

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

ANALYSIS OF CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES

In 1999 the Board of the Department of Community Affairs adopted the Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) as a statement of the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve her unique cultural, natural and historic resources while looking to the future and developing to her fullest potential. The Office of Planning and Quality Growth has created the Quality Community Objectives Assessment to assist local governments in evaluating their progress towards sustainable and livable communities.

This assessment is meant to give a community an idea of how it is progressing toward reaching these objectives set by the Department, but no community will be judged on progress. The assessment is a tool for use at the beginning of the comprehensive planning process, much like a demographic analysis or a land use map, showing a community “you are here.” The questions focus on local ordinances, policies, and organizational strategies intended to create and expand quality growth principles.

A majority of positive responses for an objective may indicate that the community has in place many of the governmental options for managing development patterns. Negative responses may provide guidance as to how to focus planning and implementation efforts for those governments seeking to achieve these Quality Community Objectives. Should a community decide to pursue a particular objective it may consider this assessment as a means of monitoring progress towards achievement.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Development Patterns

Traditional Neighborhoods

Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, compact development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.

Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our zoning code does not separate commercial, residential and retail uses in every district.		No zoning
2. Our community has ordinances in place that allow neo-traditional development "By right" so that developers do not have to go through a long variance process.	X	Absence of zoning does allow this.
3. We have a street tree ordinance requiring new development to plant shade-bearing trees appropriate to our climate.		NA
4. Our community has an organized tree-planting campaign in public areas to make walking more comfortable in summer.		NA
5. We have a program to keep our public areas (commercial, retail districts, parks) clean and safe.	X	Informal
6. Our community maintains its sidewalks and vegetation well so that walking is an option some would choose.	X	
7. In some areas, several errands can be made on foot, if desired.		NA
8. Some children can and do walk to school safely.		NA
9. Some children can and do bike to school safely.		NA
10. Schools are located in or near neighborhoods.		NA

Unincorporated Hart County does not exhibit the density of development conducive to traditional neighborhood designs, but does work with the Cities of Hartwell, Bowersville and Lavonia with regards to utility and infrastructure improvements that favor keeping higher density development within close proximity of existing urbanized areas.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Infill Development Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our community has an inventory of vacant sites and buildings available for redevelopment and/or infill development.	X	Limited
2. We are actively working to promote Brownfield redevelopment.		Potentially
3. Our community is actively working to promote greyfield redevelopment.		Unknown Concept
4. We have areas that are planned for nodal development (compacted near intersections rather than spread along a major road.)		NA
5. We allow small lot development (<5000 SF) for some uses.		No

Infill opportunities are limited within unincorporated Hart County. Several farm structures, such as chicken houses and barns, are unoccupied and in disrepair, but there is not a concentration or overabundance of these conditions such that government action is required.

Sense of Place Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. If someone dropped from the sky into our community, he or she would know immediately where she was, based on our distinct characteristics.		The type of community would be recognized, one based on rural character with agricultural traditions
2. We have delineated the areas of our community that are important to our history and heritage and have taken steps to protect those areas.	X	Delineated – Yes; Protected-Limited
3. We have ordinances to regulate the aesthetics of development in our highly visible areas.		NA
4. We have ordinances to regulate the size and type of signage.	X	Only on I-85
5. Our community has a plan to protect designated farmland.		NA

Discussions to protect rural character have not progressed to protecting active farmland, as overall density remains the crucial issue. Many are accepting of growth and change in Hart County and feel the economy could prosper from incoming development that might improve the overall standard of living.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Transportation Alternatives Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes, and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. We have public transportation in our community.	X	Limited
2. We require that new development connects with existing development through a street network, not a single entry/exit.		Are encouraging formal subdivisions to connect with paved roads.
3. We have a good network of sidewalks to allow people to walk to a variety of destinations.		Not applicable in the County.
4. We have a sidewalk ordinance in our community that requires all new development to provide user-friendly sidewalks.		Not applicable in the County.
5. We require that newly built sidewalks connect to existing sidewalks wherever possible		Not applicable in the County.
6. We have a plan for bicycle routes through our community.	X	Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
7. We allow commercial and retail development to share parking areas wherever possible.	X	Not Regulated

Hart County's rural nature restricts opportunities for pedestrian transportation except for encouragement of safe driving that shares roadways with bicyclists. As the Georgia Mountains Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan is implemented and updated, and as more development comes to Hart County this issue will be readdressed for new opportunities. The County is willing to work with Cities and developers trying to provide such amenities.

