JOSH SMALL AREA PLAN UPDATE

STORMWATER & PARKS ELEMENT

JOSH BACKGROUND

As part of the Community Work Program of the Cobb County 2040 Comprehensive Plan, the Board of Commissioners requested that Staff conduct a planning study focused on the area surrounding the intersection of Johnson Ferry and Shallowford Roads. The project is known as the Johnson Ferry/Shallowford Small Area Plan, or JOSH, for short. Located in northeast Cobb County, the study area is a mostly-affluent and connected community of single-family residential subdivisions with associated neighborhood commercial and office uses, alongside several institutional uses, such as schools and churches. Quality-of-life factors such as highly-rated schools attract families with children to the area. Additionally, the area's senior population continues to increase by way of new residents, as well as those who have chosen to remain in the area after raising children. As long as strong quality-of-life factors persist, population growth will continue in the JOSH area. With this growth trend and the accompanying land use implications in mind, Staff is in the process of creating a collaborative community plan that reflects the ideas and desires of area residents, land owners, and business owners.

JOSH focuses on five key elements: Land Use, Design Guidelines, Stormwater Management, Parks and Greenspace, and Transportation. Due to anticipated development and redevelopment, future land use is a key focal point of the study. Issues and concerns have been identified by community members and will ultimately be addressed through a conceptual land use plan and recommendations for implementation. The Design Guidelines element is being developed to create a visual identity for the JOSH community. This will aid in promoting a sense of place, aesthetically pleasing buildings and streetscape design that will set JOSH apart from the surrounding region, while preserving the suburban character of the area. As stormwater management has been a topic of concern in the past, a Stormwater element is included within the plan to address negative impacts due to flooding and erosion. Parks and greenspace is also emphasized in the study. There will be a focus on identifying needs for new parks, trail connectivity and other related concerns. A Transportation element is also part of JOSH. Transportation recommendations identified in the Cobb County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) are highlighted and additional issues and concerns are addressed through the Transportation element.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update community stakeholders and other interested parties on the work being done on the study since the last community meeting in June. The report will focus particularly on the Stormwater and the Parks and Greenspace elements of the JOSH study. The report features an existing conditions summary related to natural features, parks, greenspace, and trails, followed by a public participation summary consisting of public comments related to Stormwater Management and Parks. The public participation summary also includes feedback received through the crowdsource application that was created at the outset of the study and subsequently introduced at JOSH community meetings that have been held to-date.

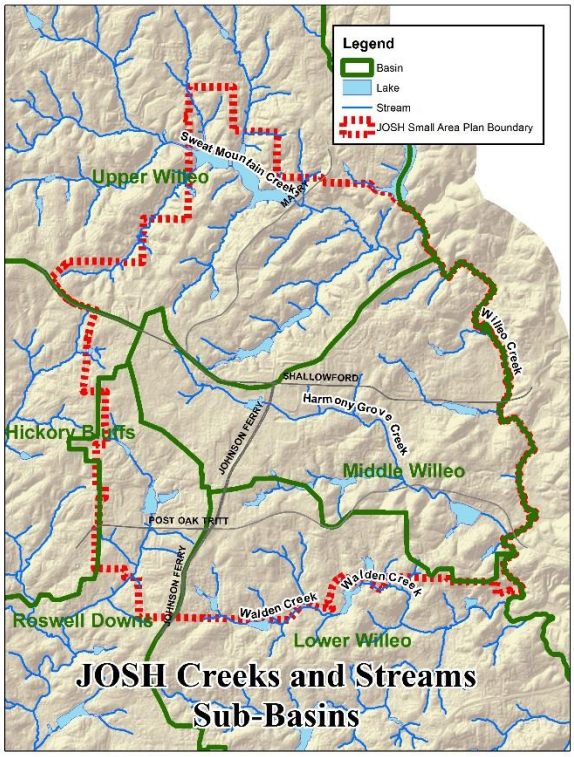
EXISTING CONDITIONS

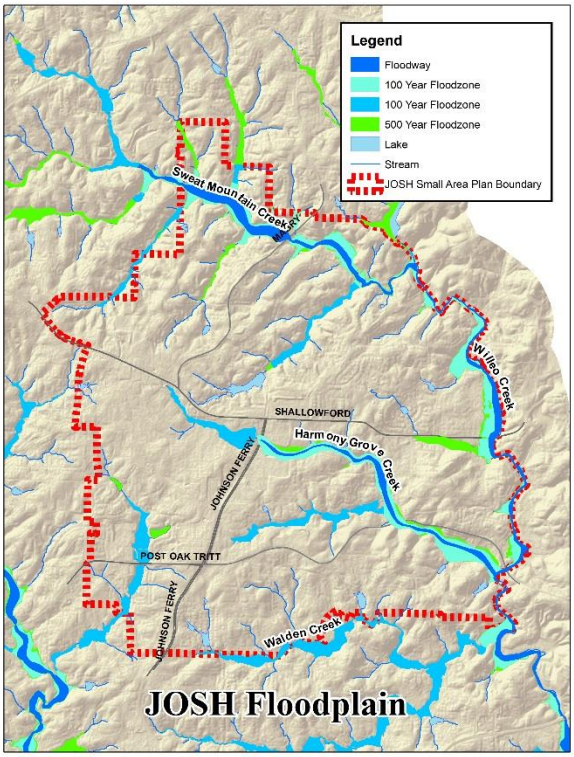
This existing conditions report specifically focuses on Stormwater, Parks and Greenspace. Demographic data, as well as land use and transportation information, will be included in the final study document.

