

Meet the Resource Team

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The Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (GQGP) is a collaboration among diverse public and private entities that seeks to provide local governments and citizens with the tools and knowledge to transform the way we define, create, and sustain high quality Georgia communities. The primary purpose of the GQGP is to facilitate local government implementation of quality growth approaches by:

- Disseminating objective information on the various approaches.
- Developing tools for implementing these approaches.
- Sharing of best practices learned from other places, times, and cultures.
- Promoting acceptance of quality growth by the general public and community leaders.

Founded in March 2000, the GQGP has grown to more than thirty organizations, each contributing time, in kind services, or financial resources to fostering Partnership efforts.

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DUBLIN, GA

INTRODUCTION



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The Quality Growth Resource Team for Dublin was brought together in July of 2001 through a collaboration of the city, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership, a state wide coalition of agencies, universities, non-profits and business groups working to provide technical assistance on *smart growth* issues to Georgia communities. The multidisciplinary team was made up of specialists in such fields as urban design, downtown development, planning, architecture, historic preservation, transportation and housing. Team members were chosen with the city's particular concerns in mind, which were initially defined in a meeting with the City Council held weeks in advance of the actual team's visit.

The team spent a week in Dublin. The visit began with a facilitated meeting involving a broad cross section of community representatives, designed to give the team members a deeper understanding of Dublin's development issues and needs. During the week, the team toured the community by bus, visited historic buildings, spoke with city staff, reviewed local ordinances, conducted field surveys of neighborhoods, parks and transportation routes, prepared schematic design solutions, and formulated policy recommendations. The visit culminated with a final presentation to the public on Friday, July 13, 2001. The teams' recommendations were then passed to DCA staff for formatting into this final report.

The Resource Team would like to thank Dublin city staff, elected officials and citizens for making us feel so welcome in your community. The ideas and solutions proposed here are only a beginning — intended to stimulate interest in good urban design, sustainable development and community self-determination. The Resource Team wishes Dublin great success in achieving its goals.

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OBSERVATIONS

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The resource team had ample time to observe Dublin, hear from local residents, and review city development regulations during the week of the team visit. Team observations resulting from the visit are summarized below:

- 1) The commercial center of the community has clearly moved from downtown to the area surrounding Dublin Mall on the west side of Dublin. It appears that the lion's share of the city's energy and investment has, in the past few years, been directed to supporting new development on the west side, in particular: new water and sewer extensions, roadway improvements, and land use regulations favorable to new development.
- 2) The new Dublin Bypass, as currently proposed, could present an invitation to more sprawl on Dublin's west side, sucking further commercial activity away from the downtown area. There may be alternatives to building this roadway that could accomplish the goal of rerouting traffic around downtown without promoting more sprawl development.
- 3) Revitalization of Dublin's downtown area is critical to the local economic development and business recruitment initiatives, since it is difficult to attract major employers without an attractive, viable downtown to show off to these prospects.
- 4) Although many downtown buildings (in fact, entire blocks) are architecturally intriguing and the daytime streets are filled with automobile through-traffic, Downtown Dublin has the feeling of a place that is in decline:
 - a) There is a lack of pedestrian activity and streetlife.
 - b) Many downtown buildings stand vacant, while several others are occupied by marginal uses such as storefront churches.
 - c) There is a lack of shady places to sit and relax.
 - d) Few of the through-traffic motorists seem attracted to stop and shop in downtown.
 - e) The courthouse square, having been eaten away by traffic lanes, does not convey a sense of civic pride.
- 5) There are several hopeful signs that point to the potential for a resurgence of downtown:
 - a) There is a strong and growing arts presence, anchored by a museum and active theater downtown. This offers the opportunity of establishing downtown as the arts and entertainment center of the community.
 - b) The county government seems committed to staying downtown and expanding its physical presence around the existing courthouse area.
 - c) A new streetscape project is underway, demonstrating the city's commitment to revitalize and improve the appearance of the Central Business District.
 - d) The city has an existing Downtown Development Authority that seems willing to take on a bigger role of steering re-development of Downtown Dublin.
 - e) Investment in a state-of-the-art fiber optic system in the downtown area creates potential to recruit businesses requiring high speed internet access. The city is only beginning to consider how to market its fast internet capability.
 - f) There is large supply of wonderful housing stock surrounding downtown on all sides, providing an opportunity to develop a variety of housing options that would support revitalization of Downtown Dublin by increasing the population within walking distance.
- 6) Although parking supply downtown seems to be a concern of local merchants and citizens, a cursory downtown parking survey indicated that most surface lots are over 60% vacant during peak hours. Parking supply seemed to be inadequate only in the area immediately surrounding the courthouse. Since much of this oversupply of available off-street parking is located on lots that are not well marked or maintained, a downtown parking management strategy may be needed to maximize use of existing parking facilities.

