










FOUNDATIONS

COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FUTURE

Adopted: February 17, 2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Board of Commissioners

- Chairman - Douglas R. Duncan, Jr.
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- Commissioner District 4 – Alison G. Couch

County Management

- County Manager – Scott J. Johnson
- Deputy County Manager – Glenn Kennedy
- Deputy County Manager – J. Matt Schlachter

Planning Services Staff

- Scott Sterling, AICP, Planning Services Division Director
- Will Butler, AICP, Planning Manager
- Nayna Mistry, Community Planner
- Danielle Montgomery, AICP, Planner II
- Dylan Douglas, Planner I
- Lindsay Mixon, Executive Assistant

Foundations For the Future Steering Committee

- Russell Wilder
- Joe Edlemon
- Jim Cox
- Bryce Melear
- Carroll Proctor
- Troy Akers
- Mike Wiltse
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- Sarah McDonald
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- Dr. Steven Flynt
- Jonathan Crawford
- Keith Lawrence

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With assistance from: All Together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 | Introduction 5

02 | Community Profile 21

03 | Vision Statement and Goals 31

04 | Land Use and Development 35

05 | Housing and Neighborhoods 47

06 | Commercial and Industrial Areas 55

07 | Transportation 69

08 | Community Facilities 83

09 | Natural Environment 103

10 | Implementation 115


COLUMBIA COUNTY
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01

Introduction

The *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan* sets the stage for policy making and will responsibly guide the County's growth over the next 20 years. The Comprehensive Plan guides future development to help it align with the community's vision while supporting a high quality of life. This chapter introduces what the Comprehensive Plan is, its purpose, and how it should be used.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

This Comprehensive Plan is the community's official guide for the future, intended to guide development and growth over the next 20 years. Comprehensive plans are built on past planning efforts, relevant existing policies, and community input from an extensive outreach process. For Columbia County, the Comprehensive Plan presents a cohesive vision that represents the interests of residents, the business community, and community stakeholders. While the Plan's recommendations may take decades to implement, the document should be revisited every five years to determine if updates are needed.

Purpose of the Plan

Georgia's Planning Act of 1989 (O.C.G.A. 50-8-1 et seq.) authorizes counties to prepare local comprehensive plans and directs the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to set minimum planning standards. In Georgia, DCA-approved plans confer Qualified Local Government (QLG) status, which opens eligibility for key state funding and programs that help implement the plan. Plans must address key topics such as land use, housing, economic development, transportation, natural and cultural resources, and community facilities. The purpose of the Plan is to guide decisions related to development regulations, capital improvements, and other local policies and actions. It is a tool for the community to help coordinate efforts and direct how the County may use its resources.

Use of the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan serves several important functions for the County and should be used on a regular basis by County officials, municipalities, local staff, regional developers, and other stakeholders. When properly used, the Comprehensive Plan does the following:

Communicates the County's Vision

The Plan serves as an expression of the community's aspirations for future growth and change. It outlines land use and development priorities and establishes direction for long-term growth.

Informs Development Proposals

The Plan guides and assists in the evaluation of public and private development proposals, as well as infrastructure investments, and helps ensure proposed development supports the County's goals and long-term objectives.

Foundation for the Regulatory Framework

The Plan is a foundation for zoning regulations, the official zoning map, and other decisions guided by these regulations. Amendments to the County code should be made to support the long-term objectives of the Plan. Zoning and development regulations can be effective implementation tools to realize the vision and recommendations of the Plan

Coordinate Initiatives

The Plan guides and coordinates planning initiatives that affect the County at local and regional levels. The Plan aids and informs efforts related to housing, business and commerce, transportation, community facilities and recreation , tourism, and natural resources.

Supports the CIP and Budgeting Process

The Plan informs the development of the County's Capital Improvement Programs (CIP) and budgeting processes by helping to establish priority expenditures and sequence capital improvement programming in a manner that is consistent with its goals and objectives.

Prepares for Future Studies

The Plan outlines a path forward but cannot address every issue the County faces in detail. It identifies additional studies and future action steps that may be needed to address specific issues.

Informs and Educates

The Plan is a valuable resource for the County Manager, Board of Commissioners, Planning Commission and staff , as well as for local organizations, businesses, and residents. It should inform the community of upcoming initiatives and provide key information. The Plan is also an effective marketing tool that can be used to promote the community and highlight opportunities for investment and economic development.

The Planning Process

The Plan is built upon the input of the public, community leaders, staff, various development departments, and other key stakeholders within the County. This phased process ensured that the Comprehensive Plan reflects the community's values, addresses current challenges, and provides direction for future growth and development in Columbia County. The planning process is comprised of the following tasks:

Task 1: Project Initiation and Management

The planning process began with meetings and workshops with County staff, the Steering Committee, and the County Board of Commissioners. Research and fieldwork on existing conditions in Columbia County were also conducted.

Task 2: Community Engagement and Existing Conditions Analysis

The community engagement process began with the launch of the project website, followed by two online community surveys and the use of map.social, an interactive mapping tool. There was also a community kick-off event where the project team conducted interviews and workshops with key stakeholders and departments as an initial data-gathering and community engagement exercise. Pop-up events and do-it-yourself workshop kits were also used to collect community input. The project team then synthesized and analyzed major outreach themes, reviewed past plans and studies, and mapped existing conditions to inform the Comprehensive Plan.

Task 3: Plan Visioning and Key Recommendations

The Plan's vision, goals, key recommendations, and character areas were developed based on input from public engagement, fieldwork, and data analysis completed in tasks 1 and 2. These draft materials were shared with County staff and stakeholders to gather initial feedback and confirm the project direction before full plan development. The results focused the planning effort and guided subsequent tasks.

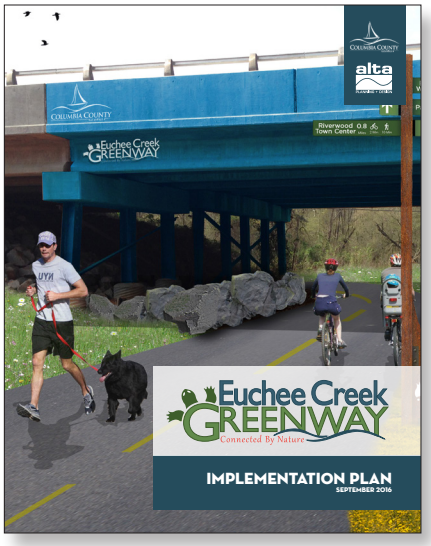
Task 4: Draft Comprehensive Plan Elements – Future Development Guide

This task was focused on preparing preliminary County-wide recommendations for the core Comprehensive Plan elements, which were developed based on findings from the Existing Conditions Memorandum, community feedback, and the established vision and key recommendations. The Comprehensive Plan elements include land use and development, housing and neighborhoods, commercial and industrial areas, transportation, community facilities, natural areas, and implementation.

Task 5: Draft and Final Comprehensive Plan

The Project Team developed draft and final versions of the Comprehensive Plan and prepared a practical and actionable implementation strategy describing the actions required to accomplish the Plan's goals, policies, and recommendations. The final draft document was presented to the County Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners for adoption.









Past Plans and Studies

Euchee Creek Greenway Implementation Plan (2016)

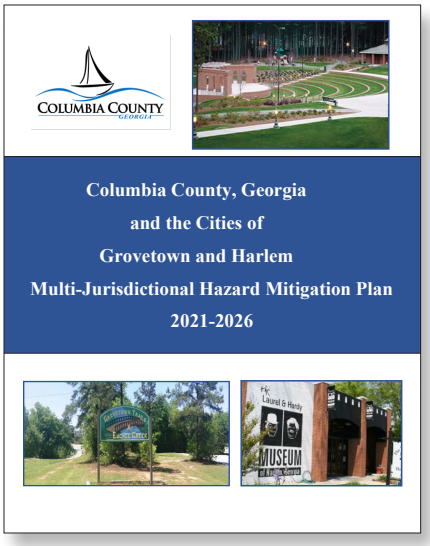
Adopted in 2000, the *Columbia County Greenspace Master Plan* established a goal to preserve at least 20% of the County's land as greenspace. In 2001, a seven-member Greenspace Advisory Board was created to identify and recommend parcels for acquisition and to pursue greenway connections, such as the Euchee Creek Greenway. In 2016 the *Greenspace Master Plan* was updated to the *Euchee Creek Greenway Master Plan*, with a focus on developing new greenway corridors throughout the County. Phase I has been completed, and most of the identified phases in the plan have been funded, with design underway, and construction expected in 2026 or 2027. The Comprehensive Plan is built upon the strategies outlined in the *Greenspace Plan* to reaffirm the goal of preserving 20% of the County as greenspace.

Harnessing Opportunities for Talent: An Economic Development Strategy for Columbia County, GA (2016)

The Development Authority of Columbia County (DACC) and the County adopted an economic development strategy to grow jobs and investment by enhancing infrastructure, attracting and retaining businesses, and supporting targeted initiatives. The economic development strategy recommended developing new industrial parks for manufacturing and office users. The Comprehensive Plan integrated these priorities and analyzed existing opportunities to align land use and infrastructure through the Future Land Use Plan. The Plan also coordinated decisions to advance long-term economic goals and community-driven priorities.

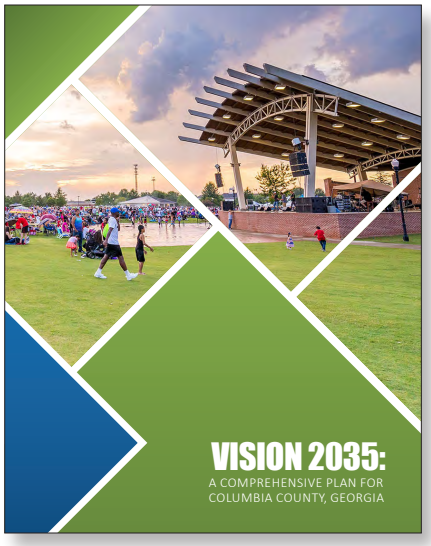
ARTS 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (2020)

The *ARTS 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)* established a long-range framework for transportation in the Augusta Regional Transportation Study area. The plan identifies near- and long-term projects and policies for an integrated, multi-modal network, roads and safety, transit, freight, aviation, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities. Although regional in scope, the MTP remains the County's primary reference for transportation infrastructure development priorities. The Comprehensive Plan builds on MTP's recommendations to guide transportation infrastructure development and capital programming and improve mobility and safety across the County.



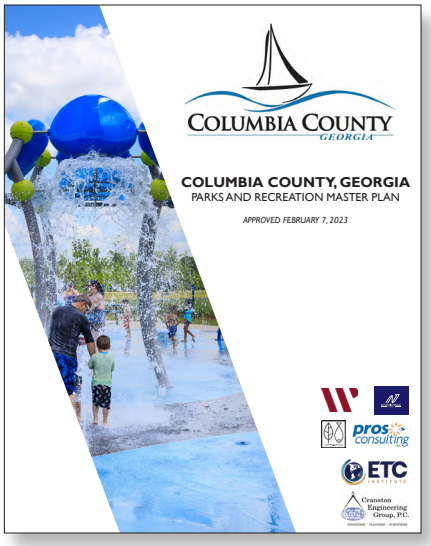
Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021-2026)

The *Columbia County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP)* sets a strategy for reducing disaster risk in the County in compliance with the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. Identifying hazards, assessing vulnerabilities, and prioritizing mitigation actions through a collaborative process with municipalities, regional partners, businesses, and residents, the Plan establishes a standing schedule for maintenance, updates, and public involvement. The Hazard Mitigation Plan remains the County's baseline for resilience; the Comprehensive Plan is informed by the HMP's hazard maps and conservation guidelines, which guided growth away from high-risk and environmentally sensitive areas and to sequence resilience investments in the Capital Improvement Plan.



Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan (2021)

The *Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan* was the County's previous comprehensive plan which provided a 15-year framework for managing growth. The plan's components addressed population change, economic development, housing, natural and historic resources, land use, community facilities, transportation, broadband, and intergovernmental coordination. A core element was the Future Development Strategy and its Future Development Map, which designated 11 character areas, including activity centers and mixed-use districts, to varied neighborhoods and rural open space, these areas providing tailored guidance for land use and investment across the County. The *Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan* laid the foundation for this Plan. The Plan evaluated completed actions, refined or replaced items that no longer fit, and realigned policies and the Future Land Use and Development framework to current data and community priorities.



Columbia County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2023)

Adopted through a community-driven process, the *Columbia County Parks, Recreation, and Events Master Plan* sets strategies for parks and recreational systems that serve residents and nearly one million annual visitors, with amenities ranging from campgrounds and athletic fields to skate parks, dog parks, walking trails, and a senior center. The plan highlights household priorities, including paved walking, hiking, and biking trails, as well as adult fitness and wellness programs. It provides an implementation schedule for facilities, programs, and natural-resource management. The Comprehensive Plan carries forward the Master Plan's priorities by aligning park and trail investments with growth areas.

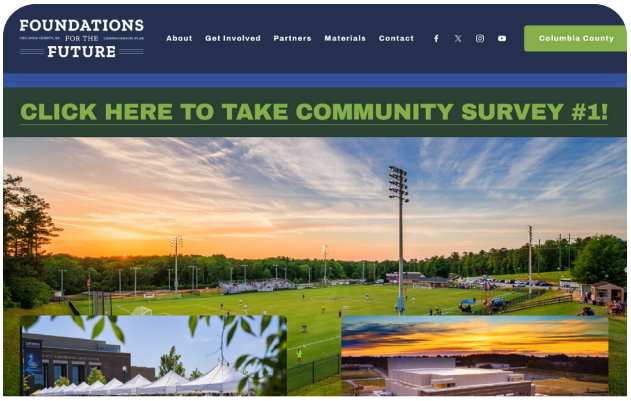
Engagement Wave #1

Kicking off in February 2025, the planning process began with a foundational engagement phase focused on identifying Columbia County's strengths and assets. This first wave of community input established a baseline understanding of what residents, businesses, and stakeholders value most about their community. These insights formed the foundation for all subsequent planning discussions, ensuring future recommendations would build upon the county's established strengths.

Project Website

Format: **Digital**
Unique Visitors: **2.2K** & Email Sign-ups: **400+**

The project website, ***futurecolumbiacounty.com***, serves as the community's online hub for everything related to the plan.



Interactive County Map

Format: **Digital**
Locations Pinned: **44**

Participants placed location-based comments on the map.social platform, identifying community assets, development priorities, and opportunities across various categories.

Kick-off Discussions

Format: **In-Person & Digital**

The launch phase included meetings with City staff, department heads, downtown partners, the Steering Committee, focus groups, interviews, the downtown plan working group, and local business owners to gather comprehensive input from all key stakeholders.



Project Launch Celebration

Format: **In-Person**
Attendees: **45+**

A community celebration with interactive exercises at the Columbia County Library in Evans brought together residents, local leaders, and partners to learn about the project and share their vision for the county's future.



Pop-up Events

Format: **In-Person**
Participants: **55+**

Pop-up events at three locations - McAllister's at Mullins Colony, Harlem Library, and Evans Towne Center Park - provided accessible opportunities for residents to engage with the project and share input on Columbia County's strengths and assets.



Community Survey #1

Format: **Digital**
Participants: **539**

The first survey, open from March 10 to April 30, 2025, gathered input on Columbia County's strengths and areas for improvement across land use, community services, transportation, parks and recreation, and overall character.

Engagement Wave #2

Building on Phase 1 insights, the second engagement phase launched in late spring 2025 with a focus on collaborative visioning. This phase shifted from identifying existing strengths to imagining Columbia County's future, bringing residents and stakeholders together to develop a shared vision and specific recommendations. Through interactive workshops and community events, participants translated their priorities into actionable ideas for growth, development, and quality of life.









Community Visioning Workshops

Format: **In-Person**
Attendees: **18+**

Two Community Visioning Workshops on May 22, 2025, at the Columbia County Exhibition Center brought together 18 participants to develop a shared vision for the county's future. Residents, business owners, and stakeholders worked in breakout groups using large maps to identify desired improvements, development opportunities, and priority areas across Columbia County.

Through collaborative mapping exercises and group discussions, participants translated their ideas into written vision statements and actionable recommendations. Each group presented their maps and big ideas to the larger assembly, creating a comprehensive collection of community input to guide the planning process and inform future county decision-making.

Pop-up Events

Format: **In-Person**
Participants: **225+**

Mobile pop-up activities at three locations - Chick-fil-A at Mullins Colony, Sunrise Grill in Martinez, and Evans Towne Center Park (with two separate events) - provided opportunities for residents to engage with the visioning process and share their ideas for Columbia County's future.

Community Survey #2

Format: **Digital**
Participants: **365**

The second survey, open from May 15 to August 3, 2025, gathered input on the community's character and needs, building on insights from the first survey to help shape Columbia County's future planning priorities and community vision.

Engagement Wave #3

Building on the collaborative vision developed in earlier phases, the third engagement phase launched in November 2025 to share draft recommendations and gather final community input. This phase invited residents and stakeholders to review proposed strategies and help ensure the final plan reflected community priorities. Through pop-up events, an open house, public hearings, and an online comment form, participants reviewed draft recommendations and provided feedback to help refine the plan before adoption.

Public Open House

Format: **In-Person**
Participants: **15+**

The Public Open House on November 20, 2025, at the Columbia County Exhibition Center encouraged the community to review the Draft Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan. Residents, business owners, and stakeholders explored draft recommendations organized by topic area, including land use, transportation, housing, parks and recreation, economic development, and community facilities.

Through interactive displays and direct engagement with the planning team, participants submitted comments via paper forms, asked questions about specific recommendations, and learned about upcoming public hearings. The feedback gathered provided valuable input to refine the draft plan before its presentation to the Board of Commissioners for consideration.

Pop-up Events

Format: **In-Person**
Participants: 205+

Mobile pop-up events at three locations on November 19 to 20, 2025 at Chick-fil-A at Mullins Colony, Sunrise Grill in Martinez, and Evans Towne Center Park, helped spread the word about the Draft Comprehensive Plan being available for public review and the upcoming Public Open House. The pop-ups met residents where they already were: grabbing breakfast, picking up lunch, or enjoying the holiday lights and ice skating rink at the park.

Website Plan Review Form

Format: **Digital**
Comments: 21

An online comment form on the project website provided the community with a convenient way to review the Draft Plan and submit feedback at their own pace. Through this digital platform, participants shared their thoughts on preserving Columbia County's rural character and raised questions about data centers. Some residents also expressed interest in understanding more about elected officials' priorities and the overall planning process.









COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The Columbia County Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan employs a comprehensive community engagement framework designed to solicit input from residents, business owners, community partners, and stakeholders across the county. Through a strategic combination of in-person forums and digital platforms, the planning process facilitates broad public participation to inform the development of a long-term vision for Columbia County's growth and development over the next 15 to 20 years.

This section presents an overview of key themes identified through community feedback. For detailed analysis and comprehensive insights, please refer to the Engagement Summary Appendix.

Key Themes

The following high-level priorities emerged from in-person and digital community engagement conducted between February and September 2025.

Everyday Infrastructure Investments

- Need for road, utility, and drainage improvements in older neighborhoods
- Traffic and congestion challenges
- Interest in more ways to get around

Managing Growth Thoughtfully

- Desire for slower, more balanced growth
- Housing diversity and attainability
- Protecting natural resources, green space, and community character

Enhancing Community Life and Places

- Enhanced parks and trail systems
- Expanded cultural, youth, and senior opportunities
- More family-friendly activities and events

Public Communication and Accessibility

- Improved communication and feedback opportunities
- Balanced county services
- Clear spending transparency



Needs and Opportunities

Needs and opportunities are gathered from public input and are key to creating goals for each of the facets of the Plan. Goals are broad and long-range desired outcomes. They are ambitious and will require the culmination of incremental actions to be fully achieved. The County's planning efforts should work to support these goals. Key recommendations identify a preliminary set of initiatives needed to support the Vision Statement; these start to form the outline for each element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Land Use and Development Patterns

- Growth outpacing planning
- Need for alternative transportation
- Growth should support quality of life
- Housing should work for everyone
- Desire to preserve rural character

Goal 1: Ensure that future development in the County follows a balanced approach to preservation and expansion by directing growth to areas served by infrastructure and utilities to limit patterns of sprawl.

Goal 2: Development in the County should include a range of complete neighborhoods, commercial districts, employment areas, with an emphasis on protecting its rural character and natural environment.

Key Recommendations:

- Review and align the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance with the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map to ensure successful implementation.
- Encourage smart and sustainable development practices to preserve rural areas across the County.
- Support a balanced mix of uses that create attractive residential areas, well-paying employment opportunities, lively commercial districts, high-quality open spaces, and recreation opportunities.
- Prioritize shared access, pedestrian improvements, landscaping, and signage upgrades along key commercial corridors.
- Coordinate with Harlem and Grovetown to align land use decisions, support shared goals, and promote thoughtful growth across community boundaries.
- Support land use transitions in development intensity to ensure new growth complements the character of existing areas.



Housing and Neighborhoods

- Housing should work for everyone
- Keep green space and community feel
- Youth and senior services
- Navigating tax concerns
- Preserve what makes us special

Goal 1: Expand the County's housing options by providing well-connected neighborhoods that offer diverse types of housing at varying price points, ensuring accessibility for existing and future residents.

Goal 2: Ensure that new housing and neighborhoods blend the County's rural character with future development.

Key Recommendations:

- Encourage development of senior housing, aging-in-place, and aging-in community housing options to meet residents' needs through all stages of life.
- Promote context-sensitive subdivision design by incorporating connectivity, sidewalks, and open space requirements, while allowing for flexibility and modified standards in rural or agricultural areas to preserve their character.
- Encourage non-monotonous design in new residential areas through various architectural styles, a mix of façade styles, and incorporating open space elements into subdivisions.
- Encourage renovating and preserving existing housing stock to maintain neighborhood character through regular code enforcement and preventive maintenance programs to strengthen existing neighborhoods.
- Consider offering incentives, such as reduced development fees, to encourage the preservation of natural landscape features in new residential development.
- Promote the development of a diverse housing stock to meet the needs of residents across all household sizes and income levels, with a focus on expanding homeownership opportunities through accessible and appropriately sized housing options.
- Identify areas in developed parts of the County that can support infill housing.



Commercial and Industrial Areas

- Need for a true downtown
- Cultural and social life
- Growth should support quality of life
- Staying and supporting local
- Local business and entertainment gap
- Data center input

Goal: Establish commercial and industrial areas that promote employment growth, enhance the tax base, and contribute to a resilient local economy with access to goods, services, entertainment, and recreation.

Key Recommendations:

- Balance regional economic growth strategies that benefit the entire community with targeted programs to support and expand locally owned businesses.
- Improve gateways and wayfinding in the County through new signage, landscaping, and beautification initiatives.
- Enhance access management in commercial areas through shared access points and reducing curb cuts to improve traffic flow.
- Explore funding tools like the Tax Allocation Districts (TADs) and Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) to support aesthetic improvements along commercial corridors, including enhancing landscaping, façade upgrades, reduced curb cuts, and the removal of billboard signs.
- Partner with the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce to recruit new businesses and expand business diversity to create local employment opportunities.
- Establish partnerships with local schools, vocational training programs, and the business community to develop industry specific workforce training programs that align with employer needs.
- Partner with the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County to support and enhance their business attraction, retention, and expansion programs.
- Encourage the development of context-sensitive commercial nodes, both rural and urban, at designated major intersections throughout the County, that offer convenient access to daily goods and services.
- Encourage the use of landscaping and buffering techniques to reduce the visual impact of industrial and commercial development, including truck traffic, and to provide a transition between industrial, commercial, and residential areas.
- Continue to develop Evans Towne Center, further establishing it as a pedestrian-friendly center of activity where residents and visitors gather to dine, shop, and enjoy public events and spaces.
- Following guidance from Vision 2035, complete a Martinez Redevelopment Plan.
- Collaborate with the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County to identify incentives and local funding options to support businesses development.



Transportation

- Traffic congestion challenges
- Need for alternative transportation
- Smarter road planning

Goal: Establish a comprehensive multi-modal transportation system that efficiently and safely connects residents and visitors to all areas of the County

Key Recommendations:

- Continue to identify and implement active transportation that can connect neighborhoods with parks, schools, and other essential services and amenities.
- Implement projects that improve the existing street network connectivity to provide alternative routes and system redundancy.
- Conduct access management studies along major corridors to improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, and enhance safety for all users.
- Evaluate Columbia County Public Transit's "Curb to Curb" service to identify opportunities for increasing ridership.
- Explore the feasibility of introducing fixed-route services, in addition to the "Curb to Curb" program, to improve efficiency and address mobility needs of residents county-wide.
- Continue collaboration with the ARTS Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to identify, design, and fund projects that improve county-wide connectivity.



Community Facilities

- Investing in aging infrastructure
- More services in more places

Key Recommendations:

- Build and maintain strong working relationships with Fort Eisenhower to support coordinated planning efforts and shared goals.
- Align the Community Work Program with the Comprehensive Plan to meet the infrastructure needs and priorities of the community.
- Continue coordinating with the Columbia County School Board to monitor population growth and development trends to help assess future school facility needs and support the Board's ability to meet current and future demand.
- Increase investment in arts, music, sports, and festivals to strengthen Columbia County's cultural scene and attract both residents and visitors.
- Explore the feasibility of creating a sports complex to attract state, regional, and national-level sporting events and tournaments.
- Identify and pursue opportunities to provide cultural and recreation activities, programming, and facilities that appeal to children, young adults, and seniors.
- Collaborate with Fort Gordon and regional partners to implement recommendations from the Compatible Use Study (CUS).



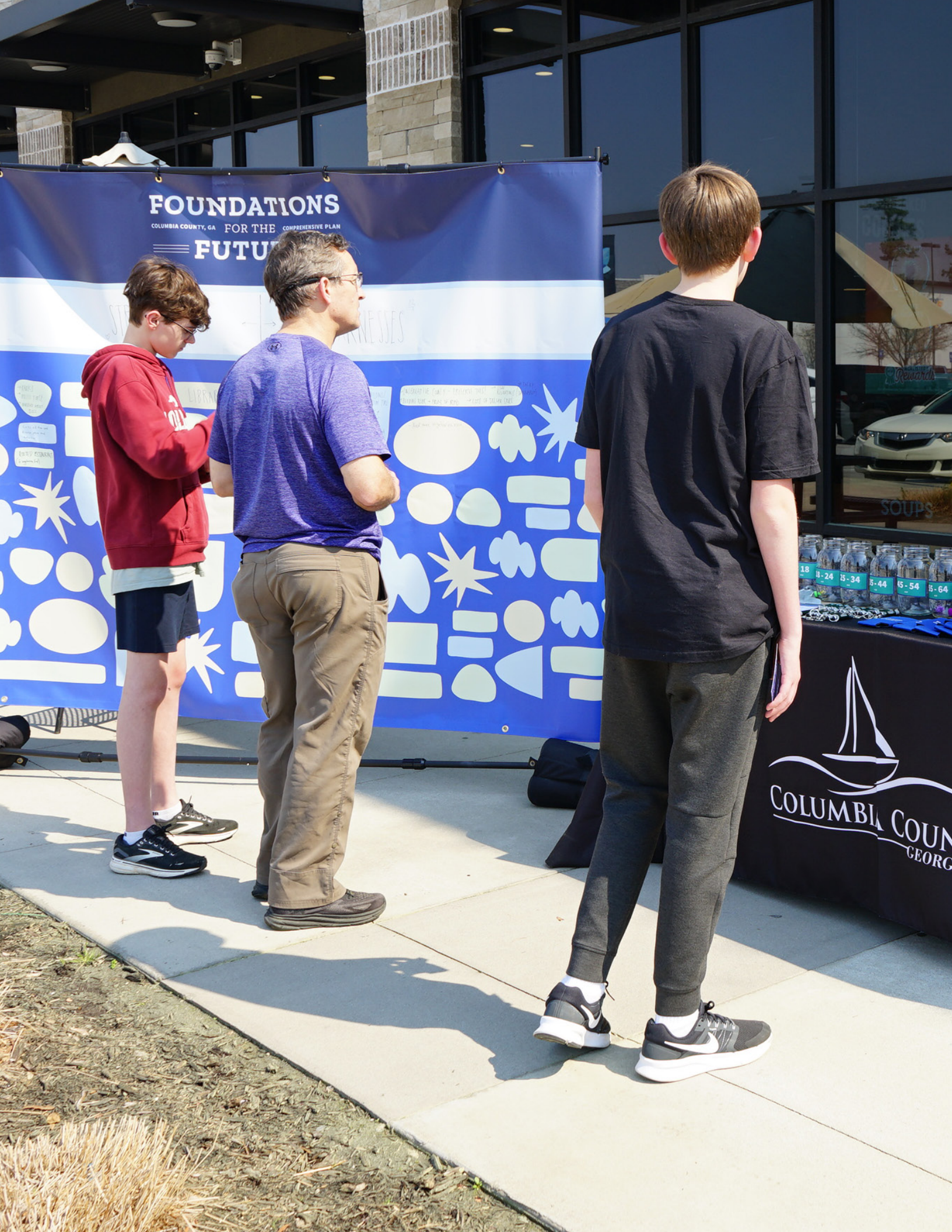
Natural Resources and Environment

- Outdoor recreation is a priority
- Better parks and recreation options
- Keep green space and community feel.

Goal: Maintain and enhance park areas to serve residents' evolving needs while protecting the County's natural areas and resources.

Key Recommendations:

- Update the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County's Economic Development Strategic Plan to include eco-tourism.
- Expand and enhance existing trails and greenways, like the Euchee Creek Greenway, to connect neighborhoods and recreation areas across the County.
- Coordinate with the U.S. Army of Corps of Engineers (USACE) to ensure any future development proposals align with the J. Storm Thurmond Project Shoreline Management Plan.
- Explore opportunities to increase public access to the Savannah River.
- Promote Clarks Hill Lake as a destination for recreation and tourism.
- Enhance recreational access to natural areas, especially Clarks Hill Lake, by increasing trail connectivity along the lakefront.
- Enhance collaboration between Columbia County, state and federal agencies, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to align future development with shared regulations and park management goals.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18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
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02

Community Profile

The Community Profile chapter is intended to summarize baseline conditions, which establish a strong understanding of what Columbia County is like today, including the analysis of market and demographics. This chapter sets the foundation for where the community wants to go.









County Context

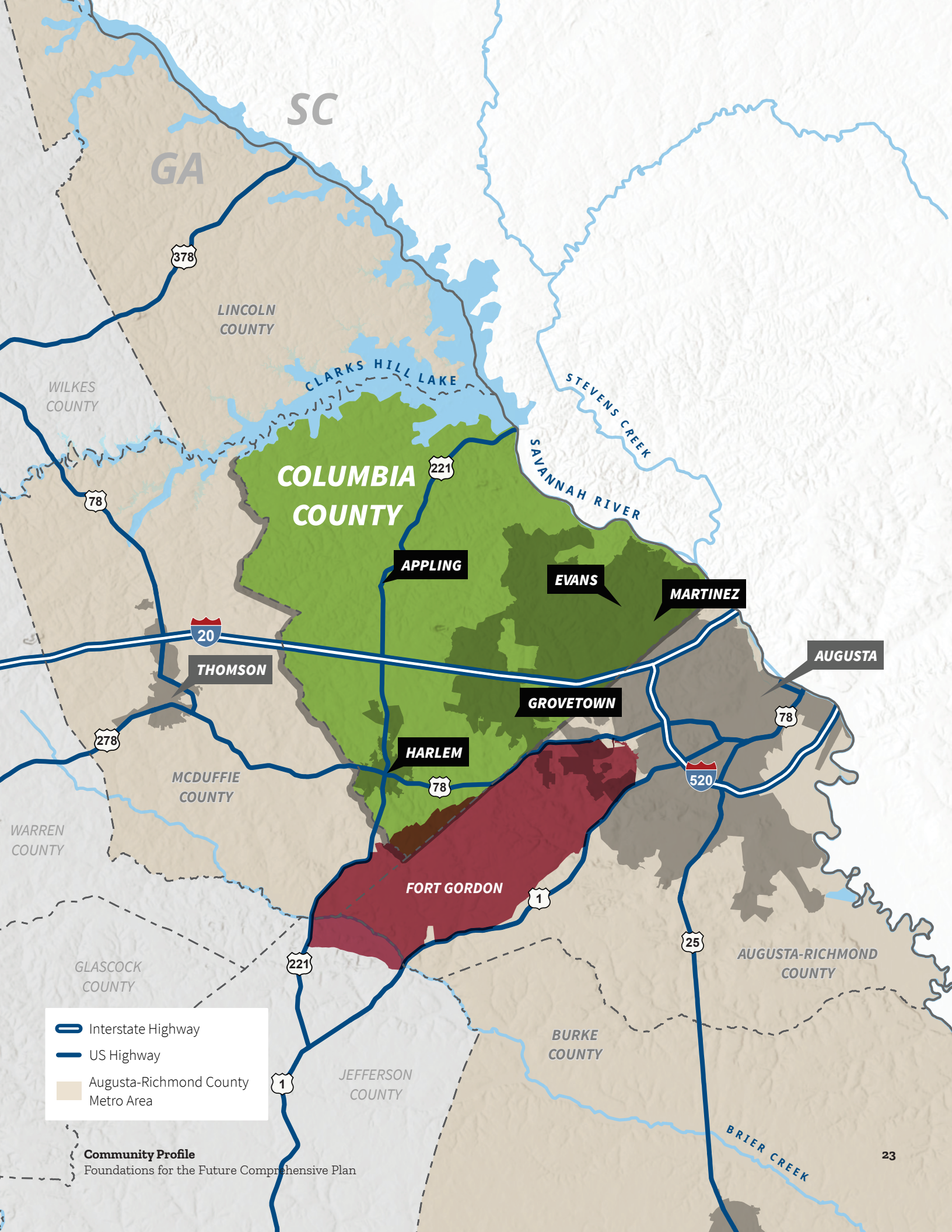
Columbia County shares a border with South Carolina. Columbia County is the fastest-growing County in the Augusta-Richmond Metropolitan Statistical Area. Its landscape features rolling hills, forests, and waterways, including Clarks Hill Lake (Lake Strom Thurmond), a major source of recreation and scenic beauty. The County includes the incorporated cities of Harlem and Grovetown, along with numerous unincorporated communities that contribute to its mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Columbia County was originally part of Richmond County and once included land areas now in McDuffie and Warren Counties. The arrival of railroads in the 1800s spurred growth in towns like Harlem and Grovetown, while Appling became the County seat.

The Great Depression caused population decline, but World War II marked a turning point with the creation of Camp Gordon (now Fort Gordon) in 1941, driving economic growth and reshaping settlement patterns. Strom Thurmond Lake was created in the 1950s, leading to recreation-based development. The construction of I-20 in the 1960s improved connectivity and spurred suburban growth.

By the 1980s, the County had evolved into a suburban community. Evans became the administrative hub of Columbia County. Major employers like John Deere established a presence near Grovetown, broadening the economic base. Infrastructure investments supported continued growth, with a focus on planned development, parks, and open space.

Columbia County is home to over 30 identified historic sites and multiple organizations dedicated to historic preservation. Its rapid growth, driven by proximity to Augusta, access to natural features like Clarks Hill Lake and the Savannah River, and transportation access via I-20 and U.S. 221, positions it as a regional center for business and recreation. Looking ahead, managing growth while preserving natural resources and community character will be critical to its future success.


SC
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LINCOLN COUNTY
WILKES COUNTY
CLARKS HILL LAKE
STEVENS CREEK
SAVANNAH RIVER
COLUMBIA COUNTY
APPLING
EVANS
MARTINEZ
AUGUSTA
THOMSON
GROVETOWN
HARLEM
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
WARREN COUNTY
FORT GORDON
GLASCOCK COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
BURKE COUNTY
JEFFERSON COUNTY
BRIER CREEK
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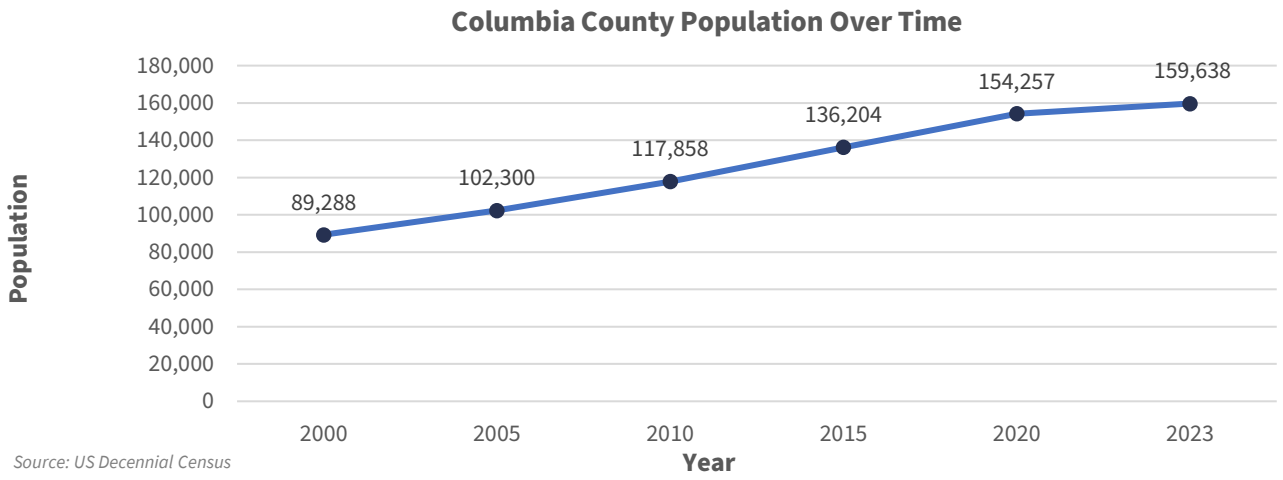
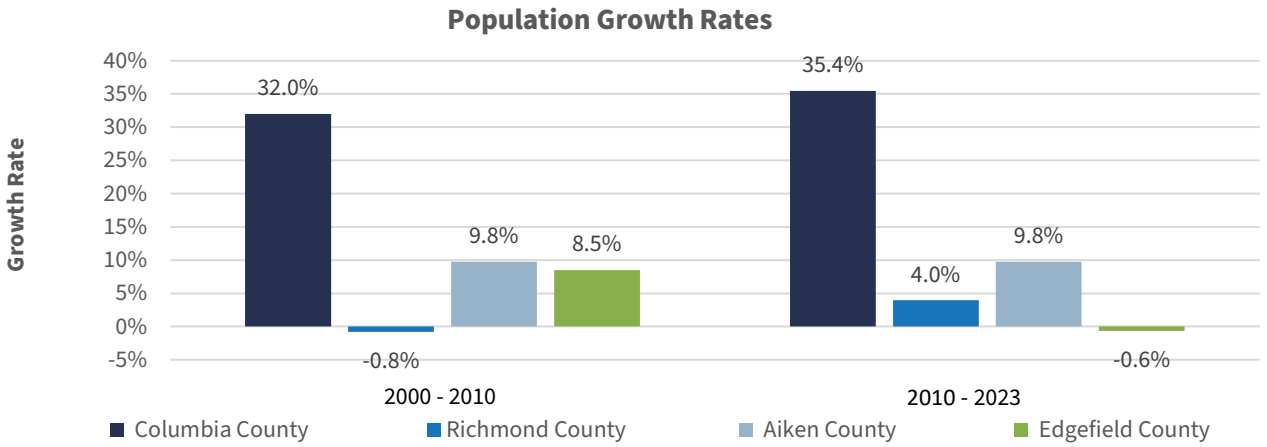
Interstate Highway
US Highway
Augusta-Richmond County Metro Area



Source: US Decennial Census



Source: 2000, 2010, and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

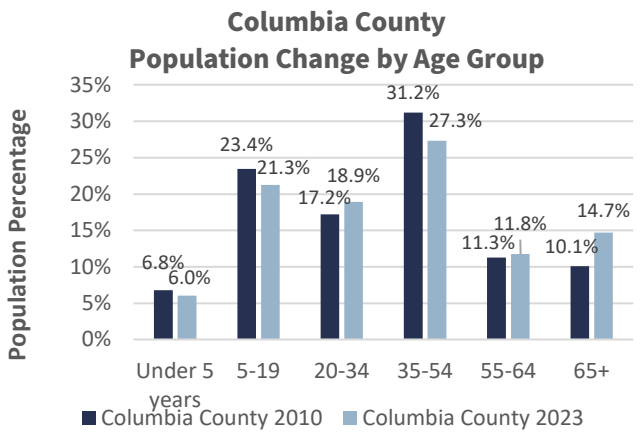
Demographic Snapshot

This section examines recent demographic and employment data primarily sourced from the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year estimates and the Decennial Census. Employment patterns by industry sector are analyzed using the U.S. Census Bureau's On the Map dataset covering the period from 2010 to 2022, the most recent data available. This section also provides a comparative analysis using benchmarks from Richmond County, Aiken County, and Edgefield County to offer regional context, enabling Columbia County to understand its place within broader demographic patterns.

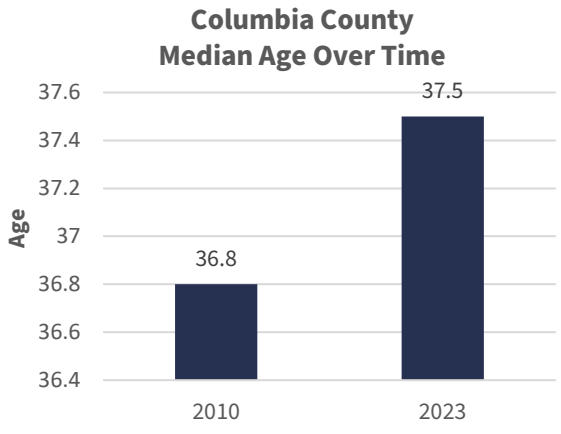
Population

Columbia County has seen steady and substantial population growth over the past two decades, making it the second-fastest growing county in Georgia. The population grew from 89,288 in 2000 to an estimated 117,858 in 2010. Between 2000 and 2010, the County's population increased by 32%, far outpacing neighboring Aiken County (9.8%) and Edgefield County (8.5%), while Richmond County's population declined by 0.8%. This growth trend continued from 2010 to 2023 with a 35.4% increase in Columbia County's population, while Aiken County grew by 9.8% and Richmond County grew by 4.0% while Edgefield County declined by 0.6%. Columbia County's population in 2023 was 159,638.

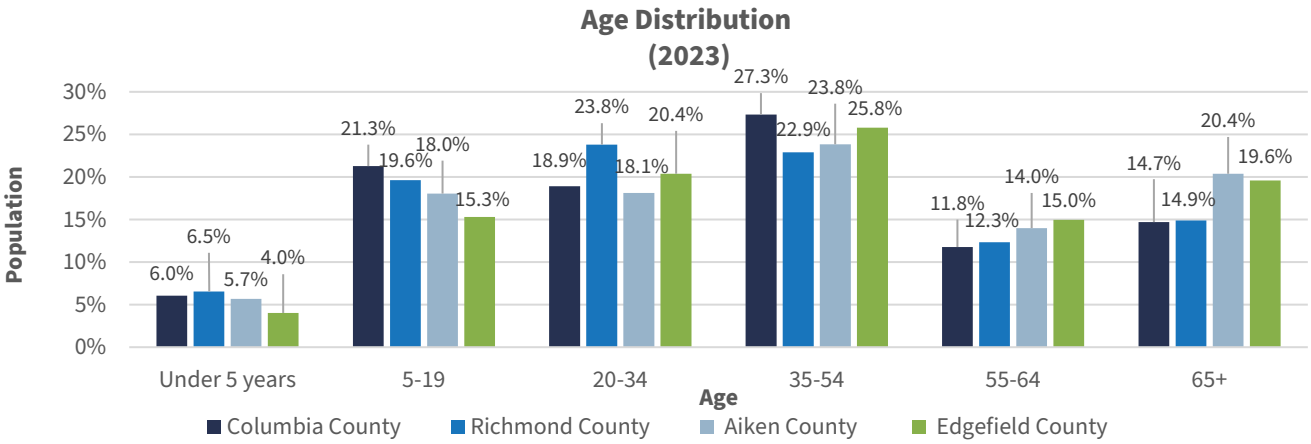
According to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, Columbia County's population is projected to reach 233,384 by 2060. This forecast is a critical factor in planning for future housing, infrastructure, and service needs.



Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

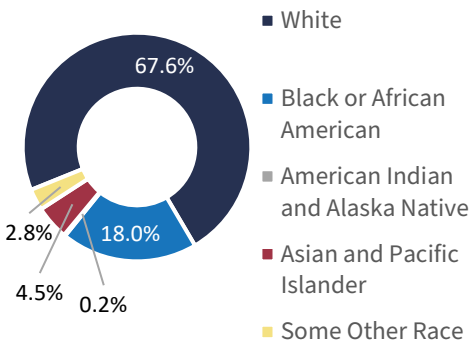
Age

Age plays a key role in shaping population trends, influencing how residents interact with their community and impacting their needs for education, employment, housing, transportation, and services. Columbia County's median age has experienced a gradual rise from 36.8 in 2010 to 37.5 in 2023. Columbia County is slightly older than Richmond County (35 years) but younger than Aiken County (41.6 years) and Edgefield County (42 years).

In Columbia County, the 35 to 54 age group is the largest, accounting for 27.3% of the population, a trend comparable to those in Aiken and Edgefield. About 21% of residents are between 5 and 19 years old, and 18.9% are between 20 to 34. Notably, a substantial share of residents falls within the five to 19 and 20 to 34 age groups, indicating a balanced age distribution that includes young professionals and families.

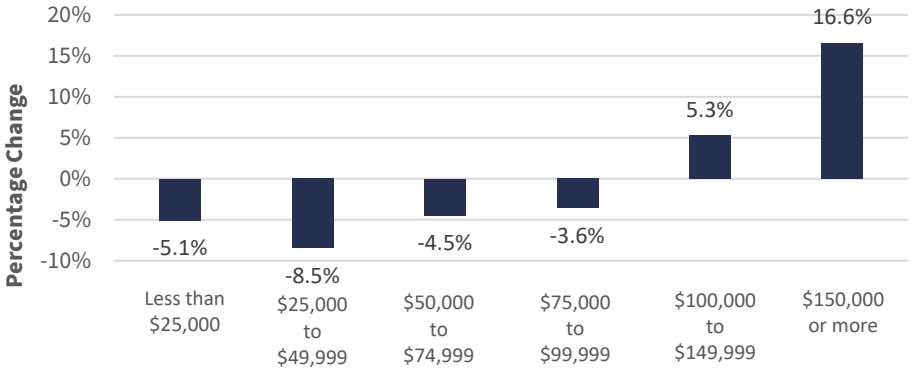
By comparison, Richmond County has a more concentrated young adult population, with 23.8% aged 20 to 34. Meanwhile, Aiken County has a more balanced age distribution but a greater share of older adults. Edgefield County also stands out with 25.8 percent of residents aged 35 to 54 and 19.6 percent aged 65 and older.

Racial Composition Columbia County (2023)



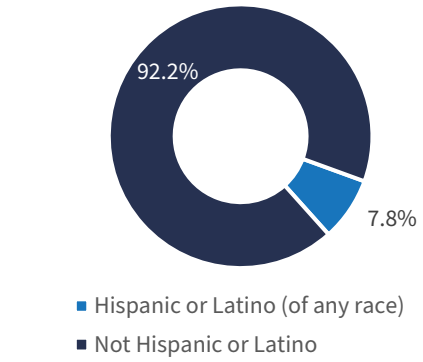
Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Change in Households by Income (2010-2023)



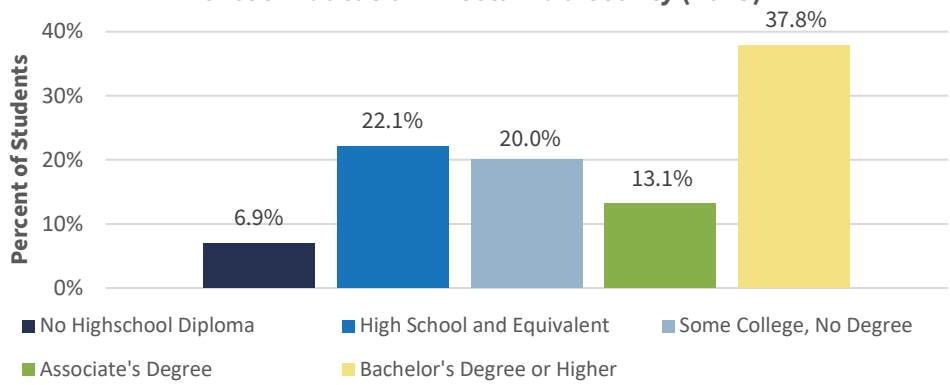
Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Ethnic Composition Columbia County (2023)



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Level of Education in Columbia County (2023)



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Race and Ethnicity

The County is predominantly White (67.6%), followed by Black or African American (18%) and Asian and Pacific Islander (4.5%). Approximately 7.8% of residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, a category defined by the U.S. Census Bureau to include individuals of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish origin, regardless of race.

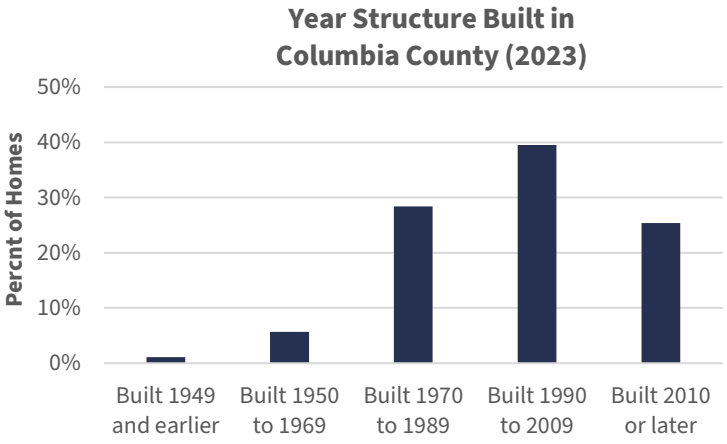
Over the past decade, the County's demographics have shifted notably. Since 2010, the White population has declined by 10.2%, while other groups have grown. The Black and Hispanic or Latino populations each increased by 3.3%, those identifying as some other race increased by 1.6%, and individuals reporting two or more races grew by 5.0%.

Income

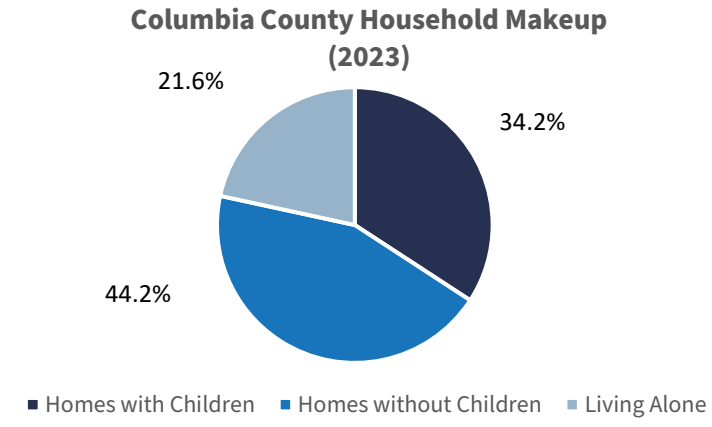
The median household income in Columbia County steadily increased, reaching approximately $96,122 in 2023, the highest among neighboring counties. In Columbia County, households earning $150,000 rose by 16.6%, followed by a 5.3% increase among the number of households earning $100,000 to $149,999. In contrast, households earning under $100,000 declined, with the sharpest drop of 8.5% in the $25,000 to $49,999 range.

Educational Attainment

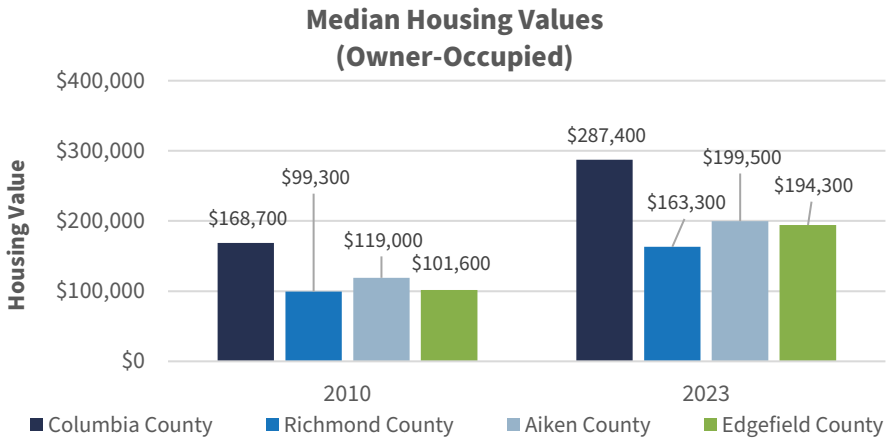
Over half of the County holds a degree, and nearly 3/4 of the County have at least some level of college education. Columbia County had the highest share of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher (37.8%) and the largest percentage holding a graduate or professional degree (13.1%) among neighboring counties. In terms of school enrollment, Columbia County recorded the second-highest public school enrollment rate at 88.2%.



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Housing

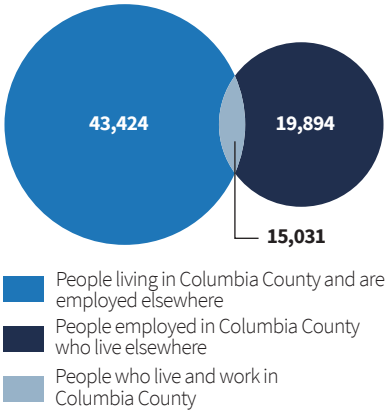
Recently, the County has experienced notable housing growth, with 22.0% of all units built between 2010 and 2019. Columbia County contains 60,412 housing units, of which 78.5% are owner-occupied and 21.5% are renter-occupied. Home values have risen sharply, with the median home value increasing 70.0% from $168,700 in 2010 to $287,400 in 2023. Homeowners are more likely to be cost-burdened than renters (13.1% versus 9.0%). Although the average household size increased from 2.81 in 2010 to 3.05 in 2023, the number of single-person or childless households comprised nearly two-thirds of the County total in 2023. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a household is considered cost-burdened if it spends more than 30% of its income on housing, which can make it difficult to afford other essentials such as food, clothing, transportation, and health care.

The County's housing stock is dominated by single-family detached homes, which make up 79.0% of all housing units. The second most common type is single-family attached homes, which account for just 6.0%. In contrast, structures with multiple housing units (2 to 10+ units) together make up 9.1%. In all the comparable counties, single-family detached is the predominant housing type, accounting for 68.3% in Aiken County, 67.2% in Edgefield County, and 58.6% in Richmond County. Columbia County has the highest proportion of single-family detached homes among neighboring counties.

Top 5 Employment Sectors for Columbia County Residents				
	Total Jobs in 2022	Share of Job Market 2022	Total Jobs in 2010	Change in Jobs since 2010
Health Care and Social Assistance	9,496	16.6%	6,932	37.0%
Retail Trade	6,102	10.4%	4,641	31.5%
Educational Services	6,041	10.3%	5,534	9.2%
Accommodation and Food Services	5,296	9.1%	3,745	41.4%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	5,216	8.9%	3,791	37.6%

Top 5 Employment Sectors for Columbia County Workers				
	Total Jobs in 2022	Share of Job Market 2022	Total Jobs in 2010	Change in Jobs since 2010
Retail Trade	5,795	16.6%	4,490	29.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	4,478	12.8%	3,348	33.8%
Educational Services	4,274	12.2%	3,571	19.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	4,142	11.9%	3,123	32.6%
Manufacturing	3,122	8.9%	2,999	4.1%

Inflow/Outflow Job Counts (2022)



Labor Force and Employment

Where Residents Work

In 2022, Columbia County had 58,455 residents employed in primary jobs, up 25.7% from 43,447 in 2010. Health Care and Social Assistance was the largest employment sector, growing by 37% from 6,932 to 9,496 jobs. Retail trade jobs rose by 31.5%, from 4,641 to 6,102, while Education Services grew by less than 10%. Transportation and Warehousing experienced the most dramatic increase, rising 151.8% from 944 to 2,377 jobs. In contrast, employment decreased by 20 % in the Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction sector and by 7% in the Information sector.

Where Workers Work

Between 2010 and 2022, the total number of primary jobs in Columbia County increased by 21.4%. In 2010, the County had 28,769 primary jobs, increasing to 34,925 in 2022, a gain of 6,156 primary jobs. Retail Trade grew by 29.1% (from 4,490 to 5,795), Accommodation and Food Services rose by 33.8% (from 3,348 to 4,478), and Educational Services increased by 19.7% (from 3,571 to 4,274). The Construction sector saw the highest growth rate, rising 44.5% from 2,083 to 3,010 jobs, which confirms that Columbia County is experiencing a construction boom.

Commute and Labor Shed

In 2022, commuting patterns show that 19,894 workers traveled into Columbia County for work, while 43,424 employed residents commuted to jobs outside the County. The key destination for outbound commuters was Augusta-Richmond County, accounting for 22.5% of all external work trips. North Augusta, SC, was another notable destination, drawing 1.8% of commuting residents.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03

Vision Statement and Goals

The vision statement is the aspirational center of the Plan. Rooted in community and stakeholder input, it reflects the collective aspirations that will guide the County's growth and development. The accompanying goals outline broad, long-range outcomes the County aims to accomplish, forming a clear framework that guides planning efforts and ensures that all future initiatives align with the community's vision. These goals are ambitious and will require the culmination of incremental actions to be fully achieved.

Vision

Columbia County will continue to be a community known for its unique character, impressive natural areas, and distinctive neighborhoods. With a shared identity that connects urbanized centers like Evans and Martinez to rural areas like Appling, the County will thoughtfully balance its heritage with strategic growth and development.

With a growing population, Columbia County's neighborhoods will continue to offer housing for households of all types and sizes. New neighborhoods will be designed around parks, greenways, and natural landscapes, creating attractive, connected communities. Reinvestment in established residential areas will enhance their vitality, while careful planning will ensure the County's rural charm continues to define that portion of the community.

Columbia County will evolve from being one of Georgia's most desirable bedroom communities into a strong and self-sustaining economic hub. Given Fort Gordon's role as a major economic and population driver, the County will continue to be a key player in the regional economy, attracting innovation, various industries, and a skilled workforce, while fostering a robust job market. New neighborhood-scale commercial nodes will bring shopping, dining, and daily conveniences closer to residents across the County. Evans Towne Center will continue to grow as the civic and cultural heart of the County, offering a mix of local restaurants, retail, and year-round events.

Roads and highways will be efficient and safe, promoting smooth traffic flow and travel for all users. An expanded network of sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails will create connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial areas. This comprehensive network will support healthy, active lifestyles and provide options for walking and biking across the County.

Essential infrastructure and services in the County will continue to support growth and maintain a high quality of life for current and future residents. Guided by community values, the County will work to preserve land and water resources, protecting them for future generations.

Parks, greenways, and conservation areas will connect residents and visitors to the outdoors, while key destinations such as Wildwood Park and the Savannah Rapids Pavilion will remain major draws for visitors, reinforcing the County's reputation for recreation, events, and natural beauty.

As Columbia County grows thoughtfully, it will build upon its reputation as one of the best places to live, work, and recreate in Georgia. Residents will benefit from access to high quality jobs, a nationally recognized school system, a variety of housing options, and exceptional natural areas, all while the County continues to prioritize safety and an outstanding quality of life.

Goals

Goals are broad and long-range desired outcomes of what the County aims to achieve in the future. They are ambitious and will require the culmination of incremental actions to be fully achieved. The County's planning efforts should work to support these goals. Key recommendations identify a preliminary set of initiatives needed to support the Vision Statement; these start to form the outline for each element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Land Use and Development

Goal: Guide future development in the County toward a balanced approach to preservation and expansion by directing growth to areas served by infrastructure and utilities to limit patterns of sprawl.

Goal: Future development in the County should include a mix of complete neighborhoods, commercial and industrial districts, and employment areas, with a continued focus on protecting its rural character and natural environment.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Goal: Expand the County's housing options by providing well-connected neighborhoods that offer housing options, ensuring accessibility for existing and future residents.

Goal: Promote new housing and neighborhoods that blend the County's rural character with future development.

Commercial and Industrial Areas

Goal: Establish commercial and industrial areas that promote employment growth, enhance the tax base, and contribute to a resilient local economy with access to goods, services, entertainment, and recreation.

Transportation

Goal: Establish a comprehensive multi-modal transportation system that efficiently and safely connects residents and visitors to all areas of the County.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Goal: Plan for sufficient infrastructure, utilities, and public safety services are available throughout the County, including established areas and potential growth areas, to support current and future development.

Goal: Strengthen community identity by investing in cultural facilities, recreational amenities, and public gathering spaces that reflect Columbia County's character and support connections among residents.

Natural Resources and Environment

Goal: Maintain and enhance park areas to serve residents' evolving needs while protecting the County's natural areas and resources.


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04

Land Use and Development

The Land Use and Development chapter provides guidance on land use and promotes practices that enhance Columbia County's neighborhoods and its commercial and industrial areas. It takes a balanced approach to preservation and growth by directing development in ways that maintain the County's rural character and protect its natural environment. The chapter is specific enough to guide land use decisions while also providing flexibility for creative, individualized approaches to land development that are consistent with the County's vision.

Existing Land Use

This section details the inventory of all the existing land use patterns throughout Columbia County as of 2025. The data is compiled from field observations conducted in March 2025, along with information provided by the County and local organizations.

Rural Residential

Rural residential areas are characterized by low-density, large-lot single-family detached homes, distributed with agricultural uses, forestry land, and undeveloped land. Natural features such as extensive tree cover and open space help maintain the rural character.

Medium-Density Residential

Characterized by moderate-density residential development, medium density residential areas feature primarily single-family homes with up to three dwellings per acre. These areas may also support limited retail and service uses, typically located at major intersections or along perimeter streets to serve nearby residents.

Higher Density Residential

These areas typically include a mix of single-family detached homes, attached units such as townhomes, and smaller multi-family buildings. Higher density residential neighborhoods are connected by sidewalks, promoting walkability between homes, nearby neighborhoods, and adjacent commercial areas. Commercial uses may be located along main or perimeter streets to serve local needs.

Neighborhood Commercial

Clustered at intersections, neighborhood commercial areas provide convenient access to goods, services, and amenities for nearby residents. These areas typically feature a compact development pattern with smaller-scale retail, gas stations, and service-oriented businesses located in small shopping centers.

Corridor Commercial

These areas include a variety of retail and service businesses such as shopping centers, grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, and hotels along major transportation corridors. These corridors offer neighborhood services, including office, retail, and dining, catering to residents and those passing through the County.

Central Core

Central core areas, including Evans and Martinez, serve as the County's hub for concentrated commercial activity, employment, and mixed-use development. These areas feature higher-density residential options and support a mix of land uses, including retail, restaurants, office spaces, hotels, and civic institutions.

Public/Semi-Public

Public/semi-public areas include County, City, state, and federal governmental uses and facilities; community service providers; schools; and places of worship and assembly.

Manufacturing and Industrial

Manufacturing and industrial areas include a range of industrial uses, including both heavy and light industries such as manufacturing, processing, warehousing, and the distribution of goods and materials.

Public Utility

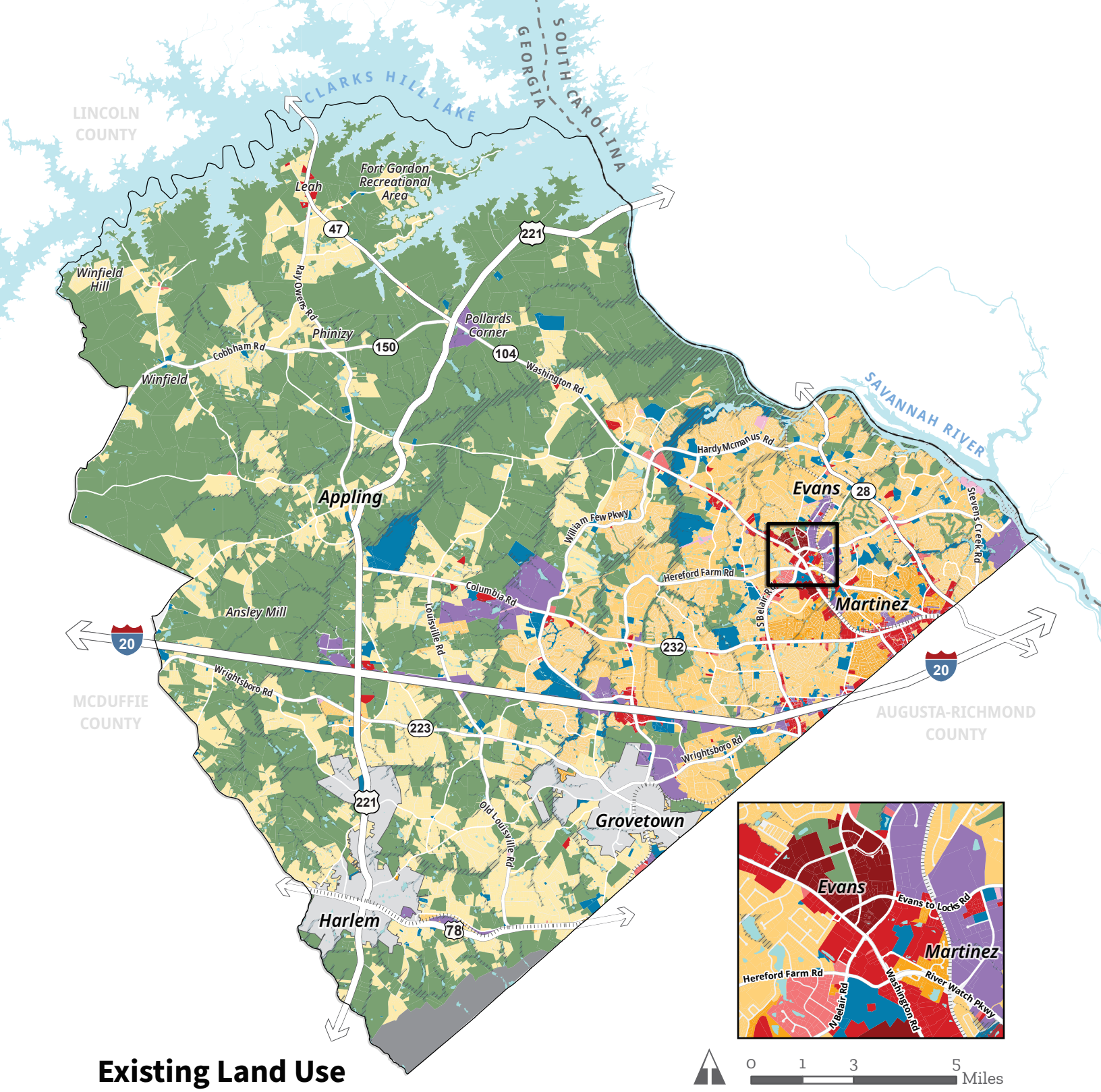
Public utility areas include utility systems for the transmission of gas, electricity, water, and wastewater. Uses within this designation include facilities and infrastructure, such as the Columbia County Wastewater Plant, and related rights-of-way.

Open Space and Conservation Areas

Open Space and conservation areas include a mix of parks, natural environments, and undeveloped lands intended for recreation, conservation, and silviculture.

Fort Gordon

This designation encompasses the Fort Gordon campus located in the southwestern portion of Columbia County. It includes the core military installations as well as supporting land uses within the campus. In addition to its primary defense-related functions, the area contains other ancillary uses that contribute to the overall operation and community of the base.



Existing Land Use

- Rural Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- Higher Density Residential
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Corridor Commercial
- Central Core
- Public/Semi-Public
- Manufacturing and Industrial
- Public Utility
- Open Space and Conservation Areas
- Fort Gordon

Constraints

Future growth is shaped by the County's existing development pattern, natural constraints such as floodplains, and conservation areas, and access to existing or planned utilities. These factors limit where and how development can occur. On the Constraints and Influences map, areas of the County with fewer constraints appear as shades of green, with darker green locations being better suited for future growth. Areas with more constraints appear as shades of orange.

Floodplains

Despite their many benefits, Clarks Hill Lake and the Savannah River present development challenges. The floodway along the Savannah River and the Clarks Hill Lake shoreline are heavily regulated, with strict limits on development due to high flood risk. In addition, a dense network of creeks and tributaries runs from the Savannah River toward the westside of the County. As Columbia County continues to plan for future growth, floodplain management and resilient land use strategies will be essential.

