

PART 2 - THE DESIGN FRAMEWORK

One of the challenges of urban design is to discover the patterns that merge to create the special character, or genius, of a place. These patterns are like the elements of DNA – building blocks that are combined in ways to make no two places alike. The patterns could be architectural (a certain street grid, or a dominant building style); or cultural (a yearly festival, or an arts performance, or a daily market); or natural (a prevailing weather pattern, a distinctive topography, a prevalent tree species); or anything else which is essential to a community's understanding and depiction of itself. Once aware of these unique patterns, urban designers can use them to create design frameworks, which organize the physical environment to strengthen the patterns and make them more visible. Design frameworks are like layers that overlap to create richness of experience.

In downtown Dahlonega, patterns are visible in everything from the square blocks of the original city plat, to the simple vernacular architecture and the multistory galleries, to the shared memory of the city's gold mining past. Like the evocative presence of Woody's Store in Auraria, Dahlonega's patterns tie the city to its location and its history. These patterns are all part of a design strategy for downtown that strives to accommodate the needs of the future without recklessly altering the past.

Figure 2.1: Woody's Store, Auraria



Rarely are the patterns that constitute the essence of a place limited to arbitrary or artificial boundaries, but extend beyond as part of a larger context. Dahlonega in particular is a product of this phenomenon. As the “Gateway to the North Georgia Mountains”, much of Dahlonega’s delight comes from its tangible and intangible connections to the Piedmont and mountain landscape that surrounds it; and the success of the downtown master plan is partly dependent on how well these connections are recognized and reinforced. Because of this, the planning process intentionally looked beyond the boundaries of the study area to attempt to discover things further afield that had a bearing on design choices. Surprisingly, every direction yielded something different. Obvious attractions like the gold museum and wine tasting rooms are direct outposts of activities that take place beyond the study area. More subtle are the things that cannot be seen but felt, like the presence of the Appalachian Trail tracing the top of the Blue Ridge. The association with the city is instinctual; to a hiker at Neels Gap, the Walisi-Yi center becomes an outpost of Dahlonega as the trail heads north into wilderness.

The connections discussed on the following pages were revealed partly by stakeholder suggestion and partly by observation, but they all become the basis for a design approach to the master plan that attempts to reinforce the place of the city as the center of its region; and use the unique aspects that can be found beyond its boundaries to invigorate its urban life.

Figure 2.2: Appalachian Trail at Neel’s Gap



(photo: www.whiteblaze.net)

the city context

Within five miles outside the Public Square in any direction, Dahlonega has a wealth of natural beauty, community amenities, and cultural tourism sites that enrich the downtown experience and hold potential for expanding downtown programs to benefit residents and visitors alike. Most of these resources are considered part of the city and included in tourism brochures and maps distributed by the Chamber of Commerce's downtown Welcome Center, as well as marketed online at www.dahlonega.org.

To the north and east, the sites are intertwined with the Chestatee River, Yahoola Creek and the city's gold rush heritage. The most significant of these are the Consolidated and Crisson gold mines, located north of town along US-19. Both were active mining sites; and although Consolidated was the largest mining operation east of the Mississippi River until it went bankrupt in 1908, Crisson is still active and supplied the gold for the gilding of the Georgia state capitol dome in 1958, and the steeple of Price Hall in 1973. Crisson and Consolidated have mining artifacts and panning activities, and Consolidated runs tours through abandoned mine shafts.

Consolidated also constructed a reservoir and aqueduct above its facility, retaining water from Yahoola Creek to use in a water-jet mining process. Today's Yahoola Creek reservoir may overlap the earlier basin, but functions as Dahlonega's water supply and a major recreation area – as does the new Yahoola Creek Park at the end of Mechanicsville Road. The park and future county municipal center give the east side of town a strong civic presence.

To the south and west, key sites are related to the proximity of the mountains. Camp Glisson contains the closest of Lumpkin County's spectacular waterfalls; and although Cane Creek Falls is only about 40' high it handles a large volume of water that makes it look larger than it is. Camp Glisson is a Methodist summer camp in existence since 1925, and has remnants