Natural Features

The topography of the JOSH study area consists of rolling hills with ridges and valleys. It is traversed by many small creeks and streams, some of which have been impeded by dams over the years, resulting in the creation of ponds and small lakes. The largest stream is Willeo Creek, which empties into the Chattahoochee River further south. Willeo Creek is fed by Sweat Mountain Creek, Harmony Grove Creek and Walden Creek, which traverses the study from the west and northwest to the east and south east.

The overall slope of the land runs from the northwest to the southeast. The southwest corner of the study area slopes from the northeast to the southwest. The highest elevation is 1,160 feet above sea level, near the intersection of Shallowford and Wesley Chapel Roads. The lowest elevation is located in the extreme southeast corner of the study area at Willeo Creek.



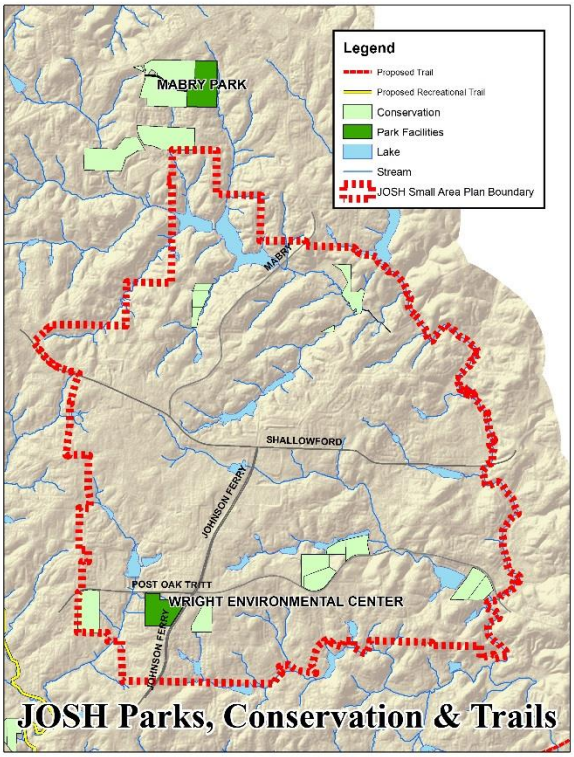


As indicated on the Floodplain Map below, there are four main areas of floodplain that follow along the major creeks in the study area. The Sweat Mountain Creek floodplain flows through residential neighborhoods in the northern portion of the study area. The Harmony Grove Creek floodplain begins at Maddox Lake near the intersection of Johnson Ferry and Shallowford Roads. In the southern portion of the study area, along the study boundary, is the Walden Creek Floodplain. The floodplain and floodways associated with these creeks cross the study area from the northwest to the southeast and

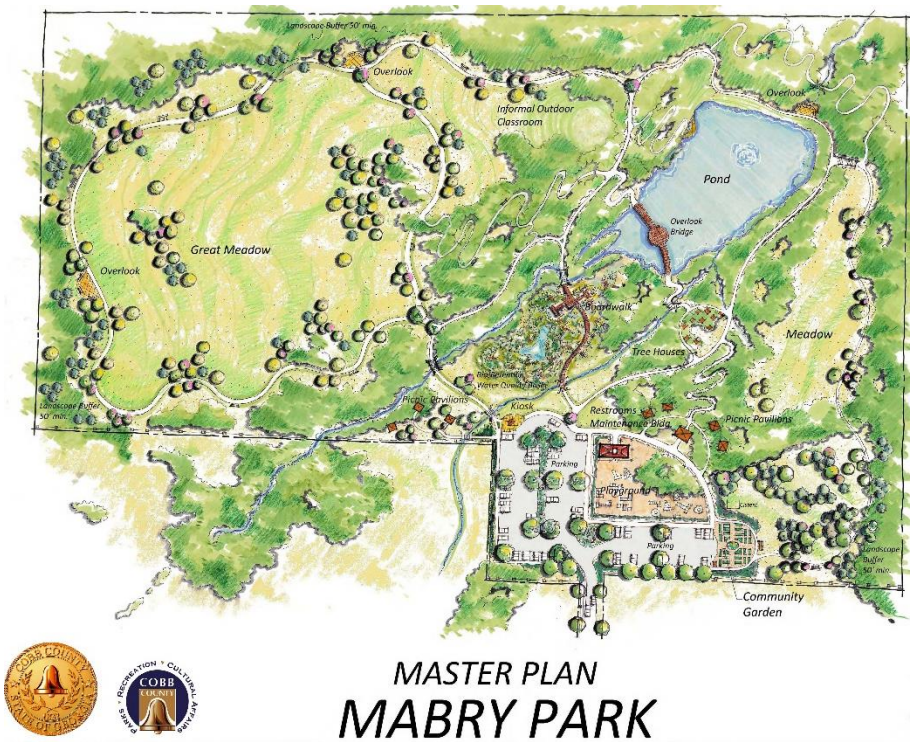
drain into Willeo Creek on the eastern edge of the study area. Willeo Creek also has associated floodplains down to where it drains into the Chattahoochee River.

Parks, Greenspace and Trails

There is only one park facility within the JOSH study area. The Wright Environmental Center is located on the southwest corner of Post Oak Tritt and Johnson Ferry Roads. It consists of 19 acres of protected land with a wide selection of plants native to Georgia. The center is not open for daily public access; it is only open to groups for educational programs focused on the environment.