Conservation Areas

A significant portion of northern Columbia County is permanently protected as public land, creating one of the region's valuable recreation and conservation corridors. Mistletoe State Park, which is managed by the State, Wildwood Park, the Fort Gordon Recreational Area, and other reserves along Clarks Hill Lake and the Savannah River are major protected and recreational assets for the County. These areas are protected by permanent preservation and management restrictions, limiting development and shaping land use patterns.

Utility Availability

Access to water and wastewater infrastructure is essential for supporting future development in the County. New development in Columbia County should be prioritized where water and wastewater service is already available or planned. These areas are easier to serve, more cost-effective to maintain, and better positioned to support new homes and businesses.

Wastewater

The existing wastewater network is well dispersed around Evans, Martinez, the County's incorporated areas, and in some portions of Appling, with treatment plants located in or near these communities. Service is limited in the northern and western parts of the County, which restricts growth in those areas. These conditions direct future infill development to areas serviced by wastewater infrastructure. Properties that are not currently served by or in existing plans for future service by the County's Water Utility Services Division are given lower priority for future growth and development.

Water

The existing potable water system extends farther than the existing wastewater system, particularly along major corridors such as GA-221, GA-104, and GA-47. This coverage can support incremental development near existing mains and established communities like Evans, Martinez. In areas without water service, particularly in central and northern parts of the County, these are given lower priority for future development.

Influences

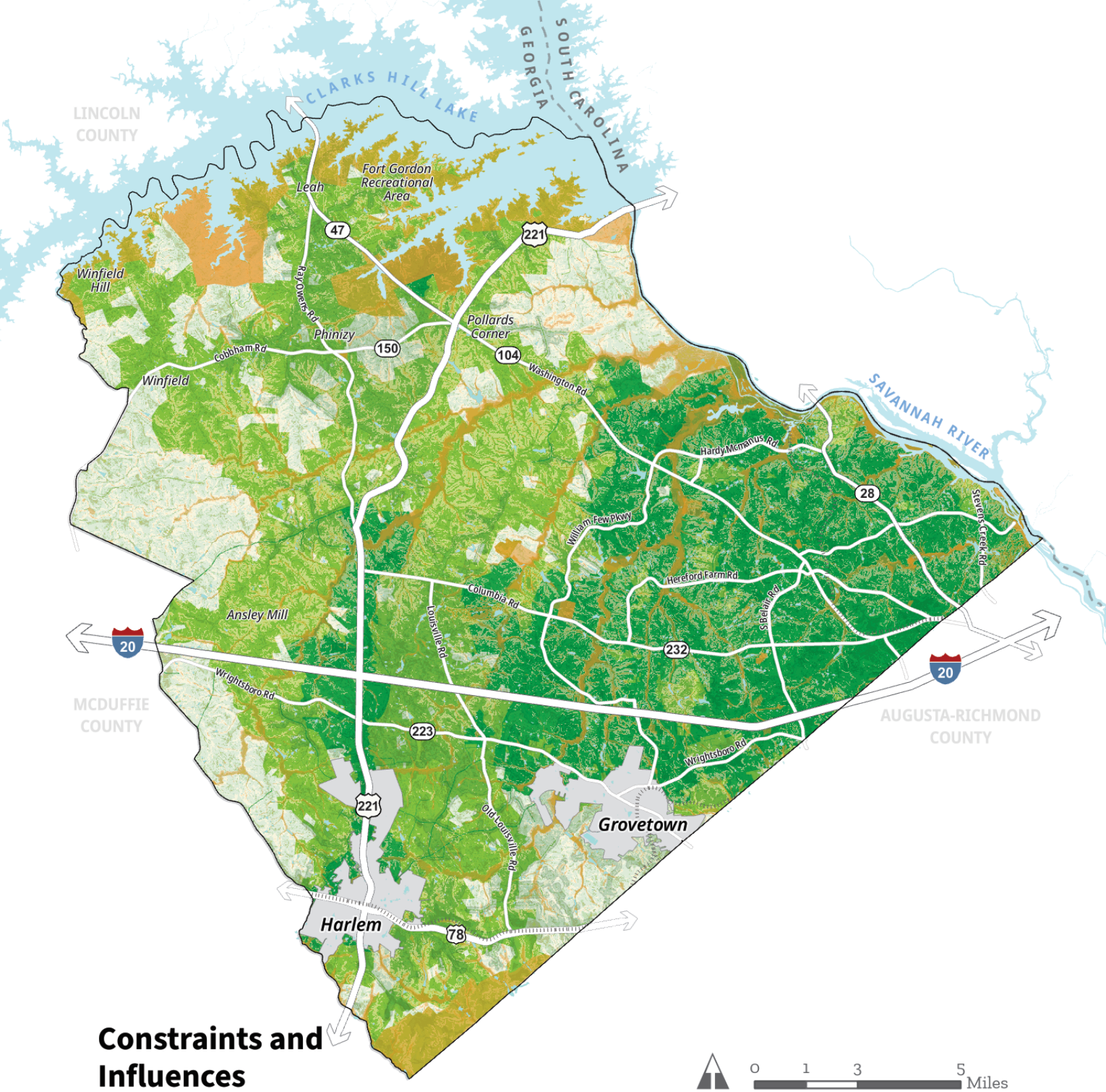
Fort Gordon is a major influence on Columbia County's development pattern, economy, and demographics. Its presence drives demand for housing and services, supports local employment, and contributes to the County's long-term growth trends.

Fort Gordon

Fort Gordon is a large federal multi-service military installation in the southwest part of the County, and a major economic engine for the region that spurs growth related to technology industries. Its secured boundary and training areas create limits on where growth can occur in the surrounding areas. Additionally, noise from training activities, safety buffers along ranges and maneuver areas, and security setbacks at gates limit the suitability of adjacent parcels for sensitive uses such as schools, hospitals, or high-density housing.

Regional Relationships

Columbia County's eastern boundary along the Savannah River defines the Georgia–South Carolina state line, connecting the County to the surrounding region. The County's proximity to Augusta provides economic and tourism benefits, particularly during the Masters Tournament, when thousands of visitors travel to the area each spring. Many residents rent their homes during the event, creating short-term housing demand and underscoring the County's connection to the regional tourism economy. However, this proximity can make Columbia County's own identity feel overshadowed.


CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Leah
Fort Gordon Recreational Area
47
221
Winfield Hill
Ray Owens Rd
Phinizy
Pollards Corner
150
104
Cobbham Rd
Winfield
Washington Rd
SAVANNAH RIVER
Hardy Mcmanus Rd
28
William Few Pkwy
Stevens Creek Rd
Hereford Farm Rd
Columbia Rd
Louisville Rd
S Belair Rd
Ansley Mill
20
232
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
223
Old Louisville Rd
Grovetown
Harlem
78
Constraints and Influences
Municipalities
Development Constraints
Development Influences
0 1 3 5 Miles





Character Areas

The Character Areas guide the future growth and development of Columbia County. These designations should serve as a foundation for development review, zoning decisions, and any future zoning amendments needed to implement the Plan's recommendations.

Each parcel within the County is assigned to one of nine consolidated character areas encompassing both current and future uses. By grouping similar uses, these Character Areas aim to reduce complexity, ensure consistency, and establish a common language for future planning. The subsequent Plan chapters will present more detailed recommendations and actions to support the County's residential, commercial, public, and open space areas.

Rural Residential/Agricultural

The Rural Residential/Agricultural character area consists of the County's large-lot single-family detached homes and parcels with agricultural activities. It includes lands in cultivated state, active farms, woodlands, timber operations, pastures, and scattered rural homesteads. These areas are primarily located outside Evans, Grovetown, and Harlem and towards Appling and Clarks Hill Lake. Uses within this character area contribute to the County's agricultural economy, scenic character, and open space network, and may include supporting neighborhood-scale commercial, service, and civic uses. Future development will continue to reinforce the existing sense of openness and separation between homes, preserving the character that defines these neighborhoods.





Medium-Density Residential

Medium-Density Residential character area primarily consists of single-family detached homes, with some two-family residential homes and townhomes. Neighborhoods within this character area are intended to provide and retain the County's single-family and two-family residential character and bridges the gap between low-density rural residential and higher-density traditional neighborhood areas. These areas may continue to include townhomes through PUDs/PRDs. These areas are most widespread in the eastern, more developed parts of the County, covering most of the areas surrounding Evans and Grovetown. These areas are also concentrated in areas near the Savannah River, along US 22, and State Route 223 in the west. Supporting uses may include those typically seen in the Community Commercial character area, but at a scale that complements the neighborhood, along with neighborhood parks, educational institutions, religious institutions, and civic facilities. Development should be prioritized where existing utility infrastructure exists or is planned.

Traditional Neighborhood

The Traditional Neighborhood character area consists of established residential neighborhoods with a mix of housing types. This character area encourages a mix of single-family detached and attached homes, townhomes, and smaller scale multi-family buildings. Traditional Neighborhoods act as a transition between the Town Center and surrounding Medium-Density Residential areas and are appropriate for moderate to high residential densities. These areas are intended to provide a range of housing types to meet community needs, allowing for more flexibility in development of residential areas within established communities. Multi-family housing should be context-sensitive and located near the Town Center character area or Community Commercial character area where adequate infrastructure is available and can support neighborhood-scale commercial development. These areas are located around the cores of Evans and Martinez. Supporting uses may include corner or neighborhood-oriented commercial uses such as cafes, small grocery stores or retail shops; offices and services; religious institutions; schools; civic and cultural facilities; and small parks.





Town Center

The Town Center character area includes commercial activity and mixed-use development, employment uses, national retailers, restaurants, a park, and entertainment venues such as the Columbia County Amphitheater and the Columbia County Performing Arts Center. This area serves as Evans' primary hub of activity and should continue to offer a concentration of civic destinations, a pedestrian-oriented mix of local retail and services, commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and public and open space. Supporting uses may include religious institutions, schools where appropriate, and parks and plazas. Buildings should frame streets and public spaces with shared or rear parking and accessible connections to surrounding neighborhoods, greenways, and public spaces where available. Future developments should consider parking structures to reduce surface lots and enable future infill opportunities.

Community Commercial

Community Commercial character area consists of medium to large concentrations of retail and services that draw customers from nearby neighborhoods, generally at key intersections of higher-traffic streets. These areas are intended to provide daily needs and specialty goods in multi-tenant centers and outparcels.

These character areas should continue to include a mix of local and national retailers, restaurants, professional and personal services, and public gathering spaces along commercial corridors and at designated nodes to serve nearby residents. The design and character of these areas should align with the corridors and nodes form and context. Supporting uses may include multi-family housing on adjacent sites, religious institutions, schools, and civic facilities where compatible. Future developments should provide internal circulation, shared access and parking, defined pedestrian routes, and connections to adjacent neighborhoods. Buildings should be oriented to the street with primary entrances on sidewalks, and parking should be located to the side or rear. Direct pedestrian connections should be provided from public sidewalks to storefronts with marked crossings through parking areas and incorporate complementary pedestrian-scale lighting. Utility and service areas should be screened and buffered with landscaping where adjacent parcels are residential neighborhoods.





Regional Commercial

The Regional Commercial character area includes the County's largest retail concentrations with a broad market draw, generally near interstate interchanges and major arterials. These character areas accommodate big-box retailers, auto sales and services, and destination shopping and entertainment. Regional Commercial character areas should include a full range of regional-scale retail and services with proper access management, internal streets, and recognizable gathering areas. Supporting uses may include nearby multi-family housing, services, schools, and civic or cultural facilities where appropriate. Regional Commercial character areas are primarily vehicle-oriented, but development in these areas should emphasize connected internal circulation, shared access, rear or structured parking where feasible, and pedestrian amenities that link buildings, parking areas, and adjacent neighborhoods. New developments should incorporate high-quality materials and facade articulation, feature landscaped buffers and screening at site edges, and utilize context-sensitive lighting and signage to minimize glare and visual clutter.

Technology and Industrial

Technology and Industrial character area includes facilities involved in technology, applied research, manufacturing, processing, storage, and distribution of goods and materials, as well as research centers, data centers, tech industries, and flex spaces. Heavier industrial uses, such as quarries, milling, and lumber operations, are also included. These areas are intended to help strengthen the County's tax base by attracting industries and providing employment opportunities. Infrastructure is in place near these areas and the White Oak Business Park to allow for new industrial uses due to the presence of existing industrial uses, such as the John Deere factory outside of Grovetown and the Club Car factory in the western part of the County.

This character area should feature large-scale buildings that produce minimal outdoor nuisances. Future technology, data, manufacturing, and industrial growth should be prioritized where utilities and easy access to major transportation corridors already exist or are planned. Structures should be located within a larger landscaped campus to ensure industrial uses are properly buffered from residential and lesser intense uses. Supporting uses may include ancillary offices, small service and supply businesses, and limited supportive retail and restaurants to serve employees. Transitions to nearby neighborhoods should use landscaping, setbacks, and building orientation.





Source: Fort Gordon, U.S. Army

Open Space and Conservation Area

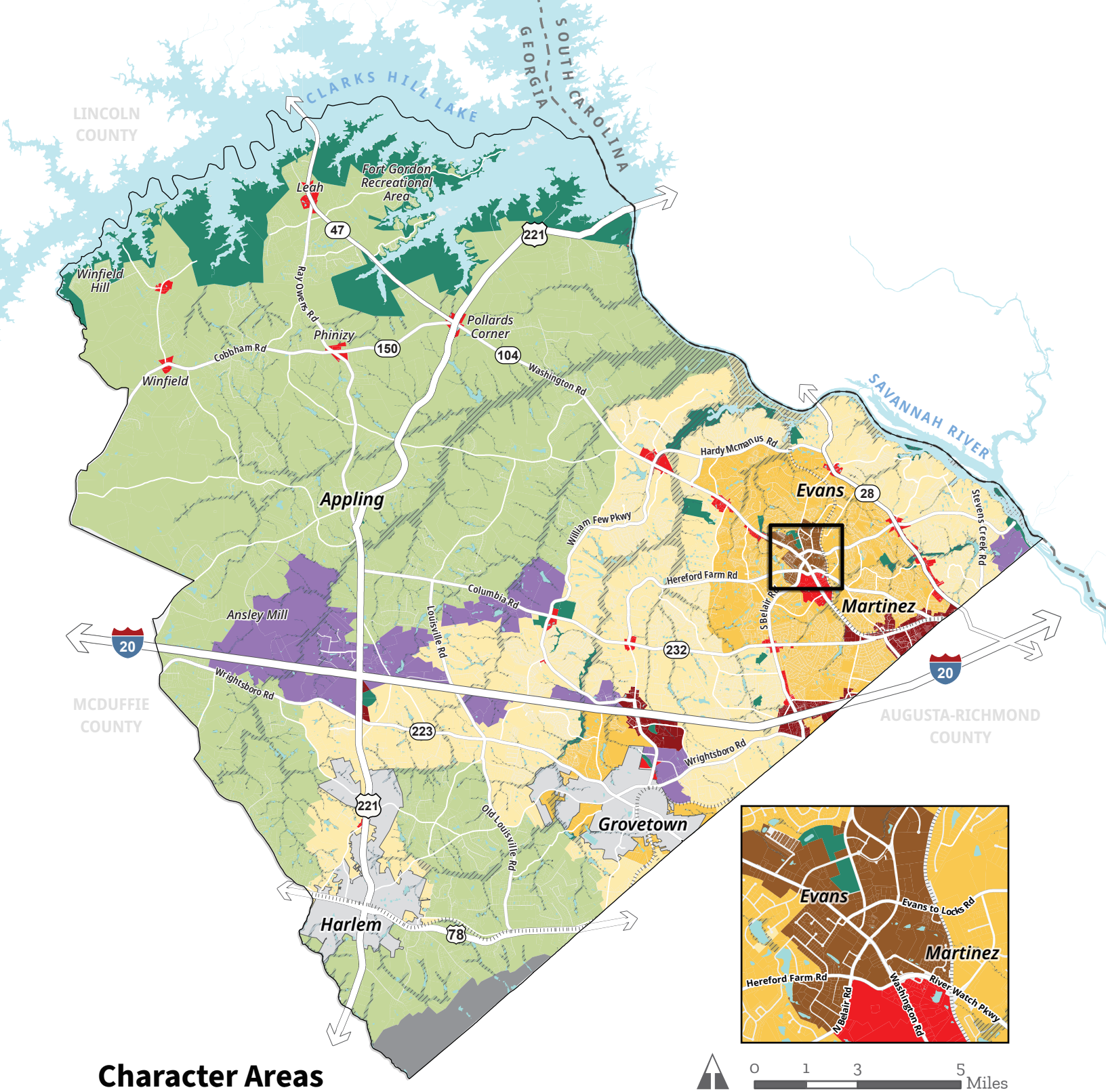
Open Space and Conservation Area character area encompasses primarily natural lands and environmentally sensitive areas, including designated public park spaces, open areas, natural environments, recreational facilities, and conservation areas. These areas include both developed parks of various sizes and functions, and large natural open spaces managed by the Federal, State, and County agencies. Environmental features like floodplains; County Greenspace properties; privately-owned conservation lands; and notable assets like Mistletoe State Park, Clarks Hill Lake, and Wildwood Park are also included in this character area.

Open Space and Conservation Areas should continue to include preserved natural areas, public parks, trails, greenways, and recreation facilities. Supporting uses may include nature centers and related civic facilities, as well as spaces for outdoor programming such as disc golf tournaments, fishing and boating events, paddling routes, and seasonal concerts or festivals. Sensitive areas will remain in their natural state to protect habitats and support passive recreation, while appropriate locations should have recreation-based development outside of protected areas, such as trails, shelters, or canoe launches, and infrastructure upgrades that enhance public access without harming ecological functions.

Fort Gordon

The Fort Gordon character area encompasses the Fort Gordon Army Installation, located in the southeast corner of the County and extending into Richmond County. The base is home to the U.S. Army Cyber Center of Excellence, the Signal Corps, and a range of cyber, intelligence, and communications units. Fort Gordon contains a mix of military housing, administrative and training facilities, dining and retail services, schools, and amenities for soldiers, families, and visitors. While much of the installation's activity occurs within federal boundaries, surrounding land uses in the County can influence military operations and access.

The County participates in the *Fort Gordon Regional Growth Management Plan (GMP)*, which was a cooperative effort among jurisdictions around Fort Gordon to manage growth, coordinate infrastructure, and mitigate impacts on the installation. Future development near Fort Gordon should continue to support military operations through compatible land uses, incorporating appropriate transitions and buffer zones to protect nearby residential neighborhoods and maintain the operational security and livability of areas outside the base boundaries.



Character Areas

- Rural Residential/Agricultural
- Medium-Density Residential
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Town Center
- Community Commercial
- Regional Commercial
- Technology and Industrial
- Open Space and Conservation Area
- Fort Gordon
- Floodplains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Housing and Neighborhoods

Columbia County has experienced significant and consistent population growth over the past two decades and is currently the second-fastest growing county in Georgia. Given this growth, the Housing and Neighborhoods chapter addresses supporting existing neighborhoods, providing new housing options, and planning for new growth. This chapter prioritizes residential reinvestment, housing availability, and a balanced approach to development.



Neighborhood Character

Many of Columbia County's recent residential developments share similar layouts architectural styles, which can make neighborhoods feel uniform and disconnected from the larger community. By incorporating a variety of housing types, street patterns, and public spaces, new residential developments can create a more connected and engaging neighborhood fabric. Thoughtful design can contribute to a mosaic of residential neighborhoods that foster a sense of pride and place.

Columbia County offers a range of neighborhood types, from established subdivisions in Martinez to newer master-planned communities in Evans. Each contributes uniquely to the County's overall character and quality of life. Neighborhoods such as Riverwood Plantation, Springlakes, and Rivershyre demonstrate how design, amenities, and connections can shape a community's identity and livability. The Riverwood Plantation neighborhood integrates schools, recreation, and open space into the neighborhood fabric. Sidewalks and nature trails connect homes to community amenities like the clubhouse, amphitheater, and Greenbrier Pond, allowing residents to walk or bike without relying on a car. This approach blends convenience with the area's natural landscape, creating a strong sense of community. Northwood's proximity to Evans Town Center provides residents with easy access to dining, retail, and entertainment options.

These neighborhoods illustrate how a mix of housing styles, connected street networks, and shared amenities contribute to lasting neighborhood character. Columbia County can support the creation of complete neighborhoods by encouraging developers to connect homes to everyday amenities and surrounding residential areas. At the same time, revitalizing aging neighborhoods and investing in areas that lack key amenities will also be important. By enhancing both new and existing neighborhoods with features like parks, sidewalks, and access to services, the County can improve livability and make its communities even more attractive places to live.

Promoting Connectivity

Many existing subdivisions and neighborhoods within Columbia County are missing formal connections to everyday destinations and community amenities. Currently, neighborhoods lack sidewalks along local streets and major roads, creating gaps both within neighborhoods and between subdivisions. Through public outreach, residents highlighted the need for safer, more convenient access within neighborhoods, particularly near schools, where safe and continuous sidewalks are a top priority. Residents, particularly seniors, stressed the need for easier access to healthcare providers and essential services across all parts of the County. To address these concerns, Columbia County should invest in a more connected network of sidewalks, bike paths, and walking trails that link neighborhoods, schools, parks, healthcare facilities, and local destinations such as restaurants, coffee shops, and retail centers. The County should also encourage the development of commercial nodes at key intersections to create destinations within walking or biking distance of residential areas. By integrating these connections into both existing and future developments in a way that complements the area's built form and natural landscape the County can enhance accessibility while preserving the character that residents value.

Recommendations

- Identify and implement sidewalk and bicycle facility projects that connect neighborhoods to parks, schools, commercial areas, and other public amenities.
- Encourage the development of urban and rural nodes at appropriate intersections across the County that include shopping, dining, and everyday services.
- Consider installing missing sidewalks, bike lanes, and walking trails in existing neighborhoods.
- Consider updating subdivision design requirements to include various architectural styles, a mix of façade styles, and open space elements into new subdivisions.



Planning for New Growth

Future residential development in Columbia County must be mindful and strategic, ensuring that new housing aligns with the County's character while maximizing existing and planned infrastructure. While some housing strategies can be applied County-wide, higher-density options are best suited to specific areas of the County. Areas surrounding Evans, Martinez, Harlem, and Grovetown have existing infrastructure and utility services, access to commercial and employment centers, and opportunities for targeted infill and greenfield development. Areas near Clarks Hill Lake and between Pollard's Corner and Evans contain rolling terrain and floodplains, and the limited utility infrastructure will shape the type and intensity of future development.

Context-Sensitive Development

Context-sensitive development in Columbia County means ensuring that new housing reflects the character of existing neighborhoods. Future development should complement the scale and design of surrounding neighborhoods. Based on the Character Areas Map, the northern portion of the County near Clarks Hill Lake is well-suited for additional large lot housing, where agricultural uses and natural features are integrated. Suburban Residential areas will create a transition, bridging the gap between low-density and higher-density residential areas. At the same time, Traditional Residential areas, through planned residential developments, will continue to expand the County's housing options in developed parts of the community where these development patterns can be supported. Within Evans, Martinez, Harlem, and Grovetown, Traditional Residential areas will play an important role in considering additional residential choices. These strategies ensure that housing responds thoughtfully to its location.

Infill Development

Infill development focuses on filling vacant or underutilized land within existing neighborhoods. The practice allows the County to expand housing options within established areas while making better use of existing infrastructure and supporting more efficient growth management. Through outreach and engagement, the community emphasized the importance of smart and sustainable development to prevent overdevelopment and infrastructure strain as a key theme. With Columbia County continuing to experience population growth over the next few decades, proactive growth management will be essential. The County should adopt smart growth practices, such as promoting a broad mix of housing options for people of different income groups and integrating community commercial areas with various housing types, to guide future development. Requiring new residential development to utilize existing infrastructure will help the County accommodate growth in a way that maintains neighborhood character and ensures long-term sustainability.

Recommendations

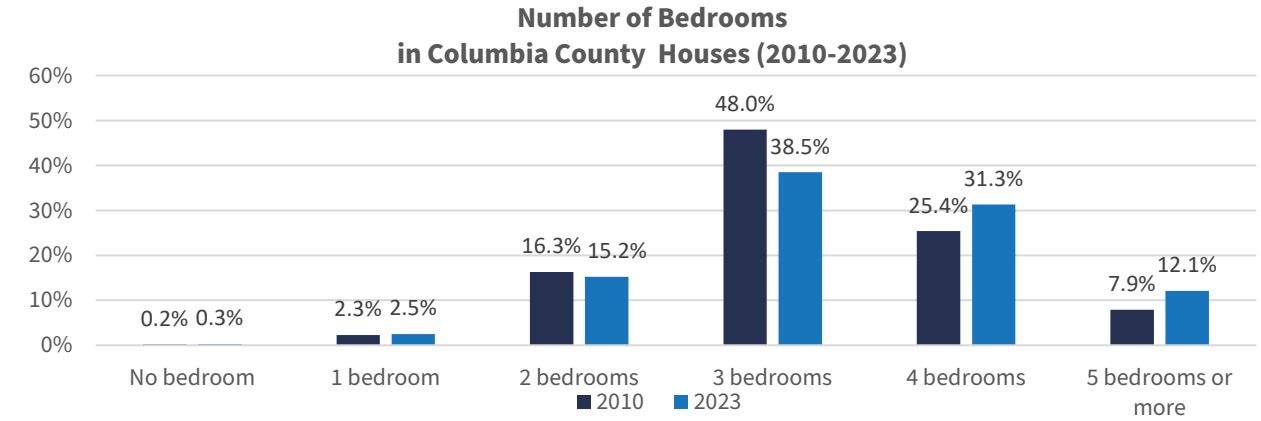
- Identify areas in developed parts of the County that can support infill housing.
- Prioritize infill development to maximize existing infrastructure and leverage proximity to established destinations and amenities across the County.
- Align housing development with the County's Community Work Program to ensure future infrastructure investments can support areas with future growth.
- Adopt a Smart Growth Plan that coordinates infrastructure investment with land use, supporting context-sensitive development.
- Encourage land use transitions in density of development to avoid abrupt changes between new and existing development.
- Consider developing infill design guidelines, as part of the zoning ordinance, to promote well-designed development that blends into the character of existing neighborhoods.



Housing Mismatch

Columbia County currently has limited smaller housing options to accommodate one- and two-person households. While outreach respondents supported the County's estate-style homes and preserving its unique natural features, a gap exists between household size and market conditions. Over 60% of the County's households consist of individuals living alone or are families without children, while 81.9% of the housing units contain three or more bedrooms. Studios and one-bedroom units account for less than 2,000 (2.5%) of the County's total housing stock.

Estate-style homes will continue to be preserved and built, while context-sensitive housing options are introduced to meet the evolving needs of residents. Following guidance from the Character Areas Map, other housing options could be considered in appropriate locations, including near Evans, Martinez, and around Grovetown. This approach can expand housing choices for young professionals, new families, and older adults while maintaining the estate-style character and natural features in other parts of the County. Thoughtful expansion of housing options will ensure that residents at all life stages can continue to call Columbia County home.



Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Addressing Housing Attainability

Expanding access to a range of housing options is key to addressing Columbia County's housing challenges. As the County's population continues to grow and evolve, many residents, whether establishing a household, raising a family, or looking to downsize, may face challenges finding homes that match their budget and lifestyle. Although Columbia County has had steady residential development, with 25% of the County's housing stock built between 2010 and 2023, the types and prices of these new homes do not always match the needs of the community. The housing stock is primarily single-family detached homes, accounting for 79% of all units, and most new construction is priced at the higher end of the market. In 2023, the County's median household income was $97,031, a 3% increase from 2022. According to HUD, housing is considered affordable when a household spends no more than 30% of its monthly income on housing costs. With a conventional mortgage, a household earning that amount could comfortably afford a home around $370,000. According to 2025 MLS real estate data, 85% of new construction sales were for homes priced between $300,000 and $650,000, with an average home sale price of $381,910, highlighting the limited flexibility many buyers face.

A wider range of housing options was one of the most common themes throughout public outreach. Opportunities exist to provide these options in areas such as Traditional Neighborhoods and in the Town Center area, where a mix of housing could complement existing development and support walkable, amenity-rich environments. Focusing on housing attainability means offering a range of options, at various price points, and in different locations, so that residents of all ages and income levels can find suitable, long-term housing in Columbia County.

PLANNING CONCEPT

ATTAINABILITY

According to the Housing Supply Accelerator, housing is considered attainable when it provides options that meet the needs of a range of households. This includes considering the relationship between housing costs and household income. Unlike affordable housing, which often incorporates income-restrictions or subsidies, attainable housing includes market-rate options and ensures that residents have the flexibility to find homes that suit both their lifestyles and budget.



Variety of Housing Options

During community outreach, participants expressed a desire for additional housing options to accommodate the County's growth. Of Columbia County's existing housing stock, only 6% are single-family attached homes and only 9% are multi-family homes. Expanding housing options may provide attainable opportunities for young professionals and families. By integrating some additional housing options, the County can address the needs of the community while retaining the existing neighborhood character.

Recommendations

- Consider pursuing a housing needs assessment to identify housing demand and supply gaps.
- Consider revising the County's zoning ordinance to simplify the development approval process for ADUs.
- Support the development of various housing sizes and price points for moderate-, middle-, and upper-middle-income populations in areas near existing infrastructure and amenities.
- Review the County's zoning ordinance to consider expanding the types of housing allowed in single-family zoning districts in areas adjacent to the Town Center area and areas with neighborhood-supporting commercial and service uses.

PLANNING CONCEPT

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a smaller, independent residential dwelling unit located on the same lot as a stand-alone single-family detached home. ADUs go by many different names, including accessory apartments, secondary suites, in-law suites, and granny flats. ADUs can be converted portions of existing homes, additions to new or existing homes, new stand-alone accessory structures, or converted portions of existing stand-alone accessory structures.



Quality and Maintenance

As Columbia County continues to grow, it will be important for the County to reinvest in established neighborhoods to ensure they continue to be desirable places to live. While neighborhoods across the County vary in character, some face visible signs of decline, particularly in aging infrastructure such as deteriorating sidewalks, limited pedestrian connectivity, and poor access to nearby amenities like parks, schools, and commercial areas. Over 35% of the County's housing stock was built before 1989, highlighting the need for ongoing maintenance to preserve housing quality and value.

The County should consider reinvestment options in aging neighborhoods through a combination of rehabilitation programs, zoning updates, and design guidelines. By assisting homeowners with repairs, encouraging reinvestment in older properties, and maintaining infrastructure such as sidewalks, street lighting, and landscaping, the County can help ensure established neighborhoods remain attractive and safe. Proactive investment in these neighborhoods can reinforce neighborhood identity and support long-term livability. To ensure steady progress, the County should prioritize routine housing and infrastructure maintenance as part of its annual capital improvement planning.

Recommendations

- Support housing rehabilitation programs to maintain existing housing stock.
- Identify areas within the County that have code enforcement issues and create an assistance program to work with property owners to aid in upkeep.
- Ensure consistent enforcement of property maintenance standards while offering technical and financial resources to assist property owners with compliance.
- Promote existing housing rehabilitation programs, funding opportunities, and homeowner resources by making them easily accessible on the County's website.
- Consider design standards that encourage high-quality upgrades to housing, such as variety in architectural features, building materials, façade elements such as porches, and patios, and landscaping.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Commercial and Industrial Areas

The Commercial and Industrial Areas chapter discusses strategies for improving Columbia County's commercial corridors, nodes, and areas. This chapter provides recommendations that encourage infill development and investment, guide the expansion of industrial parks, support the attraction of new businesses, and promote workforce development. These recommendations should be used to support local businesses and major employers with the ultimate goals of strengthening the County's tax base and fostering a dynamic and robust economy.







Commercial Nodes

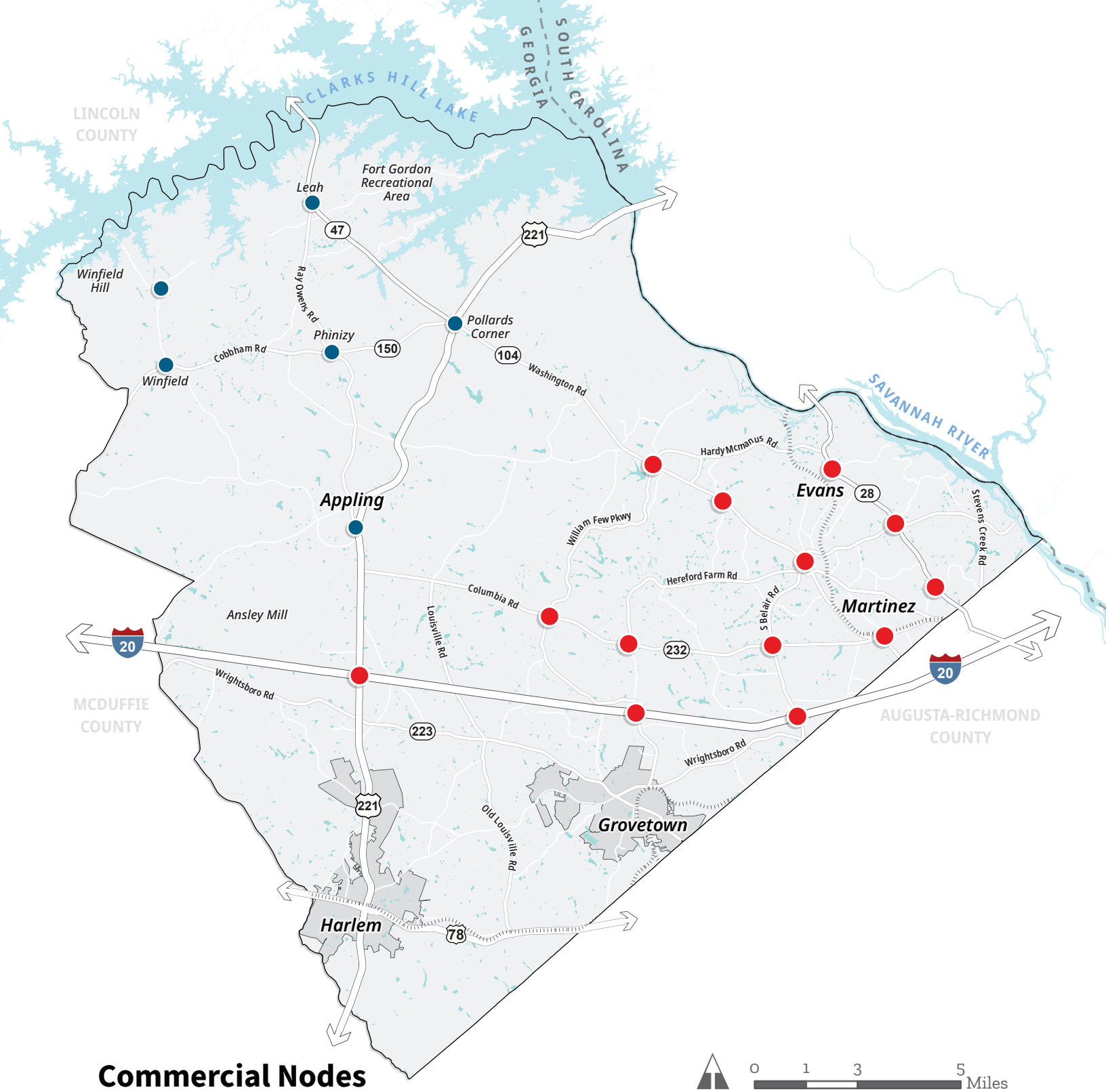
Nodes are concentrated areas of commercial activity located at key intersections. These areas bring together retail, dining, services, offices, and amenities, creating convenient destinations for nearby residents and workers. The Commercial Nodes map identifies these areas based on surrounding development, infrastructure, and accessibility. Given Columbia County's size and varying character, strengthening existing nodes and establishing new ones at key locations will help distribute shopping, dining, services, and job opportunities more evenly across the County. This approach will reduce long trips, ease congestion, and ensure that businesses continue to meet residents' daily needs. Each node will vary in size, scale, and character depending on its location, but together they help guide where future commercial growth should occur.

Urban Node

Urban nodes are well-served by existing infrastructure and public services, including utilities readily available to meet the community's development needs, and access to major transportation routes. Urban nodes are intended to host a cluster of commercial uses at major intersections in the southern regions of the County. Developments with a mix of uses should be prioritized within urban nodes that provide safe sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, street trees, and other landscaping and streetscaping features. Commercial uses along the intersections will help promote economic vitality, a variety of retail activities, and employment opportunities.

Rural Node

Rural nodes are smaller, low-intensity counterparts to urban nodes. They also sit at or are near major intersections in northern regions of the County. These nodes are intended to support limited commercial development that provide support services to the adjoining residential areas. Rural nodes are categorized by clusters of commercial development around the intersection of major roads. In these nodes, access to services is limited and less extensive than in urban nodes. Rural nodes will serve as community centers, providing local residents with access to essential services and retail goods. New development at rural nodes should be context-sensitive, compact, and prioritize uses that provide support services like gas stations, healthcare clinics, grocery and convenience stores to adjoining residential areas.



Commercial Nodes

- Urban Node
- Rural Node

0 1 3 5 Miles







Commercial Corridors

Columbia County's commercial corridors, which play a key role in shaping how residents, visitors, and future investors perceive the area, offer a range of uses including shopping centers, gas stations, fast-food restaurants, and industrial facilities. Most of Columbia County's economic activity is concentrated along several major corridors, including I-20, Washington Road, Columbia Road, Riverwatch Parkway, Evans to Locks Road, Belair Road, and Furys Ferry Road.

Development along these corridors generally follows a pattern of concentrated commercial with commercial and industrial uses surrounded by stretches of residential or rural areas. I-20 serves as a gateway into the County, with industrial, hospitality, and office uses clustered near intersections such as US 221 and Lewiston Road, including White Oak Business Park and Gateway Park. Columbia Road, Belair Road, and Washington Road feature auto-oriented commercial development, drive-through restaurants, big-box retailers, and offices, while the segments between remain largely undeveloped or residential. Furys Ferry Road has seen improvements with landscaped medians and street trees, creating a more attractive corridor, whereas Riverwatch Parkway and Evans to Locks Road function primarily as residential connectors, with some industrial uses at major intersections. Across these corridors, pedestrian infrastructure is minimal, sidewalks are often narrow or sporadic, and few roads include bike lanes.

Enhancing these corridors means improving their functionality, appearance, and contribution to the community's prosperity and identity. This involves addressing issues like traffic congestion and safety, filling the gaps between existing commercial areas, improving pedestrian and cross-access, façade improvements, and encouraging reinvestment in aging properties. Streetscaping and placemaking can transform corridors into safe, accessible, and engaging spaces, with street trees, landscaping, sidewalks, active storefronts, public art, gathering spaces, and other design features that add character and a sense of identity. Well-designed corridors attract more visitors and shoppers, make commercial areas more appealing to retailers, and support long-term occupancy.

PLANNING CONCEPT

CORRIDORS VS NODES

Commercial corridors are linear stretches of roads or streets within urban or suburban areas that have a concentration commercial activity. These corridors typically encompass a mixture of retail, dining, and service facilities, contributing to the County's economy and visual appeal.

Commercial nodes are concentrated areas within the community where various businesses, services, and amenities are clustered. These nodes serve as local, neighborhood, and regional centers for commerce, attracting a significant volume of customers. They should be located close to housing to promote walkability.

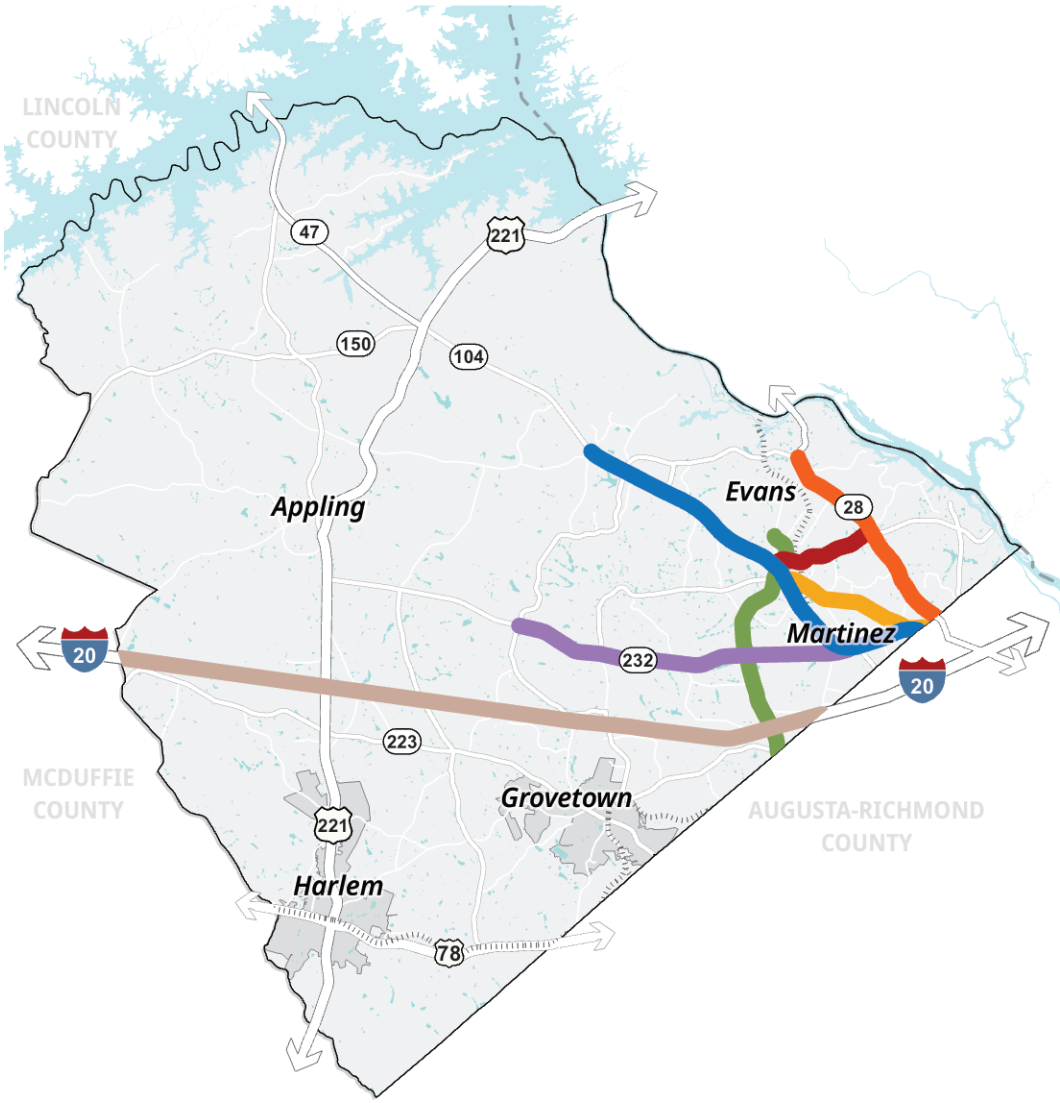






Recommendations

- Promote a wider variety of businesses, beyond gas stations and fast food, to include more retail, entertainment, and sit-down dining.
- Use landscaping and buffering techniques to reduce the visual impact of industrial and commercial development to provide a transition between industrial, commercial, and residential areas.
- Consolidate driveways and entrances in commercial and industrial areas to reduce congestion.
- Consider creating a façade improvement program to enhance the appearance and appeal of aging commercial properties.
- Identify and pursue opportunities for lot consolidation to enable more cohesive commercial redevelopment projects.
- Promote shared parking agreements for new commercial development to make efficient use of existing spaces and support walkable commercial areas.
- Continue to require coordinated lighting, signage, and landscaping to strengthen the visual character and aesthetics of corridors, creating a cohesive identity while reducing distracting visual clutter for motorists.





Proximity-Based Development

Proximity-based development focuses on placing retail, services, and amenities near where people live and work. This reduces long trips, increases walkability, and creates more community-oriented commercial areas, particularly at key intersections and along major corridors near residential neighborhoods. During outreach, participants emphasized the importance of more conveniently-located shopping and dining options, highlighting the value of this approach to meet daily needs. The intersection of Washington Road and William Few Parkway features a mix of uses, including a gym, grocery store, retail and dining, a bank, and professional offices. However, the area lacks safe pedestrian connections to the surrounding neighborhoods, forcing residents to drive to access the shopping center. Future neighborhood-oriented commercial areas should be designed to support these uses with walkable streets and outdoor gathering spaces that encourage people to linger, connect with others, and experience the area as a neighborhood focal point rather than just a place to shop or drive through.

Recommendations

- Review the zoning ordinance and update the list of allowed uses in neighborhood and community commercial districts to encourage desirable, compatible businesses.
- Integrate entertainment amenities such as live music venues, museums, and outdoor gathering spaces into urban nodes.
- Review the zoning ordinance to identify potential barriers to redevelopment or new development, such as parking requirements or setbacks.
- Support the development of businesses at rural nodes that serve residents and visitors using Wildwood Park, Fort Gordon Recreational Area, Mistletoe Park, the Clarks Hill Marina, and the Winfield Campgrounds.



Reinvestment

Several of Columbia County's commercial corridors and shopping centers are aging and underutilized, presenting opportunities for reinvestment. Many of these areas feature large parking lots fronting the roadway, limited landscaping, minimal pedestrian amenities, and few connections to nearby neighborhoods. Most are auto-oriented, with multiple driveways and access primarily from four-lane roads. As these areas redevelop, the County should encourage improvements that enhance both appearance and accessibility. Updating façades, relocating storage and auto-oriented uses away from major corridors, and orienting new buildings toward the street can help create more engaging and walkable environments. Future investments should also focus on the pedestrian experience by adding sidewalks, safe crossings, and stronger connections between commercial and residential areas.

Through outreach and engagement, participants shared that Martinez could specifically benefit from revitalization. Washington Road could benefit from rethinking the amount and layout of parking along the corridor. Many businesses between Pleasant Home Road and Bobby Jones Expressway feature large surface lots that dominate the streetscape. In addition to façade improvements and streetscape enhancements, the County should consider opportunities for outlot development. Overall, these investments could support higher-end dining and retail, filling vacancies with a mix of shops, restaurants, and entertainment, and ultimately transforming these areas into more attractive destinations for residents and visitors.

Recommendations

- Consider developing a façade improvement grant program to support businesses in maintaining and/or rehabilitating their building façades.
- Consider creating a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Tax Allocation District (TAD) financing strategy for Martinez to help fund private development.
- Identify underutilized or vacant properties to encourage redevelopment.
- Introduce landscaped medians, street trees, and plantings between parking areas and sidewalks to improve visual appeal and comfort for pedestrians.
- Continue to enforce and update the design requirements in the Corridor Protection Overlay Districts to ensure that new or redeveloped buildings front major commercial roads with parking located to the side or rear.
- Encourage reinvestment in aging shopping centers by reusing surface parking and introducing new commercial uses.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access from existing and future neighborhoods to commercial areas.



Urban Design and Placemaking

Urban design and placemaking play an important role in the success of commercial areas. Attractive streets, sidewalks, and storefronts encourage customers to stop, stay longer, and return more often. Good urban design also improves safety, creates a clearer sense of place, and helps support business visibility. The County can enhance public spaces through landscaping, public art, seating, lighting, street trees, banners, and limiting curb cuts to create inviting, functional, and pedestrian-friendly environments. Thoughtful design and placemaking strategies, such as outdoor dining and gathering areas and public art installations can help strengthen Columbia County's sense of place and community. By investing in these strategies, the County can create welcoming commercial areas that benefit both businesses and the broader community.

Gateways and Wayfinding

Columbia County's visual identity and public perception as a cohesive place depends heavily on the design of its entry points or gateways. Distinctive gateway features like monument signs, archways, landscaping, and wayfinding signage can create a professional, welcoming first impression for employers, workers, and visitors. Strategically placed wayfinding signs can further orient visitors to key destinations around the County. Gateway signage would be beneficial at key entry and exit points along I-20, as well as areas where the County borders Grovetown and Harlem. Wayfinding signage could help guide residents and visitors to major attractions, including Evans Town Center, Savannah Rapids, Blanchard Woods Park, Clarks Hill Lake, Mistletoe State Park, and Wildwood Park.

Gateway and wayfinding improvements not only help visitors navigate the County but also signal a welcoming and vibrant community to potential residents and businesses. Well-designed gateways and clear wayfinding contribute to a positive first impression, highlighting access to housing, cultural amenities, parks, and employment centers. Businesses are more likely to locate in areas where workers want to live. Implementing unified gateway treatments with landscaping, monuments, and wayfinding at key entrances will help establish a sense of place and reinforce the perception of Columbia County as a an attractive place to live, helping businesses attract and retain a skilled workforce while supporting long-term economic sustainability.

Recommendations

- Incorporate outdoor gathering spaces such as plazas, seating areas, and shaded courtyards into new commercial projects.
- Develop a distinctive brand or design aesthetic for gateways to strengthen the County's identity.
- Identify opportunities to repurpose underutilized parking areas, along Furys Ferry, Washington, Columbia, and Belair Road corridors, to accommodate additional development and placemaking amenities.
- Build on the success of established community events and festivals by partnering with organizations such as Visit Columbia County and Explore Georgia to offer more frequent events throughout the year to enhance community engagement and draw visitors.
- Consider incorporating public art, streetscaping, and placemaking elements within commercial corridors to increase visual interest and create distinctive, attractive environments.
- Incorporate green space, public gathering areas, and active outdoor amenities into commercial developments.



Workforce Development

A strong local workforce is a cornerstone of Columbia County's economic success. Developing a well-trained workforce strengthens the County's ability to attract and retain businesses while providing residents with well-paying jobs and opportunities to build careers in Columbia County. By continuing to provide workers with opportunities to enhance their skills and grow professionally, the County supports sustaining employment, encourages long-term investment, and generates tax revenue, benefiting the broader community. During outreach and engagement, participants noted that high school students are interested in trades and would like to see programs that offer career pathways beyond college. To support the County's major employers, including Club Car, John Deere, GIW Industries, and Pollard Lumber Company, the County should collaborate with these businesses to identify skills gaps and align training opportunities with workforce needs.

As the WellStar Columbia County Hospital opens in Fall 2026, the County should focus on planning, training, recruiting, and retaining a skilled healthcare workforce to meet current and future demands. This can include strategies for continuous learning, upskilling, and adapting to evolving technology and demographic trends as Columbia County's population continues to grow. With the future development of the White Oak Technology Park, the County should partner with local colleges and training providers to offer courses that align directly with the skills needed by companies. Ongoing discussion with local businesses, educational institutions, and economic development organizations will help identify labor gaps and guide the creation of targeted, career-focused training programs.

Additionally, the County should leverage its proximity to the U.S. Army Cyber Center of Excellence at Fort Gordon. Partnering with military workforce transition programs and collaborating with local colleges to generate more educational opportunities in cybersecurity, IT, and data analytics will help align regional talent with emerging opportunities. By combining foundational workforce skills with specialized training linked to Fort Gordon, Columbia County can cultivate a qualified workforce that supports both current employers and future economic growth.

Recommendations

- Partner with the Columbia County School District and the business community to support workforce development pathways in schools that align with the needs of local employers.
- Work with the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County to add resources to their website that connect residents to training opportunities and employment opportunities.
- Advertise the Georgia Veterans Education Career Transition Resource Center programs, workshops, and services at the Columbia County job fair.
- Continue to work with Fort Gordon and the U.S. Army Cyber Center of Excellence to offer workforce development and specialized training to support the local economy.



Quarries and Mining Operations

Columbia County's active quarry operations contribute to the local economy through employment, property tax revenue, and supplying construction materials across the region. The County has two active quarries in Grovetown and one in southeastern portion of the County near the Savannah River. Additionally, several materials and mining companies operate within the County, supplying construction materials to the great South Georgia region. Quarries can impact the community in several ways, including effects on air quality, water quality, and traffic. However, they are an important part of the success of the County's economy by providing a range of jobs from equipment operators and truck drivers to mechanics to administrative staff.

Quarry operations generate revenue for the County through property, sales, and use taxes, including the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). These taxes support the County's schools, roads, parks, infrastructure, and public facilities. Additionally, the County receives revenue from business licenses and permit fees.

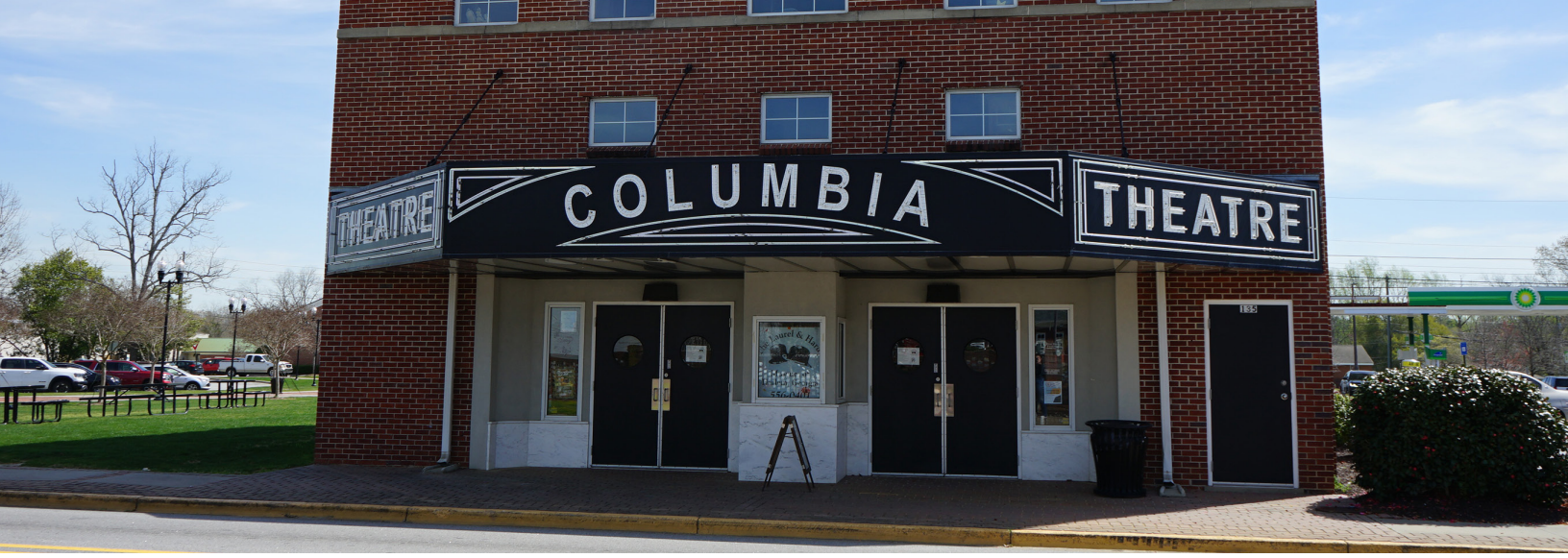
Recommendations

- Plan proactively for the future reclamation and reuse of quarry sites as they reach the end of their operational life.
- Maintain open communication with quarry operators and plan for potential traffic and environmental impacts to nearby residential areas.

CASE STUDY

BELLWOOD QUARRY, ATLANTA GA

In 2006 Atlanta purchased the Bellwood Quarry, a historic granite quarry that had been in operation for more than 100 years. The site has been transformed into the 300-acre Westside Park, featuring a 35-acre reservoir, trails, and green spaces. It now serves as a backup water supply reservoir for the city and is a public park with amenities like playgrounds, pavilions, walking paths that connect to the Atlanta Beltline, and Bellwood Quarry viewing areas.



Tourism and Events

Tourism is an important economic driver, bringing visitors who support local businesses and strengthen community prosperity. Events such as the Augusta Masters golf tournament, held just outside the County limits, bring an estimated 35,00-40,000 visitors to the area. In addition to the flexibility that homeowners are afforded in renting out their properties during the tournament, Columbia County can further capitalize on the economic benefits by supporting the development of hotels, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

Within the County limits are numerous assets upon which a tourism base can be expanded or enhanced. The International Disc Golf Center in Wildwood Park is a premier golf destination with multiple championship courses. In addition to addressing the remaining repairs to damage sustained from Hurricane Helene, creating local attractions and events around the course can help turn visitors into repeat customers, strengthening the local economy. Additionally, the County should continue to capitalize on the fishing, boating, kayaking and camping opportunities at Clarks Hill Lake, Wildwood Park, and along the Savannah River. Through Visit Columbia County, which promotes the County's outdoor attractions, and by supporting recreation businesses and investing in public infrastructure, such as parks and trails, the County can enhance the visitor experience and strengthen its reputation as a regional outdoor destination.

Events and festivals provide fun and engaging ways to bring people together, strengthening community bonds. Evans Town Center is home to popular annual events like Boom! In the Park, Movies in the Plaza, holiday parades, and seasonal markets. The Lady A Pavilion hosts year-round concerts, and the Columbia County Performing Arts Center brings Broadway shows, concerts, comedy, and local performances to the area. Together, these venues make the Town Center a cultural and social hub for the County.

Through community outreach, participants emphasized the need for a stronger, centralized place where residents can gather and interact. By building on these assets, expanding family-friendly events, cultural programming, and social events, Evans Town Center could become the community's signature gathering place, shaping Columbia County's identity, fostering pride, and creating shared traditions that both residents and visitors recognize and celebrate.

Recommendations

- Continue to collaborate with Visit Columbia County to market and advertise Columbia County as a destination for outdoor recreation.
- Work with local businesses, hotels, and restaurants to create tourism packages that include accommodations, dining, and event access for future disc golf tournaments, fishing tournaments, and off-road bike races.
- Organize annual events that center around disc golf and incorporate local elements like live music, food trucks, and markets to draw in a wider audience.
- Continue to work with the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County, Visit Columbia, and the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce to ensure that community events at Evans Town Center, Lady A Amphitheater, and the Columbia County Center for Performing Arts are advertised across the region.
- Incorporate outdoor seating or extend operating hours to increase foot traffic and enhance the vitality of Evans Town Center.



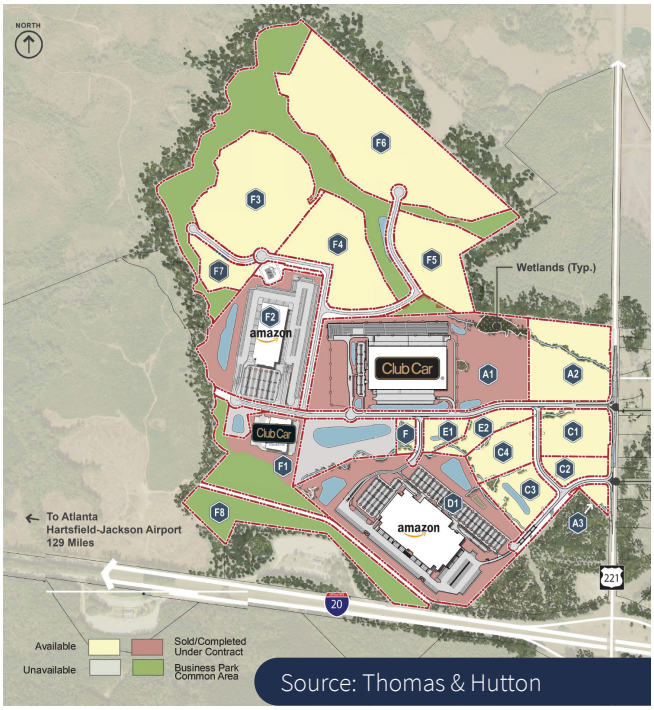
Business Development and Attraction

Columbia County's commercial businesses provide most daily needs of the community. The County has the opportunity to expand its industrial base, support locally owned businesses, and leverage its natural resources to expand the economy, broaden career options, and better meet the needs of the community.

White Oak Business Park

The White Oak Business Park is the County's leading business park, developed to strengthen the County's innovative manufacturing sector. Major companies like Club Car and Amazon anchor the first phase of this development, and have created over 800 jobs for the community. The County's recent land acquisition, in phase two, leaves an additional 218 acres of available land for future industrial and manufacturing development. As of 2025, phase three includes plans to expand onto a 1,945-acre site adjacent to the existing business park. This expansion, known as the White Oak Technology Park, is planned to include multiple data centers, forming a technology campus dedicated to data center development. The first phase of the technology park is expected to be completed within the next two years.

To attract new industrial development and broaden Columbia County's economic vitality, the County should continue to partner with organizations such as the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County and the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce to market the community's assets, such as available land, an educated workforce, and its location within the region. Through marketing and existing incentives, this can position Columbia County as a regional hub for industry and innovation while creating high-paying employment opportunities for the community.



Source: Thomas & Hutton



Supporting Local Businesses

Local businesses are essential to a robust economy, creating jobs, and stronger social and community ties. As Columbia County progresses, supporting small and local businesses across the County will be important. In addition to encouraging residents to buy and shop locally, the County should engage the local business community through partnerships and programs, such as the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce's Business Institute Series, which provides resources, connections, and training on topics related to customer retention.

Existing businesses like Sunrise Grill, Pollard Lumber Company, and Goat Kick Coffee demonstrate the variety and vitality of the County's local business sector. However, participants during outreach and engagement expressed a desire for more local businesses. To support future businesses, the County could streamline site plan review and zoning requirements to reduce barriers to entry and by identifying strategic locations for new small and local businesses across the County.

Recommendations

- Work with organizations, such as the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, to develop marketing campaigns and a business attraction and retention program to support both existing and future County businesses.
- Work with the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County to update and maintain a marketing and business recruitment strategy to position the County as a premier location for businesses.
- Consider creating programs to support locally owned small businesses, such as Small Business Saturdays, business development mentorships, and networking events with the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce.



07

Transportation

The Transportation chapter focuses on creating a high-quality and well-connected transportation network for users of all ages and abilities in Columbia County. The chapter recommends targeted investments in roadways, active transportation, and transit. Strategies to maintain and improve the roadway network featured in the chapter are aligned with the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan.* Transportation improvements can continue to prioritize multi-modal transportation for all users, reduce congestion, and improve overall mobility in Columbia County.

Roadway Network

The road network comprises essential infrastructure that supports the movement of people and goods by car and freight. During community outreach, many participants emphasized challenges with traffic and congestion. The Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Columbia County and recently adopted the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan* in 2020. The plan predicts that the state-wide Georgia roadway network will accommodate approximately 14,251,210 vehicles miles traveled (VMT) by 2040, a 29% increase from 2015. The roadway network is designed for lower volumes which leads to challenges such as congestion and the need to rely on collector roadways to move throughout the County.

Most residents will continue to use cars as their primary mode of transportation, making improving the existing system a priority. Optimizing adjacent land uses, creating efficient commercial/industrial corridors, and establishing a multi-modal network for pedestrians and bicycles can improve the road network. To allow for an efficient roadway network, the County should continue to work with ARTS MPO to plan appropriately for future demands and implement strategies of the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan*.

Roadway Classifications

Roadway classifications are governed by federal guidelines and categorize roads, streets, and highways based on the type of service they provide. This system outlines the intended role of each roadway within the transportation network, which influences design aspects such as speed, capacity, and land use development. Roads are categorized based on classifications, ranging from lower classifications that prioritize access for shorter trips (local and collector roads) to higher classifications designed for longer trips and regional connectivity (arterials and interstates). Each roadway classification serves to collect and distribute vehicles for the next higher classification in the system.

Interstates

Interstates provide the highest degree of mobility, with access limited to grade-separated interchanges to preserve capacity for high volumes of traffic and high travel speeds.

An example is I-20, providing east-west travel and regional connections.

Principal Arterials

Principal arterials provide a high level of mobility and allow for long-distance travel to a high volume of traffic at high speeds, and provide access to major activity centers within urban areas, such as major commercial corridors.

Examples of principal arterials include State Route 223 (East Robinson Avenue), State Route 388 (Horizon Parkway), or I-520 (Bobby Jones Expressway).

Minor Arterials

Minor arterials primarily connect and support principal arterials with lower speeds, increased access, and often support other transportation modes, such as bus routes.

Examples of minor arterials include State Route 47, State Route 232, or US Highway 221.

Collectors

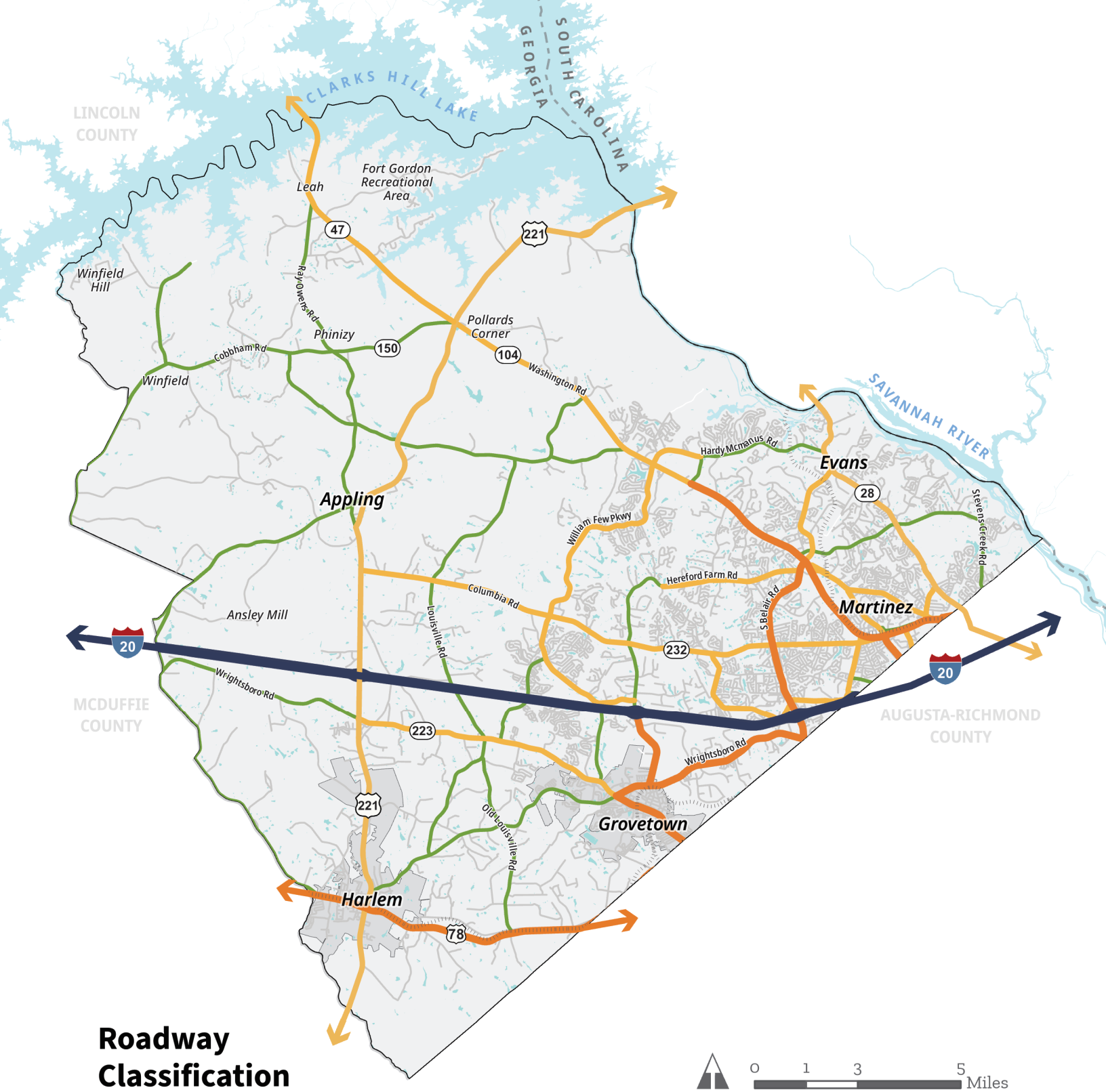
Collectors collect and distribute traffic from local roads to arterials. Collectors typically provide circulation that local roads cannot, with major collectors featuring higher speeds and more travel lanes. Minor collectors will have more connections and driveway entrances to provide access to surrounding uses.

Examples of collectors include Ray Owens Road, Cobbham Road, or Louisville Road.

Local Roads

Local roads are the lowest level of the road classification hierarchy. They comprise the largest percentage of all roadways in Columbia County, providing fewer lanes, lower speeds, and the greatest amount of access.

Examples of local roads include Evans Town Center Boulevard, Southern Pines Drive, or Gibbs Road.



Roadway Classification

- Interstate
- Principal Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Collector
- Local Road

Roadway Jurisdiction

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) manages the interstate and most arterials, such as I-20, US Highway 221, State Route 47, and State Route 232. The Columbia County Engineering Services Division manages most other minor arterials and collectors in the County, including Evans to Lock Road, Louisville Road, and White Oak Road. Harlem and Grovetown manage local roads within their municipal boundaries.