Figure 2.3: Consolidated Gold Mine

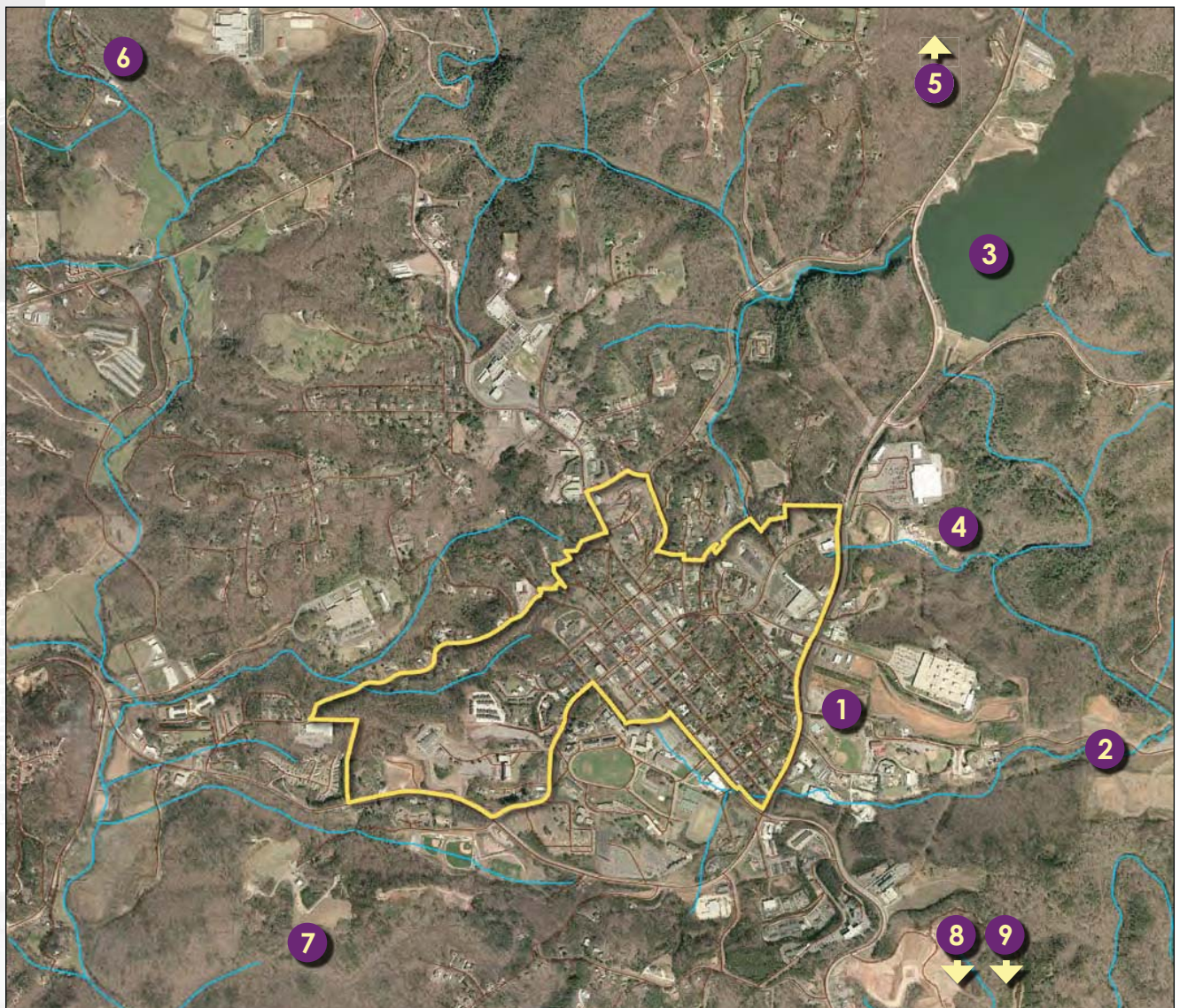


- 1 county municipal complex
- 2 yahoola creek park
- 3 yahoola creek reservoir
- 4 consolidated gold mine
- 5 crisson gold mine
- 6 camp glisson / cane creek falls
- 7 radar ridge
- 8 chestatee river trips
- 9 achasta nicklaus golf club

of Native American tribes who were attracted to the falls before Dahlonega was settled. The falls also provided hydroelectric power to the city until 1946.

Cane Creek flows south along the base of Radar Ridge, the location of a major student village for North Georgia College. Plans for Radar Ridge include water access and a potential recreational facility. The creek joins the Chestatee River downstream of Appalachian Outfitters, who offers raft trips on the gentle rapids of the river. The rapids extend upstream to the Achasta Golf Club where an island built as part of another mining and hydroelectric project now contains the course's 4th and 5th holes.

Figure 2.4: External City Influences



the county context

Dahlonega's reputation as the Gateway to the North Georgia Mountains is obvious from the dramatic panorama of the Blue Ridge from Highway 19. The city's position in this larger landscape is unique in that it occupies a ridge line, giving it remarkable visual connection to the higher elevations miles away; but its proximity to the Chestatee and Etowah Rivers link it to the surrounding valleys and their picturesque agricultural heritage. These two categories – the highlands and the lowlands – define the sites that impact downtown's identity and its role in the county.

Of all the mountains in Georgia, only the Blue Ridge has an automatic and visceral relationship to the colonial frontier, the Great Valley of the Shenandoah, and points north. In a sense, this is where the Appalachians end; and though the terminus of the Appalachian Trail on Springer Mountain is a modest finish to a great national landmark, the trail is still a powerful idea that inspires thoughts of Maine's Mount Katahdin 2,168 miles away. Dahlonega is the closest city of notable size to Amicalola Falls State Park and Springer Mountain, and yet the Appalachian Trail is more of a backdrop to other local Blue Ridge attractions like Camp Wahsega, the driving tour that features DeSoto Falls, and the Russell-Brasstown Scenic Byway. Thomas Jefferson managed to synthesize the essence of the Blue Ridge in the design of Monticello; Dahlonega, in very similar topographic circumstances, should strive for the same purpose.

More intimate with downtown is the city's relationship to the lowlands, especially the vineyards along the Chestatee to the northeast. Dahlonega is the start of the North Georgia Wine Trail, and several producers are represented on or near the Public Square through retailers and tasting rooms. The city also celebrates the wine country with two vineyard festivals in June, one at Blackstock and one at Three Sisters. Additional festivals near harvest