Just outside the JOSH study area, to the north, is Mabry Park. The park land was purchased by Cobb County with funds allocated from a $40 million bond issue that was approved in November 2006. Since the purchase of the land, the Cobb County P.A.R.K.S. Department, in partnership with the community, has developed a master plan for the park that specifies types of amenities and their location within the park. According to the plan, Mabry Park will have a playground, walking trails, a community garden, a pavilion, tree houses, a pond with an overlook bridge, a boardwalk across wetlands, and open meadows. Construction of Mabry Park is currently in-progress.



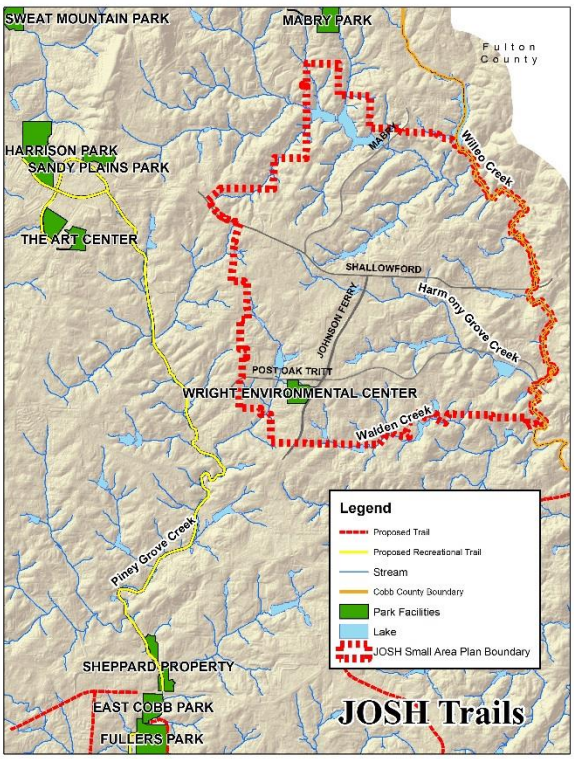
Other parks in the vicinity of the JOSH study area include Harrison Park, Sandy Plains Park, Mountain View Aquatic Center and The Art Center. Each of these facilities is located near the intersection of Shallowford and Sandy Plains Roads.

There are multiple parcels within and directly adjacent to the study area that are considered conservation lands. These parcels are privately owned and have been placed in a Conservation Use Valuation (CUVA) under O.C.G.A. Section 48-5-7.4. Owners of agricultural land, timberland and environmentally sensitive land may qualify for conservation use assessment. If granted, the property owner enters into a 10-year covenant to maintain the qualifying use during the life of the covenant. As these covenants expire, the lands could become ideal candidates for new parks and/or new development if the property owners choose not to renew the conservation use assessment, or if the covenant is breached.

PARK & GREENSPACE	Total Acres	Inside Study Area	Open to the Public	Amenities
Wright Environmental Center	19	Yes	No	Walking trails, Educational Programs
Mabry Park	26.5	No	Will be (under construction)	Playground, Walking Trails, Community Garden, Pavilions, Tree houses, Pond with overlook bridge, boardwalk across wetlands, open meadows

CONSERVATION	Total Acres	Number of Parcels
CUVA	102.5	12

Other than the nature trails at the Wright Environmental Center that can be used on a limited basis there are no other trails or proposed trails currently planned within the study area. However, there will soon be trails internal to Mabry Park just outside the study boundary. There is also a proposed recreational trail linking East Cobb Park with Harrison Park, Sandy Plains Park and the Mountain View Aquatic Center. The proposed trail would primarily run parallel to Sewell Mill Creek and Piney Grove Creek. Currently there is no funding allocated to construction of the trail.



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public input is a key component in the development of the JOSH plan. To date, the JOSH public participation program has been driven primarily by a Stakeholder Group consisting of key individuals representing a cross-section of area interests, as well as multiple options and opportunities for providing feedback to Staff. Meetings of both the Stakeholder Group and the at-large Community have been held, providing an opportunity for the public to give input and get engaged in creating a quality future for their community. The community meetings were promoted by a variety of means, including signage along the roadways near and within the study area, press releases, newsletters and social media. Additionally, staff created a project homepage on the County's website that was used to disseminate information about the project, as well as to provide the community alternative means of offering input. Staff also created a crowdsourcing application, that has provided interested parties with an interactive web-based tool to explore the project area via desktop, laptop, smartphone and/or tablet. An Image

Preference Survey (IPS) was administered online and at two in-person meetings as a tool to establish a range of public preferences for the area. The survey was available online until July 6, 2018.

To date, there have been three meetings of the Stakeholder Group, and three Community Meetings. Below are summaries and comments from the meetings pertaining specifically to Stormwater and Parks.

Stormwater and Parks Summary

Meeting #1

During the first set of meetings with the Stakeholders and the Community, a presentation on existing conditions within the JOSH community was delivered to the participants. After the presentation, Staff facilitated break-out sessions with the meeting participants and conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. Below is a summary of the SWOT analysis pertaining to Stormwater and Parks.

There were no strengths directly attributed to Parks and Stormwater. Indirect references were made about the strengths of the water, sewer, and power infrastructure, as well as recreation. Strengths associated with recreation were attributed to services provided by private or non-profit fitness and athletic facilities, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

It was apparent from the SWOT analysis results that parks, greenspace and stormwater infrastructure are either lacking or vulnerable in the JOSH community. The absence of parks and greenspace within the study area was noted by the community members as a distinct weakness. The break-out groups also commented about overburdened stormwater infrastructure, particularly the local streams, and negative impacts from new land development upstream.

