

Green Level Special Planning Area

Context

A sizable amount of the remaining developable land in Cary lies within the Green Level area – an area where much change is occurring. There has been a strong market for new development in this area, and both Cary and its neighboring jurisdiction of Apex have seen many new residential developments here over the past decade, gradually changing the historically rural character to a more suburban one.

The prior plan for this area was Cary’s Southwest Area Plan, adopted in 2004. That plan focused very heavily on maintaining and preserving the rural character of the area as it was in 2004, largely by limiting development intensity, avoiding nonresidential uses, encouraging open space preservation through clustered development, and maintaining rural character along thoroughfare and collector roads, including shielding new development from view along such roads. But new transportation infrastructure, namely the new Triangle Expressway (I-540), and the area’s proximity to RTP has increased traffic through the area and created new market opportunities for development. These changes, coupled with changes in the generational landowners’ interest in selling or developing their land have drastically changed the dynamics in this area since 2004.

History

The 2004 Southwest Area Plan set out strategies to maintain the historic rural character, protect natural and cultural resources, and limit residential densities. The motivation behind that focus was twofold. First, in the late 1990’s through the early 2000’s, a large number of long-time rural landowners and farm families organized to request that suburban development be kept out of their rural community. At the same time, they acknowledged the wishes of a small minority of their neighbors to sell their properties for development, but sought to limit the community impacts of any such development.

Second, the lower residential densities and increased open space recommended for the Green Level area were intended as a counterbalance to the higher development intensities recommended by the 2002 Northwest Area Plan, which sought to increase future development densities in the areas closest to RTP. The Northwest Plan was a special area plan for the northwestern area of Cary, located immediately north of Green Level, and extending to the border of Research Triangle Park.



Core Issues

Changing Desires of Generational Landowners

Ten to twenty years ago, most of the existing rural families and generational land owners (whose land had been in their families for multiple generations) not only opposed suburban development in their community, but also strongly asserted that they would not sell for development. Accordingly, the 2004 plan rested on an assumption that suburban development in the community would be the rare exception, rather than the rule. However, over time this has changed. In the past decade, many land owners changed their minds, and opted to sell for development – and the pace with which this happened has increased rapidly with the opening of the Triangle Expressway.

Evolving Character of Area

As landowners have sold and developed their land over the last decade, many new neighborhoods have developed. In the same time period, the area has seen development of the USA Baseball National Training Complex, plans for a new high school and elementary school, several new public greenways including the American Tobacco Trail, plans for new and expanded churches, plans for two new public parks, the extension of public water and sewer lines, many sections of widened thoroughfares, and the opening of the Triangle Expressway and its interchange at Green Level West Road. What was once an exclusively rural area has been changing over the last decade into an emerging suburban community.

Historic Resources

At the heart of the Green Level area lies the Green Level National Register Historic District, which contains important architectural and cultural resources. The District was designated by the National Parks Service in 2001. Despite Cary’s planning efforts since 2001 to help preserve structures within the district, numerous contributing buildings have since been lost. However, a number of significant historic structures still remain inside and outside of the Historic District. As the area continues to develop, it will be important to protect the remaining historic character in Green Level.