Figure 2.5: Wine Trail Vineyards

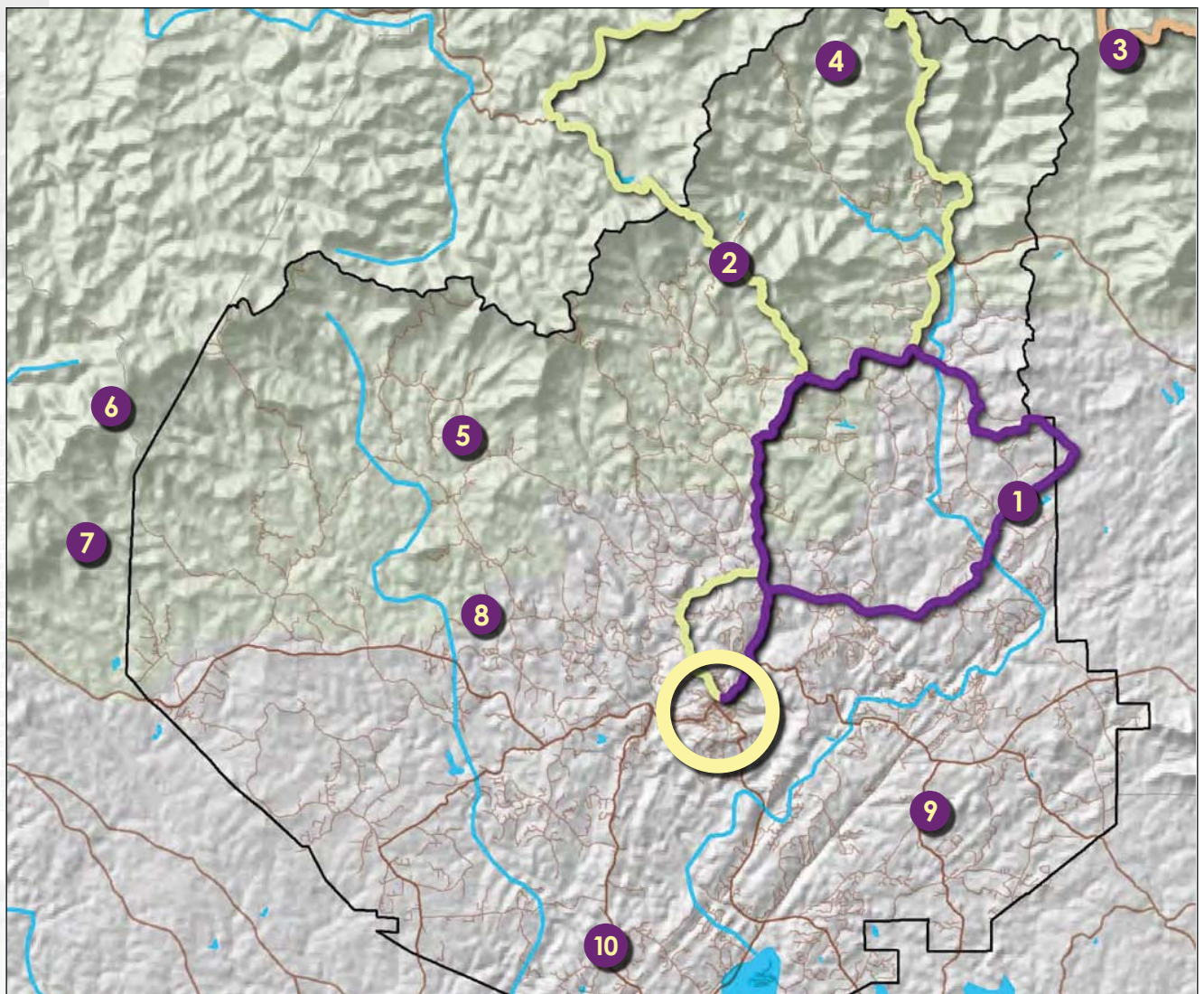


- 1 north georgia wine trail
- 2 mountain magic driving tour
- 3 russell-brasstown scenic byway
- 4 desoto / dick's creek falls
- 5 camp wahsega
- 6 springer mountain/AT trailhead
- 7 amicalola falls state park
- 8 etowah valley / organic farms
- 9 chestatee wildlife preserve
- 10 auraria

season provide an opportunity to feature local wines in the Public Square setting. Agriculture is more limited in the Etowah Valley west of town, but scattered farms produce poultry and vegetables and at least one is a certified organic grower.

Finally, two unique attractions lie closer to the city. Auraria, five miles south on Auraria Road, was the actual site of the initial discovery of gold in 1828. It became a mining community, but as prospecting diminished the town faded into obscurity. Today, a few wooden structures are all that remain. Farther east, the Chestatee Wildlife Preserve cares for orphaned wild and endangered animals, and can be visited as a guest or volunteer. This unlikely zoo has had national media coverage and has been recognized by the state legislature for its conservation work.