Regional Identity Each region should promote and preserve a regional "identity," or regional sense of place, defined in terms of traditional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our community is characteristic of the region in terms of architectural styles and heritage.	X	
2. Our community is connected to the surrounding region for economic livelihood through businesses that process local agricultural products.	X	
3. Our community encourages businesses that create products that draw on our regional heritage (mountain, agricultural, metropolitan, coastal)		Desirable
4. Our community participates in the Georgia Department of Economic Development's regional tourism partnership.		Desirable
5. Our community promotes tourism opportunities based on the unique characteristics of our region.	X	Limited – goal is to be more active
6. Our community contributes to, and draws from, the region, as a source of local culture, commerce, entertainment, education.	X	

Hart County and Hartwell are working to increase opportunities for tourist and cultural activity, including the development of a signature play about the heritage of the area. Both communities are using the attraction of the lake to foster the role of Hart County as a regional economic and cultural center.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Resource Conservation

Heritage Preservation The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining local character.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. We have designated historic districts in our community.		NA
2. We have an active historic preservation commission.	X	
3. We want new development to complement historic development, and we have ordinances in place to ensure that happening.		Considered

Hart County does seem interested in preserving certain historic resources and sites, and there is a preference to retain the rural character and scale. Most of the historic structures within the unincorporated county, however, are churches, privately owned houses or agricultural structures that are not conducive to a district or formal protective measures by the County at this time. New development is encouraged to be compatible with existing architectural styles.

Open Space Preservation New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors. Compact development ordinances are one way of encouraging this type of open space preservation.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our community has a greenspace plan.		Considered
2. Our community is actively preserving greenspace – either through direct purchase, or by encouraging set-asides in new development.		No.
3. We have a local land conservation program/ work with state or national land conservation programs to preserve environmentally important areas in our community.		There is Army Corps of Engineers' property within the county.
4. We have a conservation subdivision ordinance for residential development that is widely used and protects open space in perpetuity.		Absence of regulations makes this allowable.

There is no pressure on the County to preserve greenspace at this time, given the sparse development and existing volume of undisturbed land and Army Corps of Engineers property. The County does have minimum buffer and environmental regulations for resource protection.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Environmental Protection Environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.		
Statement	Yes	Comment
1. We have a comprehensive natural resources inventory.	X	Environmental protective regulations as required by State law
2. We use this resource inventory to steer development away from environmentally sensitive areas.	X	To the extent required of State restrictions
3. We have identified our defining natural resources and have taken steps to protect them.		Comprehensive plan will begin update of this effort
4. Our community has passed the necessary Part V Environmental Ordinances, and we enforce them.	X	
5. Our community has and actively enforces a tree preservation ordinance.		NA
6. Our community has a tree-replanting ordinance for new development.		NA
7. We are using stormwater best management practices for all new development.	X	Regulated by State
8. We have land use measures that will protect the natural resources in our community (steep slope regulations, floodplain or marsh protection, etc.)		Not above and beyond State required environmental criteria

Pace, scale and type of development coming to the unincorporated county has not begun to adversely affect the natural resources. The County will use the comprehensive planning process to encourage new development be directed towards the most sustainable areas.

Social and Economic Development

Growth Preparedness Each community should identify and put in place the pre-requisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities and managing new growth when it occurs.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. We have population projections for the next 20 years that we refer to when making infrastructure decisions.	X	
2. Our local governments, the local school board, and other decision-making entities use the same population projections.		Unknown
3. We have a Capital Improvements Program that supports current and future growth.	X	
4. We have designated areas of our community where we would like to see growth. These areas are based on the natural resources inventory of our community.		NA

Current and past use of population projections has been sporadic and inconsistent across organizations. The County is using this process as a springboard for improving coordination of growth preparedness across governmental organizations.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Appropriate Businesses The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, long-term sustainability, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our economic development organization has considered our community's strengths, assets, and weaknesses and has created a business development strategy based on them.	X	Under development
2. Our ED organization has considered the types of businesses already in our community, and has a plan to recruit business/industry that will be compatible.	X	As Part of other Initiatives
3. We recruit businesses that provide/ create sustainable products.		Not actively
4. We have a diverse jobs base, so that one employer leaving would not cripple us.	X	Goal for future

The County is using this planning process to improve efforts at coordinating economic development efforts. The County is part of a joint development authority and has become more proactive in business recruitment and retention, but the County has limited resources for these efforts.