Roadway Capacities

Forecasting future demand can help establish and maintain proper roadway capacities. Generally, the County's road network experiences challenges during peak travel times. Outreach participants indicated traffic congestion is a primary concern when traveling through the County. To avoid delays, many drivers divert and take collector streets and neighborhood routes that are not designed for high traffic volumes.

Interstate 20 is the main east-west thoroughfare in the County, with supporting roads like Riverwatch Parkway and Columbia Road carrying lower volume traffic. Roads such as Furys Ferry Road, Lewiston Road, William Few Parkway, and U.S. Highway 221 provide much of the north-south travel in the County. The County should continue to evaluate the transportation system and prioritize areas for future improvements. This is also in alignment with the community vision and first goal of the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan,* which aims to reduce congestion and traffic delays.

Average Annual Daily Traffic

Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) is the average daily traffic volume on a roadway segment for all the days of the week during a one-year period. GDOT operates 143 collection points to record annual AADT data through the Georgia Traffic Monitoring Program.

In 2023, I-20 had the most traffic volume in the County, with up to 79,900 vehicles per day. Major arterials saw between 5,840 vehicles per day (U.S. Highway 78) and 40,400 vehicles per day (State Route 232). Riverwatch Parkway is the road with the highest traffic volume of County-managed roads, with between 15,700 and 17,300 vehicles per day. With outreach participants citing traffic congestion as a main concern, the County should continue to work with GDOT to monitor, track, and analyze AADT data to plan road improvements and improve roadway circulation.

Traffic Congestion

The ARTS MPO updated the *Congestion Management Process (CMP)* in 2021, which introduced the Travel Time Index (TTI) as the primary metric to measure congestion. TTI is a ratio that represents actual travel time as a percentage of the ideal travel time. For example, if the free-flow travel time for a road segment is six minutes, and the actual travel time is nine minutes, the TTI is 1.5.

Based on these ranges and rankings, corridors throughout the MPO area were analyzed and categorized based on their level of congestion. Of the 12 primary and secondary corridors identified within Columbia County, nine are categorized as "Seriously Congested," which represents a TTI of more than 1.3. This indicates that there may be further road capacity challenges within the ARTS planning area to be addressed. The CMP will be updated with new data to continue to be analyzed regularly in a continuous effort to classify, understand, and mitigate the causes of congestion. Outreach revealed several roads are unable to support the existing road volumes and identified Baker Place Road and William Few Parkway as having the greatest traffic concerns. The County should continue to use these metrics to evaluate and align road network improvements with the goals and priorities of both the Future Mobility 2050 Plan and CMP.

Recommendations

- Continue to implement the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan* to align road improvements with forecasted traffic volumes and congestion.
- Maintain regular coordination with ARTS and GDOT to ensure proper roadway maintenance, support future development, and enhance multi-modal connectivity.
- Coordinate with GDOT for traffic studies to determine the best practice for congestion alleviation during peak usage times.
- Regularly monitor traffic volumes on collector and local roadways to identify problem areas and adapt to changing traffic patterns over time.
- Leverage new data sources such as smart infrastructure to guide CIP decisions and forecast transportation needs based on anticipated land use changes.

Roadway Improvements

Given the County's population growth, roadway improvements and additional active transportation options will be necessary to accommodate the increased number of vehicles and bicycles anticipated on the road. There are numerous road improvements underway or recently completed that were funded through the Transportation Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) including:

- **Flowing Wells Road.** Road widening from Columbia Road to Mason McKnight Parkway consisting of two lanes with a center turn lane, medians, and sidewalks.
- **Lewiston Road.** Road widening from William Few Parkway to Gateway Boulevard with four lanes and a center turn lane. This project also included the conversion of the I-20 interchange to a diverging diamond.
- **U.S. Highway 28/Furys Ferry Road.** Road widening from Evans to Locks Road to Hardy McManus Road with four lanes, a center turn lane, and sidewalk on one side of the road. This project also includes a roundabout at the Hardy McManus Road intersection.
- **Horizon South Parkway.** Road widening from Wrightsboro Road to Steiner Way consisting of four lanes with a center turn lane, medians, and sidewalks along both sides of the roadway.
- **Hardy McManus Road.** Construction of a section of Hardy McManus Road from Furys Ferry Road to William Few Parkway.
- **Other Planned Improvements.** The Hereford Farm Road widening project, from North Belair Road to Columbia Road, is scheduled to start construction in 2026.

Additional improvement projects identified in the County's 2023-2028 Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) project list include improvements to North Belair Road and roadways within Evans Town Center, intersection improvements at Ray Owens Road and White Oak Road, and new roadway connections from Chamblin Road to Horizon South Parkway. The Euchee Creek Greenway is funded by both SPLOST and TSPLOST and was planned to be built in phases as land becomes available. The improvements will connect the Greenway from Grovetown to the Augusta Canal.

Recommendations

- Improve connectivity across the County by implementing more improvement projects, such as road widening, roundabout construction, and interchange reconstructions.
- Continue to implement projects identified in the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan* through the CIP.
- Continue to use the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan* and Character Areas to support future improvements and redevelopment.
- Evaluate and identify problem intersections with high congestion and high crash ratios to plan for future improvements.

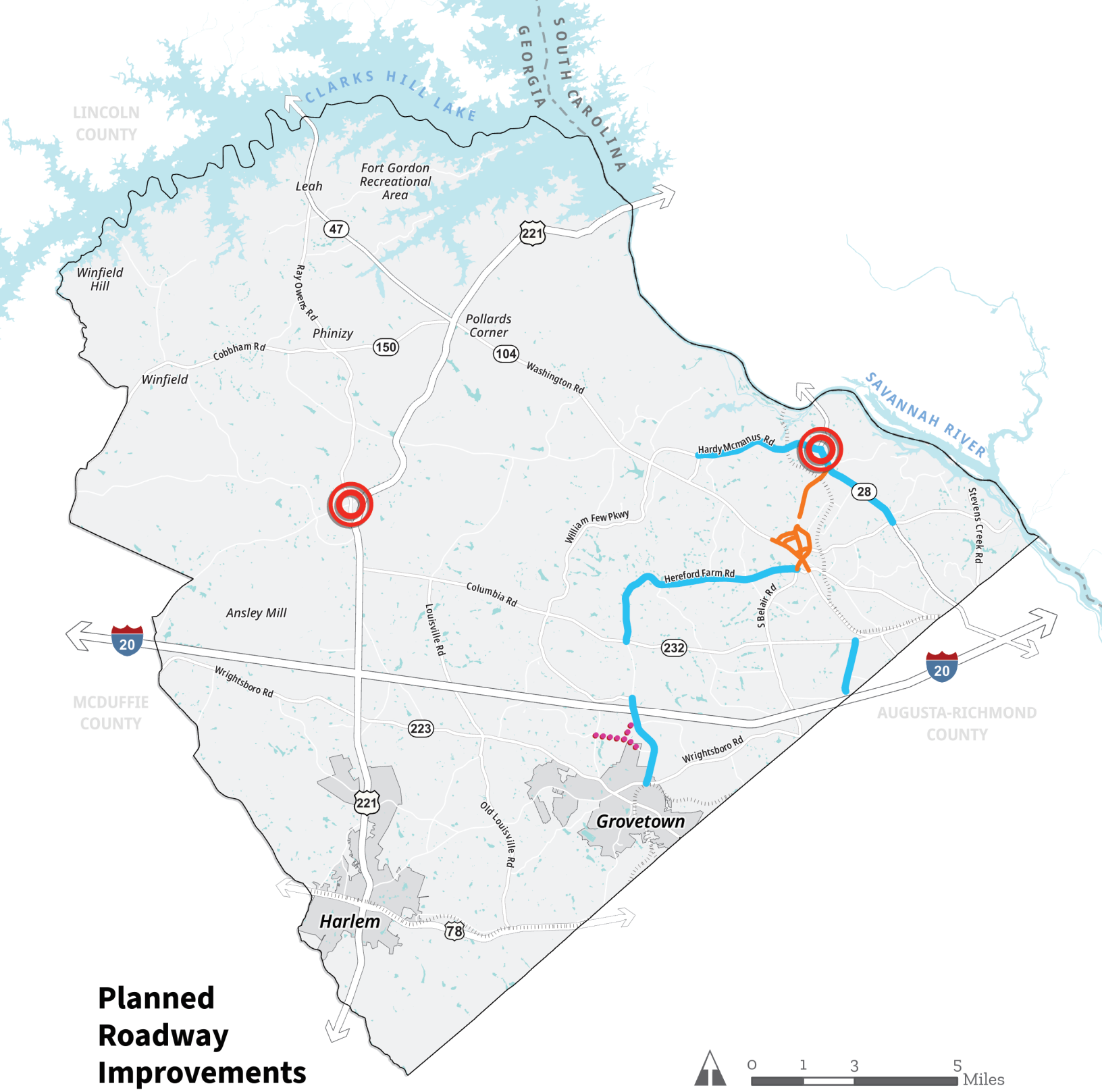
CASE STUDY

DIVERGING DIAMOND AT LEWISTON ROAD AND I-20

A diverging diamond is a road design where traffic briefly shifts to the opposite side of the road at the interchange to allow safer, more efficient left turns onto freeways without crossing in front of oncoming cars. This layout aims to improve safety and traffic flow by reducing conflict points and eliminating the need for dedicated left-turn signals.

The Lewiston Road and I-20 diverging diamond interchange opened in February 2024. Initially, drivers were hesitant in embracing the new interchange design. However, motorists quickly became accustomed to it, noting that driving through this area is quicker, smoother, and traffic has been reduced.




CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Leah
Fort Gordon Recreational Area
47
221
Winfield Hill
Ray Owens Rd
Phinizy
Pollards Corner
Cobbham Rd
150
104
Washington Rd
Winfield
SAVANNAH RIVER
Hardy Mcmanus Rd
28
Stevens Creek Rd
William Few Pkwy
Hereford Farm Rd
S Belair Rd
Columbia Rd
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
232
20
20
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
223
Wrightsboro Rd
221
Old Louisville Rd
Grovetown
Harlem
78
Planned Roadway Improvements
Intersection Improvements
Road Widening and Improvements
General Road Improvements
New Road
0 1 3 5 Miles



Active Transportation

Active transportation offers safe, convenient, healthy, and cost-effective options like bicycling or walking as part of a balanced transportation system. A well-connected active transportation network is important for those who do not drive. In Columbia County, active transportation should connect residents to schools, jobs, parks, shopping, and community amenities. By prioritizing well-designed sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, and crossings, the County can create an efficient multi-modal transportation network for residents of all ages and abilities. The *Future Mobility 2050 Plan* sets goals to expand greenways, transit routes, bike lanes, and sidewalks, directly reflecting the priorities emphasized by participants during outreach.

Sidewalk Network

Columbia County's sidewalk network is an important part of the transportation system. Existing sidewalks in the community are located primarily along newly built or improved local and collector roads. There are significant gaps in the sidewalk network that limit it from being an effective and complete sidewalk network. In the County, the sidewalk network is limited to certain areas of Evans, Martinez, Grovetown, and Harlem.

Columbia County should continue to improve the existing sidewalk network through enhancing design including wider sidewalks and buffers along busy roads to enhance safety of users. The County should also evaluate new roads suitable for road and sidewalks improvements to improve connectivity to key destinations in the County. Recent road improvement projects, such as Horizon South Parkway, have new and continuous sidewalks on both sides of the roads that meet ADA standards, while rural areas of the County do not have any pedestrian infrastructure.

An incomplete sidewalk network provides obstacles for those with different mobility levels. Identifying pedestrian crossings on collectors and arterials to create more prominent crosswalks, installing modified signal phasing for pedestrians of varying abilities, and ADA-compliant curb cuts can improve safety throughout the County.



Complete Streets

As Columbia County continues to grow, the County should consider a holistic approach to the transportation planning process. With growing pressure on road capacities and in an effort to promote more active transportation options, many urban areas have adopted a "complete streets" approach to their transportation planning processes. In a complete streets approach, streets should account for all modes and users, and provide contextually appropriate facilities that are safe and inviting. It is important to clarify that a complete streets approach does not imply accounting for every mode of transportation on every street, but rather a network approach that provides choice.

Complete streets incorporate physical infrastructure, such as raised crossings, protected bike lanes, medians, and other traffic-calming measures, to reduce vehicle and pedestrian or bicyclist conflicts. In addition to their safety benefits, complete streets can ease congestion, support economic growth, encourage walking and bicycling, improve air quality, and enhance mobility options for children and elderly residents of all ages and abilities.

In 2012, GDOT adopted a state-wide complete street policy that requires them to work with regional transportation planning and transit partners to identify and include walking, bicycling, and transit needs as part of their regional visioning plans. Complete streets align with the design standards in the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan* and Chapter 9 of the *GDOT Design Policy Manual.* The streets are designed with the safety and comfort of all road users in mind, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. To achieve complete streets, planning, implementation, and evaluation efforts need to prioritize safety, connectivity, and sustainability throughout the transportation network.

PLANNING CONCEPT

TRAFFIC CALMING

Using the principles of complete streets, well-designed traffic calming measures can be an important tool to enhance safety and comfort for multi-modal transportation. Road design strategies such lane narrowing, medians, pinch points, and speed humps can be incorporated to signal to drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians that they are entering an area where there are slower speeds and active transportation is prioritized. While this is not a comprehensive list of solutions, these techniques can be implemented to achieve greater traffic calming in priority areas, such as near schools or community facilities.

Traffic Calming Examples


- Lane Narrowing


- Medians


- Pinch Points


- Speed Humps

Bikeways and Trails

Bikeways and trails are important for promoting active transportation options, reducing traffic congestion, and lowering carbon emissions in communities. Well-designed bikeways and paths enhance safety for bicyclists and encourage more people to choose biking when commuting. This infrastructure not only supports public health by promoting physical activity but contributes to local economies by increasing access to businesses. A robust trail network can foster a sense of community and connectivity, as it creates shared spaces where residents can engage with one another and improves connectivity throughout the County.

As identified by participants during outreach, trail extensions and multi-modal connectivity to nearby schools, community facilities, and parks should be prioritized. Columbia County is actively improving the trail network through improvements such as the Euchee Creek Greenway. Outreach participants specifically identified the stretch of William Few Parkway/ Hardy McManus Road between Columbia Road and Furys Ferry Road as an ideal location for a future bike path. Improving the trail network where possible through new paving, wayfinding signage, and identifying and constructing new connection points can enhance the bikeways and trails network. Whether located on- or off-street, improvements should aim to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists in their own delineated space as they navigate roadways for improved safety.

Safe Routes to School

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is a national initiative designed to make walking and biking to school safe and more accessible for students. It focuses on improving infrastructure, educating children on safety, encouraging active transportation, and collaborating with local law enforcement. During outreach, participants expressed need for new sidewalks to enhance pedestrian safety in front of Evans High School on Cox Road and an overpass bridge in front of Grovetown High School. Continuing to identify and upgrade safe routes for students to commute to school will improve safety near schools in the County.

CASE STUDY

EUCHEE CREEK GREENWAY

The Euchee Creek Greenway is a multi-use trail that winds through the heart of Grovetown and the surrounding neighborhoods. The 6.7-mile trail is divided into two segments with a 5-mile northern section connecting Patriots Park to Canterbury Farms, and a 1.1-mile southern segment known as the Grovetown Trails at Euchee Creek. The trail features asphalt paths and elevated boardwalks traversing through the woodlands, wetlands, and residential areas.



Bikeways and Trails

- Bikeways
- Trails
- Proposed Trails



Recommendations

- Prioritize connecting new bikeways and trails to schools, community facilities, and parks to promote active transportation.
- Coordinate with the SRTS Resource Center, school districts, and local schools to identify and implement SRTS projects.
- Prioritize SRTS improvements and gain support from the Board of Education, such as fixing the sidewalks in front of Evans High School and Grovetown High School.
- Implement traffic calming strategies including high visibility crosswalks, protected bike lanes, and curb bulb-outs to improve safety near schools.
- Incorporate complete street principles that prioritize multi-modal transportation specifically along William Few Parkway/Hardy McManus Road.
- Consider adding paved shoulders through targeted road widenings in rural areas where sidewalks or bike lanes are not feasible to provide a safer space for people walking and bicycling.
- Prepare a County-wide active transportation master plan to fully assess the transportation network and recommend improvements.
- Study trail usage to identify obstacles and opportunities for improved access and connectivity throughout the network.
- Improve the local street network with context-sensitive traffic-calming measures such as delineated bike lanes on collectors and local streets for improved bicycle safety.
- Continue to close gaps in the sidewalk network, especially in older neighborhoods around schools, community facilities, and on local streets, to promote walking for short trips.
- Continue to identify streets for new sidewalks and improve major corridors with wider sidewalks or buffers between them.
- Improve road crossing safety at problematic signalized intersections along arterial roadways through the County's annual CIP or coordination with GDOT.
- Consider implementing additional road crossing safety measures, such as more prominent or raised crosswalks at busy intersections identified by the County or GDOT.
- Incorporate a complete streets policy to expand the County's network of multi-modal transportation routes.
- Develop a toolkit to apply complete street principles throughout the County and encourage the use of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Continue to work with ARTS MPO to implement the complete streets policy.



Alternative Transportation

Alternative transportation in the County is provided by Columbia County Public Transit and Augusta Transit. Columbia County Public Transit provides an on-demand micro-transit service for all County residents, while Augusta Transit's Green Line has a single stop within the County on Davis Road. The County should explore improving infrastructure to include other mobility options ,such as park-and-ride lots, bicycle rentals, and providing connecting facilities.

Columbia County Public Transit

Columbia County Public Transit currently operates a micro-transit service providing on-demand service that picks riders up directly from their homes and transports them to destinations throughout the community using ADA-accessible buses and vans. Micro-transit uses smaller vehicles to provide flexible routes in underserved areas. The buses operate between the hours of 8:30 am and 3:30 pm.

During outreach, participants expressed a desire for more flexible transportation options in the more rural areas of the County to fill service gaps and improve accessibility. In alignment with the GDOT Design Manual, transit should be integrated into roadway construction projects through design features appropriate for the context and function of the roadway, and associated transit facilities such as transit stops, stations, or park-and-ride lots.

Park-and-ride lots allow residents to park in a single location and provide buses to pick them up on a fixed-route and schedule, bringing them to a common drop-off location. This is typically common during sporting events, conferences, and during peak high-traffic hours. Bicycling to park-and-ride lots should be encouraged by providing a connected bicycle network and secure bicycle storage. The County should evaluate the feasibility to increase the micro-transit services for more rural communities through additional buses, fixed-routes from park-and-ride lots, or increased flexibility in scheduling.

Recommendations

- Explore ways to expand Columbia County's Public Transportation Program to increase ridership.
- Explore the feasibility of expanding the service hours for riders into the mornings and evenings.
- Explore partnerships or alternative transit solutions to improve the public transportation to improve access and connectivity to key destinations in Columbia County.



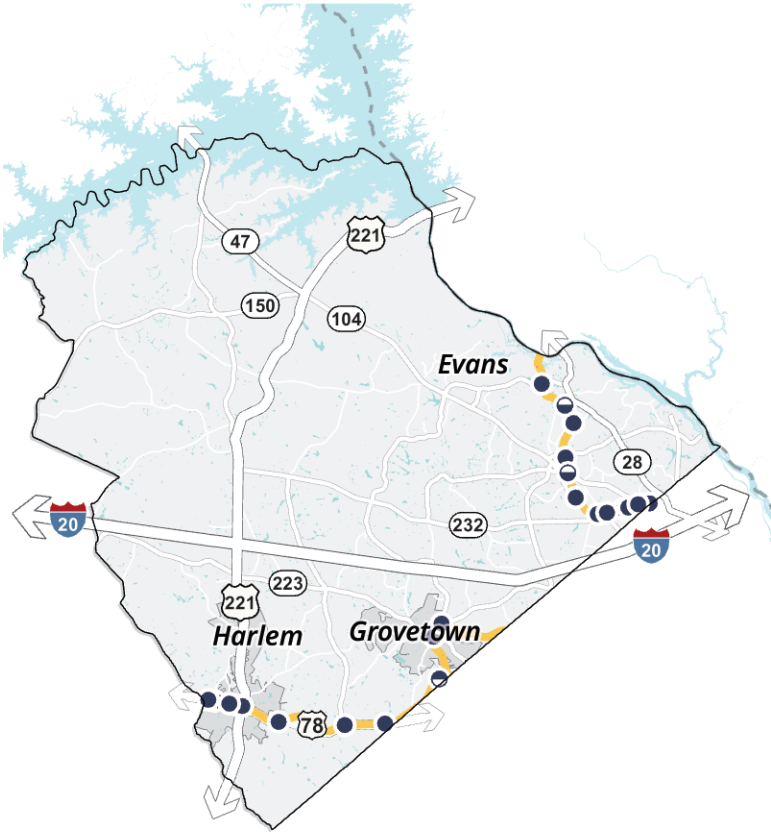
Freight Rail

Columbia County has two railroads, owned and operated by CSX Transportation, passing through the southern and eastern portions of the County. The southern line runs parallel to US 78 through Harlem and Grovetown, while the eastern line crosses the Savannah River near State Route 28 through Evans and Martinez. This eastern main line track supports the adjacent industrial uses through five spur lines, while the southern rail line sees only about one freight train a day. The rail lines are currently only used for freight purposes.

GDOT launched a Freight Rail Program designed to enhance state investment in freight rail and includes rail enhancement, rail preservation, and rail access programs. There are currently 24 crossing points between the rail lines and roadways, with only two having railroad underpasses and one having a railroad overpass. The County should work to assess conflicts with railroads and evaluate possible improvements such as over-passes and underpasses to improve the reliability of rail and road traffic.

Recommendations

- Continue to monitor and evaluate at-grade railroad crossings for problem intersections and consider the feasibility of new overpasses or underpasses.
- Partner with GDOT's Freight Rail Program to invest in upgrading short line infrastructure including track rehabilitation or bridge improvements to support more frequent service.
- Work with CSX Transportation to address safety and noise concerns specifically near residential areas.




COLUMBIA COUNTY
CULTURAL FESTIVAL

08

Community Facilities

The Community Facilities and Services chapter outlines strategies to ensure all facilities and services meet the needs of current and future residents. It provides recommendations for maintaining and enhancing existing facilities while identifying areas that require new investment. The chapter outlines a coordinated and collaborative approach for services outside the County's direct control, emphasizing communication with service providers and utility partners to support efficient infrastructure expansion and emergency preparedness. The chapter also discusses utility systems, including water, sanitary wastewater, stormwater, broadband, and green infrastructure.



Community Services

County Governance

Columbia County operates under a five-member Board of Commissioners elected from single-member districts. The board provides policy direction and fiscal oversight . Day-to-day operations and administration are handled by a County Manager and two Deputy County Managers, who assist and work in coordination with the Commission. The County is served by multiple departments and services that together manage public administration, infrastructure, development, safety, and community amenities. This structure ensures accountability while providing the professional capacity needed to align budgets with the Comprehensive Plan goals.

The County governance has effectively managed growth while maintaining service quality. Effective governance is fundamental to delivering essential services, managing growth, and ensuring transparency and accountability. It enables the County to respond proactively to residents' needs and coordinate with regional partners. Looking forward, close collaboration and coordination among multiple County boards and commissions will help ensure capital investments align with Comprehensive Plan objectives.

COLUMBIA COUNTY
GEORGIA

Emergency Services

Columbia County's emergency services represent a comprehensive approach to public safety that combines fire protection, law enforcement, and emergency medical services. Reliable and well-distributed services can influence property values and where development can occur. Reliable emergency services can safeguard public health, sustain property values, and enhance the County's overall sense of safety. The County's Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, and Emergency Services are well-equipped with facilities that ensure the efficient and equitable provision of services to all residents, businesses, and some parks. As Columbia County accommodates future growth, it will be necessary to expand and enhance these emergency services to meet growing community needs.

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement services are provided by the Columbia County Sheriff's Office, which maintains County-wide patrol, criminal investigations, detention, and community-policing units. The Sheriff's Office is located on Appling at 2273 County Camp Road and is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). The department's community-oriented approach emphasizes crime prevention and public safety education alongside traditional enforcement. The County should conduct annual community outreach events that allow residents to voice their safety concerns. At these events, officers can educate residents with practical public safety and emergency preparedness tips.



Fire Safety

Columbia County Fire Rescue (CCFR) operates 17 engines from 15 fully staffed stations, achieving an ISO rating that places the department in the top one percent of departments nationwide. This rating not only reflects exceptional service quality but also reduces insurance costs for homeowners throughout the County. The CCFR also provides community education programs, such as the Car Seat Safety Program, and fire education.

During outreach, participants expressed a need for more fire stations in underserved areas of the County, specifically south of Pollards Corners and west of Appling. To maintain the high industry standard, the County should regularly assess Fire Rescue's vehicles, equipment, and response times and ensure continued provision of exceptional fire safety services. This assessment will also ensure fire rescue has sufficient staffing and updated equipment that efficiently serves to the community's growing needs.

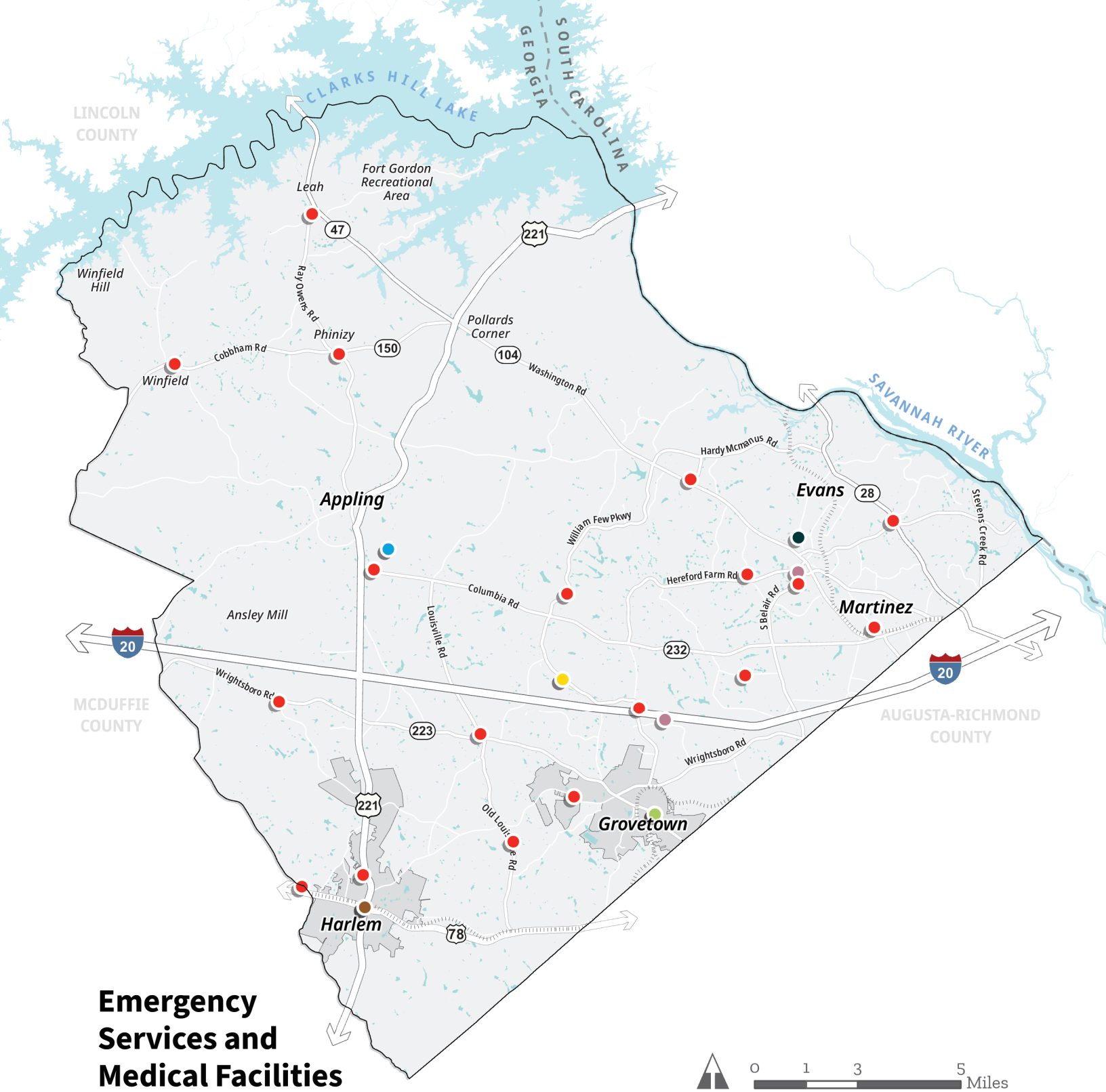
Emergency Management Services

The Emergency Management Agency (EMA), located in Evans on Ronald Reagan Drive, is dedicated to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. EMA's responsibilities are to identify vulnerabilities, effectively mitigate disasters, provide public education, plan for all-hazard emergencies, ensure continuity of government and business, and facilitate effective recovery . To better serve people affected by disasters like hurricanes, flooding, and wildfires, the County should continue improving its emergency notification and alert capabilities (like HyperReach), and identify areas for additional emergency substations in areas of high vulnerability.

Health and Medical Facilities

Columbia County currently supports healthcare access through the Columbia County Health Department in Grovetown, which provides preventive, immunization, and public health services. There is also a mental health clinic operated by LifeStance Health in Evans, providing therapy and psychiatric services. Healthcare infrastructure in the County is expanding with the construction of the 100-bed WellStar Columbia County Hospital. The hospital is located in Grovetown near I-20 and is projected to open in 2026. This facility aims to increase local health care capacity and reduce the need for residents to travel to other counties for medical services. The new facility will shorten travel times, as most emergency cases previously had to be transported to Augusta. The facility will also attract medical professionals and provide satellite urgent-care and mobile clinics that serve rural communities of the County.

Improving local healthcare services and medical facilities is essential for the community's resilience and quality of life. Access to quality healthcare influences demographic trends, supports an aging population, and provides the foundation for economic development by ensuring a healthy population. Looking ahead, collaborating with the WellStar Columbia County Hospital and Doctors Hospital of Augusta to set up satellite clinics in underserved areas will help improve healthcare access and reduce travel times for residents living in the northern part of the County. Additionally, the County can partner with hospitals and Augusta City to share clinical, training, and support resources, such as jointly expanding telehealth and shared laboratory services to maximize healthcare access. The County should continue to work on improving access by coordinating land-use and transportation plans with medical providers, offering incentives for satellite clinics in underserved areas, and expanding telemedicine partnerships to bring specialty care directly into homes and schools.



Emergency Services and Medical Facilities

- EMA Buildings
- Columbia County Sheriff's Offices (CCSO)
- Georgia State Patrol
- Grovetown Police Department
- Harlem Police Department
- Hospitals
- Fire Stations



Library

Columbia County's library system consists of three branches. The main branch, Columbia County in Evans, houses a 300-seat performing arts theatre, meeting rooms, and classrooms that host a range of events, from civic forums to robotics clubs.

The Grovetown Library, located Downtown on Old Wrightsboro Road, offers spaces for classrooms, meeting rooms, public computers, a teen room, and modern amenities including free Wi-Fi. It also offers the region's largest Spanish-language collection.

The Harlem Library, on Louisville Street, holds a collection of over 20,000 items, and provides 36 public computers, meeting and study rooms, and supports community programs and events.

Library services support lifelong learning and play an important role in supporting workforce development and civic engagement by offering job search assistance, digital literacy support, and partnerships with employment programs. To ensure residents have easy access to library services, the County should actively find solutions that increase access to these services, particularly for communities in the northern part of the County. Continued development of programs, such as teen development, after-school tutoring, emergency preparedness, and adult events, will promote community engagement. Through these programs, the County can create active learning spaces and enrich public life.



COLUMBIA COUNTY LIBRARIES OFFER OVER 20,000 COLLECTION ITEMS, INCLUDING THE REGION'S LARGEST SPANISH-LANGUAGE COLLECTION

Educational Facilities

Educational facilities represent one of the most significant public investments in any community, directly affecting property values, demographic trends, and economic development potential. High-quality schools attract families and businesses while developing the skilled workforce necessary for economic growth.

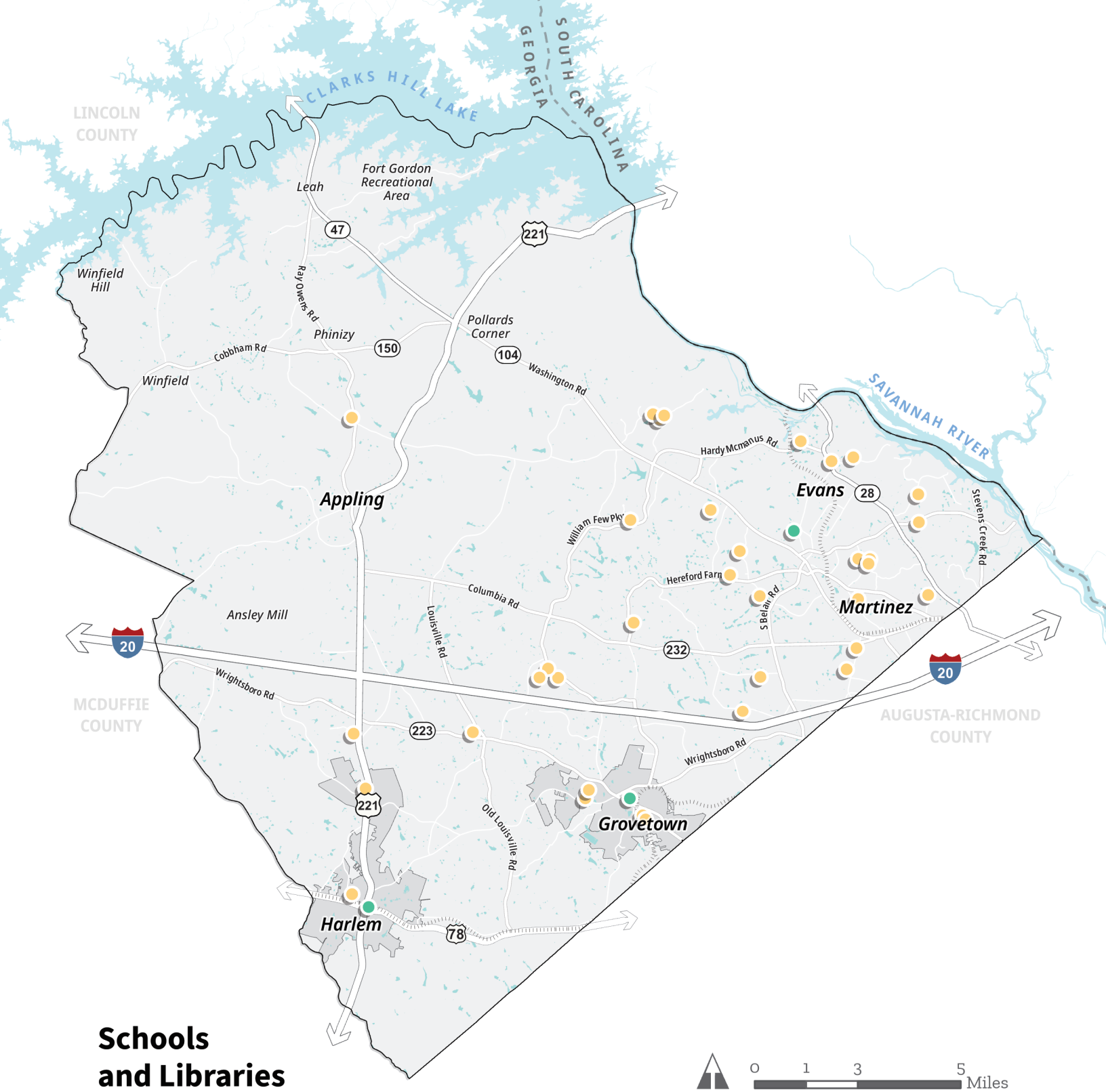
The County education system is anchored by the Columbia County School District, which is the 15th largest district in Georgia. The School District also operates the Columbia County Alternative School and the Columbia Virtual Academy to provide personalized and virtual education. The Columbia County School District serves nearly 29,000 students across 30 schools. The district is one of the largest employers in the County, with 4,322 employees. The school district achieved a 92.96% graduation rate in 2025, which considerably exceeds state and national averages. This exceptional performance reflects strong community support for education.

The County has nine private schools serving 1,626 students. Additionally, institutions like Augusta Technical College and the Columbia County Center of Augusta Tech offer free adult education courses, GED/HiSET preparation, and provide degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

The School District is actively pursuing strategic expansion sites reserved in growth corridors that can accommodate rising enrollments. Outreach highlighted the need for more educational facilities in the northern parts of the County, as there is just one elementary school north of Appling. Supporting educational excellence through coordinated planning, infrastructure investments, and intergovernmental cooperation is necessary to ensure that schools and facilities are equipped to meet the County's evolving needs. The County should work with schools and colleges to consider expanding new educational facilities in underserved areas. Coordinating with School District to expand access to technical, vocational, and adult education programs will help align with workforce needs.

Recommendations

- Ensure that capital investments align with Comprehensive Plan goals and proactively address resident and business needs.
- Maintain professional management and transparent fiscal oversight to support continued growth while ensuring service quality.
- Work with the Sheriff's Office and Fire Rescue to host community forums for residents to discuss safety concerns, incorporating education on crime prevention, emergency preparedness, disaster management, and fire safety, targeted at high-growth areas of the County.
- Conduct a long-range facilities and staffing analysis for the Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, and EMA to forecast needs over the next 10–20 years and align public safety investments with population and development growth.
- Work with the Sheriff's Office and Fire Rescue to assess staff, training, equipment, and infrastructure so the County can strategically allocate resources and continually improve emergency services for residents.
- Coordinate with the Sheriff's Office and Fire Rescue to identify locations for new stations in growth areas; prioritize constructing additional police and fire stations in expanding northern and western regions to maintain timely response.
- Mandate annual reviews of vehicles, equipment, manpower, and response times to ensure uninterrupted service, incorporating upgrades for emerging needs, including wildfire risks near the Savannah River corridor.
- Encourage WellStar and local organizations to establish urgent-care and mobile clinics in underserved northern areas, aiming to cut travel times and attract medical professionals to support County residents, where feasible.
- Strengthen partnerships between the School Board and County to prepare for enrollment growth by reserving and developing school sites in northern underserved areas.
- Support schools through targeted investments, such as joint funding programs, infrastructure grants, and shared utility or site planning, to update school facilities.



Schools and Libraries

- Library
- Schools (Public and Private)



Update Utilities and Infrastructure

To support both existing communities and future growth, it is necessary to prioritize maintaining reliable utility services while strategically expanding infrastructure into new and planned development areas. Development within Columbia County depends on access to a network of public and private utilities and infrastructure. Outreach participants voiced their concerns regarding straining existing infrastructure due to growth and expansion within the County. Essential services such as water, wastewater, stormwater, electricity, and telecommunications are crucial for residents and businesses, and their availability shapes where future development and industrial growth can occur.

Water and Wastewater Services

Reliable access to public water services supports existing customers and enables growth across residential, commercial, and industrial sectors in Columbia County. The Columbia County Water Utility supplies water in the County. The water is withdrawn from either the Savannah River or the Thurmond Lake Reservoir at Clarks Hill and then treated in the Jim Blanchard Water Treatment facility. The treatment facility has capacity of up to 46 million gallons per day, supplemented by eight million gallons per day at the Clarks Hill Plant.

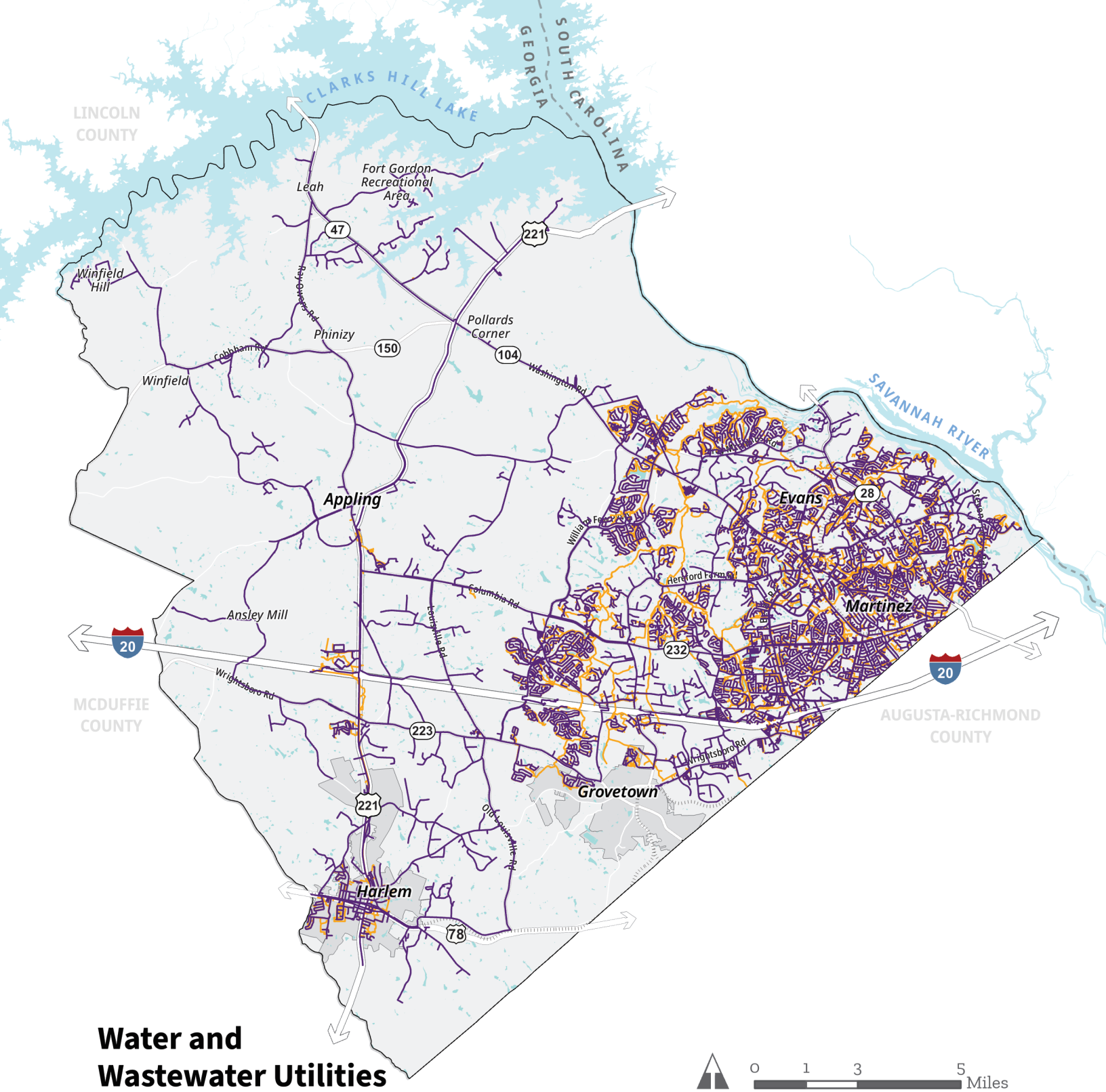
Additionally, wastewater infrastructure works in conjunction with water services to serve current users while meeting future demand. It protects public health by preventing untreated sewage overflows and preserving water quality in nearby streams and groundwater. Adequate capacity and appropriate locations for treatment facilities determine where development and redevelopment can occur while maintaining environmental quality and public health protection. It is important to ensure that treated wastewater meets state and federal standards so that discharges don't harm rivers, streams, or groundwater.

As the County attracts new residential, commercial, and industrial developments, distribution lines must continue to serve current capacity and accommodate planned growth. The County should regularly assess and maintain water and wastewater infrastructure and prioritize modernizing aging infrastructure aligned with the capital improvement plan. Recently, the County formed a Water Quality Task Force to address water discoloration and pressure issues, with plans for cleaning transmission mains and enhanced monitoring and upgrades. The County should continue these efforts and prioritize completing and extending planned services to further expand the network.

Stormwater

Stormwater infrastructure refers to a network of systems, including storm drains, culverts, detention and retention basins, rain gardens, bioswales, and swales. These are designed to collect, convey, treat, or store stormwater runoff to protect water quality and manage flooding. Stormwater infrastructure must manage increased runoff from development while protecting water quality, reducing flood risks, and safeguarding property and environmental health. Effective stormwater management will help protect both property and environmental quality while supporting sustainable development patterns.

The County protects its waters through compliance with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) small phase II Municipal Separate Storm Wastewater System (MS4). The MS4 is an entirely different stormwater drainage management system that collects and carries rainwater runoff to the Savannah River Basin. The County's MS4 program targets flood-prone areas along Euchee and Kiokee creeks while requiring best management practices for new developments. This regulatory approach adheres to federal requirements and utilizes local planning to manage stormwater impacts. The County should strengthen stormwater management through green infrastructure investments and enhanced development standards.



Water and Wastewater Utilities

Water Lines

Wastewater Lines



Energy Services

Columbia County benefits from reliable electrical service through Georgia Power and Jefferson Energy, which provides service for both residential and commercial users. Energy infrastructure investments must anticipate future demand while maintaining service reliability and ensuring uninterrupted services. It is important that energy infrastructure supports both current needs and future development patterns. The County should continue to coordinate with energy service providers to guarantee all areas are serviced while planning for future growth to maintain adequate capacity and coverage that accommodates expected expansion. The County should work with energy providers to incorporate emerging technologies for improved service offerings to customers in the County

Gas

Natural gas services in the County are provided through Georgia Natural Gas, Gas South, Atlanta Gas Light, and SCANA Energy. These organizations provide competitive utility options that support both residential needs and economic development. To stay ahead of growth, the County can work with these providers to map future demand corridors, coordinate right-of-way acquisitions, and support extending service into newly planned development areas.

Recommendations

- Collaborate with energy providers like Georgia Power and Jefferson Energy to align substation upgrades and feeder extensions with identified urban and rural nodes.
- Require early utility coordination at rezoning and preliminary plat stages so infrastructure upgrades are built into the budget and completed before development.
- Work with Atlanta Gas Light and marketers (Georgia Natural Gas, Gas South, SCANA) to ensure all communities in the County are serviced.
- Collaborate with developers and property owners to align water and wastewater line projects to the Character Areas Map.
- Assess existing capacity, distribution systems, treatment facilities, and related infrastructure for water and wastewater utilities to direct upgrades and ensure sufficient service to growth areas.
- Reserve and acquire utility sites (tanks, booster stations, pump stations) in advance before growth or new development happens within planned service sheds.
- Continue to require on-site retention and infiltration, riparian buffers, and soil restoration in all new projects to reduce runoff, protect creek health, and help safeguard public health by reducing exposure to pollutants.
- Continue to require and integrate stormwater retrofits into all future development projects, including but not limited to road widenings and park projects, to meet MS4 goals and improve water quality.

CASE STUDY

NORTH CAROLINA'S "DIG ONCE" POLICY

North Carolina's Dig Once policy is a broadband infrastructure coordination framework established through Executive Order No. 91, implemented in 2021. Administered jointly by the NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT), the policy lets multiple internet providers install broadband infrastructure during state road projects, reducing repeated excavations and lowering costs. This approach speeds up broadband expansion, especially in underserved areas, and minimizes future road disruptions while ensuring highway project schedules remain the top priority.



Telecommunications and Broadband

In 2018, Georgia legislation passed the Achieving Connectivity Everywhere (ACE) Act (SB 402), which directs local governments to plan for broadband deployment and provides tools, incentives, and partnerships to expand high-speed service. The State defines broadband services as a minimum of 25Mbps down and 3Mbps up in speed.

The County created Columbia County Community Broadband Utility (C3BU) in 2010, which owns and operates an open-access fiber network spanning more than 200 route-miles and connecting over 180 facilities, including government offices, educational buildings (schools, colleges), public safety agencies, hospitals or health departments, libraries, and nonprofit facilities. Additionally, private internet service providers have extended their services to residential neighborhoods, although gaps persist in rural northern areas of the County.

Broadband access has become essential infrastructure for economic development, education, healthcare, and overall quality of life. It is also important for supporting existing industries and attracting companies in the future, like Amazon, which require robust connectivity as a baseline for locating operations. The County's investment in fiber infrastructure positions it well for business attraction, economic growth, and digital learning opportunities. Columbia County should continue its efforts to expand broadband by forming public-private partnerships and making targeted investments in underserved areas, particularly where existing infrastructure is weak or nonexistent. Universal broadband access is important for economic competitiveness and educational equity, ensuring that every community member can participate in the digital economy.

Recommendations

- Continue to work with broadband service providers to analyze and ensure all areas of the County have coverage and access to broadband, prioritizing rural northern communities.
- Create and adhere to a "dig-once" policy, requiring conduit placement in all new road and utility projects.
- Continue to support community Wi-Fi pilots at parks and libraries to ensure equitable access for all.

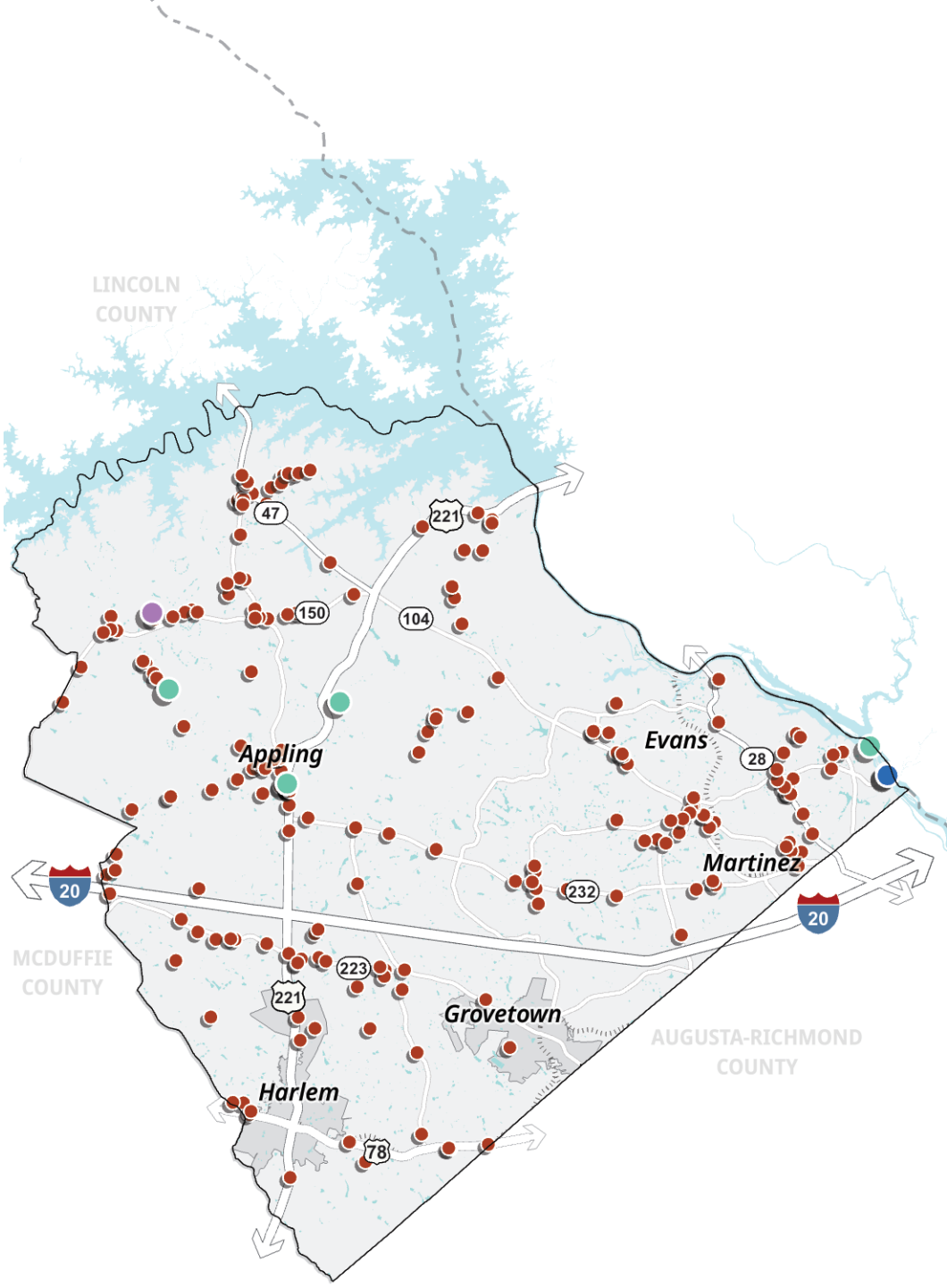
CASE STUDY

WINFIELD PAVILION

Located in northern part of the County, the Winfield Pavilion is one of the County's designated Public Wi-Fi Pavilions, offering free high-speed internet access in a covered outdoor setting. The pavilion offers access to WiFi in a rural area of the county, providing residents, students, and visitors a reliable space for remote work, online learning, and community activities, helping expand digital connectivity in rural parts of the County. Managed by the C3BU, the site supports the County's goal of improving broadband access and bridging the digital divide for all residents.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The Columbia County Historical Society was founded in 1975 and offers various initiatives to engage and inform community members about the region's heritage. The County's historic resources include rural intersections (community focal points), churches, and mill sites that reflect its early settlement and growth. The County's notable historic venues, such as the Augusta Canal Headgates at the Savannah Rapids Pavilion and Patriots Park help preserve County identity while attracting visitors and supporting local economic development. These resources require systematic cataloging and maintenance to ensure their preservation for future generations. The County's Historic Property Preservation Advisory Committee (HHPAC) plays an important role in identifying and protecting these sites. Additionally, the County can enhance preservation efforts by expanding digital documentation and mapping of historic sites, increasing public accessibility and awareness. Strengthening partnerships with the School District will further promote heritage education and educate residents around Columbia County's historic and cultural legacy. Historic sites also boost tourism by drawing visitors to the County's cultural landmarks.



Historic Sites

- County Historic Site
- National Register of Historic Places
- National Historic Landmark
- State Historic Landmark





Preservation of Historic Resources

The County's rich cultural and historical resources are integral to its identity and community well-being. Preserving and enhancing these assets not only celebrates the County's heritage but also drives economic benefits by increasing tourism opportunities. Key historical assets include the Augusta Canal Industrial District, the County Courthouse in Appling, and the historic districts in Harlem - Central, Sanders, and Sawdust.

Harlem has a Historic Preservation Commission made up of five members who review alterations to properties within Harlem's historic districts. Established in 2008, these districts include 185 designated properties. The Central District includes historic downtown Harlem, Milledgeville Road, and the surrounding historic streets. The Sanders District includes Harlem Cemetery, City Park, and the Sanders House. The Sawdust District features Mount Tabor Baptist Church and the Sawdust Community Store.

National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) registered sites in the County:

- Augusta Canal and Industrial District
- Columbia Courthouse
- Kiokee Baptist Church
- Stallings Island
- Lock Keepers Cottage

During outreach, Community members voiced their concerns regarding the preservation of historic sites, including United Methodist White Oak Campground, the William Few home, and Woodville. The County should collaborate with entities such as Columbia County's HHPAC , Harlem's Historic Preservation, the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), which can help the County access grants, technical assistance, and revitalize historic resources.

Recommendations

- Continue to work with HHPAC to regularly update the County-wide inventory and GIS map of the County's historical sites and notable historic venues.
- Expand digital documentation and public interpretation for key sites and districts and integrate this content into school partnerships to broaden access and awareness.
- Consider updating and expanding guidelines and ordinances for the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction of historic structures, ensuring compatibility with federal standards from the Secretary of the Interior.
- Update design guidelines for new structures in historic districts to ensure they align with the character of existing buildings.

KIOKEE BAPTIST CHURCH

Kiokee Baptist is Georgia's oldest continuously operating Southern Baptist congregation, founded in 1772. The historic church, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, offers traditional and modern worship services and remains a cornerstone of local heritage, reflecting deep roots in Georgia's faith community.



Parks and Open Space

This section addresses issues and opportunities identified during field reconnaissance and community outreach related to parks, recreation, cultural resources, and critical trail systems. This section outlines strategies to ensure that all parks, community open spaces, and recreational facilities within the County meet the needs of current and future residents.

Columbia County Department of Parks and Recreation

Columbia County's Parks, Recreation, and Events Department is responsible for maintaining and operating a variety of parks, recreational areas, and event spaces throughout the County. The department manages over 1,600 acres of parkland, including neighborhood, community, regional parks, and natural resources. These facilities host nearly one million visitors each year. The County's recreational facilities range from neighborhood gathering spaces to regional destinations, providing campgrounds, dog parks, athletic fields, trails, and specialized facilities like the senior center. The department has earned national recognition through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) and has recently adopted the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* . Community outreach highlighted the need for new parks in the County's northern regions and on both sides of Louisville Road between Tubman Road and Columbia Road. Participants also emphasized complete trail connections, especially linking the Euchee Creek Trail to nearby neighborhoods and parks like Patriots Park.

The *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* provides a detailed inventory of parks, trails, and facilities and outlines actionable recommendations to guide future improvements and expansions. Moving forward, the County should continue to support the efforts of the Parks, Recreation, and Events Department to maintain and upgrade existing facilities, expand amenities, like walking trails and community centers, and ensure parks meet the evolving needs of residents. Prioritizing updates to the parks and recreational facilities identified in the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan's* capital improvement recommendations will enhance service coverage and improve access to recreation opportunities across the County.

Improving Access to Parks

County parks serve as regional destinations that attract visitors from throughout Georgia and neighboring states while providing exceptional recreation opportunities for residents. By hosting tournaments and recreational events, these facilities support the County's commitment to recreation and help drive local economic development through events and tourism. Notable County parks range from Patriots Park's 103-acre multi-sport complex to the 974-acre Wildwood Park, a regional destination for boating and camping on Clarks Hill Lake. Additionally, community parks in the County offer accessible, neighborhood-friendly spaces where residents can relax, play, and connect. There are additional community parks within Harlem and Grovetown that are maintained by those municipalities.

Ensuring equitable access to parks and recreation facilities represents a fundamental responsibility that directly affects community health, social cohesion, and quality of life for all residents. The current distribution of park facilities reflects historical development patterns, with major parks concentrated near population centers and in the County's eastern areas. However, there are gaps in park access, particularly in the western portion of the County, where wooded areas lack connections to sidewalks, trails, and recreation amenities. The County should continue its efforts to expand and develop new park facilities in the underserved areas. The County should work with property owners and developers to encourage the inclusion of pocket and neighborhood parks in new subdivision projects.

LESS THAN HALF OF THE POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES LIVES WITHIN HALF A MILE OF A PARK.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Recreational Facilities

Recreational facilities of the County cater to various interests and age groups, enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. The County's recreation portfolio combines everyday amenities with regional-scale venues that draw visitors to Patriots Park, Clarks Hill Lake, Evans Towne Center Park, Savannah Rapids Park, Bobby Waters Gymnasium, and Wildwood Park, which anchor lake-based recreation and host nationally significant events. These facilities not only provide recreational space to the residents but also attract and host visitors during events. The facilities offer amenities like playgrounds, picnic pavilions, and kayak/paddleboard rentals, and events like Evans Market, summer camps, Beach Summer Blast, and more. To enhance these offerings, the County should expand public access, integrate them into a rolling maintenance and capital program, and prioritize upgrades that make facilities flexible, ADA-compliant, and connected to trails so residents can arrive without a car. Renovations should be designed for shared community use on non-event days, and capital projects should be sequenced with a unified events calendar to maximize utilization and minimize downtime.

Based on outreach, a potential regional sports complex represents an opportunity to enhance both recreation services and economic development through tournament hosting and event programming. Within the County, a private developer plans to build a multi-sport complex on undeveloped land across Patriots Park by 2026. This will be a $50 million facility developed on 22 acres and will include a competition swimming pool, basketball courts, football training area, and indoor track. Such a facility could accommodate state and regional competitions while expanding capacity for concerts, exhibitions, and other events that support local business activity and tourism development.

Riverfront Enhancements

Columbia County's riverfront along the Savannah River has potential to serve as a hub for recreation and tourism. Currently, the riverfront supports recreation through existing boat ramps, fishing piers, and the Serene18 Paddle Trails. Building on these assets, the County can expand public access to the Savannah River by developing additional launch sites, boardwalks, and trail connections that link nearby neighborhoods and parks as part of the regional blueway system, which links Clarks Hill Lake, the Augusta Canal, and the Savannah River. At the same time, future improvements should prioritize ecological preservation, incorporating shoreline restoration and green buffer zones to protect water quality and habitat. Integrating educational signage and raising awareness can help residents and visitors understand the importance of river conservation and environmental stewardship. These strategic investments can position the Savannah River corridor as a driver of recreation, tourism, and education.

PLANNING CONCEPT

BLUEWAYS

Blueways are designated water-based recreation routes that promote kayaking, canoeing, boating, and fishing along rivers and lakes. They combine outdoor recreation with natural conservation and tourism by connecting scenic waterways to parks and access points. In Columbia County, the Serene18 Paddle Trail serves as the primary Blueway system. It spans about 18 miles across five paddle routes linking Clarks Hill Lake, the Savannah River, and the Augusta Canal.

Trails (Bombasin and Serene18)

Columbia County's trail system offers a mix of greenways, towpaths, and blueways that connect neighborhoods to forests. The County has a trail network that caters to hikers, cyclists, nature enthusiasts, and families. Most of these trails wind through scenic landscapes, including forests, wetlands, riverbanks, and the historic Augusta Canal, offering opportunities for recreation in the region's natural beauty.

According to the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan,* the County currently maintains around 60 miles of paved trails and over 40 miles of natural-surface trails, with additional routes under development or planned for expansion. Amenities along many of these trails include parking areas, picnic spots, restrooms, and open space.

Signature corridors include the Serene18 Paddle Trail, which connects water on Clarks Hill Lake, the Savannah River, and the Augusta Canal. Additionally, the Bombasin Land Trail connects routes such as the Augusta Canal Tow Path and the Euchee Creek Greenway. To further enhance these assets, continued attention is needed to ensure safe access, consistent wayfinding, and sustainable design across all trails. Enhancements such as standardized signage, parking, trail crossings, ADA-compliant launches, and shoreline protection will help accommodate growing use while preserving these natural assets and ecological integrity.

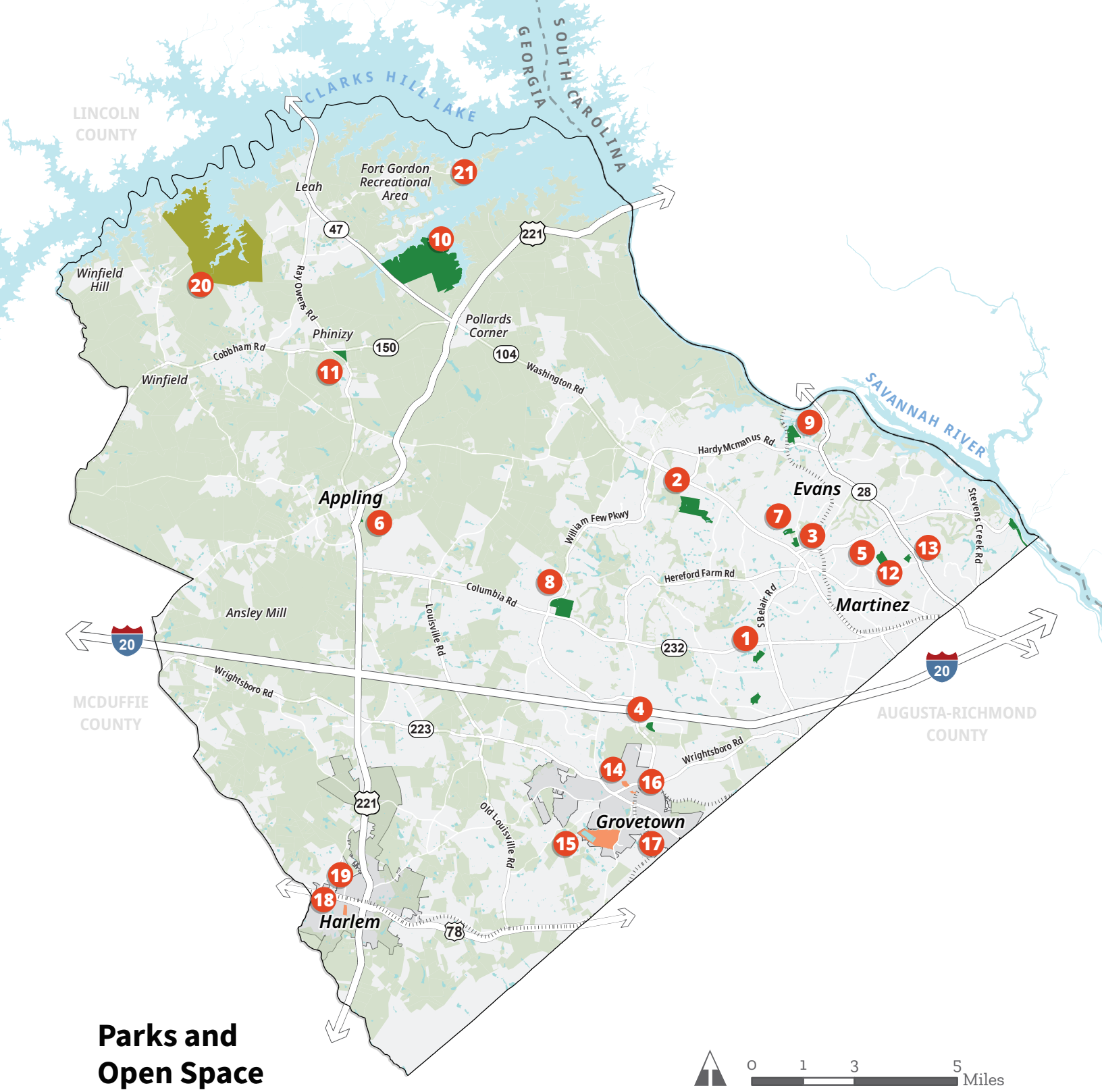
Recommendations

- Continue implementing the strategies outlined in the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* to update and improve parks, trails, and recreational facilities across the County.
- Regularly assess and allocate funding to update Patriots Park, Wildwood Park, and Savannah Rapids Park that upgrades ADA access, field lighting, shade, restrooms, and wayfinding.
- Conduct regular assessments of all County parks and recreation facilities to identify needed upgrades, and allocate funding to improve accessibility, lighting, shade, restrooms, and wayfinding so that every park meets modern standards for safety and usability.
- Consider allowing gyms, meeting rooms, and pavilions at Patriots Park and the Bobby Waters Gymnasium to be used for community activities when not used for sports, and track how often they are used to plan future upgrades.
- Identify and create connections that link neighborhoods to recreation areas, including the Bombasin routes and Serene18 trails, and ensure all trailheads provide consistent amenities such as parking, wayfinding, and safe crossings.
- Consider incorporating green building and/or sustainable design principles in the new planned sports complex to ensure long-term efficiency.
- Maintain partnership with local, state, federal, and private organizations to expand and improve recreational opportunities across the County, so the residents and visitors can enjoy these spaces in the future.
- Expand river access by developing new public access points along the Savannah River, including kayak launches, fishing piers, and small-boat ramps at locations such as Savannah Rapids Park and Betty's Branch.
- Restore and protect shoreline by implementing erosion control and green buffer zones along the riverfront to improve water quality, preserve habitat, and support recreational use.

PLANNING CONCEPT

GREENWAYS

Greenways are linear parks or corridors that connect neighborhoods, parks, schools, and natural areas through trails designed for walking, running, and biking. They encourage active transportation, recreation, and environmental stewardship while improving connectivity across communities. Columbia County's main Greenway, the Euchee Creek Greenway, runs approximately 4.2 miles between Patriots Park and Canterbury Farms, featuring paved paths, boardwalks, and scenic natural areas.



Parks and Open Space

- State Park
- County Parks
- Community Parks
- Open Space and Conservation Areas

1. Blanchard Park
2. Blanchard Woods Park
3. Evans Towne Center Park
4. Gateway Park
5. Lakeside Park
6. Lonnie Morris, Sr. Park
7. Memorial Gardens Park
8. Patriots Park
9. Riverside Park
10. Wildwood Park
11. Eubank Blanchard Park
12. Columbia County Racquet Center
13. Reed Creek Interpretive Park
14. Grovetown Goodale Park
15. Grovetown Liberty Park
16. Kiddie Park
17. Memorial Park
18. Harlem City Park
19. Glenn Phillips Memorial Park
20. Mistletoe State Park
21. Fort Gordon Recreational Area





Tourism

Tourism is a growing and contributing sector to the County's economy and identity. In 2023, visitors spent about $201.6 million locally, supporting 2,485 jobs and generating $15.7 million in state and local tax revenue. The County boasts an extensive natural landscape, recreational facilities, events, and amenities that can be leveraged to expand tourism opportunities further. Signature attractions include Wildwood Park on Clarks Hill Lake, which hosts the national bass-fishing tournaments and the International Disc Golf Center.

