



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Future Land Use and Character

April 12, 2019



The **future land use map** is intended to show the general pattern of uses anticipated and/or desired in the years ahead. The map indicates the type of use that is expected to predominate in areas where land is currently undeveloped or, in previously developed areas, based on what is already on the ground and will likely remain or possibly evolve over time. Along with the predominant use types, other complementary uses will likely remain or emerge in particular areas of the city (e.g., small-scale, neighborhood-oriented retail and service uses near the edges of largely residential areas). Certain uses can be located amid other predominant use types, such as public facilities and places of worship within predominantly residential areas.

Some uses are highly market-driven, with their timing and particular location dictated by the extent and pace of other types of development. This includes the typical pattern of retail uses locating near new residential “rooftops” and often at key roadway intersections. The location and extent of various forms of residential development can also be difficult to predict amid broader housing market cycles, regional needs, plus developer areas of expertise and interest in bringing single-family or multi-family products to market.

Future Land Use Planning Versus Zoning

The side-by-side comparison below highlights the distinct purposes and uses of a future land use map relative to a zoning map. The City’s development regulations are among the primary tools for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. The zoning regulations, in particular, can play a significant role in establishing and protecting the physical character of the community. These regulations delineate land use districts and the types of uses permitted within them, together with standards for buildings and site improvements. As a result, the zoning regulations, together with the City’s subdivision regulations, largely direct development outcomes. Although the Comprehensive Plan and associated future land use map provide only general planning guidance, their role is especially relevant as it can lead to rewrites and updates of the zoning regulations and district map.

Future Land Use Map versus Zoning Map

Aspect	Future Land Use Map	Zoning Map
PURPOSE	- Outlook for future use of land and character of particular areas of the community. - Macro level, showing generalized development patterns.	- Basis for applying different land use regulations and development standards in different areas of the community (“zones”). - Micro level, with an area- and site-specific focus.
USE	- Guidance for City’s zoning map and related decisions (zone change requests, variance applications, etc.) - Baseline for monitoring consistency of actions and decisions with the Comprehensive Plan.	Regulating development as it is proposed, or as sites are positioned for the future with appropriate zoning (by the property owner or the City).
INPUTS AND CONSIDERATIONS	- Existing land use in the city. - The locational aspects of community planning priorities involving housing, economic development, infrastructure, parks and recreation, public facilities, etc.	- Comprehensive Plan and future land use map for general guidance. - Zoning decisions that differ substantially from the general development pattern depicted on the future land use map should indicate the need for some adjustments the next time the Comprehensive Plan is revised.

Land Use Planning with Character in Mind

To begin the process of preparing a **Future Land Use and Character Map** for Littleton, the accompanying draft map shows potential areas to be designated in three categories that address both use and character:

- Estate Residential.
- Suburban Residential (starting with areas of single-family detached dwellings).
- Urban Downtown Area Mixed Use.

A fourth category, Neighborhood Conservation, focuses on the integrity of mainly residential areas that may have Urban, Auto Urban or Suburban character.

For context, the map also shows locations of existing preserved open space, parks, and non-park locations for recreation (e.g., swimming pools, tennis courts, playgrounds and other amenities maintained by homeowner associations).

The following descriptions indicate the anticipated principal types of uses in each category, plus the intended character of the areas in which the land uses occur, abut, or mix. Public and institutional uses commonly occur in all of these areas and should match the character. Specific standards for land development based on these designations are articulated through the City's implementing regulations (zoning and subdivision) as they currently exist and may be further amended over time based on this planning guidance.

ESTATE RESIDENTIAL

This designation is for areas that should have limited development activity other than large-lot residential. Such areas provide a transition between a city's rural fringe and more urbanized in-city development patterns and intensities. Lots in this category ideally should be one acre or larger, which provides substantial openness and separation between individual dwellings, and can incorporate agricultural uses.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER PRIMER

