Hart County Comprehensive Plan 2007-2030 COMMUNITY AGENDA



October, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

This document, the Community Agenda, is the final piece of the Hart County Comprehensive Plan. It represents the summation of efforts to identify the issues and opportunities most critical to Hart County as it moves forward to the year 2030 and beyond. The Community Agenda in particular outlines the first steps the County will take in striving to guide and manage community development.

The most prevalent concern identified during this process was the desire to maintain a sense of Hart County's rural character amidst the coming suburban growth. Current efforts to improve economic and social conditions are considered satisfactory but with room for minor improvements. Improvements that will likely come with the increased information and technology being applied to County programs and services. The County must continue to evolve its operations so as to better understand the changes happening around and within Hart County, and then understand how best to respond.

As a result of this process Hart County is better poised to act on the issues and opportunities identified and will work to achieve the type of community desired. Though the region is shifting away from a predominantly agricultural based economy, that industry can and will shape an important part of the county's character. So to will Lake Hartwell, and the County will improve its efforts to protect this resource. Relations with local cities can be improved so as to foster a stronger sense of place in each city, and in turn a stronger identity for Hart County.

For the next 20 years Hart County is well positioned to see both economic growth and the enhancement of the rural character that shapes so much of the local quality of life. Following through with the measures identified within the Community Agenda will assist in making those objectives a reality.

Purpose

The purpose of planning and community development is to provide guidance for everyday decision-making by local government officials and other community leaders. When implemented, local plans help their community address critical issues and opportunities while moving toward realization of its unique vision for the community's future.

In Georgia, local Counties and Cities are required to follow a process outlined by the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). This process involves two majors stages: 1) The collection and assessment of data for use in the planning process, accompanied by the design of the public involvement strategies, and 2) the identification of the vision, objectives and implementation measures for the community.

The first stage is complete with the development of a Community Assessment and Participation Program, which is to be reviewed by DCA before work can be fully initiated on the later stage. Hart County completed this document in August 2007.

The purpose of the second stage is to develop the Community Agenda, a concise, user-friendly document for day-to-day decision making by community leaders as they work toward achieving the desired future of the community. The Community Agenda includes the community's vision for the future, key issues and opportunities it chooses to address during the planning period, and its implementation program for achieving the stated vision and objectives. This format not only provides community leaders with this vision for developing the community but it also provides a mechanism by which to make the vision a reality.

Profile of Hart County

What is now Hart County was part of the Cherokee Nation until the Cherokee relinquished their lands to the state through various treaties in the late 1700's. Early settlements were made adjacent to major waterways such as the Savannah and Tugaloo Rivers to take advantage of the rich bottomland most suitable area for farming. Tobacco began as the main staple but was quickly abandoned in the early 1800s. Over time the farm economy diversified until cotton began to dominate the antebellum period around 1850.

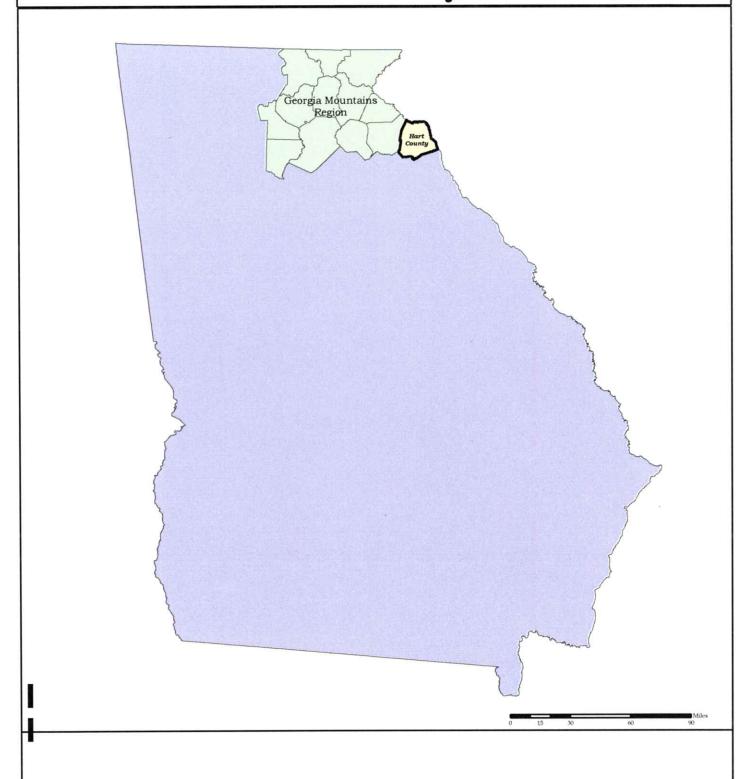
In late 1853 Hart County was created from portions of Franklin and Elbert Counties. The County was named for Revolutionary War heroine Nancy Hart, and lies on the eastern edge of Georgia, along the Savannah River/Lake Hartwell boundary between Georgia and South Carolina.