7) Downtown Dublin is surrounded by neighborhoods that have many of the desirable features currently being touted by architects and planners who practice “neotraditional” development:

- a) Small lots with houses nestled close to the streets.
- b) Narrow pedestrian-friendly streets with sidewalks and mature shade trees are a big asset.
- c) Clusters of small-scale commercial buildings (some are vacant) that could be recycled as neighborhood commercial centers serving a five minute walking radius within each neighborhood.
- d) Architectural styles of homes, most of which are at least 50 years old, are varied and charming.
- e) Some housing is in poor condition and many buildings have been demolished, leaving holes in the fabric of these intown neighborhoods.
- f) There seems to be a public perception that these neighborhoods are more riddled with drugs and crime than the suburbs.

With careful revitalization efforts, intown neighborhoods could provide affordable housing opportunities, establish a loyal customer base for the downtown, and serve as a positive asset in recruiting new jobs and businesses to the area.

8) Dublin and Laurens County are rich in historic resources, but it seems that the community has made only limited commitment to taking advantage of these resources:

- a) There is only one locally designated historic district — the Bellevue residential area located just west of downtown Dublin.
- b) There are currently only two Dublin listings in the National Register of Historic Places: the Carnegie Library (at Bellevue and Academy streets) and a fish trap on the Oconee River, although there are two pending National Register district nominations: the Stubbs Park – Stonewall Street Historic District, and the Downtown Central Business District.

Historic preservation incentives could be a powerful tool for revitalizing the Downtown Central Business District and surrounding in-town neighborhoods. National Register District listing enables property owners to recoup up to 20% of the cost of rehabilitating historic buildings as a federal tax credit.

9) Dublin has many pleasant parks and a good recreation program. The recent development of the Railroad and Riverside parks creates a good basis of open space in the downtown area, and these parks could also serve as the beginning of a larger recreational trail system. The city could also benefit from more outdoor public gathering areas, particularly in the downtown area.

10) The current streetscape project being funded with a TEA-21 grant may inspire support for more landscaping improvements downtown and in other areas of the community. However, if the city adds more street trees, landscaping, and intown green spaces, some expansion of the city’s horticultural maintenance capability will be essential, since Dublin cannot depend entirely on citizen volunteers to keep community gateways attractive in the long-term.

11) In general, the major entry corridors into Dublin are unattractive:

- a) Barren concrete center medians and extremely wide lanes cause motorists to speed and do little to reinforce the city’s historic charm.
- b) In spite of the city’s innovative *adopt an entry* program, many roadsides appear somewhat unkempt.
- c) Development along these roadways appears somewhat haphazard, with too much signage and acres of parking lots surrounding each building.

12) Experience in other communities has shown that unless strong measures are taken to control development along the new Dublin Bypass, the city and Laurens County could end up with another unattractive conglomeration of scattered strip development rather than an efficient transportation corridor. The absence of zoning regulations in the county complicates this problem.