When asked about opportunities to transition the negative internal influences to positive influences or opportunities, the recommendations were provided. Overall, the community was vocal about opportunities for more park land; specifically, recreational park development, neighborhood pocket parks, and establishing a park and greenspace near Waterfront and Shallowford Roads. Community members also suggested providing full access to and staffing of the Wright Environmental Center.

Residents also voiced opportunities for better stormwater management. A lot of residents on the northern end of the JOSH study area have experienced negative impacts from flooding and soil erosion. The opportunities that were expressed focused on innovative approaches to stormwater management and improved erosion control, such as the establishment of a disposal area for sedimentation and use of permeable materials for the construction of roads and sidewalks.

Threats to the community and its quality of life were provided through the SWOT analysis. It was noted that if improvements to stormwater management do not occur, it would result in portions of the community continuing to experience flooding, soil erosion, eroding stream banks and sediment deposits filling lakes. In addition, one of the overall threats to the community was a decline in quality of life. Improving stormwater management for the Willeo Creek basin and identifying potential park land and greenspace within the study area will increase the quality of life for the JOSH community, reversing

this threat perception. The SWOT analysis is summarized within a group of tables located on pages 8 and 9.

Positive Impact - Internal influence	*Negative Impacts - Internal Influences*
STRENGTHS	**WEAKNESSES**
Schools Good Schools Excellent Schools	***Transportation*** Shallowford Road bottle neck Secondary road congestion No room to expand roadway Traffic Lack of walkability Poor access lanes Limited access to major roadways Transportation Lack of maintained roads Traffic flow Lack of bridges across Chattahoochee Limited road space (widths)
Location Variety of choices Close to GA 400, I-75, Winward Pkwy Convenient shopping/restaurants	***Streetscape Design*** Lack of aesthetic continuity Insufficient signage Lack of street cleaning Power lines Lack of maintaining medians Inconsistent signage
Commercial Limited retail (food, shopping) Retail Centers Commercial area Services Good shopping	***Parks and Greenspace*** Lack of park land Not enough greenspace
Land Use Low density residential Sufficient shoppiing area YMCA Low density housing Recreation Balance between residential & commercial in well defined area	***Overburden infrastructure*** Overburden infrastructure due to development Stormwater problems New growth impact on infrastructure
Transportation 2016 SPLOST Improvements Good transportation Sidewalk coverage Decent roads	***Land Use & Development process*** Development process Lack of zoning control Residential and Commercial balance is eroding Z-68
Taxes Low(er) Taxes	***Police Coverage*** Lack of police
Infrastructure Water/Sewer/Power	***Workforce Housing*** Unaffordable housing for people to live and work in area
Neighborhoods Property values Trees Good housing/subdivisions Well maintained properties	***Community Engagement*** Lack of involvement
Housing Maintained homes Appreciating homes Stable homes	***Home Maintenance*** Poorly cared for homes
Community Civilty Good community interaction High income Well run Highly educated Highest income in the area Quality of life	***Environmental*** Weakened trees from utility companies shearing trees and limbs
Public Safety Good emergency response service Low Crime	

Positive Impact - External Influences	*Negative Impacts - External Influences*
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
Parks	***Transportation / Safety***
Staffing for Wright Environment Center	Shallowford Road East/West
Access to the Wright Environment Center	Traffic
More Parks	Traffic from outside areas
Park land and Greenspace	Increase in traffic
Recreational area development	Lack of traffic control (no continuity of flow)
Community parks (pocket parks)	Unmanageable traffic
Park @ Waterfront and Shallowford	***Undesirable development/redevelopment***
Quality Development/Redevelopment	Redevelopment
Use of undeveloped areas	Developing property that should not be developed
Developing underutilized areas	Poor quality development
Transitional senior living	Cutting too many trees
NAC-P9 Redevelopment (Keep Lake)	High density housing
Improve Land Uses	Uncontrolled development
Control Growth	***Overburdened and aging infrastructure***
Smarter/strategic rezoning	Overburdened utilities/stormwater facilities
Restrict additional growth	Water supply issues
Maintain residential character	Overbuilding powerlines and poles
Lower density housing	Infrastructure decline
Moratorium on building	***Stormwater Management***
Traffic Congestion Improvements	Flooding
Road improvements	Sediment control
Coordinate Land Use and Transportation	Erosion
Safer walking areas	Stormwater
Innovative Stormwater and Erosion controal	***Overpopulation***
Disposal area for sedimentation	Additional population
Permeable roads and sidewalks	***Housing***
Streetscape enhancements	Increase in rental housing
Road beautification	Aging homes
Maintain medians and ROW	***Taxes***
Utilities	Increase in taxes
Underground utilities	***Population Age***
Improve Schools	Lack of age diversity
Continue to build school excellence	***Planning***
	Lack of planning
	Economics
	Poorly performing commercial areas
	Quality of life
	Decline of quality of life

Meeting #2

The second JOSH Community Meeting was conducted in a workshop format with interactive stations designed to get community members engaged in discussions with Staff through sharing their thoughts and ideas. As attendees entered the meeting room, they were asked to look at maps of existing conditions and participate in four (4) different exercises. The interactive exercises allowed participants to comment on a wide range of topics – from Land Use to Transportation – for the purpose of creating a draft vision statement and participate in an Image Preference Survey (IPS). Below is a summary of the exercises with a focus on comments related to Parks, Greenspace and Trails and Stormwater.

