



Greene County Comprehensive Plan

2018 Update

Developed by the Planning & Government Services Division of the
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission



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Chapter 1

Introduction & Overview

Purpose

This comprehensive plan serves as a decision-making guide for local government officials and community leaders. Based on input from the public and a steering committee, the plan identifies needs and opportunities, goals and policies, land use practices, and an implementation framework for key elements.

Process

The comprehensive plan process follows the rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, effective 3/1/2014.

Public Involvement

Public Input & Steering Committee

The planning process began with a public hearing and was followed by a series of community input sessions during which the public and a local steering committee were invited to discuss local trends and aspirations. The availability of steering committee members to take questions and comments throughout the process (as presented at the first public hearing) provided additional feedback opportunities. A final public hearing was held before submittal of the plan to the DCA for review.

NEGRC's Role

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission's (NEGRC) Planning & Government Services Division oversaw the development of this plan, including facilitating public and steering committee meetings.

Chapter 2

Needs & Opportunities

The following list of needs and opportunities results from a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis conducted at the first input meeting, with both steering committee and public present, as well as professional analysis of relevant data and results of the online questionnaire.

**Italicized entries indicate high priorities (with STWP project number in parentheses)*

Population, Community, and Governance

Greene County's population has remained stable with a growth rate of 1.08% from 2010 to 2017, nearly identical to the state's (1.07%).

According to projections, the population is expected to increase at an annual rate of 1.04%, which is slightly higher than the state and national figures (1.03% and .83%, respectively).

The county's median age is 50 years, with 44% of the residents between 55 and 85; 24% of residents are under 24 and 32% are between 25 and 54. Stakeholders point to the migration of young families and young adults out of the county as a threat. This presents an opportunity for the community to develop a plan to retain and attract young adults.

As of 2017, 59% of residents identify as white, with the largest minority group being black at 34%. Although only 6.4% of residents identify as "Hispanic Origin," language barriers exist within the 18-64 age group, with 381 of those residents identifying as not speaking English well or speaking only Spanish. Stakeholders indicate that diversity is a strength, but that the perceived self-segregation of black and white residents is a weakness. Alongside race and ethnicity, disparity of wealth is a concern: according to 2011-2015 estimates, the poverty rate for the county is 25%, which is significantly higher than the state's (18.3%). However, only 1.2% of households received public assistance income. The median income is \$40,916, which is lower than the state's median income of \$52,336. Several stakeholders note that a significant weakness in the community is the socioeconomic division between residents living south (more affluent) and north (less) of I-20. *To address this, the community should organize a working group tasked with outlining and implementing a strategy to bridge socioeconomic gaps. (1)*

Despite the stated weaknesses and threats, several input meeting attendees indicated that strengths include good quality of life, small-town sense of community, and low crime.

Planning, Land Use, and Housing

Greene County has 6,707 households, with 70% identifying as family households. The housing stock comprises 74.5% single-family units, 86.6% of which are listed as rural. The estimated ratio of owner-to-renter-occupied housing units is 3:1; in contrast, the state's ratio is approximately 1.7:1. Stakeholders state that the growing tax base, which is due to the high-valued properties near Lake Oconee, is a strength. *However, many stakeholders note that the lack of affordable housing opportunities is a weakness. (7)*

Stakeholders also suggest that cities need revitalization. *Officials should update zoning and development ordinances to include diverse housing opportunities, develop affordable housing programs, and introduce blight eradication programs. (2, 7, 8)*

Transportation

An interstate and numerous state highways, as well as a major freight rail line, traverse the county; it also boasts a small regional airport. Stakeholders comment that traffic congestion has become a concern, but that widening SR 44 will likely mitigate this issue.

Greene County Public Transit System provides demand-response public transportation. Bike and pedestrian travel are also important to residents. *The county, Woodville, and Union Point are part of Northeast Georgia's planned Firefly Trail, which is a multi-purpose path for pedestrian, bicycle, and other non-motorized use. (5, 6)* The trail is expected to have a positive impact on the economy by creating small-business opportunities, sparking commercial growth that stakeholders' state is essential.¹

According to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), an estimate of \$951,675 will be used to improve transportation in the county for FY18-FY21. Projects include improving pedestrian crossings, resurfacing and maintenance of roads, and bridge rehabilitation.² Leadership should continue to work with GDOT to ensure that projects align with the needs of the community.

Natural & Cultural Resources

Greene County has an abundance of greenspace dedicated to wildlife protection, such as the Redlands and Oconee Wildlife Management Area.

¹ Firefly Trail. Accessed 6/12/2018, <https://www.fireflytrail.com/planned-trail.html>.