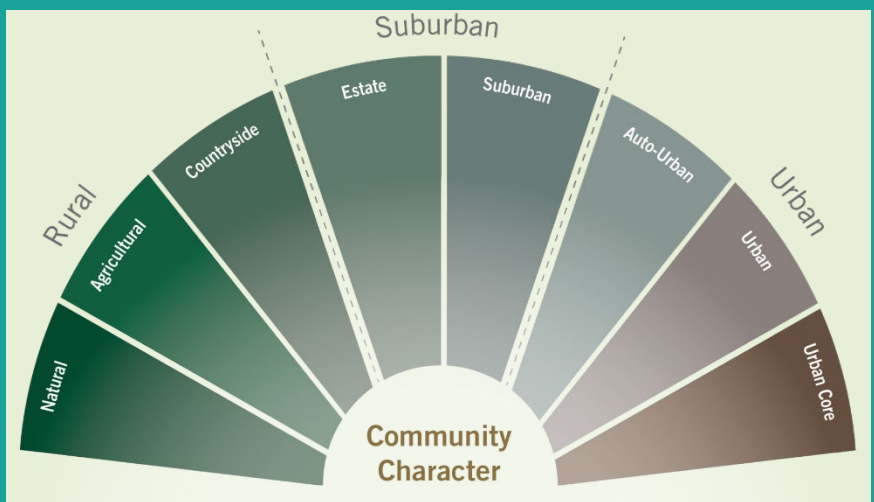
The **community character** approach to evaluating and planning for land use emphasizes the variation in physical conditions that is experienced along a spectrum from natural and rural landscapes at the edges of a community to its most urbanized environments. Looking beyond land use alone, a character-based approach focuses on development intensity, which encompasses:

- The density and layout of residential development;
- The scale and form of non-residential development; and
- The amount of building and pavement coverage relative to the extent of open space and natural vegetation or landscaping.

How the automobile is accommodated is a key factor in distinguishing character types including how public streets are designed, how parking is provided, and how buildings and paved areas are arranged on sites. Among the three major character classes:

- **Rural** character areas have wide open spaces where structures and paved surfaces occupy only a minimal portion of the landscape.
- **Suburban** character areas have noticeably less intensive use of land, with open and green spaces balancing – or, in Estate areas, exceeding – the extent of land covered by structures and paved surfaces.
- **Urban** character areas exhibit the greatest pedestrian orientation, through a more compact scale and “architectural enclosure” of streets by buildings situated close to front property lines and sidewalks.

Within the Urban class, **Auto Urban** character areas are a particular planning challenge as they are designed mainly to accommodate automobile circulation and parking. Land cover by buildings and paved surfaces is similar to **Urban** areas, but without the walkability emphasis.





Estate character area along and south of Rangeview Drive in south Littleton.

Primary Land Use Types

- Detached residential dwellings.

Characteristics

- Transition between rural and suburban character areas, with further progression along the character spectrum from rural environments where the landscape is visually dominant over structures.
- In the suburban range of the character spectrum but with larger lots (typically one acre or larger), especially where required by public health regulations to allow for both individual water wells and on-site septic systems on properties where centralized water and/or wastewater service may not be available or feasible.
- One-acre lots are usually adequate in wooded areas to achieve visual screening of homes from streets and adjacent dwellings. Three-to five-acre lots may be needed to achieve and maintain true estate character in more open areas with less vegetation and/or topographic changes.

SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL

This designation is for residential areas where suburban character is established and preserved by achieving a balance between buildings and other site improvements relative to the degree of open space maintained within the neighborhood. The openness may be found in relatively large yard areas on individual lots and between homes and/or in common green spaces or water features. This distinguishes suburban character areas from more auto-oriented residential areas where site coverage in the form of dwellings, driveways and other paved surfaces predominates relative to undeveloped space.

Primary Land Use Types

- Detached residential dwellings.
- Planned developments that may integrate other housing types (e.g., attached residential such as patio homes or townhomes), with increased open space to preserve an overall suburban character.



Suburban Residential character area around S. Coventry Lane in west Littleton.

Characteristics

- Less noticeable accommodation of the automobile compared to more intensive auto-oriented areas, especially where residential driveways are on the side of homes rather than occupying a portion of the front yard space and where garages are situated to the side or rear of the dwelling.
- A larger baseline minimum lot size in a Suburban Residential zoning district allows for deeper front yards and building setbacks and greater side separation between homes. Character-based zoning and development standards can also:
 - Promote land planning approaches that discourage overly standardized subdivision designs and allow for varied lot sizes, with lots smaller than the baseline requiring greater open space set-aside (with the additional open space devoted to maintaining the suburban character and buffering adjacent properties and roads).
 - Include a cluster development option that further concentrates the overall development footprint while providing the developer the same lot yield – or even a density bonus to incentivize conservation designs with an even higher level of open space set-aside.
- Preservation of mature trees or other natural site features, along with generous landscaping, can offset auto-oriented design elements that detract from Suburban character.
- More opportunity for natural and/or swale drainage (and storm water retention/absorption) relative to concentrated storm water conveyance in Auto Urban character areas.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION

While cities strive to maintain the integrity of neighborhoods in all character classes (i.e., Estate, Suburban, Auto Urban, Urban), this designation on the future land use map supports the exploration of regulatory strategies for particular neighborhoods that may warrant more customized zoning for two scenarios:

1. The neighborhood-specific zoning may be aimed at protecting the character of older, intact neighborhoods through customized standards that ensure no significant change in the development type or pattern and reinforce existing physical conditions (e.g., prevailing lot sizes, building setbacks, architectural elements such as front porches, rear garage access via alleys versus front garages and driveways, etc.).
2. In other cases, the customized zone may serve to manage a neighborhood in transition, such as one where interest in infill and/or redevelopment activity is on the rise. Another example is where older homes fronting on a perimeter street with increasing traffic volumes are allowed to convert to small-scale office uses over time while still maintaining a residential character and appearance in line with the balance of the neighborhood.



Potential Neighborhood Conservation area just north of Littleton Boulevard, east of Downtown.

Primary Land Use Types

- Detached residential dwellings.
- Depending on the particular neighborhood, the customized zoning may provide for additional housing types and/or small-scale office or retail uses on vacant sites at the edge of the neighborhood or other appropriate locations, subject to standards that ensure consistent character.

URBAN DOWNTOWN MIXED USE

This designation involves the most intensively developed area of the community in terms of the greatest coverage of sites with building footprints and the least amount of private development area devoted to off-street parking and landscaped open space. Instead, most parking is accommodated on-street and/or within public parking areas or structures. This enables most streets and other public spaces to be framed by buildings with zero or minimal front setbacks, creating “architectural enclosure” versus the progressively more open feel in other character areas (auto-oriented, suburban, etc.). All of these elements, along with a predominance of mixed uses, make the urban downtown area the most conducive for pedestrian activity and interaction. Public plazas and pocket parks provide green space amid the urban environment and a place to gather and host community events.



Primarily Urban character in Downtown Littleton, along with pockets of surface parking.

Primary Land Use Types

- Mixed uses, on single sites and within individual buildings.
- Potential for residential space above commercial or office uses.
- Detached residential dwellings on relatively small lots.
- Attached residential types (e.g., townhomes, brownstones, apartments, condos, etc.).
- Live/work units.
- Commercial retail and services.
- Office.
- Entertainment uses (e.g., restaurants, pubs, live music venues, theater, cinema, etc.).
- Potential for parking structures and limited public or commercial surface parking areas.

Characteristics

- Multi-story structures encouraged (or required) to bolster urban character, encourage vertical mixed use, promote retail viability, support transit ridership, etc.
- Mostly on-street parking and minimal off-street surface parking (until transition areas around the downtown core begin to give way to auto-oriented site design).
- Streetscape enhancements in public ways given limited area for private on-site landscaping relative to other character areas.
- May exclude some auto-oriented uses that, by their very nature, cannot achieve an urban character (e.g., gas stations, auto repair, drive-in and drive-through uses, etc.).

- Public/institutional uses designed to match the urban character.
- Alleys and rear-access garages can reinforce urban character on blocks with attached or detached residential dwellings.
- Often the only place in a community where multi-level parking structures may make sense and be financially viable.

Direction for Land Use and Character Policies

Based on discussion and feedback on the categories above and the associated mapping, related policies to be drafted for the Comprehensive Plan could provide guidance for:

- Minimum lot areas in Estate and Suburban Residential character areas to limit overall development intensity.
- Minimum yard depths and building setbacks in Estate and Suburban Residential character areas to ensure openness and adequate separation of adjoining homes.
- Rather than minimum front building setbacks as in most zoning districts, maximum front setbacks in Urban character areas to ensure that building fronts are at or close to sidewalks to give streets a pedestrian orientation.
- Maximum lot coverage by both buildings and paved surfaces in Estate and Suburban Residential character areas to ensure adequate land surface devoted to open space and vegetation.
- Limitations on the extent and location of surface parking within Urban character areas.
- Adequate buffering along property lines and street frontages in Estate Residential character areas to maintain visual dominance of the landscape versus structures.
- Sufficient landscaping and tree planting/preservation in Suburban Residential character areas to ensure that structures, driveways and other paved surfaces do not predominate over unbuilt and green spaces.
- Potential architectural design standards in Suburban Residential character areas to minimize auto-oriented elements.
- Potential limitations on expansion of existing homes into side yard areas of lots in Suburban Residential character areas to maintain adequate side separation between homes.
- In general, adequate buffering and transition measures between areas of differing character.

Finally, given the purpose of Neighborhood Conservation designations, some common policies may apply across multiple neighborhoods while other policies will reflect the conditions and needs of a particular area and its unique scenario.