13) The intersection of so many state highways in the Dublin area presents both challenges and opportunities. Regional through-traffic is advantageous to the downtown area in terms of bringing potential customers, however rerouting trucks around downtown may be needed to reclaim pedestrian friendliness of the city’s civic hub.

- 14) The city's existing development regulations have some positive attributes:
 - a) The regulations are organized in a user-friendly manner, which makes them easily understandable for developers and other users of the codes.
 - b) The city has a traditional pyramidal zoning system. Within the city limits, residential, business, manufacturing, agricultural, civic, and open space uses are all permitted within relatively close proximity of one another, generally supporting a well-balanced community.
 - c) The zoning provisions for the Bellevue Historic District are good. The regulations support preservation of historic mansions by allowing their conversion into limited business uses. It also ensures that new development within the area occurs at a scale and building setback that is compatible with the historic structures.
- 15) In other respects, the city's development regulations are at odds with implementation of smart growth approaches, for instance:
 - a) The definition of a *comprehensive development plan* in the city's zoning ordinance is vague, not clearly referring to the city's comprehensive plan as adopted under the Georgia Planning Act.
 - b) Because it appears to be primarily geared towards guiding new development on the outskirts of town, the current zoning ordinance does not have adequate provisions for guiding redevelopment of existing developed areas of the community.
 - c) Except in the Bellevue Historic District, minimum building setbacks of up to 40 feet work against creation of new developments that are friendly to pedestrians and help restore the traditional look of the community.
 - d) The zoning ordinance includes provisions for Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), but these provisions are vague regarding design and environmental review standards for these developments, they do not define the minimum size of a PUD, require inclusion of open space or specifically authorize clustering of homes to preserve open space, nor do they provide density bonuses or other incentives to encourage PUD developments.
 - e) The zoning ordinance allows the city to require dedications of land for public purposes. This provision is probably indefensible under the Georgia Development Impact Fee Act.
 - f) Minimum parking requirements for commercial developments are much higher than in other cities, virtually assuring that new developments will be surrounded by an unnecessary sea of asphalt. Much of this underutilized parking could be used for retail space more productively. Landscaping requirements for screening and shading of parking areas are inadequate.
 - g) Sign regulations appear to be inadequate for both on and off premise signs.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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RECOMMENDATION	ILLUSTRATION NO.	COMMENTS
<p>Reassess local development priorities and make decisions on how the community desires to balance new development between intown areas and the periphery (particularly the West Side).</p>		<p>Perhaps this can best be accomplished through an update of the land use element of Dublin's comprehensive plan, undertaken with maximum involvement by all segments of the community.</p>
<p>Establish a mechanism for evaluating decisions on new public facility and infrastructure investments to avoid favoring growth on the periphery over intown areas of Dublin.</p>		
<p>Fill the new community planner position with an individual who has experience in directing community redevelopment projects and is familiar with <i>smart growth</i> principles.</p>		<p>This planner can also support the revitalization work of the Downtown Development Authority.</p>
<p>Hire a consultant or have new community planner undertake a comprehensive audit of the city's development regulations to identify any barriers to smart growth practices. Simultaneously identify any ordinance changes needed to implement the recommendations of this report.</p>		<p>Contact Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Office of Growth Management for more information on how to do this.</p>
<p>Adopt necessary revisions of development regulations identified above.</p>		<p>Simultaneously review the city's comprehensive plan and amend it to reflect any changes in the development regulations, since consistency between the city's plan and its ordinances provides important legal support for administrative findings and public policy decisions.</p>
<p>Minimize new urban sprawl by encouraging infill housing in existing neighborhoods, promoting higher density mixed use commercial and residential development, and strictly controlling access and new development along the new Bypass.</p>		
<p>Before proceeding further with development of the Bypass, try a low-cost alternative of designating Hillcrest Avenue as a Bypass for automobile traffic and establishing a truck route around downtown along Industrial Boulevard. Evaluate whether this adequately improves downtown traffic congestion.</p>	<p>1</p>	

