

SERENBE

CHATTAHOOCHEE HILLS, GEORGIA

Creating a connection with food, conserving land, and growing community

LESSONS

- By clustering development within areas defined by the natural landscape, vast areas of forest can be preserved and a working farm can be created, even within a metropolitan area experiencing significant development pressures.
- In order to create a community based around a farm and preserved open space, it may be necessary to work to change zoning laws to allow for denser development and on-site food production.
- Building a community centered on a working farm allows social interaction, events, and opportunities for area youth to learn about nature, art, and growing food.

QUICK FACTS

Location
9110 Selborne Lane, Chattahoochee Hills, GA 30268

Project type
Mixed-use/master-planned community

Development team
Nygren Placemaking

Project cost
\$2 billion

Project size
1,200 acres (486 ha) with 70 percent as preserved land; 1,600 units

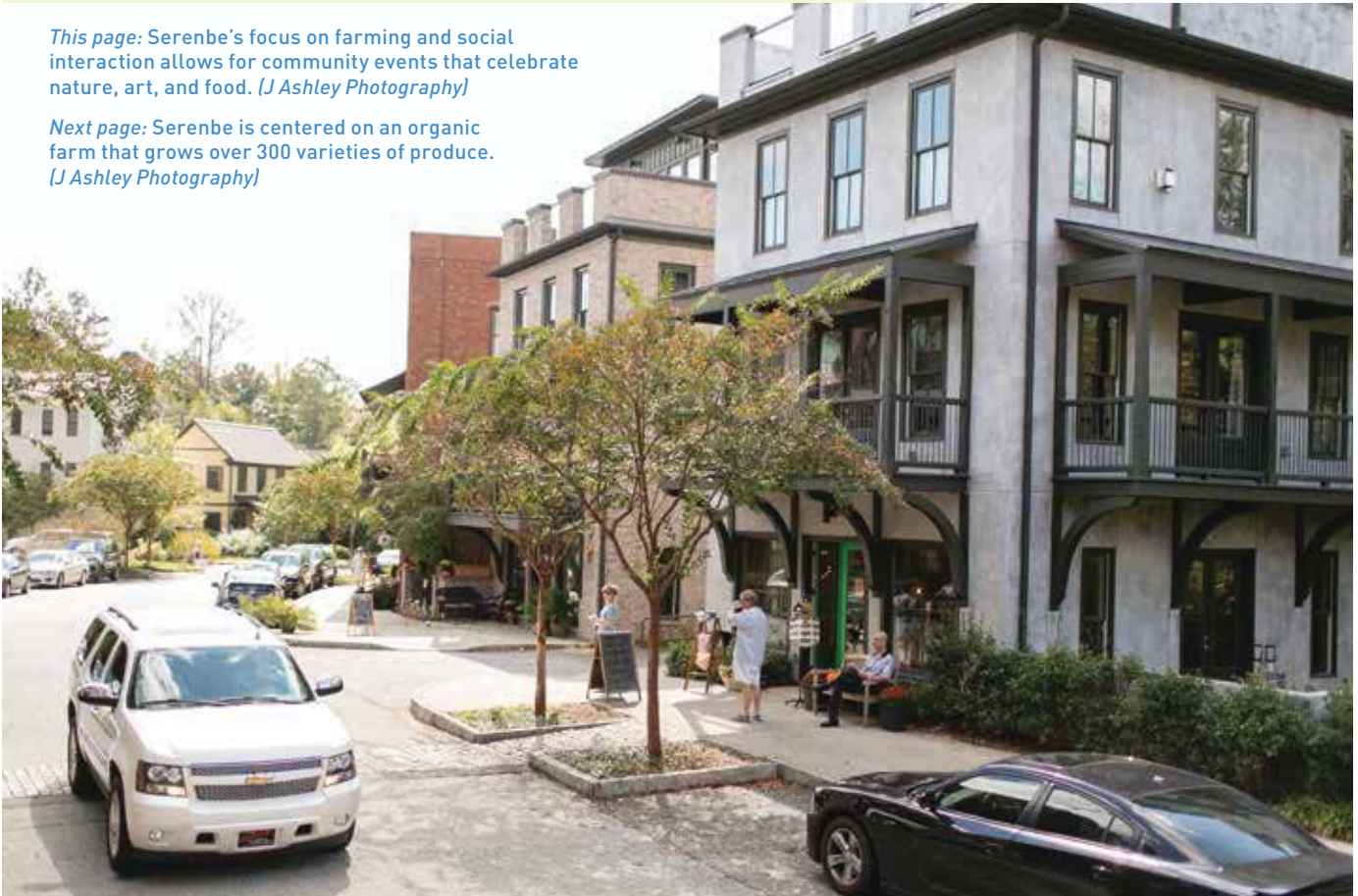
Project status
20 percent complete

Financing
Private equity with traditional bank loans

Equity partner
Not applicable

This page: Serenbe's focus on farming and social interaction allows for community events that celebrate nature, art, and food. *(J Ashley Photography)*

Next page: Serenbe is centered on an organic farm that grows over 300 varieties of produce. *(J Ashley Photography)*



SERENBE is a 1,000-acre (405 ha) community that broke ground in 2004 in Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia, that currently includes 200 homes (single family, multifamily, and live/work units), commercial and arts space, and three restaurants, with eventual plans for a total of 1,200 residents. The development includes a number of food-based amenities, most notably a 25-acre (10 ha) professionally managed organic farm that forms the heart of the community. Serenbe also features an extensive nature trail system, conserves water through landscaping, and naturally treats wastewater for use in irrigation.

Features and Innovations

- **Organic farm:** Serenbe Farms is a certified organic farm where more than 300 varieties of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers are grown, many of which are used in Serenbe's on-site restaurants. Over 60,000 pounds (27,215 kg) of produce are harvested each year.
- **Saturday farmers market:** Much of the produce grown at Serenbe Farms is sold at the Serenbe Farmers and Artisan Market. In addition, the market features food products from other local farmers and regional food producers.
- **Community-supported agriculture program:** Food produced at Serenbe Farms is available through a community-supported agriculture program, which allows anyone to sign up to receive a weekly box of produce and eggs throughout much of the year.
