Potential Policy Solutions: Design & Site

Envision Glynn: Zoning Update
DRAFT FOR CONSIDERATION April 27, 2020

This document explores initial draft solutions to the policy questions identified in the Diagnostic Report. These concepts and options were developed using best practices, professional judgment, and input from Glynn County stakeholders, and will be discussed with the Planning Commissions, Glynn County Commission, and the public before any changes to regulations are drafted. For each item, one or more of the potential solutions may warrant further exploration. The technical updates in the Diagnostic Report will also be addressed in the next phase of this effort.

1. **Maximum building height for zoning purposes** is currently measured either from flood level or ground level (whichever is higher) to the highest point of the roof.

   Potential solution A: Update the definition of building height so that it is measured only from ground level. This would provide a simple, consistent measurement for all new buildings and avoid allowing taller buildings in flood-prone areas. Since regulations on St. Simons Island limit the number of habitable stories in addition to building height in feet, this solution may further limit the number of stories in flood-prone areas on St. Simons Island.

   Potential solution B: Update the definition of building height as in potential solution A, but also update height, lot coverage, and setback regulations to ensure that buildings have an appropriate bulk, in addition to height.

   Potential solution C: Measure height from the mid-point of sloped roofs to avoid flat-roofed buildings that try to maximize the allowed height.

   Potential solution D: Measure height based on existing ground level before any grading or construction, to avoid lots that re-grade to increase the allowed height.

   Potential solution E: No change.

2. **Finished floor elevation** is currently required to be one foot above base flood elevation.

   Potential solution A: Increase this requirement so all new buildings must be at least two feet above flood level.

   Potential solution B: Increase this requirement so all new buildings must be at least three feet above flood level.

   Potential solution C: Confirm that fill dirt cannot be used to increase site elevation to meet base flood elevation requirements, except on large development parcels.

   Potential solution D: No change.

3. **Height regulations for telecommunications towers** are currently inconsistent.

   Potential solution: These will need to be explored in more detail and should be consistent with FAA regulations while taking appropriate clearance zones into account.

4. Minimal **site, landscaping, and architectural design standards** exist only for certain types of development today.

   Potential solution A: Expand these countywide to address basic design elements for residential and non-residential development countywide, including facade materials, number of facade materials/colors/textures, window area, recessed windows, garage setbacks, landscaping, and underground utilities.

   Potential solution B: The basic design standards in potential solution A could apply only in certain areas, such as St. Simons Village (in both the overlay and the Village Mixed Use district), the remainder of St. Simons Island, I-95 gateway areas, other commercial corridors, or only to non-residential developments.

   Potential solution C: Create architectural standards that look at more specific elements of design beyond just facade materials or other items from potential solution A. These could apply only in certain areas.

   Potential solution D: Incorporate elements of form-based zoning into existing and potential zoning districts. These elements could include standards that address the design of building frontages. These could apply in St. Simons Village and potential new walkable mixed-use developments.

   Potential solution E: No change.

   Note: Depending on the solution selected, TSW may recommend specific coding tools that would support it. Examples may include design standards, form-based codes, or other strategies.

5. **Open space** is not currently required for new developments.

   Potential solution A: Require all new developments to set aside a percentage of their site as open space, with larger developments required to provide a larger percentage. Require open spaces to be designed as useable places rather than leftover spaces by establishing minimum areas, dimensions, and required amenities.

   Potential solution B: Adopt requirements in potential solution A, but also allow existing areas of natural or scenic value to count double toward this requirement if made accessible, protected with a conservation easement, given to the Land Trust, or based on other criteria.

   Potential solution C: Exempt parcels in the St. Simons Village or within a short distance of existing public parks from any open space requirements, or allow different types of open spaces (such as balconies or roof decks) to count toward open space requirements in these areas.

   Potential solution D: No change.

   Note: Any selected solution will need to be coordinated with the ongoing impact fee discussion.

6. **Historic buildings** are not currently protected.

   Potential solution A: Adopt the state model historic preservation ordinance to create historic districts and regulations that apply to the buildings and districts recommended in the Glynn County Historic Resources Survey Report, including restrictions on demolition or major alterations and regulations to ensure that new development is compatible. If this ordinance is adopted, the process of establishing local historic districts would begin afterward.