Employment Options A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our economic development program has an entrepreneur support program.	X	
2. Our community has jobs for skilled labor.	X	
3. Our community has jobs for unskilled labor.	X	
4. Our community has professional and managerial jobs.	X	Limited

To the extent possible, the County has recognized trends and needs with respect to business recruitment and development and worked towards improving education opportunities for the labor pool. Many of these efforts are dependent on growth and outside forces to increase the economies of scale better suited for non-agricultural industries.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Housing Choices A range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community (reducing commuting distances), to promote a mixture of income and age groups in each community, and to provide a range of housing choice to meet market needs.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our community allows accessory units like garage apartments or mother-in-law units.	X	
2. People who work in our community can afford to live here.	X	
3. Our community has enough housing for each income level (low, moderate, and above-average incomes)		Some need for quality affordable housing.
4. We encourage new residential development to follow the pattern of our original town, continuing the existing street design and recommending smaller setbacks.		NA
5. We have options available for loft living, downtown living, or "neo-traditional" development.		NA
6. We have vacant and developable land available for multifamily housing.	X	
7. We allow multifamily housing to be developed in our community.	X	
8. We support community development corporations building housing for lower-income households.	X	
9. We have housing programs that focus on households with special needs.		Not currently
10. We allow small houses built on small lots (less than 5,000 square feet) in appropriate areas.		No

Hart County has vacant housing units of various types and land for new housing construction. The lake area is receiving attention from new builders and developers but there remain opportunities for more higher-end housing. The County could improve with more quality affordable housing, as most lower end housing in the unincorporated area relies on rental units, the weakest of the rural residential units or older, manufactured housing.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Educational Opportunities Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. Our community provides work-force training options for our citizens.	X	
2. Our workforce training programs provide citizens with skills for jobs that are available in our community.	X	
3. Our community has higher education opportunities, or is close to a community that does.	X	
4. Our community has job opportunities for college graduates, so that our children may live and work here if they choose.		Desired

Recent efforts within and outside the county have improved facilities and resources for education. Level of employment opportunities has not been so strong as to dictate changes to existing programs.

Governmental Relations

Local Self-determination Communities should be allowed to develop and work toward achieving their own vision for the future. Where the state seeks to achieve particular objectives, state financial and technical assistance should be used as the incentive to encourage local government conformance to those objectives.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. We have a citizen-education campaign to allow all interested parties to learn about development processes in our community.	X	Open Government
2. We have processes in place that make it simple for the public to stay informed on land use and zoning decisions, and new development.		For what few regulations exist, this could be improved
3. We have a public-awareness element in our comprehensive planning process.	X	Will use local media, promotional materials and the internet.
4. We have clearly understandable guidelines for new development.	X	
5. We offer a development guidebook that illustrates the type of new development we want in our community.		No
6. We have reviewed our development regulations and/or zoning code recently and are sure that our ordinances will help us achieve our QCO goals.		NA
7. We have a budget for annual training for planning commission members and staff, and we use it.		NA
8. Our elected officials understand the land-development process in our community	X	

The County's residents have to date resisted efforts to expand the application of land use regulations. Recent improvements in communications technology have aided efforts to communicate government issues and actions in all regards and especially with respect to land use management.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Regional Cooperation Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources or development of a transportation network.		
Statement	Yes	Comments
1. We plan jointly with our cities and county for Comprehensive Planning purposes		Developing
2. We are satisfied with our Service Delivery Strategies	X	
3. We cooperate with at least one local government to provide or share services (parks and recreation, E911, Emergency Services, Police or Sheriff's Office, schools, water, sewer, other)	X	

Current levels of coordination with the Cities have been sufficient, but as the governments improve the applications of GIS technology and more detailed planning processes such as this one, there will likely be new opportunities for improved, cooperative planning.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides a summary listing and discussion of potential issues and opportunities identified during the Analysis of Data and Information. These items may be modified through additional analysis or require further study, but they must be considered as the City completes the Community Agenda. The elements discussed include:

- **Population**
- **Community Facilities and Services**
- **Housing**
- **Economic Development**
- **Natural Resources**
- **Historic Resources**
- **Intergovernmental Relations**
- **Land Use**

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Population

The foremost task of any government is to promote the welfare of the existing and future populations. This is the basis for all strategies involved in economic development, capital improvement projects, and land use regulation. The hope is that any changes can be managed such that opportunities exist for economic expansion without diluting the quality of services provided. Achieving this requires an understanding the characteristics of both the present and future populations of the region; their traits, needs, and capabilities. Much of this begins with identifying trends within the population, to help explain current conditions and gain insight into probable future conditions.