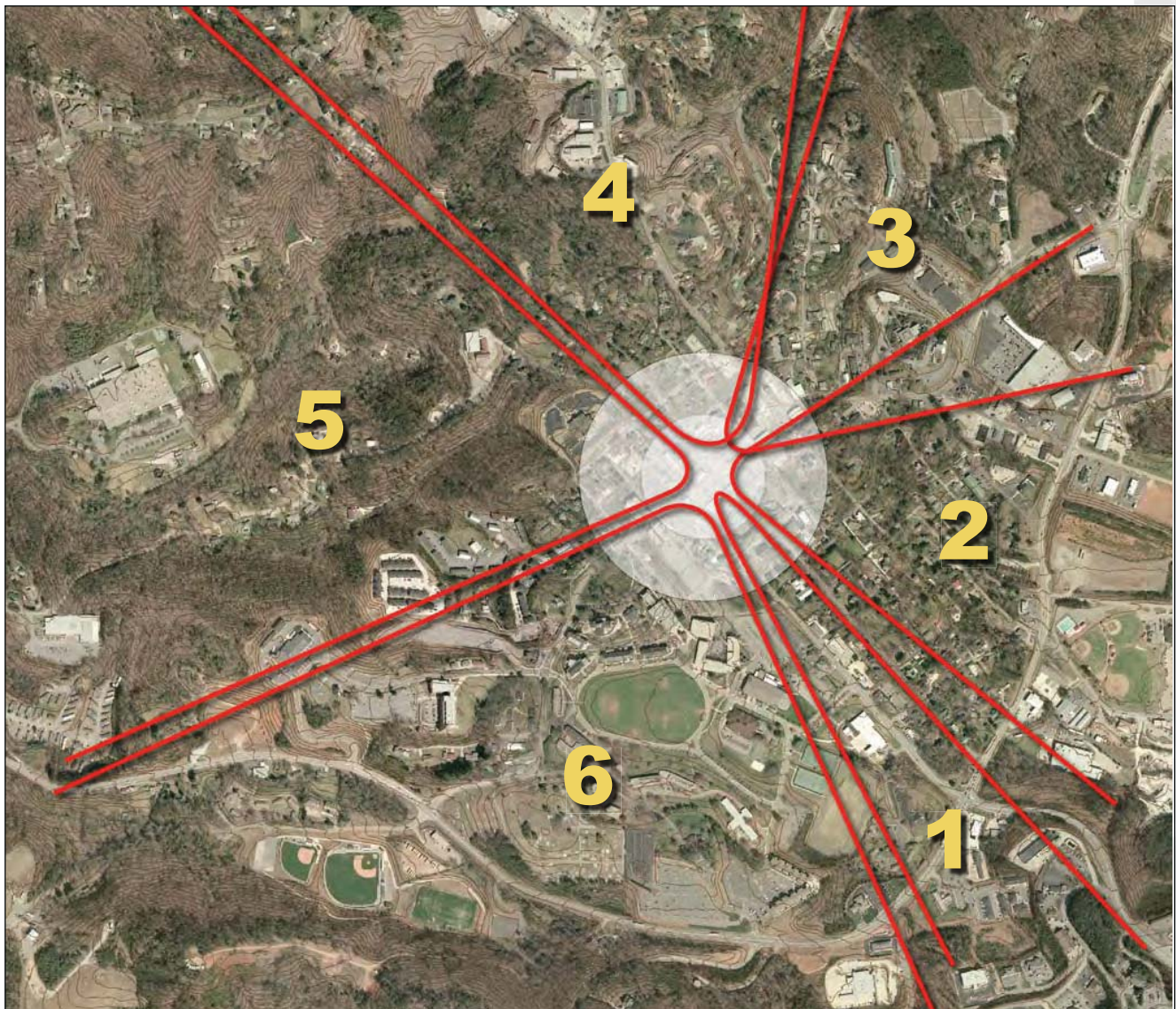
Figure 2.6: County Influences



thematic areas

The larger context that lies beyond the borders of the study area has ramifications for the growth of the historic core of downtown. Each distinct site described in the previous pages can exert a positive “pull” on the core allowing it to expand in ways that are rationalized by the sites, instead of trying to force the core to expand by pressure from within. In other words, the core can expand in a more logical way if the natural and cultural attractions outside the study area can be made part of the redevelopment program. The similarity of many attractions suggests six “thematic areas” providing design cues for both the core and major sections of the study area. Parking facilities can be strategically located where the extents of the thematic areas overlap each other and the outer edge of the core expansion (shown in white).

Figure 2.7: Thematic Areas



design themes



Figures 2.8a,b,c: Design Models

1. Historic Core / Entry: Central point for downtown and surroundings; South Chestatee main entry / gateway to the city from south. Strong preservation focus (Figure 2.8a); expansion of Public Square to surrounding blocks; improvement of South Chestatee as extension of Public Square; partnership with North Georgia College.

2. Historic Neighborhoods: Residential compliment to historic core; North Park Street as residential Main Street; full-block “country estates” (Figure 2.8b). Strong preservation focus, especially on North Park; compatible small-scale infill development; rural landscape elements.

3. Arts / Government: Culinary, fine crafts and visual arts with Cannery, vineyards and gold mines; courthouse hill as civic center. Strong redevelopment area with arts theme; “new town” compliment to historic core; memorials.

4. Mountain Gateway: Visual and physical connection to Blue Ridge, wilderness camps, outdoor activities. Preservation and enhancement of natural environment; rustic architecture (Figure 2.8c); feeling of being in the mountains without actually being on the mountains.

5. University Heights: Mixed-income “sustainable” neighborhood within walking distance of campus, Public Square. Enhancement of natural environment; residential annex to campus, “faculty village”.

6. North Georgia College: Equivalent to Public Square in symbolic importance; growing campus with national reputation but strong local roots. Quintessential academic setting; traditional brick architecture surrounding quads; some modern buildings in expansion areas.

the framework plan

One of the most important parts of a master plan is creating a well-informed and thoughtful framework plan to organize the individual programmatic elements and catalytic projects into a composition that creates synergies between its components. The framework plan usually is limited to the public realm, and is intended to focus public investment in such a way as to provide investment reassurance to the private sector for potential development or redevelopment projects (Figure 2.9). The framework plan is also a diagram that describes the interrelationships of different elements of the city's capital improvements program, and the physical platform for development regulation.