Stakeholders state that the abundance of natural resources and land is the county's greatest strength. However, some worry that federal and state conservation lands undermine economic development.

Historic preservation is also important, as national register districts exist (ex.: Greensboro, Siloam).

Community Facilities & Services

Stakeholders cite recreation and medical facilities as a strength. Meeting attendees specifically mentioned St. Mary's Hospital, Lake Oconee, and local access to a host of specialist physicians and medical facilities.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Coordination between local governments is critical. The Board of Commissioners and various departments work with the five cities and other governmental units within the county to provide public safety, economic development, and other public services. *Leadership should establish a standing meeting time to address intergovernmental issues to facilitate improved communication, coordination, and efficiencies. (3)*

Stakeholders note that broadband internet access is not sufficient. (15)

Economic Development

The county's unemployment rate (4.9%) is lower than the state's (5.9%), and while 64% of the workforce is employed locally, the remaining 36% commutes outside the county for work. The primary employer as of 2016 is the Daniel Corporation (Reynolds Lake Oconee). Although the Lake Oconee Area Development Authority has taken advantage of the job tax

² Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). Accessed 6/12/18, <http://www.dot.ga.gov/InvestSmart/Documents/STIP/FY18-21/FinalSTIP-FY18-21.pdf>.

credits offered by the state as incentives for relocating manufacturers and warehouse facilities in Georgia (O.C.G.A §36-62- 5.1), meeting participants state that the industrial base is small and that there are limited work opportunities.³ Stakeholders also stress the importance of ensuring that economic development does not compete with protecting resources and maintaining the rural/small-town character of the county. *A countywide economic development strategy (as basic or complex as is deemed necessary) that seeks to create quality jobs while enhancing quality of life and natural and cultural resources is necessary. (10)*

As of 2017, 35.2% of residents have a high school diploma/GED and 31.6% have an associate, bachelor, or graduate degree. These data suggest that the county has a good balance of low- to high-skilled workers. Stakeholders indicate that Greene County has an excellent charter school (Lake Oconee Academy), but that the Greene County School System underperforms and is a weakness. *A communitywide discussion on educational equity could catalyze effective action. (9)*

³ Greene County. Accessed 6/12/2018, <http://www.greencountyga.gov/index.php?submenu=LOADA&src=gendocs&ref=LakeOconeeAreaDevelopmentAuthority&category=Business>.

Chapter 3

Vision

Greene County's central location to the I-20 corridor makes it an excellent location for the development of small businesses and industry. Its location also makes the development of affordable housing options possible, which will encourage young adults and young families to establish roots within the county. The strong leadership will focus on improving infrastructure, public safety, recreation, and education. Leaders will also continue to preserve natural and cultural resources as well as create community engagement activities that strengthen cohesion.

Goals & Policies

1. Enhance engagement to create a cohesive community regardless of race, income, or location within Greene County
2. Improve service delivery and infrastructure
3. Encourage the Board of Education and other educational stakeholders to increase communication between Lake Oconee Academy and the Greene County School System to improve academic performance
4. Encourage small business and commercial development to further employment opportunities
5. Complete the Firefly Trail in the unincorporated areas while coordinating with and encouraging Union Point and Woodville to complete sections of the trail within their municipal boundaries
6. Encourage and support efforts of the cities in implementing strategies for revitalization
7. Maintain facilitative and supportive zoning practice to ensure continued development of quality housing
8. Continue to support developers through zoning and regulatory practices in the development of affordable housing, including reviewing appropriate ordinance changes
9. Encourage the continued preservation of natural resources and Historical architectural districts
10. Support the regional healthcare system

Chapter 4

Land Use

These future land uses (FLU) correspond to the map that follows. While zoning regulations vary, FLU represents a standardized approach to envisioning and planning for desired scenarios. As such, inconsistencies between FLU and existing land use or zoning maps may arise because FLU presents a blueprint for what is to come.

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting

Predominantly farms and forest land. Residential development maintains a rural character with single-family homes on large lots.

Commercial Corridor

Property where business and trade are conducted. Includes major retail stores, shopping centers, dining establishments, and office buildings. Located along SR 44 between I-20 and Lake Oconee.

Light Industrial Offices

Property used for warehousing, distribution, trucking, and manufacturing.

Mixed Use Community Center

Live-work-shop-play district including housing, small-scale shopping and dining, offices, and community facilities.

Neighborhood Commercial

Nodal, village-based shopping district intended for daily goods and services.