Issues:

- The county's population is largely shaped by trends from surrounding urban regions: Gainesville-Hall, Athens-Clarke, Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson.
- All three metro regions are growing in size and population, suggesting that Hart County's central location among these MSAs will experience comparable growth.
- Hart County is increasingly becoming a "retirement" community due to the low cost, low crime, warm climate, natural assets, and other quality of life features. Hart County may have to adjust the planning for select community facilities and services to address the needs of more elderly and proportionately fewer school-age children.
- While the smaller number races are expected to increase significantly in size over the planning period, the overall change in ratios will be negligible.
- The County needs to look forward during the next planning period to further this positive trend and help to overcome the higher poverty levels of the Southwestern section of the county by promoting infrastructure investments and economic development opportunities for this region.
- There is a notable volume of households (30%) earning below \$20,000. This suggests a significant portion of the county remains in, or at risk of falling into, poverty. It would be prudent for the community to review education and/or assistance programs for fixed income households under the possibility many residents are in untenable financial situations.
- The need for additional senior citizen services, such as home health care, recreational centers, specialized housing (such as opportunities for independent living), and transportation will have to be met. As the needs of this population are met the needs of the younger generation may suffer. If this were to occur the decline in the younger population may actually accelerate. The County needs to pay particular attention to the projected population trends so that the County can plan appropriately.
- Business patterns will also change because of an increase in the older population. As the population matures, businesses traditionally catering to young consumers will loose

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

business. Business meeting the needs and demands of older consumers however could expect new growth and opportunity.

- Projections suggest the population will feature more adults with higher levels of education during the planning period. This will be important in attracting new employers to the County with quality jobs.

Community Facilities and Services

Public facilities and services are those elements vital to a population's health, safety, and welfare that are most effectively provided by the public sector, such as sewerage, law enforcement and school services. This element examines the community's ability to adequately serve the present and projected demands for such services, identifying concerns with the spatial distribution and conditions affecting service delivery. These assessments can then assist in projecting future demands and in planning future capital improvement projects.

Issues:

- The jail facility does not meet the current needs and additional space will have to be addressed within the planning period. One option being explored is to expand the jail using the space currently occupied by the Sheriffs office administration and deputies.
- At least one fire station, Reed Creek, will need to be replaced with a larger facility over the next 20 years. Additional expansions or replacements of the other fire stations may also be needed over the planning period pending the scope of population growth.
- The long range plans for expansion of water service in the county will be limited by funding. Other funding sources will be needed over the planning period to meet the current projection of \$15-20M for the total proposed water expansions.
- Hart County does not provide any direct sewer service, instead contracting with local municipalities to provide this service in select areas. Expansions of these service areas may be required to accommodate some options of industrial development. Further, the abundance of septic systems in the county may address the short-term needs for treating wastewater but may also create long-term problems if leaking systems pollute local water bodies.
- As the retirement community continues to grow in Hart County additional recreation opportunities for this population may be needed. The current recreation programs focusing on organized sports may need to be expanded to meet the needs of other residents who do not participate in the traditional organized sports of baseball, basketball and football. These needs must be explored over the planning period.
- Three broad goals have been recommended for the Hart County Hospital including increased sensitivity to the healthcare marketplace, continued efforts of physician and staff recruitment as needed, and the improvement of the physical facilities at the hospital. While facilities for physical therapy have recently been renovated, improvements to other

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

portions of the hospital are needed, including the emergency room, surgery, outpatient, laboratory, and radiology. Updated facilities for the emergency room and surgery are currently in the planning stages.

- Emergency response times to some areas of the County can be as high as 20 minutes. The County is investigating the potential to decentralize the EMS system and the potential benefits and negative effects that may result from this move.
- While the nursing home facilities are considered adequate in the short-term, local health care/social service professionals indicate that additional personal care home facilities would be well utilized. A market study is needed, however, to determine the exact need for such facilities.
- The library facilities are adequate as far as floor space is concerned, but the quality of those facilities and the collections of books and media are lacking. Currently the library operates out of a temporary facility due to mold contamination within the main facility. This problem will need to be addressed in the near future and will cost several hundred thousands of dollars to correct.
- Based upon these projections, public educational facilities are considered adequate throughout the planning horizon with the exception of the middle school where there is currently a need for additional space.
- Currently no major long-range improvement plans are proposed in Hart County other than the widening of Interstate 85. It is critical that Hart County and its municipalities create a priority of projects for consideration from the GDOT for larger improvement projects. By adopting local priorities Hart County can push the State to pursue local road construction programs, show unified local support that will advance the project and avoid the possibility of State money going to other communities instead.

Opportunities:

- While there are plans for expanding and improving the water system, there is ample water supply for the County over the planning period. This should aid in plans for economic development and the overall growth of the county.
- The general level of service from Hart County's utilities and services is considered very good. Most programs will need only expansions in the future as opposed to major revisions or amendments.
- Land is available for new and expanded facilities, including parks and new fire stations. Proper planning should enable the county to prepare for an increased population and meet future needs more effectively.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

Hart County Comprehensive Plan

- The potential exists for alternate transportation systems as the county grows. Trails and sidewalks linking popular destinations can be introduced to improve the accessibility of the community, and early planning can maximize the potential of such systems.