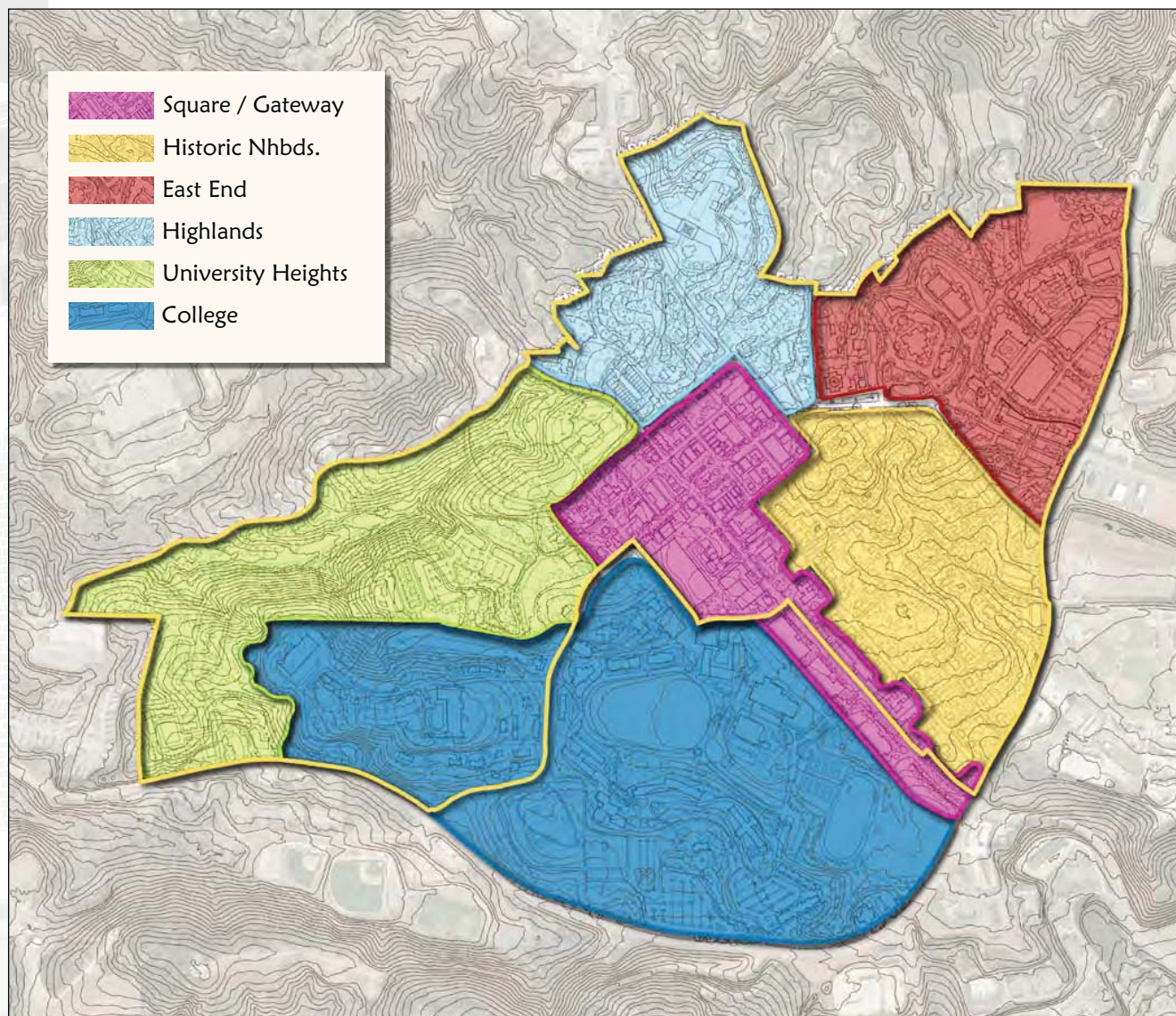
On the following pages some of the design frameworks that are essential to a well-integrated and coherent downtown master plan are described. These layers – land use / development districts, trails and open space, streetscapes, street networks, parking, and historic preservation – are combined in an overall framework plan that forms the “bones” of the final development plan discussed in Part 3. Each framework layer has a number of associated public improvement projects or policy initiatives that are listed in Part 4.

Figure 2.9: Greenbriar Plaza Redevelopment Area



The thematic areas that emerged from the contributions of the larger city and county context translate directly into a land use and development framework for downtown. Six development districts replicate the six thematic areas; and each district has its own set of priorities, projects, and design identities that are discussed further in Part 3. Two districts – Public Square / Chestatee Gateway and Historic Neighborhoods – are based on historic preservation as a driving force for growth, including preservation-oriented design standards for new development. Two others – East End and University Heights – revolve around new residential and mixed-use development that is influenced by the surrounding historic context but do not replicate it. The Highlands District has a unique design aesthetic relating to mountain rusticity and a development program emphasizing hospitality; while the College District continues design themes of the historic campus, updated for its western expansion.