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<p>Increase the Main Street program budget to provide a reasonable salary for the Manager and more money for promotions and other activities. (Dublin's Main Street program currently has the lowest funding level of any in the state.)</p>		<p>The Main Street Manager's immediate efforts should focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a parking management plan, to be administered by the Downtown Development Authority, for increasing utilization of existing downtown parking lots. • Establishing a functional organization of downtown merchants to work with the Chamber of Commerce on downtown promotions and marketing. • Collecting basic downtown inventory data (existing businesses, vacant spaces, etc.).
<p>Create a separate staff position for the Theater/Arts Alliance functions that are currently handled by the Main Street Manager.</p>		<p>This person's efforts could focus on expanding cultural and fine arts activities downtown, such as outdoor concerts, greater utilization of the existing performance spaces, or special exhibitions related to the unique culture of central Georgia.</p>
<p>Commission a niche market study to identify the types of businesses that would succeed in downtown.</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>Once the study is completed, ask the Downtown Development Authority to coordinate with the Chamber of Commerce in developing a plan for recruiting the identified types of businesses into the downtown area.</p>
<p>Capitalize on downtown's unique fiber-optic access.</p>		<p>Possibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving the Chamber of Commerce in marketing downtown's fiber-optic advantages. • Drawing attention to the availability of this service within the community, perhaps through establishing a downtown internet café or community learning center (within the Communities in Schools office). • Providing workforce training in computer skills through the local technical college (to develop a suitable workforce for hi-tech employers). • Providing free or lower cost internet service for building owners who agree to make significant improvements to their buildings.
<p>Support Laurens County's efforts to meet their expanding office space needs in the downtown area by encouraging redevelopment of the block immediately northwest of the Courthouse for office space and parking.</p>	<p>5</p>	<p><i>See illustration for more details.</i></p>

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<p>Improve appearances around the Courthouse and proposed new county office complex by narrowing existing streets to two lanes, expanding sidewalks for outdoor dining, and adding greenspace and landscaping.</p>	6	<p>This will require negotiating minor changes to the current TEA-21 streetscape project.</p>
<p>Develop a festival plaza in front of the Dublin Theater.</p>	7	<p>This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the street in front of the Dublin Theater and reconfiguring as landscaped pedestrian area with shade trees and seating. • Reducing landscaping in front of the historical museum to better expose the historic Carnegie Library façade.
<p>Expand and enhance River Walk Park to create a dramatic gateway into Downtown Dublin.</p>	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating the parking lot beside the Theater into the plaza area, perhaps featuring a raised stage for outdoor performances. • Encouraging re-use of the building adjacent to the theater as a restaurant/coffee house catering to theater-goers.
<p>Expand and enhance River Walk Park to create a dramatic gateway into Downtown Dublin.</p>	9	<p><i>See illustration for detailed concept.</i></p>
<p>Develop a farmers market at the gateway to downtown at Hwy. 441 and Jefferson St. to welcome tourists downtown and encourage more use of the existing Railroad Park.</p>	10	
<p>Plan for a future multimodal transportation facility in downtown near Railroad Park.</p>		<p>Relocate the Greyhound bus station to the site in the short term, and reserve space to add a passenger rail station for the Macon to Savannah commuter rail line, once it is developed.</p>
<p>Create an enclosed park with surrounding townhouses on the block south of W. Madison Street between Church and Monroe Streets.</p>	7	
<p>Encourage development of more housing in the downtown area.</p>	7	<p>Opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redeveloping the Fred Roberts Hotel or similar historic buildings into apartments, possibly targeted to the senior population. • Rehabilitating the historic warehouse/loft buildings located east of downtown and north of the railroad tracks into live/work loft units, with a mix of interesting businesses located at street level. • Constructing new townhouses as infill development on empty downtown parcels, including the area adjacent to the proposed park south of W. Madison Street between Church and Monroe Streets.