   Potential solution B: Create historic preservation requirements and incentives without adopting the state model ordinance.

   Potential solution C: Create a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program to preserve historic buildings, as well as natural areas, and encourage development in appropriate locations without reducing overall entitlements.

   Potential solution D: Do not create historic preservation standards.

7. **Buffers** are currently required between different types of development but requirements are complicated.

   Potential solution A: Reduce the number of types of buffers and simplify their regulations.

   Potential solution B: Reduce the number of types of buffers and simplify their regulations. Require buffers to be opaque, with minimum sizes for trees and shrubs. Do not allow buffers with fences or walls to be narrower. Require buffers to be maintained by the property owner.

   Potential solution C: Rephrase Buffer Type D as a screening requirement since it applies to all development, regardless whether buffers are required.

   Potential solution D: No change.

8. **Fences and walls** currently have some height restrictions but are not otherwise regulated.

   Potential solution A: Establish maximum heights for all zoning districts based on front, side, and rear yards.

   Potential solution B: Prohibit fence and wall materials that are not durable or contextual.

   Potential solution C: Establish fence and wall material or height regulations in key zoning districts or areas of the county.

   Potential solution D: Require building permits for fences and walls taller than 8 feet.

   Potential solution E: No change.

9. **Signs** are regulated in many aspects today, but the results may not be appropriate for certain areas of the County.

   Potential solution A: Update regulations countywide related to sign height, size, illumination, electronic signs, billboards, number of signs, and other sign regulations.

   Potential solution B: Update regulations as in potential solution A, but include distinctions for specific areas such as along I-95 or commercial corridors, or near scenic or historic areas.

   Potential solution C: No change.

10. **Pervious pavement** currently counts toward maximum site coverage and is prohibited in parking lots with more than 10 spaces.

    Potential solution A: Update the definition of "site coverage" to align with the stormwater ordinance and exempt pervious pavement so that it will be encouraged. Allow a percentage of spaces in all parking lots to be pervious.

    Potential solution B: Update the definition of "site coverage" as in potential solution A above, and require a percentage of spaces in all parking lots to be pervious (but with paved aisles).

    Potential solution C: Update the definition of "site coverage" as in potential solution A above, and allow a portion of pervious parking spaces to count toward required open space.

    Potential solution D: No change.

11. **Site coverage** restrictions are currently provided in some zoning districts.

    Potential solution A: Add site coverage limits to all zoning districts.

    Potential solution B: No change.

12. **Neighborhood retail** is allowed in several zoning districts today, but those same districts also allow strip centers.

    Potential solution A: Create a new neighborhood commercial zoning district that allows small, pedestrian-friendly retail but not large, car-oriented strip centers.

    Potential solution B: No change.

13. **Reverse frontage** (in which the backyards of houses face the road) is currently allowed on major roads as long as there are buffers.

    Potential solution A: Prohibit reverse frontage in more walkable areas.

    Potential solution B: No change.

Potential Policy Solutions: Procedural & Admin.

14. Some existing **zoning districts** are nearly identical to other zoning districts.

    Potential solution A: Reduce the number of both residential and commercial zoning districts by consolidating similar districts. Rezone properties currently in districts that are proposed for consolidation. Delete regulations for the Shopping Center district and any other districts that are on the books but not applied to any property.

    Potential solution B: Reduce the number of commercial zoning districts, but no residential zoning districts. Rezone properties currently in districts that are proposed for consolidation.

    Potential solution C: No change.

15. Many properties are zoned **PD Planned Development,** but there are no minimum standards.

    Potential solution A: Require developments zoned PD to conform to existing and new regulations related to open space, buffers, density, design, and other regulations to the maximum extent possible.

    Potential solution B: Create further physical or procedural standards that all previous and future PD developments must follow.

    Potential solution C: Require that new PD districts be at least 100 acres.

    Potential solution D: Rezone land from PD to other zoning districts, to allow for more predictable development outcomes.

    Potential solution D: Prohibit all future rezonings to PD, but keep those regulations on the books for properties that are already zoned PD.

    Potential solution E: No change.