Other key destinations include the Augusta Canal, Savannah Rapids Park, and Serene18 Paddle Trail, which is a network of five paddle routes spanning 18 square miles. It is designed to promote paddling along local waterways. To keep the visitor economy resilient, it is necessary to align branding, programming, and capital investments so that these facilities, trail connections, shoreline stewardship, and event-ready facilities keep up with demand.

Visit Columbia County is the County's nonprofit Convention and Visitors Bureau. It promotes travel and tourism, provides information and support to the hospitality sector, and works to attract visitors, groups, and events that generate overnight stays. It operates the Visitors Center at Savannah Rapids Park and maintains the official visitor guide and event listings. The County should continue its efforts to promote County events and facilities.

IN 2023, VISITORS SPENT ABOUT $201.6 MILLION IN COLUMBIA COUNTY, SUPPORTING 2,485 JOBS

Clarks Hill Lake

Clarks Hill Lake is one of the southeast's largest and most popular public recreation lakes. Spanning more than 71,000 acres with over 1,200 miles of shoreline that extend along Columbia County's northern boundary, the lake offers scenic shoreline and year-round opportunities for boating, fishing, camping, and outdoor recreation. Wildwood Park functions as the County's primary lakefront hub with multi-lane ramps, large event parking, and three championship disc-golf courses. The park regularly hosts national youth and high-school bass championships that spotlight the lake and drive overnight stays. Long-term success of these assets depends on pairing event growth with shoreline protection and coordinated operations. Work with Army Corps of Engineers to improve tourism facilities by adding parking, wayfinding, and ADA-accessible amenities, ensuring upgrades meet Corps shoreline standards and support both visitor access and conservation.

Savannah River and Augusta Canal

The Savannah River corridor anchors heritage and nature-based recreation at Savannah Rapids Park, where the park serves as the County's visitor center overlooking the Augusta Canal headgates. This setting connects paddlers and cyclists to the Serene18 and canal greenway network and provides an accessible launch point for guided trips and festivals. To protect the corridor as use grows, riverfront improvements should couple new access with riverbank stabilization, rehabilitation, and shared interpretation with the Canal Authority.



Cultural Events

Beyond its natural attractions, the County offers a range of entertainment events, performances, and festivals. Venues like Evans Towne Center Park, the Lady A Pavilion, and the Columbia County Performing Arts Center host year-round events that strengthen community ties and create opportunities for shared experiences. These facilities complement the County's recreation system by providing a hub for arts, music, and civic celebrations that enhance cultural vitality. The County should continue to promote and expand its signature events, such as Spooky to be Hungry, Trick or Treat on Main Street, and the Columbia County Cultural Festival, to attract visitors. Engaging with residents can help identify new cultural and youth-oriented events that bring families together.

AUGUSTA NATIONAL WOMENS AMATEUR

The August National Womens Amateur is an annual golf tournament played over three rounds. This first 36 holes are played at Champions Retreat, with the final round played at Augusta National Golf Club. Participants consist of winners of previous amateur competitions, highly ranked amateur players, or those receiving a special invitation. Winners receive invitations to future golf tournaments, provided the winner remains an amateur golfer. This event was established by the Augusta National Golf Club to inspire greater interest and participation in women's golf and draws thousands of spectators each year.

Recommendations

- Continue to work with Visit Columbia County, to promote County parks, recreation facilities, and annual events through coordinated marketing and visitor information.
- Dedicate a defined share of hotel-motel tax and grants to trail and blueway connections (e.g., Euchee Creek links and additional Serene18 access points) and to shoreline restoration projects at high-use lake and river sites.
- Pursue a partnership work plan with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Clarks Hill Lake that coordinates ramp capacity, parking, and shoreline management with the County's tournament schedule and park operations.
- Expand visitor services at Savannah Rapids Park and Wildwood Park (wayfinding, outfitters, guided programs) and maintain the state-certified visitor center as the hub for trip planning and Serene18 itineraries.
- Continue to monitor event attendance, room nights, trail counters, and conservation outcomes, so tourism reinvestments are data-driven and aligned with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Partner with local artists, schools, and community organizations to identify new cultural and youth-oriented events that showcase the County's heritage.



09

Natural Environment

The natural environment is one of Columbia County's defining features. A combination of rolling forested hills, streams, shorelines, and more contributes to the County's beauty, sense of place, and ecological health, while also offering spaces for residents to live healthy, active lifestyles. These natural spaces are essential factors in planning and development and are important components of the County's economy and residents' wellbeing. This chapter provides an overview of the County's natural features and explores opportunities to preserve existing natural areas, enhance nature-based recreation options, and promote environmental management practices that help mitigate the impact of extreme weather.

Local Geography

Columbia County is located within Georgia's Southern Outer Piedmont and Sandhills ecoregions, which are large areas of land or water with similar climate, geology, soils, hydrology, landforms, and vegetation. These ecoregions are characterized by rolling hills, oak and pine forests, and extensive watersheds. The Piedmont Region covers much of North Georgia, connecting the Appalachian Mountains in the north to the Coastal Plain in the south. Although most of the County is within the Piedmont, the County's proximity to the fall line of the Savannah River means some environmental and topographical characteristics of the Sandhills ecoregion are present on the southern edge of the County.

For much of the County's history, small self-sufficient farmers operated alongside large cotton plantations, both benefiting from the region's terrain and river access. As Augusta's textile industry expanded, the County's cotton production increased. When suburban development began spreading into the County in the late 20th century, agricultural land was rapidly converted into new housing. With the decline of traditional agriculture, timber production became the primary use of the County's natural areas. Today, much of the County's undeveloped land is either allowed to remain untouched within designated parks, wildlife areas, and private properties, or managed by timber producers.

Water Features

Water features include rivers, streams, canals, ponds, lakes, reservoirs, wetlands, and watersheds. These natural features require preservation and protection for their ecological significance, including their role in supporting wildlife and sustaining healthy ecosystems. The Georgia Department of Natural Resource's High-Priority Watersheds include the Savannah River Sandy Run Creek, which originates just south of Harlem and flows south into Fort Gordon. The *2023 Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Regional Water Plan* provides comprehensive recommendations for the preservation of current water features and their continued, unobstructed function for the next 40 years.

STATE WATER PLANNING

The *Georgia State Water Plan (2008)* is a comprehensive framework, established by the 2004 State Planning Act, to ensure the state's water resources are managed sustainably for future economic prosperity, public health, and the proper function of natural systems. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) oversees the implementation of this plan, including the triennial review of water quality standards, while the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center conducts research and modeling to support the plan's objectives.

The State Water Plan recognized that the state's water resources vary significantly in differing regions and recommended the preparation of regional water plans to ensure focused recommendations for part of the state. Columbia County falls within the *Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Regional Water Plan (2023)*, which monitors the water quality and availability of most of the Savannah River and many of its tributaries and provides recommendations on their continued preservation.



Savannah River

The Savannah River is one of Georgia's largest rivers, forming the eastern boundary of Columbia County and much of the border between Georgia and South Carolina. The Savannah River basin is around 10,500 square miles. It includes counties in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina and a population of 1.3 million people. Tributaries of the river in Columbia County include the Kiokee Creek and Uchee Creek. The Savannah River is home to numerous species of plants and animals, and offers many recreational activities for visitors and residents.

Clarks Hill Lake

The County's northern boundary is located on the southern shore of Clarks Hill Lake. Clarks Hill Lake, also known as Lake Strom Thurmond, is a manmade reservoir constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers between 1951-1952. The reservoir is the third largest east of the Mississippi River and provides a range of recreational and economic benefits, such as kayaking, fishing, and camping opportunities for residents and visitors. The reservoir's water level remains relatively consistent but can fluctuate depending on present drought conditions. The reservoir can be accessed from multiple marinas, boat ramps, and beaches, but development is limited as it is a regulated floodplain, and the Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction of the entire shoreline. The County should continue to promote recreational activities on the reservoir and work with the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain and improve access points along the shoreline. The County should also continue preservation efforts along the shore to protect the area, ensuring that any future development minimizes environmental impacts.

Local Creeks

Many smaller creeks, such as Lloyd Creek, Kiokee Creek, Reed Creek, and Sandy Run Creek, flow into the Savannah River. Each creek is surrounded by a watershed that covers most of the County and restores freshwater to the Savannah River. Runoff from nearby areas, including urbanized areas, drain into these watersheds, which filter out pollutants before the runoff reaches the Savannah River. This function, and the critical riparian habitats, where the creeks and Savannah River meet, are valuable to the ecological stability of the County. According to the *2023 Regional Water Plan*, all creeks within the County have "good" or "very good" available assimilative capacity for runoff pollutants. Assimilative capacity refers to how much pollution the river and creeks can handle before it becomes harmful to people, animals, or plants. This level is expected to be maintained in the next 40 years, though small sections at creek headwater may have poor localized assimilative capacity.

Columbia County has several programs in place to reduce runoff pollution and protect water features to minimize the risk of contaminating the County's drinking and recreation water. These include the Green Guide, a handbook that provides numerous educational resources for preserving water features; an adopt-a-stream program, and an Innovative Stormwater Solution Award, which awards local properties for utilizing stormwater and runoff best practices.

COUNTY ADOPT-A-STREAM PROGRAM

The County's Adopt-a-Stream program is a hands-on, do-it-yourself program aimed at advancing citizen stewardship and sense of ownership of the County's numerous streams. The program educates volunteers on the importance of streams and methods for evaluating stream health. Volunteers are then able to identify and inventory present macro-invertebrates and conduct stream monitoring and water quality testing.



Riparian Buffers

Riparian buffers are transitional zones where land meets a water feature, such as a creek, stream, river, marsh, pond, or lake. These areas support distinctive vegetation and wildlife that both depend on and contribute to the health of the adjacent water feature. Riparian buffers serve as natural biofilters, helping to reduce sedimentation, pollution, and erosion. Reducing sedimentation benefits communities in several ways. It protects shorelines from erosion, keeps water clean for fishing and swimming, and lowers the risk of disasters like flooding, mudslides, and infrastructure damage from fast-moving stormwater. Recognizing their ecological significance, Georgia's Forestry Commission recommends maintaining a buffer width of between 35 feet to 100 feet to preserve the natural conditions around water features and, where feasible, restoring or enhancing them.

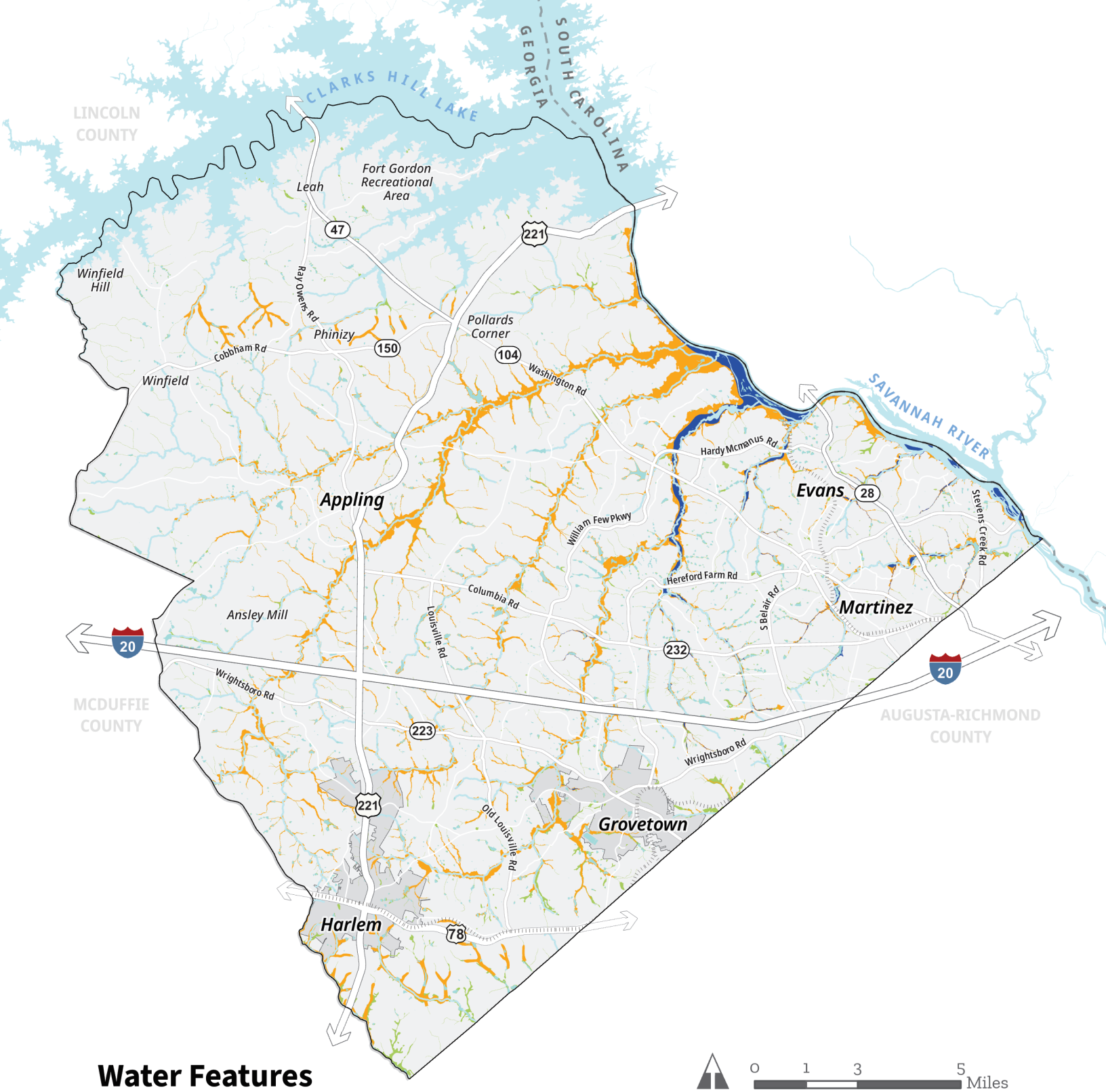
Wetlands

As defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), wetlands are "areas that are inundated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions." These features include swamps, marshes, bogs, and other areas with consistent inundation. The County contains approximately 20,000 acres of wetlands, which provide unique habitats to a variety of plants and animals. In addition, wetlands help manage runoff and flooding as they slow the velocity of water and recharge groundwater levels. The County should ensure that existing wetlands remain undisturbed.

Floodplains

Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), or floodplains, are areas defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) "that will be inundated by the flood event having a 1-percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year." The SFHA includes the regulatory floodway, which is the portion of a river, stream, or tributary and the land immediately adjacent that conveys most of the water during a flood event. Floodways must be able to release flood water "without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation more than a designated height," and are therefore more strictly regulated. Floodplains can be found extensively across Columbia County. According to the *2021 Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan*, about 17% of Columbia County's land area is in a flood prone area, influencing land use, development, and environmental management.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) managed by FEMA provides flood insurance to property owners, renters, and businesses, and works with communities to enforce floodplain management regulations. Flood insurance policies are required whenever structures are located within a floodplain, but a property does not have to be located in a floodplain to obtain a policy. FEMA created the FloodSmart website to inform the public about flood risks and costs, insurance policies, and flood event recovery. This resource can prove invaluable to those who live in or near flood-prone areas. Municipalities can utilize this tool in outreach efforts to increase awareness of flood hazards in conjunction with other hazard mitigation planning efforts.



Water Features

- Water
- Stream Channel
- 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
- Regulatory Floodway
- Wetlands

0 1 3 5 Miles

J. Storm Thurmond Project Shoreline Management Plan

In 1973, the Army Corps of Engineers created a preliminary shoreline allocation plan, regulating uses along Clark Hill Lake with the intention of protecting the lake's water quality and balancing private development, recreational access, and environmental preservation. Subsequent revisions and updates were made over the years, resulting in the current 2018 version of the Plan.

The Corps has five different shoreline allocations:

- Limited Development Areas – Private facilities and use privileges, such as piers and certain land-based activities, may be permitted.
- Public Recreation Areas – Managed by public entities, these areas allow high-intensity recreational use by the public. No private facilities or activities are permitted.
- Protected Shoreline Areas – These areas are designated to reduce conflicts between public and private uses and to maintain shoreline aesthetics, fish and wildlife habitats, and cultural and/or environmental values. No private facilities or activities will be permitted.
- Special Use Areas – These areas are managed by quasi-public organizations or public entities for specialized uses. Floating facilities are allowed under lease agreements.
- Prohibited Access Areas – These areas are reserved for project operation in proximity to hydropower structures, operational areas, and water intake structures.

Columbia County has 126 miles of shoreline along Clarks Hill Lake. Nearly 40% of the shorelines is dedicated to public recreation, ensuring recreational lake access for the various and adjacent parks and campgrounds. Around 20% of the shoreline is protected, primarily on the islands within the lake and sections of shoreline between recreation areas. Limited development is allowed north of Wildwood Park and west of Mistletoe State Park (24% of the shoreline). In accordance with the Corp's shoreline management plan, the County should limit development to existing limited development areas and work with the Corps to maintain sensitive shoreline areas.

Recommendations

- Continue to adhere to the water resources recommendations of the *2023 Parks and Recreation Master Plan.*
- Consider stricter development standards near groundwater recharge areas and riparian buffers, including limiting density and ensuring that riparian buffering follows state guidelines.
- Limit impervious surface coverage on lots near these sensitive areas to promote groundwater infiltration and reduce runoff.
- Continue to promote Clarks Hill Lake and the Savannah River as destinations for recreation and tourism.
- Maintain and enhance the County's Green Guide to provide residents with educational resources and volunteering opportunities for the County's water features.
- Continue supporting the County's Adopt-a-Stream program to help maintain and improve water quality across local streams.
- Continue awarding the County's Innovative Stormwater Solution Award to highlight responsible private property owners and encourage the use of water management best practices.
- Continue to coordinate with the U.S. Army of Corps of Engineers (USACE) to ensure any future development proposals align with the *J. Storm Thurmond Project Shoreline Management Plan*.
- Educate residents about local flood risks by using FEMA flood maps and tools, and include this information in hazard mitigation outreach efforts.



Habitats and Protected Areas

Valuable habitats and protected areas – like forests, parks, wetlands, and nature preserves – serve as natural homes for plants and animals. These areas shelter countless species and provide recreational spaces, help clean air and water, and keep the environment healthy by preventing floods and supporting bioity. Preserving these habitats is important to ensure ecological stability and safeguard natural resources vital for life. Numerous parks, preserves, and wildlife management areas are located along Clarks Hill Lake, the Savannah River, and the County's extensive forested areas.

Forests, Plants, and Wildlife

The County's forests include a combination of hardwood deciduous trees and softwood coniferous trees. The most common species of trees include the loblolly pine and shortleaf pine. Forests managed for timber production exclusively contain dense stands of coniferous trees. Forests within protected areas such as Mistletoe State Park or within the County's numerous riparian zones have a wide plant variety, offering habitat options for many species of wildlife.

The County's considerable forest cover also provides habitats for a variety of animal species. These include mammals, like as white-tailed deer; birds, like the red-shouldered hawk; and fish, amphibians, and reptiles. Not only do wild animals play an integral role in local ecosystems, but they also attract visitors interested in birdwatching and other recreational activities.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages several wildlife management areas in Columbia County, which help maintain sustainable populations of local wildlife, including several endangered species. According to the Georgia DNR, regulated activities such as hunting and fishing are permitted in WMAs as part of responsible wildlife management, ensuring that population levels remain healthy and ecosystems stay balanced. These species require special conservation actions to keep population numbers at a viable level; these actions can be found in *Georgia's 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan*. The County should continue to work with state agencies to maintain critical habitats and ensure future development accommodates natural areas.

Mistletoe State Park

Mistletoe State Park is a 1,972-acre located in the northwest region of the County on the southern shore of Clarks Hill Lake. The area features mature mixed pine and hardwood forests, riparian areas along creeks, and regenerated woodlands.

Heggie's Rock Preserve

Heggie's Rock Preserve contains a granite outcropping that rises approximately 70 feet above the surrounding terrain, covering about 101 acres in the County. This distinctive natural landmark provides a vital habitat for local flora and fauna within its forests of oak, pine, and hickory. Managed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Heggie's Rock was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1980, in recognition of its ecological importance. Access to Heggie's Rock Preserve is restricted to protect its delicate ecological balance.

Wildwood Park

Wildwood Park is a County park spread across 867 acres. Forests within the park can stand untouched, resulting in unmanaged succession, and a healthier ecosystem. Many animal species, such as deer, make use of the park's habitats. Although not formally protected, Wildwood Park was included in the *Columbia County Growth Management Plan Update (2005)*, reflecting a commitment to preserving its natural environment.

Stallings Island Preserve

Stallings Island Preserve is a National Historic Landmark in Columbia County. The preserve is a 16-acre archaeological site in the Savannah River known for its association with the Stallings Culture, which thrived during the Late Archaic period (4,500–3,500 years ago). Today, the island is monitored via surveillance and signage to protect its artifacts and wildlife, and remains off-limits to the public.

STALLINGS CULTURE

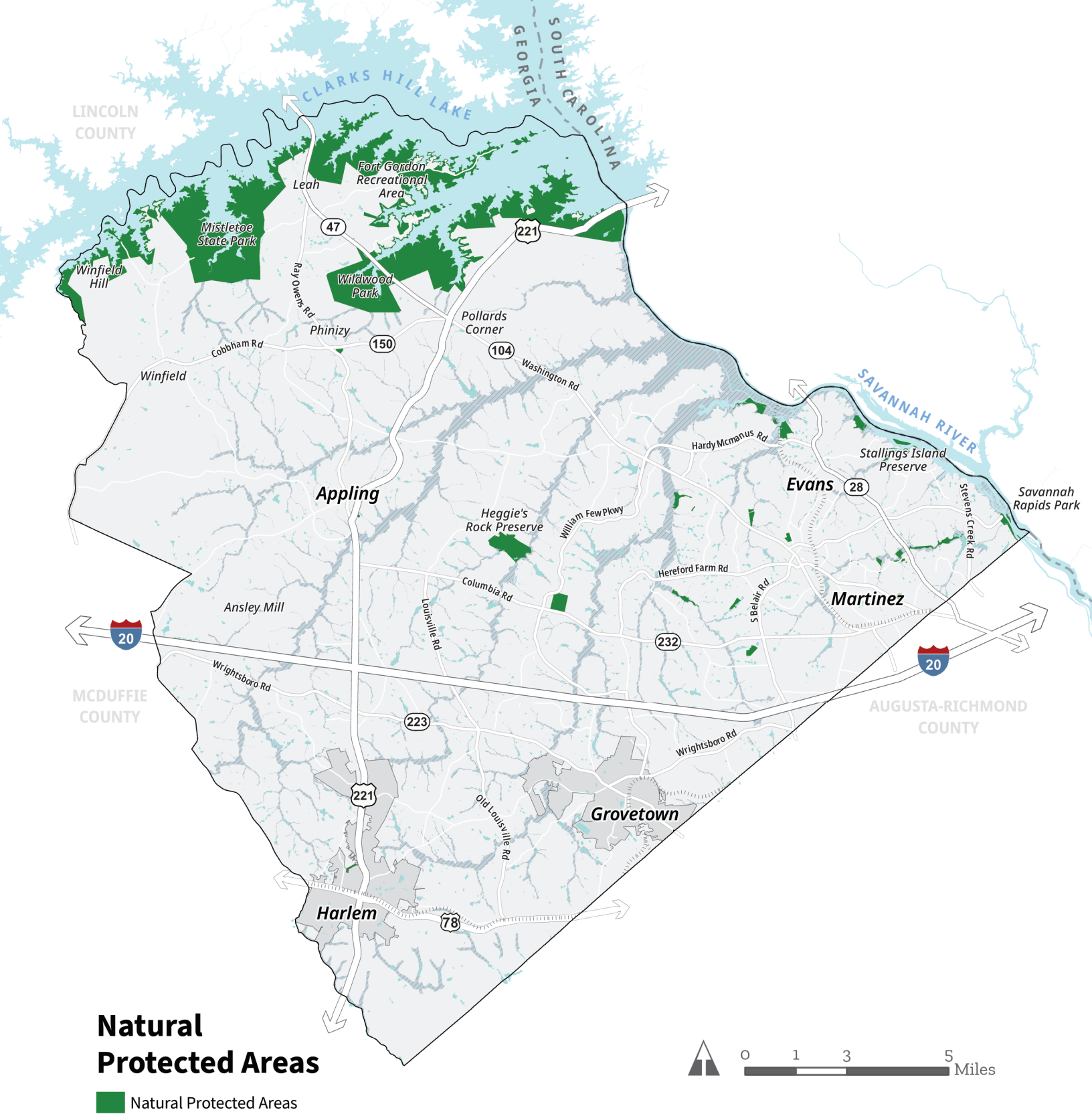
The Stallings Culture represents one of the earliest known Native American civilizations in North America, settled along the Savannah River nearly 4,000 years ago. Centered on Stallings Island, this culture is recognized for creating the oldest documented pottery and fiber-tempered ceramics on the continent. The Stallings people were also among the first to build shell-midden mounds, reflecting their reliance on riverine resources and a transition toward more settled, community-based living. The legacy of this culture is preserved today on Stallings Island, which is protected by the Archaeological Conservancy that provides insight into the daily lives and craftsmanship of one of North America's earliest river-based civilizations. This heritage remains a defining part of Columbia County's cultural landscape, linking the region's present-day communities to its ancient past.

Savannah Rapids Park

Located along the Augusta Canal and Reed Creek waterfall, the park encompasses 33 acres of preserved natural landscapes, including riparian zones along the Savannah River and Reed Creek. The park's conservation efforts focus on maintaining ecological functions such as filtering stormwater and reducing erosion, ensuring the protection of water quality. Additionally, the park offers educational opportunities through interpretive signage and programs highlighting the importance of habitat preservation.

Recommendations

- Manage protected areas and other County parks and open space and help manage identified species of greatest concern in accordance with the recommendation of the *2025 State Wildlife Action Plan*.
- Continue to work with relevant state and federal agencies, such as the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, in the management of protected areas in the County.
- Where possible, establish or expand public or private neighborhood parks, reserves, and other protected areas.
- Work with residents, businesses, and public agencies to control and/or prevent invasive plants, animals, and pathogens from being established.
- Promote educational resources and/or programs about wildlife and habitat protection.



Natural Protected Areas

Natural Protected Areas



Existing Hazards

Columbia County is susceptible to multiple types of natural hazards due to its location, climate, and development patterns. These hazards have the potential to threaten the lives and properties of County residents. In recognition of several natural threats and in accordance with the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, the County developed and continues to update a hazard mitigation plan. The latest update, the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021-2026), prepared by the EMA, provides a range of recommendations for types of disasters and general mitigation actions that should be undertaken in all parts of the County and its two Cities. This Plan outlines the hazards expected to impact the County include:

- Flooding
- Tornadoes
- Earthquakes
- Winter Storms
- Hurricanes/Tropical Storms
- Drought
- Severe Thunderstorms
- Wildfires
- Extreme Heat
- Dam Failures
- Lightning
- Hail

The Plan highlights local risks, such as flash flooding, which is one of the most common due to overflowing riverbanks from heavy rainfall. Significant floodplain areas are found along the Euchee Creek, as well as near Clark's Hill Lake and the Savannah River, with 42 documented flooding incidents over the past 70 years. The entire County is vulnerable to hurricanes and tropical storms and is in FEMA Wind Zone III. With 66 percent forest cover, wildfire is a potential risk, though the National Centers for Environmental Information record no significant wildfire events. Hurricane Helene occurred after adoption of the current plan and should be incorporated into future updates.

The primary goal of the Hazard Mitigation Plan is to reduce the risks for those who live in, work in, and visit the County. In addition to specifying the appropriate response to each type of natural hazard, the Plan's goals and recommendations help coordinate local and regional agencies and provide a foundation for implementing local mitigation activities. The six goals are as follows:

- Goal 1: Protect the safety, health and well-being of all County citizens;
- Goal 2: Protect public infrastructure and private property;
- Goal 3: Educate the community about natural hazards affecting the community and disaster preparedness.
- Goal 4: Manage current and future development to minimize loss;
- Goal 5: Natural Resources Protection; and
- Goal 6: Structural modifications to reduce the impacts of hazard events.

The Comprehensive Plan considers the latest Hazard Mitigation Plan to be the authoritative document for hazard mitigation and response within Columbia County. Its goals and recommendations should continue to be pursued and implemented where necessary. However, the relative age of the current update of the Hazard Mitigation Plan (set to expire in 2026), in conjunction with experiences endured by the County in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, means an update to the Hazard Mitigation Plan is necessary.

Disaster Response and Recovery

Columbia County must plan to meet the needs of its communities when impacts from hazards occur. While the County is not new to disaster response and recovery, its efforts must be adapted as hazards evolve due to changes in the environment and developed areas.

The County's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) is responsible for providing mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and coordination for large-scale emergencies and natural disasters, to all residents of Columbia County for the purpose of saving lives, preventing property damage, and ensuring continuity of government and business operations. To facilitate effective mitigation and recovery, the EMA coordinates with local, state, and federal agencies to continuously keep mitigation efforts in line with state and federal regulations and to ensure necessary resources are available in the event of disasters. Outside of planning for and responding to disasters, the EMA provides educational opportunities and resources for everyday or seasonal safety and works with other County agencies to maintain an emergency notification system.

Columbia County's emergency communication system plays an important role in keeping residents informed during severe weather and other hazards. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio network provides continuous, real-time broadcasts of weather warnings and emergency information. These radios ensure that hat critical alerts still reach the public when power or cellular service is disrupted. Strengthening access to these systems and expanding communication channels can further improve community preparedness.

In the future, the County should continue to integrate conservation and preparedness into planning and development to reduce exposure to natural hazards. Steering future growth away from high-risk or flood-prone areas and guiding thoughtful future development will help minimize property damage, safeguard residents, and reduce recovery costs. The County should also continue strengthening community awareness by educating residents about interactive and real-time weather and flood alerts. Helping residents understand local risks and how to respond effectively before, during, and after severe weather events will strengthen overall community resilience.

Recommendations

- Expand multi-channel public warnings and place or maintain NOAA Weather Radios in public facilities, continuing regular outreach so households know how to enroll and receive alerts.
- Periodically assess and update the *2021-2026 Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan.*
- Collaborate with state and federal agencies to access funding and grant resources and support disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.
- Launch a public outreach program to educate residents about hazard risks, emergency preparedness, evacuation routes, and available alert systems.
- Extend real-time monitoring by adding stream gauges in fast-growing western watersheds, such as Reed and Little Kiokee Creeks, and consider publishing a public flood-warning dashboard integrated with the Hyper-Reach notification system.
- Incorporate hazard mitigation goals into capital improvement planning, prioritizing stormwater upgrades, generator installations at critical facilities, and safe emergency access routes in flood-prone or high-risk areas.
- Continue implementing mitigation actions and strategies outlined in the *Hazard Mitigation Plan.*
- Continue to work closely with officials and experts of regional, state, and federal disaster response partners to ensure new best practices are incorporated into the policies of the EMA.
- Consider the inclusion of human-caused hazards, such as cyber-attacks and the release of hazardous materials in the next update to the Hazard Mitigation Plan.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10

Implementation

The implementation chapter outlines specific steps to assist the County in achieving the Plan's long-term vision. It includes an action matrix detailing recommendations to realize the Plan's supporting strategies and identifies a variety of potential funding sources to support these efforts. The chapter also compiles five-year Community Work Plans (2026–2030) prepared by County departments to prioritize new projects, plans, and programs.

Implementation will require the cooperation of a wide range of organizations and stakeholders, including County staff, elected and appointed officials, public agencies, the local business community members, property owners, developers, and residents. Together, these groups will be essential in realizing the County's vision for its future.

Use of the Comprehensive Plan

The *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan* should be used as the official policy guide for planning decisions elected officials, boards, commissions, and staff will make. The Plan should serve as a primary reference in guiding policy formation, evaluating projects and planning initiatives, reviewing development proposals, and prioritizing public expenditures. Referencing the Plan will ensure future planning efforts and decisions align with the community's long-term vision and goals. Service providers and partner organizations should also be encouraged to use the Comprehensive Plan when considering new development, facilities, infrastructure updates, and programming within Columbia County.

Regular Use of the Comprehensive Plan

To ensure routine use of the Plan, the County should:

- Make a digital version of the Plan and associated maps available online.
- Aid the public by explaining the Plan and its relationship to public and private development projects and other proposals, as appropriate.
- Meet with department directors and elected/appointed officials to explain the purpose, importance, and intended benefits of the Plan.
- Provide a Plan "orientation" for new staff, officials, and board/commission members that highlights key takeaways and goals of the Plan that are essential to County policy and initiatives.
- Maintain a running list of recommended amendments, issues, or needs that may be the subject of changes, additions, or deletions to the Plan.
- Create implementation groups organized around the roles discussed in this section and establish a regular meeting schedule.

Zoning Regulations

While the *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan* articulates a vision for the community, the County's development regulations are one of the primary tools that can be used to implement the Plan's recommendations. Following adoption of the Plan, the County should consider updating the current zoning ordinance and related ordinances, such as the Subdivision Regulations and Development Standards, to ensure that regulations reflect County's policy and the desires of the community. Amendments to development regulations and design standards should consider complementary programs and incentives that can be used to achieve the community's vision for neighborhood character, economic development, connectivity, and other aspects of the Plan.

Implementation Roles

The Plan addresses a wide range of topics. While Columbia County departments, adjacent municipalities such as Grovetown and Harlem, and other local partners are equipped to address many of these topics, implementation will require a coordinated effort among the Board of Commissioners, County Administration, private organizations, stakeholders, and residents.

County officials and staff will need to form implementation groups, tapping partner organizations and local knowledge to champion the Plan, prioritize actions, and structure the County's response. Implementation roles are further delineated and organized into the following groups.

- **Champions -** County leadership (e.g., Board of Commissioners, County Manager, and department heads) establish the importance of the Plan, identify opportunities to promote and integrate it into County-wide initiatives, engage adjacent municipalities and partner agencies, and allocate staff and resources as appropriate.
- **Implementation Advisors -** Topic-focused groups composed of existing boards/commissions (e.g., Planning Commission, Construction Board, Public Facilities Authority, Recreation Board), neighboring jurisdictions, and other knowledgeable stakeholders. Advisors help prioritize actions, troubleshoot implementation issues, and provide guidance to the Plan Implementation Teams.
- **Plan Implementation Teams -** Implementation teams organized around major Plan elements, such as Housing ad Neighborhoods, Commercial and Industrial Areas, or Transportation, identify ways to incorporate the Plan into ongoing work programs and lead the implementation of specific action steps.
- **Oversight -** Columbia County staff, in coordination with representatives from partner agencies and adjacent communities, track implementation progress, prepare annual progress reports, and recommend adjustments to priorities and actions as needed.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Columbia County recognizes that today's challenges, from managing growth to service deliveries, will require partnerships that extend beyond County borders. Maintaining a collaborative approach with regional, state, and federal partners will help the County create a framework for shared solutions that benefit the entire community.

Building on Success

These intergovernmental partnerships are more than formal agreements, they reflect Columbia County's commitment to working collaboratively to address regional challenges and create mutually beneficial opportunities. As the County continues to grow, these relationships will become even more important for managing regional transportation systems, protecting natural resources, and sustaining the quality of life that draws residents and businesses to the area.

Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission

Columbia County is an active partner in the Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission (CSRA RC), which brings together 13 counties to coordinate regional planning and development initiatives. Through CSRA RC working groups, the County collaborates with Augusta-Richmond County, Grovetown, Harlem, and neighboring rural communities on a range of initiatives, including transportation improvements and workforce development. Recent examples include joint applications for federal infrastructure funding that have brought millions of dollars to the region, coordinated hazard mitigation planning protecting communities from natural disasters, and shared broadband initiatives aimed at closing the digital divide in rural areas.

Army Corps of Engineers

Regular coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can help the County plan greenway extensions, manage lakefront development, and enforce floodplain regulations around J. Strom Thurmond Lake to protect property and natural resources. Following Hurricane Helene, the Corps assisted with debris removal and restoration of day-use areas, demonstrating how these partnerships provide essential support during emergencies. By maintaining recreational facilities and water quality, the Corps help protect both the environment and the local economy.

Cooperative Planning

Columbia County coordinates with neighboring jurisdictions through intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) and the state-mandated Service Delivery Strategy (SDS), which defines service boundaries, provider responsibilities, and funding to eliminate duplication. IGAs are legally binding tools in Georgia that allow governments to share services, facilities, and costs to deliver services to the residents. The SDS provides a flexible framework for local governments to develop a coordinated service delivery system.

Columbia County has existing IGAs with Harlem's water and wastewater, where Harlem sold its water distribution and wastewater collection systems to the County. In Grovetown, County's consolidated 911 center dispatches emergency calls to provide faster response and better coordination between police, fire, and Emergency Medical Service (EMS). In unincorporated areas such as Appling, the County provides essential services, including sheriff services, solid waste collection, and utility services where available.

The County is also an active member of the bi-state Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which serves as the pipeline for federal transportation funding across Richmond and Columbia Counties in Georgia and Aiken and Edgefield in South Carolina. Through the MPO and other partnerships, Columbia County collaborates with Harlem and Grovetown on road improvement projects and other regional transportation initiatives.

In the future, Columbia County should support and strengthen collaborations with communities and organizations by updating and expanding intergovernmental agreements to efficiently deliver shared services, such as public safety, utilities, and emergency response, to residents. These collaborations will help coordinate infrastructure investments, align transportation priorities, and secure federal and state funding for regional mobility projects. Continue to maintain, assess and update the IGA's and SDA's as needed to ensure reliable utilities delivery, faster emergency response, and coordinated growth while eliminating service overlaps.

Implementation Partners

The County should collaborate with municipalities to lead the implementation of the Plan, coordinating administrative actions, joint review and approval of land development applications, and delivery of public improvements identified in the *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan*. Success of implementation will depend on sustained partnerships with stakeholders across the County, including public agencies, municipalities, community groups, the local business community, foundations, and the private sector. Whose involvement is essential to achieving the County's goals and long-term vision.

Consistent with Plan strategies, the County should identify and engage specific organizations and agencies to assist with implementation and explore opportunities for formal partnerships and collaborations. Following Plan adoption, ongoing coordination with partner entities should focus on how goals and strategies can be accomplished through partnership. The County should also ensure that property owners and developers plan and construct improvements consistent with the Plan's directives.

List of Partners

- State of Georgia
- Municipalities
- Town of Appling
- City of Harlem
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Homebuilders Association
- Developers
- Realtors
- Columbia County Tourism
- Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission (CSRA RC)
- Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR)
- Alliance for Fort Gordon
- Development Authority of Columbia County
- Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
- Columbia County Habitat for Humanity
- Columbia County School District
- Georgia Recreation and Park Associations
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
- WellStar Columbia County Medical Center
- USDA Rural Development
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Georgia Emergency Management Agency
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Funding Sources and Opportunities

Many of the projects and improvements recommended in the Plan can be implemented through administrative and policy decisions or traditionally funded state or local programs. However, other projects may require special technical and/or financial assistance.

The County should pursue external partnerships and funding sources. A list of potential funding and incentives is in the following section. The list provides a general overview of the potential tools and resources rather than a detailed summary of requirements and applications. County staff should regularly monitor these sources to account for legislative or statutory changes that may influence the applicability or availability of funding, as well as proactively seek new, available funding sources.

Housing and Neighborhoods

HOME Down Payment Loan Program

This state-wide tool provides zero-interest second mortgages, up to $10,000, to income-eligible homebuyers. It helps expand homeownership and stabilize neighborhoods by reducing the financial barriers to purchasing a home. The loans are originated through HUD-approved counseling agencies and forgiven after five years of owner occupancy. Columbia County can leverage this program to promote affordable homeownership, particularly targeting workforce housing initiatives.

Community HOME Investment Program

The program uses federal HOME funds to help local governments and nonprofits provide affordable housing. The 2025 cycle provides approximately $10 million in funding for two activities: up to $500k for renovating owner-occupied homes and up to $1.5 million per application for new single-family home construction sale. Eligible applicants are cities, counties, public housing authorities, and nonprofits. Columbia County could use the funds to rehabilitate aging homes in rural areas or partner with a nonprofit to build affordable for-sale houses.

Workforce Housing initiative – OneGeorgia Authority

This initiative allocates $34 million from the OneGeorgia Authority's Equity Fund to support workforce housing projects. Grants of up to $2.5 million can be used for infrastructure enhancements such as water, wastewater, and road improvements, while construction loans up to $1 million are also available. Counties with populations over 50,000 are required to provide a 30% match. Eligible applicants include local governments, housing authorities, and development authorities partnering with housing developers. Columbia County could use this program to develop infrastructure for mixed-income projects near future technology and industrial areas or to offer low-interest construction loans to developers focused on workforce housing.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

This is a federal CDBG program administered by Georgia DCA to provide grants for housing rehabilitation, new construction, and rental assistance benefiting low- to moderate-income residents. Eligible applicants are non-entitlement local governments (municipalities and counties not receiving direct HUD funding). Columbia County could apply for housing rehabilitation programs in low-income neighborhoods, homebuyer assistance, or neighborhood revitalization. Award amounts vary based on project scope, typically ranging from several hundred thousand to over $1 million. The program requires beneficiaries to be at least 51% low-to-moderate income.

Georgia Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program

Georgia DCA administers both federal and state Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to support the development of affordable rental housing. While applications are from private developers, Columbia County can strengthen applications by providing community support and coordination. Projects house tenants earning between 20-80% of Area Median Income. The program operates an annual competitive cycle supporting housing development near employment and transit centers.

Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission (CSRA RC) – Housing and Community Development Support

The Community Development Commission at CSRA Regional Commission provides grant writing, program administration, environmental review, procurement/compliance support, and construction oversight for housing and neighborhood infrastructure programs (e.g., CDBG, CHIP, water/wastewater, and related public facility grants). The CSRA RC works with communities to secure about $7–$10 million annually in state and federal grants for member governments. Local jurisdictions can engage the CSRA RC for pre-application strategy, eligibility confirmation, cost estimates/scopes, and post-award compliance, which often improves competitiveness and delivery.

Habitat for Humanity Augusta-CSRA

This is a local nonprofit organization that delivers affordable homeownership and critical home repairs, funded by grants, donations, and ReStore proceeds. The organization also offers no-interest mortgages to income-eligible buyers who meet the need, ability to pay, and homebuyer education requirements. Through separate home repair/preservation funds, the organization supports safety, accessibility, and exterior improvements for qualifying households. Selection windows for homeownership open periodically, while repair funding is announced as dollars become available.

Economic Development

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant (REDLG)

USDA offers zero-interest loans (up to $1 million, with a 10-year repayment term) to local utilities. These utilities then pass funds through to end recipients, such as small businesses, healthcare facilities, or training centers in rural areas, to promote job creation and economic growth. Eligible areas are typically rural, with populations under 50,000. For example, a rural electric cooperative in Columbia County could sponsor a loan for a workforce training center or a small manufacturing hub, supporting regional economic vitality.

U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) offers competitive grants that Columbia County can apply for directly, with the CSRA Regional Commission serving as the region's EDA-designated planning district, maintaining the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and supporting applications. Key programs are Public Works (site and public infrastructure for industry/commercial growth), Economic Adjustment Assistance (flexible funding for infrastructure and planning, including Revolving Loan Funds), Partnership Planning (CEDS support), and Local Technical Assistance (feasibility/impact studies). Awards must meet eligibility and matching requirements and align with EDA investment priorities, with outcomes such as job creation and private investment emphasized.

Georgia Tourism Development Act (GTDA)

The GTDA offers a financing option for specific tourism attraction projects. Companies building qualifying attractions costing a minimum of $1 million can keep a part of their sales tax revenues for 10 years. This incentive is designed to promote investment in new tourism attractions across the state.

Industrial Revenue Bond (IRB) Financing & Property Tax Abatements

The Development Authority of Columbia County issues tax-exempt or taxable industrial revenue bonds to help companies finance land, buildings, and equipment purchases. Eligible manufacturing or distribution projects with capital investments between $1 million and $20 million may use IRBs; bond rates are based on the company's credit profile. When bonds are issued, the Authority enters a lease-back agreement that temporarily deeds the facility to the Authority, allowing the company to receive property-tax reductions during the bond term.

Columbia County Opportunity Zone

The Economic Development Authority of Columbia County has designated the West Town Shopping Center area as an Opportunity Zone, making businesses there eligible for Georgia's top tier job tax credit. Businesses creating at least two net new jobs receive a $3,500 annual tax credit per job for up to five years, totaling up to $17,500 per employee over the credit period. The credit applies against 100% of Georgia income tax liability and payroll withholding taxes, and is available to any lawful business regardless of industry. Beyond tax incentives, the County plans to partner with universities and technical colleges to launch a small business incubator or accelerator that creates jobs, retains and expands employers, ifies the economy, and strengthens the innovation ecosystem.

Small Business Financing Opportunities

The U.S. Small Business Administration and the Central Savannah River Area Business Lending Agency offer financing options to small businesses in Columbia County. Through three options, local businesses can access SBA 504 (through CSRA Business Lending) for owner-occupied real estate and major equipment with long-term, fixed rates, and low equity. The SBA 504 can also be used for certain debt refinancing. Complement this funding with SBA 7(a) loans for working capital, tenant improvements, or inventory, and consider SBA Microloans (up to $35,000) provided through nonprofit intermediaries. Together, these programs can finance a build-out in Evans or equipment for a small manufacturer, with 504 covering the facility and 7(a)/Microloan addressing operating needs.

Transportation

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Rural Transit Programs

Section 5311 provides federal capital, planning, and operating assistance for public transit in places with populations under 50,000. In Georgia, GDOT is the direct recipient and subawards funds to local entities (counties, transit operators, nonprofits). Eligible uses include vehicles and maintenance, facility improvements, service expansion, planning, and operating support. Apportionments to states follow a statutory formula: 83.15% based on rural land area and population, and 16.85% based on land area, rural vehicle revenue miles, and low-income rural population (with a 5% cap on the land-area factor share).

Georgia Department of Transportation Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG)

LMIG provides annual formula grants to Georgia counties and municipalities for local transportation maintenance and improvements including road resurfacing, drainage, signage, bridges, and sidewalks. Columbia County receives funding based on road miles and population, with no match required. This state tool complements federal transportation grants for routine infrastructure care.

Georgia Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

Managed by the Georgia Department of Transportation, TAP utilizes federal set-aside funds to develop pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and ADA-compliant sidewalks. Grants usually cover up to 80% of project costs, requiring a 20% local match. Columbia County has the opportunity to apply for projects that expand its Greenway Trail network, connect neighborhoods to schools, or enhance streetscapes in downtown Evans and Grovetown.

Governor's Office of Highway Safety Grants

The Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) administers federal National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) funding for traffic safety programs addressing impaired driving, police traffic services, speed control, occupant protection, pedestrian/bicycle safety, motorcycle safety, and traffic records. Eligible applicants include state and local safety-related agencies and law enforcement. Columbia County Sheriff's Office, local police departments, or County government could apply for DUI enforcement, speed enforcement equipment, seat belt campaigns, pedestrian safety initiatives, or traffic safety education. Grants serve as "seed money" for programs. Application period typically opens early calendar year (estimated deadline March 3, 2026 based on previous cycle).

Community Facilities and Parks

USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program

This USDA program provides low-interest loans and grants for construction or improvement of essential community facilities in rural areas. Grants can cover up to 75% of project costs, depending on community income and population. Eligible uses include public safety facilities, libraries, healthcare clinics, and community centers. Columbia County could leverage this program to build or expand a public health clinic or renovate a rural fire station serving low-income communities.

RAISE/BUILD Transportation Discretionary Grants

The Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program provides competitive grants for surface transportation projects with significant local or regional impact. Columbia County can pursue funding for multimodal transportation improvements, road and bridge reconstruction projects, transit system enhancements, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and freight transportation improvements. Projects must demonstrate economic benefits, safety improvements, environmental sustainability, and quality of life enhancements. The FY2025 program offers $1.5 billion nationally, with grants ranging from $1 million to $25 million ($1 million minimum for rural projects).

Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP)

This program provides grants and loans supporting parks, greenspace acquisition, and outdoor recreational infrastructure. Eligible are local governments, state agencies, and conservation nonprofits. Columbia County may apply for land acquisition to enhance natural preserves or develop multi-use trails. Grants require a minimum 25% local match and operate on a biennial cycle. Award sizes depend on project scope with examples including development of public parks or waterfront conservation.

Georgia State Historic Preservation Grants

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Historic Preservation Division offers competitive grants to Certified Local Governments (CLGs) to fund preservation planning, surveys, and educational initiatives. These awards usually reach up to $50,000 annually, requiring a 40% match from local funds. Columbia County is eligible to apply for funding to revise local historic resource surveys or develop National Register nominations for important sites.

Community Foundation for the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) Funds

Regional philanthropic organizations, such as the Community Foundation for the CSRA, provide grants supporting education, workforce, health, and social impact initiatives. These grants provide up to $15,000, depending on program scale and community impact. This organization frequently collaborates with public agencies and nonprofits on pilot projects, capacity building, and community engagement efforts.

Natural Environment

Georgia Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

This federally funded program, administered by Georgia Department of Natural Resources, supports local governments in acquiring and developing outdoor recreation spaces. Columbia County can access funds for park playgrounds, sports fields, and trail renovations. Grant awards range from $25,000 to $500,000 and require a dollar-for-dollar local match. The program runs on a biennial application cycle, with limits of one application per jurisdiction per cycle.

Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) Loans

GEFA administers low-interest loan programs for water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, providing principal forgiveness or interest-rate reductions for conservation or energy-efficient projects. Columbia County can apply for loans to finance water system improvements, stormwater management, or green infrastructure projects. Loan amounts vary widely, and applications are accepted annually.

Georgia Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)

Federal FEMA funding administered through GEMA/HS to assist state, local, tribal, and territorial governments in preparing for all-hazards emergencies. Columbia County Emergency Management could receive formula-based funding for emergency planning, training, exercises, emergency operations center equipment, and coordination with state emergency management programs. FY2025 funding totals approximately $32.4 million nationally, allocated on a population basis.

Action Matrix

The Action Matrix compiles all implementation strategies, policies, and recommendations in the *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan*. It provides County staff with a tool to prioritize implementation activities and program projects over the life of the Plan. It also enables the County to approve specific, actionable items each year and to evaluate progress based on completed actions. Each line includes a brief description and indicates the following:

Priority Level

Priority is assigned based on cost and importance. Each action in the Action Matrix is indicated with one of the following:

- **Priority 1:** Near-term, low-cost, easier to implement, critical
- **Priority 2:** Mid-term, essential
- **Priority 3:** Long-term, desirable

Time Frame

Time frame indicates when the County should begin an action: Ongoing (currently underway and should continue), Short-term (1–2 years), Mid-term (3–5 years), Long-term (5+ years).

Partners

Columbia County will work with municipalities, regional agencies, state and federal partners, and community organizations to fully implement the *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan.* While the County is generally responsible for initiating and implementing most actions, many partnerships will be required to achieve the Plan's goals and strategies. The Partners column identifies likely collaborators; additional partners may be added where appropriate.

Community Work Plan

The County's CWP serves as a practical, five-year roadmap guiding the County and stakeholders in making informed decisions about land use, development, infrastructure, economic growth, and community improvements. These actions are categorized into Regulations, Functional Plans, Processes/Programs, Inventory/Assessment, and Infrastructure Projects.

For each CWP action, the County will document:

- Brief description of the action
- Timeframe for undertaking the action (for example, 2026 to 2030)
- Estimated cost to implement
- Responsible party for implementation
- Potential funding source

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
05	**Housing and Neighborhoods**			
	Neighborhood Character			
05-01	Implement sidewalk and bicycle facility projects that connect neighborhoods to commercial areas and public amenities.	Priority 2	Mid-term	
05-02	Develop rural and urban nodes at appropriate intersections across the County to provide everyday services.	Priority 1	Short-term	
05-03	Consider installing missing sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails networks in existing neighborhoods.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Developers, Property Owners
05-04	Consider updating subdivision regulations to require varied architectural styles and facade styles, and the inclusion of open space in new subdivisions.	Priority 2	Mid-term	
	Planning for New Growth			
05-05	Identify areas in developed parts of the County that can support infill housing.	Priority 1	Short-term	Developers
05-06	Prioritize infill development in areas serviced by existing infrastructure and amenities across the County.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Development Authority of Columbia County, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Municipalities
05-07	Align housing development with the County's Community Work Program, ensuring future infrastructure investments support growth.	Priority 2	Ongoing	State of Georgia; CSRA RC; ARTS MPO; GDOT; Municipalities
05-08	Adopt a Smart Growth Plan that coordinates infrastructure investment with land use, supporting context-sensitive development.	Priority 3	Mid-term	CSRA RC, State of Georgia, GDOT
05-09	Encourage land use transitions in density of development to avoid abrupt changes between new and existing development.	Priority 2	Short-term	
05-10	Consider developing infill design guidelines as part of the zoning ordinance to design development that blends into the character of existing neighborhoods.	Priority 3	Short-term	
	Housing Mismatch			
05-11	Conduct a housing needs assessment to identify demand and supply gaps.	Priority 1	Short-term	CSRA RC, Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Municipalities
05-12	Revise the zoning ordinance to streamline ADU approvals.	Priority 1	Short-term	
05-13	Support development of various home sizes and price points near existing infrastructure and amenities.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Developers, Property Owners
05-14	Review the County's zoning to allow additional housing types in targeted single-family districts near the Town Center and neighborhood-serving corridors.	Priority 1	Mid-term	
05-15	Review zoning ordinance to develop infill design guidelines, to ensure development blends with character of existing neighborhoods.	Priority 3	Long-term	
	Quality and Maintenance			
05-16	Support housing rehabilitation programs to maintain existing homes.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Property Owners
05-17	Identify areas having code-enforcement issues and launch an owner assistance program for property upkeep.	Priority 1	Short-term	Property Owners
05-18	Enforce property maintenance standards consistently and provide technical and financial assistance pathways.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Property Owners
05-19	Make rehabilitation programs, grants, and homeowner resources easily accessible to residents.	Priority 1	Short-term	
05-20	Consider design standards that encourage high-quality upgrades, including materials, facades, porches, patios, and landscaping.	Priority 1	Short-term	Homebuilders and Developers

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
06	**Commercial and Industrial Areas**			
	Commercial Corridors			
06-01	Promote a wide variety of businesses beyond gas stations to include more retail, entertainment, and sit-down dining options.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Development Authority of Columbia County, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Realtors
06-02	Use landscape and buffer techniques to reduce visual impact and provide a transition between industrial or commercial sites and nearby neighborhoods.	Priority 1	Short-term	Developers
06-03	Require shared access and driveway consolidation in commercial and industrial site plans.	Priority 1	Short-term	Developers
06-04	Launch a façade improvement grant or loan program for aging commercial properties.	Priority 2	Short-term	Development Authority of Columbia County, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, DCA, Municipalities
06-05	Identify opportunities to consolidate small parcels in key corridors to enable cohesive redevelopment.	Priority 2	Mid-term	Developers
06-06	Promote shared parking agreements for new commercial development.	Priority 2	Short-term	Municipalities, Developers
06-07	Continue to require coordinated lighting, signage, and streetscape to create a cohesive identity and strengthen aesthetics of corridors.	Priority 1	Mid-term	
06-08	Consider creating a façade improvement program to enhance the appearance of aging commercial properties.	Priority 3	Mid-term	Developers, Property Owners
	Proximity-Based Development			
06-09	Update allowed uses in neighborhood and community commercial districts to attract compatible businesses.	Priority 1	Short-term	
06-10	Plan and zone for entertainment amenities like live music venues, museums, and outdoor gathering spaces where appropriate.	Priority 3	Long-term	Columbia County Performing Arts Center
06-11	Review zoning ordinance to remove redevelopment barriers like parking minimums or setbacks.	Priority 1	Short-term	Developers, Business Community
06-12	Support business development at rural nodes serving Wildwood Park, Fort Gordon Recreational Area, Mistletoe Park, Clarks Hill Marina, and Winfield Campgrounds.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
	Reinvestment			
06-13	Consider developing a facade improvement grant program to support businesses in maintaining and rehabilitating building facades.	Priority 2	Short-term	Business Community
06-14	Create a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Tax Allocation District (TAD) strategy for Martinez to help fund private development.	Priority 3	Mid-term	
06-15	Identify underutilized or vacant properties to encourage redevelopment.	Priority 1	Short-term	
06-16	Introduce landscaped elements between parking areas and sidewalks to improve corridor character.	Priority 1	Mid-term	Developers, Property Owners
06-17	Continue to enforce and update the design requirements in the Corridor Protection Overlay District to ensure new buildings front major roads with parking to the side or rear.	Priority 3	Long-term	
06-18	Reinvest in aging shopping centers by reusing excess surface parking and adding new commercial uses.	Priority 2	Mid-term	Developers, Property Owners
06-19	Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections from existing and future neighborhoods to commercial areas.	Priority 1	Short-term	Developers, Property Owners

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
06	**Commercial and Industrial Areas**			
	Urban Design and Placemaking			
06-20	Require outdoor gathering spaces (plazas, seating, shaded courtyards) in new commercial projects.	Priority 1	Short-term	Developers
06-21	Create a Countywide gateway branding and design standard.	Priority 3	Mid-term	Development Authority of Columbia County, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
06-22	Repurpose underused parking along Furys Ferry, Washington, Columbia, and Belair corridors for infill and placemaking.	Priority 2	Mid-term	Developers, Property Owners
06-23	Partner with Visit Columbia County and others to expand year-round events that boost community engagement and visitation.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Visit Columbia County, Columbia County Performing Arts Center, and Explore Georgia
06-24	Consider incorporating public art, streetscape, and placemaking in commercial corridors to increase visual interest.	Priority 1	Short-term	Developers
06-25	Incorporate green space, public gathering areas, and active outdoor amenities in commercial site plans.	Priority 2	Short-term	Developers
	Workforce Development			
06-26	Partner up to expand career pathways aligned with local demand.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Columbia County School District, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Development Authority of Columbia County
06-27	Add training and job resources to the Development Authority website.	Priority 1	Short-term	Development Authority of Columbia County, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
06-28	Promote Georgia Veterans Education Career Transition Resource programs at County job fairs.	Priority 1	Ongoing	State of Georgia, Alliance for Fort Gordon, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
06-29	Coordinate with partners to deliver targeted workforce training.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Fort Gordon, U.S. Army Cyber Center, Business Community
	Quarries and Mining Operations			
06-30	Prepare reclamation and reuse plans for quarry sites approaching end of life.	Priority 2	Short-term	Quarries
06-31	Establish regular coordination with quarry operators and plan for traffic and environmental impacts to nearby neighborhoods.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Quarries, GDOT, GADNR, EPA
	Tourism and Events			
06-32	Collaborate to market outdoor recreation tourism.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Visit Columbia County
06-33	Work with local businesses, hotels, and restaurants to create tourism packages with hotels and restaurants for disc golf tournaments and other major events.	Priority 2	Short-term	Business Community
06-34	Host annual disc golf events with live music, food trucks, and markets.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Visit Columbia County, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
06-35	Advertise events at Evans Town Center, Lady A Amphitheater, and the Performing Arts Center across the region.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Development Authority of Columbia County, Visit Columbia County, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
06-36	Allow outdoor seating and extended operating hours in Evans Town Center to increase foot traffic.	Priority 1	Short-term	Evans, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
06	**Commercial and Industrial Areas**			
	Business Development and Attraction			
06-37	Develop marketing campaigns and a business attraction and retention program with the Chamber and partner organizations.	Priority 1	Short-term	Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Development Authority of Columbia County
06-38	Update and maintain a Countywide marketing and business recruitment strategy with the Development Authority.	Priority 3	Ongoing	Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Development Authority of Columbia County
06-39	Launch small-business support programs (Small Business Saturday, mentorships, networking with the Chamber).	Priority 2	Short-term	Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Development Authority of Columbia County, Business Community

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
07	**Transportation**			
	Roadway Capacities			
07-01	Implement Future Mobility 2050 projects to align road upgrades with forecasted volumes and congestion.	Priority 1	Ongoing	ARTS MPO, GDOT, State of Georgia
07-02	Coordinate regularly with ARTS and GDOT on roadway maintenance, development-supporting improvements, and multimodal connectivity.	Priority 3	Ongoing	ARTS MPO, GDOT
07-03	Conduct GDOT-coordinated traffic studies to address peak-period congestion.	Priority 1	Short-term	GDOT, ARTS MPO, Municipalities
07-04	Monitor traffic volumes on collectors and locals and adjust operations and projects accordingly.	Priority 3	Mid-term	ARTS MPO, GDOT
07-05	Use smart infrastructure and new data to guide CIP decisions and forecast needs based on land use change.	Priority 1	Short-term	ARTS MPO, GDOT, State of Georgia
	Roadway Improvements			
07-06	Deliver connectivity projects including road widenings, roundabouts, and interchange reconstructions.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
07-07	Continue to implement Future Mobility 2050 projects through the CIP.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
07-08	Use the *Future Mobility 2050 Plan* and Character Areas to guide improvements and redevelopment.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
07-09	Evaluate and prioritize high-congestion and high-crash intersections for improvement.	Priority 2	Short-term	
	Active Transportation			
07-10	Connect new bikeways and trails to schools, community facilities, and parks.	Priority 2	Short-term	ARTS MPO, Columbia County School District, Parks and Recreation Department
07-11	Coordinate with the SRTS Resource Center and local schools to identify and deliver SRTS projects.	Priority 3	Short-term	Columbia County School District, GA Safe Routes to School
07-12	Prioritize SRTS improvements and gain support from the Board of Education for upgrades at Evans High School and Grovetown High School.	Priority 3	Short-term	Columbia County School District, Board of Education
07-13	Install traffic calming near schools (high-visibility crosswalks, protected bike lanes, curb bulb-outs).	Priority 1	Short-term	GDOT, ARTS MPO, Columbia County School District, Municipalities
07-14	Apply complete streets principles along William Few Parkway and Hardy McManus Road.	Priority 2	Short-term	GDOT, ARTS MPO
07-15	Add context-sensitive traffic calming on collectors and local streets.	Priority 1	Short-term	ARTS MPO
07-16	Add paved shoulders on rural roads where sidewalks or bike lanes are not feasible.	Priority 2	Mid-term	
07-17	Prepare a Countywide active transportation master plan.	Priority 1	Mid-term	CSRA RC, ARTS MPO
07-18	Study trail usage to identify obstacles and opportunities for improved access and connectivity.	Priority 2	Short-term	Mobility groups, Outdoor recreation groups, ARTS MPO
07-19	Stripe delineated bike lanes on collectors and local streets for safer cycling.	Priority 1	Short-term	GDOT, ARTS MPO, Municipalities
07-20	Add paved shoulders on rural roads where sidewalks or bike lanes are not feasible.	Priority 2	Mid-term	GDOT, Municipalities
07-21	Close sidewalk gaps near schools, community facilities, and local streets in older neighborhoods.	Priority 1	Short-term	Columbia County School District, ARTS MPO

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
07	**Transportation**			
	Active Transportation			
07-22	Update GIS to map all existing and proposed sidewalks, trails, greenways, bike lanes, and multi-use paths.	Priority 3	Short-term	CSRA RC, ARTS MPO
07-23	Identify streets for new sidewalks and widen or buffer sidewalks on major corridors.	Priority 1	Short-term	GDOT, ARTS MPO
07-24	Improve road crossing safety at problematic signalized intersections via CIP or GDOT coordination.	Priority 1	Short-term	GDOT, ARTS MPO
07-25	Add enhanced crossing treatments (e.g., raised or more prominent crosswalks) at busy intersections.	Priority 1	Short-term	GDOT, ARTS MPO
07-26	Adopt a complete streets policy to expand multimodal routes.	Priority 1	Short-term	ARTS MPO
07-27	Develop a toolkit to apply complete streets principles Countywide.	Priority 3	Mid-term	ARTS MPO
07-28	Continue working with ARTS MPO to implement the complete streets policy.	Priority 1	Ongoing	ARTS MPO, GDOT
	Alternative Transportation			
07-29	Explore ways to expand Columbia County's Public Transportation Program to increase ridership	Priority 1	Ongoing	Columbia County Public Transit, Augusta Transit
07-30	Evaluate extending transit service hours into mornings and evenings.	Priority 1	Short-term	ARTS MPO
07-31	Explore partnerships and alternative transit options to improve access to key destinations.	Priority 2	Short-term	ARTS MPO, Development Authority of Columbia County
	Freight Rail			
07-32	Monitor at-grade railroad crossings and evaluate feasibility of new overpasses or underpasses at problem locations.	Priority 3	Ongoing	GDOT, ARTS MPO, Municipalities, CSX Transportation
07-33	Partner with GDOT's Freight Rail Program to fund short line upgrades, including track rehabilitation and bridge improvements.	Priority 1	Mid-term	GDOT, State of Georgia, CSX Transportation
07-34	Coordinate with CSX Transportation to address safety and noise near residential areas.	Priority 3	Ongoing	CSX Transportation

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
08	**Community Facilities**			
	Community Services			
08-01	Align capital investments with Comprehensive Plan goals and resident and business needs.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
08-02	Maintain professional management practices and transparent fiscal oversight to support growth and service quality.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
08-03	Host public safety forums with partners to address crime prevention, emergency preparedness, and fire safety in populated areas.	Priority 2	Short-term	Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, EMA, Georgia Emergency Management Agency
08-04	Complete a 10-20 year facilities and staffing analysis for the Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, and EMA.	Priority 3	Long-term	Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, EMA
08-05	Assess public safety staffing, training, equipment, and infrastructure to strategically allocate resources and improve emergency services.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, EMA
08-06	Identify suitable sites for new police and fire stations in northern and western growth areas to ensure timely responses.	Priority 2	Mid-term	Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, EMA
08-07	Conduct annual reviews of vehicles, equipment, staffing, and response times, including wildfire readiness near the Savannah River corridor.	Priority 3	Mid-term	EMA, Georgia Emergency Management Agency, Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue
08-08	Encourage WellStar and local organizations to establish urgent-care and mobile clinics in underserved northern areas to cut travel times.	Priority 2	Mid-term	WellStar Columbia County Medical Center
08-09	Reserve and develop future school sites in northern underserved areas through County–School Board coordination.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Columbia County School District, Municipalities, CSRA RC
08-10	Support school facility upgrades via joint funding, infrastructure grants, and shared utility or site planning.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Columbia County School District
	Update Utilities and Infrastructure			
08-11	Align substation upgrades and feeder extensions with urban and rural nodes in coordination with utilities.	Priority 3	Mid-term	Georgia Power, Jefferson Energy, Municipalities
08-12	Require early utility coordination at rezoning and preliminary plat to budget and deliver needed upgrades before development.	Priority 1	Short-term	Georgia Power, Jefferson Energy, Atlanta Gas Light
08-13	Coordinate with Atlanta Gas Light and gas marketers to extend service to unserved communities.	Priority 2	Mid-term	Atlanta Gas Light, Georgia Natural Gas, Gas South, SCANA, Municipalities
08-14	Align water and wastewater line projects with the Character Areas Map in coordination with developers and property owners.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
08-15	Assess water and wastewater capacity and facilities to target upgrades for growth areas.	Priority 1	Short-term	
08-16	Reserve and acquire sites for tanks, booster stations, and pump stations in planned service sheds ahead of growth.	Priority 3	Long-term	
08-17	Require on-site retention, infiltration, riparian buffers, and soil restoration on all new projects.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
08-18	Integrate stormwater retrofits into all future projects to meet MS4 goals and improve water quality.	Priority 2	Ongoing	