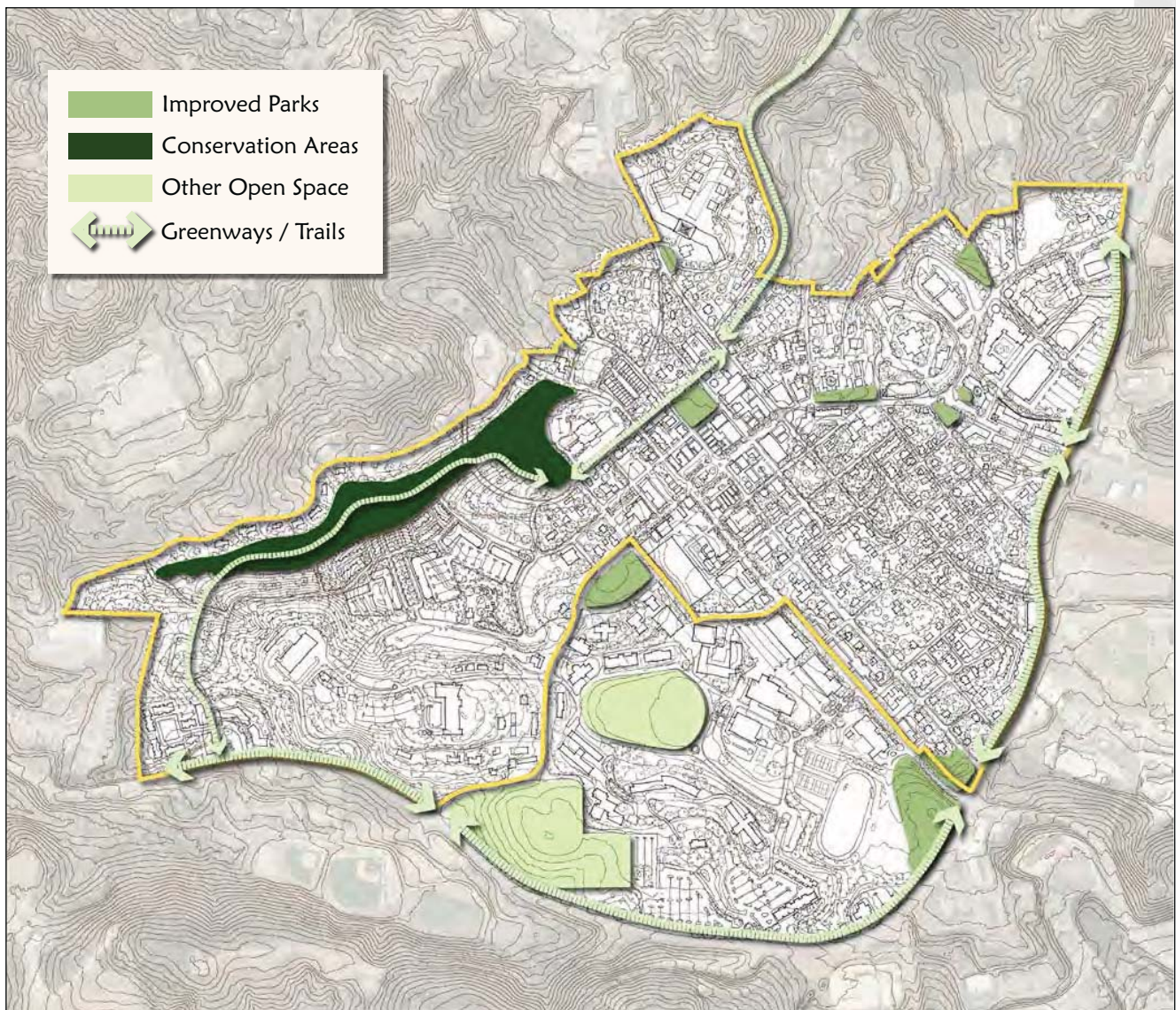
Figure 2.10: Districts Framework



trails / open space

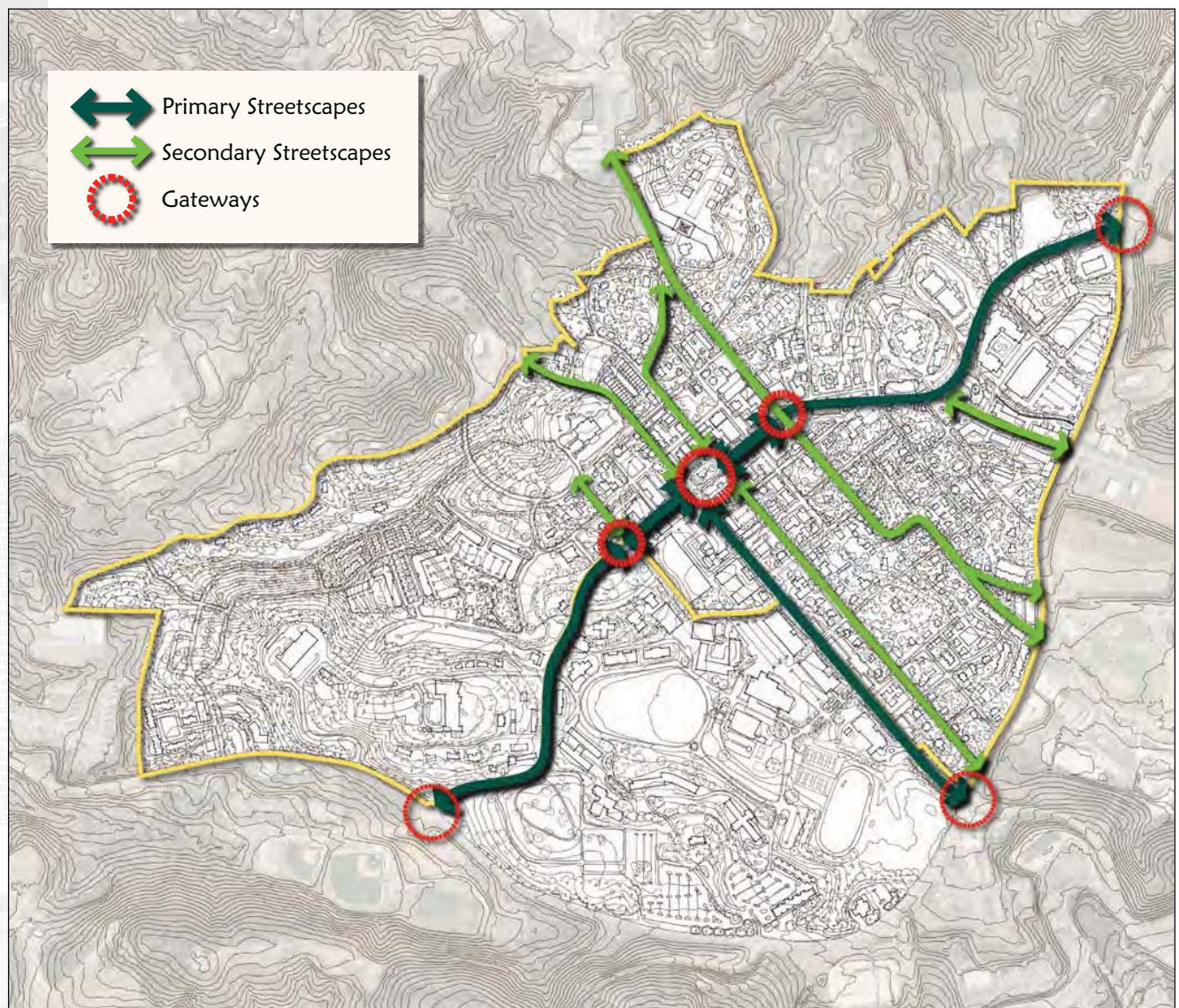
Downtown's open space framework centers on two strategies – creating or improving pocket parks around the Public Square to complement its small scale; and adding major new parks and open spaces on the fringes to provide larger recreation opportunities. Main Street and South Chestatee are the two primary open space corridors of downtown. Existing parks like Hancock and the College entry lawn are enhanced, while new pocket parks around Memorial Drive are added to create a succession of diverse landscapes connected by pedestrian and street improvements. A large expansion of Madeline Anthony Park anchors the east end of South Chestatee; while a conservation area adds forested park space on the west. A greenway / multiuse trail system links the open spaces together into a comprehensive network as well through trails paralleling Wimpy Mill Road, Hawkins Street, and Morrison Moore Parkway; and tracing the creek bed in the linear park in University Heights.