By the time of the Great Depression in 1929 the cotton industry in Hart County began to fade. A series of government supported efforts would slowly aid the development of industry in and around Hart County while farming began to recover. In 1950 the United State Congress authorized the construction of Hartwell Dam. By 1961, Lake Hartwell was completed and full, and with it began the second decline of agriculture. This time, however, the changes were not due to economic woes but by as a byproduct of growth in manufacturing related industries.

Today, Hart County is noted for its location immediately south of Interstate 85 near Lavonia, situated within one of the fastest growing areas of the United States, surrounded by rapidly expanding metropolitan areas; Atlanta, Gainesville and Athens, Georgia, and the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson metropolitan area of South Carolina.

There are two incorporated cities within Hart County. Hartwell is the county seat and the largest of the two at just over 4,200 residents. It is located in the center of the county close to Lake Hartwell. The other city is Bowersville, a small community in northwestern Hart County with approximately 340 people. Combined the county was estimated to have 24,036 residents in 2005.

Location Map Hart County



A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE SUMBITTAL OF THE COMMUNITY AGENDA FOR HART COUNTY TO THE GEORGIA MOUNTAINS RDC FOR DCA APPROVAL

WHEREAS, the Hart County Board of Commissioners have completed the draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan as part of the 10-year Plan Update.

WHEREAS, this document was prepared according to the rules and regulations of the State of Georgia, and the required public hearing was held on October 4, 2007.

BE I THEREFORE RESOLVED, that the Hart County Board of Commissioners does hereby transmit the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update to the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center for transmittal to the DCA for approval.

Adopted this 23rd day of October, 2007

R C Oglesby, Chairman Hart County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This is the summary listing and discussion of issues and opportunities identified for Hart County. Many were first discussed during development of the Community Assessment, with some identified through subsequent analysis and consideration. All of the ones ultimately listed, however, should be considered and preferably resolved as Hart County moves towards achieving its goals. The elements discussed include:

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

Population

The basis for all of a community's strategies involved in economic development, capital improvement projects, and land use regulation is to promote the welfare of the existing and future populations. Understanding the characteristics of both the present and projected populations allows opportunities for economic expansion without diluting the quality of services provided. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's needs:

Issues:

- Incoming population growth (likely high)
- Monitoring surrounding demographic patterns
- Accommodating notable increase in retirement age population
- Maintain improvements in education
- Need to improve household income levels

- ✓ *Policy*: Network with neighboring communities Assign staff to collect information (Demographic, development trends) on other communities on an annual basis. Maintain open communication so as to stay aware of regional trends and issues. Cooperate with neighboring communities by offering similar information about Hart County.
- ✓ Annual Report of Demographics Develop a regular report that provides population and demographic data to County Commission and Department managers. This will ensure all facets of County operations are designed to address current trends and issues. The trends found within can be monitored for progress versus the projections outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. GMRDC is available to assist with this effort.
- ✓ Learn about impacts of retirement age populations Contact Chamber, GMRDC, and DCA and other organizations to research scope and type of impacts of retirement age populations: Social and economic demands, health care needs, etc. Consider a study specifically for Hart County, or possible workshop.