Economic Development

Economic development analyses inventory a community's functional conditions and achievements to identify the strengths, weaknesses and needs of native businesses. This portrait of a region's economic state is the foundation for assessing the performance of wages and job skills, employment and industry patterns, and the programs and efforts designed to improve local economies.

Issues:

- With the encroachment of several metropolitan areas reaching the area, Hart County's economy is transitioning from a predominantly Manufacturing and Agricultural base to one more Service based. Large-scale textile employers from the region have been closing down, while a majority of recent job growth has come from commercial and professional service industries. Hart County must continue to monitor these trends to ensure the labor force has the skills necessary to retain and attract desired employers.
- The county is considered lacking in Education and Health Service professionals compared to some neighboring communities. This could prove critical as the county grows if the school age or elderly populations assume larger shares of the resident population and alter the demand for local services.
- Hart County has experienced an overall drop in the total wages earned by local employers, with a majority of jobs in 2003 paying below the average wage rate of \$26,684 for the county. This trend implies the county may struggle to afford/maintain the desired high quality of life unless higher paying industries can be attracted to, or developed in, Hart County.
- Hart County's labor force is improving in overall education levels, a trend that should be maintained but will still require monitoring by the County. The overall skills of the labor force are comparable to those expected of the region but remains higher in those categories associated with lower wage Service industries or skilled manufacturing positions that might not be available for much longer. This trend can also be noted in the County's comparably high unemployment rates which have remained above 5.1% since 2000. There must be continued work to both improve the education and training services for the labor force while also fostering business development appropriate for the skills of the existing labor force.

Opportunities:

- Recent investments from Hart and neighboring Counties have improved the quality and extent of public utilities and telecommunications in the region, making the area more

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

attractive to new and larger industries. Scheduled utility improvements should accommodate healthy business development throughout the planning period.

- Infrastructure improvements along Hwy 17 and the interchange with I-85, located immediately across the county line in Lavonia, will greatly improve the accessibility of Hart County. The industrial sites along the I-85 corridor have done well and have room for expansion.
- The encroachment of the metropolitan areas from Atlanta, Athens and Anderson, SC, will provide a larger market base for businesses within Hart County. While this will spur Service related positions the most, in time this could support more sustainable growth among Goods Producing and higher-paying Professional Service industries.

Housing

Housing is a critical issue to every community as a primary factor of quality of life. The costs and availability of quality housing is a key gauge in calculating local costs of living and one measure in defining the long-term sustainability of the resident population. The housing element of the comprehensive plan is used to evaluate whether existing and projected development will meet the county's housing needs with respect to supply, affordability, and accessibility.

Issues:

- As the region grows Hart County will need to ensure an efficient mix of housing types is maintained. There is an increased need for multi-family residential both for transitional, starter housing and as a measure of affordability. Some of this need may be addressed within the city limits of Hartwell or Bowersville, but the overall mix of types and levels of affordability must be monitored for the whole county.
- There will also be a need for more housing for the elderly. The 65+ age-group will see strong growth in Hart County within the planning timeframe. To properly care and house this population group will require special needs housing. This refers to the accessibility of housing design, affordability and the proximity to health care and amenities demanded by seniors.
- Hart County does feature a significant amount of manufactured housing. This fact alone does not imply a problem, but must be noted in the event the County experience problems with housing conditions or notable depressions of property values. Manufactured housing units are considered the most susceptible to lack of investment within the short-term, and can indicate a lack of quality affordable housing and/or lower than desired wage levels among local employment centers.
- Hart County also exhibits some housing with incomplete plumbing and or kitchen facilities. This is a direct indication of the level of impoverished households in the area. While Hart County's levels for these housing units is not considered egregious, the fact that such units remain indicates the market is still working to raise the standard of living above such conditions.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

- There is a significant amount of seasonal housing within Hart County, largely due to Lake Hartwell and wildlife areas used for hunting. Seasonal units are often considered a positive in their ability to generate tax revenue with only marginal demands for public services, but they can also contribute to extreme fluctuations in the economy and make things difficult for employers trying to stabilize businesses and employment. The County should work with the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to monitor the impact of such housing.

Opportunities:

- Improvements in technology and investment in the local infrastructure have raised the accessibility of Hart County. More and more households are seeking residence in rural areas with a high quality of life now that telecommunications and other features are making urban-style amenities available in places like Hartwell.
- The Lake and rural character of the county will continue to serve as a draw for new residential development, likely of high quality. This means the County and the Cities of Hartwell and Bowersville will be able to work with the development community with healthy market conditions and continue to improve the overall quality of housing in the area.

