of daily needs, and in locations that do not

encroach on existing single-family neighborhoods. We refer to this clustering of more intense uses as a “Centers and Corridors Approach.” It is an organizing theme for *Plan Chattanooga* and the growth scenarios that are being studied.

### ***Where can I find out about proposed new developments in my area?***

The Development Dashboard on the RPA’s website (<https://chcrpa.org/project/development-trend-dashboards/>) is a great place for such information. An interactive map allows you to search by City Council district or Planning Area. You can look up new subdivision plats, building permits, zoning cases, and the status of development projects.

The RPA also posts a monthly list of new rezoning requests at <https://chcrpa.org/zoning-subdivisions/agendas-case-information/>.

Another good source for general geographic information is the City’s Geographic Information System (GIS.) <http://www.chattanooga.gov/> From the city’s home page, take the following path.

1. Click on the green “Online Services” box at the bottom of the screen.
2. Click on the red “GIS Maps” box – under the Public Works menu. A map of Hamilton County will load on your screen. You can zoom in and out on this map using your cursor.
3. You can click on individual lots for property information.
4. You can also click on the blue “I want to” button (top left of the map) to search for a particular address, and open various map layers, such as zoning, City Council district boundaries, floodplains, and topographic contours.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### ***Will Plan Chattanooga address road repairs and repaving? Sidewalks? Bike lanes?***

*Plan Chattanooga* will address transportation issues and include recommendations for some road improvements, new sidewalks, and bike lanes. However, the Chattanooga Department of Public Works will have to prioritize these projects across the entire city based on the availability of funding each year.

Routine street maintenance projects are also the purview of the Chattanooga Department of Public Works. In 2022, more than half of the city’s available dollars for capital improvements went to paving and resurfacing existing roads. Any paving requests should be submitted to them by calling (423) 643-6311, or by visiting [http://iframe.publicstuff.com/#?client\\_id=1000051](http://iframe.publicstuff.com/#?client_id=1000051).



### ***Will Plan Chattanooga include recommendations for road widening to alleviate traffic congestion?***

The city does not have the capacity for extensive widening projects. In fact, most major widening projects tend to be on State routes and are therefore carried out by the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). Those projects are prioritized through a separate process under the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO). Information about the TPO and current projects can be found at <https://chcrpa.org/transportation-planning-organization/>.

In many cases, widening projects can do more long-term harm to communities. For instance, people who live on two-lane roads, such as Igou Gap or Morris Hill, often tell us they do not want the road to be widened, as it will likely increase the amount and speed of traffic.

Numerous studies have shown that widening roads to increase capacity simply enables more development further out, which adds more traffic, which then saturates the new capacity almost as soon as it can be funded, built, and used. The name for this phenomenon is “induced demand.”

One of the best ways to accommodate growth in traffic volumes is to interconnect neighborhoods, which creates multiple routes for reaching destinations, and therefore disperses traffic across multiple streets rather than funneling it onto a few major thoroughfares. Creating a mix of uses that are easily accessible to neighborhoods also provides some people with other travel options, reducing the number of car trips needed.

### ***Are new bus routes, or more frequent transit service, possible throughout the city?***

Transit requires a lot of people in a concentrated, walkable area to be efficient. Single-family neighborhoods typically are not dense enough to support transit. Multi-family housing and a cluster of walkable commercial uses near each other are needed. When these types of commercial and higher intensity residential uses are clustered at a few key intersections, or along portions of commercial corridors, rather than allowed to spread out along multiple corridors, transit service becomes more feasible. See the Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority’s (CARTA) website for more information. <https://www.gocarta.org/>

## **FLOODING**

### ***Are developers prevented from building in the floodplain?***

No. Development is currently allowed in the floodplain if certain requirements are met, but challenges do exist for developing in a floodplain. Building codes require that all habitable spaces be constructed one foot above the 100-year floodplain elevation, which often requires a significant amount of fill dirt. Additionally, some areas do not currently have sewer service, which limits the amount of development that can occur.

Some basic information about floodplains may be helpful. Rivers, creeks, and streams have associated floodplains—technically referred to as the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), as designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Special Flood Hazard Area is where water is expected to flow during flood events. The Special Flood Hazard Area is divided into the following three categories:

1. **Floodway** – the channel through which water flows in a creek or stream.
2. **100-year floodplain** – areas with a 1.0% risk of flooding in any given year.
3. **500-year floodplain** – areas with a 0.2% risk of flooding in any given year.

These floodplains—mapped in the 1970s and 80s by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—inform flood insurance policies. In their natural state, floodplains provide cost effective flood control, but increased development in floodplains can make homes and businesses more vulnerable to large flood events.

You can see the boundary of floodways, the 100-year, and 500-year floodplains on the interactive map located on the city’s website. <https://chattanooga.gov/> From the city’s home page, take the following path.

1. Click on the green “Online Services” box at the bottom of the screen.
2. Click on the red “GIS Maps” box – under the Public Works menu. A map of Hamilton County will load on your screen. You can zoom in and out on this map using your cursor.
3. Click on the blue “I want to” button (top left of the map) and scroll down to “Change visible map layers.”
4. Check the Operational Layers box and click on the adjacent plus sign (+) to expand that menu.
5. Check the FEMA box and click on the adjacent plus sign (+) to expand that menu.
6. You can then click on the Floodway, 100-Year Flood, and 500-Year Flood to view those on the map.

Flooding issues should be reported by calling 311, (423) 643-6311, or by [visiting CHA311.com](http://visitingCHA311.com).