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. A community's ability to adequately serve the present and projected demands for such services depends on identifying concerns with the spatial distribution and conditions affecting service delivery. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's needs for public facilities and services:

Issues:

- Need for additional jail space. Possible expansion of existing facility
- Must replace Reed Creek fire station with a larger facility over the next 20 years
- Funding sources for expansion of water service in the county
- Possible needs for expanded sewer service for industrial development and to minimize impacts of septic systems
- Need additional recreation facilities, particularly those for retirement age residents
- Need for Hart County Hospital to implement strategic plan
- Improve response times for EMS
- Possible need for more nursing and personal care homes
- Need to improve library facilities
- Need for additional middle school space
- Possible need for transportation plan
- Need for expanded/new animal shelter

Opportunities:

- Ample water supply
- Quality utilities
- Available land

Possibility for trails and alternate transportation

- ✓ Expansion of jail
- ✓ Develop Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- ✓ Identify site for new fire station
- ✓ Consider Transportation Plan County should at least develop list of prioritized issues
 for communicating to GDOT and monitoring coordination of State projects. County can
 also build upon Rural Transit Plan developed by the GMRDC. Inclusion of a bike route
 and trail element would also be encouraged if the County finds a strong need or
 opportunity for either/both mthods of travel and recreation.
- ✓ Expansion/Renovation of Library
- ✓ Identify site for new middle school
- ✓ Consider investment in animal shelter GMRDC is providing the County with a cost-benefit study of several options for investing in a local animal shelter. Recommendation may suggest investing in expansion and renovation of existing facility in Lavonia or investing in a new facility within the county. County should follow through with one of the recommended options and strive to support a quality animal shelter.
- ✓ Inventory funding sources for water and sewer Contact EPD and GMRDC to compile a list of outside funding options for investment in public water supply systems and public sewer. Develop a timetable for grant and loan applications and schedule for construction of system improvements.
- ✓ Water system expansion: Phase 1 Based on expansion plan for constructing new main lines throughout the county
- ✓ Develop/ Implement sewer expansion plan In conjunction with partnering communities and the HCWSA

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. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's needs:

Issues:

- Changing economic conditions; Need to expand economic base
- Need to attract quality labor pool, particularly among education and health service professionals
- Need to increase average wage levels
- Need for more professional, skilled employment opportunities

Opportunities:

- Quality utilities and infrastructure
- Interstate accessibility
- Access to metropolitan areas

- ✓ Consider regular review of economic conditions Invite the Chamber, Development Authorities and GMRDC to assist the County with regular review of economic conditions. Possibly as a workshop and/or as annual report. This will ensure County and all stakeholders have latest, comparable knowledge about job loss and creation in area, trends in employment, etc.
- ✓ Assist IDA with targeted recruitment Make sure the County is aware of the types of industries the IDA is working to attract/expand, and specifically of those industries' needs for public facilities and services and that those needs are being addressed.
- ✓ Policy: Support region's industrial parks Where possible, the County should continue its support for industrial and major office parks within the region through the coordination of utilities and infrastructure, development policies, etc.
- ✓ Policy: Support region's post-secondary education facilities Where possible, the County should continue its support for area colleges and universities through the

coordination of satellite facilities and programs and cooperative efforts with local high schools.

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. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's housing needs:

Issues:

- Need to maintain variety of housing types and increase volume of quality, affordable housing
- Need for more housing for the elderly
- Continue reduction in substandard housing units
- Need to understand economic impact of seasonal housing units

Opportunities:

- Utilities and technology make Hart County more accessible
- Volume of "quality of life" factors

- ✓ Study substandard housing conditions Develop detailed inventory of units and parts of the county with concentrations of substandard housing. Identify measures the County can take to encourage reinvestment.
- ✓ Study impact of seasonal housing units Consult with DCA, GMRDC and other organizations to learn about economic and social impacts of seasonal housing. Consider workshop or report identifying any concerns for Hart County.