- Three-word exercise

  Attendees were asked to identify three words that best describe the JOSH community today, and three words describing what they hope the community would be by the year 2030. The purpose of the exercise was to utilize word clouds to get a short, concise expression of how the community feels about current conditions and how the community should progress moving forward. The following word clouds depict the results of the three-word exercise. Font sizes of words within the cloud indicate the frequency in which they were used (smaller font – less frequent, larger font – more frequent).

  To summarize, *Traffic* and *Congestion* were illustrated as the top two sentiments describing the JOSH community today, followed by *Schools* and *Haphazard*. To a lesser extent, residents feel the area is *Over-developed*, *Unwalkable*, *Suburban*, and *Safe*. (Note: opinions of the participants may be assets of the community, as well as shortcomings.)

How the community feels about JOSH today

Projecting out to the year 2030, it appears that more greenspace is a desired outcome. Residents also would like the JOSH area to remain suburban in character with a relatively low residential density. They are looking for walkable options with parks in a safe, quiet environment. Residents also would like for the JOSH area to have a greater sense of place.

What the community desires for JOSH in 2030

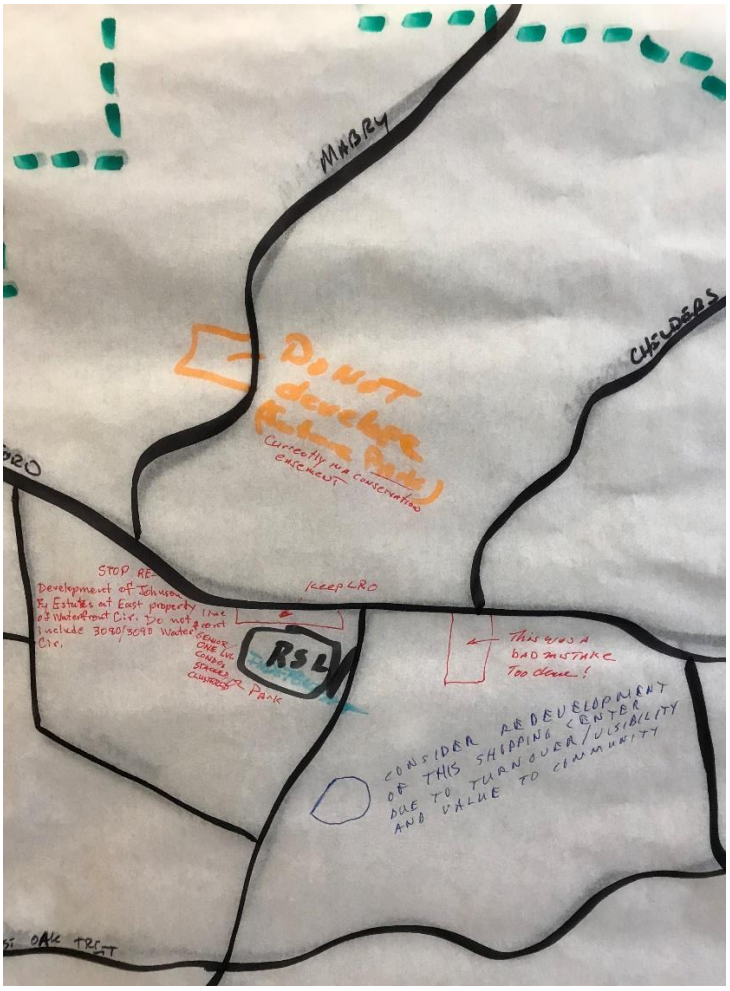
- Design Workshop Groups
  One of the most useful tools for gathering input from the community is breaking out elements into working groups. This allows for the recording of detailed feedback in the form of written words and/or graphic depictions. The JOSH workshop included three working groups with topics related to Land Use, Transportation, and Stormwater. Each group had access to a base map (aerial image) that included the JOSH boundary and roads for reference. Tracing paper was provided to each group for participants to draw or illustrate their concepts, designs and ideas over the base map. The intended result of the exercise was to assist in the creation of an overall conceptual plan that provides the framework for future coordinated development. The following comments pertain to the Land Use work group – which includes Parks, Greenspace, and Trail comments – and the Stormwater work group.

  Comments received regarding Parks, Greenspace, and Trails are below:

  - *Preserve Maddox Lake – Dining and retail on the water*
  - *Maddox Lake area should be County Park.*
  - *Sidewalks to make walking to retail possible*
  - *Intersection of Shallowford/Johnson Ferry/Waterfront Rd. should be developed as commercial with public access around lake in "park atmosphere"*
  - *Trees as buffers*

  Comments received regarding Stormwater are below:

- *Consider stormwater consequences when zoning/developing property. Slope of property is critical.*
- *Stormwater Utility Fee for the JOSH study area.*
- *JOSH specific Stormwater Utility Fee should apply to drainage basins that affect JOSH property but are outside of the JOSH study area.*
- *Train inspectors on stormwater consequences and strictly enforce stipulations and development standards.*
- *Improve staffing to insure excellent oversight of properties being developed.*
- *Stormwater management provided by original Maddox Lake must be retained upon redevelopment.*
- *Educate owners on importance of keeping stormwater on their property. Consider how to do things like driveway changes that support this*
- *Institute Stormwater Utility Fee.*
- *Elevated stormwater measures that apply to rezonings should apply to redevelopment where there would be adverse consequences downstream.*



Comments from the Land Use table during the second meeting (workshop).