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
08	**Community Facilities**			
	Telecommunications and Broadband			
08-19	Continue working with the service provider to assess Countywide broadband coverage and identify gaps, prioritizing rural northern communities.	Priority 1	Short-term	Broadband service providers
08-20	Partner with providers to extend broadband to unserved and underserved areas.	Priority 1	Mid-term	Broadband service providers
08-21	Adopt a dig-once policy requiring conduit in all new road and utility projects.	Priority 2	Short-term	
08-22	Expand community Wi-Fi pilots at parks and libraries to ensure equitable access.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
	Historic and Cultural Resources			
08-23	Continue collaborating with HHPAC to update the Countywide historic sites inventory and GIS map.	Priority 3	Mid-term	HHPAC
08-24	Expand digital documentation and public interpretation for key sites and integrate this content into school partnerships.	Priority 2	Short-term	HHPAC, GCHRL, Columbia County School District
08-25	Update and expand preservation and rehabilitation ordinances to align with the Secretary of the Interior's standards.	Priority 1	Short-term	
08-26	Update design guidelines for new structures in historic districts to match the character of existing buildings.	Priority 2	Mid-term	
	Parks and Open Space			
08-27	Implement strategies from the Parks and Recreation Master Plan to upgrade parks, trails, and facilities Countywide.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Parks and Recreation Department
08-28	Fund upgrades at Patriots Park, Wildwood Park, and Savannah Rapids Park for ADA access, lighting, shade, restrooms, and wayfinding.	Priority 2	Short-term	
08-29	Conduct recurring assessments of all parks and allocate funding to meet modern safety and accessibility standards.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Parks and Recreation Department
08-30	Consider allowing the reuse of pavilion amenities at Patriots Park and Bobby Waters Gym for community use when not scheduled for sports events.	Priority 2	Short-term	Parks and Recreation Department
08-31	Build neighborhood links to recreation areas and equip trailheads with parking, wayfinding, and safe crossings.	Priority 1	Mid-term	Parks and Recreation Department, GDOT
08-32	Consider incorporating green building and sustainable design principles in the new planned sports complex.	Priority 2	Long-term	
08-33	Maintain and expand partnerships to grow recreational opportunities across the County.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Parks and Recreation Department, State of Georgia
08-34	Add new Savannah River access points (kayak launches, fishing piers, small-boat ramps) at locations such as Savannah Rapids Park and Betty's Branch.	Priority 3	Mid-term	
08-35	Restore and protect shoreline with erosion control and green buffers to improve water quality and habitat.	Priority 1	Mid-term	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Parks and Recreation Department

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
08	**Community Facilities**			
	Tourism			
08-36	Coordinate marketing with Visit Columbia County to promote parks, recreation facilities, and annual events.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Visit Columbia County, Parks and Recreation Department, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
08-37	Allocate a share of hotel-motel tax and grants to trail and blue way connections and shoreline restoration at high-use lake and river sites.	Priority 1	Short-term	
08-38	Pursue a partnership work plan with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Clarks Hill Lake to align shoreline management with tournaments and park operations.	Priority 2	Short-term	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
08-39	Expand visitor services at Savannah Rapids Park and Wildwood Park and maintain the state-certified visitor center as the trip-planning hub for Serene18.	Priority 2	Mid-term	Parks and Recreation Department
08-40	Continue to monitor event attendance, room nights, trail counters, and conservation outcomes to ensure tourism reinvestments are data-driven	Priority 3	Long-term	Visit Columbia County
08-41	Partner with local artists, schools, and community organizations to identify new cultural and youth-oriented events that showcase the County's heritage.	Priority 2	Short-term	Columbia County School District, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Visit Columbia County

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
09	**Natural Areas**			
	Local Geography			
09-01	Align water resource decisions with the Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Regional Water Plan.	Priority 1	Ongoing	State of Georgia
09-02	Follow the 2023 Parks and Recreation Master Plan's water resource recommendations.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
09-03	Adopt stricter standards near groundwater recharge areas and riparian buffers, including density limits consistent with state guidelines.	Priority 3	Long-term	State of Georgia, Municipalities
09-04	Limit impervious coverage near sensitive areas to reduce runoff.	Priority 1	Short-term	
09-05	Promote Clarks Hill Lake and the Savannah River as recreation and tourism destinations.	Priority 2	Ongoing	Visit Columbia County, Parks and Recreation Department
09-06	Maintain and enhance the County's Green Guide with education and volunteer opportunities for water resources.	Priority 2	Short-term	
09-07	Continue supporting the County's Adopt-a-Stream program to improve local stream water quality.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
09-08	Continue the Innovative Stormwater Solution Award to recognize best practices by private property owners.	Priority 2	Ongoing	
09-09	Coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to align development with the *J. Strom Thurmond Project Shoreline Management Plan*.	Priority 1	Ongoing	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
09-10	Educate residents on flood risks using FEMA maps and include this in hazard mitigation outreach.	Priority 3	Mid-term	Emergency Management Agency
	Habitats and Protected Areas			
09-11	Manage protected areas and at-risk species in accordance with the *2025 State Wildlife Action Plan*.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department
09-12	Continue coordination with state and federal agencies to manage protected areas.	Priority 1	Ongoing	State of Georgia
09-13	Establish or expand neighborhood parks, reserves, and other protected areas where feasible.	Priority 2	Mid-term	Land Owners, Developers
09-14	Work with residents and partners to prevent and control invasive plants, animals, and pathogens.	Priority 1	Short-term	Businesses, and Public Agencies
09-15	Promote educational programs and resources on wildlife and habitat protection.	Priority 3	Short-term	Parks and Recreation Department, Columbia County School District

#	Actions	Priority Level	Timeframe	Partners
09	**Natural Areas**			
	Existing Hazards			
09-16	Expand multi-channel public warnings and place or maintain NOAA Weather Radios in public facilities.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Emergency Management Agency
09-17	Update the *2021–2026 Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan* on a regular cycle.	Priority 3	Mid-term	
09-18	Collaborate to secure funding and grants for preparedness, response, and recovery.	Priority 2	Ongoing	State of Georgia, Municipalities, CSRA-RC
09-19	Launch a public education program on hazards, preparedness, evacuation routes, and alert systems.	Priority 2	Short-term	Columbia County School District
09-20	Extend real-time stream gauges in western watersheds and publish a public flood-warning dashboard integrated with Hyper-Reach.	Priority 1	Mid-term	
09-21	Incorporate hazard mitigation goals in the CIP, prioritizing stormwater upgrades and safe emergency access routes in flood risk areas.	Priority 2	Short-term	
09-22	Continue implementing actions and strategies from the *Hazard Mitigation Plan*.	Priority 1	Ongoing	
09-23	Work with experts to adopt new best practices into EMA policies.	Priority 1	Ongoing	Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, State of Georgia
09-24	Coordinate with Harlem, Grovetown, and County agencies to update the *Hazard Mitigation Plan*.	Priority 1	Short-term	Harlem, Grovetown
09-25	Include human-caused hazards (cyber-attacks, hazardous materials releases) in the next *Hazard Mitigation Plan* update.	Priority 2	Short-term	

Community Work Plan

Action/ Implementation Strategy	Time Frame					Cost Estimate	Responsible Party	Funding Source
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030			
Regulations								
Complete sampling for UCMR6 as required by EPD			●	●		$100,000	Water Utility	General Operating Fund
Renew NPDES permits for Little River and Kiokee Creek WTP			●			$20,000	Water Utility	General Operating Fund
Work with the US Army Corps of Engineers to increase our withdrawal permit at the Clarks Hill WTP	●	●	●			$2,500,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Develop and Submit the Access Management Plan as required by EPD	●	●				$30,000	Water Utility	General Operating Fund
Complete Comprehensive Nutrient Optimization Plan (CNOP)		●	●			$25,000	Water Utility	General Operating Fund
Functional Plans								
Update Information Security Plan 2028-2033			●			$0	Technology Services Division	Staff time only
Update Business Continuity Plans for County Departments				●		$0	Technology Services Division	Staff time only
Complete Disaster Recovery Plans for Technology-Driven Departments	●					$0	Technology Services Division	Staff time only
Complete County-wide Continuity of Operations Plan		●				$0	Technology Services Division	Staff time only
Develop formal IT Infrastructure Management (ITIM) Plan	●					$0	Technology Services Division	Staff time only
Water Utility Master Plan				●	●	$600,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Process/Program								
Implement Cityworks Software for existing business processes in work-order heavy departments	●					$0	GIS	Staff time only
Develop business strategy for the adoption of Artificial Intelligence into county work processes	●					$0	Technology Services Division	Staff time only
Migrate Tax Assessor and Tax Commissioner Software into a hosted cloud environment		●				$500,000	IT	IT Operating
Inventory/Assessment								
Building “A” Evans Campus	●					$27,835,495	Facility Services	SPLOST

Community Work Plan

Action/ Implementation Strategy	Time Frame					Cost Estimate	Responsible Party	Funding Source
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030			
Infrastructure Projects								
Construct a Local Disaster Recovery Site	●					$0	IT	Various
Implement new hardware GIS Infrastructure	●					$250,000	GIS	GIS Operating
Modernize broadband infrastructure (network switches)		●				$1,000,000	C3BU	C3BU Capital
Continued expansion of fiber-optic network	●	●	●	●	●	$5,000,000	C3BU	Various
IT Data Center Core Refresh					●	$2,000,000	IT	IT Capital
Ongoing Program of Network Equipment Lifecycle Replacements	●	●	●	●	●	$2,500,000	IT	IT Capital
Chemical Upgrades to Clarks Hill WTP	●	●				$5,200,000	Water Utility	Bonds
Chemical Upgrades to Jim Blanchard WTP	●	●				$8,500,000	Water Utility	Bonds
Process Upgrades to Clarks Hill WTP				●	●	$2,500,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Euchee Creek Sewer Force Main	●	●				$19,000,000	Water Utility	ARPA
Euchee Creek Harlem Inteceptor	●	●				$23,000,000	Water Utility	Bonds
Sawdust Road Waterline	●	●				$4,000,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Hereford Farm Road Waterline Relocation		●	●	●		$7,500,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Jim Blanchard WTP Entrance Improvements and Upgrades	●	●				$2,000,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Reed Creek Sewer Improvements		●	●	●	●	$10,000,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Little Kiokee North Sewer Improvements		●	●			$2,750,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
620 to 670 Distribution System Improvements			●	●		$4,500,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Windfield Distribution Improvements		●				$750,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
650 System Elevated Water Tank				●		$6,000,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension
Stormwater Improvements				●	●	$5,834,950	Stormwater Management	SPLOST
Reed Creek WWTP Improvements				●	●	$7,500,000	Water Utility	Renewal and Extension

Community Work Plan

Action/ Implementation Strategy	Time Frame					Cost Estimate	Responsible Party	Funding Source
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030			
Infrastructure Projects								
Senior Center Remodel	●					$1,177,599	Parks and Rec	SPLOST
Patriots Park upgrades/redesign	●					$9,587,143	Parks and Rec	SPLOST
Columbia County Sports Complex	●	●				$19,838,830	Facility Services	SPLOST
Savannah Rapids Pavilion	●	●				$8,672,858	Facility Services	SPLOST
Harlem multipurpose park			●			$18,671,840	Parks and Rec	SPLOST
Blanchard Woods Park upgrades			●			$2,005,101	Parks and Rec	SPLOST
Riverside Park upgrades				●		$3,033,246	Parks and Rec	SPLOST
C3BU Facilities			●	●		$6,148,976	Facility Services	SPLOST
Camera Lifecycle and System Expansion	●	●				$599,409	Facility Services	SPLOST
Campus Network				●	●	$710,803	Facility Services	SPLOST
Fiber Upgrades	●	●	●	●	●	$799,313	Facility Services	SPLOST
Wi-Fi Pavilions	●	●	●	●	●	$82, 585	Facility Services	SPLOST
Evans Town Center Intersection Upgrades			●	●		$5,103,197	Facility Services	SPLOST
Horizon South Chamblin Road Connector	●	●				$13,487,020	Facility Services	SPLOST
Ray Owens and White Oak Road Improvements				●	●	$4,374,169	Facility Services	SPLOST
Replacement (2) Pumper Fire Trucks	●					$1,405,690	Facility Services	SPLOST
New (2) Pumpers Fire Trucks		●				$1,874,250	Facility Services	SPLOST
Fire Rescue Training Complex		●	●			$6,895,850	Facility Services	SPLOST
New Aerial Fire Truck		●				$1,697,440	Facility Services	SPLOST
New Fire Stations	●	●	●			$8,487,200	Facility Services	SPLOST
Replacement Fire Stations				●	●	$7,956,750	Facility Services	SPLOST
Sheriff Training Facility Improvements			●	●	●	$3,528,000	Facility Services	SPLOST

Appendix A:
Community Outreach

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PROJECT
KICK-OFF
Columbia County Comprehensive Plan
March 18-19, 2025

Project Team

FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

COLUMBIA COUNTY
GEORGIA

HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

All Together.

Agenda

- What is a Comprehensive Plan?
- Review of Project Timeline and Planning Process (Scope of Work)
- Workshop: Issues and Opportunities
- Outreach Strategies – Website, Community Questionnaire, map.social
- Next Steps


ABOUT THE
PLANNING PROCESS

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

- A "Roadmap" or "Blueprint" for the next two decades
- The Comprehensive Plan
  - Engages the community
  - Identifies community desires, needs, and aspirations
  - Assesses the County's existing issues and strengths
  - Guides a broad range of topics (policy)
  - Is a dynamic document – can be updated and maintained to reflect trends and events

Why is it important?

- Tell Columbia County's story and share the community's vision
- Evaluate and inform development proposals
- Foundation for the regulatory framework
- Coordinate local and regional initiatives
- Support capital improvements planning and budgeting
- Identify future studies and funding opportunities
- Inform and educate the community

Role of the Steering Committee

- Provide input on issues and opportunities within the County
- Act as sounding board for the Columbia County community
- Attend open house meetings to show support and continuity
- Provide feedback throughout the planning process
- Review key Plan elements
- Provide a public face for the planning process and demonstrate the commitment of the County to seek meaningful input

Scope of Work

Approximately 12-month process to:



Scope of Work

Approximately 12-month process to:

- Establish where we are today
- Define where we want to go
- Establish the roadmap to get there



Scope of Work

Approximately 12-month process to:

- Establish where we are today
- Define where we want to go
- Establish the roadmap to get there



Scope of Work

Approximately 12-month process to:

- **Establish where we are today**
- **Define where we want to go**
- **Establish the roadmap to get there**




WORKSHOP

Workshop

1. Identify five (5) issues or concerns confronting Columbia County.

2. List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

3. Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken to positively impact Columbia County.

4. What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

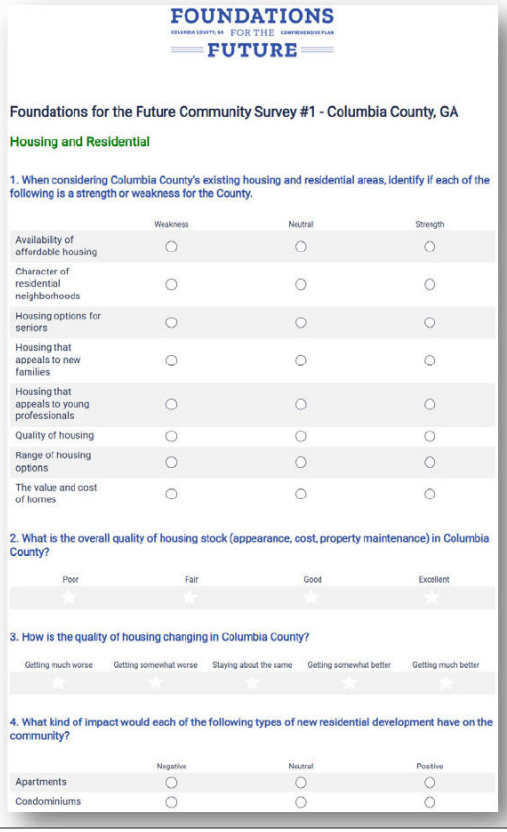
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Project Website – www.futurecolumbiacounty.com

Community Countywide Survey #1

https://hla.fyi/ColumbiaCountySurvey1



FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Foundations for the Future Community Survey #1 - Columbia County, GA

Housing and Residential

1. When considering Columbia County's existing housing and residential areas, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the County.

	Weakness	Neutral	Strength
Availability of affordable housing			
Character of residential neighborhoods			
Housing options for seniors			
Housing that appeals to new families			
Housing that appeals to young professionals			
Quality of housing			
Range of housing options			
The value and cost of homes			

2. What is the overall quality of housing stock (appearance, cost, property maintenance) in Columbia County?

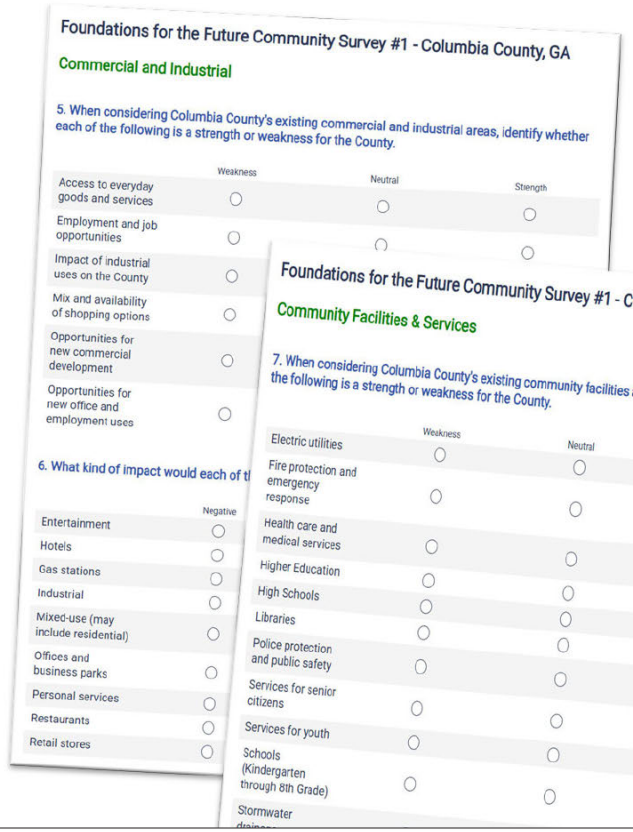
Poor | Fair | Good | Excellent

3. How is the quality of housing changing in Columbia County?

Getting much worse | Getting somewhat worse | Staying about the same | Getting somewhat better | Getting much better

4. What kind of impact would each of the following types of new residential development have on the community?

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Apartments			
Condominiums			



Foundations for the Future Community Survey #1 - Columbia County, GA

Commercial and Industrial

5. When considering Columbia County's existing commercial and industrial areas, identify whether each of the following is a strength or weakness for the County.

	Weakness	Neutral	Strength
Access to everyday goods and services			
Employment and job opportunities			
Impact of industrial uses on the County			
Mix and availability of shopping options			
Opportunities for new commercial development			
Opportunities for new office and employment uses			

6. What kind of impact would each of t

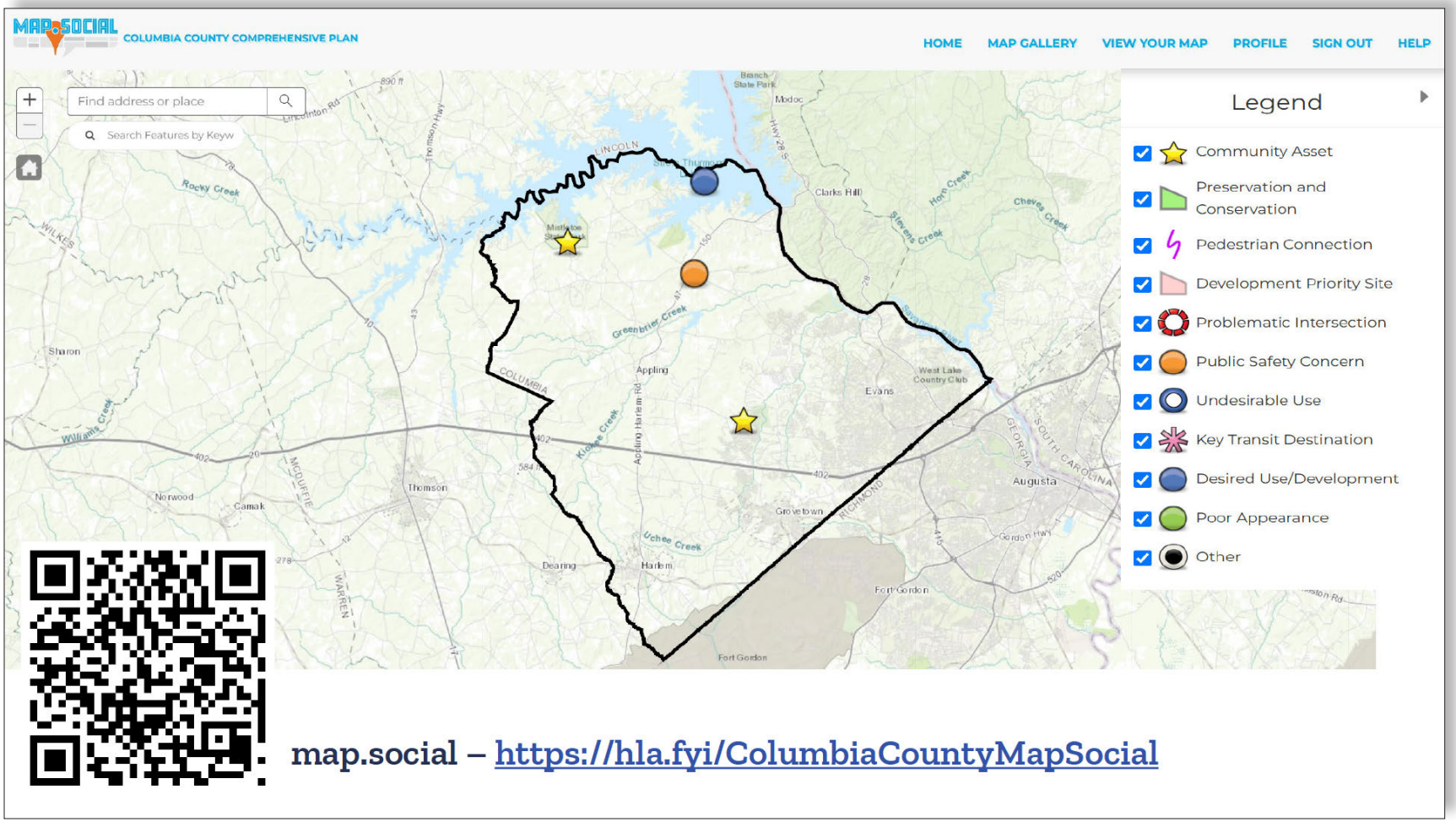
	Negative
Entertainment	
Hotels	
Gas stations	
Industrial	
Mixed-use (may include residential)	
Offices and business parks	
Personal services	
Restaurants	
Retail stores	

Foundations for the Future Community Survey #1 - Columbia County, GA

Community Facilities & Services

7. When considering Columbia County's existing community facilities and services, identify if each of the following is a strength or weakness for the County.

	Weakness	Neutral	Strength
Electric utilities			
Fire protection and emergency response			
Health care and medical services			
Higher Education			
High Schools			
Libraries			
Police protection and public safety			
Services for senior citizens			
Services for youth			
Schools (Kindergarten through 8th Grade)			
Stormwater			


MAP.SOCIAL
COLUMBIA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
HOME
MAP GALLERY
VIEW YOUR MAP
PROFILE
SIGN OUT
HELP
Find address or place
Search Features by Keyw
Legend
Community Asset
Preservation and Conservation
Pedestrian Connection
Development Priority Site
Problematic Intersection
Public Safety Concern
Undesirable Use
Key Transit Destination
Desired Use/Development
Poor Appearance
Other
Augusta
Thomson
Evans
Appling
Harlem
Grovetown
Fort Gordon
Clarks Hill
Sharon
Norwood
Camak
Dearing
map.social – https://hla.fyi/ColumbiaCountyMapSocial

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

- Online Engagement
  - Website, survey, and map.social available now
  - Outreach Challenge – Ask 5 people to take the questionnaire or try map.social!
- In-Person Engagement
  - Community Planning Kick-off Event & Pop-Up Events
  - Business Community Workshop
  - Key Stakeholder Interviews/Focus Groups
  - Steering Committee Roundtable
- Project Deliverables
  - Engagement Key Themes
  - Existing Conditions Memo

Community Planning Kick-off Event

- **Date:** March 18, 2025
- **Time:** 6:00 pm
- **Location:** Columbia County Library
  7022 Evans Town Center Blvd.

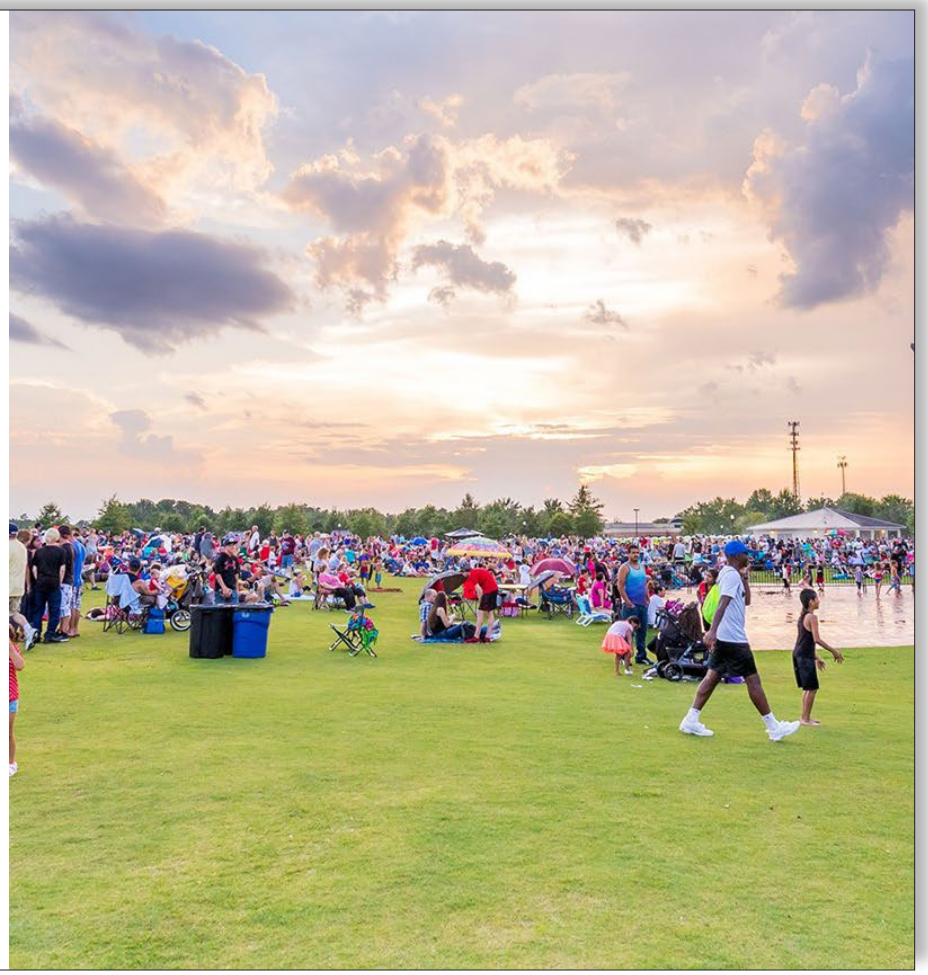


Community Pop-up Events

- Date: March 18, 2025
- Time: 2:00 – 4:00 pm
- Location: Mullins Colony
  4235 Washington Road

- Date: March 19, 2025
- Time: 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
- Location: Harlem Branch Library
  145 N. Louisville St.

- Date: March 19, 2025
- Time: 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm
- Location: Pollard's Corner
  6007 Clarks Hill Rd.



Business Community Workshop

- **Date:** March 19, 2025
- **Time:** 7:30 am
- **Location:** Columbia County Library
  7022 Evans Town Center Blvd.



Steering Committee Roundtable

- **Date:** March 19, 2025
- **Time:** 7:00 pm
- **Location:** Columbia County Library
  7022 Evans Town Center Blvd.



FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

THANK YOU!

HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.
- School Populations with Growth
- Traffic on Corridors
- Strip Mall Development - Sprawl
- High Density Neighborhood Development
- Lack of Exploration of Lake.

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.
1. ~~Development (Impact on Schools~~ 6
2. ~~Transportation~~ 1
3. 7

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.
- Child Care - Support.
-
-

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?
- Education System
- Leadership.

Jim Cox
Jonathan - SE DEV
Dr Hirst
Ret. Mil
Quest Search

Chang Eldridge - Dew Auth.
- Tiffany - Homebuilders Assoc.
- Keith Lawrence - Mayborn

Community WIDE SURVEY over 300
- GOAL

Map Sourc'n. Columbia County

May Week of 19th of May

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

- the lack of first time home buyers housing - attainable housing
- only certain type of "people" wanted here / live here - they can work here but not live here
- A true downtown area / feel -
- lack of national / chain restaurants
- the lack of creativity given to developers / mix of housing / different types.

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. 10
2. 11
3. 6, 13

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

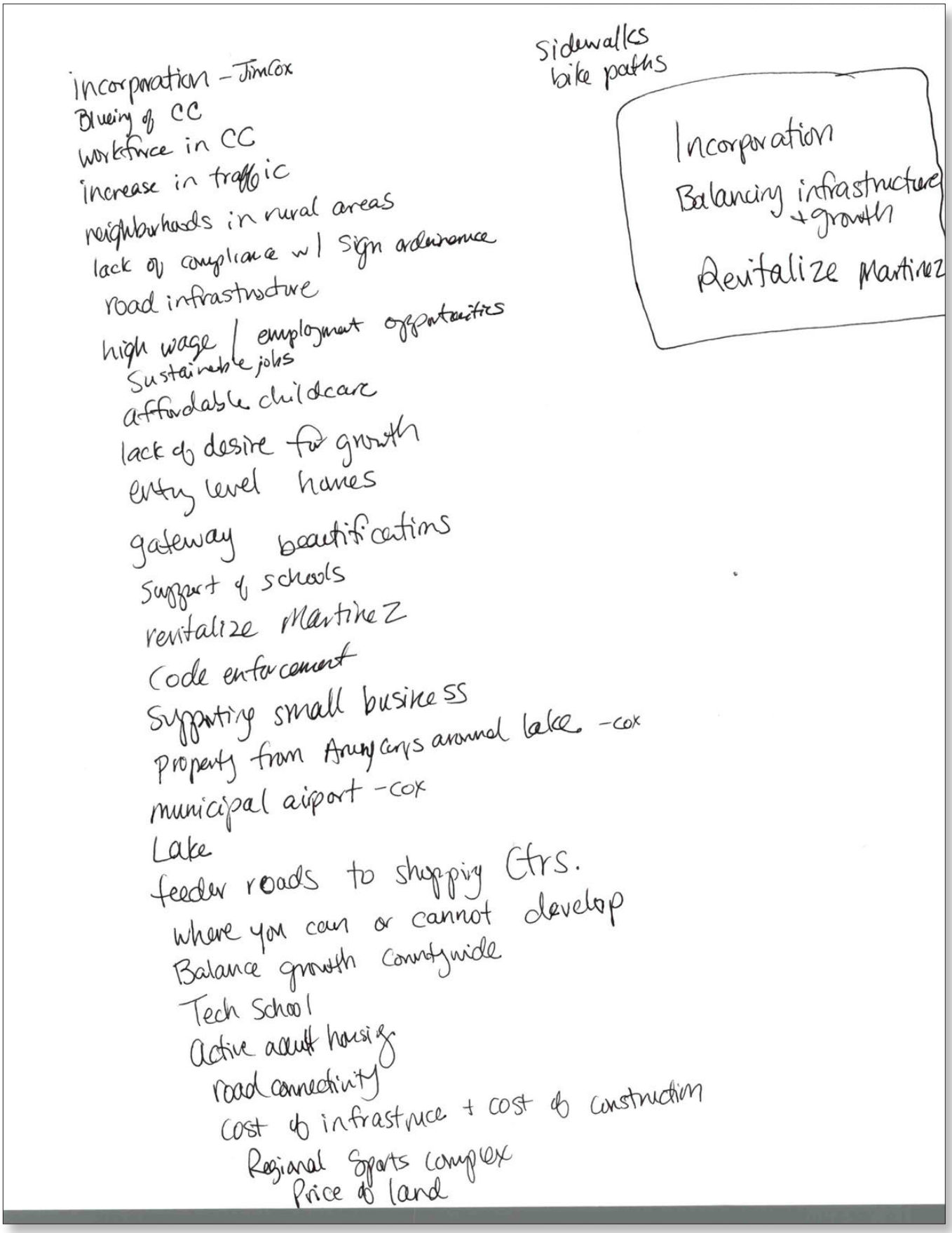
(1) ~~Make~~ offer $5K to $10K per small ~~person~~ business to update their storefronts / signage landscaping

(2) support housing development like amberly Quads for

(3) TAD for Martinez.

4) What ~~are the~~ primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

- safety
- Schools
- Harlem ?!
- Parks
- Entertainment zones / districts
- leadership - Jim Cox


Incorporation – Jim Cox
Blueing of CC
workforce in CC
increase in traffic
neighborhoods in rural areas
lack of compliance w/ sign ordinance
road infrastructure
high wage / employment opportunities
Sustainable jobs
affordable childcare
lack of desire for growth
entry level homes
gateway beautifications
support of schools
revitalize Martinez
Code enforcement
Supporting small business
Property from Army Corps around lake. -Cox
municipal airport -Cox
Lake
feeder roads to shopping Ctrs.
where you can or cannot develop
Balance growth Countywide
Tech School
Active adult housing
road connectivity
cost of infrastruce + cost of construction
Regional Sports complex
Price of land
Sidewalks
bike paths
Incorporation
Balancing infrastructure + growth
Revitalize Martinez

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

(1) roadway infrastructure ✓
(2) The availability of attainable housing ✓
(3) The availability of active adult housing ✓
(4) The lack of desire for more growth ✓
(5) Job generating industries needed ✓

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. 10
2. 11
3. 6

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

- Identify an area of Columbia County where Columbia County can support Attainable housing.
- Dedicate 50 million dollars to roadway expansions + improvements
- Support a housing initiative for better communities through increased neighborhood character requirements.

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

- Columbia County Schools
- [redacted] Public Safety
- Parks + Recreation

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

Population Growth
Infrastructure
Transportation
Schools
New construction

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. 6
2. 1
3. 12

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

6 – Balancing infrastructure and growth
13 – Revitalizing downtowns

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

Safe community
Schools
Affordable homes

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: 3-19-25

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.
Revitalizing the Martinez part of the County.
Increasing infrastructure to support larger businesses
Improving arterial road connectivity.
Building infrastructure ahead growth, not after.

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.
1. 13
2. 1
3. 6

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.
Educating the public and marketing the need for incorporation.

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?
The majority of the citizens are the reason for the community's success.

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: 3/19/25

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

Traffic, Incorporation!!
Code Enforcement
Develop of multi Fram. Apartment
Small Business (more Friendly)
~~Tax Base Development~~

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. 1
2. 24
3. 14

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

Start Process for Inc. with Gener Assy
Talk to Core

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

Schools
Constr Leadership
Gov. Finance. Conservit
Law Enforcement

Traffic

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Fort Gordon 2025: 100 families

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

1. employment centers within county
2. regional retail draw
3. hotels
4. traffic
5. incorporation

a) neighborhood sprawl
b) sustainable / high-wage jobs
* c) affordable child care (Troy Akers)
d) gateway butification (Bryce Melear)
* e) Martinez Revitilization (Russel Wilder)
* f) acquire land from CORPS @ Lake
g) municipal airport via federal grants
h) technical college
* i) availability of active adult housing
j) regional park / aquatic center
↘ Lakepoint
k) establish entertainment zones - alcohol, etc.

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

Balancing infrastructure + growth
1. ~~Lake~~ Incorp.

Incorporation
2. ~~Daycare~~ Lake

Revitalizing Martinez
3. ~~Incorporation~~ Daycare

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

* Tiff / Tadd to ~~revitalize~~ incentive redevelopment of Martinez
* Incentivized childcare

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

a) balance sheet
b) demographics
c) school system

FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

Increase traffic
Lack of sidewalks on main thoroughfares
Aging housing
Activities for range of population ages

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. Infrastructure + Growth
2. Supporting Schools
3. Walkability + sidewalks

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

add sidewalks on major main roads

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

Schools

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

1. The need for shopping areas to have feeder roads.
2. Non-compliance with the sign ordinance - not enforced
3. Traffic flow in certain areas (4 lights signaling to quickly, causing red light running. 5.

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. Revitalization of Martinez.
2. Neighborhood sprawl
3. Gateway beautification

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

Martinez - enforce code, particularly behind Bobby Jones, remove dilapidated buildings,

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.
   1. traffic/road infrastructure for # of vehicles + growth
   2. overcrowding + over development in certain areas (i.e. Grovetown)
   3. Preserving some land
   4. Lack of resources for county (must go to Richmond County for assistance)
2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.
   1. 6
   2. 8
   3. 13
3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.
4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?
   Schools
   Safe
   Family Friendly/generational

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

Traffic/congestion, lack of affordable childcare, zoning/ordinances preventing new growth, underutilization of Parks/rec due to no programming

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. Balancing infrastructure + growth
2. (23)
3. (1)

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

E

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.
- housing availability
- traffic
- quality of life attractions
- population growth
- rural development done properly
- providing high skill/high wage employment opportunities

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.
1. affordable childcare
2. retaining workforce in county
3. balancing infrastructure + growth

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.
- incetivized ~~healthcare~~ childcare
-

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

- Roadside Green Space
- Retaining Workforce
- Gateway Beautification
- Traffic

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. 6

2 6 7

2. 2

3. ~~X~~ 1

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

- Educating Citizens

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Workshop Questionnaire

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

Group: _____ Date: _____

1) Identify five (5) issues or concerns facing Columbia County.

1) Incorporation
2) Martinez Redevelopment
3) Lake Access/Utilization
4) ~~Wild Oak Expansion/Access~~
5) Posh for Apartments
6) Airport

2) List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

1. Incorporation
2. Lake Area Acquisition
3. Martinez Redevelopment

Entertainment Zone

3) Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken.

Incorporation
Acquire Lake Property for ACE
Martinez Redevelopment

4) What are the primary strengths and assets of Columbia County?

1) Our leadership
2) Our People

FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

Kick-off Workshops Summary

Foundations for the Future – Comprehensive Plan | March 2025

On March 18 and 19, 2025, Columbia County hosted three meetings for the Comprehensive Plan project. These included the Department Heads Workshop, Business Workshop, and Steering Committee Workshop. The workshops provided attendees with the opportunity to share their thoughts on the current state of the County and provide feedback regarding the changes they would like to see. Input from these outreach activities will help guide the planning process and inform the goals, recommendations, and policies for the Comprehensive Plan.

Note on Summary Context:

The following summaries reflect the thoughts, comments, and opinions received in the workshops. The items identified in this summary are not recommendations or observations of the consultant, but represent feedback and comments received from those who participated in the workshops.

Department Heads Workshop

March 18, 2025
Attendance – 17

The Department Heads Workshop consisted of seventeen representatives from various County departments and was held in the Columbia County Office Building. The Department Heads Workshop provided an opportunity for staff to offer their input and feedback regarding the County to inform the Plan, with a focus on community impacts. The workshop included a review of the planning process as well as an exercise to gather input regarding issues, opportunities, and key strengths and assets of the County.

Issues and Concerns

Participants were asked to individually identify the issues and concerns facing Columbia County. Next, participants worked to create a single, cumulative list as a large group where each participant shared issues from their list. Participants were tasked with ranking the top three most important issues discussed from the cumulative list.

The summaries identify the highest-ranked collective issues as determined by this method, represented by rank in parentheses, as well as all other issues identified throughout the workshop. The number of votes an issue received is included for issues most often identified by participants.

Below are the top issues as determined by this method, as well as all other issues identified throughout the workshop.

Top Issues

- Growing population with high expectations (11)
- Need to better manage infrastructure with growth (9)
- Need for a variety of development (4)

Other Issues by Category

Housing and Neighborhoods

- Lack of affordable housing
- Increasing home prices
- Current high cost of development

Economic Development

- Need for workforce training
- Current difficulty finding and training qualified employees
- Lack of entertainment/retail/restaurants
- Need for more local businesses
- Poor maintenance and appearance of commercial strip malls

Transportation and Mobility

- Traffic, particularly along arterial roads, and increases with population growth
- Need for a long-range pavement maintenance plan
- Lack of a comprehensive transportation network (non-vehicle modes)
- Poor arterial connectivity
- Poor road surfaces – potholes and resurfacing needs

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

- Cost of treatment plant upgrades
- Need for green space maintenance
- Struggle to balance quality of life with services
- Need to expand the water system across the County

Other

- Negative consequences from rapid growth
- Growth of military base infrastructure around Grovetown
- High expectations from County residents that are challenging to/cannot be met by the County
- Misinformed public hampers County work
- Tax increases
- Need to maintain low crime rates
- Preconceived mindsets about County government
- Lack of funding for County projects
- Need to incorporate unincorporated areas
- Poor private infrastructure management
- Bi-State MPO splits its attention between Georgia and South Carolina
- Current poor opinion of density (perception vs reality)

Priority Actions and Projects

In response to the list of issues, participants were asked to name specific projects or actions that would provide solutions to those issues identified in the first part of the exercise. Below is a list of the projects identified by participants.

- Expand County water and sewer network
- Build out of Evans Town Center
- Campaign to involve the public (e.g., public budget workshops)

Strengths and Assets

As the Comprehensive Plan is developed, the key strengths and assets of Columbia County should be regarded as areas to maintain and build upon. For the final part of the exercise, participants were asked to list the strengths and advantages of Columbia County that should be preserved. The following were identified:

- County leadership and employees
- Public safety
- Public parks and open space
- Education system
- Fiscal status
- Quality of life
- Utilities and services
- Broadband network
- Water system
- Transportation network
- History
- Health services

Business Workshop

March 19, 2025
Attendance – 5

The Business Workshop was an opportunity for business owners and operators to offer their input and feedback regarding the County and the Plan, with a focus on business community impacts. The workshop included a review of the planning process as well as an exercise to gather input regarding issues, opportunities, and key strengths and assets of the County for business owners and local entrepreneurs.

Issues and Concerns

The summaries identify the highest-ranked collective issues as determined by this method, represented by rank in parentheses, as well as all other issues identified throughout the workshop. The number of votes an issue received is included for issues most often identified by participants.

Below are the top issues as determined by this method, as well as all other issues identified throughout the workshop.

Top Issues

- Traffic (2)
- Challenges with messaging (e.g., County to new residents and seniors) (2)

Other Issues by Category

Housing and Neighborhoods

- Need for affordable housing
- Lack of housing for the County's aging population
- Housing density is too high (especially in Grovetown)
- Blight in Grovetown

Economic Development

- Lack of entertainment options
- Lack of readily available and affordable locations for new businesses
- Lack of a trained workforce
- Infrastructure to support industries needs improvement

Transportation and Mobility

- Poor transportation infrastructure / not keeping up with growth
- Traffic

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

- Lack of childcare – affordability and access

Other

- Population growth is stretching County resources
- Current appearance of Martinez
- Lack of lakefront development
- Perception vs reality
- Hurricane cleanup
- Messaging – challenge of spreading good news to all outlets
- Need a fresh vision for the County

Priority Actions and Projects

- Improve roads
- Improved messaging to showcase all the work that the County is doing
- Redevelopment of Martinez
- Affordable senior development
- Bigger venues (parks/entertainment)
- Architectural design overlay districts for the whole County
- Acquire all GDOT roads and approve/implement all traffic projects
- Funding
- Private sector revitalization
- Supporting new businesses
- Build a new technical training facility

Strengths and Assets

- Fiscal responsibility
- County employees and leadership
- Educated citizens
- Pride and culture

Steering Committee Workshop

March 19, 2025
Attendance – 14

The Steering Committee Workshop was held at the Columbia County Public Library in Evans and consisted of fourteen committee members. The workshop, which served as the Committee's introduction to the project, consisted of a presentation on the planning process and a discussion of the Committee's role in the project. The workshop provided an opportunity for the Project Team to gather input regarding issues, opportunities, and key County strengths and assets via an interactive exercise with the Steering Committee.

Issues and Concerns

The summaries identify the highest-ranked collective issues as determined by this method, represented by rank in parentheses, as well as all other issues identified throughout the workshop. The number of votes an issue received is included for issues most often identified by participants.

Below are the top issues as determined by this method, as well as all other issues identified throughout the workshop.

Top Issues

- Need for balancing infrastructure and growth (9)
- Need for incorporation (7)
- Need for revitalizing Martinez (4)

Other Issues by Category

Housing and Neighborhoods

- Need for attainable housing
- Too much high density neighborhood development
- Too much apartment development
- Aging housing stock
- Lack of creative housing development

Economic Development

- Need for regional retail draw
- Lack of employment centers
- Need for retaining and attracting a workforce
- Strip mall development
- A true downtown area/feel (around Evans Town Center)
- Job generating industries needed
- Lack of restaurants
- Need for small businesses
- Few hotels
- Need for a municipal airport
- Lack of available lakefront for new commercial activities

Transportation and Mobility

- Increased traffic
- Need for better roadway infrastructure improvements
- Arterial connectivity
- Sidewalk gaps
- Lack of frontage roads to access commercial uses along major arterials

Community Facilities, Parks, and Infrastructure

- Lack of quality recreation options on Clarks Hill Lake
- Concern over school populations being negatively affected by growth
- Need for activities for a range of age groups
- Currently underutilized parks
- Need for roadside green space
- Lack of land preservation
- Need for gateway beautification

Other

- Population growth straining resources
- Poor transportation and utility infrastructure
- Need for City/County incorporation
- The current tired appearance of Martinez
- Lack of compliance with sign ordinance/code enforcement
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Lack of desire for more growth
- Quality of new construction
- Lack of resources for County projects
- Overdevelopment in certain parts of the County, such as Grovetown
- Zoning ordinances preventing development

Priority Actions and Projects

- Tax allocation district (TAD) for Martinez
- Childcare support
- Revitalize Martinez
- Develop affordable housing along Bobby Jones Expressway
- Remove dilapidated building from Bobby Jones Expressway
- Develop a food hall or mixed-use retail in Martinez or Evans Town Center
- Establish entertainment districts around sports, cultural, or commercial areas
- Construct a new municipal airport
- Acquire land from the Army Corps of Engineers around Clarks Hill Lake for better utilization
- Establish a technical college
- Balance infrastructure with growth
- Educate the public on the importance of incorporation
- Support attainable housing development
- Incentivize business owners to update their signage, facades, and landscaping
- Roadway expansions and improvement
- Incorporate neighborhood character requirements
- Support schools
- Install sidewalks along major arterials
- Retaining a skilled workforce

Strengths and Assets

- Education system
- Leadership
- Safety
- Parks and Recreation
- Attainable homes
- Citizens
- Demographics
- Balance sheet
- Family-friendly
- Harlem


FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE
Comprehensive Plan Engagement Summary | March 2025 - January 2026

PROJECT BACKGROUND + STEPS

The **Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan** will bring together the voices of our residents, business owners, and local organizations to build a foundation for the County. Its focus areas will include recreation, sustainable growth, local business support, and character preservation.

The helps guide Columbia County's future. It's about preserving what makes our community special and ensuring we meet the needs of residents today and in the years to come.



Project Kick-off

Winter 2025 - Spring 2025

Existing Conditions

Winter 2025 - Spring 2025

Visioning + Key Recs

Spring 2025 - Summer 2025

Elements + Process Guide

Summer 2025 - Fall 2025

Project Adoption

Winter 2025 - Spring 2026

ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Let's get to visioning, Columbia County!

Share your ideas for the future! Your input is essential to shaping the Comprehensive Plan. Take surveys, join events, and stay up-to-date on how your input shapes the plan.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED



FUN WORKSHOPS



COMMUNITY SURVEYS



COUNTYWIDE POP-UPS



INTERACTIVE MAP



DO-IT-YOURSELF KITS



PUBLIC MEETINGS

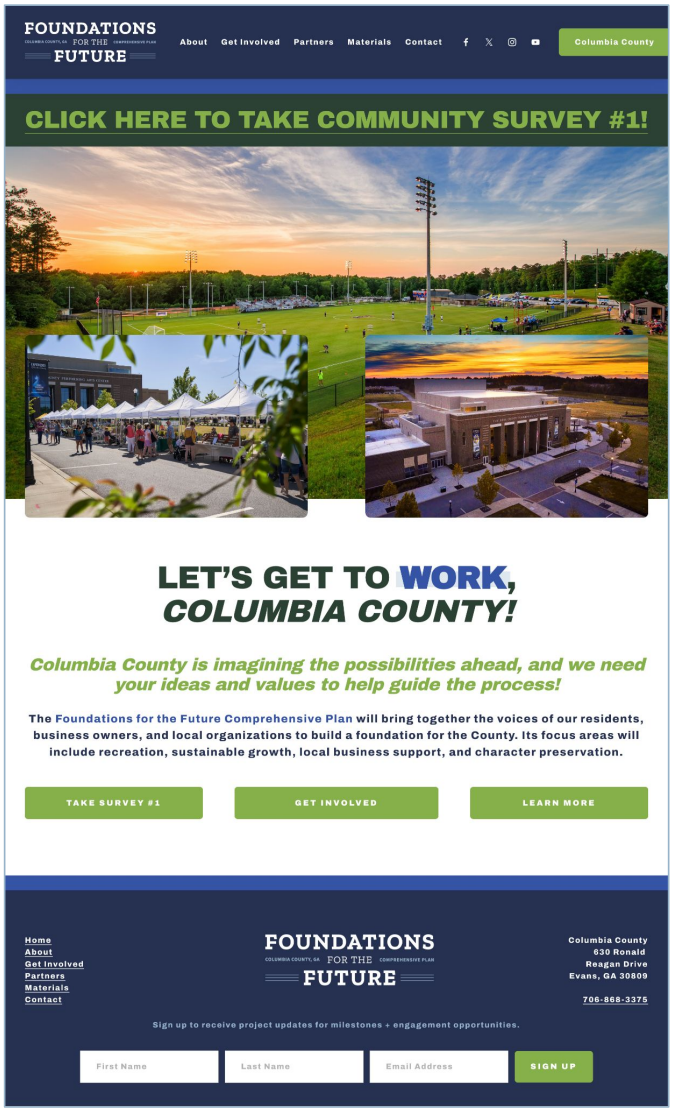
PROJECT WEBSITE

Engagement Waves #1-3

3.9k
Unique Viewers

443
Email Sign-ups

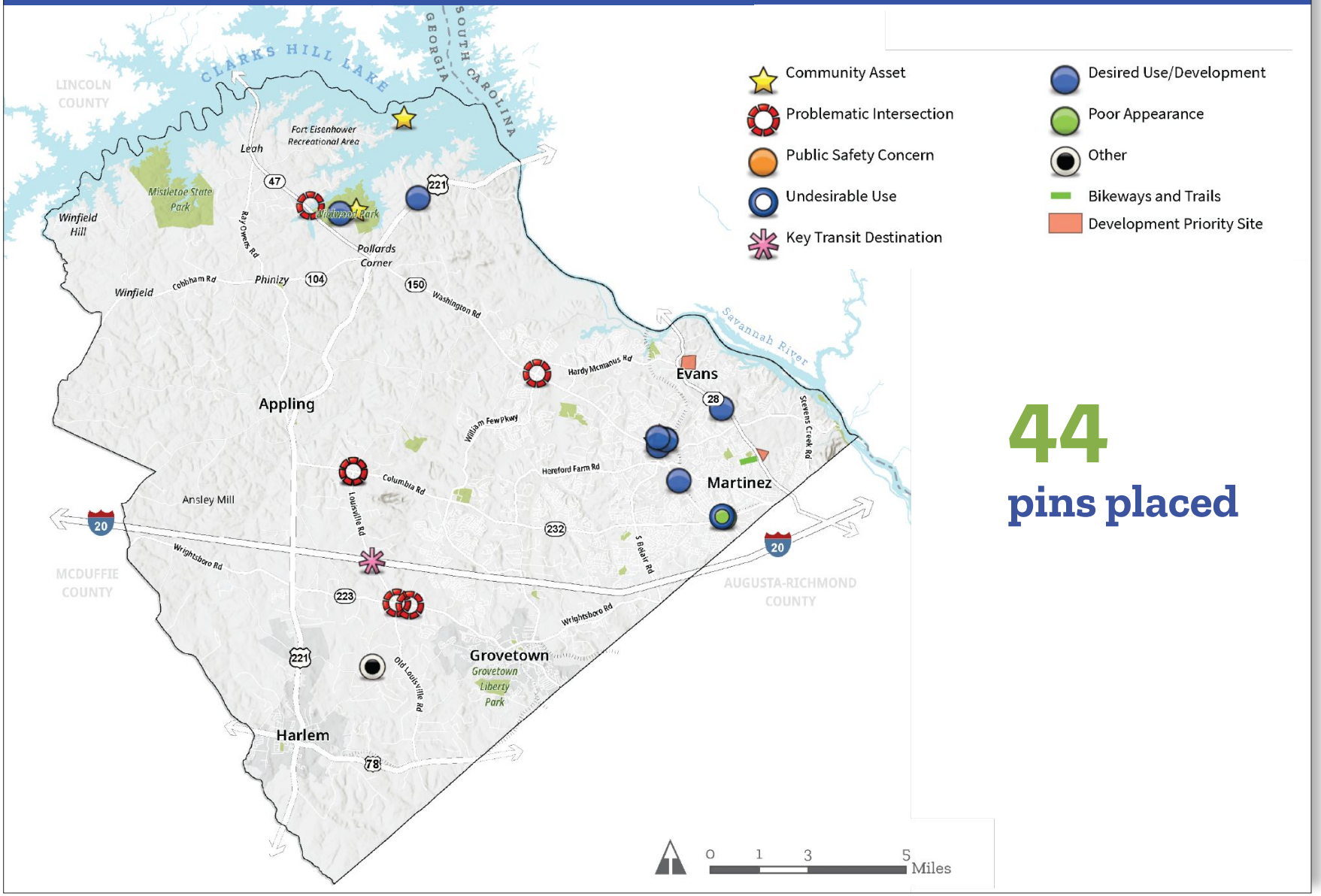
4
Contact Submission





MAP.SOCIAL

Engagement Waves #1-3



44

pins placed

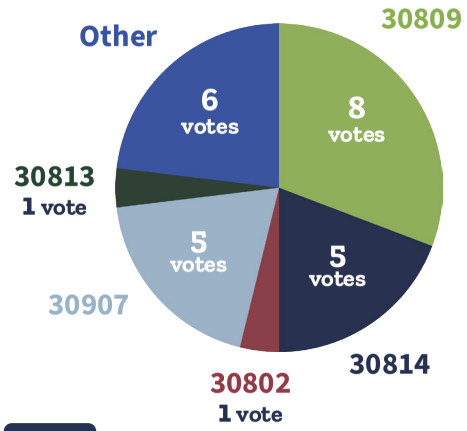
COUNTYWIDE POP-UPS

Engagement Waves #1-3

480+ Folks Reached

10 pop-up events

ZIP CODE



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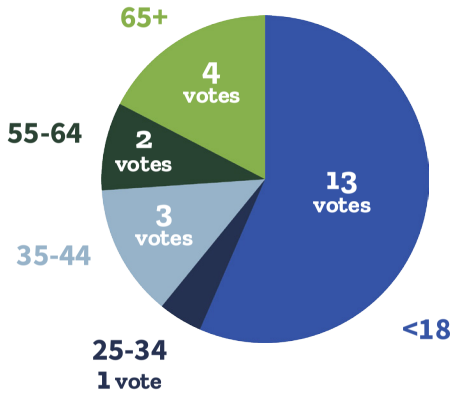




Mullins Colony





Chick-fil-A



Harlem Library





Sunrise Grill









Evans Towne Center Park (Playground, Graduation, Farmer's Market, Ice Skating)

**Not all participants voted in the jar activity at the nine pop-up events.*

COUNTYWIDE POP-UPS

Engagement Waves #1+2

24 Write-ins

What do we need to build upon? What are the strengths & assets of Columbia County?

- Lots of fun and diverse places/activities
- Rooted restaurant (for vegetarian food)
- Events
- Library
- Parks Police force
- Affordable housing
- It's big
- Beautiful parks, my grandchildren love going there
- Parks, family-friendly how walkable and accessible it is, no weaknesses
- Parks, nice people, trees, weather, schools
- Quiet, beautiful, convenient and people are nice and friendly
- Community stuff - lots of things for kids
- Park with free charging stations
- Park and pool
- Family events
- Park and school
- Park where my dad and I go to play catch
- Playground, outdoor space, kid-friendly stuff
- School (reading), my hoverboard
- Local business support, parks, and farmers market
- Playing at the park - this (Evans Towne Center Park) is my favorite park
- Going to Euchee Trail and parks with my family and dog
- Kids storytime at Harlem LIbrary
- Getting more involved with my community

COUNTYWIDE POP-UPS

Engagement Waves #1+2

28 Write-ins

Where do we need to improve? What aspects of Columbia County need work?

- Traffic (x3)
- Allow building/construction time
- Buildings and code don't line up - buildings stay vacant (Evans to Locks)
- No Section 8 off of Furys Ferry Road
- Conservative county
- We need to preserve our conservative county
- We need sign regulations (ordinance) - no tacky signs
- Prevent building rear at the front of the road
- Too many dollar stores
- Need more vegetarian restaurants
- Few to no recycling opportunities
- Need to be a premiere community
- Richmond County has a centralized trash service; we could use that out here; we want actual recycling that doesn't dump in the same truck with trash
- Roads have a lot of bumps, more pool time throughout the year and more pools overall; more running trails
- More sports for younger kids; what's available is usually for 7th grade and up; we mostly just have the YMCA for younger kids
- Traffic and streets - parks could be better too
- We need more swing sets

COUNTYWIDE POP-UPS

Engagement Waves #1+2

28 Write-ins

Where do we need to improve? What aspects of Columbia County need work?

- Need more swings and less traffic and cars; more support for the arts
- More restaurants and places to drink; I go to family-friendly breweries in Richmond County; it would be nice to have something around here
- My biggest ask is for a centralized place/platform for county communications; it would be good to know what's happening and local events in one place
- Need bigger and more slides
- Need more recreation and more sidewalks
- More swings at this (Evans Towne Center Park) park
- More stuff to do and places to play sports
- More roads, less traffic
- We need a more accessible event calendar for families; hard to know what's happening
- Need more swings, spinning set, food trucks

COUNTYWIDE POP-UPS

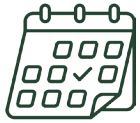
Engagement Waves #1+2

14 Write-ins



The best thing about Columbia County is...

- **The canal walk**
- **Lady A**



In 20 years, I hope Columbia County is...

- **Giving us more variety for things to do**
- **Better with traffic**



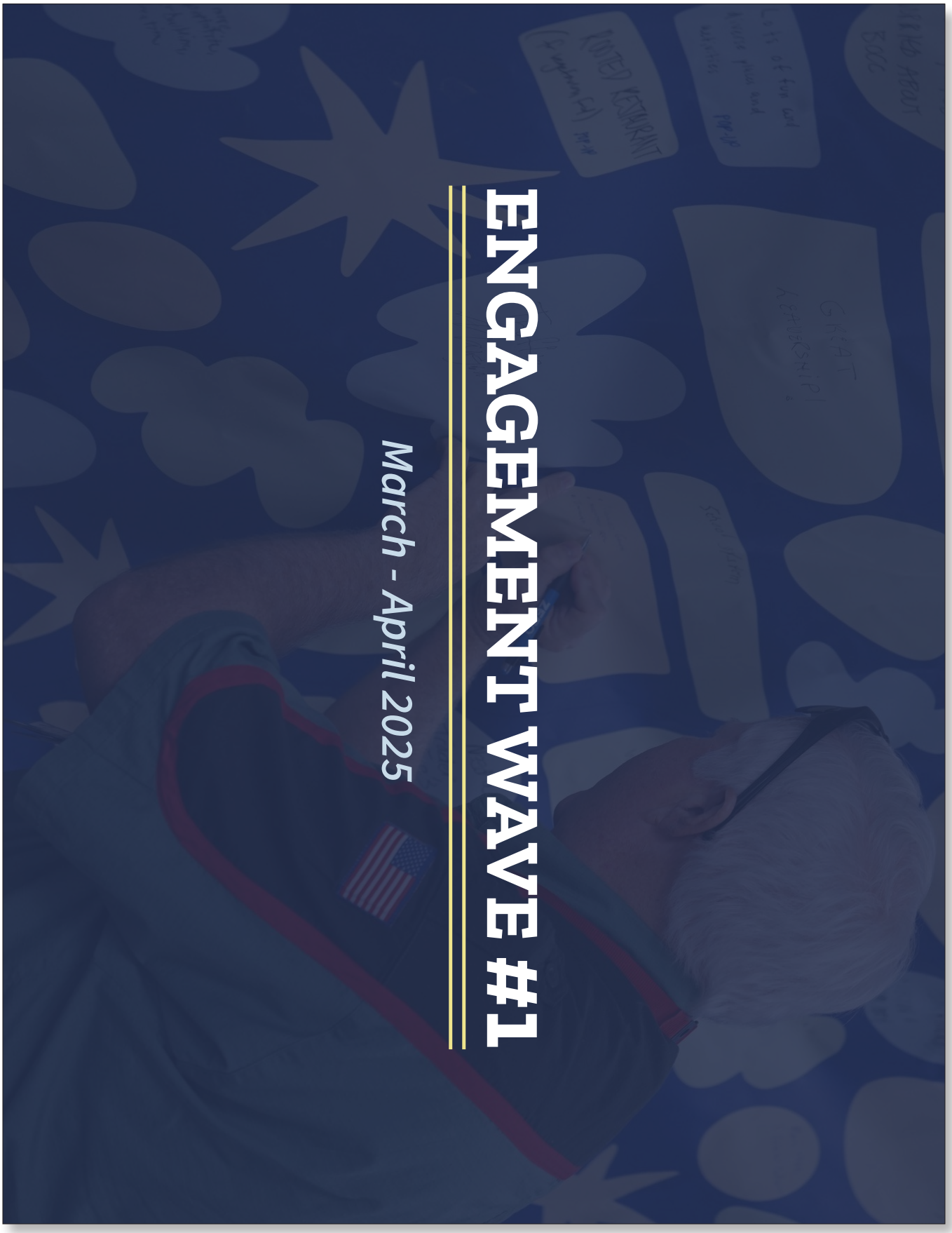
Columbia County would be better if...

- **Better dog parks**
- **Partnering with public health organizations that help those with addictions**
- **More green space, more walking paths and nature trails for pedestrians only.**
- **Less shopping centers being built (use current infrastructure first)**



A project or idea I wish the County would explore is...

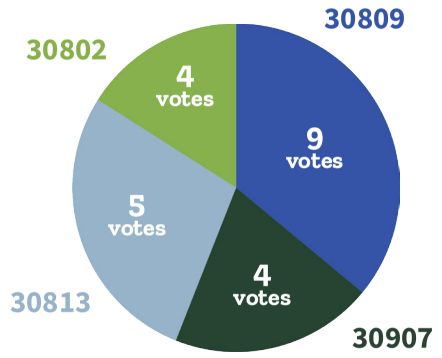
- **More stop lights**
- **More sidewalks**
  More parking decks for events
- **More hotels in Martinez and a big community park**
- **More parking spaces (residential & commercial)**
- **More fun events to go to!**


ENGAGEMENT WAVE #1
March - April 2025

KICK-OFF CELEBRATION

45+ Attendees

ZIP CODE



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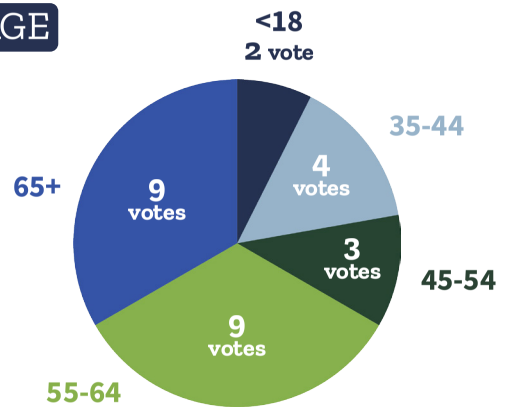






Columbia County Library



**Not all participants submitted a vote during the pop-up jar activity.*

KICK-OFF CELEBRATION

17 Write-ins

What do we need to build upon? What are the strengths & assets of Columbia County?

Neighborhood Living • **Vision 2035** • **Beautiful Parks** (x2) • **Safety**
The Lake • **School system** • **Library** (x2) • **Safe community** • **School system**
First Responders • **Great leadership** • **Managed Growth**
Traffic Management • **Maintained Quality of Life** • **Increase Infrastructure**

Where do we need to improve? What aspects of Columbia County need work?

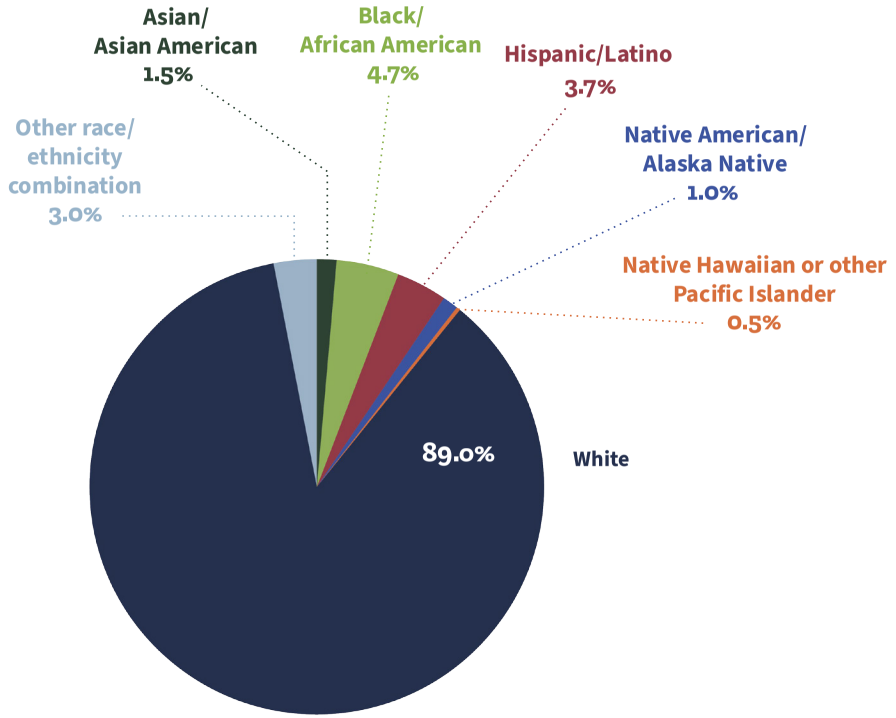
Affordable, Senior Centers w/ Transportation (x5) • **BOCC**
Redistribution of Traffic (x2) • **No Community Pool** • **Airline Transport**
Affordable Senior Housing • **Student/Youth Engagement** •
Lack of Recycling Options • **Roadway Infrastructure**
More Housing Options (Attached/Single-Family/Quads) (x3) • **Trader Joe's** (x2)
More Vegetarian Restaurants • **Do Not Rezone RA** (x3)

COMMUNITY SURVEY #1 | DEMOGRAPHICS*

539 Participants

*Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis.

RACE/ETHNICITY *



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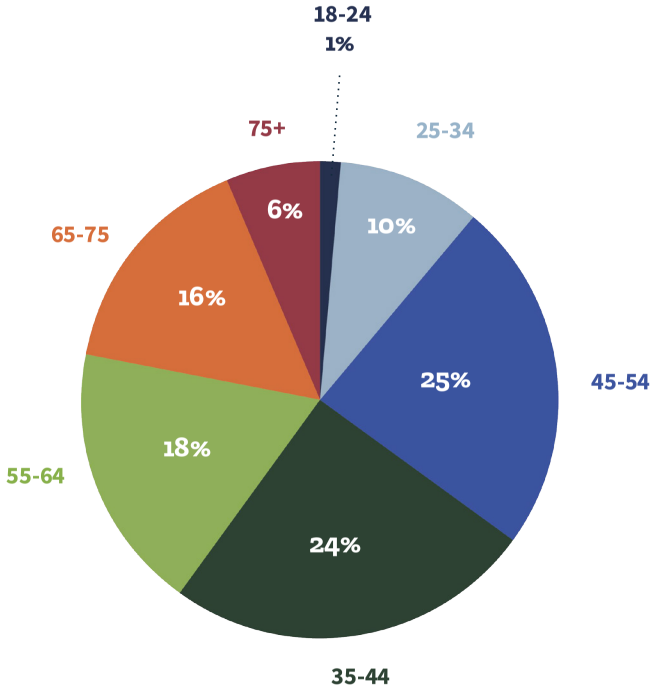


* Results exceed 100% because respondents could select more than one answer.