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Improve the appearance of gateways, parks and public rights-of-way throughout the community, particularly in the downtown area.

Possibilities include:

- Installing more street trees, attractive outdoor furniture, and fountains wherever possible throughout the downtown area.
- Planting shade trees and other landscaping to increase the attractiveness and useability of downtown surface parking lots.
- Developing a coordinated signage scheme for parks and gateways to historic downtown.
- Using a palette of signature plant materials for new planting projects. (See appendix for recommendations of plant palette).

To support these efforts:

- Expand the public works or recreation budget to add additional horticultural workers and watering vehicles.
- Contract with a landscape architect or arborist to oversee landscape projects and train landscape maintenance personnel.
- Provide training in specific plant material and design guidelines for volunteers involved in planting or maintaining landscaping.
- Develop a partnership program for assisting property owners downtown and along priority corridors with watering and maintenance of new plantings.

Develop Urban Redevelopment Plans for each of the proposed intown neighborhood activity centers. Seek input from existing intown residents so that redevelopment plans will address their concerns and create a sense of participation and ownership.

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These plans should include:

- Detailed representation of the desired development of the area.
- Needed changes in development regulations to promote the desired development patterns.
- Design guidelines for ensuring that new infill development matches the character of the neighborhood.
- Public investments in infrastructure and public facilities (such as public gathering places, community centers, neighborhood parks, sidewalks, bike paths, streetlights, or landscaping) to support redevelopment of the area.

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Take advantage of the Georgia Urban Redevelopment Law to promote desired redevelopment of intown neighborhood activity centers.

This law permits local governments to use eminent domain to assemble key parcels and resell these for private redevelopment that is consistent with the Urban Redevelopment Plan discussed above. (See the Appendix for a summary of this law.)

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Make strategic public investments (consistent with the redevelopment plans) in neighborhood activity centers as soon as possible. This will show residents and developers that the city is committed to revitalization of these areas.

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- Possibilities include:
- Plant street trees.
 - Install attractive street lighting.
 - Repair and expand sidewalks and properly mark street crossings where needed.
 - Locate police precinct stations or bicycle police in these areas (to counter perception of crime).
 - Work with the school board for reuse of vacant school properties as community centers or housing.
 - Work with the local Housing Authority to improve appearance/maintenance of public housing and to decentralize concentrations of public housing.

Offer incentives to encourage developers to undertake projects consistent with the redevelopment plans for intown neighborhood activity centers.

These incentives might include writedown of land acquisition costs, property tax breaks, new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project, or waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.

Take advantage of state and federal programs to encourage housing rehabilitation and new construction in intown neighborhoods. Enlist the local Housing Authority or establish a Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDO), either of which have access to a variety of public funding sources for affordable housing.

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- A few possibilities include:
- Home rehabilitation funds for individual owner-occupants through DCA's CDBG or CHIP programs.
 - Low cost home loans through DCA Home Buyer Loans, Federal Home Loan Bank/Affordable Housing Program (FHLB/AHP), or USDA/Rural Development funds.
 - Down payment assistance through DCA's OwnHOME Loan or CHIP programs, or FHLB/AHP. (*See the Appendix for other possible funding sources.*)

Pursue Certified Local Government (CLG) status in order to give the community greater technical assistance and access to grant funds through the Georgia Historic Preservation Division.

See the Appendix for CLG Fact Sheet.

Rewrite the existing historic preservation ordinance to bring it in line with Georgia Historic Preservation Act and to include provisions requiring design compatibility for new commercial infill development.

Georgia Historic Preservation Division grants are available for this purpose. Once rewrite is completed, educate Historic Preservation Commission members about their responsibilities in administering the new ordinance.