Natural Resources

A community's natural resources are the native conditions and elements that contribute to the local character and livelihood, and 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. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's needs

Issues:

- Maintaining water quality of Lake Hartwell and area streams
- Protection of environmentally sensitive areas
- Consideration of measures to preserve prime agricultural lands
- Consideration of land management measures
- Protection of endangered species

Opportunities:

- Parcel-level GIS database and new aerial imagery in development
- Modern variety of land management resources available for consideration
- Volume and variety of outdoor and agriculture related tourism opportunities
- Variety of parks and recreation land established

- ✓ Review environmental protection policies Present list of existing policies to County Commission, consider need for any additions or amendments.
- ✓ Review of environmental conditions with GIS Upon completion of the parcel-level GIS database for Hart County, have the GMRDC present a report or workshop highlighting the development within and around environmental sensitive areas.
- ✓ Review agriculture in Hart County Consider inventory of formal agricultural operations and prime agricultural land within the county. Study with GMRDC, Georgia Farm Bureau and UGA the projected economic impact of agriculture within the community and the need (if any) of any special measures to preserve specific lands or practices.

✓ Policy: Support DNR TMDL program - Stay knowledgeable of current TMDL status of streams within Hart County. Identify any measures for direct action by the County that would aid the remediation.

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. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's needs

Issues:

- Possible loss of existing and potential historic structures through demolition or neglect
- Lack of formal inventory of historic and archaeological sites

Opportunities:

- Framework for inventory of historic resources and sites available through this planning process
- Increased markets for historic and agricultural tourism
- Availability of preservation resources and programs through GMRDC, Ga HPD and other organizations

- ✓ Develop historic resources inventory With the GMRDC, complete an inventory of the existing and potential historic resources within the County. Identify the conditions of each and any measures the County could or should take to preserve them and encourage reinvestment.
- ✓ Consider historic and agri-tourism study Upon the completion of the inventory of historic resources, study the potential for expanded tourism related to historic-sites. Consider coordination with agricultural related businesses and county's rural character.

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. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's needs

Issues:

- Ability to improve cooperation with the Army Corps of Engineers
- Need for more networking with neighboring communities to monitor growth trends

Opportunities:

- Able to expand existing intergovernmental cooperative actions
- Existing Joint Development Authority available for economic development
- Improved information and technology for regional growth management

- ✓ Policy: Network with neighboring communities Assign staff to collect information (Demographic, development trends) on other communities on an annual basis. Maintain open communication so as to stay aware of regional trends and issues. Cooperate with neighboring communities by offering similar information about Hart County.
- ✓ Policy: Network with partner organizations (Chamber, Corps, Dev. Authority, etc) To ensure the County is fully aware of conditions and to improve communications between the County and other organizations, consider an annual report presented by staff on the status and conditions at various facilities/programs/ organizations within Hart County. Make sure the Commission understands the various need and identifies any potential areas for providing direct support.

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. The following trends and issues identified for Hart County must be considered during the planning period to ensure the County is responding to the community's needs

Issues:

- Desire to protect community's rural character
- Need to preserve land use balance of housing, commercial and industrial uses in high growth corridors
- · Low support for land management measures
- Need for coordinating growth with utilities

Opportunities:

- Improved land use information available through GIS
- Opportunity for cooperative land use planning with GMRDC and adjacent communities
- Modern variety of land management resources available for consideration

- ✓ Consider study to define rural character The planning process identified desire to retain rural character, with varying concepts on the most important factors contributing to that trait. The County should consider a follow-up effort to refine the definitions of rural character and ensure the County is preserving its most critical elements. Methods to consider include a formal study and report, a single workshop, or a survey.
- ✓ Land use forum with communities along Ga 17 Given the pending improvements in GIS information and new aerial imagery expected within a couple years, and noting that GDOT has improvement plans for the road, Hart County should conduct a land use and development forum for communities along the Ga 17 corridor. Participants could include the GMRDC, Franklin County and the cities along this corridor. This would allow each community to view their plans in context and facilitate discussion of coordinate improvement and land management measures.