Figure 2.11: Open Space Framework



The city has done an exceptional job in improving the pedestrian environment of the Public Square, and many other streets in the study area could benefit from the same attention. Capital improvement funds are limited however, and so the streetscape framework shown below identifies only those streets that are highest priority in terms of essential connections or catalyzing development. Hierarchically the most important streetscape is Main (East and West), with the five blocks between Church and Grove extremely critical because of its role in physically defining the core expansion area. South Chestatee is a high-priority streetscape as well for its crucial role in providing an extended entry to the Public Square. Second-tier streetscapes on Park, Grove, Riley and Memorial define their districts and facilitate crucial connections to public facilities and new development. Gateways mark important transition points to both downtown and the expanded Public Square.

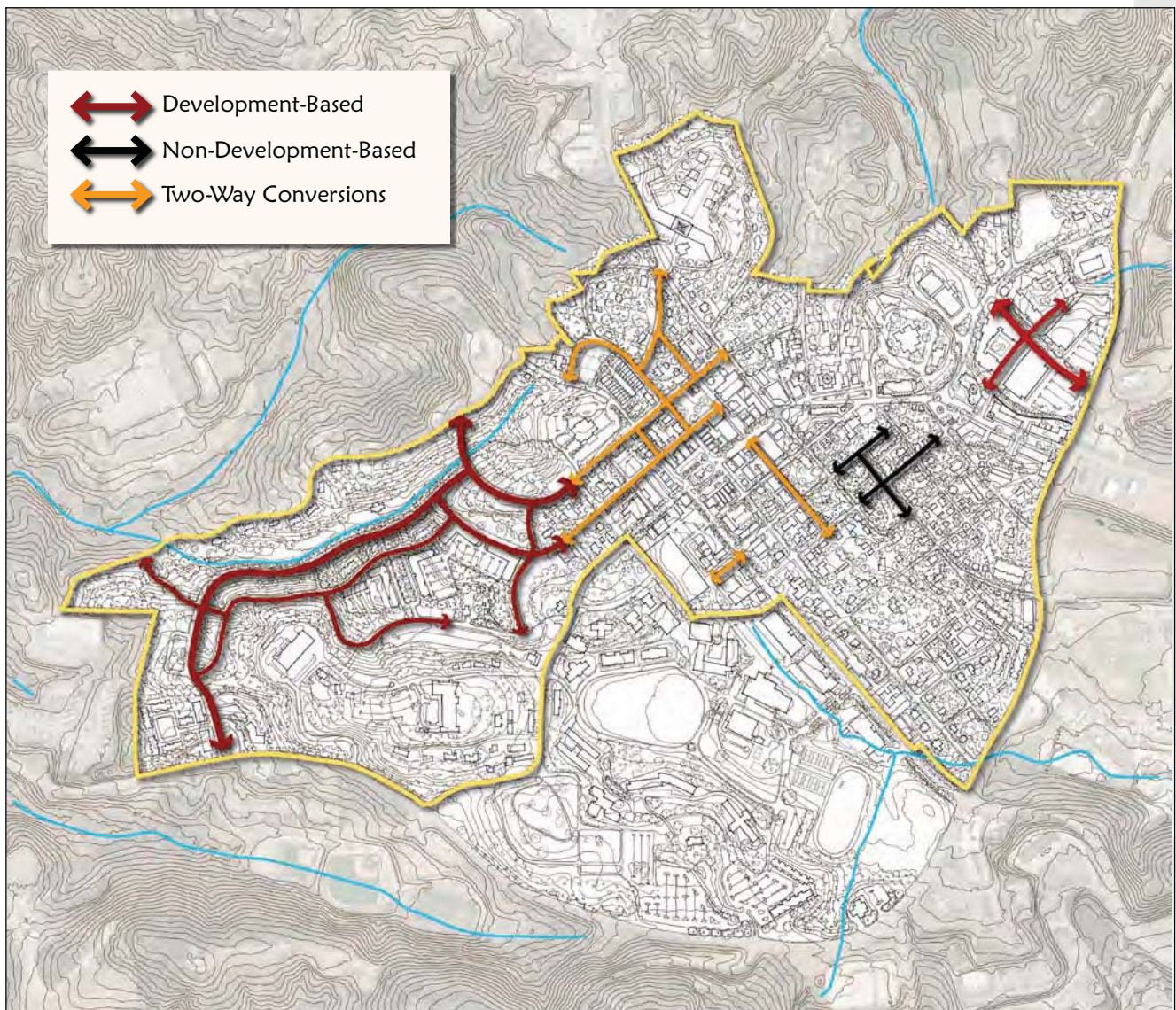
Figure 2.12: Streetscape Framework



street network

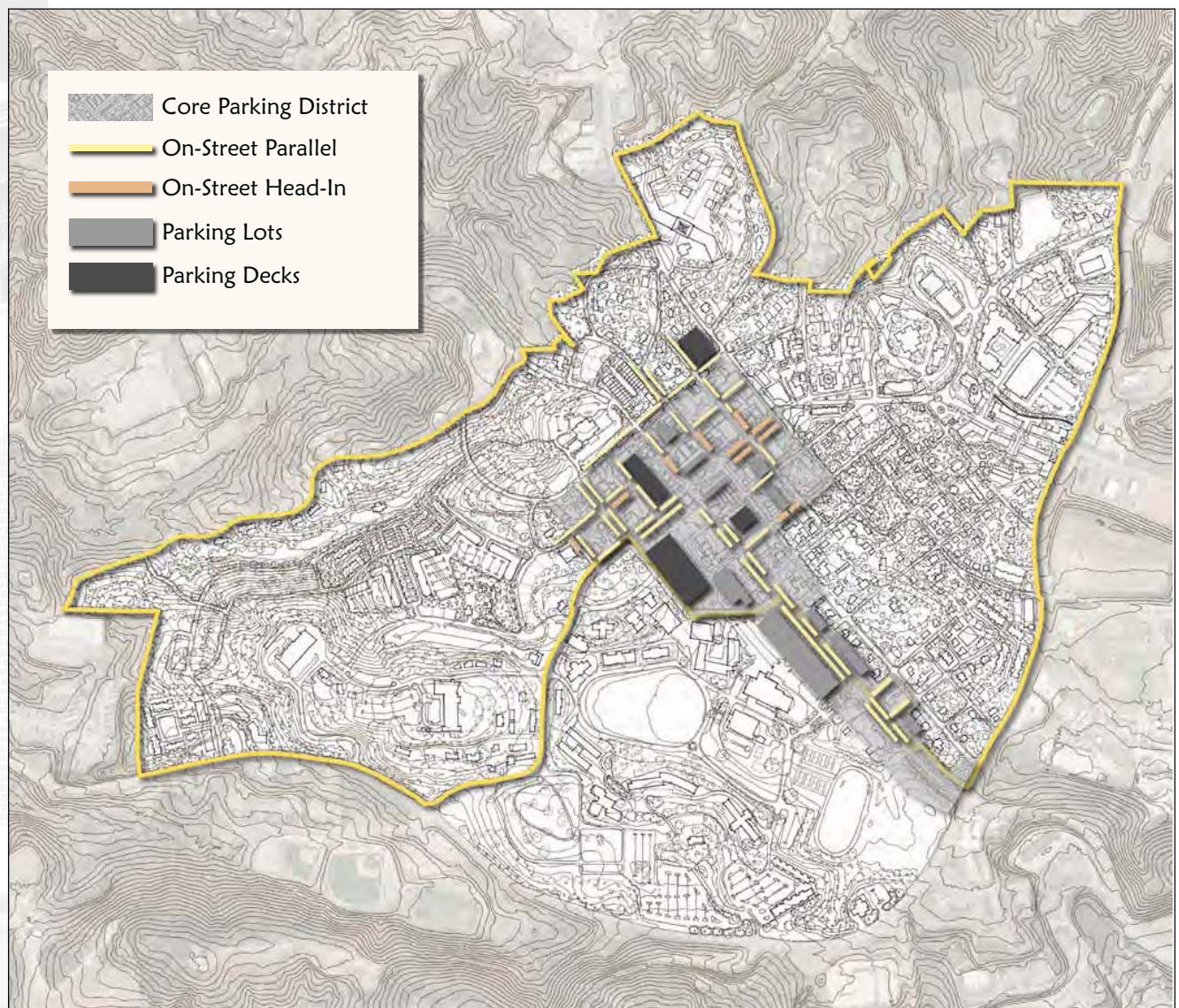
Downtown's tight street grid is custom-made for walkability and unrestrained access, but the one-way street pattern west of the Public Square is confusing and frustrating and should be converted to two-way traffic. In general, one-way streets should be reserved for very limited situations where directional control is unavoidable. Significant portions of the study area will also need new street networks for development and linkages back to the core. Most of these networks should be provided as part of private-sector development projects, such as the residential streets required in University Heights, or the commercial streets on the redevelopment parcels in East End. Finally, in the northwest corner of Mechanicsville several existing rights-of-way continuing the historic core block pattern are notably absent streets; their publicly-financed construction could provide the incentive for smaller, more marginal developers to subdivide larger lots for needed infill housing.

Figure 2.13: Street Network



The perceived lack of parking is a serious problem in the core area, and therefore the Public Square / South Chestatee District is given special attention with a multifaceted parking strategy. The four-tiered approach relies on parking facilities and on-street parking to satisfy demand without overwhelming the sensitive context. Parking decks, beginning with the new college facility, provide large quantities of spaces in key locations on the periphery of the core area. Surface parking lots function in the same way but are more dispersed and can often be fitted into residual spaces in block interiors. On-street parking is generally configured as parallel spaces wherever possible; but many streets have the added dimension to make angled head-in parking feasible, especially in key retail locations. The parking scenario shown below provides approximately 1,275 total spaces assuming 200 spaces in the RecDec and an average of three levels in all other structures.