16. There is currently no true **mixed-use district**.

    Potential solution A: Create a mixed-use or traditional neighborhood development zoning district to allow for new village-type development in a compact, walkable design. No property would be rezoned, but this district would be available for developers interested in creating this type of place.

    Potential solution B: No change.

17. **Rezoning notifications** must currently be mailed to property owners within 200 feet of the property being rezoned. This goes beyond the requirements of state zoning law but does not inform the broader community. Subdivisions and land disturbance permits do not have public notice requirements.

    Potential solution A: Remove the requirement for notifications by mail, but create an online system for all citizens to easily access all rezoning, variance, subdivision plat, tree removal, and land disturbance permit applications.

    Potential solution B: No change.

18. **Site coverage variances** allow property owners and developers to apply for relief from regulations in unique circumstances, but this type of variance is currently prohibited on the Islands. In addition, commercial lot coverage variances on the Mainland are approved by the Planning Commission, while all other variances are approved by the Board of Appeals.

    Potential solution A: Allow site coverage variances based on the same criteria as all variances.

    Potential solution B: Clearly spell out what variances are allowed and what can be altered by administrative variance.

    Potential solution C: Allow the Board of Appeals to decide all non-administrative variances.

    Potential solution D: Continue to prohibit site coverage variances on the Islands (no change).

    Potential solution E: Continue to require commercial site coverage variances on the Mainland to be approved by the Planning Commission rather than the Board of Appeals (no change).

19. **Sign variances** are currently approved or denied by the County Commission, while all other variances are decided by the Board of Appeals.

    Potential solution: No change.

20. **Subdivision approvals** for non-residential development and residential subdivisions with four or fewer lots are currently decided administratively.

    Potential solution A: Expand this rule to allow larger subdivisions to be approved administratively.

    Potential solution B: Decrease this rule to require smaller subdivisions to be approved by the County Commission.

    Potential solution C: No change.

21. **Site plan review** by the Planning Commissions is currently required for all commercial buildings, including very small buildings and unenclosed buildings.

    Potential solution A: Allow site plans for unenclosed buildings and commercial buildings less than 500 square feet to be reviewed by staff, but do not require Planning Commission review.

    Potential solution B: Continue to require all buildings to undergo site plan review by the Planning Commissions (no change).

22. **Site plan approvals** expire after two years under current regulations, including approved site plans for PD Planned Development districts over three acres.

    Potential solution A: Keep this regulation but enact a policy to formally rezone PD properties that have not received a land disturbance permit after 2 years.

    Potential solution B: No change.

23. **Site plan review standards** used by the Planning Commissions are currently tied closely to the zoning requirements.

    Potential solution A: Require construction plans (including stormwater facilities) to be included in site plan applications to ensure that the Planning Commissions can review the full design up front.

    Potential solution B: Establish a threshold over which all developments have to conduct a traffic impact study and submit the results to the Planning Commissions.

    Potential solution C: No change.

24. Existing **engineering standards** allow developments to have the flexibility to use light impact drainage practices rather than conventional engineering, based on state standards.

    Potential solution A: Provide specific criteria for light impact design to ensure that it is effective and environmentally sensitive, such as requiring a certain percentage of stormwater infrastructure to mimic natural processes.

    Potential solution B: Expand or reference design guidelines outside the zoning ordinance to ensure developers are familiar with best practices.

    Potential solution C: Require that stormwater be treated before draining into marshes.

Potential solution D: Update stormwater ordinances to match the Metro North Georgia Water Planning District model ordinance and adopt the Coastal Stormwater Supplement.

Potential solution E: No change.

Potential Policy Solutions: Streets & Transportation

26. **Street design standards** currently consist only of minimum width requirements.

    Potential solution A: Rephrase new street width standards as requirements rather than minimums to ensure that new streets are not unnecessarily wide, which could increase development cost, maintenance cost, stormwater runoff, and speeding.

    Potential solution B: Require sidewalks, street lights, street trees, benches, and trash receptacles on new streets in certain zoning districts.

    Potential solution C: Provide a menu of street designs, including various widths of lanes, sidewalks, and landscape strips, as well as bike facilities, deceleration or turn lanes, and other elements. Developers would choose from these options, or they could be prescribed for certain zoning districts or uses.