Yates Family House in Green Level



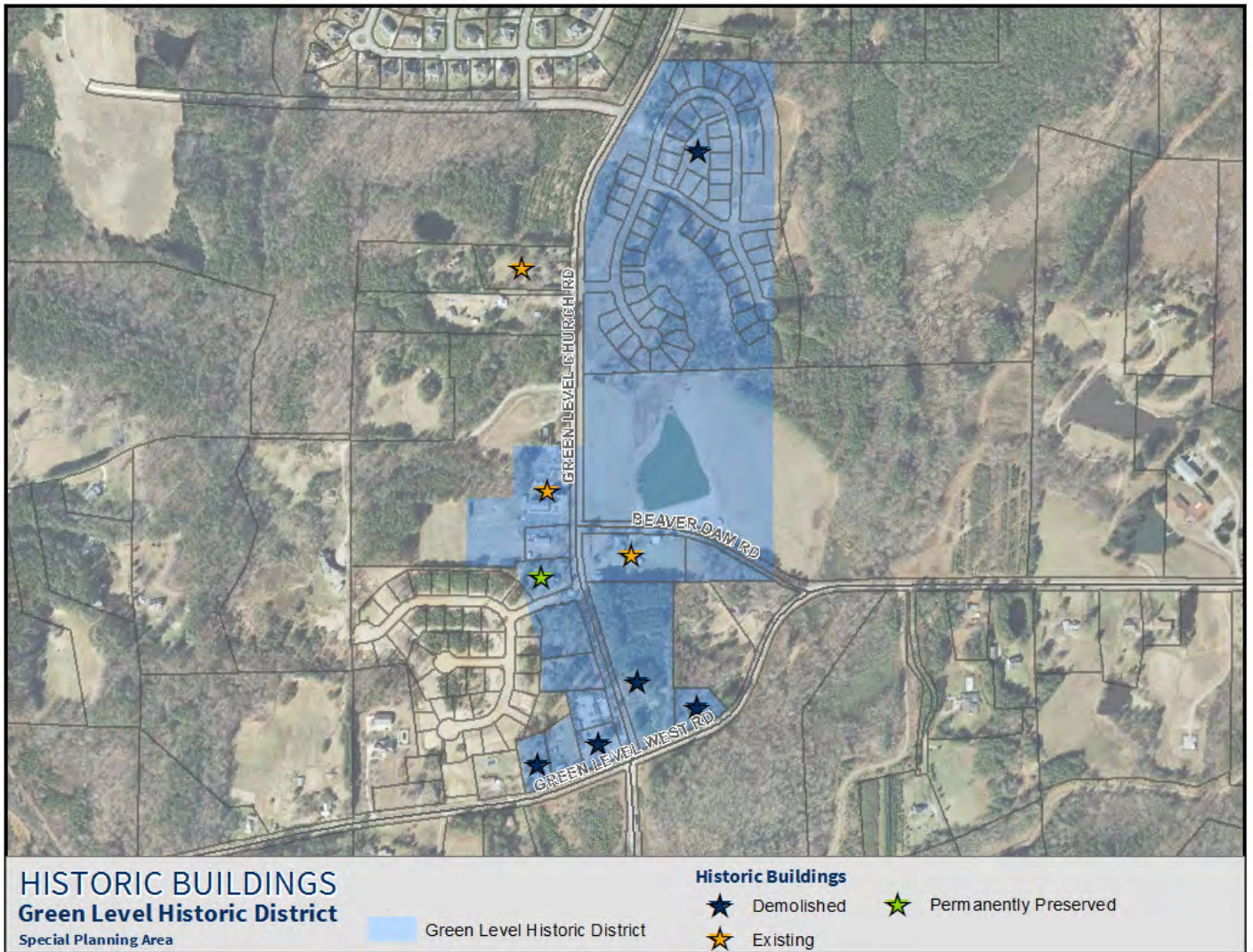
Green Level Baptist Church in Green Level