Natural Resources

A community's natural resources are the native conditions and elements that contribute to the local character and livelihood. As the rivers and lakes supplying public water, mineral deposits that support local industry, or a scenic park serving locals and tourists alike, these resources can serve a community's health, culture and economy when properly managed. Because these sites and conditions are highly susceptible to disturbance from human activity, they are regarded environmentally sensitive and need to be preserved for public benefit.

Issues:

- Lake Hartwell and several major creeks within Hart County should be monitored for and protected from possible negative impacts from development. Even as new development in the area might employ proper measures for stormwater management and erosion & sedimentation control, the potential exists for development to impact these water bodies. Given the importance of the lake, rivers and creeks as sources of water for public drinking, irrigation and as recreational attractions, it is important for the County to monitor how development is altering stormwater run-off patterns and ensure no contaminants are introduced into the water.
- In addition to the simple value of the surface waters there are a host of environmentally sensitive resources within Hart County, including wetlands, floodplains and water supply watersheds. There are two water supply watersheds within the county, servicing the City of Hartwell and downstream the City of Elberton. The watershed associated with the City of Hartwell intake is considered exempt from one layer of State regulations

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

regarding environmental protection, but should still be monitored for impacts from development considering the value of the public water system.

- A large portion of the County is considered prime agricultural land or of statewide importance for agricultural use. This does not imply a requirement for agricultural activity, but does suggest the use should be preserved and promoted where and when possible.
- Given the presence of environmentally sensitive resources within the county it is of some concern that there are only marginal measures for land use management within Hart County. Past public votes have turned down the concept of formal zoning, and the parcel and land cover mapping is in the process of being updated. More accurate information and some progressive measures might be required to protect any of these identified natural resources.
- Increased development within the county may adversely impact some threatened or endangered species of plants and animals, including the Red-cockaded woodpecker and the Southern Bald Eagle. While no immediate action is considered necessary, the County must work with the Department of Natural resources and other organizations to ensure the habitat for these species is maintained as best as possible.

Opportunities:

- The County is working with the Georgia Mountains RDC to update its mapping system and GIS database. This will give the County an improved understanding of where natural resources are in relation to development patterns, and enable the County to be more proactive in preserving its natural resources.
- Improvements in land use management tools and best management practices for development can provide the County more options for educating residents and protecting natural resources. There are additional sources of support and program funding to assist Hart County with the implementation of protective measures, as well.
- The increasing appeal of outdoor and agricultural related tourism in north Georgia provides Hart County with a medium for raising the awareness of protecting natural resources. As these industries gain in financial and popular value it becomes easier and more prudent for Hart County to invest in protection programs and gain support from area residents.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Historic Resources

Historic resources are those man-made sites, structures and resources that contribute to the identity of a community and are considered to have a worth beyond their direct economic value. Historic resources are typically defined as buildings, objects or sites that are listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places because of their associations with certain times and people in history.

Issues:

- County appears to be losing some existing and potential historic structures through demolition or neglect. At the least, a large volume of aging structures within the area might be underutilized or are failing to be considered historically significant due to one of several factors (lack of information about the structure, lack of understanding about possible benefits of recognizing historic significance...)
- Contributing to the impact of historic sites noted above, there is no current, formal inventory of historic and archaeological sites within Hart County. In order for the County to become pro-active with regards to historic resources an inventory must be done to identify such resources and classify their individual needs and potential.

Opportunities:

- The possibility does exist for developing an inventory of historic sites, even at various levels of detail. Improvements in technology and the level of education and resources available to support Hart County make the prospect of such an undertaking more feasible. The Georgia Mountains RDC, the University of Georgia and other organizations are readily available to assist the County with doing an inventory and cataloging the information for improved record keeping and creating the database and mapping necessary to enable area stakeholders to be more proactive in preserving and promoting the value of these sites and structures.
- There is an opportunity for increased tourism and economic growth related to investing in the area's historic sites. Several of the existing and potential sites have direct and notable significance to the history of the region, particularly of the development of the local agricultural industry. The preservation and promotion of these structures could foster an increase awareness of local identity, spur reinvestment in properties (even if not considered historically significant), and contribute to a collection of publicly accessible sites for pure tourism.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Intergovernmental Coordination

Many government services and facilities are managed through cooperative arrangements with other entities and/or neighboring communities. To ensure the local government is maximizing the benefits of these relationships it should inventory and evaluate the structure of such arrangements, keeping them up-to-date and based on informed assessment of local conditions.

Issues:

- *Cooperation with the Army Corps of Engineers* – Hart County and the City of Hartwell should encourage the Corps to consider extended summer pool levels for Lake Hartwell to maximize the lake's use for recreation and tourism. The County should also work with the Corps to assist in efforts to protect water levels in times of drought.
- *Growth management* – The County should continue to work with neighboring communities to monitor and evaluate development trends so as to ensure Hart County is able to address new issues and maintain sustainable land use patterns. The County could improve its review of regional land use and development information.