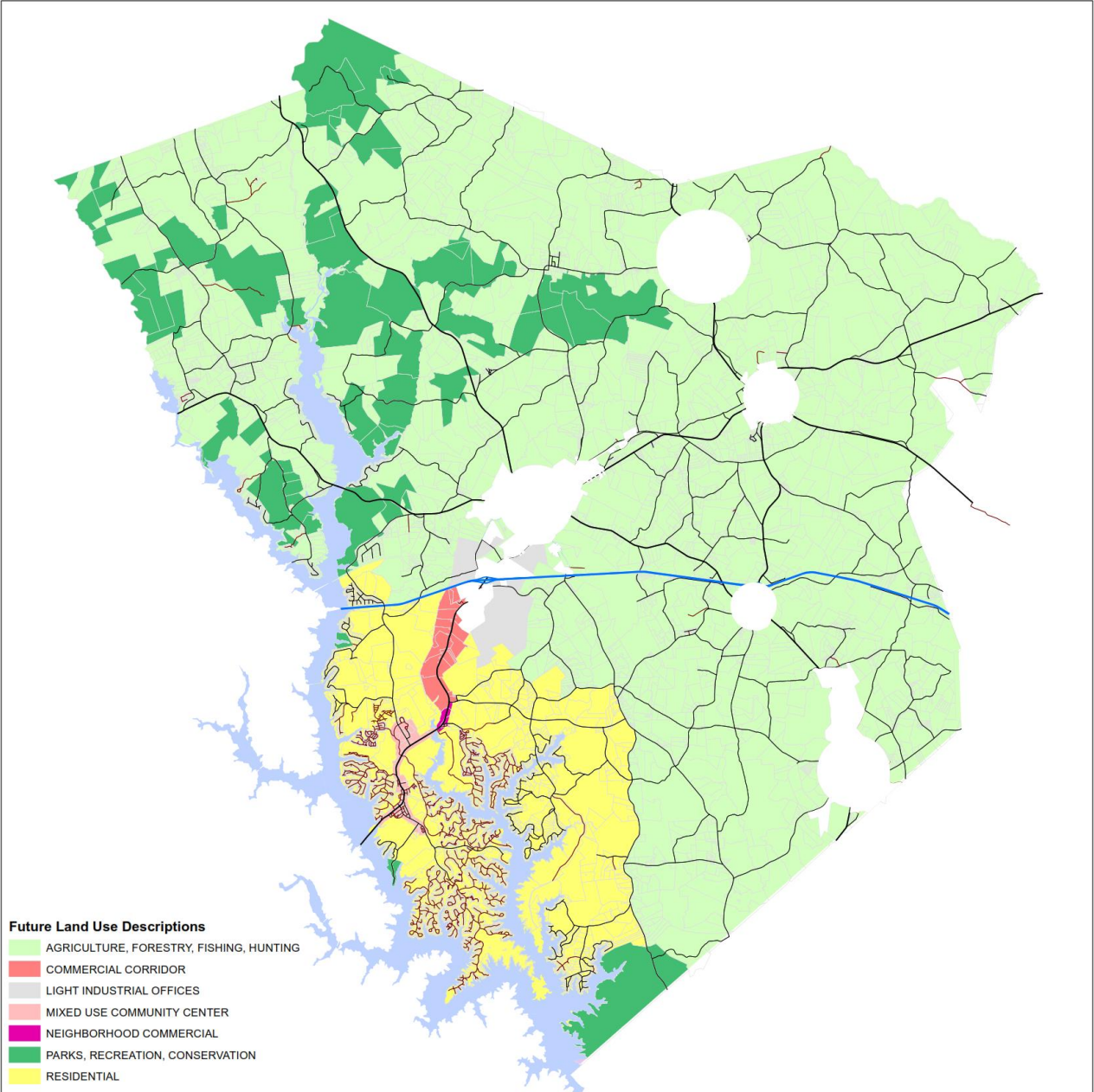
Parks, Recreation, Conservation

Recreation areas, lands held for conservation, and floodplains.

Residential

Conventional housing applications that include concentrations of efficient density and preserved greenspace.

Future Land Use Map



Chapter 5

Community Work Program

The Short-Term Work Program (2018-2022), updated every five years, provides a list of specific activities that the community plans to address as immediate priorities. A Report of Plan Accomplishments, which provides status commentary on the previous work plan (2013-2017), follows.