    Potential solution D: Require all new streets, including private streets, to be designed and maintained to public street standards.

    Potential solution E: Require all new non-single-family residential streets to be public and prohibit gated streets.

    Potential solution F: No change.

27. Minimum numbers of **parking and loading spaces** are currently required.

    Potential solution A: Reduce minimum parking and loading requirements to avoid the cost and environmental impact of unused spaces.

    Potential solution B: Eliminate all minimum parking and loading requirements to avoid the cost and environmental impact of unused spaces and allow businesses to determine how much parking they need to be successful.

    Potential solution C: Allow mixed-use developments to internally share parking for uses with parking demands at different times of the day and week.

    Potential solution D: Allow parking spaces leased on nearby properties to count toward parking requirements in certain circumstances.

    Potential solution E: Establish minimum bicycle parking requirements in certain areas (number of spaces and design).

    Potential solution F: Establish minimum golf cart parking requirements in certain areas (number of spaces and design).

    Potential solution G: No change.

28. **Interparcel access is** currently required between adjacent office and commercial developments. Residential subdivisions on the islands with over 25 homes must have multiple entrances.

    Potential solution A: Expand this requirement to other types of development, such as multifamily residential and industrial.

    Potential solution B: Clarify and strengthen requirements to require new streets to be connected to existing and proposed streets.

    Potential solution C: Require residential subdivisions over a certain size on the Mainland to have multiple entrances, to ensure appropriate access, including in emergencies.

    Potential solution D: No change.

29. **Driveway curb cuts** currently have a minimum width.

    Potential solution A: Establish maximum widths countywide or just in some areas.

    Potential solution B: No change.

Potential Policy Solutions: Miscellaneous

30. **Family size** is defined in order to determine the number of people that can live in a single-family house. The current definition excludes households with roommates or adopted children.

    Potential solution A: Update the definition of family to allow for additional living situations.

    Potential solution B: No change.

31. Regulations for **short-term rentals, bed and breakfasts, time share units, and similar uses** are currently being considered as part of another process.

    Potential solution A: Integrate the results of the parallel effort into the zoning ordinance, including any updated use definitions.

    Potential solution B: Determine in which zoning districts each of these uses should be allowed.

32. Current zoning allows for some variety of housing types. For example, **missing middle housing** types, which include quadplexes and small multifamily buildings, are allowed in several zoning districts. **Small houses** on foundations are also allowed, but no standards exist, and no regulations for cottage courts are provided.

    Potential solution A: Adopt International Residential Code Appendix S and other regulations as necessary to provide minimum design standards for small houses.

    Potential solution B: Define cottage court as a use or building type, provide minimum standards, and specify in which zoning districts it would be allowed.

    Potential solution C: Define building types and create diagrams and standards to show how a variety of housing types would be designed.

    Potential solution D: Provide minimal standards for certain housing types.

    Potential solution E: No change.

33. No **workforce housing** incentives are currently provided, but a variety of housing types and sizes are allowed throughout the county, and much affordable housing is available in Brunswick.

    Potential solution A: No specific workforce housing provisions would be provided, but affordability would be considered in drafting regulations elsewhere in the code, such as regulations for minimum parking requirements, tiny houses, and design standards.

34. Carriage houses and similar **accessory dwellings** are not defined in current regulations. Mother-in-law suites are called "lock out units" and count toward the total number of units in a development.

    Potential solution A: Define carriage houses and similar accessory dwellings, specify in which zoning districts they are allowed, require the homeowner to live on site, and provide minimum design standards such as setbacks and size restrictions.

    Potential solution B: Exempt mother-in-law suites from counting toward the total number of units, or allow them to count as a fraction of a unit.

    Potential solution C: No change.

35. The latest **energy codes** are not yet required in Glynn County. New buildings and major renovations are not required to meet the highest energy efficiency standards.

    Potential solution A: Adopt the 2018 International Energy Conservation Code (the state of Georgia requires only the 2015 IECC) countywide.

    Potential solution B: Require all new buildings larger than 20,000 square feet to exceed the requirements of ASHRAE 90.1 by 10%.

    Potential solution C: Adopt the National Green Building Standard.