National Historic District



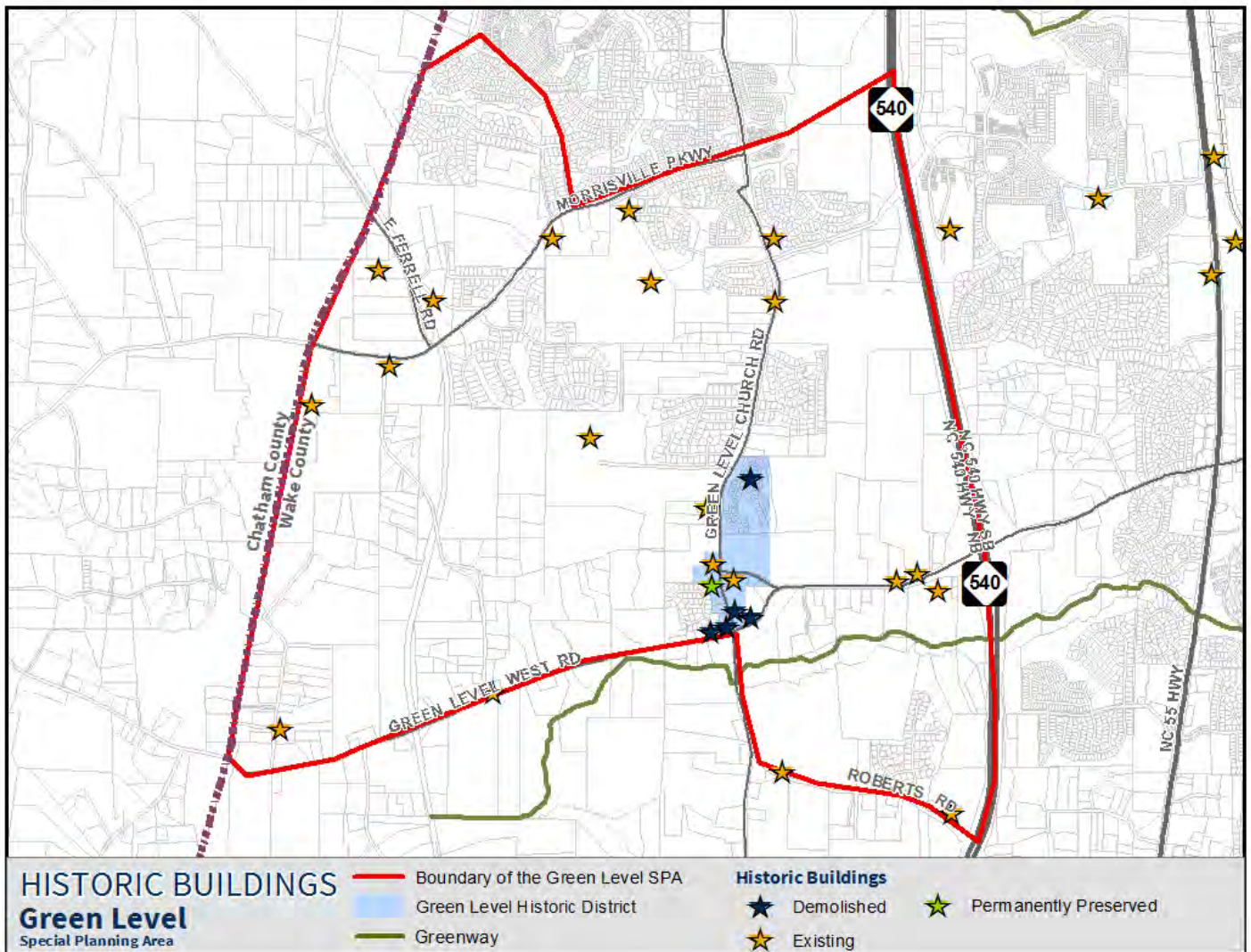
Looking South on Green Level Church Road