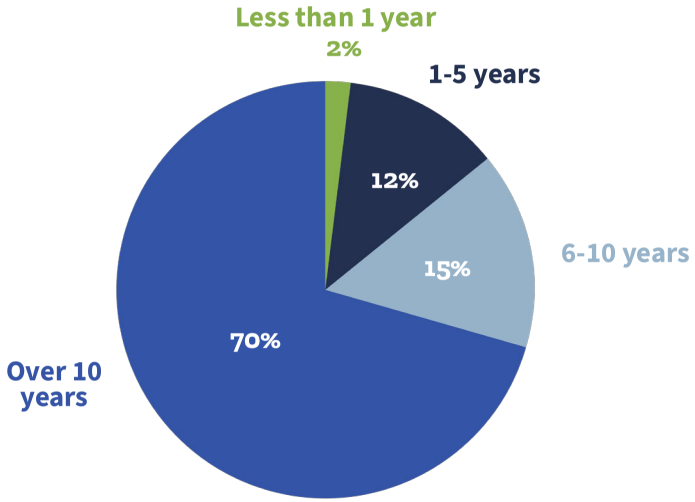
COMMUNITY SURVEY #1 | DEMOGRAPHICS*

539 Participants

**Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis.*

RESIDENCY

If you are a resident, how long have you lived in Columbia County?



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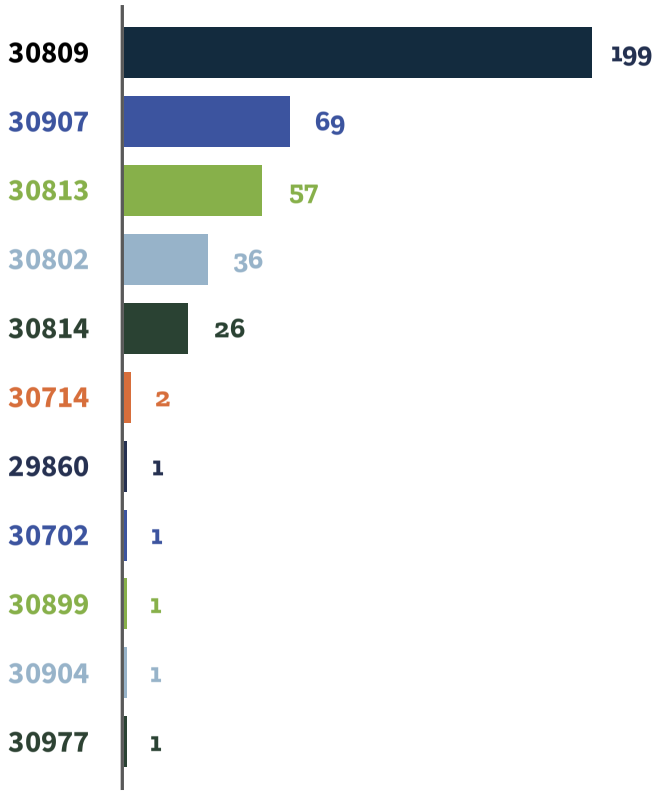
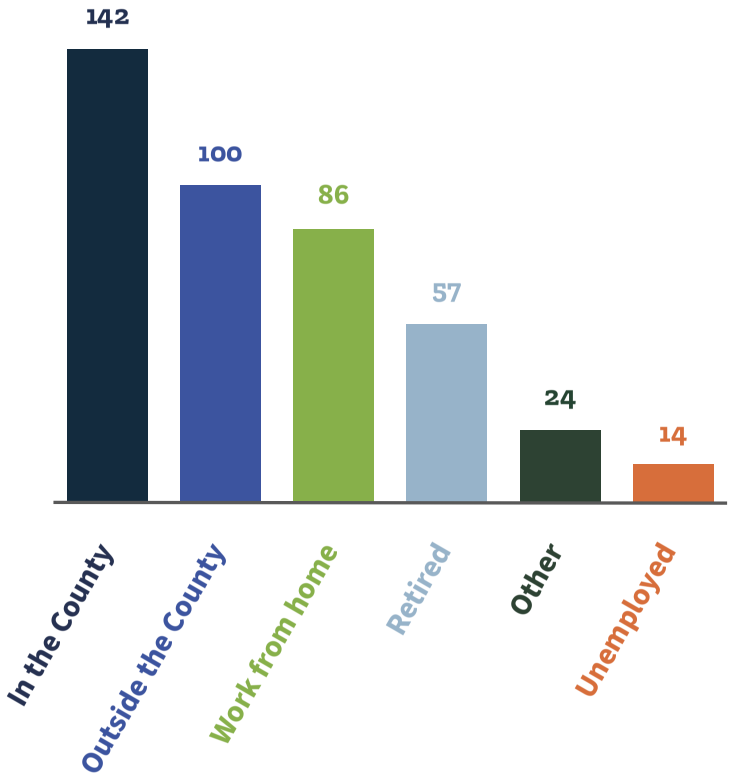


COMMUNITY SURVEY #1 | DEMOGRAPHICS*

539 Participants

**Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis.*

WORKPLACE



80

respondents identified as a member of the local business community

"Reduce permit time and cost to do business."

"If support is available or becomes available, make sure to communicate it."

"Attract and support better quality businesses."

HOUSING + RESIDENTIAL

Survey #1

What are the top ranked strengths & weaknesses?

- #1 **Quality of housing** [53%]
- #2 **Housing that appeals to new families** [52%]
- #3 **Character of residential neighborhoods** [51%]

- #1 **Housing options for seniors** [43%]
- #2 **Availability of affordable housing** [41%]
- #3 **The value and cost of homes** [37%]

What is the overall quality of housing stock (appearance, cost, property maintenance) in Columbia County?

2.8 Stars

weighted average



COMMERCIAL + INDUSTRIAL

Survey #1

What are the top ranked strengths & weaknesses?

#1 **Access to everyday goods and services** [67%]

#2 **Mix and availability of shopping options** [46%]

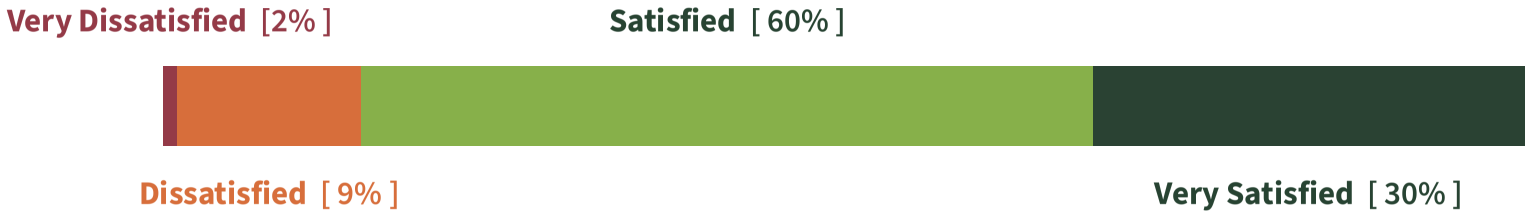
#3 **Employment and job opportunities** [38%]

#1 **Mix and availability of shopping options** [26%]

#2 **Opportunities for new commercial development** [21%]

#3 **Employment and job opportunities** [18%]

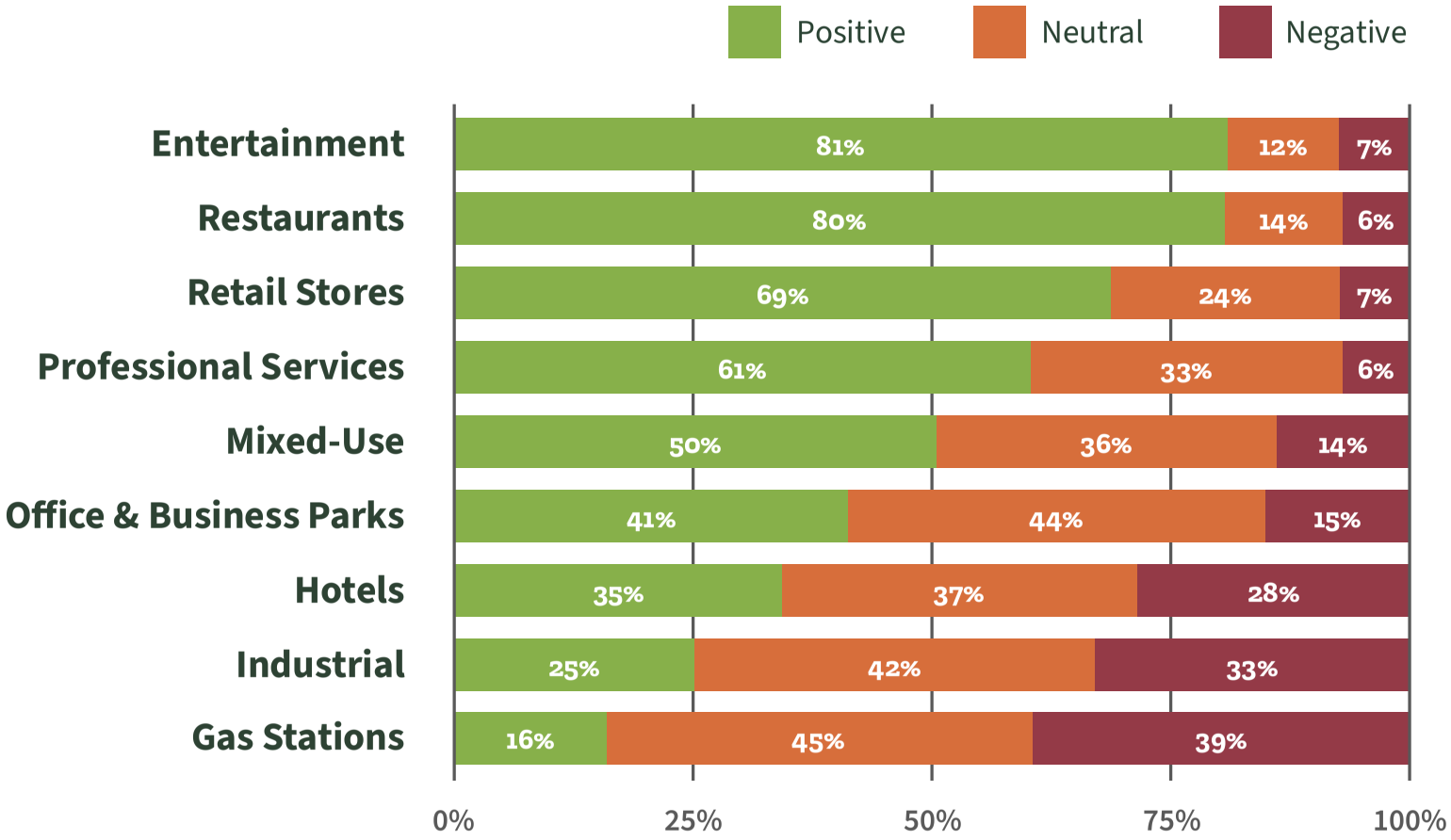
Are you satisfied with the overall quality of life in the county?



COMMERCIAL + INDUSTRIAL

Survey #1

What kind of impact would each of the following types of development have on the community?



COMMUNITY FACILITIES + SERVICES

Survey #1

What are the top ranked strengths & weaknesses?

#1 **Fire protection and emergency response** [83%]

#2 **Police protection and public safety** [81%]

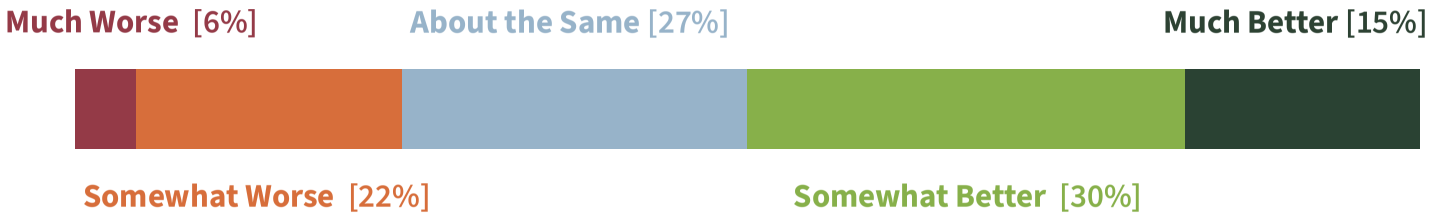
#3 **Schools (Kindergarten through 8th Grade)** [68%]

#1 **Higher Education** [36%]

#2 **Water quality** [26%]

#3 **Services for youth** [25%]

How does the quality of life in Columbia County today compare to ten years ago, or since you moved to the community if it has been less than ten years?



TRANSPORTATION

Survey #1

What are the top ranked strengths & weaknesses?

#1 Access to Interstates and highways [61%]

#2 Condition of roadways [38%]

#3 Character of major roadways and corridors [35%]

#1 Traffic flow and congestion [66%]

#2 Transit options and access [62%]

#3 Effectiveness of major roadways to handle traffic [62%]

65% P

of respondents said parking was adequate in Columbia County

"Transportation is a problem that needs to be addressed."

"I would like to see more sidewalks or walking trails."

"There are neighborhoods right next to schools, within walking distance, without sidewalks."

PARKS + RECREATION

Survey #1

What are the top ranked strengths & weaknesses?

#1 Community parks [72%]

#2 Accessibility of parks and recreation [71%]

#3 Sports fields and courts [57%]

#1 Urban tree canopy [34%]

#2 Neighborhood parks [25%]

#3 Open space and natural areas [24%]

"Beautiful parks, well kept and maintained. Our greenways are amazing! Columbia County offers entertainment for the entire family, it feels like family and it feels like a pop of city at the same time!"

"I would love to see some shade (canopies or playground shades) at the parks for the kids."

"I'm amazed by the amount of parks and bike trails—keep adding more trail possibilities."

CHARACTER + PERCEPTION

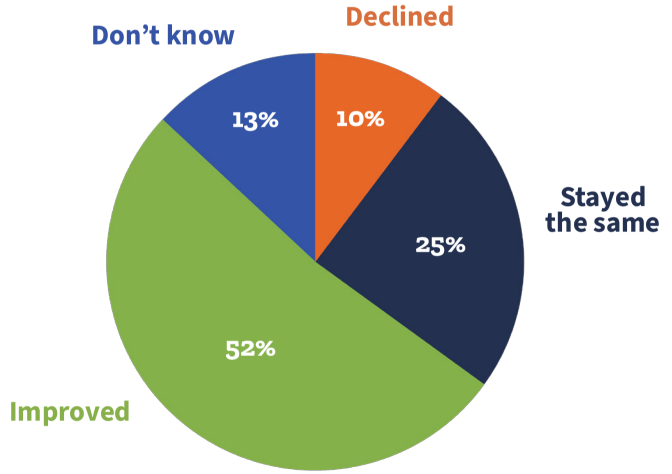
Survey #1

What are the top ranked strengths & weaknesses?

- #1 **Maintenance of public areas and properties** [63%]
- #2 **Landscaping of public areas and properties** [62%]
- #3 **Community appearance** [60%]

- #1 **Public art** [39%]
- #2 **The character of entry points into the community** [32%]
- #3 **Historic preservation and assets** [28%]

How would you describe the business community in Columbia County today compared to ten years ago?



CHARACTER + PERCEPTION

Survey #1

What are Columbia County's hidden gems?
What makes the county special and unique?

"Evans Towne Center Park. Beautiful and clean public spaces."

"Savannah Rapids, Heggie's Rock is a hidden gem that is just now being made public."

"Good schools."

"Beautiful parks, well kept and maintained. Our greenways are amazing!"

"Reed Creek Nature Park, Euchee Creek Greenway, Evans Library."

"The people that live here."

"The trails are great. The Performing Arts Center is the not-so-hidden gem in my opinion, as well as our libraries."

KEY TAKEAWAYS | ENGAGEMENT WAVE #1

Infrastructure + Transportation



Investing in Aging Infrastructure

- Residents are calling for investment in aging infrastructure, including road repairs, drainage improvements, and utility upgrades in the county's older neighborhoods.



Traffic is a Major Problem

- Slowdowns, poorly timed traffic lights, and roads that haven't kept up with new developments were mentioned repeatedly.



More Ways to Get Around

- There is strong interest in expanding transit options and increasing opportunities for active mobility—such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and safe pedestrian crossings—particularly in areas where walkability is currently limited.



Smarter Road Planning

- Residents want road improvements to be more strategic, better coordinated with growth, and reflective of long-term development patterns.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | ENGAGEMENT WAVE #1

Growth, Development, + Land Use

Growth Supporting Quality of Life

- There's a strong feeling that growth is happening too fast and without enough planning. People want thoughtful development that focuses on quality over quantity and has a better mix of uses.

Housing That Works for Everyone

- There is concern about too much luxury development and too many fast-built apartments. Residents want more affordable housing options, especially for seniors and working families.

Keep Green Space and Community Feel

- Residents love Columbia County's beauty and want to keep it that way. Many said they're worried about losing trees, natural areas, and the character that makes their neighborhoods feel like home.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | ENGAGEMENT WAVE #1

Community Amenities + Quality of Life



Better Parks and Recreation Options

- Parks are a big community asset, and people want more shaded areas, indoor recreation, and places that work for families, kids, and seniors alike.



Need for a True Downtown

- People want a walkable area with local restaurants, small businesses, and public spaces—something that feels like the heart of the community.



Youth and Senior Services

- There is a desire for more youth programs, teen-friendly spaces, and dedicated facilities for older adults and residents with disabilities.



Cultural and Social Life

- Residents want more cultural events, libraries, arts programming, and fun, family-friendly things to do that create a sense of place and belonging.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | ENGAGEMENT WAVE #1

Government, Communication, + Services

Keep the Public Informed

- Some people didn't know about public meetings or how to get involved. There's a clear need for better communication, more regular updates, and easier ways to share feedback.

More Services in More Places

- Residents expressed a strong desire for more equitable access to government and public services, particularly in rural and outlying areas of the county.

Navigating Tax Concerns

- Some residents, particularly seniors, have expressed concerns about taxes. They feel that despite contributing more, they aren't always noticing improvements in roads, parks, and other public services.


ENGAGEMENT WAVE #2
May - August 2025

VISIONING WORKSHOPS

20+ Attendees

Columbia County
Exhibition Center





What does Columbia County look like?
Share your bold vision for our community's future.

- **Smart, sustainable development should be embraced.**
- **Protect open, green, and natural areas.**
- **Work with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) to make a small recreation area.**
- **Wildwood – kayak launch, kids' area, campsites, cabins, small stores.**
- **Maintaining natural rural areas (build what fits within County).**
- **Protect areas in the north; develop more high density in the southern portion of the County.**
- **More neighborhood-friendly developments with bike paths.**
- **More traffic engineering needs to be considered and in place before expansions are approved.**

VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

- **Housing Variety**
  Residents requested diverse housing options from high-density development near Fort Eisenhower to large rural lots (2.5+ acres) in northern areas near state parks.

- **Senior Housing**
  Strong demand for senior-friendly housing like townhomes and assisted living near medical facilities.

- **Sustainable Growth**
  Emphasis on smart development that preserves rural character and prevents infrastructure strain, with concerns about over development around Baker Place and Columbia Roads.

VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Commercial Areas

- **Retail Preferences**
  Residents want shopping options along I-20 at Highway 221, small businesses near Pollard's Corner, and commercial expansion along Lewiston Road to balance development.

- **Mixed-Use Development**
  Support for mixed-use developments at I-20 and Highway 221, plus river-based commercial activities like kayak rentals and campgrounds.

- **Traffic Balance**
  Concerns about overcrowding near I-20 and Chamblin Road, with suggestions to distribute commercial development more evenly across the county.

VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Transportation + Mobility

- **Traffic Concerns**
  Major congestion issues on Baker Place Road, Chamblin Road, Lewiston Road, and William Few Parkway, with requests for additional I-20 ramps and better traffic planning before new development.

- **Pedestrian Safety**
  Strong demand for sidewalk improvements, especially near schools, including new sidewalks at Evans High School and an overpass at Grovetown High School.

- **Bike Infrastructure**
  Residents want bike lanes and paths, particularly on William Few Parkway between Columbia Road and Furys Ferry Road.

VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Community Facilities + Infrastructure

- **Community Centers**
  Need for additional facilities for voting, public gathering, and recreation, including a multi-zoned community center near Kelarie housing development and community gardens with education programs.

- **Schools + Emergency Services**
  Requests for a new school between Phinizy and Pollards Corner, plus additional fire and EMS stations to serve growing areas and senior facilities.

- **Infrastructure**
  Need to extend services along Wrightsboro Road and Savannah River areas, address recycling facility capacity issues, and improve trail connectivity between neighborhoods.

VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Natural Resources + Environment

- **Environmental Protection**
  Strong support for preserving wetlands, creeks, and natural springs, with emphasis on maintaining green buffers around developments like White Oak Business Park.

- **Parks + Connectivity**
  Desire for new parks in northern areas and along Louisville Road, plus better trail connections between neighborhoods and existing parks like Patriots Park.

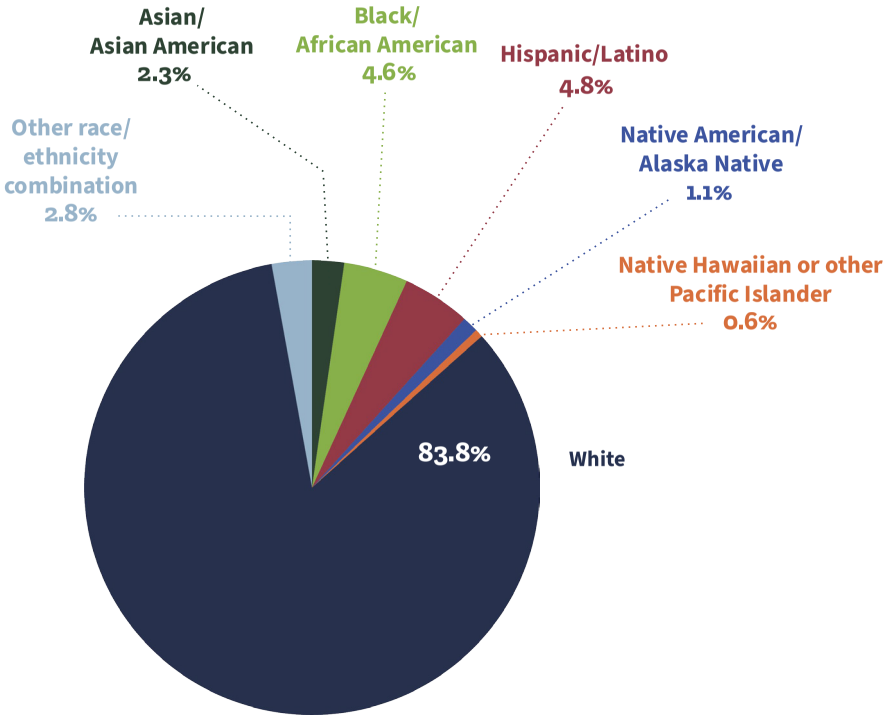
- **Savannah River Development**
  Residents want additional recreational opportunities along the river, including county-owned parks, kayak rentals, pavilions, and fishing areas, particularly between Furys Ferry Road and Clarks Hill Road.

COMMUNITY SURVEY #2 | DEMOGRAPHICS*

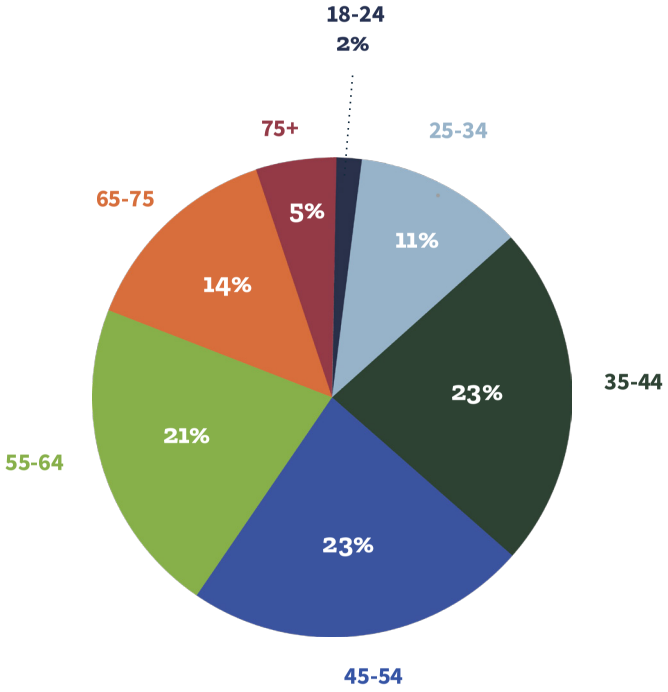
365 Participants

**Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis.*

RACE/ETHNICITY *



AGE



** Results exceed 100% because respondents could select more than one answer.*

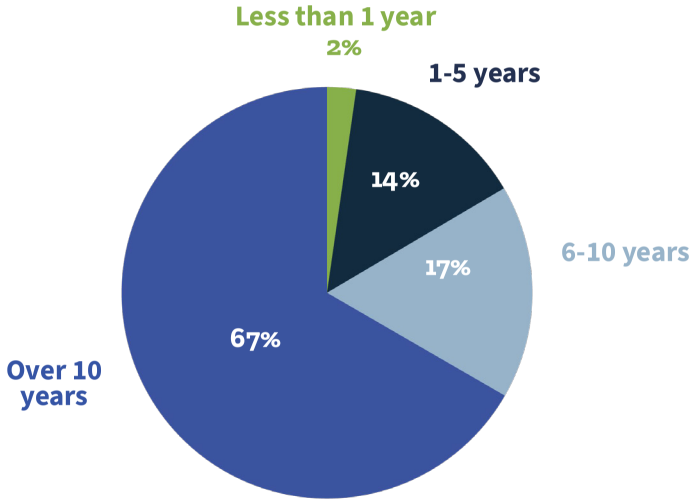
COMMUNITY SURVEY #2 | DEMOGRAPHICS*

365 Participants

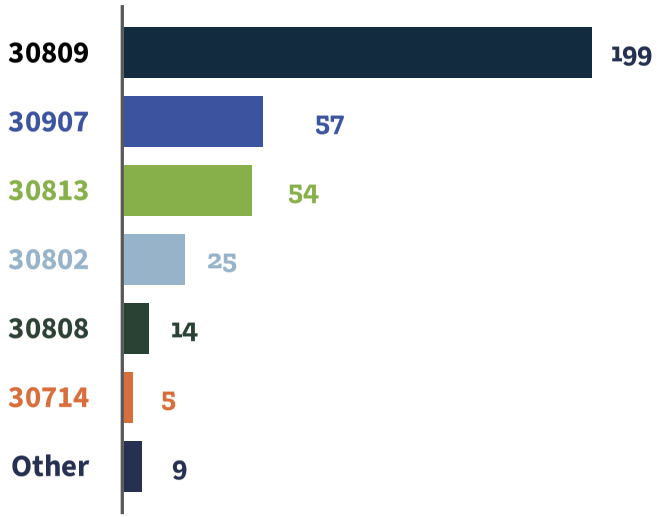
**Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis.*

RESIDENCY

If you are a resident, how long have you lived in Columbia County?



ZIP CODES *



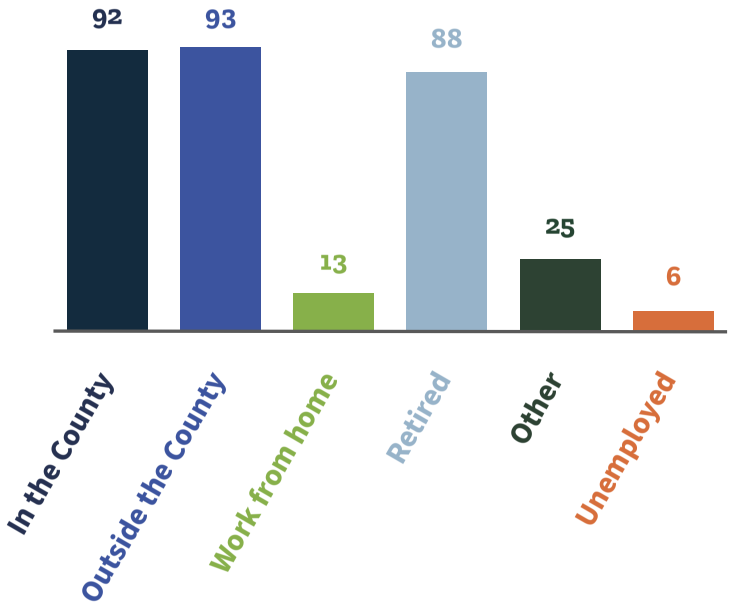
** "Other" zip codes have only one instance each.*

COMMUNITY SURVEY #2 | DEMOGRAPHICS*

365 Participants

**Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis.*

WORKPLACE



Other, please describe:

- **Military/Government**
  Fort Eisenhower employees, retired Air Force, VA students
- **Self-Employed/Business**
  Multiple self-employed individuals, sales professionals, licensed realtor, timber farming
- **Civic Engagement**
  Planning commission member, volunteer citizen advisory panel, juvenile court volunteer
- **Caregivers/Family-Focused**
  Stay-at-home parents, homeschool parent, homemakers
- **Healthcare/Education**
  Registered nurse, former teacher, school system employee
- **Students**
  Current students at various levels
- **Multi-County Workers**
  Employees who work both in and outside Columbia County
- **Retired/Disabled**
  Retired individuals and those no longer able to work due to disability

VISION FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY

Survey #2

In 3-5 words, how would you describe Columbia County NOW?

Growing (59) • **Family** (39) • **Safe** (31) • **Great** (30) • **Place** (25)
Crowded (24) • **Community** (24) • **Friendly** (24) • **Traffic** (24) • **Live** (19)
Nice (18) • **Good** (16) • **Congested** (16) • **Potential** (13) • **Clean** (13)

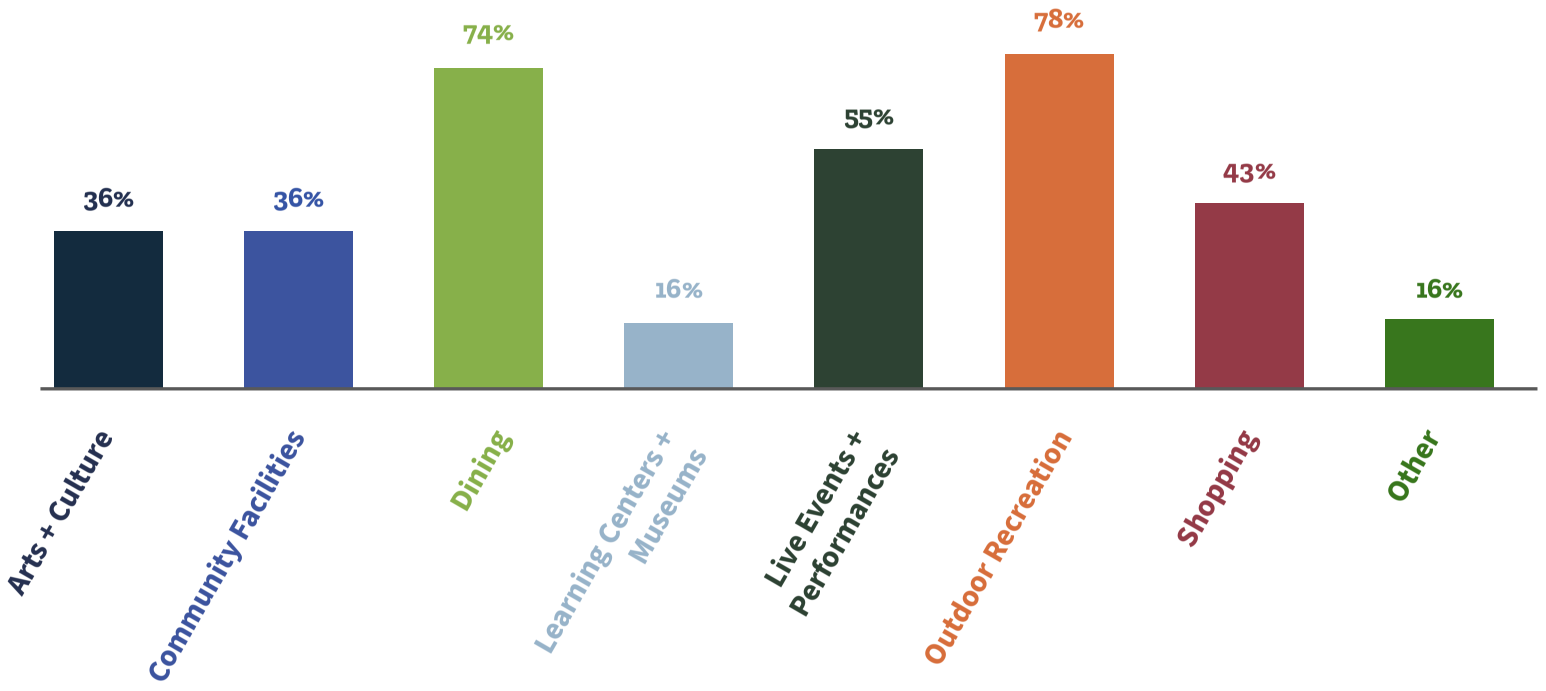
In 3-5 words, how would you want to describe Columbia County IN THE FUTURE?

Community (31) • **Friendly** (3) • **Family** (28) • **Safe** (27) • **Growth** (26)
Place (25) • **Live** (18) • **Less Traffic** (18) • **Fun** (17) • **Green** (16)
Bike (16) • **Outdoor** (15) • **Better** (14) • **Great** (14) • **Inclusive** (12)

VISION FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY

Survey #2

What do you do for fun in Columbia County?



Other: Upscale dining and shopping; better indoor recreation facilities; enhanced cultural events

VISION FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY

Survey #2

What would make spending time in Columbia County more enjoyable?

#1 **Nature and Outdoor Recreation:** Respondents most frequently called for more bike lanes, parks, green spaces, and outdoor connectivity for walking, hiking, and cycling throughout the county.

#2 **Dining and Entertainment Options:** There was strong interest in more locally owned restaurants (instead of chains), breweries, entertainment venues, and cultural events for all ages.

#3 **Traffic and Transportation Issues:** Many respondents expressed concerns about congestion and desired improvements in traffic flow, road infrastructure, and facilities for walking and biking.

#4 **Water Recreation:** Public pools, waterparks, aquatic centers, and splash pads were frequently requested as ways to offer relief during heatwaves and expand recreational opportunities for families.

#5 **Shopping and Local Business Development:** Respondents desired more local businesses, diverse shopping options, and walkable shopping areas.

VISION FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY

Survey #2

Do you think Columbia County is a welcoming community?



If you voted 'No', please expand on your thinking:

Discrimination and Lack of Inclusivity
Concerns about discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, minorities, and people of different faiths or backgrounds

Political and Cultural Divisions
Reports of strong political polarization affecting local libraries, schools, and County government

Community Connection & Social Issues
Limited genuine community connections, suspicion of newer residents, and "us vs. them" mentality

VISION FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY

Survey #2

What do you want to see done to preserve Columbia County's natural features and open spaces?

#1 **Preserve Trees & Green Space:** There was a significant demand for protecting existing natural areas, keeping trees during development, and maintaining green spaces against overdevelopment pressures.

#2 **Create More Parks & Trails:** Respondents called for additional walking trails, hiking paths, bike trails, nature areas, and connected greenway systems to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.

#3 **Change the Pace of Development:** With requests for development moratoriums and stricter growth controls to preserve community character, there was interest in halting or slow new construction.

#4 **Limit Chain Store/Strip Mall Development:** Most respondents expressed frustration with with repetitive chain stores, strip malls, and generic commercial development that lacks character and clutters the landscape.

#5 **Improve Existing Spaces:** While new community facilities were welcomed, many respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining, repairing, and making better use of existing parks, trails, and facilities.

VISION FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY

Survey #2

What transportation and infrastructure improvements do you want in Columbia County?

#1 **Reduce Traffic Congestion:** This was the top concern, particularly on roads such as Washington Road, Columbia Road, and William Few Parkway. There was strong support for road widening and improved traffic flow management.

#2 **Build Bike Lanes & Pedestrian Infrastructure:** There was a strong demand for sidewalks, bike lanes, and walkable infrastructure to create safer alternatives to driving and connect neighborhoods to destinations.

#3 **Establish Public Transportation:** Feedback underscored a desire for bus systems, trolleys, and public transit options, especially for seniors and to reduce car dependency in the growing community.

#4 **Improve Road Infrastructure & Maintenance:** Many respondents advocated for fixing potholes, repaving roads, completing construction projects timely, and maintaining existing infrastructure quality.

#5 **Plan Development & Manage Growth:** Respondents voiced frustration that infrastructure lags behind new development and urged better planning to address transportation needs upfront.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | ENGAGEMENT WAVE #2

Infrastructure + Transportation



Traffic Congestion Challenges

- There were major concerns about traffic on major roads (Washington Road, Columbia Road, and William Few Pkwy). Road infrastructure has lagged behind development and growth, creating daily frustration for residents and visitors.



Need for Alternative Transportation

- Community members called for comprehensive sidewalk connections, protected bike lanes where appropriate, and active mobility options to support walkable neighborhoods and reduce reliance on cars.

Countywide Character + Identity



Preserving What Makes Us Special

- Residents appreciate the county's growth while emphasizing the importance of preserving its distinctive character and avoiding generic development.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | ENGAGEMENT WAVE #2

Community Amenities + Quality of Life



Outdoor Recreation Priority

- Community members expressed a strong desire for expanded trail systems, connected greenways, additional parks, and water recreation facilities.



Staying and Supporting Local

- Many residents expressed a desire to enjoy more amenities locally, with several noting they would prefer to 'spend their dollars in their own county' rather than traveling to neighboring areas for shopping, dining, and entertainment options.

Government, Communication, + Services



Strengthening Voices

- Some survey respondents noted concerns about feeling excluded from local decision-making processes and experiencing a lack of welcome in community discussions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS | ENGAGEMENT WAVE #2

Growth, Development, + Land Use



Growth Outpacing Planning

- Community members felt that the county is "overcrowded" and "growing too fast" with new subdivisions and commercial development approved without adequate consideration for traffic impacts, school capacity, or infrastructure requirements.



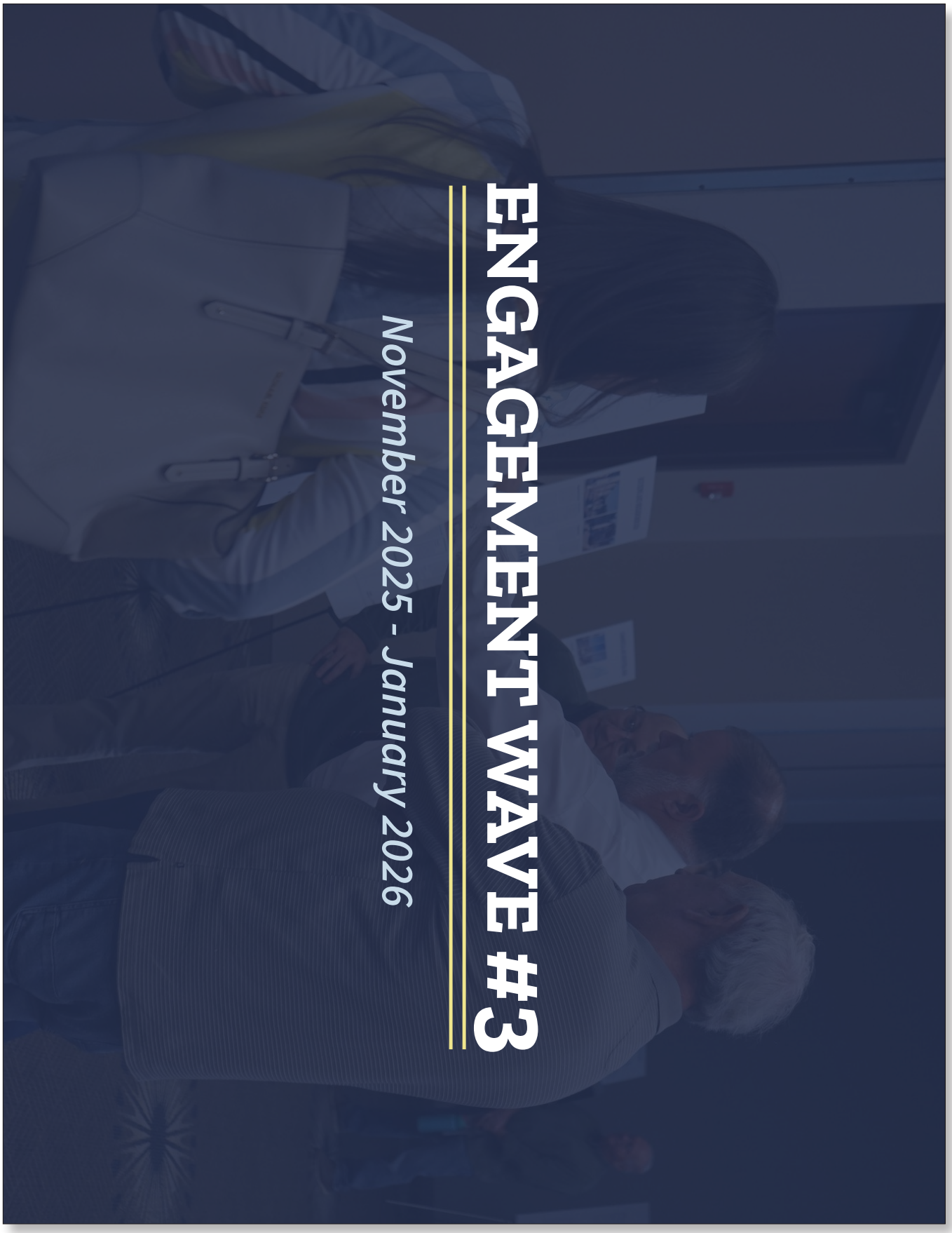
Preserve Natural Character

- There were widespread calls to halt excessive clear-cutting, protect existing trees and green spaces, and prevent an excess of generic strip malls and chain stores that could negatively affect the county's rural charm and natural beauty.



Local Business and Entertainment Gap

- Many shared frustration with chain-dominated dining and shopping landscape. There was a desire for breweries, locally-owned restaurants, unique retail, cultural venues, and entertainment options that foster community and encourage gathering.


ENGAGEMENT WAVE #3
November 2025 - January 2026

ENGAGEMENT WAVE #3

During the third engagement wave for the **Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan**, the project team shared a draft of the plan and invited the community to weigh in.

Comments were received through:

- Public Comment Period of the Draft Plan (November 2025 - January 2026)
- Public Open House (November 20, 2025)
- Columbia County Planning Commission Meeting (January 29, 2026)

Columbia County Exhibition Center





PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT PLAN

21 Submitted Comments

TOP THEMES

#1 **Data Center Input:** The most frequently mentioned feedback involved proposed data centers in the Appling-Harlem area. Community members expressed worries about health impacts, noise pollution, water depletion, and industrial development in rural areas.

#2 **Priorities of Elected Officials:** Some participants expressed a desire for increased engagement with County commissioners and more opportunities to provide input on development decisions. Several wanted greater visibility into how community feedback influences County priorities.

#3 **Desire to Preserve Rural Character:** A few community members emphasized that they chose to live in areas like Appling, Harlem, and Greenpoint specifically for peace, quiet, and rural lifestyle. They did not want these places becoming extensions of areas like Evans or Grovetown.

#4 **Questions about Planning Process:** Some participants asked about the relationship between "Vision 2035" and the new comprehensive plan, and expressed interest in understanding more about the planning process.

Appendix B:
Existing Conditions

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HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

CHICAGO
188 W Randolph St Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60601
312-372-1008

LOS ANGELES
360 E 2nd St Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213-259-1008

HELENA
317 Cruse Ave Suite 202
Helena, MT 59601
406-944-1008

SEATTLE
999 3rd Ave Suite 700
Seattle, WA 98104
206-828-1008

MILWAUKEE
313 North Plankinton Ave Suite 207
Milwaukee, WI 53203
414-392-1008

hlplanning.com

MEMORANDUM

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

To: Columbia County
Scott Sterling, AICP, Division Director - Planning Services Division

From: Houseal Lavigne Associates
Josh Koonce, AICP, Practice Lead
Kari Papelbon, AICP, CFM, Senior Planner

Date: May 20, 2025

Re: Existing Conditions Memorandum
Foundations for the Future: Columbia County, GA Comprehensive Plan

This Existing Conditions Memorandum presents existing conditions and discusses their influence on the comprehensive planning process. The memorandum is a preliminary step in the planning process and does not contain plan recommendations. Existing conditions, issues, and opportunities identified in the memorandum will guide the *Foundations for the Future: Columbia County, GA Comprehensive Plan*.

Purpose of the Existing Conditions Memorandum

The memorandum is not the plan. The Existing Conditions Memorandum answers the question "Where is Columbia County today?" It is a summary of relevant data points, an interim deliverable rather than an adopted document. The memorandum is directed toward County staff and the Steering Committee but should also be made available to elected and appointed officials, residents, and stakeholders in the County. It is the result of research and analysis, field reconnaissance, and a review of data provided by the County and its partners or obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources. This memorandum includes:

- A **demographic snapshot**, providing a picture of influencing factors, trends, and potentials that will inform the plan.
- An examination of Columbia County's **recent plans, studies, and reports** acknowledging that these contain relevant recommendations and policies that may be carried forward.
- An overview of **current zoning and existing land uses** in the County today.
- An overview of the **transportation network and mobility** options in the County.
- An overview of **community facilities and infrastructure** in the County, from government buildings to education and utility services to parks and open spaces.
- An appendix that compiles summaries of the community **outreach and engagement** completed to date.

As an overview, the Existing Conditions Memorandum focuses on relevant information that will make the *Foundations for the Future: Columbia County Comprehensive Plan* accurate and relevant. The baseline of existing conditions will be built upon and addressed in the plan, informing goals, key policies, and land use recommendations in upcoming stages of the planning process. Each section of the memorandum concludes with key takeaways, which will serve as a basis for developing plan recommendations and ensuring a clear link between existing conditions and future strategies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1 - Introduction **1**

Planning Process 1
Planning Area and Regional Setting 2

Section 2 - Outreach Summary **4**

Phase 1 Community Engagement Overview 4
Engagement Key Takeaways 5

Section 3 - Past Plans, Studies, and Reports **6**

Columbia County Greenspace Master Plan (2000) 6
Harnessing Opportunities for Talent: An Economic Development Strategy for Columbia County, GA (2016) 6
ARTS 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (2020) 7
Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021-2026) 7
Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan (2021) 8
Columbia County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2023) 8

Section 4 - Demographic Profile **9**

Population 9
Veteran Population 11
Race and Ethnicity 12
Housing 13
Income 17
Educational Attainment 19
Labor Force and Employment 20

Section 5 - Existing Land Use and Development **22**

Existing Land Use 22
Zoning Districts 25
Overlay Districts 28
Historic Preservation Commission 31
Historic Districts and Sites 32
Land Use and Development Key Takeaways 33

Section 6 - Transportation **34**

Roadway Network 34
Rail 43
Public Transportation 43
Pedestrian and Bicycle Network 45
Travel Patterns and Behavior 47
Transportation Key Takeaways 48

Section 7 - Community Facilities and Infrastructure **49**

County Governance 49
Emergency Services 49
Education 51
Libraries 52
Infrastructure 54
Parks and Open Space 58
Trails 62
Notable Trails and Activities 62
Community Facilities and Infrastructure Key Takeaways 63
Parks and Recreation Spaces Key Takeaways 63

Section 8 - Natural Environment **65**

Water Features 65
Riparian Areas 66
Existing Flood Hazard Areas 66
Wetlands 66
Farmland 68
Wooded Areas 68
Valuable Habitat 68
Natural Environment Key Takeaways 70

Section 9 - Outreach Appendix **71**

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Planning Process

The project will be complete within an approximately 14-month timeline and will consist of County staff, the County Planning Commission, County Board of Commissioners and other stakeholder workshops; interviews; public meetings; and data collection.

Kick-off and Existing Conditions

To "kick-off" the planning process on the right foot, meetings were conducted with County staff, the County Planning Commission, and County Board of Commissioners, on March 18 and 19, before undertaking other community outreach activities. This step included an assessment of existing conditions and the preparation of this document, the Existing Conditions Memorandum.

Community Engagement

Community engagement began with the launch of the project website in February 2025. This was accompanied by several online engagement methods, including the first of two online community questionnaires. At the same time, the project team launched map.social, an interactive platform that allows residents to identify opportunities and improvements in the community based on specific locations. The initial phase of engagement also included a Kick-off Celebration held on March 18. Additionally, key stakeholder interviews, focus groups, DIY kits, and pop-up events were conducted as part of the initial data-gathering and engagement efforts. Community engagement is ongoing and residents and stakeholders will have several opportunities to provide input throughout the planning process.

Plan Visioning and Key Recommendations

This purpose of this step will be to establish a clear "vision" for the future of Columbia County, providing focus and direction for the subsequent planning activities and serving as the foundation for the consensus-building process. Building on the previous steps in the planning process, the Vision, Goals, and Key Recommendations Memorandum will be developed.

Draft Comprehensive Plan Elements

Based on feedback received in the previous tasks, preliminary County-wide policies and recommendations for core elements of the Comprehensive Plan will be prepared for review and consideration. The Comprehensive Plan elements prepared in this step will reflect the Vision, Goals, and the Key Recommendations Memo developed in the previous step of the planning process.

Draft and Final Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan will be the foundation for land use decision-making as well as serve as a working document. It will set the vision and establish priorities for County development and infrastructure, identify long-term strategies for implementation, and provide practical guidance for everyday use. Based on the previous steps in the planning process, the draft and final versions of the Comprehensive Plan document will be prepared for review, consideration, and adoption.

Planning Area and Regional Setting

Columbia County, located along the Savannah River in the eastern part of Georgia, is the fastest-growing county in the Augusta-Richmond Metropolitan Statistical Area. The County's landscape features rolling hills, forests, and waterways, including the expansive Clarks Hill Lake, which provides a wealth of recreational opportunities and scenic beauty. Columbia County encompasses both incorporated cities like Harlem and Grovetown, as well as numerous unincorporated communities, each contributing to the County's diverse mix of developed areas, including suburban neighborhoods, rural communities, and emerging urban centers. The presence of Fort Eisenhower, a vital military installation, adds both strategic importance and a unique character to the area.

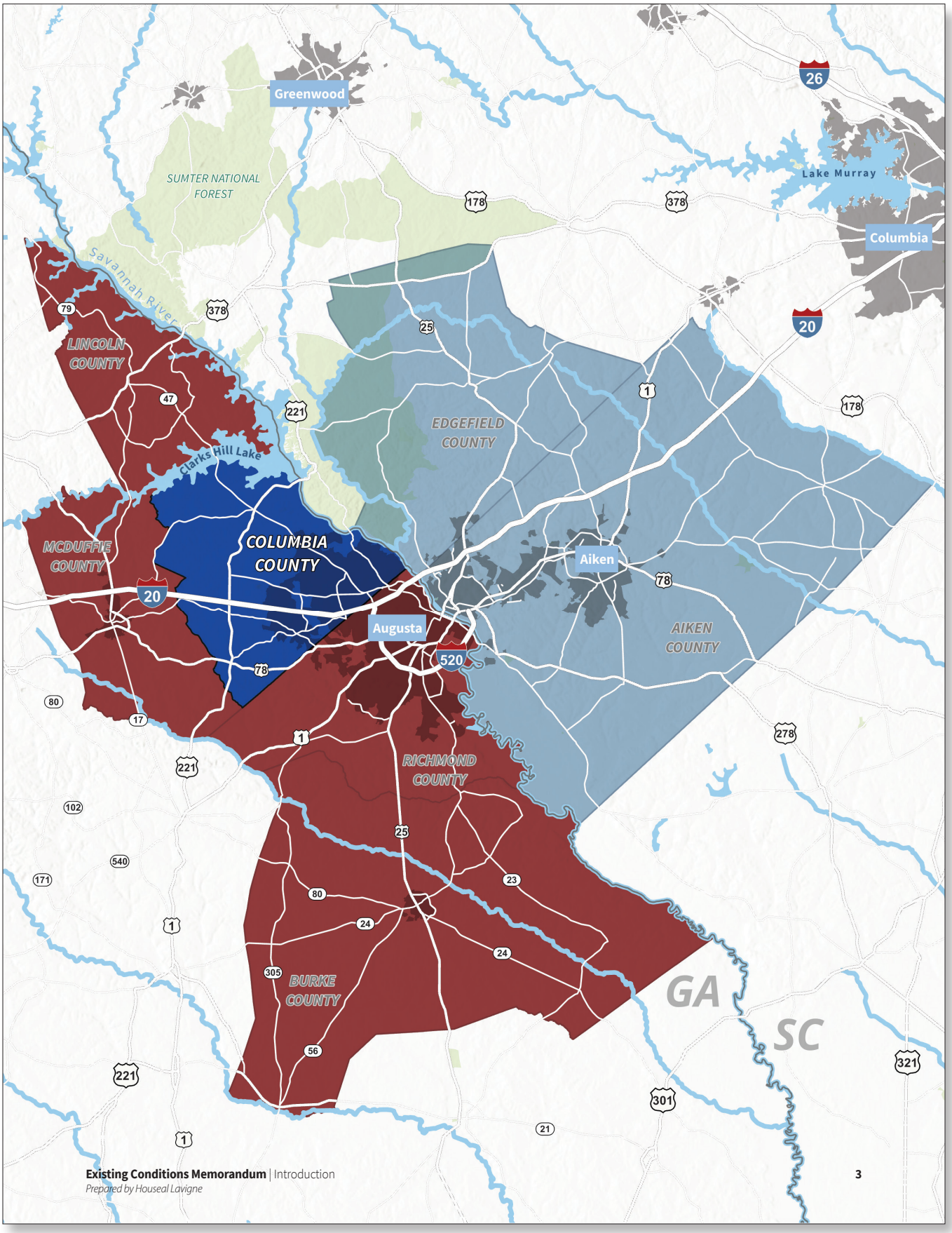
Columbia County was established on December 10, 1790, and was named after Christopher Columbus. It was originally part of Richmond County and included areas that are now in McDuffie and Warren Counties. The 1800s brought railroads, sparking growth in towns like Harlem and Grovetown, while Appling, named after a hero of the War of 1812, became the center of county government. Before the Civil War, the County relied heavily on cotton plantations.

The Great Depression led to population decline as residents sought work elsewhere. World War II transformed the County by establishing Camp Gordon in 1941, which later became Fort Gordon (now Fort Eisenhower), bringing jobs and economic activity. This military presence reshaped land use and population distribution, setting the stage for suburban growth.

In the 1950s, the construction of Clarks Hill Dam created Strom Thurmond Lake, flooding parts of the County and attracting recreational development. The opening of Interstate 20 in the 1960s improved transportation and spurred suburban expansion. Evans and Martinez grew rapidly as families moved in, many connected to Fort Eisenhower. The County's population surged, and commercial centers emerged to serve new residents.

By the 1980s, the County transitioned from a rural to a suburban community. Evans became the County's administrative hub, though Appling remained the official County seat. Major employers like John Deere established operations northeast of Grovetown, diversifying the economy. Infrastructure investments expanded roads, utilities, and parks. The County's population nearly doubled, with planned development guiding growth while maintaining open spaces and recreational amenities.

Today, Columbia County remains one of Georgia's fastest-growing areas, with a population of approximately 159,638 in 2023. The County is rich in historical and cultural assets, with more than 30 identified prehistoric sites and various organizations dedicated to preserving its heritage. The County's rapid population growth, fueled by its proximity to Augusta and its desirable living conditions, is transforming its demographics and economy. Columbia County benefits from immediate access to major highways, with Interstate 20 (I-20) serving as a key east-west corridor, and U.S. Highway 221 offering a crucial north-south connection. This prime location places Columbia County within a two-hour drive of major cities such as Savannah, Atlanta, Charleston, and Charlotte, further enhancing its appeal as a regional hub for both business and leisure. As the County continues to grow, balancing its urban development with its natural resources and diverse communities will be key to shaping its future.



Existing Conditions Memorandum | Introduction
Prepared by Houseal Lavigne

3

SECTION 2

OUTREACH SUMMARY

Phase 1 Community Engagement Overview

Foundations for the Future is a community-driven comprehensive planning effort to shape the long-term vision for Columbia County. Through a participatory engagement process, the plan will explore key topics such as growth, parks and recreation, housing, infrastructure, local business support, and preservation of the County's unique character. The engagement strategy leveraged a dynamic mix of tools and opportunities to involve the community at every step—inviting residents, business owners, youth, visitors, and stakeholders to share their perspectives, lived experiences, and ideas to help shape the County's future.

Phase 1 of engagement, held from March to April 2025, focused on introducing the planning process, raising awareness, and listening to community perspectives on strengths, challenges, and future needs. This snapshot provides a timeline of outreach activities and key takeaways from the first phase of community input. Refer to the Phase One Community Engagement Summary graphic report for more details.

In-Person and Digital Opportunities

Columbia County residents were invited to participate in the planning process through various online and in-person channels. Phase 1 engagement opportunities included a custom project website, a countywide survey, an in-person kickoff celebration, stakeholder discussions, a Steering Committee workshop, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) workshop kits, and an interactive mapping tool called map.social. These activities provided residents with opportunities to share their ideas, priorities, and experiences—helping shape the early direction of the comprehensive plan.

Project Website

Launched in February 2025, www.futurecolumbiacounty.com is the community's go-to online hub for all things related to the comprehensive plan. The site features project information, updates, meeting notices, and key documents. Since its launch, it has attracted over 1,000 unique visitors and 36 email signups.

Pop-up Events

During the spring, Columbia County staff and the project team hosted a series of interactive pop-up events at three key locations across the County. In collaboration with local partners, the team connected with more than 55 residents and visitors at Mullins Colony, the Harlem Library, and Evans Towne Center Park. These events promoted the community survey and invited participants to share feedback on Columbia County's strengths and challenges through a large-scale interactive exercise, accompanied by fun project swag.

Kick-off Celebration

On Tuesday, March 18, more than 45 residents joined the Foundations for the Future Kick-Off Celebration at the Columbia County Library. The event featured fun, hands-on activities for all ages and provided an opportunity for community members to share their ideas and priorities for Columbia County's future. Participants contributed valuable input at five workshop stations on local strengths, challenges, and aspirations—helping to launch the comprehensive planning process on an energetic and inclusive note.

Community Survey #1

Over 539 respondents have participated in the first survey, available from Monday, March 10 to Wednesday, April 30. The survey gathers input on Columbia County's vision for the future, land use, community services, transportation, parks and recreation, and overall character. In addition, more than 60 local business owners have offered to share further local insights and experiences.

Interactive Mapping Tool

Through the map.social platform, participants placed 19 pins with comments across the city, highlighting Columbia County's strengths and opportunities. Pin categories included Desired Use/Development, Priority Development Sites, Bike/Trail Connections, Community Assets, Undesirable Land Uses, and more. This interactive tool will remain open for additional feedback as the project moves into the second phase.

Engagement Key Takeaways

The following takeaways highlight the key insights and progress achieved so far, serving as a strong foundation for what lies ahead. As we look to deepen collaboration and explore new avenues for engagement, these reflections mark the beginning of an ongoing and evolving conversation.

Fix Infrastructure First: People want better roads, drainage, and utilities before building new neighborhoods or shopping centers. Many shared concerns about cracked streets, flooding, and outdated infrastructure that cannot keep up with growth.

Traffic Is a Major Frustration: Slowdowns, poorly timed traffic lights, and roads that have not kept up with new developments were mentioned repeatedly. Residents feel like it's getting harder to get around, especially in busier areas.

Growth Should Support Quality of Life: There's a strong feeling that growth is happening too fast and without enough planning. People want thoughtful development that focuses on quality over quantity and has a better mix of uses.

Keep Green Space and Community Feel: Residents love Columbia County's beauty and want to keep it that way. Many said they're worried about losing trees, natural areas, and the character that makes their neighborhoods feel like home.

Better Parks and Recreation Options: Parks are a big community asset, and people want more shaded areas, indoor recreation, and places that work for families, kids, and seniors alike.

Housing That Works for Everyone: There is concern about too much luxury development and too many fast-built apartments. Residents want more affordable housing options, especially for seniors and working families.

Need for a True Downtown: People want a walkable area with local restaurants, small businesses, and public spaces—something that feels like the heart of the community. Many said Columbia County needs a real town center.

Keep the Public Informed: Some people didn't know about public meetings or how to get involved. There's a clear need for better communication, more regular updates, and easier ways to share feedback.

More Services in More Places: People want more options for public transportation, indoor recreation, and better access to government services, especially in rural areas.

Taxes Are Becoming a Burden: Rising property taxes, especially for seniors, are putting pressure on households. Many feel they're paying more but not seeing improvements in roads, parks, or other public services.

More Public Transportation and Active Mobility: There is interest in expanding public transportation options and creating more sidewalks, bike lanes, and safe pedestrian crossings—especially in areas that lack walkability.

Smarter Road Planning: Residents want road improvements to be more strategic, better coordinated with growth, and reflective of long-term development patterns.

Youth and Senior Services: There is a clear call for more programs and spaces tailored to youth and teens, as well as dedicated facilities and services for older adults and residents with disabilities.

Celebrate Culture and Connection: Community members want to see more cultural events, library services, arts programming, and family-friendly activities that foster a sense of place, connection, and belonging.

SECTION 3

PAST PLANS, STUDIES, AND REPORTS

The Existing Conditions Memorandum evaluates current conditions to guide future decisions, building on past planning efforts that have shaped Columbia County's development. The review of the County's past plans and studies ensures existing community policies and goals are carried forwarded within the Plan where relevant. The following section provides an overview of the key plans and studies of the County. The overview is not an exhaustive list as there may be other important plans, studies, and reports relevant to land use planning.

Columbia County Greenspace Master Plan (2000)

The Columbia County Greenspace Master Plan, adopted in 2000, established a goal to preserve at least 20% of the County's land as greenspace. In 2001, the Board of Commissioners established the Greenspace Advisory Board, a seven-member citizen panel responsible for identifying and recommending parcels for greenspace acquisition.

The Greenspace Advisory Board helps the County identify potential opportunities for permanently protecting additional greenspace and considers opportunities to provide greenway connections (i.e. trails) between greenspaces, such as the Euchee Creek Greenway system.

Relationship to the new Comprehensive Plan

Although the Plan was developed over twenty years ago, it reflects the County's commitment to preserving at least 20% of its land as greenspace. The updated Comprehensive Plan will affirm the County's intention to continue working toward this goal by incorporating strategies that build on the original plan's vision. The updated Comprehensive Plan will review the current conditions, assess which strategies remain relevant or need adjustment, and integrate revised greenspace objectives and connectivity initiatives, such as greenway and trail systems.

Harnessing Opportunities for Talent: An Economic Development Strategy for Columbia County, GA (2016)

The Development Authority of Columbia County (DACC) and Columbia County developed an economic development strategy to foster economic growth, creating jobs and opportunities for residents in the County. Goals outlined in the plan were related to infrastructure enhancements to attract and retain businesses, promoting the County to potential companies, and supporting various economic initiatives.

A key recommendation from the strategy was the development of new industrial parks to accommodate manufacturing and office developments. Additionally, Columbia County's Vision 2035 Plan designates the Exit 183 area as an employment center, reflecting community input and long-term growth objectives.

Relationship to the new Comprehensive Plan

By providing a focused framework for economic growth and aligning infrastructure and land use priorities from the Harnessing Opportunities for Talent Plan, the updated Comprehensive Plan can effectively integrate economic priorities with broader policies. The development of new industrial parks in the County will be evaluated through the Future Land Use Plan process to ensure appropriate sites are identified to support future industrial users. The Comprehensive Plan will help to coordinate land use decisions with the County's long-term economic development goals and community-driven priorities.

ARTS 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (2020)

The ARTS 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Update, also known as the Future Mobility 2050 Plan, is a comprehensive guide for transportation improvements in the Augusta region. This federally mandated plan outlines long-term strategies for developments in the Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) planning area. The planning area includes Columbia and Richmond Counties in Georgia, and Aiken and Edgefield Counties in South Carolina.

The plan details long- and short-term strategies to create an integrated, multi-modal transportation system, addressing highways, roads, traffic safety, aviation, freight, public transit, and pedestrian and bike paths. Nearly 2,000 stakeholders participated in the engagement process, and the MTP reflects community visions and priorities. This plan is a prerequisite for federal transportation funding. It aims to guide investments and policies to enhance mobility, safety, and connectivity, while supporting sustainable growth and improving quality of life for residents in Columbia County and the broader region.

Relationship to the new Comprehensive Plan

Adopted in 2020, the MTP provides an in-depth evaluation of Columbia County's transportation system and outlines recommendations for improving and maintaining the system. The Plan documents existing transportation conditions, assesses existing and future transportation needs, and prioritizes projects to enhance mobility, accessibility, and connectivity. Key recommendations included strategies to reduce traffic congestion and delays, improve roadway safety, and expand multimodal transportation options. Since the Plan's adoption in 2020, Columbia County has undertaken several major transportation projects including Furys Ferry Road expansion, Hereford Farm Road widening, and interchange improvements at I-20 and U.S Route 221. The Transportation Chapter of the updated Comprehensive Plan will incorporate projects that have not yet been implemented and ensure that recommendations align with the MTP's priorities, promoting coordinated land use and transportation planning to support sustainable growth and improve overall mobility in Columbia County.

Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021-2026)

The Columbia County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan is a comprehensive and evolving strategy for reducing the impact of natural disasters, protecting citizens and property, and enhancing community resilience. This plan, initially approved in August 2005 and subsequently updated in 2011, 2016, and again in 2021, represents a review and improvement on previous hazard mitigation efforts. Developed in compliance with the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, it involves identifying hazards, assessing risks and vulnerabilities, and outlining mitigation actions. A key focus is on engaging a diverse group of stakeholders, including government agencies, local businesses, and citizens, to collaborate on mitigation strategies. Emphasizing the integration of hazard mitigation into long-term planning documents like the Comprehensive Plan, this living document also establishes a process for continued maintenance, updates, and public involvement, to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in fostering sustainable development and minimizing potential losses from natural disasters.

Relationship to the new Comprehensive Plan

To ensure sustainable development and community resilience, the Columbia County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan should be strategically integrated into the updated Comprehensive Plan. By aligning infrastructure and land-use priorities, the Comprehensive Plan can effectively integrate hazard mitigation into policies, strategies, and recommendations. This integration will create a coordinated approach to growth and development in Columbia County, ensuring that economic priorities are balanced with the need to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards.

Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan (2021)

Vision 2035 is Columbia County's current Comprehensive Plan. Originally adopted in 2016, the purpose of this Plan was to guide the County's vision and growth over the next 15 years. The Plan has three major components: community vision, future development, and a community work program. Each component addresses population growth, economic development, housing, natural and historic resources, land use and development patterns, community facilities, transportation, broadband service, and intergovernmental coordination. A major element of *Vision 2025* is the Future Development Strategy, which includes a Future Development Map that designates Character Areas which describe the desired development and land uses for each area across the County.

The Future Development Map establishes a framework for guiding growth and land use across Columbia County by identifying 11 distinct character areas. These areas capture the diversity of environments within the County, ranging from activity centers and mixed-use districts to a variety of residential neighborhoods and expansive rural lands and open spaces. Each character area reflects a unique blend of land uses, development patterns, and community goals, providing tailored guidance for future improvements, preservation efforts, and investments.

Relationship to the new Comprehensive Plan

Although the document was adopted nearly ten years ago, it serves as the foundation for the Comprehensive Plan update. Previous recommendations, priority investments, and projects will guide the development of new recommendations. Since the adoption of Vision 2035, several significant projects have shaped Columbia County, including the White Oak Business Park, Evans Towne Center, the start of construction on the Wellstar Columbia County Medical Center, and major infrastructure improvements to key roads across the County. The updated Comprehensive Plan will review the County's progress in implementing remaining initiatives, assess whether they remain relevant or feasible, and revise them to align with a renewed vision for Columbia County's future. It will also reflect current community priorities, integrate measurable goals and policies, and establish clear strategies to address today's challenges and opportunities.

Columbia County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2023)

The Columbia County Parks, Recreation, and Events Department serves a growing community of over 160,000 residents and nearly one million annual visitors, offering amenities such as campgrounds, skate parks, dog parks, athletic fields, walking trails, and a senior center. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan outlines a strategic vision to enhance facilities and services while also focusing on the County's natural resources and recreational needs. The planning process involved a community-driven approach, including assessments of current programs, services, and demographic trends. Households identified paved walking, hiking, and biking trails and adult fitness and wellness programs as key priorities. Supported by a strategic implementation plan, the Recreation Master Plan provides actionable strategies for parks, trails, facilities, recreation programs, natural resource management, and staffing to ensure high-quality recreational opportunities for all residents. Additionally, the department's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agency (CAPRA) highlights the County's commitment to management and operational quality.