    Potential solution D: No change.

36. **Building codes** in Glynn County follow state standards but do not include any additional provisions to prevent property damage from winds and floods in hurricanes or other storms.

    Potential solution A: Adopt the Georgia Disaster Resilient Building Construction Appendices.

    Potential solution B: Amend the requirements of section 1609.3 of the International Building Code to require that buildings be designed for higher wind speeds.

    Potential solution C: No change.

37. Residential **lots on septic tanks** and wells, under certain circumstances, are currently required to be larger than lots on public water and sewer. This ensures adequate land for septic systems but also prevents higher density development where there is no infrastructure.

    Potential solution A: Expand this requirement so that residential lots on septic in certain zoning districts must be at least 5 acres.

    Potential solution B: Prohibit all non-agricultural uses on septic systems in certain zoning districts countywide.

    Potential solution C: Simplify these requirements to address only septic systems and not wells.

38. The **FA Forest Agricultural zoning** district currently allows residential subdivisions with half-acre lots. This is not consistent with agricultural character, does not protect job-generating agricultural uses, and could prevent adequate groundwater recharge.

    Potential solution A: Establish a minimum lot size of 40 acres for new residential lots.

    Potential solution B: Establish a minimum lot size of 20 acres for new residential lots.

    Potential solution C: Establish a minimum lot size of 10 acres for new residential lots.

    Potential solution D: Allow farm owners to subdivide their land into a limited number of smaller homestead lots for immediate family members.

    Potential solution E: No change.

39. Existing **infill regulations** control how new houses can be built on small historic lots. A single house is allowed to be built on any substandard size lot platted before 1966 countywide. On St. Simons Island, a new house on a substandard lot smaller than 6,000 square feet or narrower than 60 feet has height limits and a maximum number of bedrooms based on a sliding scale tied to the size of the lot. Subdividing lots smaller than one acre is prohibited. Combining residential lots to then create a subdivision is also prohibited.

    Potential solution A: Keep the existing requirements but reformat them into a table so that they are easier to understand.

    Potential solution B: Amend the requirements for lot size, maximum number of stories, and maximum number of bedrooms, or change the tiers within which these apply.

    Potential solution C: Limit the application of these regulations only to the Islands.

    Potential solution D: Remove minimum lot size requirements for new lots and allow maximum units per acre limits to control density, but provide more flexible development patterns (see conservation subdivisions below).

    Potential solution E: Establish limits on the height or size of infill houses relative to the houses they replace or neighboring structures.

    Potential solution F: Establish flexible or tiered setbacks for smaller lots to reduce the number of variance requests.

    Potential solution G: Limit the number of bedrooms in all new single-family houses.

    Potential solution H: Limit the area of building footprints, building width, or building depth in certain zoning districts or on smaller lots.

    Potential solution I: No change.

40. Employees of **home-based businesses** (referred to as home occupations in the zoning code) are currently required to be members of the family living in the home.

    Potential solution A: Allow a limited number of non-resident employees.

    Potential solution B: Allow a limited number of non-resident employees as in potential solution A, and provide additional standards to minimize the impacts of this use.

    Potential solution C: No change.

41. **Cats and dogs** are currently the only animals allowed as pets.

    Potential solution A: Specify other types of animals that are allowed as household pets, with maximum numbers.

    Potential solution B: Remove references to animals from the zoning ordinance and update other parts of the County code if necessary.

    Potential solution C: No change.

42. **Relocating historic houses** or other buildings into the county is currently tightly regulated.

    Potential solution A: Remove zoning regulations related to historic building relocations and let the building code regulate this.

    Potential solution B: No change.

43. Existing **light pollution** regulations require new light fixtures to be full cutoff and specify maximum lighting levels.

    Potential solution A: Expand existing requirements to apply to single-family houses.

    Potential solution B: Expand existing requirements to specify maximum light levels (as measured in foot-candles) at the property line regardless of the zoning of the adjacent property.

    Potential solution C: Create more strict regulations near the coast to protect sea turtles and other marine wildlife.

    Potential solution D: No change.

44. No **tree planting** and landscaping requirements exist today for new developments except for in buffers, although a tree protection ordinance is in place on St. Simons Island.