Albert M. Council House in Green Level Historic District on Green Level Church Road



The Green Level National Register Rural Historic District, established in 2001, has lost a number of contributing historic structures in recent years.



The wider Green Level area contains a number of historic resources outside of the National Register District. Preservation of these structures is a high priority.

Jordan Lake Watershed Stormwater Impacts: Density and Open Space Offsets

Jordan Lake, which is the primary water supply for Cary, is located due west of Green Level. The continued protection of the Jordan Lake water supply watershed has long been one of Cary's key policy goals. The Southwest and Northwest Area Plans were developed in 2002 and 2004 as part of a coordinated effort to achieve a comprehensive approach to future development in western Cary. Part of that comprehensive approach anticipated that the lower densities and additional open space provided in Green Level would be used to offset some of the water quality impacts that might result from increased densities in the northwest. It was anticipated that a combined watershed management plan could be approved by the State for the two planning areas taken as a whole. However, efforts by the Town in 2005-06 to develop a Jordan Lake Watershed stormwater management plan did not find support at the state level. Hence, the additional open space and lower density development in Green Level have not provided any stormwater mitigation benefit for the areas north of Green level.

Opportunity for Western Cary Destination Center

The Future Growth Framework Map identifies a new mixed-use Destination Center around the four quadrants of the freeway interchange at Green Level West Road. The availability of sizable tracts of developable land around the interchange makes this Destination Center one of Cary's premier opportunities for economic development. Located just two exits from RTP, and with opportunities for site visibility from I-540, this Destination Center offers exceptional promise for attracting "Class A" office and employment, in addition to supporting commercial and residential uses. Its future development should be carefully managed.

Chatham County-Town of Cary Joint Planning Agreement

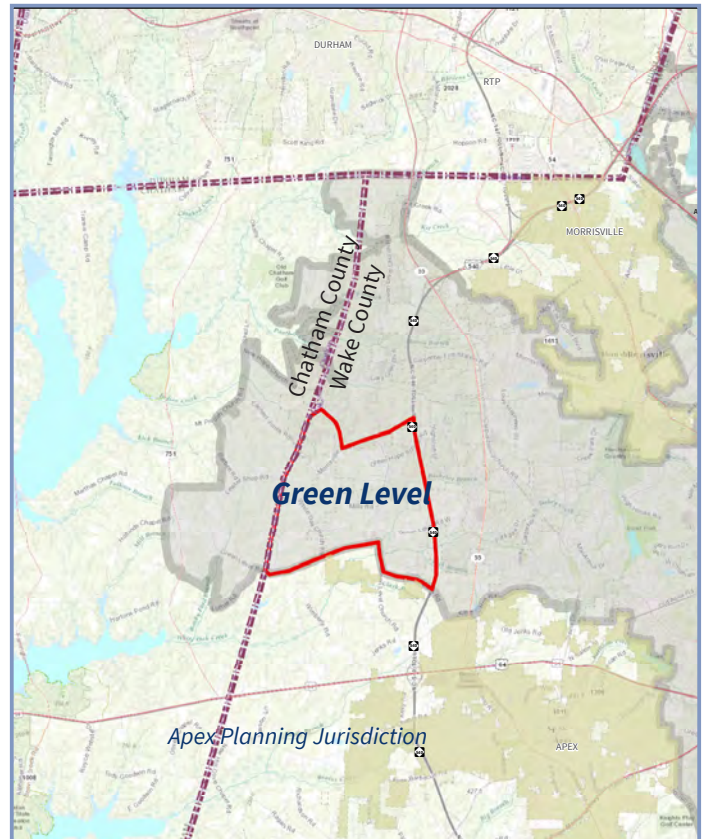
To the west of the Green Level Special Planning Area, between the Chatham County Line and Jordan Lake, lies an area of almost 12,000 acres that is subject to a special area plan, the Chatham County-Town of Cary Joint Land Use Plan, adopted in 2012 under an inter-local agreement between Cary and Chatham. That plan, with its interlocal agreement, governs land uses and densities for the portion of the Cary Community Plan located in Chatham County. For the area immediately west of Green Level, future land uses are recommended to be single family residential, at no more than 1-2 dwellings per acre. The Future Growth Framework carries forward the land use policies from this plan.