- **Public farm tours:** Serenbe Farms offers tours that allow people to learn about the benefits of organic produce, composting, and pest and disease control, as well as how to market local produce.
- **Edible landscaping:** Plants, such as blueberry bushes and fig trees, are located throughout Serenbe, allowing people to pick fruit for personal use.

Creating Value: People, Planet, Profit

Serenbe's location in Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia, a city of 38,000 acres (15,378 ha) located on the southwest edge of Atlanta, has directly influenced its development. Serenbe is the first—and currently the only—community developed within Chattahoochee Hills. Aside from Serenbe, the entire city consists of forests and agricultural uses.

Preserving a significant portion of some of the last open space near Atlanta allowed the creation of a community focused on food and interaction between neighbors. Steve Nygren, president and founder of Serenbe, explains that this vision required a rethink of common development practices, stating, "Most of what we have done is really common sense, but we had to work to rewrite local zoning laws to allow for high-density residential 'hamlets' within walking distance of community and commercial centers."



"At Serenbe, we are advancing environmentally responsible, balanced growth and creating places for people to gather around food."

Steve Nygren, President and Founder, Serenbe

Nygren continues, "We created plans for 20 percent more residential units than would have been possible with traditional development practices and preserved over 70 percent of 'developable' land for agriculture and open space—all of this within 30 minutes of the world's busiest airport."

Serenbe is unique in the region in that all other land that is a similar distance from the center of Atlanta follows more traditional suburban development patterns. The added residential units support the project's financial success, while the village atmosphere underpins the mission of the project—to create an environment that facilitates mental and physical health, where people connect with neighbors over food, nature, art, and events.

Serenbe's lots are currently selling for around \$150,000 to \$400,000, with completed homes ranging from around \$470,000 to \$1,400,000. Leased units range from around \$1,000 to over \$5,500, with custom homes selling for a substantial market premium.

While creating a community centered around a working farm supports Serenbe's bottom line by differentiating the project from others on the market, Nygren explains that the ability to advance health and environmental sustainability goals is even more important, stating, "Our development is financially successful, but more essentially, we measure success in terms of the well-being of our residents and by our ability to teach area youth about topics like the seasonality of local produce."