Relationship to the new Comprehensive Plan

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SECTION 4

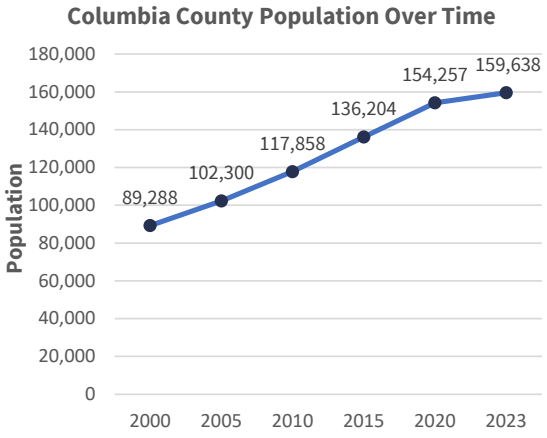
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The Demographic Profile examines the current characteristics of the County's population by using data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates and the Decennial Survey. By analyzing these characteristics, County officials can identify trends to ensure essential services are distributed appropriately, anticipate future demands, and provide better response to resident needs. This demographic analysis will inform the Comprehensive Plan, ensuring it addresses existing trends, issues, and opportunities. Where appropriate, comparison data from Richmond County, Aiken County, and Edgefield County are used to provide regional context, allowing Columbia County to understand how it fits within broader demographic patterns.

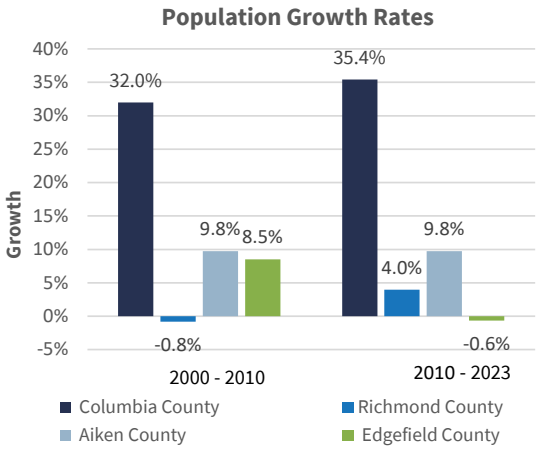
Population

Columbia County has experienced consistent and significant population growth over the past two decades and is currently the second-fastest growing County in Georgia. In 2000, the County had a population of 89,288, which grew to an estimated 159,638 residents by 2023. From 2000 to 2010, Columbia County's population increased by 32%, far outpacing neighboring Richmond County (-0.8%), Aiken County (9.8%), and Edgefield County (8.5%). This trend continued between 2010 and 2023, with Columbia County's population expanding by 35.4%, while surrounding counties experienced much slower growth.

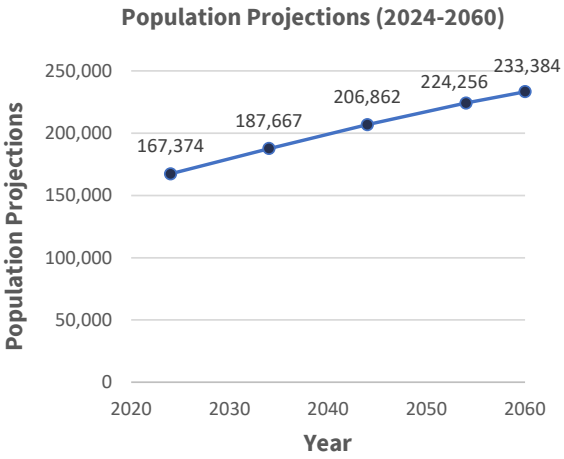
The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget is responsible for preparing, maintaining, and providing official demographic data for the state. Based on current projections, Columbia County is expected to reach a total population of 233,384 by 2060. This residential-based forecast serves as a key foundation for evaluating future infrastructure and service needs.



Source: US Decennial Census



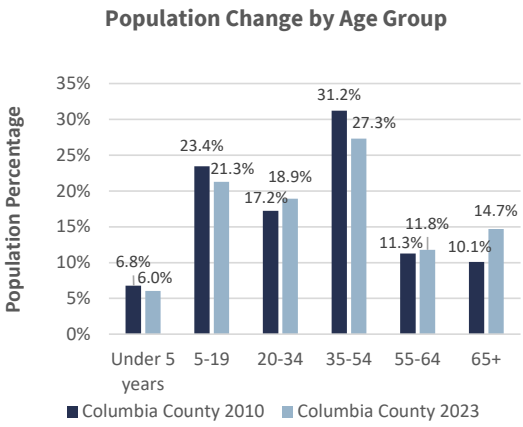
Source: 2000, 2010, and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



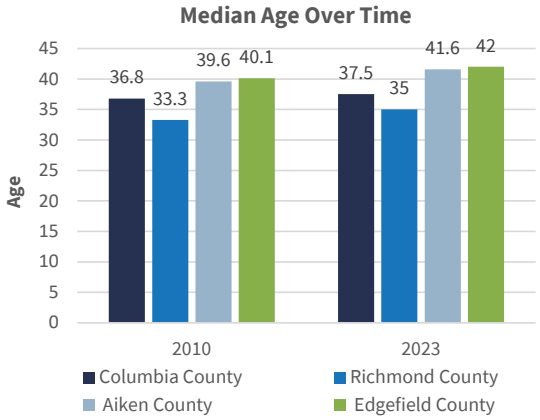
Source: Governor's Office of Planning and Budget

Age

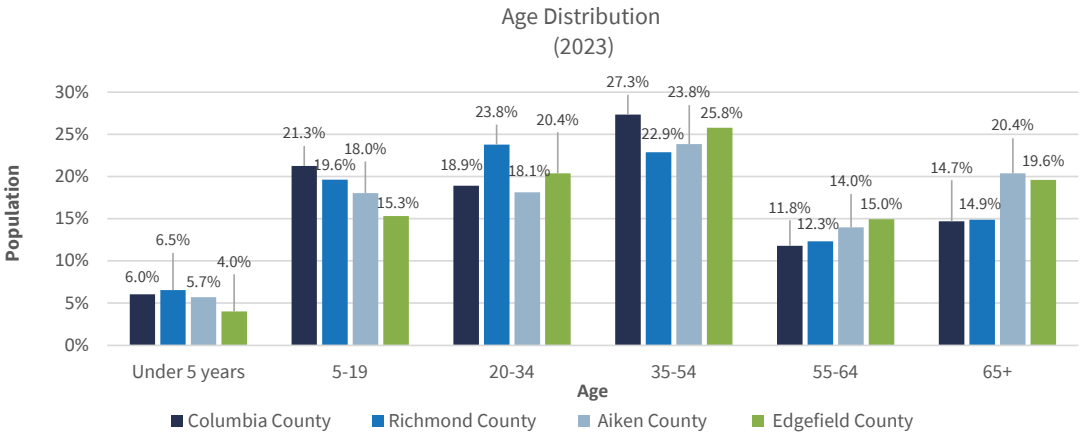
Age is a crucial factor in assessing population trends, as it influences how residents engage with their community. It also affects their educational, employment, and service needs, as well as their preferences for housing, transportation, and amenities. As of 2023, Columbia County's median age was 37.5 years—slightly older than Richmond County (35 years) but younger than Aiken County (41.6 years) and Edgefield County (42 years). Since 2010, the median age has gradually increased across all four counties, reflecting broader demographic shifts. In Columbia County, the 35-54 age group is the largest, comprising 27.3% of the population, similar to Aiken and Edgefield Counties. Additionally, significant portions of the population fall within the 5-19 and 20-34 age groups, highlighting a balanced age distribution that includes young professionals with or without families.



Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



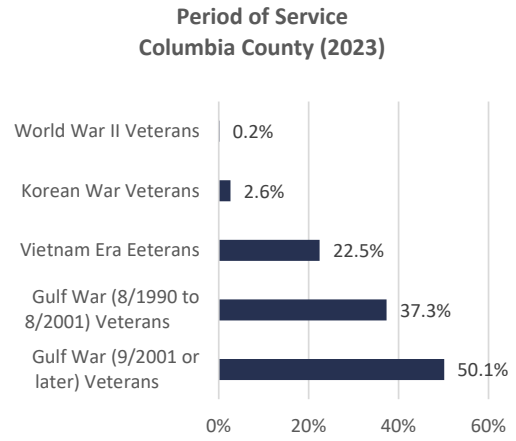
Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Veteran Population

Examining Columbia County's population reveals a strong connection to military service, with 14.6% of residents having served in the armed forces. The largest group of veterans served during the post-9/11 Gulf War era (50.1%), followed by those from the earlier Gulf War period (1990–2001) at 37.3%. Vietnam era veterans make up 22.5% of the veteran population, while fewer residents served in the Korean War (2.6%) or World War II (0.2%). The County's strong military presence is expected, given its proximity to Fort Eisenhower, which has been a key part of Georgia's military landscape since 1977.



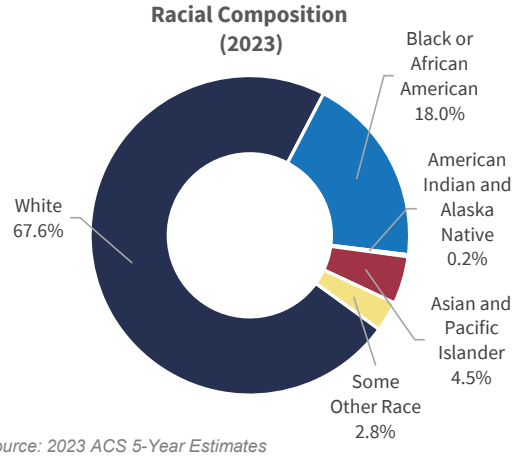
Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Race and Ethnicity

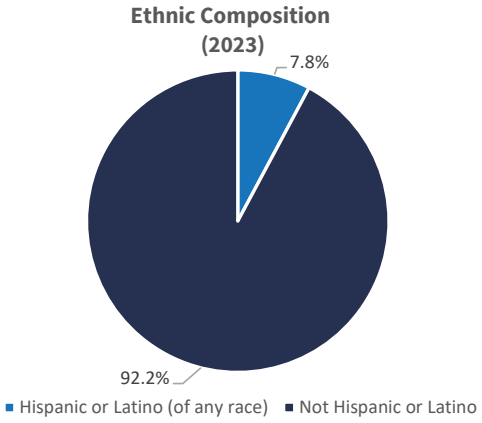
Examining Columbia County's racial and ethnic composition provides valuable insights for planning efforts. The County's population is predominantly White (67.6%). The next most predominant groups are Black or African American (18%) and Asian and Pacific Islander (4.5%). Approximately 7.8% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, which the U.S. Census Bureau defines as individuals of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

Compared to similar communities, Columbia County has a higher percentage of Asian and Pacific Islander and Hispanic or Latino residents, but a smaller Black or African American population. For example, Richmond County (56.1%), Aiken County (24.5%), and Edgefield County (31.4%) all have larger Black or African American populations than Columbia County (18%).

Over the past decade, Columbia County's demographic trends have shifted notably. Since 2010, the County's White population has declined by 10.2%, while other racial and ethnic groups have grown. The Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino populations each increased by 3.3%, individuals identifying as some other race increased by 1.6%, and those identifying as two or more races grew by 5%.



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



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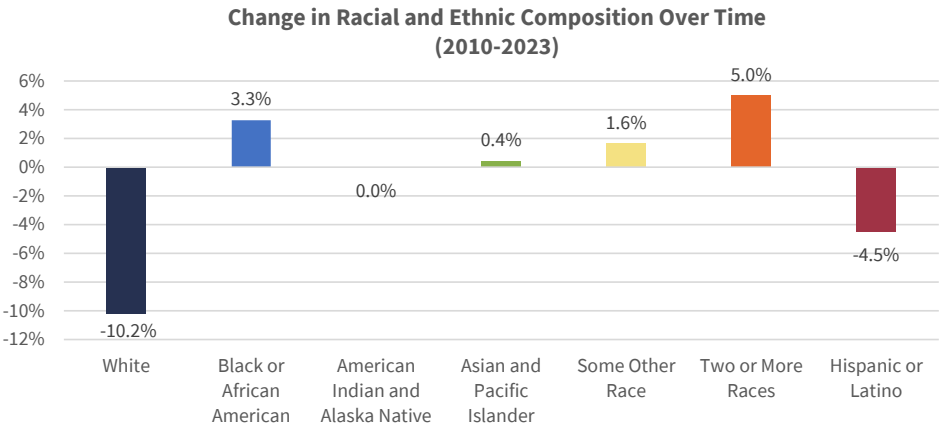


Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

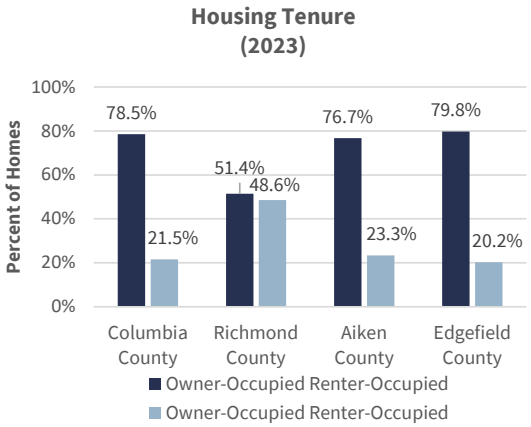
Housing

Housing Tenure

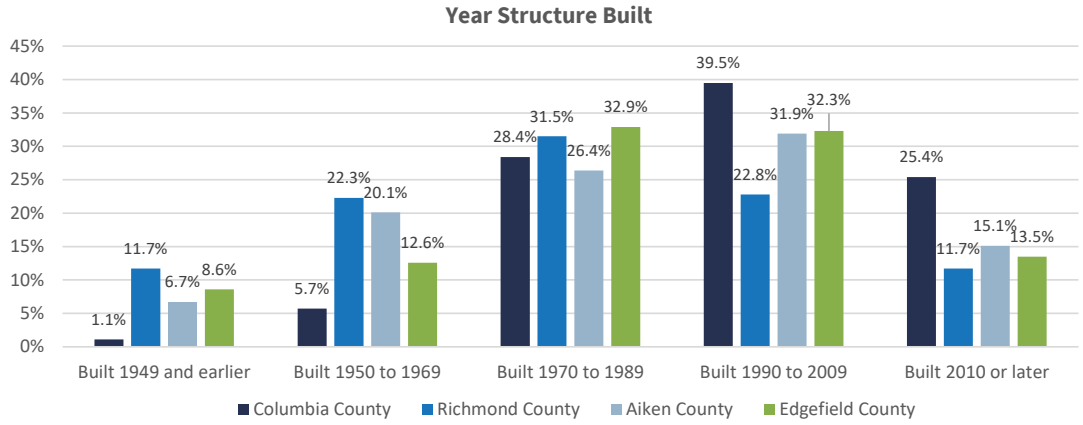
Columbia County has 60,412 housing units, with 78.5% owner-occupied and 21.5% renter-occupied. This distribution is similar to Edgefield and Aiken Counties. In contrast, Richmond County has a lower homeownership rate, with 51.4% of homes owner-occupied and a higher share of renter-occupied units at 48.6%.

Year Built

Columbia County has experienced significant housing development in recent years with 22.7% of its housing stock built between 2010 and 2019. This rapid growth has been driven by a rising population and strong demand for new housing options. In contrast, Aiken County has maintained a more balanced distribution of older and newer homes, reflecting steady, long-term growth. Both Richmond and Edgefield Counties saw their peak housing development in the late 20th Century, with Richmond experiencing the highest percentage of construction between 1970 and 1979, while Edgefield's peak occurred between 1980 and 1989. Columbia County had the most housing construction between 1990 and 2009.



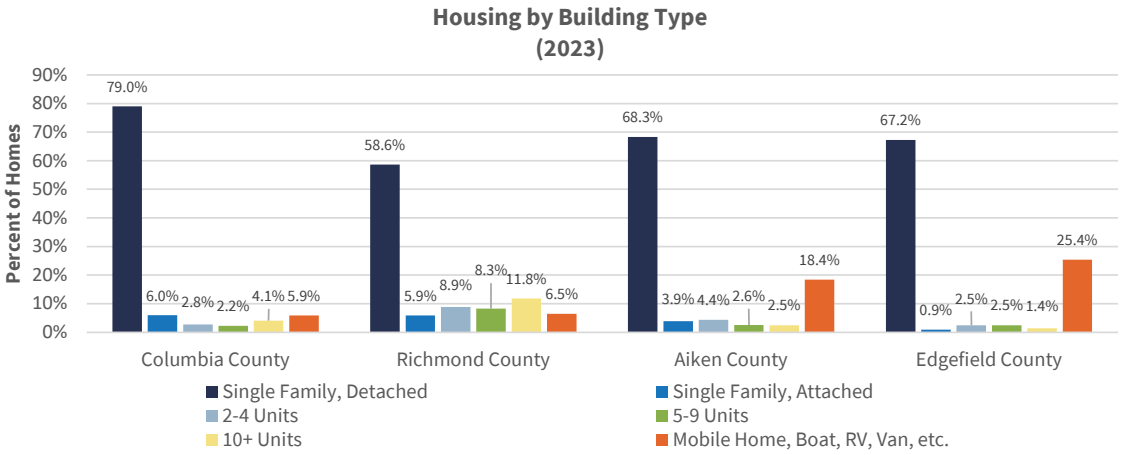
Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Housing Type

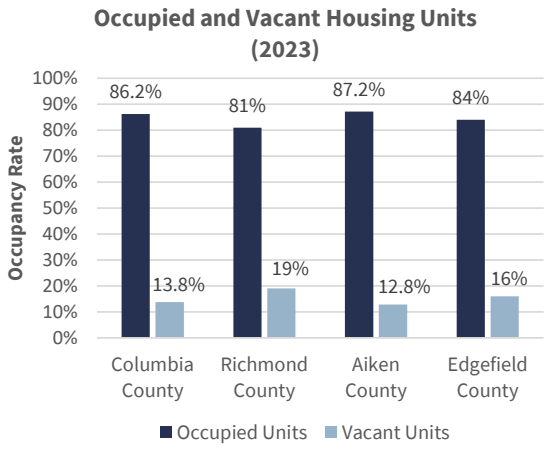
Columbia County's housing stock is largely dominated by single-family detached homes, which make up 79% of all housing units. The second most common type—single-family attached homes, such as townhouses and row houses—accounts for just 6.0%. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, these units are characterized by unbroken walls that extend from the ground to the roof, separating them from adjacent structures. In contrast, 2- to 4-unit structures consist of multiple housing units within a single building, such as duplexes or small apartment buildings. While Columbia County has the highest proportion of single-family detached homes among neighboring counties, its overall housing mix remains limited, with relatively few multi-family options available to meet the needs of a more diverse population.



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Housing Occupancy

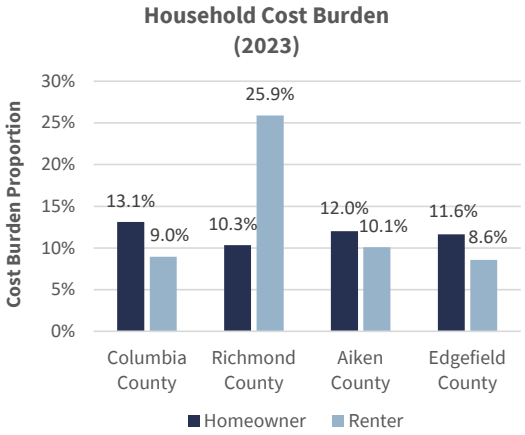
Columbia County's housing occupancy rate is comparable to nearby counties, with 86.2% of homes occupied and 13.8% classified as vacant. Similarly, Edgefield County (84%), Aiken County (87.2%), and Richmond County (81%) exhibit a similar breakdown of housing availability and demand.



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Cost Burden

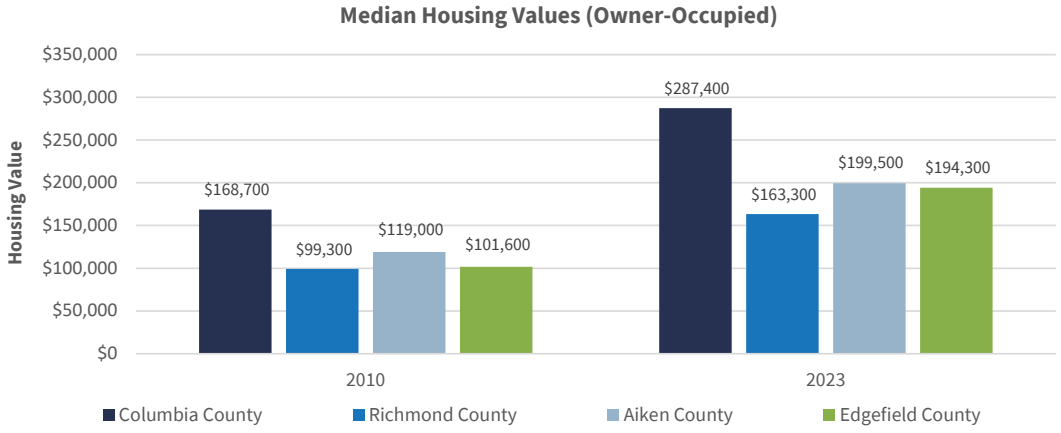
In Columbia County, homeowners are more likely to experience housing cost burdens than renters. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a household is considered cost-burdened if it spends more than 30% of its income on housing, which can make it difficult to afford other essentials such as food, clothing, transportation, and health care. In Columbia County, 13.1% of homeowners are cost-burdened, compared to 9% of renters. While renter and homeowner cost burdens are somewhat moderate in Columbia County, Richmond County has a significantly higher share of cost-burdened renters, highlighting regional differences in housing affordability.



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Housing Value

Housing values in Columbia County rose significantly, with the median value increasing by 70%—from $168,700 in 2010 to $287,400 in 2023. Edgefield County experienced the largest growth, with median housing values climbing 91% from $101,600 to $194,300 over the same period. Aiken County also saw steady growth, with values rising 68% from $119,000 to $199,500. Similarly, Richmond County's median housing values grew by approximately 64%, increasing from $99,300 to $163,300. This data highlights substantial growth in housing values in all areas, with the highest housing values in Columbia County. Data from MLS Realtors showed that in 2024, 2,721 houses were sold at an average sales price of around $300,000.

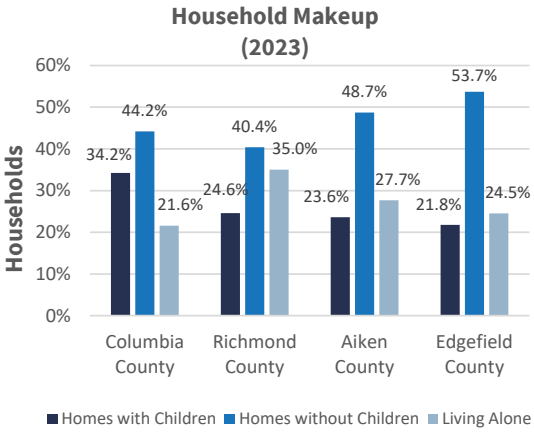


Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

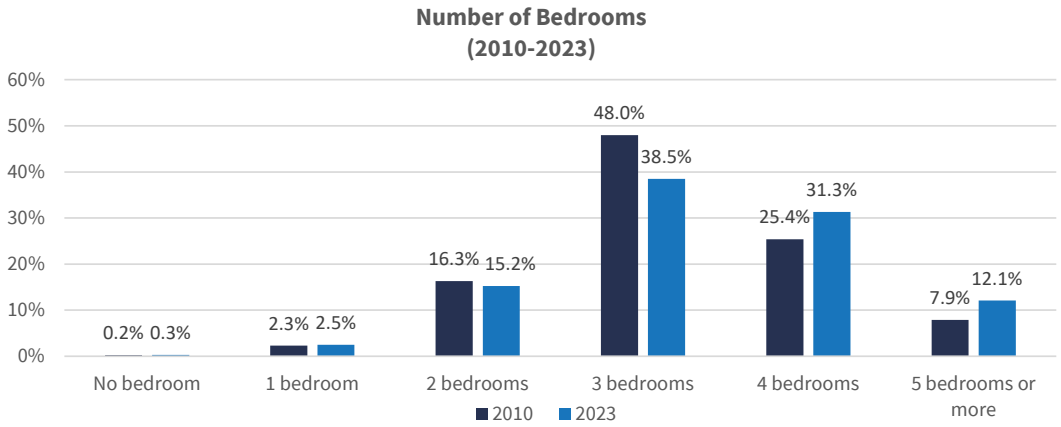
Household Mismatch

Since 2010, new residential construction in Columbia County has continued to favor larger homes. The share of four-bedroom (5.9%) and five-bedroom (4.2%) units has increased, while studios and one-bedroom units have only grown by 0.3%. Three-bedroom units experienced the largest decline (-9.5%), whereas two-bedroom units decreased slightly by 1.1%.

Columbia County currently has limited smaller housing options to accommodate the growing number of one- and two-person households. While only 34.2% of the population are considered families, 81.9% of the County's housing units are three-bedroom homes or larger. Studios and one-bedroom units account for fewer than 2,000 of the County's 60,412 housing units.



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

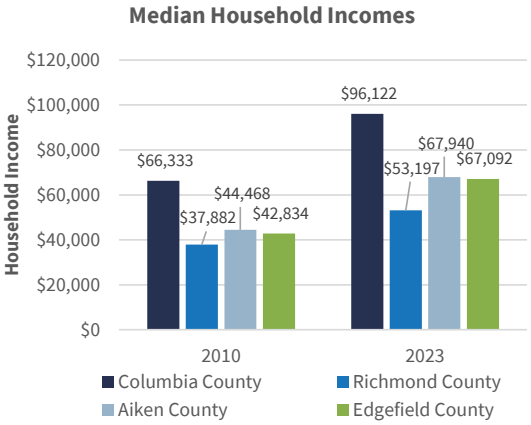


Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

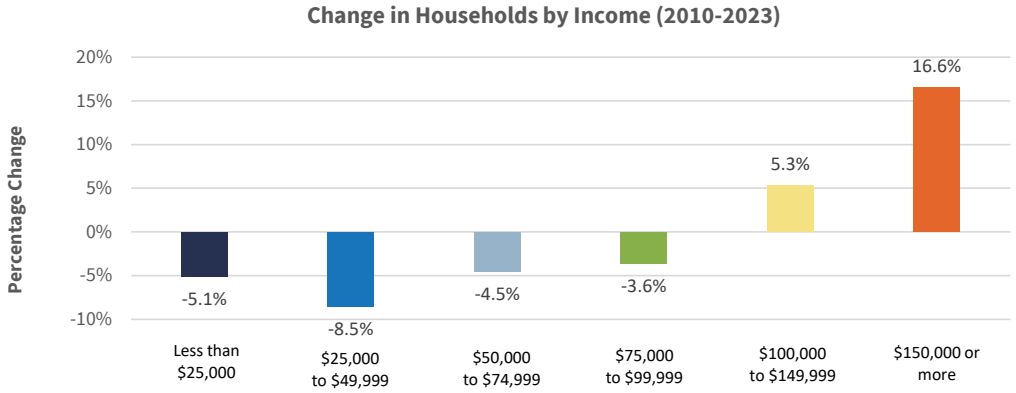
Income

The median household income in Columbia County has steadily increased, reaching an estimated $96,122 in 2023, the highest among the compared counties. Edgefield County experienced a similar growth rate, increasing from $42,834 in 2010 to $67,092 in 2023. Aiken County followed a similar upward trend. In contrast, Richmond County saw the most modest increase, with median household income growing from $37,882 in 2010 to $53,197 in 2023.

In Columbia County, households earning $150,000 or more saw the largest increase, growing by 16.6%, followed by a rise of 5.3% among households earning between $100,000 and $149,999. Conversely, households earning less than $100,000 saw declines, with the most significant decrease occurring in the $25,000 to $49,999 income group (-8.5%).



Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

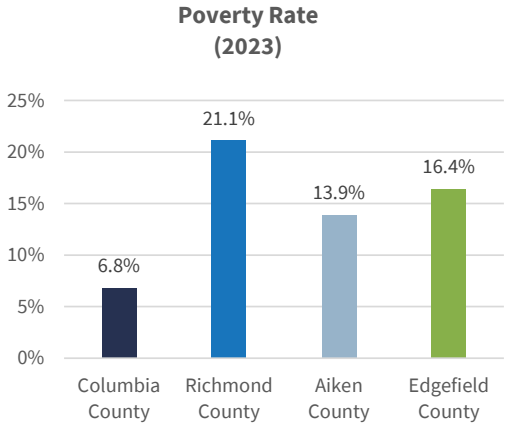


Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

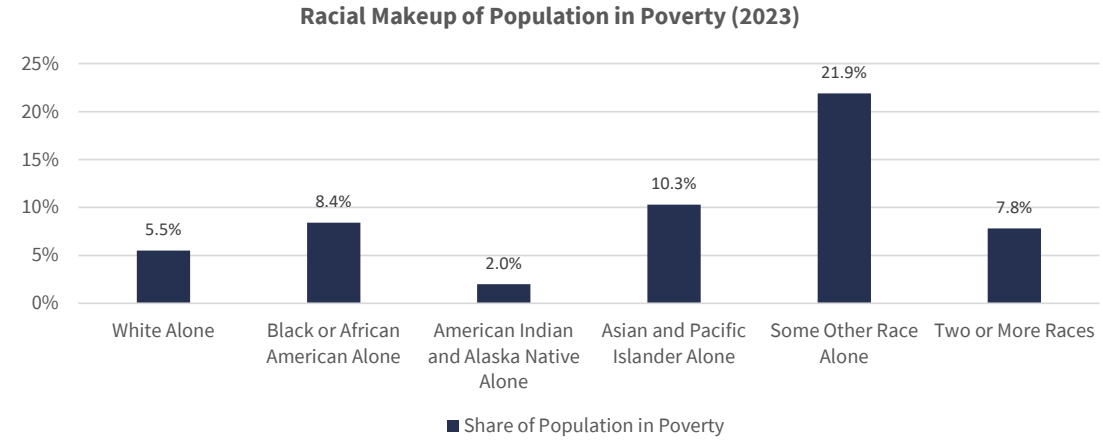
Poverty Rate

Fewer individuals in Columbia County (6.8%) face poverty compared to other communities. The U.S. Census Bureau defines households in poverty as those households earning less than the cost-of-living threshold. The threshold is calculated every year to consider changes in the cost of necessities like housing and food.

According to the 2023 American Community Survey, 10,805 residents in Columbia County live in poverty. Of those individuals in poverty, 9.0% are under 18 years old, 7.8% are under five years old, and 7.3% are 65 years old or older. The race of the population in poverty is 5.5% White, 8.4% Black or African American, 2% American Indian and Alaska Native, 10.3% Asian and Pacific Islander, 21.9% Some Other Race, and 7.8% Two or More Races. Compared to the overall population's race and ethnicity makeup, Columbia County's American Indian and Alaska Native population (0.2%), Asian and Pacific Islander population (4.5%), population of those identifying as some other race (2.8%), and population of those identifying as two or more races (7%) are disproportionately living in poverty.



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



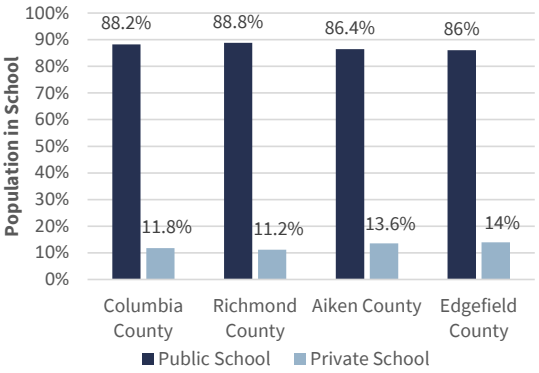
Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Educational Attainment

Columbia County has the highest percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher at 37.8 %, as well as the highest share of residents holding an associate's degree at 13.1%. In contrast, Edgefield County has the highest percentage of residents without a high school diploma (18.2%) and those with only a high school education (32.5%).

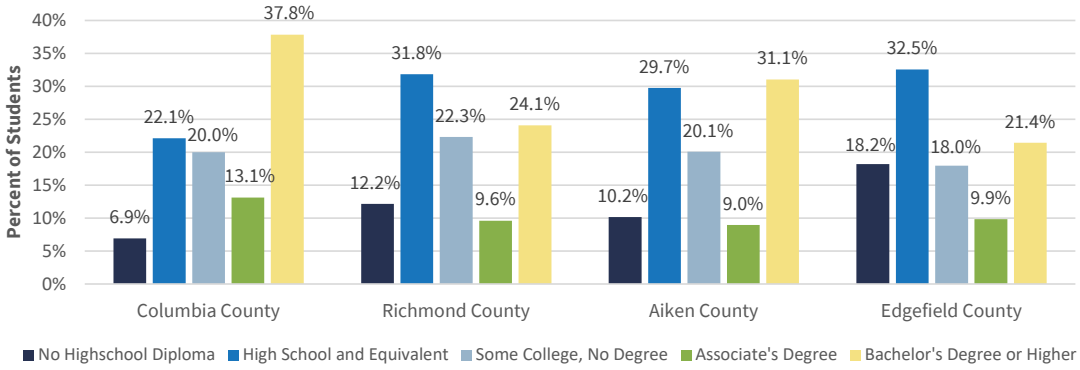
Regarding school enrollment, Columbia County has the second-highest public school enrollment rate at 88.2%, just behind Richmond County at 88.8 %. Edgefield County currently has the highest private school enrollment rate, estimated at 14%.

School Enrollment by Type



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year

Level of Education



Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Labor Force and Employment

In 2022, Columbia County had 58,455 residents holding primary jobs, up from 43,447 in 2010, a 25.7% increase. Health Care and Social Assistance jobs for residents grew by 37%, increasing from 6,932 to 9,496, making it the largest employment sector for Columbia County residents. Retail Trade jobs increased by 31.5%, from 4,641 to 6,102. Education Services remained steady, increasing by less than 10%. Transportation and Warehousing saw the most significant increase in jobs, growing from 944 to 2,377, marking a 151.8% change since 2010.

Among all sectors, the total number of jobs in Columbia County grew to 34,925 in 2022, an increase of 21.4% or 6,156 jobs from 2010. From 2010 to 2022, the Retail Trade sector grew by 29.1%, from 4,490 to 5,795 jobs. Accommodation and Food Services rose by 33.8%, from 3,348 to 4,478 jobs, while Educational Services saw a 19.7 % increase, from 3,571 to 4,274 jobs. Notably, the Construction sector experienced the most significant growth, increasing by 44.5 % from 2,083 to 3,010 jobs, reinforcing Columbia County's economic impact in the region.

Top 10 Employment Sectors for Columbia County Residents

	Total Jobs in 2022	Share of Job Market 2022	Total Jobs 2010	Change in Jobs since 2010
Health Care and Social Assistance	9,496	16.6%	6,932	37.0%
Retail Trade	6,102	10.4%	4,641	31.5%
Educational Services	6,041	10.3%	5,534	9.2%
Accommodation and Food Services	5,296	9.1%	3,745	41.4%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	5,216	8.9%	3,791	37.6%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	4,501	7.7%	2,543	77.0%
Manufacturing	4,330	7.4%	3,684	17.5%
Construction	4,068	7.0%	2,421	68.0%
Transportation and Warehousing	2,377	4.1%	944	151.8%
Wholesale Trade	1,936	3.3%	1,499	29.2%

Source: 2022 U.S. Census Bureau On the Map

Top 10 Employment Sectors for Columbia County Workers

	Total Jobs in 2022	Share of Job Market 2022	Total Jobs in 2010	Change in Jobs since 2010
Retail Trade	5,795	16.6%	4,490	29.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	4,478	12.8%	3,348	33.8%
Educational Services	4,274	12.2%	3,571	19.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	4,142	11.9%	3,123	32.6%
Manufacturing	3,122	8.9%	2,999	4.1%
Construction	3,010	8.6%	2,083	44.5%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	2,591	7.4%	2,138	21.2%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,675	4.8%	1,194	40.3%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	1,329	3.8%	924	43.8%
Public Administration	1,208	3.5%	1,254	-3.7%

Source: 2022 U.S. Census Bureau On the Map

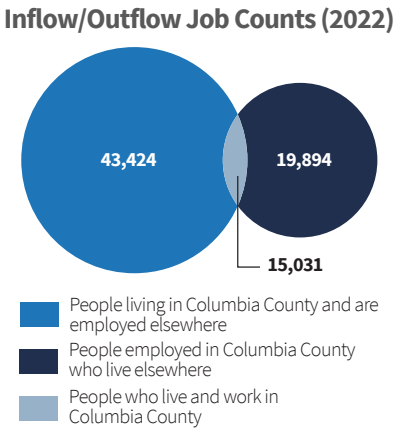
Commute and Labor Shed

Commuting patterns in 2022 show that 19,894 workers commute from outside areas to work in Columbia County. Meanwhile, 43,424 employed residents of Columbia County commute to jobs outside the County. Key destinations for Columbia County residents working outside the County include Augusta-Richmond County (22.5%). Other significant destinations include North Augusta, SC (1.8%).

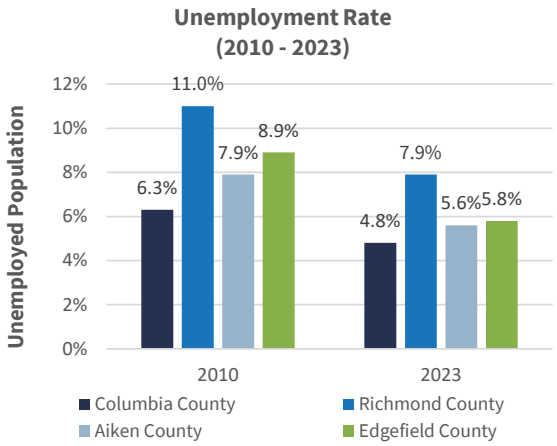
Unemployment

The unemployment rate has decreased slightly over the last ten years in all areas. In 2010, the unemployment rates were higher, with Richmond County having the highest rate of 11%. By 2023, unemployment in Richmond County and Edgefield County dropped by just over 3%, while unemployment in Columbia County dropped 1.5%.

NOTE: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a person is considered unemployed if they were not employed at the time when the current population survey was taken, they were available for work during the survey reference week (excluding temporary illness), and had made efforts to find a job within the four weeks preceding the survey, or if they were temporarily laid off with the expectation of being rehired.



Source: 2022 U.S. Census On the Map



Source: 2010 and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

SECTION 5

EXISTING LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Existing Land Use and Development section analyzes Columbia County's current land use composition and development patterns, forming a foundation for future planning in the *Foundations for the Future: Columbia, County, GA Comprehensive Plan.* This section will inform recommendations in the Plan to help shape the County's built form and character in the years ahead.

To support the planning process, an inventory of existing land use and development patterns has been conducted to enhance understanding of the County. The findings from this review will inform recommendations and policies that guide future development within the Comprehensive Plan.

Existing Land Use

Rural Residential

Rural residential areas are characterized by low-density, large-lot single-family detached homes, distributed with agricultural uses, forestry land, and undeveloped land. Predominantly located on the western side of the County, these areas support private agricultural, forestry uses, farm homesteads, estate homes, and large-lot residential properties. Natural features such as extensive tree cover and open space help maintain the rural character. Development typically consists of single-family homes on lots of 2.5 acres or more, with large setbacks that reinforce the rural aesthetic. Some of these areas lie outside of the County's sewer service area and include lake neighborhoods, which are large-lot single-family properties positioned near regional and state parks.

Suburban Residential

Characterized by moderate-density residential development, suburban residential areas feature single-family homes with up to three dwellings per acre. Single-family detached housing is the dominant housing type with some two-family residential and small apartment buildings interspersed throughout the County. Neighborhood parks and open spaces within suburban residential areas offer recreational amenities. These areas may also support limited retail and service uses, typically located at major intersections or along perimeter streets to serve nearby residents.

Urban Residential

These areas typically include a mix of single-family detached homes, single-family attached units, such as townhomes, and smaller multi-family buildings. Urban residential neighborhoods are connected by sidewalks, promoting walkability between homes, nearby neighborhoods, and adjacent commercial areas. These areas also include civic uses, such as community centers, libraries, parks, schools, and places of worship. Commercial uses may be located along main or perimeter streets to serve local needs. A notable example of an urban residential area is the Riverwood area.

Neighborhood Commercial

Clustered at intersections, neighborhood commercial areas provide convenient access to goods, services, and amenities for nearby residents. These areas typically feature a compact development pattern with smaller-scale retail, gas stations, and service-oriented businesses located in small shopping centers. Civic uses such as community centers, places of worship, and schools may also be present. Notable examples of neighborhood commercial nodes include developments at William Few Parkway, Riverwood West, and Furys Ferry Road.

Corridor Commercial

These areas include a variety of retail and service businesses such as shopping centers, grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, and hotels along major transportation corridors. Key locations include Washington Road from Martinez to Evans Town Center. These corridors offer neighborhood services, including office, retail, and dining, catering to residents and those passing through the County.

Urban Core

Urban core areas, including Evans and Martinez, serve as the County's hub for concentrated commercial activity, employment, and mixed-use development. These areas feature a diverse mix of land uses, including retail, restaurants, office spaces, hotels, and civic institutions. Higher-density residential options such as apartments, condominiums, townhomes, and mixed residential developments could be found throughout the areas. A notable example is the recent Evans Towne Center development.

Public/Semi-Public

Public/semi-public areas include County, City, state, and federal governmental uses and facilities; community service providers; schools; and places of worship and assembly.

Manufacturing and Industrial

Manufacturing and industrial areas include a range of industrial uses, including both heavy and light industries such as manufacturing, processing, warehousing, and the distribution of goods and materials. Large businesses in these sectors include Club Car Inc., Amazon, and John Deere Commercial Products. Areas like White Oak Business Park provide space for these industrial operations, which contribute to the region's commercial activity and provide significant employment opportunities.

Public Utility

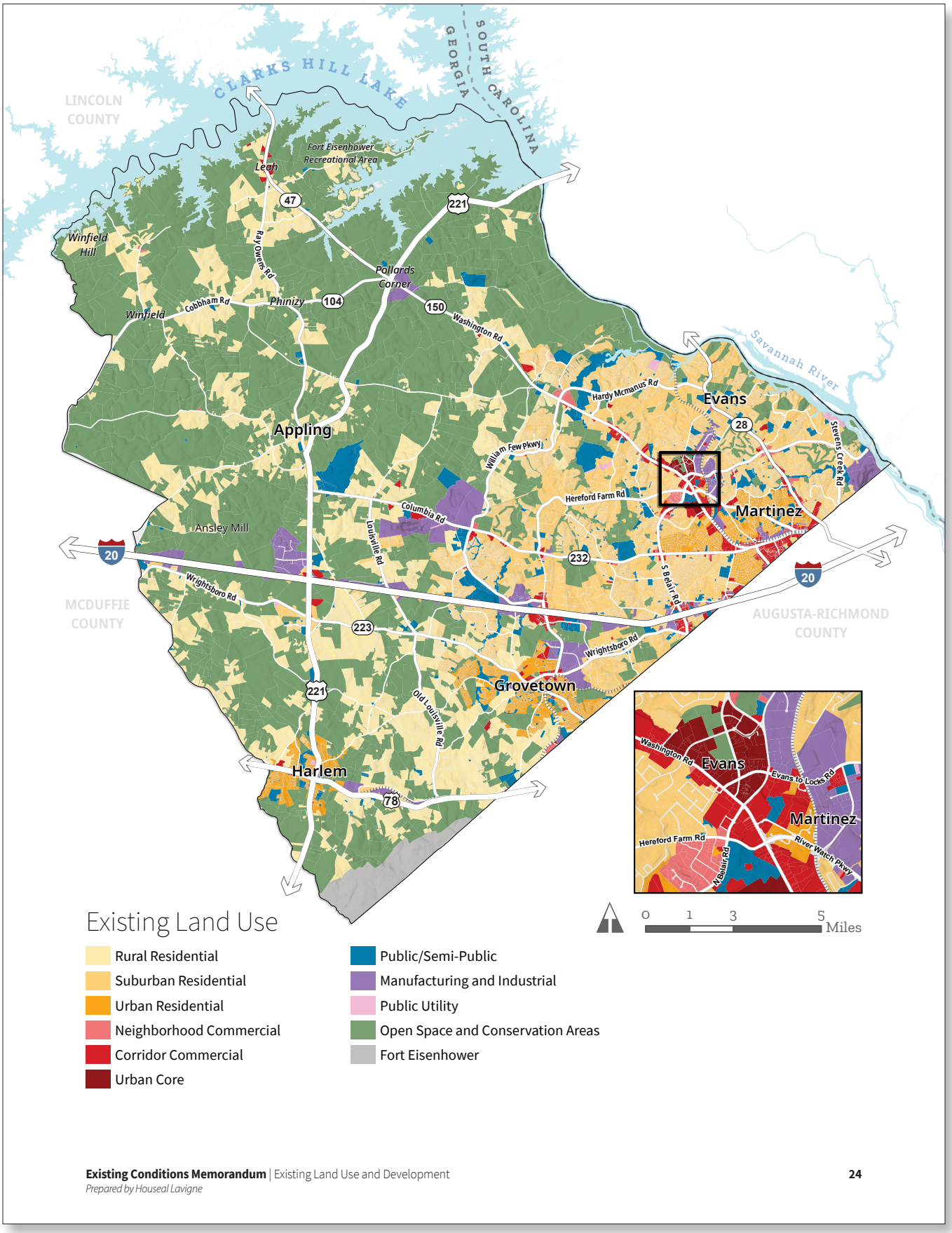
Public utility areas include utility systems for the transmission of gas, electricity, water, and sewer. Uses within this designation include facilities and infrastructure, such as the Columbia County Sewerage Plant, and related rights-of-way.

Open Space and Conservation Areas

Open space and conservation areas include a mix of parks, natural environments, and undeveloped lands preserved for recreation and conservation. These areas encompass both developed parks of varying sizes and functions, as well as large natural open space managed by federal, state, and county entities. Open space may be publicly or privately owned but is generally intended to remain undeveloped to support passive recreation and preserve ecological functions. Key features include floodplains, designated parkland, and County Greenspace properties. Notable open space assets include Mistletoe State Park, Clarks Hill Lake, Wildwood Park, and surrounding recreational areas such as the Fort Eisenhower Recreational Area. A significant portion of land around Clarks Hill Lake remains undeveloped under the stewardship of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, maintaining the County's natural character and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and conservation.

Fort Eisenhower

This designation encompasses the Fort Eisenhower campus located in the southwestern portion of Columbia County. It includes the core military installations as well as supporting land uses within the campus. In addition to its primary defense-related functions, the area contains other ancillary uses that contribute to the overall operation and community of the base.



Existing Conditions Memorandum | Existing Land Use and Development 24
Prepared by Houseal Lavigne

Zoning Districts

Zoning and development controls mold a community's character. They determine allowable land uses, as well as their density, scale, and layout. They also set standards for parking, signage, and other elements. By guiding growth in an aesthetically pleasing and appropriate way, zoning and development regulations serve as key instruments for putting the Comprehensive Plan into action. In Columbia County these regulations are codified in Chapter 90 of the County's Code of Ordinances. The current Code, which includes the zoning ordinance, was adopted on September 18, 2001, and has undergone various amendments over time to reflect the County's evolving development goals and priorities.

A-R: Apartment Residential

The A-R Apartment Residential district is designed to accommodate multifamily residential developments with a maximum density of 14 units per acre while ensuring ample off-street parking. At least 10 percent of the development site must be dedicated to usable open space, with a portion improved for active recreation, including play equipment for children. These amenities must be fully installed before 50 percent of building construction is complete. Note: While the A-R district remains in the zoning code, the County does not use this district, and it is no longer applied to new developments.

A-R10: Apartment Residential

The A-R10: Apartment Residential district is intended for multifamily residential developments with a maximum density of 10 units per acre, ensuring ample open space, recreational areas, and off-street parking. Developments must be served by public water and sewer and are encouraged to be located within Tier 1 and Tier 2 nodes of the growth management plan. At least 10 percent of the site must be dedicated to usable open space, with a portion improved for active recreation, including play equipment for children. The district supports strategic growth by promoting apartment developments within designated nodes aligned with the County's growth management plan. Note: While the A-R10 district remains in the zoning code, the County does not use this district, and it is no longer applied to new developments.

C-1: Neighborhood Commercial

The C-1: Neighborhood Commercial district is designed to provide decentralized areas for the retail sales of goods, and for personal services which provide the everyday necessities and conveniences of local residents. The C-1 district is for commercial use of land and structures which blend smoothly into the character of adjoining residential areas, and to exclude activities which generate perceptible light or noise, or attract traffic from outside the immediate neighborhood.

C-C: Community Commercial

The C-C: Community Commercial district is designed to accommodate individual retail and service businesses, as well as planned commercial centers that serve both local and regional shoppers, including the traveling public. These commercial uses require convenient access to major thoroughfares and are best suited for designated commercial growth corridors and community commercial centers identified in the growth management plan. The district supports strategic commercial development while enhancing accessibility and economic vitality.

C-2: General Commercial

The C-2: General Commercial district is designed to accommodate both highway-oriented businesses and planned commercial centers that serve community and regional shoppers, as well as the traveling public. This district is intended for commercial uses that require large sites with convenient access to major thoroughfares. C-2 zoning is best suited for major commercial centers identified in the growth management plan, supporting strategic economic growth and accessibility.

C-3: Heavy Commercial

The C-3: Heavy Commercial district is intended for businesses engaged in distribution, sales, service, or storage of goods and equipment that require large indoor or outdoor spaces, specialized handling equipment, or significant truck or rail access. These uses may generate limited emissions and noise, making them unsuitable for residential or general commercial areas. The C-3 district accommodates industries that support regional commerce while ensuring compatibility with surrounding land uses.

M-1: Light Industrial

The M-1: Light Industrial zoning district is intended for industrial uses in areas with access to major transportation facilities and adequate utilities but where traditional heavy industrial development is less suitable due to proximity to residential, recreational, or commercial areas. This district supports industries that are compatible with nearby residential properties by incorporating appropriate open spaces, landscaping, and parking areas to minimize impacts and maintain a balanced urban environment.

M-2: General Industrial

The M-2: General Industrial district is designed to provide areas for manufacturing, assembling, fabricating, warehousing and related activities. Such uses generate some emissions and have some adverse effects on surrounding properties, and are not compatible with primary commercial, institutional, and residential uses.

P-1: Professional

The P-1: Professional zoning district is designed to accommodate office and professional service uses that generate minimal traffic, noise, or other impacts on adjacent residential areas. This district serves as a buffer between higher-intensity commercial zones (C-1, C-C, and C-2) and residential neighborhoods, ensuring a smooth transition while maintaining compatibility with surrounding development.

PDD: Planned Development District

The Planned Development District (PDD) is designed to facilitate a smooth transition from single-family residential areas fronting arterial streets to low-intensity commercial and office development. This district is best suited for areas where residential properties with shallow front yards are adjacent to established commercial corridors. Development within a PDD must prioritize compatibility with existing single-family homes by addressing parking, hours of operation, signage, lighting, exterior design, and roof pitch to ensure a cohesive and balanced built environment.

PRD: Planned Residential Development

The Planned Residential Development (PRD) zoning district is intended to promote cohesive, flexible, and well-designed residential communities that enhance the character of the County. PRD developments must incorporate design features that ensure compatibility with surrounding areas and provide amenities beyond those typically found in conventional developments. To enhance community livability, at least 10 percent of the usable project area must be permanently allocated to open space.

PUD: Planned Unit Development

The Planned Unit Development (PUD) district encourages innovative land planning and site design that enhance community aesthetics, environmental sensitivity, energy efficiency, and quality of life. It allows flexibility in zoning and development standards, enabling a mix of residential, commercial, and professional uses with varied housing types, lot sizes, and densities. PUD districts promote efficient land use by integrating open space, active recreation, pedestrian and bike connections, and high-quality urban and traditional neighborhood design. Developments must be served by public water and sewer and be compatible with surrounding land uses. Approval is location-specific, recognizing that some concepts may be more suitable than others.

R-1: Single-Family Residential

The R-1: Single-Family Residential zoning district is intended for low-density suburban development on lots served by public water, with or without access to public sewer. It serves as a transition between the R-A and R-1A districts. The minimum lot size in the R-1 district is 30,000 square feet when public sewer is available and 40,000 square feet when sewer service is not provided.

R-1A: Single-Family Residential

The R-1A: Single-Family Residential zoning district is intended for low to medium-density single-family residential development. It serves as a transition between the R-1 and R-2 districts. All uses within the R-1A district must be served by public water and sewer, with a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet.

R-2: Single-Family Residential

The R-2: Single-Family Residential zoning district is intended for medium-density single-family residential development. All uses in the R-2 district must be served by public water and sewer, with a minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet. For properties rezoned to R-2 in 2012 or later, at least 10% of the property must be designated as common space.

R-3: Single-Family Residential

The R-3: Single-Family Residential zoning district is designed for high-density single-family residential development. All uses in the R-3 district must be served by public water and sewer, with a minimum lot size of 7,500 square feet. For properties rezoned to R-3 in 2012 or later, at least 10 percent of the property must be dedicated as common space.

R-3A: Single-Family Residential and Two-Family Residential

The R-3A: Single-Family and Two-Family Residential district is designed to provide for high-density single-family and two-family residential development. Uses in the R-3A district must be served by public water and sewer. The minimum lot size in the R-3A district for single-family development is 7,500 square feet, and for two-family development, the minimum lot size is 10,000 square feet. For property rezoned to R-3A in 2012 or at a later date, a minimum of 10 percent of the property shall be set aside as common space.

R-4: Recreational Residential

The R-4: Recreational Residential district is designed to provide for low-density residential development related to Clarks Hill Lake. The R-4 district is intended to permit only those residential and related recreational uses of land and structures, and to exclude all those activities not compatible with the character of recreational-residential areas. The minimum lot size in the R-4 district is 40,000 square feet, with the exception of legal lots of record existing at the time of the enactment of the zoning ordinance.

R-A: Residential Agricultural

The R-A: Residential-Agricultural district is designed to provide for rural farm or very low density, non-suburban development in areas where intensive land development is not desired due to limited ability to provide public services and facilities. The minimum lot size in the R-A district is 2½ acres, with the exception of legal lots existing at the time of the enactment of the zoning ordinance.

S-1: Special District

The S-1: Special District is intended to provide for the proper placement of private, semiprivate, and public uses which require special consideration because of their character, physical setting, size, and/or relation to surrounding land uses.

T-R: Townhouse Residential

The T-R: Townhouse Residential district is designed to provide for the development of townhouse residential units at a density not greater than eight units per acre. Uses in the T-R district must be served by public water and sewer. It is intended that the T-R district serves as a transition between single-family detached houses and existing commercial and apartment zoning districts, or areas designated for a commercial and apartment development in the growth management plan. A minimum of 10 percent of the site approved for a development under the T-R district shall be set aside as open space, a portion of which shall be improved with active recreation facilities, including play equipment suitable for children.

Overlay Districts

Overlay Districts in Columbia County provide enhanced protections for high-visibility areas (e.g., key corridors, historic sites, or scenic gateways) by imposing strict design standards. These requirements are applied in addition to the requirements of the underlying zoning. These rules apply to non-residential properties within the Overlay district.

Evans Town Center Overlay District (ETCOD)

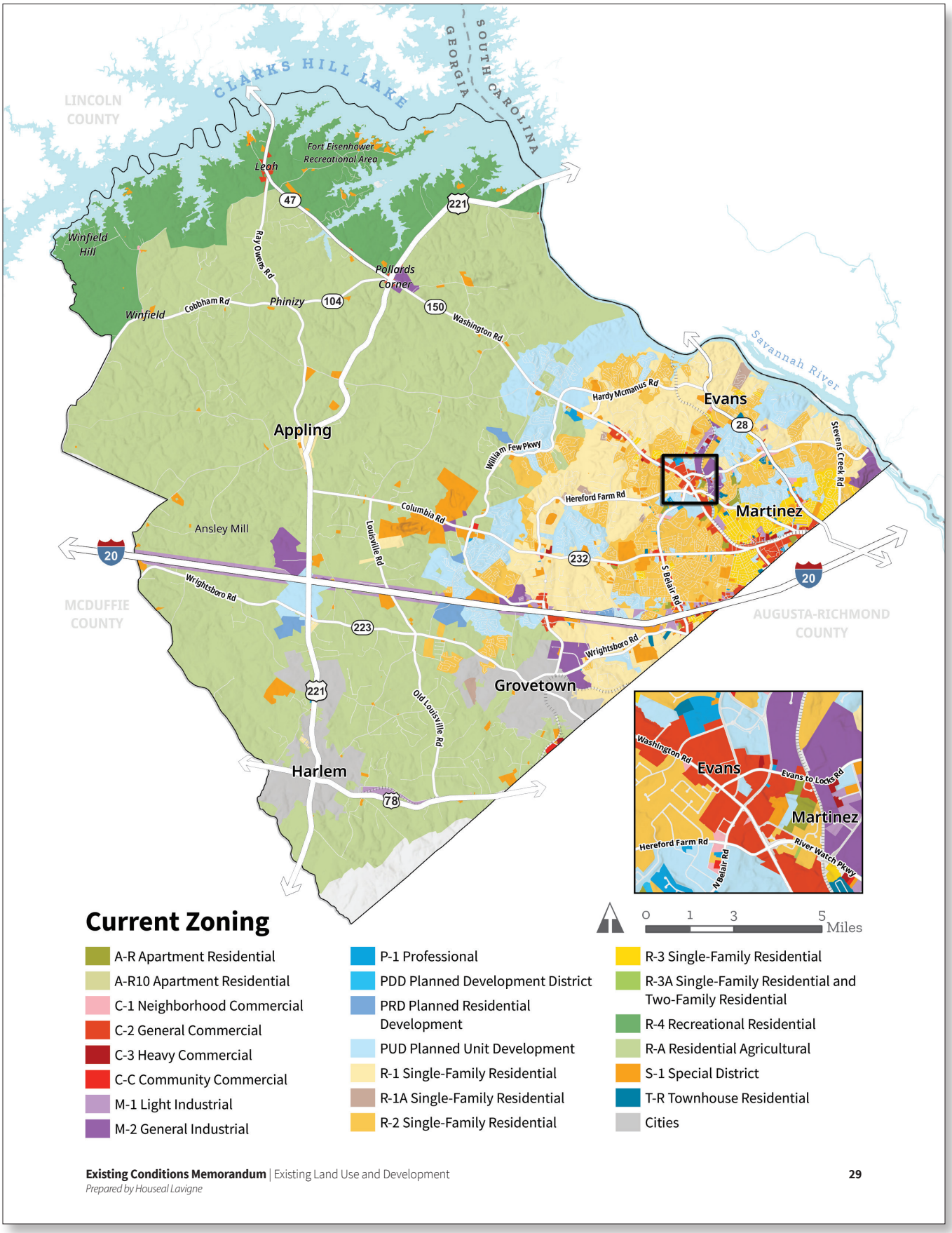
The Evans Town Center Overlay District (ETCOD) is designed to encourage the creation of a town center. This district fosters a unique identity by connecting public, medical, retail, and service uses. It promotes pedestrian activity, opportunities to diversify land uses, and efficient vehicle access. Unified by urban design elements like lighting, coordinated signage, landscaping, and architectural compatibility, the ETCOD ensures a cohesive and accessible environment.

Node Protection Overlay Districts (NPOD)

The Node Protection Overlay Districts (NPOD) are created at key intersections to support planned growth while maintaining a distinct identity. These districts encourage compatible land uses and architecture that reflect regional styles. Designed for pedestrian and bicycle accessibility, NPODs integrate urban design elements and concentrate commercial activity in strategic areas, maximizing the use of existing infrastructure and reducing sprawl.

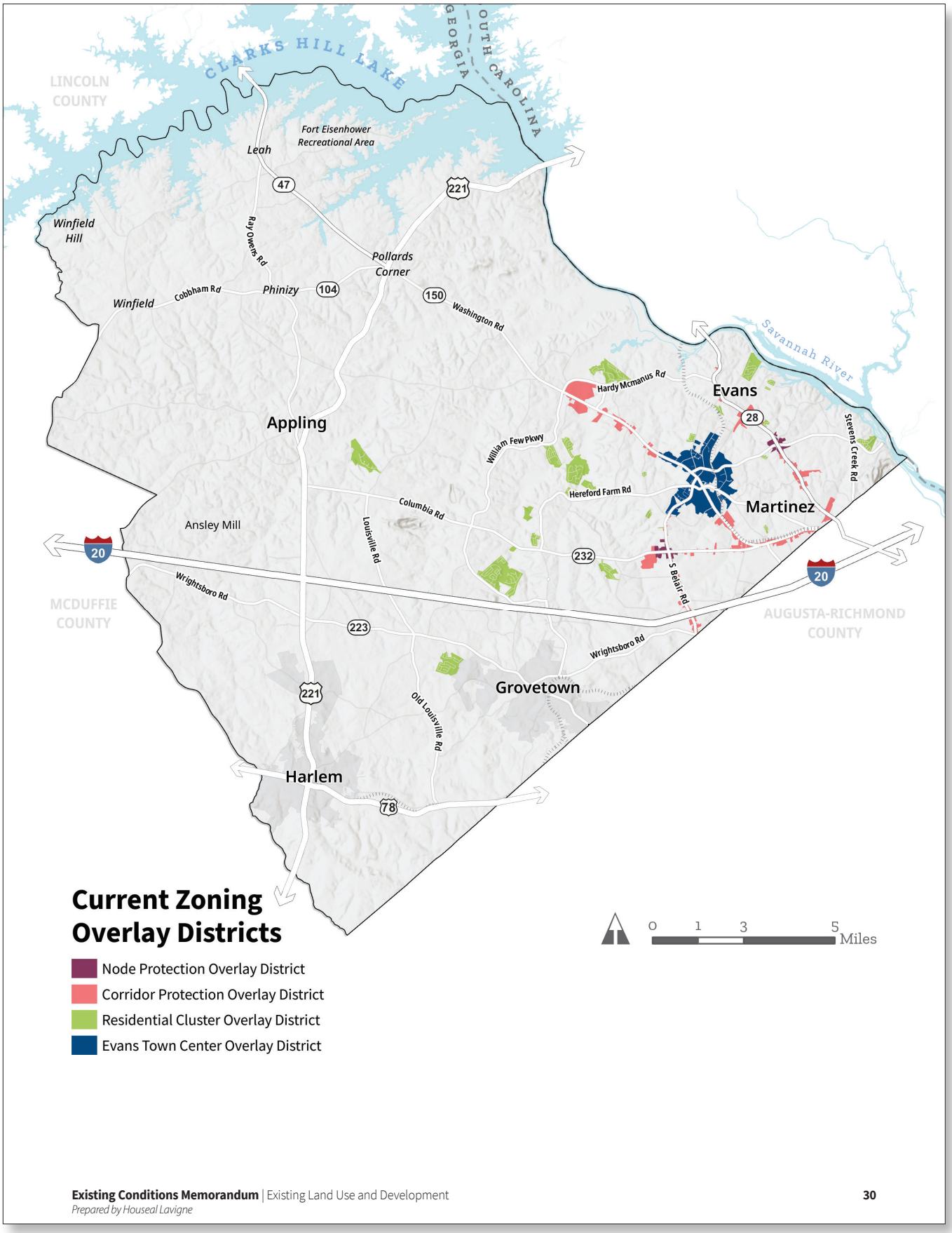
Corridor Protection Overlay Districts (CPOD)

The Corridor Protection Overlay Districts (CPOD) are established along major arterial roads to enhance aesthetics and public safety. These districts enforce standards for screening, landscaping, and visual design to create a distinct character and also provide increased public safety while reducing visual clutter for motorists. Like other overlay districts, CPODs maintain cohesion through shared urban design elements.



Current Zoning

- A-R Apartment Residential
- A-R10 Apartment Residential
- C-1 Neighborhood Commercial
- C-2 General Commercial
- C-3 Heavy Commercial
- C-C Community Commercial
- M-1 Light Industrial
- M-2 General Industrial
- P-1 Professional
- PDD Planned Development District
- PRD Planned Residential Development
- PUD Planned Unit Development
- R-1 Single-Family Residential
- R-1A Single-Family Residential
- R-2 Single-Family Residential
- R-3 Single-Family Residential
- R-3A Single-Family Residential and Two-Family Residential
- R-4 Recreational Residential
- R-A Residential Agricultural
- S-1 Special District
- T-R Townhouse Residential
- Cities


CLARKS HILL LAKE
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MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
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Wrightsboro Rd
Grovetown
221
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
78
Current Zoning Overlay Districts
Node Protection Overlay District
Corridor Protection Overlay District
Residential Cluster Overlay District
Evans Town Center Overlay District
0 1 3 5 Miles

Historic Preservation Commission

Columbia County Historical Society

The Columbia County Historical Society was founded in 1975 to promote and preserve the rich cultural history of the County. Its mission is to capture and preserve historically significant history while nurturing a sense of pride in the County's rich and distinctive heritage. Through various initiatives and events, they engage the community in recognizing and valuing the region's rich past.

Columbia County Historic Property Preservation Advisory Committee

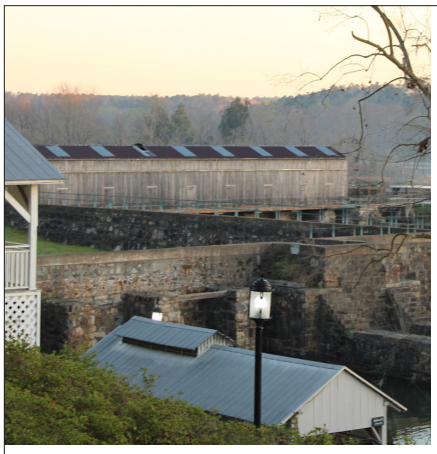
The Columbia County Historic Property Preservation Advisory Committee (HHPAC) advises County leaders, raises awareness of the County's history, makes recommendations about historic properties and other preservation issues, and collects and preserves historic documents and artifacts. Currently, no specific districts or sites are locally designated by the HHPAC; however, several properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, emphasizing the County's commitment to historical preservation.

Harlem Historic Preservation Commission

The Harlem Historic Preservation Commission protects and preserves Harlem's historic resources for current and future generations. This five-member board reviews changes to properties within Harlem's three historic districts—Central, Sanders, and Sawdust—and issues Certificates of Appropriateness for exterior modifications. The Commission also recommends new historic designations and ensures changes align with the Harlem Historic District Residential and Downtown Design Guidelines. While Harlem is incorporated, its Historic Preservation Commission contributes to the County's commitment to the preservation of historic sites and landmarks.

Historic Districts & Sites:
Harlem has three local historic districts, established in 2008, which include 185 designated properties:

- **Central District:** Covers historic downtown Harlem, Milledgeville Road, and surrounding historic streets.
- **Sanders District:** Includes Harlem Cemetery, City Park, and the historic Sanders House.
- **Sawdust District:** Features Mount Tabor Baptist Church and the Sawdust Community Store.





Historic Districts and Sites

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) historical sites and districts within the County include the following:

Augusta Canal and Industrial District: The Augusta Canal, a National Historic Landmark, was built along the west bank of the Savannah River in 1845 to harness waterpower for Augusta's textile mills. The five-mile canal system includes the Augusta Canal Trail, offering guided tours and educational programs on 19th-century industrial engineering and its role in the Southern textile industry. This National Heritage Area begins at the Headgates located in Savannah Rapids Park, situated in Columbia County. This location marks the start of the canal, which then extends into Augusta, where it historically powered mills and other industries with its hydropower capabilities.

Columbia County Courthouse: Located in Appling, the Columbia County Courthouse was listed on September 18, 1980 and is still used today. It is the oldest courthouse used in the State. Constructed in the early 19th century, it serves as a functional government center while preserving its historical architecture. The courthouse reflects Columbia County's administrative legacy and community identity.

Kiokee Baptist Church: Founded in 1772 in Appling, Kiokee Bapitist Church is Georgia's oldest Baptist congregation. The church's first structure, originally used as a meetinghouse, predates the State's ratification of the U.S. Constitution. The church's historic sanctuary and cemetery stand as testaments to early American religious life and the region's colonial-era settlement patterns.

Stallings Island: A 16-acre archaeological preserve on the Savannah River, Stallings Island is a National Historic Landmark tied to the Stallings Culture (5,000–3,500 years ago). Protected by the Archaeological Conservancy, the site is known for its shell middens, and as the site of North America's oldest documented pottery.

Lock Keepers Cottage: The Lock Keepers Cottage, located just below the Headgates of the Augusta Canal, was built around 1890 to house one of the canal's lock keepers. Currently, this building houses the Columbia County Visitors Center, which provides information about local attractions.