Further west in Chatham County is the proposed Chatham Park Project on the west side of Jordan Lake in Pittsboro - a 7,000 acre project that is proposed to include nearly 28,000 residential units and 23 million square feet of non-residential development. While not immediately adjacent to Green Level, this development likely may have an impact on the area.

Town of Apex

The planning jurisdiction for the Town of Apex begins immediately south of the Green Level SPA. Apex updated its comprehensive plan in 2013, which envisions single family development south of Green Level West Road at up to 3 dwellings per acre, and either single family detached or townhomes south of Roberts Road, at up to 6 dwellings per acre. The Apex plan also recommends a mix of office and retail on the Apex side of the Green Level West and Green Level Church Roads intersection. Apex's plan densities are twice those recommended in Cary's 2004 plan.

Context of Green Level

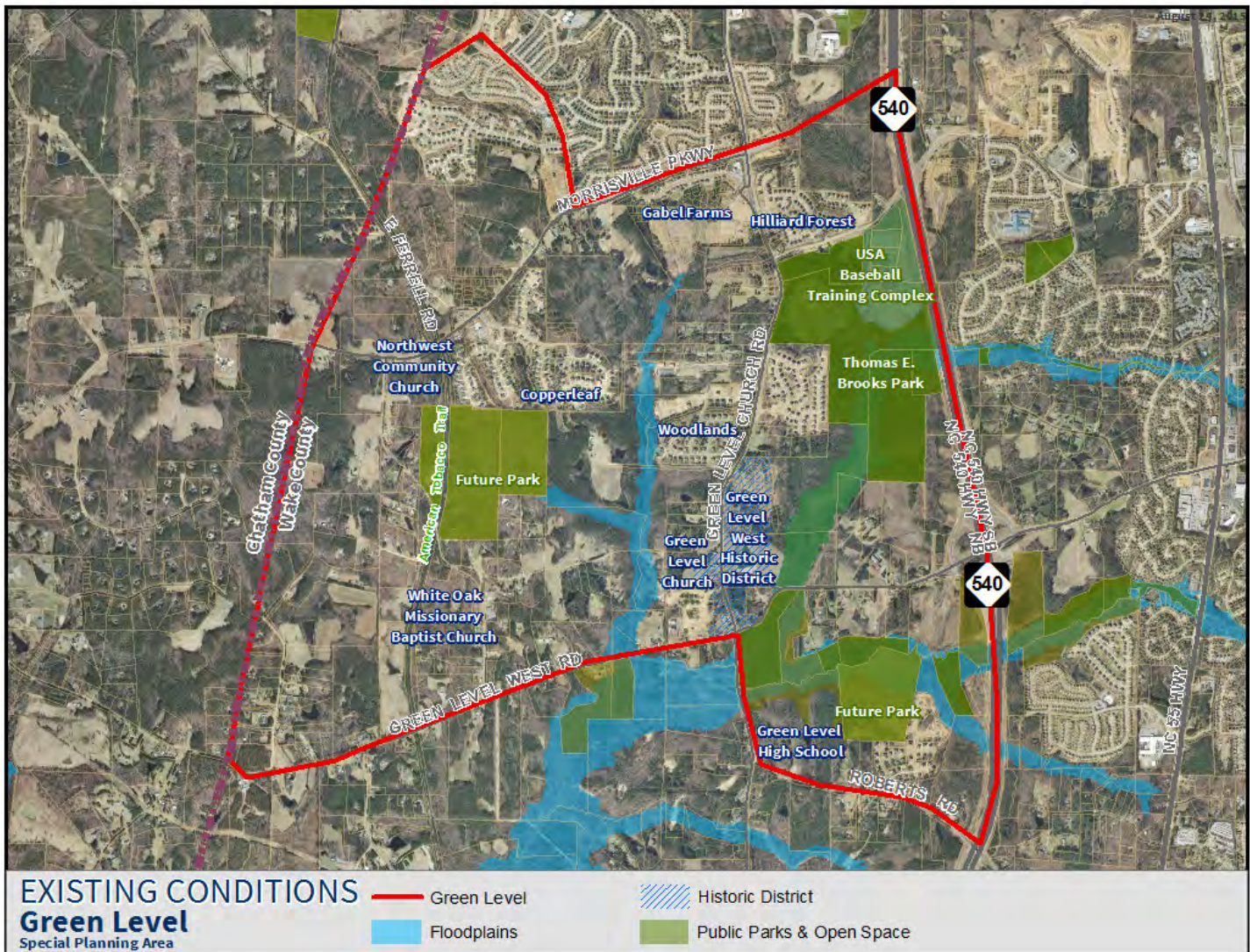


Green Level is located in the western part of Cary between NC-540 to the east and the Wake-Chatham county line to the west. Immediately south of the planning area is the Town of Apex Planning Jurisdiction. Further west an agreement with Chatham County governs land use.

Green Level Today



Thoroughfare improvements in Green Level from 2004-2015 used a “rural” treatment in an attempt to reflect the more rural character of Green Level at that time. The section of Morrisville Parkway, shown to the left, uses a swale and ditch design rather than curb and gutter. In mid-2015, Cary discontinued this design approach for thoroughfares in Green Level.



Vision for Green Level

Green Level will be an area that blends historic, rural character with “green,” suburban neighborhoods. The area’s rural heritage will be reflected through a mix of historic preservation and environmentally sensitive development. New development will include community open space that provides water quality benefits, wildlife habitat, and recreational places for citizens to enjoy the natural setting. A public greenway system will provide connections to the public parks in Green Level, as well as to the regional greenway system. New residential development west of the Triangle Expressway (I-540) will occur as clustered subdivisions that provide extra amounts of preserved open space than typically found elsewhere in Cary.

WESTERN PORTION OF GREEN LEVEL

Areas in the western portion of Green Level will be designed to help protect critical environmental features and provide opportunities for residents to access natural open spaces from their neighborhood while also including traditional suburban amenities. New neighborhoods will have lower densities than in the Eastern Portion, but higher than in neighboring Chatham County.



Preexisting farm features such as farm ponds and woodlands might be preserved as open space, while still allowing homes on rather conventional suburban lot sizes.

EASTERN PORTION OF GREEN LEVEL

Areas in the eastern portion of Green Level will be designed to take advantage of the regional transportation network and proximity to RDU and RTP. New neighborhoods here will have higher densities than in the Western Portion of Green Level. Subdivisions will be designed to offer the full array of amenities and will be located near a new mixed-use Destination Center at Green Level West and I-540. This center will provide significant economic development opportunities for Cary, with ample room for employment growth, as well as offering residents a place to work, shop, and dine within a short commute of their homes. These developments will use environmentally sustainable designs and building practices that complement the significant natural resources in the area, such as White Oak Creek and Bachelor Branch, as well as complement the historic rural and agricultural character of the area.



Using smaller lots in one portion of a subdivision can allow greater amounts of open space to be preserved in another portion. Design features harken back to the rural era.