RECOMMENDATION	ILLUSTRATION NO.	COMMENTS
<p>Designate three new local historic districts and develop design guidelines for each. Above ordinance would apply in these new districts.</p>	16	<p>Proposed districts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warehouse District: Area east of downtown and north of the railroad tracks, filled with cotton warehouses and other buildings associated with local railroad and agricultural heritage. • Intown Neighborhood District: neighborhoods north and south of the downtown, containing residences and commercial buildings typically associated with Dublin's African-American heritage. • Central Downtown District: extending along Jackson from Academy to the River, along Madison from Lawrence to Truxton Street.
<p>Complete designation of the two pending National Register districts (Downtown Central Business District and Stubbs Park-Stonewall Street Historic District) and apply for National Register designation of the Warehouse District (above).</p>	17	<p>This designation enables use of federal and state historic rehabilitation tax incentives within these districts. Upon designation, property owners in each district should be educated about these incentives, designed to encourage proper rehabilitation of historic properties.</p>
<p>Work with Laurens County to prepare a greenspace plan for the city and county.</p>	1	<p>This plan is the first step toward ensuring eligibility for the Governor's Greenspace funding. The plan should include a map of trails/greenways linking parks and other popular destinations throughout the county.</p>
<p>Encourage DOT to purchase wetland areas immediately north of I-16 at the Oconee River for mitigation/wetlands banking under the TEA-21 program.</p>	1	<p>These areas could serve as the terminus of a pedestrian/bike greenway along the Oconee River, connecting River Walk Park and the golf course.</p>
<p>Make improvements to existing parks in Dublin.</p>		<p>Suggestions for Stubbs Park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace unattractive chain link fence around drainage pipe and playground. • Close Park Place Street, which divides the park, and incorporate it into the park. <p>Suggestions for Railroad Park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve signage at the entrance to the park. • Install better lighting for security. • Get permission from the railroad to mow grass all the way to the tracks. • Keep all Crepe Myrtles trimmed. • Plant trees beside the road to reduce noise and improve view from seating area. • Encourage private development of a trackside restaurant adjacent to the park. • Create pedestrian linkages between the park and the proposed farmers market.

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COMMENTS

Improve the appearance and functionality of major roadways throughout the city, particularly routes that are gateways to downtown Dublin.

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- This should include:
- Replacing center lanes with landscaped center medians with periodic left turn lanes.
 - Adding street trees, sidewalks, lighting, and appropriate street furniture along the right-of-way.
 - Reducing superfluous curb cuts and restricting the number of new curb cuts permitted.
 - Requiring new commercial buildings to be located near the street frontage (minimal setback), with parking lots located behind the buildings.
 - Encouraging development of commercial buildings at the street frontage of existing oversized parking lots.

Amend local parking standards, including display lots at car dealerships and similar establishments.

- Revised standards should:
- Establish MAXIMUM parking requirements based on appropriate "smart growth" standards.
 - Require a large percentage of parking be located on the rear or to the side of the buildings they serve.
 - Require parking lots to include a landscaped buffer along the street frontage, sides and rear.
 - Require parking lots on separate properties to be interconnected (to reduce the need for multiple curb cuts).
 - Require raised pedestrian corridors between rows of parking spaces in large parking lots.

Work with Laurens County to strengthen sign regulations both in the city and county.

- Ideally, sign sizes and setbacks should be tied to road widths and driving speeds:
- Maximum heights:
 - 4-6 lane streets: 12 feet
 - 2 lane streets: 8 feet
 - Maximum sign areas:
 - <35 mph: 32 square feet
 - 35-45 mph: 42 square feet
 - >45 mph: 64 square feet
 - Sign setbacks
 - 10 feet for buildings more than 50 ft from curb.
 - No freestanding sign for buildings closer than 50 feet from curb.

Test the market for public transit in Dublin by providing limited shuttle service on a trial basis. Discontinue or expand service depending on local response.

A possible initial route could link major destinations in Dublin such as the Hwy. 441 hotel cluster, Downtown, and the West Side commercial centers. This route could be used to bring tourists downtown and to transport downtown workers between West Side parking lots mornings and evenings.