Opportunities:

- *Existing intergovernmental cooperative actions* – Measures such as the Service Delivery Agreement and the Special Purpose Local Option Tax (SPLOST) provide an existing framework for expanding cooperation and communication between Hart County and adjoining governments. Hart County should work to make sure every multi-jurisdictional program is being utilized to support community development efforts.
- *Joint Development Authority* – The cooperation of Franklin, Hart and Stephens County has greatly assisted with the economic development of the I-85 corridor near Lavonia. This type of partnership has enabled all three counties to reap benefits from the Interstate access and maximize utility service. Hart County should continue to work with the other governments in expanding this effort and exploring additional opportunities for the Joint Development Authority to grow business within the region.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Land Use

Land use and transportation are the main factors of community development planning. Ensuring the best balance of land uses, levels of accessibility and the overall sustainability of a community requires an understanding of development trends and issues.

Issues:

- *Desire to protect rural character* – Hart County is still largely a rural community that reflects its agricultural history. Most residents wish to retain this sense of character even while pursuing some new growth and industrial expansion. The County should work to maintain the generally low density and rural development patterns as best as possible to preserve this character.
- *Land use balance in growth corridors* – Hart County has fairly well defined areas receiving the majority of new growth and development: I-85, Ga 17 and around Lake Hartwell. Each corridor is experiencing different types and scales of growth pressures and features different priorities (See *Character Areas*). The County and cities should monitor development trends in these areas for possible land use conflicts and to properly gauge their impact on public facilities and services.

Opportunities:

- *Improved land use planning* – Hart County is working with the GMRDC to begin formal application of parcel-level GIS technology and is seeking new aerial imagery. It is anticipated that within a couple years the County should have a much more advanced system and database for monitoring and managing land use.
- *Cooperative land use planning* – Hart County and its cities could improve formal measures to coordinate land use planning. Currently the communities do collaborate on the Service Delivery Strategy and no major land use conflicts have arisen to date, however, as growth pressures escalate and the character of the communities evolves each community may be called upon for new/more levels of formal land use management policies. Given the relatively small scale of existing such policies it would be easier for the communities to lay the groundwork for coordination of land use management measures.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

The Community Participation Program outlines the basic public involvement process that will be used to ensure Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan represents the values and desires of the residents. Ensuring the participation of a variety of stakeholder groups in developing the Community Agenda will also improve efforts for implementing the Plan by securing wider public understanding, support and cooperation.

The completion of the Community Assessment provides a baseline of information about the community to assist with the public involvement process, assuring the participants have a better understanding of the conditions and issues involved. The Community Participation Program will guide how this information is presented to the open public and various stakeholder groups, whose responses will refine the information, prioritize the issues and goals and identify the preferred alternatives for achieving those goals.

Identification of Stakeholders

Public involvement for developing the Community Agenda will be accomplished by directed measures for three sub-groups: 1) The General Public, 2) a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, 3) and Elected Officials and Chief Government Officers. This approach is designed to accommodate the differing levels of understanding of the planning process and to maximize the energy of those involved.

The first sub-group to receive consideration will be the General Public. A variety of open forums, and displays will be used to engage all of the residents, property owners and business owners of Hart County to ensure they've full opportunity to review, comment and direct the planning process. The Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center will assist the County staff in educating the public about the planning process and the Comprehensive Plan document, emphasizing the key elements of the Plan that are driven by and wholly about the general public of Hart County: The Community Vision and the goals and tasks outlined to achieve that vision.

The second sub-group targeted is the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. This committee will feature up to 12 different people from a variety of stakeholder groups, but may be smaller pending the availability of those invited to participate. The role of this committee will be to assist in analyzing the input received from the General Public and to provide for deeper discussion and analysis than may be allowed through the open public forums. Their participation on this committee will provide an additional layer of perspective on the grand dreams and concerns of the general citizenry. Representatives for this committee will be invited from several local key businesses, homeowners associations and other organizations with an active interest in community development issues. The following organizations have been targeted for their involvement due to their critical roles in Hart County:

School Board
Chamber of Commerce
Joint Development Authority

US Army Corps of Engineers
Ga. Department of Natural Resources
Hart County Industrial Building Authority

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

The third sub-group to be addressed will be the Elected and Administrative Officers of Hart County. The comprehensive plan process was devised to provide local public discourse and direction about the management of local communities. As the organization principally responsible for implementing the Comprehensive Plan, it is vital that the officials within the Hart County government not only participate in the process but understand the full scope of what's being proposed. They can maximize the opportunity to listen to the public's comments, identify what the government offices can and cannot do and can refine their operations to ensure they match the goals of the residents and business owners.