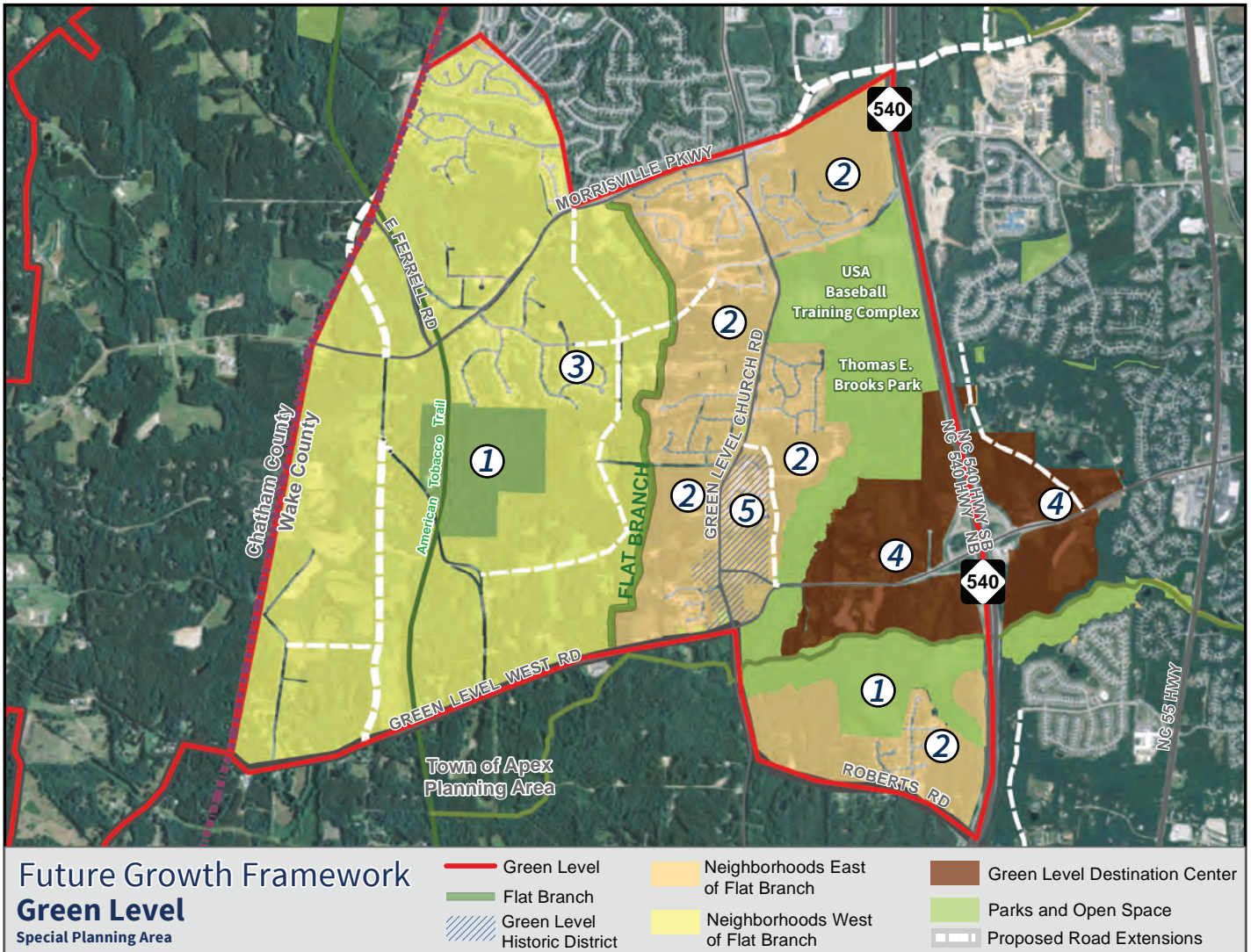


The Destination Center should include walkable, mixed-use areas and green spaces that draw to mind the area’s past.

Policies for Green Level

In order to achieve the vision for Green Level, the Town’s special policies for this area are:

Policy	Policy Intent
Policy 1: Maintain Land Use Transition	
<p>Ensure that Green Level is characterized by a transition, east to west, from more intense suburban development patterns around the Triangle Expressway (I-540) to lower densities at the area’s western edge with Chatham County.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to create transitions in development density and character that will provide for more intense development on the eastern portion of Green Level near I-540 and transition to lower density development closer to Chatham County. In order to maintain a downward density transition across the County Line into Chatham, and into the area guided by the Chatham-Cary Joint Land Use Plan, residential densities in the areas approaching the western edge of Wake County should be somewhat higher than those proposed just over the County Line, while providing a compatible transition.</p>
Policy 2: Respect Heritage and Open Space	
<p>Organize the pattern of new development around important natural and historic features, landscaped transportation corridors, open spaces and community gathering spaces.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to recognize and respect the heritage and history of Green Level by designing developments to utilize and incorporate a site’s environmental and historic assets and features as prominent or integrated design elements in new development. It is the intent that new development should uphold the rural character by retaining historic structures in their original location when near streets, and use landscape designs that set out key natural features as focal points and that protect these areas as public open spaces. Open spaces and community gathering places in neighborhoods should be connected and easily accessed from neighborhood homes.</p> <p>Thoroughfare and collector roads should have streetscape buffers that shield new development from view, and also use a less formal type of streetscape landscaping. Such streetscape designs might have a greater reliance on retaining existing forest, utilizing native vegetation, grassed medians, and/or design elements such as rural fences.</p>
Policy 3: Allow Either Rural or Suburban Designs for Local Roads	
<p>Encourage local streets to be designed to a suburban standard that includes curb and gutter, sidewalks, street lighting, etc., while allowing local streets to alternatively use a rural design that uses swale and ditch edges in lieu of curb and gutter.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to encourage local streets to be designed to include street lights, sidewalks or streetside trails, and curb and gutter, as found in other parts of Cary. This is in response to public input suggesting that the “swale and ditch” type of local street that was encouraged for Green Level subdivisions built during 2004-2015 did not meet the mobility and safety needs of the community. (Note that from 2004-2015, Cary’s policy was for thoroughfares and collectors in Green Level to use swale and ditch designs rather than curb and gutter, avoid the use of street lights, and use off-road greenways rather than sidewalks. That policy was repealed in summer 2015.)</p>
Policy 4: Support Development of a Signature Mixed Use Destination Center	
<p>Support development of a signature Mixed Use Destination Center at Green Level West Road and the Triangle Expressway (I-540) that incorporates special features which acknowledge the area’s culture and past, as well as its location proximate to unique environmental features and resources.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to create a prominent Destination Center that will support residences in Green Level and the larger region. The new Destination Center will highlight the juxtaposition of a major interchange and nearby sensitive natural areas by integrating environmental features into a densely developed and vertically-mixed center. As one of the last quality sites for employment uses, this Destination Center should include not only commercial and residential uses, but also a significant portion of the site should be dedicated to office or other employment uses.</p>