Short-Term Work Program, 2018-2022

(*carryover from the previous STWP)

#	Activity	Timeframe	Responsible Party	Cost Estimate	Funding Source
1	Develop strategies for outreach and diversity/inclusivity, including in education (communicating and working with existing community groups)	2018	BOC	None	NA
2	Adopt blight eradication plan	2019-2022	BOC	Minimal	General Fund (GF)
3	Schedule standing meeting for city/county coordination	2018-2019	BOC	None	NA
4	Prepare project lists for SPLOST and TSPLOST	2018-2019	BOC, Manager	None	NA
5	Adopt county plan for the development of the Firefly Trail and coordinate with the cities of Union Point and Woodville (include a focus on maximizing the trail's fiscal impacts)	2018-2019	BOC, Manager	\$1,000	GDOT
6	Build segment of the Firefly Trail in unincorporated county in conjunction with the cities of Union Point and Woodville	2019-2022	BOC, Manager	TBD	TSPLOST
7	Update zoning ordinance and design guidelines to ensure quality, intentional development (include consideration of housing diversity, esp. affordable housing)	2019-2021	BOC, Planning and Zoning Board	Minimal	GF, DCA
8	Review zoning ordinance to identify any barriers hindering the development of affordable housing options	2019	BOC, Planning and Zoning Board	\$2,000	GF, DCA
9	Set standing time for county elected and appointed officials to meet with elected and appointed officials from the Greene County Board of Education	2019	BOC	None	NA

#	Activity	Timeframe	Responsible Party	Cost Estimate	Funding Source
10	Adopt a countywide economic development strategy (include a focus on creating opportunities for unemployed residents and industrial and small-business growth)	2019-2022	Greene County Development Authority	TBD	Development Authority, GF
11	Update zoning and development standards with specific attention to signage, aesthetics, corridor overlays, and design standards	2019	BOC, Planning and Zoning Board	\$5,000	GF, DCA
12	Conduct public safety services and facilities needs analysis	2019-2022	BOC, Manager	Minimal	GF, DCA
13	Develop countywide recreation plan focusing on facilities and programs	2018-2019	Recreation Board, BOC	\$5,000	GF, DCA
14	*Replace bridge on Old Eatonton Rd	2018-2019	County	\$1.2M	SPLOST, County
15	Develop plan to address broadband internet connectivity issues; implement how and where appropriate	2018-2022	County	Minimal	GF, DCA, grants

Report of Plan Accomplishments, 2013-2017

#	Activity	Status	Notes
1.	Promote recycle and reuse programs through the distribution of marketing materials for residents and businesses	Ongoing	No carryover into Work Program
2.	Expand water and sewer lines to Richland Connector area.	Postponed	Contingent on private provider Piedmont and market demands; timeline unknown
3.	Relocate EMS Station #1 to County Public Service Annex	Completed	
4.	Replace EMS Station #2	Completed	
5.	Increase fiber optic connectivity between County offices	Completed	
6.	Designate a pauper's cemetery	Abandoned	State law allows pauper cremation now
7.	Create Economic Development Strategic Plan	Abandoned	The Greene County Development Authority, a joint constitutional development authority made up with representatives from Greene County, City of Greensboro, and City of Union Point are discussing strategic planning in support of economic development
8.	Work with local governments to integrate lower- to moderate-income housing developments	Ongoing	No carryover into Work Program; the County stands ready to assist and work with developers on desirable zoning in support of affordable housing developments where appropriate
9.	Utilize Future Land Use Map to encourage new development in appropriate areas serviced by necessary infrastructure	Ongoing	No carryover into Work Program; FLU map included in 2018 Comprehensive Plan Update

#	Activity	Status	Notes
10.	Evaluate the Future Land Use Map every two years to ensure it reflects current development visions	Ongoing	No Carryover into Work Program
11.	Consider zoning overlay in high growth areas to promote desirable development	Underway	Imminent completion, no carryover into Work Program; Rental Overlay District zoning class addition; other proposed overlays under consideration
12.	Continue to enforce greenspace requirements in the zoning ordinance	Ongoing	No Carryover into Work Program
13.	Create Debris Management Plan	Ongoing	No Carryover into Work Program
14.	Create Volunteer Resources Plan	Ongoing	No Carryover into Work Program
15.	Ensure connectivity between the new Charter School TND and nearby amenities as development occurs	Abandoned	The TND surrounding the Charter School was largely abandoned by the developer
16.	Regularly evaluate and promote county transit system	Ongoing	No Carryover into Work Program
17.	Send representative to Firefly Trail project meetings at NEGRC	Ongoing	No Carryover into Work Program
18.	Replace bridge on Old Eatonton Rd	Underway	2019 completion
19.	Veazey Connector	Completed	
20.	Liberty Connector	Underway	Imminent (Fall 2018) completion, no carryover into Work Program
21.	Add I-20 Interchange at Carey Station	Postponed	Long-term completion, no carryover into Work Program; the County continues to work with GDOT