- Vision
  Staff provided a draft vision statement that was based on information gathered via the SWOT exercise from the first Community Meeting. Attendees were asked to provide feedback, including recommended edits. The Vision Statement has yet to be finalized and remains open for discussion and revision.

Draft Vision Statement

The JOSH community is a unique, thriving suburban village that offers varied housing and commercial choices, in close proximity to parks and open space that meets the needs of the residents and business owners. It supports innovative stormwater management techniques, high quality, low impact redevelopment and new development that enhances the existing scale and neighborhood character of the area.

- Image Preference Survey (IPS)
  The IPS was created to use photos as a method for assessing community preferences. The IPS is intended to establish a set of preferred options related to land use type, architectural design, scale of buildings, streetscape design, stormwater infrastructure and landscape design.

  In addition to being administered at Community Meeting #2, the IPS was shaped into an online survey, which allowed respondents to take the survey at any time. The survey included images related to Residential Development Type, Commercial Development Type, Stormwater Treatment Design, Park/Greenspace/Public Gathering Space Design and Streetscape Design. Participants were asked to place dots within a range of how desirable or undesirable certain features within the images would be in the JOSH community.

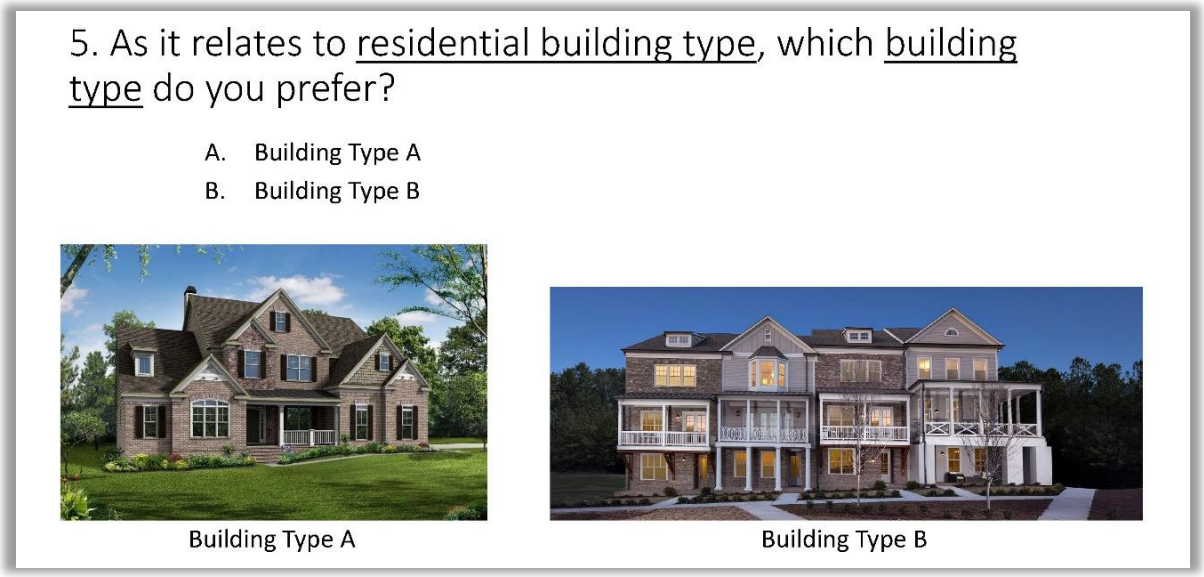
  The response during the community workshop was a success. However, concerns regarding images of residential and commercial development types depicting a more urban scale within a suburban character area resulted in Staff creating an updated survey that would be more representative of the JOSH community.

- Image Preference Survey Update
  Commissioner Ott, along with Community Development Staff and the Stakeholder Group, decided that a conceptual plan would not be presented to the community during the third Community Meeting. After gathering feedback from IPS respondents, a new survey that represents a more suburban character was created. The third Community Meeting was used to administer the updated IPS and inform the community that the updated survey would be available online. In addition, it was announced that a fourth community meeting would be added to the project schedule. The updated IPS closed July 6, 2018

Meeting #3

The third JOSH Community Meeting was used solely for administering the updated IPS, utilizing wireless, handheld polling devices. Based on feedback received from the initial JOSH IPS, Staff created