1 New Community Park (north of Roberts Road)

- Design guidance provided in the 2012 Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Master Plan will be utilized to design this new community park
- Connect park to Destination Center and proximate neighborhoods via greenways, sidewalks, and bike trails



Future Park (east of American Tobacco Trail)

- Design guidance provided in the 2012 Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Master Plan will be utilized to design this new park/open space
- Connect park to American Tobacco Trail and proximate neighborhoods via greenways, sidewalks, and bike trails

Neighborhoods in Green Level (areas ② and ③)

- New development should be shielded from view from thoroughfares and the American Tobacco Trail (ATT) using natural topography, opaque vegetated open spaces, and/or streetscape buffers.
- Subdivisions should preserve historic resources identified on Cary's Historic Properties Inventory. First priority should be given to preserving structures in situ whenever possible, or otherwise as near as possible to original locations.
- The use of clustered, or conservation, subdivision design is encouraged. Preserved open spaces should be oriented around prominent natural features and/or historic resources.
- New development should be designed using features and elements that complement and harken back to the historic rural character of Green Level.
- Taken as a whole, new housing Green Level will be predominantly single family detached.
- Thoroughfare and collector roads should have streetscape buffers that shield new development from view, and also use a less formal type of streetscape landscaping. Such streetscape designs might have a greater reliance on retaining existing forest, utilizing native vegetation, grassed medians, and/or design elements such as rural fences.

② Neighborhoods East of Flat Branch

- This area begins the gradual downward transition in density moving from areas east of I-540, heading west towards the Chatham County Line.
- The area east of Green Level Church and Roberts Roads will be generally akin to Classic Neighborhoods, while areas west of Green Level Church Road akin to Contemporary Neighborhoods.
- Single family detached housing predominates, with a mix of lot sizes possible across the area. Pockets or mixes of other housing types, such as patio homes or townhomes are also acceptable, provided such are shielded from view from thoroughfares. Multifamily should be sited in the Green Level Destination Center, and not in this area.
- At buildout, the aggregate density of the area east of Flat Branch will be somewhat higher than the area west of Flat Branch, with an aggregate, gross area-wide density not exceeding about 3 dwellings per acre.



3 Neighborhoods West of Flat Branch

- This area continues the gradual downward transition in density moving west from I 540, heading towards the Chatham County Line, as begun in the Neighborhoods East of Flat Branch. At buildout, the aggregate density of the area west of Flat Branch will be lower than the area east of Flat Branch, with an aggregate, gross area-wide density not exceeding about 2.5 dwellings per acre.
- This area is generally akin to Contemporary Neighborhoods.
- Single family detached housing predominates over most of the area, with lot sizes generally about a quarter acre or larger in conventional subdivisions, with smaller lot sizes possible in clustered subdivisions.
- Pockets or occasional mixes of other housing types, such as small-lot single family, patio homes, or townhomes, may also occur. Small or specialty multifamily (e.g., senior housing, care facilities, affordable housing) are also acceptable provided they are on sites of limited size – ideally about 10 acres or less (as opposed to sites of about 20-30+ acres typical for such housing in other parts of Cary). These types of housing should be shielded from view from thoroughfares and the American Tobacco Trail.



Conventional Subdivision

Conventional subdivisions are typically developed to accommodate the maximum number of single family dwellings permitted by zoning, and do not set aside public spaces except for roads, recreational amenities, and protected environmental features. The illustration below shows how a conventional subdivision might be developed to maximize the number of homes and protect critical areas, but provide no common open space.



Cluster or Conservation Subdivision

Conservation subdivisions (popularly called “cluster subdivisions”) provide the same number of homes as a conventional subdivision, but utilize allow homes on smaller lots in order to preserve more land in its natural condition as permanently protected open space. Open spaces should be designed as large, cohesive and contiguous areas to maximize the ecological viability and natural habitat of the site. Some communities provide developers with a density bonus – an increase in the total number of homes – as an incentive to use the conservation subdivision approach.



4 Green Level Destination Center

The Green Level mixed-use Destination Center will provide significant economic development opportunities for Cary, with ample room for employment growth, as well as offering residents a place to shop and dine within a short commute of homes. This Destination Center should be designed using environmentally sustainable designs and building practices and site designs that complement the significant natural resources in the area, such as White Oak Creek and Bachelor Branch, and that harken to the historic rural character of the area.