Figure 2.14: Parking Framework



historic preservation

Dahlongega is a city that treasures its history and its rich architectural heritage. It has evolved as a destination for tourists to visit and thrives on the interaction of this visiting population with the local community. An important element that continues to attract people to the city, is the quality of life components that Dahlongega offers to enrich one's experience. This is achieved by creating a sustainable environment through the preservation and reuse of existing resources. Preservation plays a key role in improving the quality of life of a place, which in turn serves to boost the tourist generated economy.

Preservation works in two ways within the city, one through the excellent inventory of the historic buildings, and the other through the preservation of the natural topography and landscape. It is necessary to care for them both because together they make the character that is uniquely Dahlongega. Moreover, "the greenest building is one that has already been built" and the city needs to identify all its available resources and put them to good use. Older buildings were designed and built to take advantage of the natural environment through windows and construction materials and today these features help in the reduction of utility costs. Costs are also decreased because infrastructure to serve the property exists, new materials are not required and there isn't any wastage of energy. These spaces are generally what impart the special ambience to a place and create environments that inspire.

Dahlongega has created a historic commercial district at its core (Figure 2.16) and another district along Hawkins Street which protects a few residential structures. The city now needs to create another residential historic district along South Park Street, adjacent to the historic core and one that covers part of the Mechanicsville neighborhood. This area is rich in old

Figure 2.15: Public Square Architecture



residential structures some of which are built on large estate lots that impart a sophisticated, rural feel to the area. This neighborhood is a jewel in terms of its architecture with wood elements, the characteristic porches and balconies and detailing. Neglect and lack of incentives have caused some properties to deteriorate. The two districts cover a large percentage of the historic buildings. Many of these buildings including those that lie outside the districts in the neighboring areas and on the NGCSU campus have the potential for National Register listing.

By creating a residential historic district the city will not only be able to encourage property owners to maintain their homes but would also be able to showcase a well-defined and consistent historic residential character and promote it for heritage tourism.

Figure 2.16: Preservation Framework