    Potential solution A: Establish minimum tree planting requirements for all new developments countywide based on use or zoning district, including number of trees required per acre or lot, allowed species, minimum size, and minimum soil area. A list of allowed species should be provided, including a sub-list of salt tolerant species for trees near the coast. This list could also apply in buffers.

    Potential solution B: Establish parking lot tree planting requirements for all new parking lots. These could incorporate the existing parking lot buffer requirements (Buffer Type E).

    Potential solution C: Establish minimum landscaping requirements, including allowed species, spacing, height, and planting density requirements. These could also apply in buffers.

    Potential solution D: Clarify the language of the tree protection ordinance to simplify and remove inactive provisions.

    Potential solution E: No change.

45. **Conservation subdivisions** are addressed in conflicting ways in the current regulations.

    Potential solution A: Require all new subdivisions on the Islands to be conservation subdivisions.

    Potential solution B: Require all new subdivisions county-wide to be conservation subdivisions.

    Potential solution C: Do not require conservation subdivisions anywhere, but allow them by regulating density with maximum units per acre rather than minimum lot size, and by requiring open space preservation.

46. Existing **environmental regulations** protect beaches and dunes but do not go beyond state requirements for stream or marsh setbacks, allow shorelines and marshes to migrate over time, or otherwise address the impacts of flooding and sea level rise.

    Potential solution A: Adopt the 50-foot marsh setback language from state law (which is currently not enforced) as a county requirement.

    Potential solution B: Increase the existing 25-foot marsh setback from state law (the section that is currently enforced) to 50 feet, and reduce or remove exemptions for lots platted prior to 2015, lots on which more than 18% of the area falls in the buffer, and other exemptions.

    Potential solution C: Prohibit the construction of sea walls in the marsh buffer, but provide standards for "living shorelines" that would provide natural protection from erosion.

    Potential solution D: Increase the stream setback from the state-mandated 25 feet to a total of 75 feet average, with a 50-foot minimum width and a 150-foot maximum width.

    Potential solution E: Clarify that the Beach and Dune Protection overlay district still applies, and align its requirements with the Georgia Shore Protection Act.

    Potential solution F: Establish building regulations for the Coastal High Hazard Area (the area closest to the coast and subject to wave action during storms).

    Potential solution G: Adopt coastal setbacks or other standards that increase or expand over future decades, to allow time for property owners and developers to adapt, and to respond to rising sea or flood levels.

    Potential solution H: Adopt a setback from wetlands.

    Potential solution I: Rezone sensitive coastal or environmental areas to CP Conservation Preservation.

    Potential solution J: Establish a coastal overlay zone to regulate uses, land disturbance, setbacks, pervious cover, finished floor elevation, and other aspects of development near the coast or in sensitive areas.

    Potential solution K: No change.

47. Residential portions of **PD Planned Developments** are currently regulated by the requirements of the GR General Residential zoning district, while "the most restrictive standards specified elsewhere in this [zoning] ordinance" apply to all non-residential uses.

    Potential solutions: See 0 above.

48. Zoning regulations currently prohibit **rezoning any property to R-6** on St. Simons Island.

    Potential solution A: Move this requirement from the zoning ordinance to the Envision Glynn plan, potentially as part of a land use compatibility table (see 49 below).

    Potential solution B: Expand this requirement to include other zoning districts.

    Potential solution C: No change.

49. Currently, the **Envision Glynn Comprehensive Plan** provides very broad lists of the zoning districts that are appropriate in each Character Area. This may make it difficult to deny inappropriate rezoning requests.

    Potential solution A: Create a land use compatibility table to connect zoning districts with the appropriate Future Land Use designation.

    Potential solution B: No change.

50. Non-conforming buildings that are damaged or destroyed by an **act of God** such as a hurricane must be rebuilt to conform with all zoning requirements if the repair or re-construction cost is more than 50% of the value of the building and certain other criteria apply.

    Potential solution A: Temporarily waive this requirement when a state of emergency is declared or a certain category storm impacts Glynn County.

    Potential solution B: Keep this requirement, but develop a plan to expand enforcement and building permit review capacity after major weather events, or to allow expedited approvals for reconstruction that does not increase floor area.