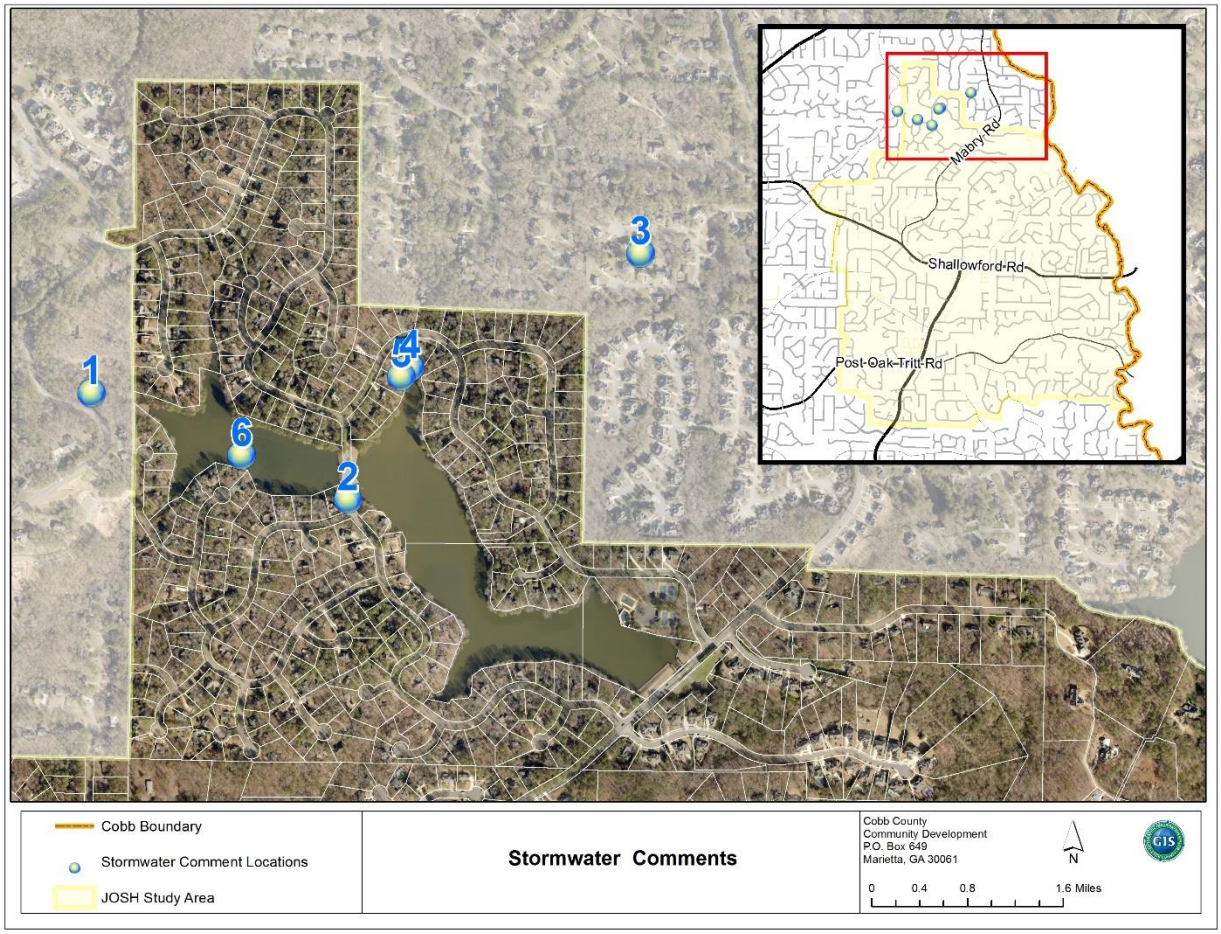
a second survey that focuses more on suburban development types. This survey includes more-specific residential, commercial, office and mixed-use development types that would be more typical of a neighborhood activity center and transition areas within a suburban community. In addition, the format of the survey was revised. The initial survey involved respondents looking at specific elements within an image and rating those elements on a range of how desirable or undesirable those features are. The revised IPS asked respondents to compare two different images and choose the image they would prefer based on the question.



Crowdsource Application

For the first ever, Staff developed a Crowdsource Application. It is a web-based tool that allows interested parties to provide feedback and input pertaining to the JOSH project from their desktop or mobile devices at any time. In addition, users are able upload images and view/rate others' comments. Below are comments from residents related to Stormwater and Parks. The number associated with each comment corresponds to the number on the map. The images provided with each comment represents a visual of the comment. *Votes* indicates the number of people that viewed the comment and "liked" the comment.

Stormwater Comments:



1. *Intense development means that Cobb County is no longer a rural environment. Huge amounts of impervious surface means that stormwater that used to largely be absorbed into the ground instead flows off roads, driveways, roofs, parking lots into streams. These streams do not have the capacity to handle the increased volume, velocity and duration of flow. Stream banks are eroded and the silt flows downstream into the proliferation of lakes in the study area (and all over Cobb County). In addition, Riparian vegetation along the stream banks is undermined, and ultimately torn away and flows downstream into lakes where is accumulates. Streams are part of the stormwater infrastructure and need to be maintained. Banks need to be stabilized. Although the streams and lakes may be on private property they are serving a public purpose, and should be treated as such. Funding could be provided thru a storm water utility.*
   Votes: 0

2. *Below is a picture of Riparian material that has come downstream and is lodged in the culverts that are located under Loch Highland Parkway. Although all this material came from upstream, the residents of Loch Highland are left to deal with it. The consequences of stormwater should be the responsibility of everyone, and maintenance funded through a storm water utility. Proper maintenance of the storm water infrastructure, which includes streams and lakes on private property, are part of the environmental quality issues in JOSH.*
   Votes: 0

3. *The JOSH study area was primarily developed many years ago. Roadway storm drains were routinely piped 25 feet off the road and then the stormwater was dumped onto the ground. Attached is a picture of the effects of one stormwater drain on a cup-de-sac in Coventry Downs. The water from the drain flows downhill and at the bank of the creek has created a pit about 15 feet high, 10 feet deep and 10 feet wide. All the silt flowed into Loch Highland's lake. This is from only ONE storm drain. Infrastructure in the study area needs to be upgraded to mitigate damage from stormwater runoff.*
   Votes: 0