COMMUNITY VISION

The Community Vision is intended to paint a picture of what the community desires to become. This includes a complete description of the development patterns to be encouraged within the jurisdiction and provides overall guidelines for the qualities by which the community will measure itself an define success.

Future Development Scenario

The Future Development Scenario delineates the boundaries of major character areas throughout the entire community. It builds upon the Recommended Character Areas identified in the Community Assessment and may involve adjusted boundaries and/or modify the number or types of character areas based on discussions about desired future development patterns.

Defining Narrative

The overall development desired for Hart County will compliment existing patterns and scale, allowing the county to retain much of its rural character. Higher density land uses will be directed toward the cities and areas with existing utility capacity, reserving the bulk of the county for agricultural functions, large-lot residential estates and occasional commercial or professional operations the compliment the community.

One important factor to be considered in developing the Future Development Scenario for Hart County is the absence of major land use management policies. The County does have environmental protection measures in place, but does not have any type of formal zoning. To help manage the impacts of growth, the County can direct and influence development through the placement and scale of utilities, management of any improvements to local roads, criteria for subdivisions and minimum lot sizes. Areas where the County wishes to remain sparsely developed will see little public investment, whereas areas targeted for receiving growth and higher densities will see major investment in utilities and services.

Building upon those recommended in the Community Assessment, the Future Development Scenario for Hart County features 9 Character Areas. Each area has properties that will shape its development in unique fashion, while still contributing to the character of the whole county.

Note: Part of the planning process involves measuring local objectives against the Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) outlined by the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), as completed in the Community Assessment. Of the 17 QCOs identified, the following were considered applicable to Hart County:

- Traditional Neighborhoods
- Sense of Place
- Transportation Alternatives
- Regional Identity
- Heritage Preservation
- Environmental Protection

- Open Space Preservation
- Growth Preparedness
- Appropriate businesses
- Employment Options
- Housing Options
- Regional Cooperation

Character Areas

Greater Royston

Location – Southwestern corner of Hart County, surrounding the City of Royston.

Description – The goal of this area is to support the role of Royston as a minor regional center. It will foster a collection of neighborhood scale residential use with a variety of commercial, office and other public uses.

Of the cities along the Ga 17 corridor Royston is the southern destination for commercial and employment activity centers. Thanks to the medical facilities it functions on a scale comparable to Hartwell and Lavonia, and has the utility capacity to sustain larger commercial centers.

Land use in this area should compliment this distinction. Residential uses can include single family and multi-family residential units, as well as specialty units such as those for the aged or infirmed. Preferences should be given to traditional neighborhood forms, with sidewalks and smaller blocks, that allow newer development to feel compatible with established residences and, where possible, enable pedestrian accessibility.

Given the presence of water and sewer service it is expected that Royston will continue to serve as a destination for many services and activities unavailable in the smaller cities of Canon and Bowersville, as well as for rural portions of Hart, Elbert and Franklin Counties. Commercial and office activity can be either neighborhood scale or larger. Royston does feature a couple conventional strip shopping centers, though updated design features that decrease the impact of the automobile are preferable. Building heights of 3 and possibly 4 stories are possible close to the urban core of the city. As these uses are located further away from the urbanized areas, they should adopt smaller scales (under 3 stories) and seek to blend in with the rural landscape. It is expected the transition to purely rural environments will progress more quickly than with surrounding Hartwell.