Public Involvement and Comment

A variety of measures will be employed to secure involvement from each of the three sub-groups. Each measure is designed to provide another layer in the process of identifying and prioritizing the issues, goals and objectives for Hart County.

The primary measure will be direct public involvement through open forums. Several public hearings will be held over a two to three month period to review and refine the Plan material, beginning with a Vision and progressing towards the action items designed to make that Vision a reality. Ideally these forums will be held in close succession (no more than 4 weeks apart) help the public more easily see this progression and maintain their level of energy.

In addition to the open forums the public will have additional opportunities to review material and provide comment. Several displays offering information about the Plan and copies of material developed at each stage will be set up throughout the county in places such as the library, County administrative offices and elsewhere. Citizens will be encouraged to review these items and provide comment to the County at any time during the process. They will also have the opportunity to track the process online via the GMRDC and/or another local web site and to submit comments via email. All comments received will be recorded for the process.

During the public forums GMRDC staff will lead discussion through prioritization of the issues and objectives for Hart County and through reviews of the Character Area maps to try and facilitate small area planning. Some survey methods may be used for prioritizing the issues and objectives, both one-time surveys featured at the events and extended period surveys available for completion for up to 2 weeks. Some fashion of extended period surveys will be used to allow for participation by those people unable to attend events and allow others to fully review material at home before responding.

Advertising for the process and public events will be handled through several means. The local newspaper will be used for general advertising and will be contacted directly to provide notice of key events and offer cooperation for the development of any feature articles about the process. Copies of select material will be provided to the press directly and in electronic form for ease of reproduction. In addition to working through the newspaper, flyers advertising the process will be set up in several key public locations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the library. Businesses will be recruited for assistance as well in hopes of placing flyers in their establishments. These flyers will be designed such that they provide information about the next

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

public event as well as the locations for finding copies of Plan materials at the public displays or online. To assist with recognition and build the brand of the planning process in the public eye, the flyers will be consistent in design and placed in the same locations throughout the process, using different color pages to signify updated information.

The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee will be called upon to provide more direct and detailed levels of participation in this process. Members will be given full copies of the Community Assessment to review and will be contacted directly by the GMRDC and/or County staff about Committee meetings, surveys and public forums. The Committee will meet at least three times: Once to confirm the issues and opportunities identified within the Community Assessment and establish a preliminary vision and objectives, a second time to refine the vision and objectives and review comments from the General Public, and a third time to prioritize the objectives and develop the draft Community Agenda.

The Elected and Administrative Officers of Hart County receive attention and direct contact same as that afforded the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee with an emphasis on matching the objectives of the Plan to the effective operations of the County government. There will be at least two meetings held during the process exclusively for this sub-group, with additional follow up of individual staff as needed.

Development of the Community Agenda

The overall process for devising the Community Agenda will focus on using the information generated in the Community Assessment for confirming and prioritizing issues and opportunities, developing the Vision and then crafting the goals and objectives that will address the issues and advance Hart County towards the stated Vision. The general timeframe for the process will be approximately 8-10 weeks (given the County's due date for QLG status), seeking to capitalize on a high-energy campaign for public involvement but allowing for evolving conditions. The GMRDC staff will work with the Advisory Committee and County staff to develop the actual document throughout the process, allowing everyone to see and understand that the work is contributing to a very tangible product that will be accessible in the near future.

It should be noted, Hart County and the GMRDC will continue to solicit public review and comment on the Comprehensive Plan even after it's approval. Public participation in this issue has been marginal at best and barring significant changes in this trend the County recognizes that it will take time to educate and communicate with residents about the scope and nature of the Comprehensive Plan.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
Hart County Comprehensive Plan

Proposed Community Agenda Development Process

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>
<i>Identify and invite members for Plan Advisory Committee</i>	Week 1
<i>Begin Displays and Promotion</i> Create promotional material, make copies of Plan material available, establish locations for distribution of promotional material	Week 1
<i>Open Forums & Committee meetings - Initial</i> Review Community Assessment, confirm Issues and Opportunities, discuss Vision	Week 2-3
<i>Update Displays/ Communicate with Committee</i> Distribute updated information about draft Vision statement, key issues and goals for Hart County	Week 3-4
<i>Open Forums & Committee Meetings – Follow Up</i> Confirm Vision for Hart County, prioritize issues and goals, update Character Area maps and begin crafting Future Development Scenarios	Week 4-5
<i>Update Displays/ Communicate with Committee</i> Create draft Community Agenda and distribute for review	Week 5-6
<i>Open Forums and Draft Agenda Reviews</i>	Week 6-7
<i>County Hearing and Approval of Community Agenda</i>	Week 8+