4. *The 2009 storm severely eroded the banks of the stream that runs through this property. The volume of stormwater was primarily caused by all the upstream development from which storm water now flows into the creek upstream that runs across this property. The property owner had to spend about $15,000 to place rocks to stabilize the creek banks. This sort of work needs to be done on the banks of all the creeks that are part of the stormwater infrastructure. On the bank of the picture shown is all the debris that also comes downstream and becomes the responsibility of the property owner to remove under current law. The cost should be borne by all residents, not just downstream property owners. As the second photo shows, it filled a truck.*
   Votes: 0

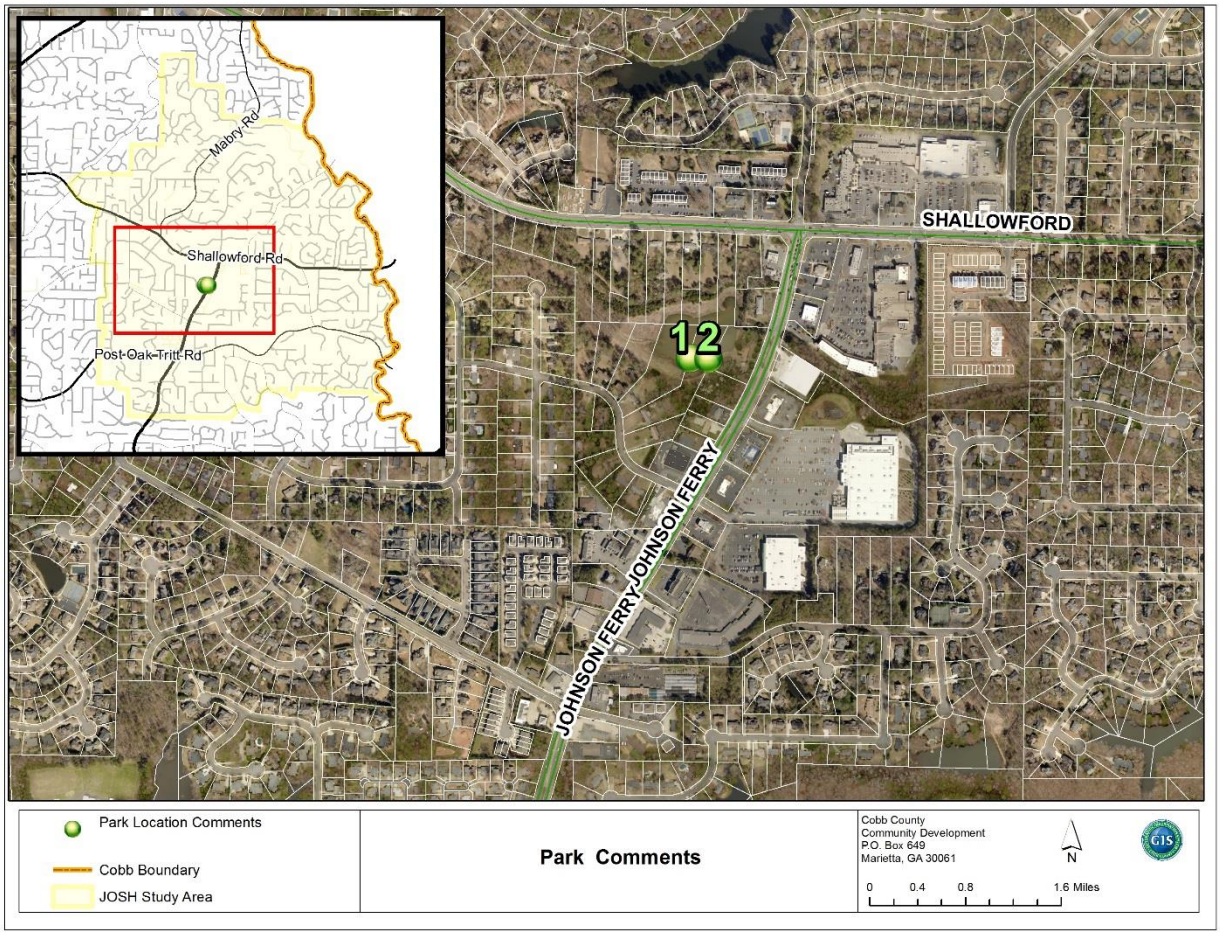
5. *This photo failed to upload properly. It shows the rock work done to stop erosion on a creek bank running across this property, at a cost to the homeowner of approximately $15,000. The 2009 storm caused the erosion, and the stormwater was much worse because of all the upstream development, from which increased storm water runoff flowed into the creek upstream. (photo not available)*
   Votes: 0

6. *Erosion of creek banks from storm water runoff sends silt downstream which accumulates in the lakes in the JOSH study area. It should not be left to the property owners to pay all the costs of removing the silt. Unmaintained, these lakes will deteriorate and negatively impact the quality of*

life in the JOSH study area and also erode the tax base of property. Below is a picture of what residents of Loch Highland pay to have silt removed and hauled away. Virtually all the silt came from upstream.

Votes: 0

Park Comments:



1. *Great opportunity for a passive community park. Potential for neighborhood restaurant. (photo not available)*

Votes: 4

2. *A prime opportunity to create a community asset that can be used by all residents of the JOSH area. Few areas in Cobb have the opportunity to increase the walkability of their communities like we do with this conveniently located land. (photo not available)*

Votes: 3

An engaged community is the most essential step in creating a vision and plan. For JOSH, the public participation efforts have been successful to-date. These efforts will continue as at least one more community meeting will be held (date, time, and location TBD).