Some industrial activity could also be sustained within this area, pending the availability of utilities. Such uses would be prohibited from nuisance activities that might impact surrounding residential and public uses, but there are opportunities for such larger scale developments in this area.

Appropriate Land Uses -

Single family residential Mutli-family residential Commercial Office Institutional Light industrial Churches Parks and recreation

Related QCOs -

•	Traditional Neighborhoods	Connection with established Royston
•	Sense of Place	Intention of complimenting Rosyton's scale and small-town character
•	Transportation Alternatives	Potential with higher density areas
•	Regional Identity	Maintains region's identity as rural agricultural center with many small towns
•	Heritage Preservation	Complimenting existing styles and communities; Encouraging reinvestment
•	Environmental Protection	NA
•	Open Space Preservation	NA
•	Appropriate businesses	Locating higher uses within urbanized areas
•	Employment Options	Royston is an economic center capable of sustaining jobs and commerce
•	Housing Options	This area will focus on enhancing quality and options of housing, and attract growth so as to relieve pressure from rural areas
•	Regional Cooperation	Coordination with Royston

Implementation Measures -

- ✓ Select allocation of water, sewer and paved roads within this area to attract/ control development
- ✓ Attempt to concentrate some growth so as to deflect pressure from elsewhere in County
- ✓ Encourage development of commercial, office and industrial centers
- \checkmark Monitoring development for application of environmental standards
- ✓ Encourage open-space preservation in new development

Greater Bowersville

Location - Western edge of Hart County surrounding the cities of Bowersville and Canon.

Description – While part of the Ga 17 corridor that is experiencing growth pressures, these cities represent modest civic centers amidst rural settings. Neither functions as a commercial or employment center save for several smaller businesses mostly catering to immediate residents, nor is there the volume of water or sewer available to support higher densities. The goal of this area is to compliment these roles of smaller town centers, offering a minor shift from purely rural, agricultural surroundings with small communities based almost exclusively on housing.

Neither Bowersville nor Canon has large, established neighborhoods. Most housing associated with these communities remains rural in character (larger lots, often on active farms), with modest clustering of units coming together around the town centers. Housing introduced into the area, even in subdivisions, should be of larger lot sizes than traditional neighborhoods like those in Royston and Hartwell. Additional design considerations with landscaping, buffering and the inclusion of open space should be incorporated so as to distinguish this area from formal urbanizing areas.

Commercial uses should be restricted to neighborhood scale activities designed primarily to support area residents. Particularly as Ga 17 is improved and likely moved out of this part of Hart County, most through traffic should be regional in nature and oriented to the immediately neighboring communities. As such larger, regional commercial activities should be reserved for areas in and around Hartwell, Lavonia and Royston.

There are some industrial operations around Bowersville and it is recognized that available water capacity and arterial access makes the area suitable for such uses. Additional industrial activity is encouraged providing such uses are prohibited from nuisance activities that might impact surrounding residential and public uses.

Appropriate Land Uses -

Single family residential Neighborhood Commercial Light industrial Churches Parks and recreation

Related QCOs –	
 Traditional Neighborhoods 	NA
• Sense of Place	Intention of complimenting scale and small- town character of Bowersville & Canon
 Transportation Alternatives 	NA
 Regional Identity 	Maintains region's identity as rural agricultural center with many small towns
 Heritage Preservation 	
 Environmental Protection 	Development should adhere to best management practices
 Open Space Preservation 	Seek to incorporate into new development
 Appropriate businesses 	Restricted to those complimenting area residents
 Employment Options 	NA
 Housing Options 	This area will focus on enhancing quality and options of housing
 Regional Cooperation 	Coordination with Bowersville, Canon

Implementation Measures -

- ✓ Select allocation of water, sewer and paved roads within this area to attract/ control development
- ✓ Attempt to concentrate some growth so as to deflect pressure from elsewhere in County
- ✓ Monitoring development for application of environmental standards
- ✓ Encourage open-space preservation in new development