- This signature Destination Center should utilize a consistent design palette across its four quadrants to reinforce the cohesive nature of the center and should incorporate high quality architecture and design elements that are influenced by the area's rural and agricultural heritage
- The center should include employment, commercial, and higher-density housing using multistory vertically mixed designs, preferably a range of 4-7 stories in height.
- Structured parking is preferred over large surface lots.
- As one of the last large sites suitable for major employment uses, this Destination Center should include not only commercial and residential uses, but also a significant portion of the site should be dedicated to office or other employment uses
- Center should be designed as a highly walkable environment that integrates the built environment and natural features within public areas, and fosters an active public realm
- Historical buildings in the center should be protected, utilizing adaptive reuse whenever possible.
- Center designs should strive to protect prominent environmental features
- Multi-story Class A office buildings and employers are desired, and intended to be sited for optimal visibility from the freeway



5 Green Level Historic District and Other Historic Resources

- Protect and preserve the historic district's contributing historic resources as well as resources identified on, or qualified for, Cary's Historic Properties Inventory throughout the Green Level area
- Retain historic structures in their original location whenever possible
- Strive to protect the landscape context around historic structures
- Strive to protect the views towards historic structures from major roadways
- New infill development or redevelopment should be designed to be compatible with historic resources and their surrounding landscape
- Protect the historic district's context and historic resources by using context-sensitive thoroughfare and streetscape designs within the historic district, including the consideration of asymmetrical road widenings if appropriate and feasible.



How We Will Achieve Our Vision

1 Maintain an East-to-West Transition in Density While Respecting the Area's Heritage and Open Spaces

Major Actions:

Evaluate and update zoning and site development ordinances to implement the vision of the Green Level Special Planning Area. This includes updating current zoning districts that can be applied to neighborhoods in Green Level to allow for both cluster and larger lot subdivisions, as well as updating zoning incentives and/or requirements for historic preservation. The Town's streetscape ordinance and other design standards should be updated to conform to the vision for this special area.

2 Support Development of a Signature Mixed-Use Destination Center

Major Actions:

Prepare mixed-use development and design standards that protect and celebrate the sensitive environmental setting of the future destination center; consider a form-based or hybrid zoning approach. This could include a sustainability points system that provides additional incentives or removal of barriers for projects that incorporate environmentally sustainable designs.

RELATED POLICY DIRECTION IN OTHER CHAPTERS

This plan has been organized to address specific topics in specific chapters; however, the policies listed throughout this plan are very much interrelated. Listed here are the policies included in other plan chapters that relate to the Town’s policies on Green Level.

Shape: Guiding Community Growth in Green Level	Live:	Work:	Shop:	Engage:	Move:	Serve:
	Fostering Strong Neighborhoods	Assuring Continued Prosperity	Creating Vibrant Destinations	Experiencing the Cary Community	Providing Transportation Choices	Meeting Community Needs
	<p>Policy #1: Maintain Neighborhood Character</p> <p>Policy #2: Provide More Housing Choices for All Residents</p> <p>Policy #3: Provide for More Housing Options in New Neighborhoods</p> <p>Policy #4: Provide the Greatest Variety of Housing Options in Mixed Use Centers</p> <p>Policy #5: Support Residential Development on Infill and Redevelopment Sites</p>	<p>Policy #1: Grow A Sustainable and Diversifying Workforce</p> <p>Policy #2: Enhance Locational Appeal to Businesses and Workers</p> <p>Policy #4: Diversify Cary’s Economy</p> <p>Policy #5: Attract New, High Value Businesses</p> <p>Policy #6: Attract and Nurture Small Businesses</p> <p>Policy #8: Support the Locational Needs of New and Expanding Firms</p> <p>Policy #10: Reserve and Provide Employment Sites in Selected Commercial Mixed Use and Destination Centers</p>	<p>Policy #2: Focus Commercial Uses within Mixed-Use Centers</p> <p>Policy #3: Support the Development of a Limited Number of Destination Centers</p>	<p>Parks and Recreation Master Plan Goals #1, #2, #4, #7</p> <p>Public Art Master Plan Vision</p> <p>Historic Preservation Master Plan Goals #1, #2, #3, #4, #5</p>	<p>Policy #3: Design Transportation Infrastructure to Address Land Use Context</p> <p>Policy #4: Focus Investments on Improving Connections and Closing Gaps</p> <p>Policy #8: Ensure a Well-Maintained System</p>	<p>Policy #1: Provide Affordable and High Quality Public Services and Facilities for Current and Future Generations</p> <p>Policy #2: Provide Safe, Reliable Water and Wastewater Services</p> <p>Policy #3: Encourage Environmentally Responsible Stormwater Management</p> <p>Policy #5: Protect and Restore Open Space and the Natural Environment</p> <p>Policy #6: Protect Air Quality</p> <p>Policy #7: Improve Energy Efficiencies and Sustainable Energy Practices</p> <p>Policy #9: Preserve and Protect the Urban Tree Canopy</p>