Land Use and Development Key Takeaways

Balancing Anticipated Growth and Rural Character: During outreach and engagement residents mentioned how much they value Columbia County's homesteads, estate-style homes, and natural features such as Clarks Hill Lake, tree cover, and open space. Balancing this appreciation for rural character with the realities of future growth will be a key challenge for the County. Based on population projections, the County is expected to grow by an additional 30,000 people in the next 30 years. The Comprehensive Plan can help guide growth in a way that preserves open space and rural character while accommodating future housing needs.

Traffic Congestion: During community outreach, community members expressed their concern regarding traffic congestion along the County's arterial roads. Columbia County has experienced significant population growth over the past decade. However, limited connectivity among local and collector roads has placed an increasing burden on the County's arterial network. In response, Columbia County has initiated several major transportation projects, including the expansion of State Route 28, the widening of Hereford Farm Road, and interchange improvements at I-20 and U.S. Route 221.

Homestead Housing Affordability: In workshops and interviews, community members expressed concern about housing affordability in Columbia County. In November 2024, Georgia voters approved a constitutional amendment to help address this issue by capping annual increases in the assessed value of owner-occupied homes to the rate of inflation, offering potential relief from steep property tax hikes. After four public hearings, the County voted to opt out of the amendment; however, residents have voiced continued support for exploring alternative strategies to reduce property taxes. Through the planning process, the Plan can provide guidance on how local policies and land use strategies can support housing affordability and help residents remain in their homes.

Neighborhood Connectivity: Many neighborhoods in Columbia County lack connectivity to one another, with limited pathways for residents to travel between them. A lack of sidewalks compounds this issue, making it difficult to walk between neighborhoods or access nearby destinations. The Plan can address these challenges by promoting a more connected network of sidewalks, greenways, and trails that improve walkability, support safe routes to schools, and link neighborhoods together.

Lack of a Cohesive Identity: A key concern expressed by both residents and County staff during outreach and engagement is that the County lacks a cohesive identity. Many feel that areas around the County have distinct identities. Evans, for example, is undergoing significant development and growth, creating a more modern and urban atmosphere, while the neighborhoods in the rural northwest are characterized by homestead-style homes on large lots. In contrast, Harlem and Appling still have their historic charm, reflecting the County's older heritage. This variety in character across regions highlights the need for a unified vision that can bring these diverse areas together while respecting their unique qualities.

SECTION 6

TRANSPORTATION

A balanced, efficient, and well-connected transportation system provides access to goods, services, community resources, and supports land use development through a variety of modes. This section provides an overview of Columbia County's roadways, freight network, pedestrian facilities, and bicycle facilities.

Roadway Network

The County's roadway network consists of a variety of street types with specific functions and various degrees of mobility for different transportation modes. A network of major arterials provides connections to I-20, South Carolina, other neighboring counties, and local destinations. Local streets give access to neighborhoods, commercial areas, and recreation.

Roadway Jurisdiction

Ownership and maintenance of the County's roadway network are split among several authorities. Most major arterials, such as I-20, U.S. Highway 221, State Route 223, State Route 47, and State Route 232, are managed by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). Columbia County's Engineering Services Division manages most other roads in the County, including Hereford Farm Road, River Watch Parkway, Evans to Lock Road, Louisville Road, and White Oak Road. The cities of Harlem and Grovetown manage several streets within their municipal boundaries. These include North Hicks Street, East Trippe Street, Dorn Street, and Katherine Street.

Functional Classifications

Roadways have two basic functions – to provide mobility and to provide land access. For planning and design purposes, roadways are classified in a hierarchical structure by function to define their role in the transportation system and their eligibility for certain types of federal transportation funds. Four general functional classifications are typically used, including freeways, arterials, collectors, and local roads.

Arterials and collectors are commonly subdivided into major and minor designations based on location, service function, and design features (e.g., right-of-way, road capacity, continuity within the system, speed limits, parking controls, traffic signal spacing, etc.). Each roadway classification serves as a collecting/distributing facility for the next higher classification in the system. The following summarizes the roadway functional classification system serving Columbia County, as defined by GDOT, and describes these thoroughfares based on their context and design features.

Interstates

Interstates provide the highest degree of mobility, with access limited to grade-separated interchanges to preserve capacity for high volumes of traffic and high travel speeds. I-20 runs east/west through the southern portion of the County. It connects to local streets via intersections with U.S. Highway 221, State Route 388, State Route 383, and Wheeler Road/Flowing Wheels Road.

Principal Arterials

Principal arterials provide a high degree of mobility and function as the primary travel routes through urban areas. These roadways are continuous and serve the broader region, connecting the freeway system with the local system of minor arterials and collector roads, as well as the major activity centers within a community. Principal arterials are higher-capacity roadways that carry high volumes of traffic and require more stringent access controls and traffic signal spacing.

The County has seven principal arterials: U.S. Highway 78, East Robinson Avenue, Wrightsboro Road, State Route 388 (south of I-20), North Belair Road/South Belair Road/Jimmy Dyes Parkway, Washington Road, River Watch Parkway, and Bobby Jones Expressway.

Minor Arterials

Minor arterials augment the major arterials by accommodating somewhat shorter trips to and from residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, employment centers, and recreational facilities at the community level. As such, operating speeds and road capacity may be less than that of the major arterials, with less stringent controls on property access.

The County's minor arterials include U.S. Highway 221, State Route 47/State Route 104/Washington Road, State Route 232, and State Route 28.

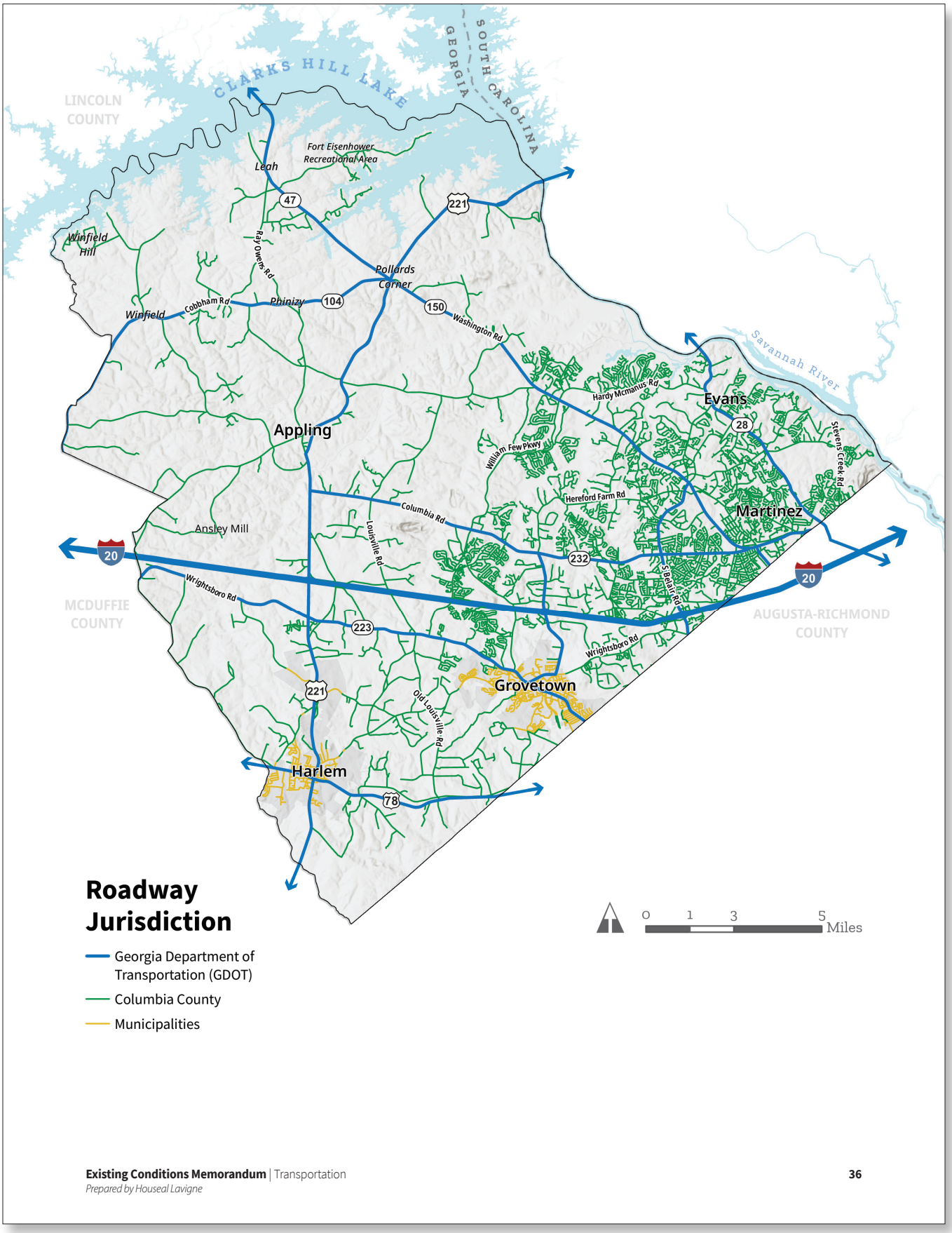
Collectors

The collector system is designed to support the arterial network. Collector roads consist of medium-capacity, medium-volume roads that have limited continuity and serve to distribute traffic between the higher-level arterials and the lower-level local roads. Collectors typically operate at lower speeds than arterials and provide some direct land access but to a more limited degree than local roads.

The County's collectors include Ray Owens Road, Cobbham Road, Louisville Road, Harlem Grovetown Road, and Evans to Locks Road.

Local Roads

Local roads provide direct access to private property and connect with the arterial and collector roads. Trip lengths on local roads are typically short and volumes and speeds are typically low. Most roadways in the County are classified as local roads and are generally two-lane roadways with parking permitted on one or both sides. Examples of local roads include Evans Town Center Boulevard, Gibbs Road, Ridge Road, and Tubman Road.



Existing Conditions Memorandum | Transportation
Prepared by Houseal Lavigne

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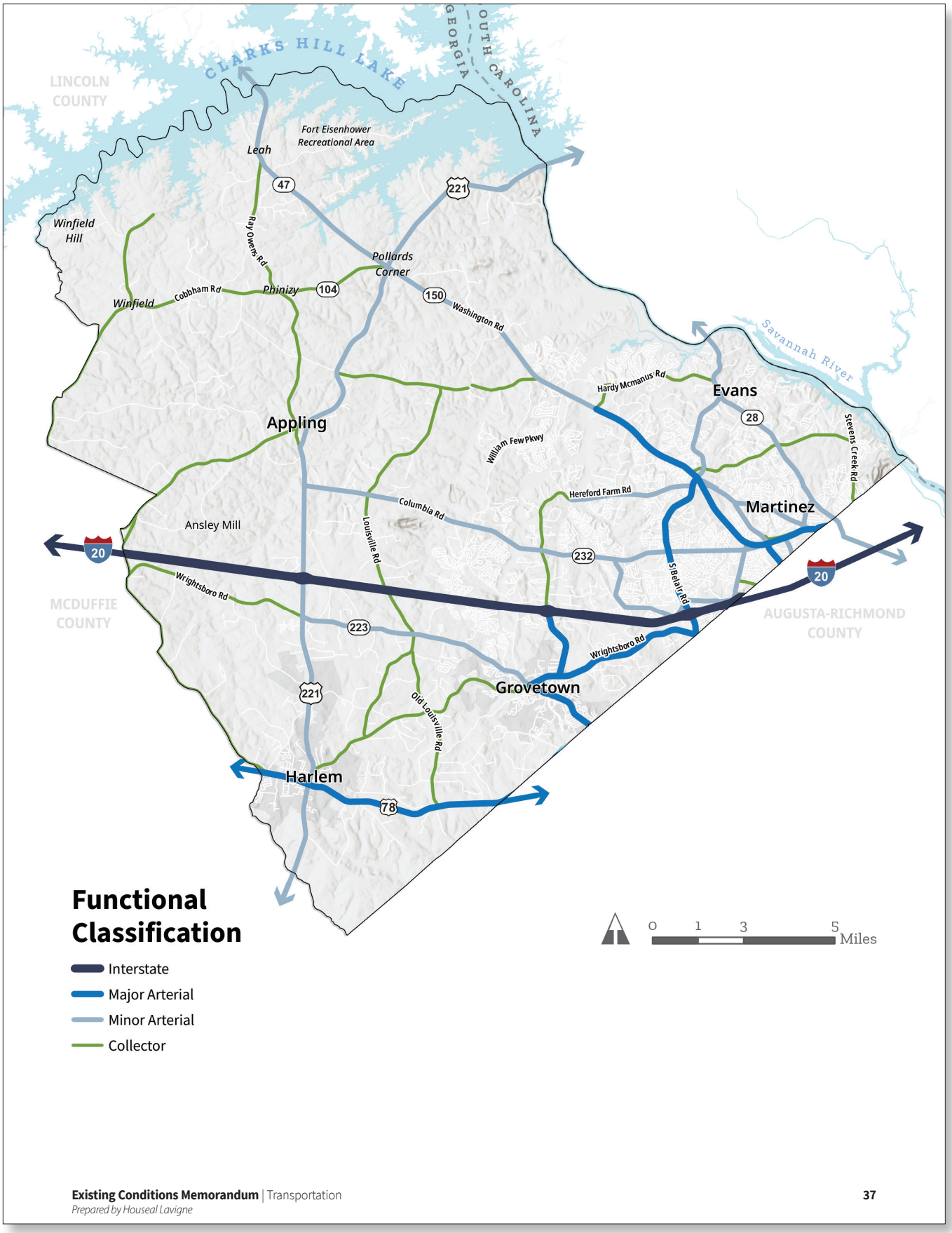
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Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
223
Wrightsboro Rd
Grovetown
221
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
78
Functional Classification
Interstate
Major Arterial
Minor Arterial
Collector
0 1 3 5 Miles

Daily Traffic

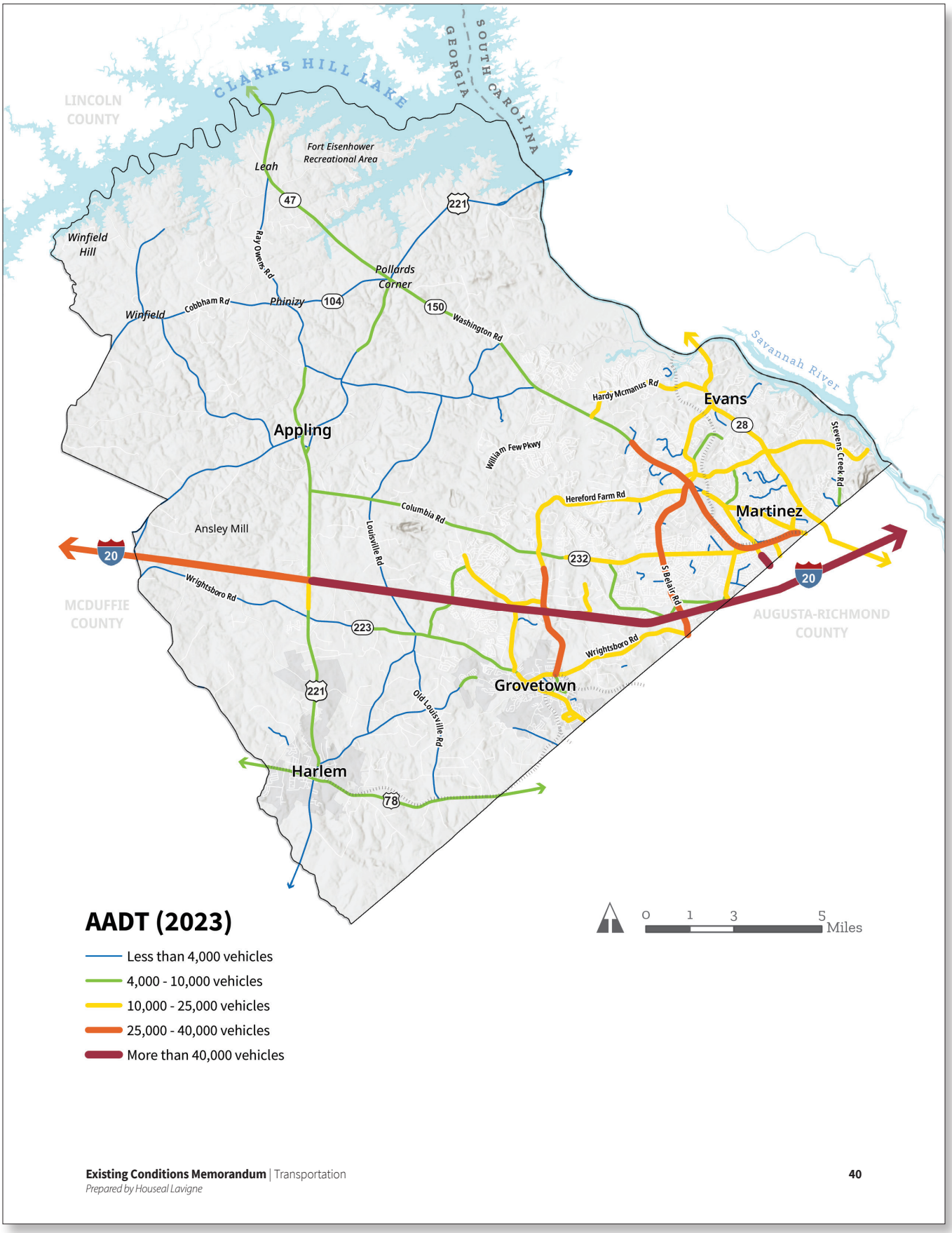
GDOT records annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) through the Georgia Traffic Monitoring Program. As of 2023, GDOT operates 143 collection points within the County. These range from permanent Continuous Count Stations (CCSs) to temporary installations. The average daily traffic of select roads in the County in 2023 are provided in the following table and shown on the following map.

Roadways which experience the largest amount of daily traffic are those operated by GDOT. I-20 carries the highest average traffic volume the highest average traffic, between 39,800 – 79,900 vehicles per day. Major arterials saw between 5,840 vehicles per day (U.S. Highway 78) and 40,400 vehicles per day (State Route 232). Of the roadways managed by the County, River Watch Parkway saw the most traffic, with 15,700 – 17,300 vehicles per day.

Roadway Functional Classification, Jurisdiction and Traffic Volume

The table provides a listing of the freeways, arterials, and collector roads along with the jurisdictional ownership and AADT.

Functional Classification	Roadway	Jurisdiction	Annual Average Daily Traffic
Interstate	I-20	GDOT	39,800 - 79,900
Major Arterials	US 78	GDOT	5,840 - 9,540
	GA 104	GDOT	21,800 - 36,000
	GA 223	GDOT	4,300 - 14,400
	GA 232	GDOT	40,400
	GA 338	GDOT	19,600 - 28,600
	GA 383	GDOT	22,300 - 38,500
	Wrightsboro Road	Columbia County/City of Grovetown	12,900 - 15,400
Minor Arterials	US 221	GDOT	1,460 - 11,900
	GA 28	GDOT	13,800 - 22,900
	GA 47/GA 104	GDOT	5,930 - 9,410
	GA 223	GDOT	4,790 - 17,300
	GA 232	GDOT	8,150 - 18,400
	Baston Road	Columbia County	11,600
	Davis Road	Columbia County	15,700
	Flowing Wells Road	Columbia County	14,300
	Hereford Farm Road	Columbia County	14,400
	North Belair Road	Columbia County	13,000
	Old Evans Road	Columbia County	13,400
	River Watch Parkway	Columbia County	15,700 - 17,300
	South Old Belair Road	Columbia County	5,340
	Wheeler Road	Columbia County	7,230
Collectors	GA 150	GDOT	1,510 - 1,900
	GA 223	GDOT	3,890
	GA 338	GDOT	17,800
	GA 874	Columbia County/ City of Harlem/City of Grovetown	2,800 - 10,500
	Evans to Locks Road	Columbia County	7,460 - 15,400
	Hardy McManus Road	Columbia County	10,800
	Hereford Farm Road	Columbia County	14,400
	Louisville Road	Columbia County	1,560 - 2,710
	Martinez Boulevard	Columbia County	2,790
	Mistletoe Road	Columbia County	970
	Old Louisville Road	Columbia County	1,650
	Old Washington Road	Columbia County	3,400
	Ray Owens Road	Columbia County	2,530 - 4,350
	Tubman Road	Columbia County	1,090
	White Oak Road	Columbia County	890 - 1,810
	White Oak Campground Road	Columbia County	1,310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Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
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AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
Wrightsboro Rd
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Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
78
AADT (2023)
Less than 4,000 vehicles
4,000 - 10,000 vehicles
10,000 - 25,000 vehicles
25,000 - 40,000 vehicles
More than 40,000 vehicles
0 1 3 5 Miles

Truck Routes

Truck routes are typically roadways that provide continuous regional travel and/or are designed to support heavy commercial traffic while avoiding residential areas. Primary truck routes are identified by GDOT as designated state freight network corridors, which in Columbia County is just I-20. GDOT also established a network of oversized truck routes, which specifies roadways with the capacity to support oversized trucks. This network includes I-20, U.S. Highway 221, State Route 47, and State Route 104.

Roadway Network Continuity

In the more populated eastern half of the County, the primary functions of the roadway network are to manage traffic exiting Interstate 20, traffic moving to and from Augusta, and traffic visiting local businesses. Most local roads connect to a larger collector or arterial. In the western half of the County, with fewer roads, the network's primary function is to provide local connectivity and access to distant destinations. Overall, the roadway network provides good local accessibility and regional connectivity.

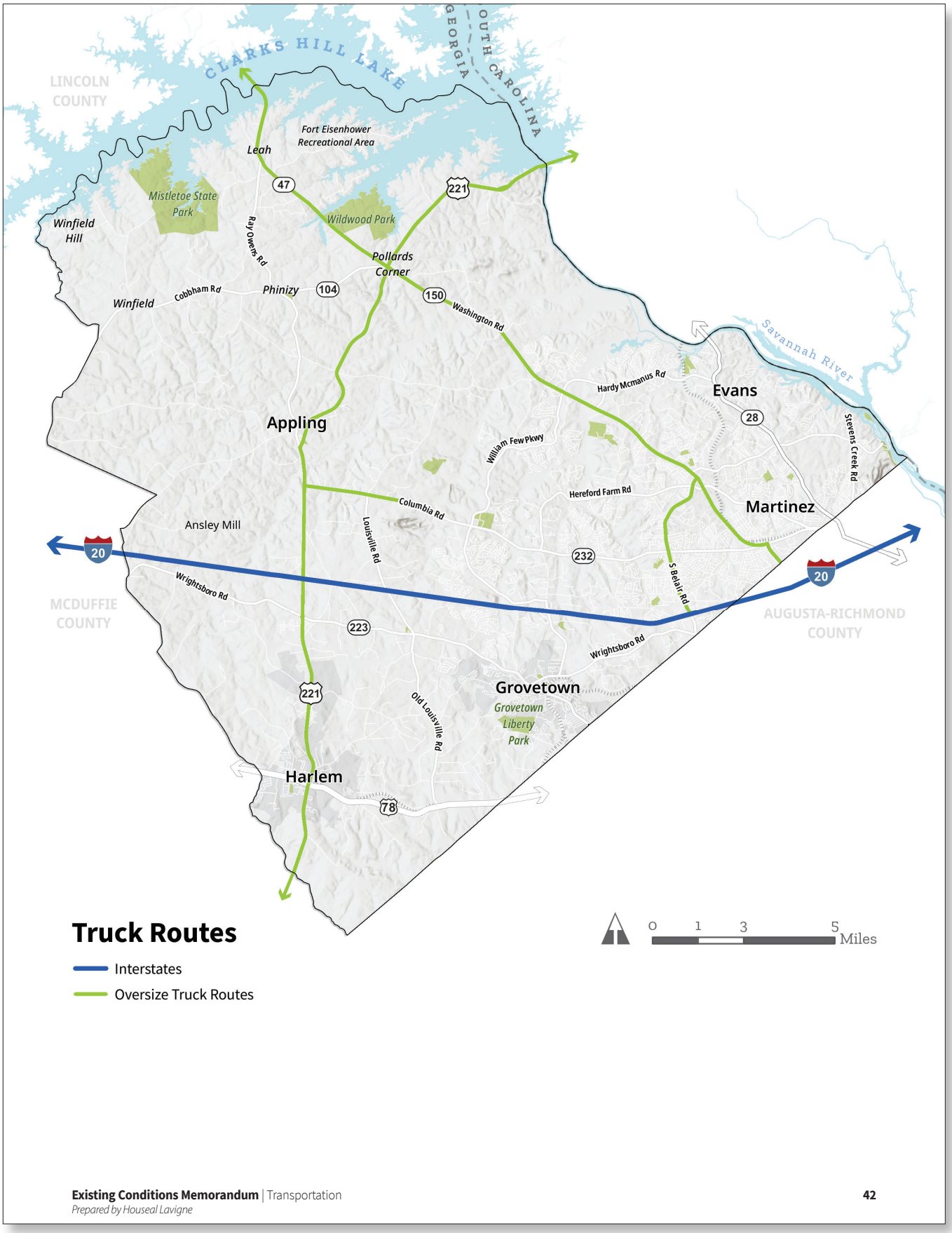
Options for crossing Clarks Hill Lake or the Savannah River are limited. The only option for crossing the lake is State Route 47/Washington Road. Within the County, the only direct options for crossing the Savannah River are U.S. Highway 221 and State Route 28. Although Interstate 20 crosses the Savannah River just outside the county limits, it is widely used and likely serves as the primary crossing point for regional traffic between Columbia County and South Carolina.

Electric Vehicle Services

There are currently 12 electric vehicle charging stations in the County, with a mix of private and public locations. Eight of them are Level 2 chargers and four are DC fast chargers. Several chargers are located along Interstate 20 and State Route 104. Additionally, the County is actively expanding EV infrastructure, including publicly accessible chargers at government buildings, such as those outside Building B, with approximately 25 more planned as part of a County-identified project. Columbia County contains nearly one-third of all EV chargers in the Augusta metro area.

Planned Roadway Improvements

Given the County's rapid population growth, roadway improvement will be necessary to accommodate the increased number of vehicles anticipated on the road. Improvements that are currently under construction include road widening projects on Flowing Wells Road, Lewiston Road, U.S. Highway 28/Furys Ferry Road, Hardy McManus Road, Hereford Farm Road, and Horizon South Parkway. Additional improvement projects, identified in the County's 2023-2028 Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) project list, include improvements to North Belair Road and roadways within Evans Town Center, intersection improvements at Ray Owens Road and White Oak Road, and new roadway connections from Chamblin Road to Horizon South Parkway.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Old Louisville Rd
Grovetown
Grovetown Liberty Park
Harlem
78
Truck Routes
Interstates
Oversize Truck Routes
0 1 3 5 Miles

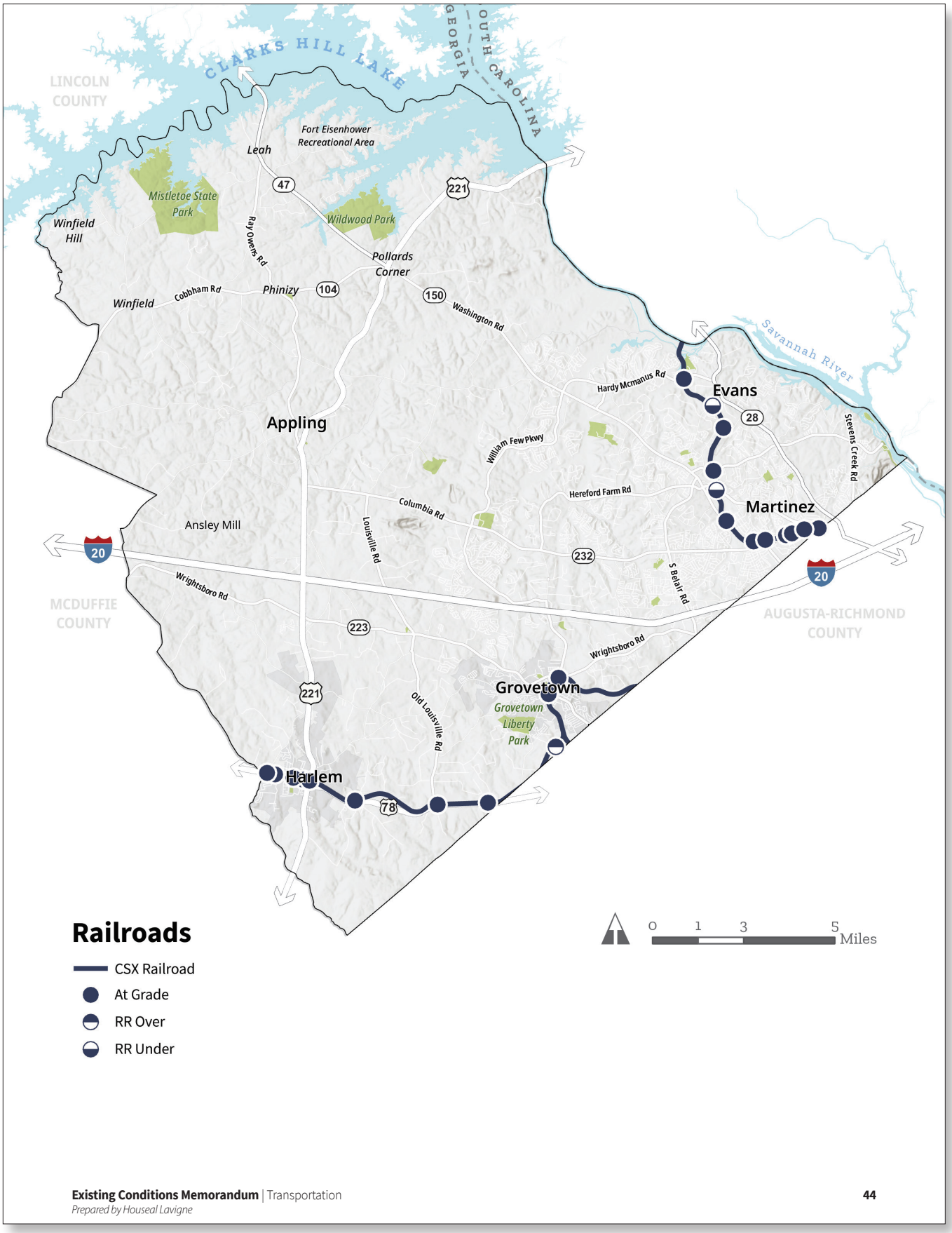
Rail

Two railroad lines pass through the southern and eastern portions of the County. The southern line runs parallel to U.S. Highway 78 and passes through Harlem and Grovetown. The eastern line crosses the Savannah River near State Route 28 and runs south through Evans and Martinez along State Route 104/Washington Road. Historically, the Georgia Railroad and Banking Company operated the *Georgia Cannonball* passenger train between Atlanta and Augusta, with stops in Harlem and Grovetown. The last passenger train ran in 1983.

Today, both railroad lines are owned and operated by CSX. The tracks and other rail infrastructure can support CSX's maximum allowable gross weight of 286,000 lbs. Five spur lines connect to the eastern main line, servicing industrial uses along the line. According to the Federal Railroad Administration, the northern line sees an average of one through train each night (6 pm to 6 am) and two local switching trains. The southern line sees an average of one through train each day (6 am to 6 pm). There are 24 crossing points between the two lines and the County's roadways; 21 of these crossings are at grade, two of these crossings have a railroad underpass, and one crossing has a railroad overpass.

Public Transportation

Public transit within the County is provided by Columbia County Public Transit and Augusta Transit. Columbia County Public Transit provides "curb to curb" services for all County residents. It services the entire County and the Medical District in Augusta-Richmond County. Augusta Transit's Green Line, originating from Augusta Transit's Broad Street Transit Facility, has a single stop within the County on Davis Road.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Railroads
CSX Railroad
At Grade
RR Over
RR Under
0 1 3 5 Miles

Pedestrian and Bicycle Network

Communities strive to develop a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian system to promote mobility by non-auto means and to encourage an active, healthy lifestyle. The County's sidewalk network is primarily concentrated in its eastern section, around Evans, Martinez, and in newer residential subdivisions. The network is largely disconnected, with many individual subdivisions containing sidewalks on their interior streets, but none that connect to other subdivisions or distant destinations in the County. There are also multi-use trails, such as the Euchee Creek Trail and the pathway traveling alongside Evans to Locks Road, that offer recreational opportunities and connect to other parks and trails.

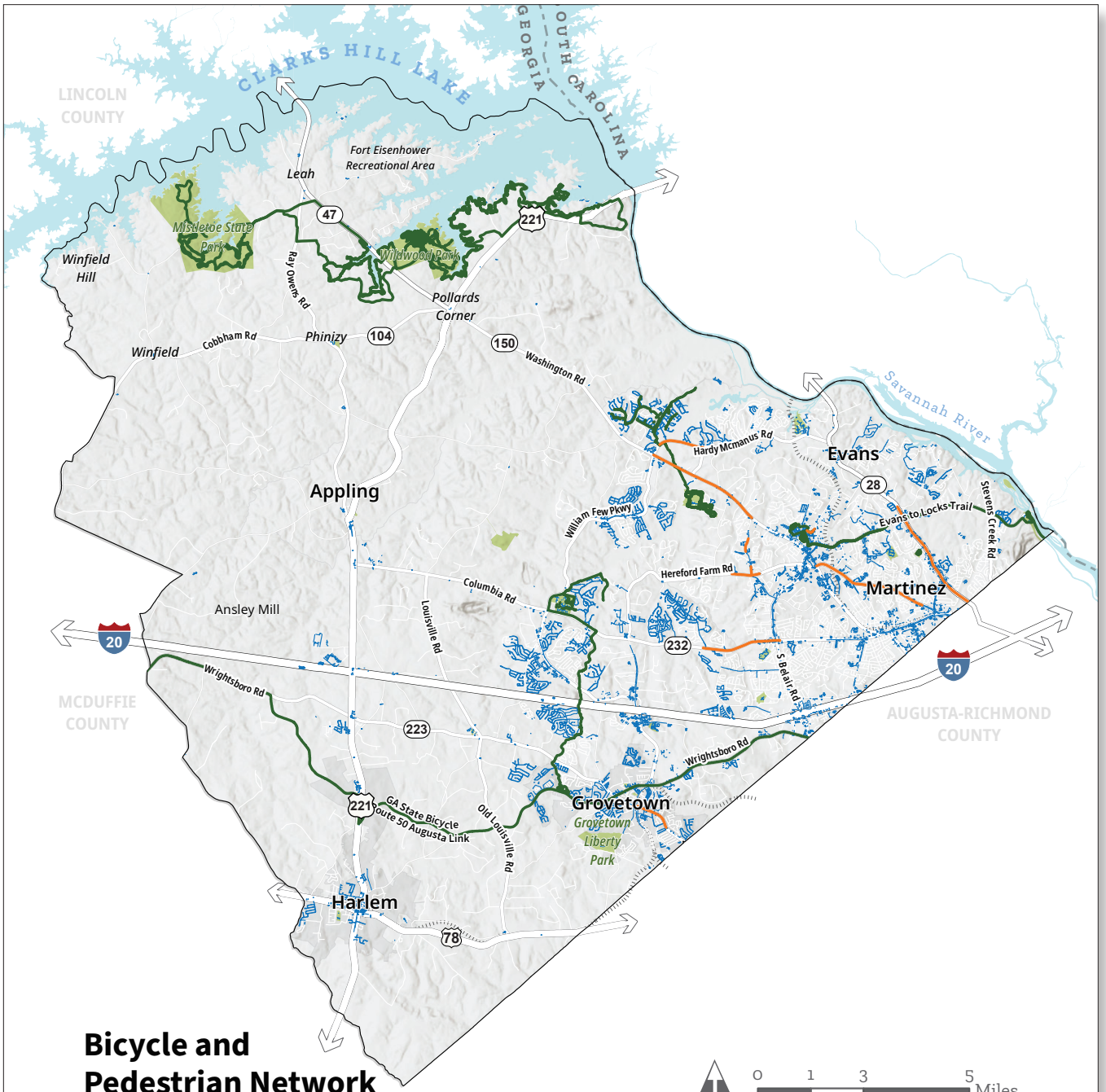
The County's bicycle network currently consists of on-street bike lanes, such as those on River Watch Parkway and U.S. Highway 28; multi-use side paths, such as the one on Evans to Locks Road; and multi-use trails, such as Euchee Creek Trail. The bicycle network is disconnected, with several on-street bikeways appearing and disappearing along the same street. Only a single bikeway, on U.S. Highway 28, connects to another bikeway – the pathway along Evans to Locks Road.

Planned Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements

Improvements to the pedestrian and bicycle networks occur piecemeal as additions to roadway improvement projects. For example, the road widening projects on Flowing Wells Road, U.S. Highway 28, Hardy McManus Road, Hereford Farm Road, and Horizon South Parkway include new sidewalks on one or both sides of the road. These improvements may also come with on-street bike facilities, but this is not specified in their respective plans. The Euchee Creek Trail/Greenway, which provides space for both pedestrians and bicyclists, is planned to extend from Grovetown to the Augusta Canal as land becomes available for construction.

Complete Streets

Complete streets were highlighted within the *ARTS 2050 Metropolitan Plan Update* as streets designed to enable safe access for all road users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and drivers of all ages and abilities. The Plan notes that GDOT incorporated complete street design standards into its design manual in 2019. This is evident in recently improved County roadways, which provide facilities for both pedestrians and bicyclists. The Plan also highlights areas within the County that have areas of high active transportation demand, hotspots for crashes involving pedestrians/bicycles, and buffers around schools that would be well served by complete streets design.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AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
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Wrightsboro Rd
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GA State Bicycle Route 50 Augusta Link
Old Louisville Rd
Grovetown
Grovetown Liberty Park
Harlem
78
Bicycle and Pedestrian Network
Bike Lanes
Trails
Sidewalks
0 1 3 5 Miles

Travel Patterns and Behavior

The table below shows the primary mode of travel for Columbia County workers, compared to that of the rest of the August-Richmond County metropolitan statistical area (MSA). Nearly 75% of the County's working residents are employed outside the County, and an understanding of their destination and travel mode is important for the County's future capacity improvements, construction, and maintenance.

Household Auto Ownership and Vehicle Miles Traveled

More than 85% of Columbia County households have access to two or more vehicles. This is a higher proportion than the rest of the MSA. This higher rate of vehicle ownership corresponds to the County's higher average vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per household of 22,228 (compared to the MSA's 21,735 miles).

Average Annual Vehicle Miles Traveled per Household	
Columbia County	Augusta-Richmond County MSA
22,228	21,735

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology H+T Affordability Index, 2023

Vehicles Available	Columbia County	Augusta-Richmond MSA
0	1.8%	2.8%
1	12.6%	19.8%
2	41.9%	37.8%
3+	43.6%	39.6%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Survey

Spending on Transportation

The affordability of a community can be measured by the average percentage of household income devoted to housing and transportation costs. The Center for Neighborhood Technology H+T Affordability Index considers 45% or household income spent on housing and transportation costs as affordable. A typical household in Columbia County earning the region's median income ($96,122) would spend 37% of their household income on the combined costs of housing and transportation. This makes the County comparatively more affordable to the rest of the MSA.

Costs	Columbia County	Augusta-Richmond MSA
Housing Cost	20%	22%
Transportation Cost	17%	24%
Housing and Transportation Costs	37%	46%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimate, Center for Neighborhood Technology H+T Affordability Index, 2023

Commuter Travel Time

Most commuters either work within Columbia County (25.7%) or somewhere within the Augusta-Richmond County MSA (46.8%). Though the mean travel time is 25.8 minutes, there is a considerable portion of workers (13.8%) that commute to Atlanta. Consideration should be made for local accessibility and regional connectivity.

Commuter Travel Time	Columbia County	Augusta-Richmond MSA
By all Modes 0-45 min.	86.8%	88.1%
By all Modes 45-60+ min.	13.2%	11.9%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Survey

Travel Mode

Most (80.4%) Columbia County residents drive alone to work. The next most common mode of travel is carpooling (8.4%). A much smaller proportion of residents take transit, walk, bike, or use another form of transportation. Not all County residents commute from home to work, as there is a significant proportion of residents (9.6%) that work from home. These travel mode percentages mimic those found in the overall Augusta-Richmond County MSA .

Mode of Travel	Columbia County	Augusta-Richmond MSA
Drive Alone	80.4%	79.6%
Carpool	8.4%	7.7%
Transit	0.1%	0.7%
Walk	0.2%	1.2%
Bicycle	0.2%	0.1%
Other	1.1%	2.1%
Work at Home	9.6%	8.7%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Survey

Transportation Key Takeaways

The Plan's policies and recommendations for transportation and mobility will be built from this assessment of existing transportation conditions in Columbia County and will consider the input received during the community outreach process. The Plan will also incorporate regional improvements planned by GDOT and the County. Additionally, the Plan will align with the existing and planned transportation infrastructure in the County's neighboring counties and the larger Augusta-Richmond County MSA.

Development Pressure on Roadways: Much of the County's roadway network is designed for low traffic volumes. This may become inadequate as isolated residential subdivisions develop into rural areas of the County. Typical subdivision design minimizes the amount of connecting roads to one or two, heavily relying on nearby collectors or arterials to move residents elsewhere. Without an emphasis on local road connectivity, the County's existing collectors and arterials will need to be continuously improved to manage larger traffic volumes.

Gaps in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Networks: Existing sidewalks and bikeways are largely isolated to individual streets or residential subdivisions. A comprehensive network does not yet exist, but continued roadway improvements will slowly fill in current gaps. The Euchee Creek Greenway is planned to extend across the County, but connections between the trail and many other parts of the County do not exist. Additional greenways may be necessary to provide more access to recreation and/or long-distance bicycle transportation options.

Inadequate Bicycle Facilities: Current on-street bicycle facilities include painted bike lanes, which are unsafe on larger collectors and arterials. For example, sections of River Watch Parkway have painted bike lanes, but the roadway consists of two lanes of traffic in either direction, (15,700 – 17,300 vehicle per day) moving at speeds of 45 miles per hour or higher. At intersections, the bike lanes are crossed by left-turn lanes and slip lanes for vehicles turning right from connecting roads. These conditions are not conducive to a comfortable or safe biking experience.

Limited Public Transit: The County's transit access is limited to a single stop for Augusta Transit's Green Line or curb to curb service with Columbia County Public Transit. Most residents are able to travel in a private vehicle, but sections of the population that are reliant on other forms of transportation may benefit from dedicated transit facilities.

SECTION 7

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Community facilities include parks, fire stations, government buildings, and more. These facilities and the services they provide ensure a high quality of life for Columbia County residents. Most community facilities are provided by the County, such as libraries or municipal services, but many public and semi-public organizations provide complementary services. An inventory of Columbia County's community facilities and services was completed and provided below.

County Governance

Columbia County operates under a Commission-Manager form of government. The Board of Commissioners consists of five members, elected from single-member districts, with the Chairperson elected county-wide. Commissioners serve staggered four-year terms and appoint a County Manager to oversee daily operations, implement policies, compile the annual budget, and develop short- and long-range plans to improve government efficiency and effectiveness. The County Manager's Office works directly with the Board to support policy matters and provide guidance to County departments. Deputy County Managers assist the County Manager in carrying out the Board's priorities, developing and administering operating and capital budgets, recommending policies and management strategies, enhancing service delivery, and supporting economic development initiatives. Various departments and commissions oversee County operations and services, including the Tax Commissioner's Office, Board of Commissioners, Coroner's Office, Judicial Circuit, Sheriff's Office and the Office of the County Manager. Additionally, commissions and authorities such as the Planning Commission, Board of Education, Board of Elections, Civil Service Commission, and the Development Authority play key roles in governance and community development.

Emergency Services

Police

The Columbia County Sheriff's Office is committed to providing comprehensive law enforcement services to its residents. The Sheriff's Office has authority throughout the entire County, including within municipalities. Their primary responsibility is to cover the unincorporated areas of the County, but they do collaborate with and provide support to established municipal police departments within the County. The Sheriff's Office operates two stations. The Harlem Police Department, Grovetown Police Department, and Georgia State Patrol each operate a single station. The Columbia County Sheriff's Office is structured into several divisions, each with specific responsibilities:

- **Criminal Investigation Division:** The Criminal Investigation Division (CID) was established to solve crimes through victim, witness, and suspect questioning. With 17 full-time investigators, one Sergeant, three Staff Sergeants, one Lieutenant, one Captain, and two Administrative Coordinators, the CID uses traditional investigative efforts to work cases in Columbia County.
- **Community Services Division:** The Community Services Division is responsible for public education on crime prevention and various volunteer service programs. The Division includes programs like the Reserve Unit, Neighborhood Watch Program, Citizens Law Enforcement Academy, and several others.
- **Detention Center:** The Detention and Court Services Bureau, oversees the daily operations of the Detention Center, Transportation, and Court Services Divisions, with 136 approved positions including certified peace officers, detention officers, and civilians. The Detention Center houses up to 358 inmates, processes approximately 4,000 inmates annually, and facilitates inmate transportation, video court appearances, and medical care.
- **Patrol Division:** Comprised of 72 certified law enforcement officers, the primary responsibility of the Patrol Division is to provide 24-hour protection and law enforcement services to Columbia County.
- **Special Operations Division:** The Special Operations Division focuses on proactive crime prevention and enforcement through units such as crime suppression, traffic, mountain bike patrol, and vice and narcotics. These units work to reduce crime, enhance traffic safety, conduct surveillance, assist other law enforcement divisions, and target drug, gambling, and vice-related offenses to ensure a safer community.

Fire Rescue

Columbia County Fire Rescue (CCFR) provides comprehensive fire protection, education, vehicle extrication, rescue, and medical first response services to the residents of Columbia County. There are 15 fully staffed stations across the County. Additionally, the CCFR provides community education programs, such as the Car Seat Safety Program that provides free car seat safety inspections and fire education videos posted to the County's website. CCFR achieved an ISO Class 1/1X rating in 2017, a rating that indicated that the community has an excellent fire protection program, placing it among the top-tier fire departments nationwide.

Emergency Management Agency

Columbia County's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) is dedicated to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. It works to minimize risks and protect lives and property. The agency coordinates emergency response plans, identifies vulnerabilities, and implements mitigation strategies. In collaboration with local, state, federal, and private partners, EMA develops and maintains the County's Emergency Operations Plan and manages the Emergency Operations Center. Additionally, EMA provides training and resources to educate residents on safety and disaster preparedness.

Health and Medical Services

The County's first ever hospital, Wellstar Columbia County Hospital, broke ground in April 2024. The 100-bed hospital will bring state-of-the-art healthcare to the County and its surrounding areas. Located along Gateway Boulevard in Grovetown, the hospital is a level 2 trauma center which offers 24-hour treatment for sudden injuries. The Emergency Department, with critical care and trauma rooms, will have 19 exam rooms, six operating rooms, interventional radiology and cardiac catheterization, in- and outpatient imaging suites, pharmacies, and dining options.

Along with treatment, the hospital will bring telehealth and new technology to help rural areas and an adjacent medical office building. This medical building will provide women's health services and other specialty services.

Gold Cross Emergency Medical Service (EMS)

Based out of Augusta, Gold Cross offers a range of emergency and non-emergency medical transportation services, including Critical Care and Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances equipped for intensive care, cardiac monitoring, and airway management. For non-emergency needs, stretcher vans and wheelchair transportation are available.

Education

Columbia County has a diverse education system, enabling residents to choose from public schools within the Columbia County School District (CCSD) or private and charter schools throughout the County.

Columbia County School District

The Columbia County School District is the 15th largest district in Georgia, serving 28,668 students across 17 elementary schools, eight middle schools, five high schools, the Columbia County Alternative School, and the Columbia Virtual Academy. With a total of 4,322 employees, it is one of the largest employers in the County and maintains a strong commitment to educational excellence, as reflected in its 93.4% graduation rate in 2024. The district's vision is to lead the nation in educational excellence by engaging, enriching, and inspiring each student.

The Columbia County Board of Education unanimously voted to approve a partnership with the Richmond County School System and Junior Achievement of Georgia to build the Discovery Center of the CSRA in the CCSD Support Department Complex. Opened in January 2024, the center will serve 15,000 middle school students from Columbia County and Richmond County schools, along with other school districts in the region.

Elementary Schools

- Baker Place Elementary
- Brookwood Elementary
- Euchee Creek Elementary
- Greenbrier Elementary
- Lewiston Elementary
- North Columbia Elementary
- Parkway Elementary
- Riverside Elementary
- Blue Ridge Elementary
- Cedar Ridge Elementary
- Evans Elementary
- Grovetown Elementary
- Martinez Elementary
- North Harlem Elementary
- River Ridge Elementary

Middle Schools

- Columbia Middle
- Evans Middle
- Greenbrier Middle
- Grovetown Middle
- Harlem Middle
- Lakeside Middle
- Riverside Middle
- Stallings Island Middle

High Schools

- Evans High School
- Greenbrier High School
- Grovetown High School
- Harlem High School
- Lakeside High School

Other Schools

- Columbia County Alternative School
- Columbia Virtual Academy

Charter Schools

Located in Evans, the School for Arts Infused Learning (SAIL) is a public charter school with capacity for 804 students authorized by the Georgia State Charter School Commission. SAIL is a kindergarten through eighth grade school that focuses on arts-infusion. Arts-Infusion is an approach to teaching and learning that infuses skills and content from an art form such as dance, music, theater, visual arts or kinesiology with a core subject area such as math, science, language arts, and social studies. Applicants to SAIL are accepted through an open enrollment process.

Private Schools

Columbia County offers a variety of private educational institutions serving students from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12. As of 2025, Columbia County has nine private schools serving 1,626 students. These private educational institutions provide a diverse academic curriculum, many with a religious focus.

Libraries

Greater Clarks Hill Regional Library is a consortium comprised of eight public libraries serving the communities of Columbia, Burke, Lincoln, and Warren Counties in Georgia. Columbia County is home to three branches: the Columbia County Library, Grovetown Library, and Harlem Library.

The system is dedicated to providing high quality services and materials to all patrons, with a vision of meeting the diverse needs of its communities. Each branch serves as a valuable resource for residents, offering unique amenities to their local populations.

Columbia County Library

Located in Evans, the Columbia County Library offers a range of resources and amenities for the community. The library features 42 public computers available – 12 in the children's area upstairs, and 30 downstairs for adults. In addition to books, DVDS, audiobooks, and other resources, the library includes a 300-seat performing arts theatre, several meeting rooms and classroom, and the Friends of the Library bookstore.

Adjacent to the library, the park offers three playgrounds, including accessible areas, a large pond, and a scenic walking trail.

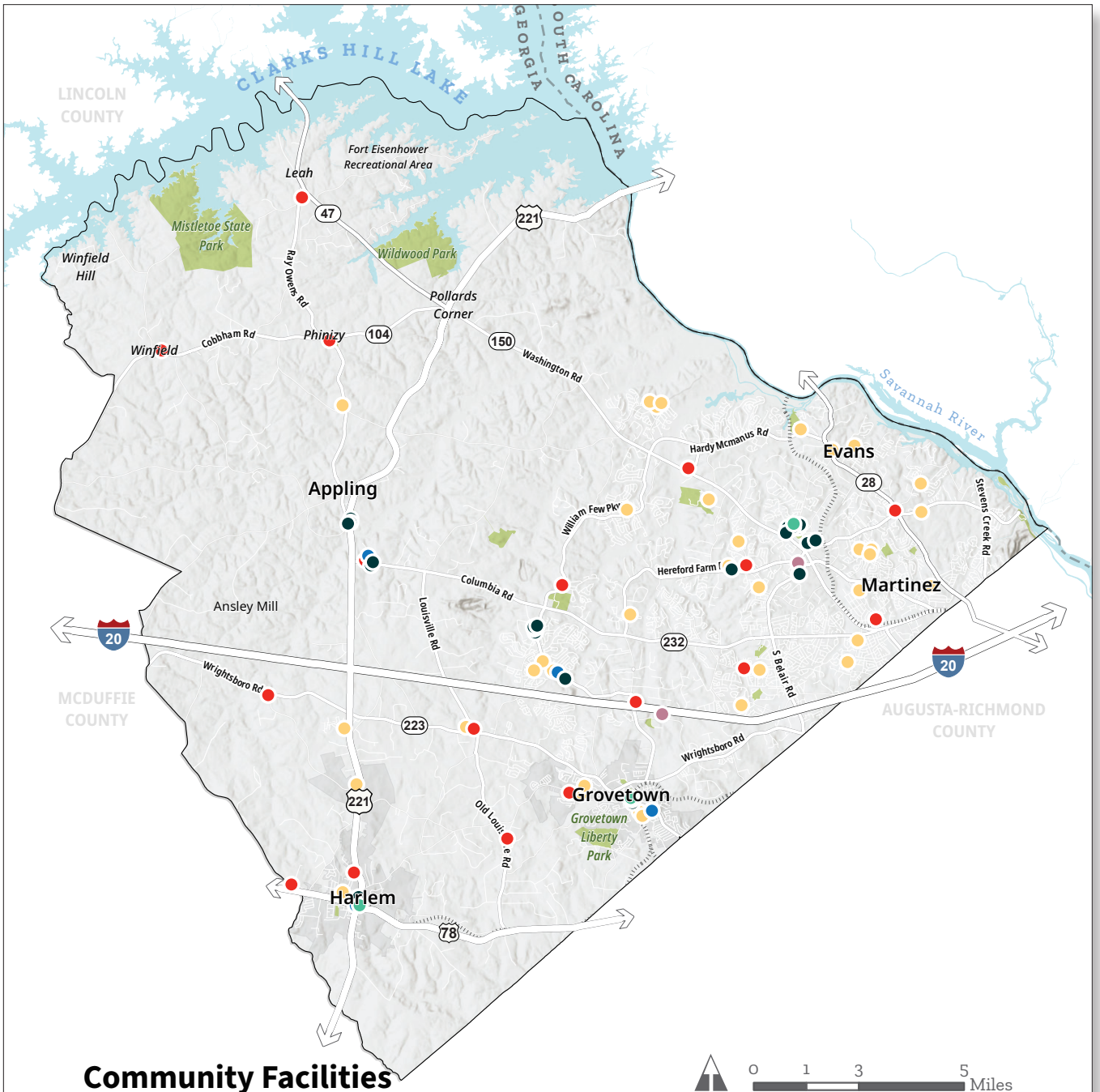
Grovetown Library

The newly constructed Grovetown Public Library, located in downtown Grovetown next to City Hall, offers an array of services and resources. Patrons have access to books in all formats, reference assistance, computer courses, and children's story times. The library also boasts the largest collection of Spanish materials in the region.

This branch features a dedicated Teen Center equipped with books, manga, games, computers and a large screen television. Additional amenities include three private classrooms and an upstairs meeting room. There are 24 adult computers, eight children's computers, and four young adult computers.

Harlem Library

The Harlem Library has a collection of over 20,000 items including books, DVDs, and audiobooks. The library features 36 public computers, one meeting room, and three study rooms.


CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Fort Eisenhower Recreational Area
Leah
47
221
Mistletoe State Park
Wildwood Park
Winfield Hill
Ray Owens Rd
Pollards Corner
Winfield
Cobbham Rd
Phinizy
104
150
Washington Rd
Savannah River
Hardy Mcmanus Rd
Evans
28
Stevens Creek Rd
Appling
William Few Pkwy
Hereford Farm
Columbia Rd
Martinez
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
232
S Belair Rd
20
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
223
Wrightsboro Rd
221
Grovetown
Grovetown Liberty Park
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
78
Community Facilities
Government Administration Buildings
Library
Police Stations
Hospitals
Fire Stations
Schools (Public and Private)
0 1 3 5 Miles

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the backbone of Columbia County, supporting its growing population, economic development, and overall quality of life. Reliable water and sewer services, stormwater management, and broadband connectivity are essential to ensuring public health, safety, and economic opportunity. As the County continues to expand, maintaining and enhancing infrastructure is critical to accommodating future growth, attracting investment, and improving resilience to environmental and economic challenges. This section examines the current state of Columbia County's infrastructure and identifies key opportunities for improvement to support the County's long-term vision.

Energy

Georgia Power is the main energy provider in Columbia County. Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia Power serves more than 2.4 million customers across 155 of Georgia's 159 counties. Additionally, Jefferson Energy Cooperative provides energy to 11 counties in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA), including portions of Columbia County.

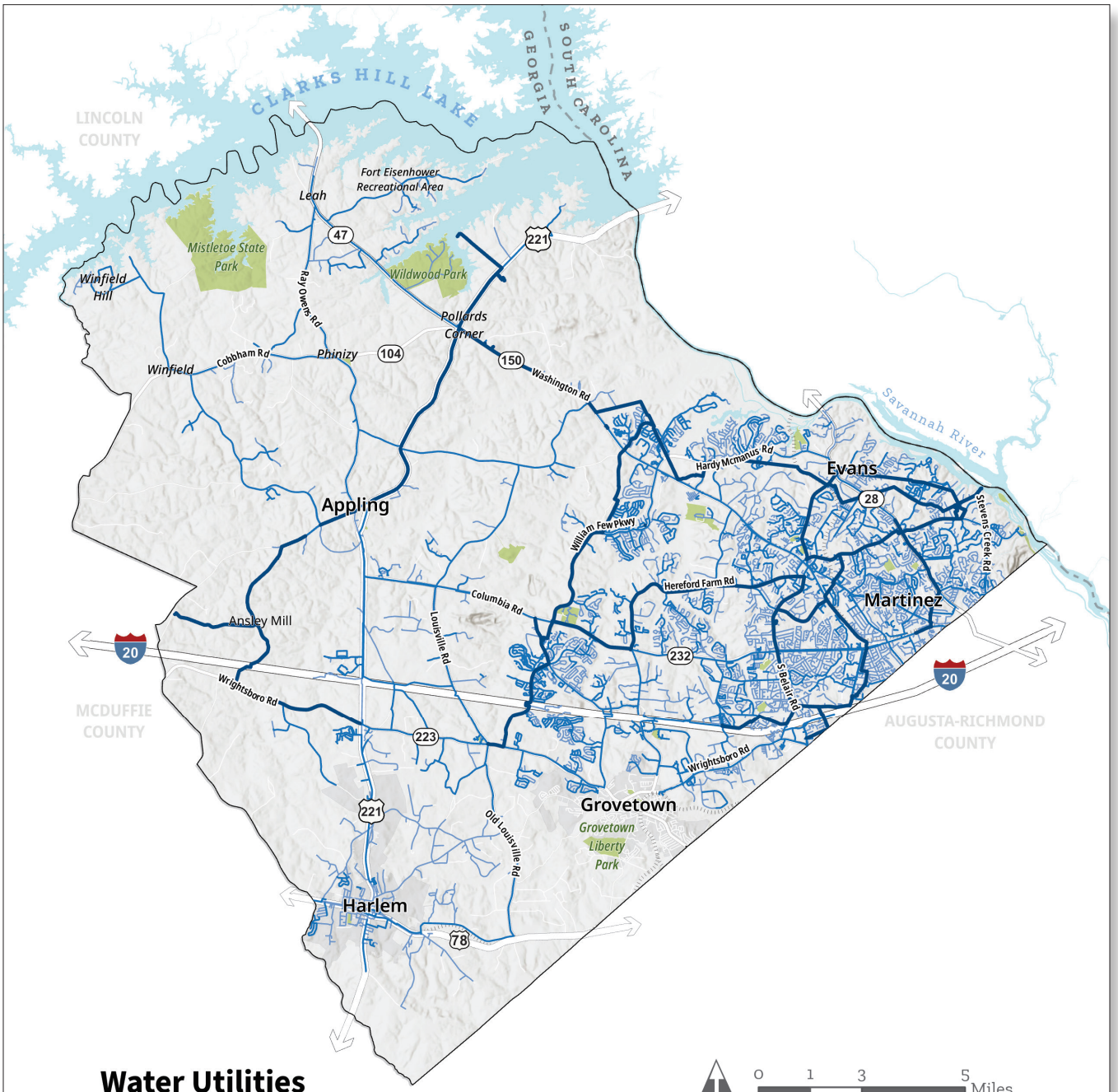
Natural Gas

Columbia County receives natural gas services through Georgia Natural Gas, Gas South, Atlanta Gas Light, and SCANA Energy. These companies offer a range of natural gas solutions for residential, commercial, and industrial customers, ensuring reliable and efficient energy distribution throughout the County.

Water

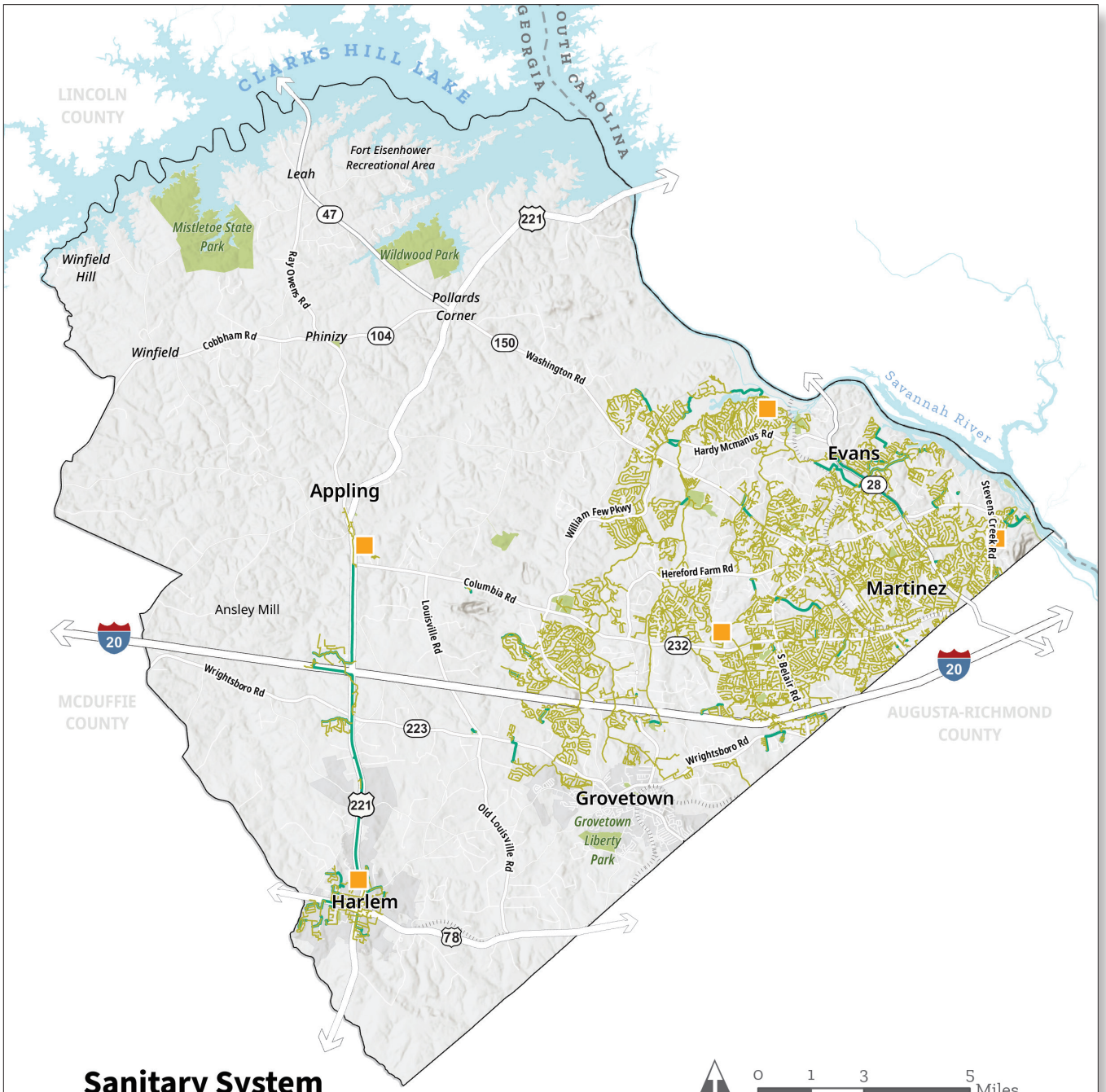
Columbia County's drinking water is supplied by the Columbia County Water Utility. Columbia County's drinking water is withdrawn from either the Savannah River or the Thurmond Lake Reservoir at Clarks Hill. Up to 46 million gallons per day is withdrawn from the Savannah River and is treated at the Jim Blanchard Water Treatment Facility on Point Comfort Road. The Clarks Hill Water Treatment Plant can treat a daily maximum of eight million gallons per day.

In addition to sourcing water from the Savannah River and Thurmond Lake Reservoir at Clarks Hill, Columbia County's Water Utility operates a distribution system that ensures clean, safe drinking water across the County. The County also conducts regular water quality testing to comply with state and federal regulations, ensuring the water meets or exceeds safety standards. The Water Utility manages wastewater treatment services and maintains infrastructure to support growth and environmental sustainability in the region. Five wastewater treatment plants are spread throughout the southern half of the County.



Water Utilities

- 0.5"-6" Pipe Diameter
- 7"-14" Pipe Diameter
- 15"+ Pipe Diameter


CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Fort Eisenhower Recreational Area
Leah
47
221
Mistletoe State Park
Wildwood Park
Winfield Hill
Ray Owens Rd
Pollards Corner
Winfield
Cobbham Rd
Phinizy
104
150
Washington Rd
Savannah River
Hardy Mcmanus Rd
Evans
28
Appling
William Few Pkwy
Stevens Creek Rd
Hereford Farm Rd
Columbia Rd
Martinez
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
232
20
S Belair Rd
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
223
Wrightsboro Rd
221
Old Louisville Rd
Grovetown
Grovetown
Liberty Park
Harlem
78
Sanitary System
Gravity Main
Pressurized Main
Wastewater Treatment Plant
0 1 3 5 Miles

Telecommunications and Broadband

In 2010, Columbia County received a Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) Grant, which led to the creation of the Columbia County Community Broadband Utility (C3BU). C3BU owns and operates a fiber network that consists of a point-of -presence (POP) facility, seven communication tower facilities, and over 210 route miles of underground fiber optic open-access network in Columbia County.

C3BU directly serves Community Anchor Institutions (CAI) which consists of government, education, public safety, and non-profit facilities. C3BU currently partners with five service providers to provide services to commercial and residential customers. C3BU currently has over 180 facilities connected to the network excluding residential customers, and five service providers collocated in the point of presence facility.

The Winfield Pavillion

Columbia County has constructed a prototype Community Wi-Fi Pavilion on Cobbham Road. The purpose of the Wi-Fi Pavilion is to provide access to Wi-Fi in a rural area of the County in which there are no other parks or facilities where Wi-Fi is readily available on a 24-hour basis. This facility features a covered shelter, charging stations, a ceiling fan, safety lighting, and four picnic tables. As a prototype, it is seen as an opportunity to provide a service to the County's underserved areas.

In addition to the C3BU, AT&T, Xfinity, WOW!, and T-Mobile Home Internet provide reliable connection throughout the County.

Trash Disposal and Recycling Services

Waste Management

Waste Management (WM) is one of the largest trash and recycling service partners in the area. WM is contracted to provide residential garbage pickup, commercial waste disposal, and a dumpster rental service.

City of Grovetown Garbage Collection

The City of Grovetown General Services Department is responsible for overseeing bulk and yard waste services in the City, including municipal solid waste and disposal services. Residential garbage collection services are provided through a contract with Waste Management. The City also offers biweekly curbside pick up of large bulk household items and provides curbside leaf and tree limb collection services.

Augusta Disposal and Recycling

Located in Evans, Augusta Disposal provides trash hauling and yard waste removal for Columbia County. In addition to regularly scheduled service, Augusta Disposal offers option yard waste removal on a pre-pay basis.

Columbia County Recycling Center

Columbia County operates two recycling centers that accept a variety of materials including electronic scrap, metals, paper, and certain plastics. Operating hours are Tuesday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Saturday from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The centers are closed on Sundays, Mondays, and federal holidays (The County does not observe all federal holidays).

Parks and Open Space

The County offers a diverse range of parks and recreational spaces that cater to various interests and age groups of visitors and residents. From natural retreats to urban green spaces, the County offers endless opportunities for outdoor exploration and leisure. With over a dozen parks, Columbia County provides a mix of amenities, including playgrounds, picnic areas, sports fields, hiking trails, and water access points.

County Parks

The Parks, Recreation, and Events Department is responsible for maintaining and operating a variety of parks, recreational areas, and event spaces throughout the County. They host nearly a million visitors each year, offering a multitude of active and passive use amenities including campgrounds, dog parks, concert venues, walking trails, athletic fields, a skate park, and a senior center. The County's commitment to maintaining these spaces is evident through its accreditation by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). This recognition confirms that Columbia County's Parks and Recreation Department is operating according to the national standards of excellence, demonstrating its commitment to providing top-quality services and amenities to the community.

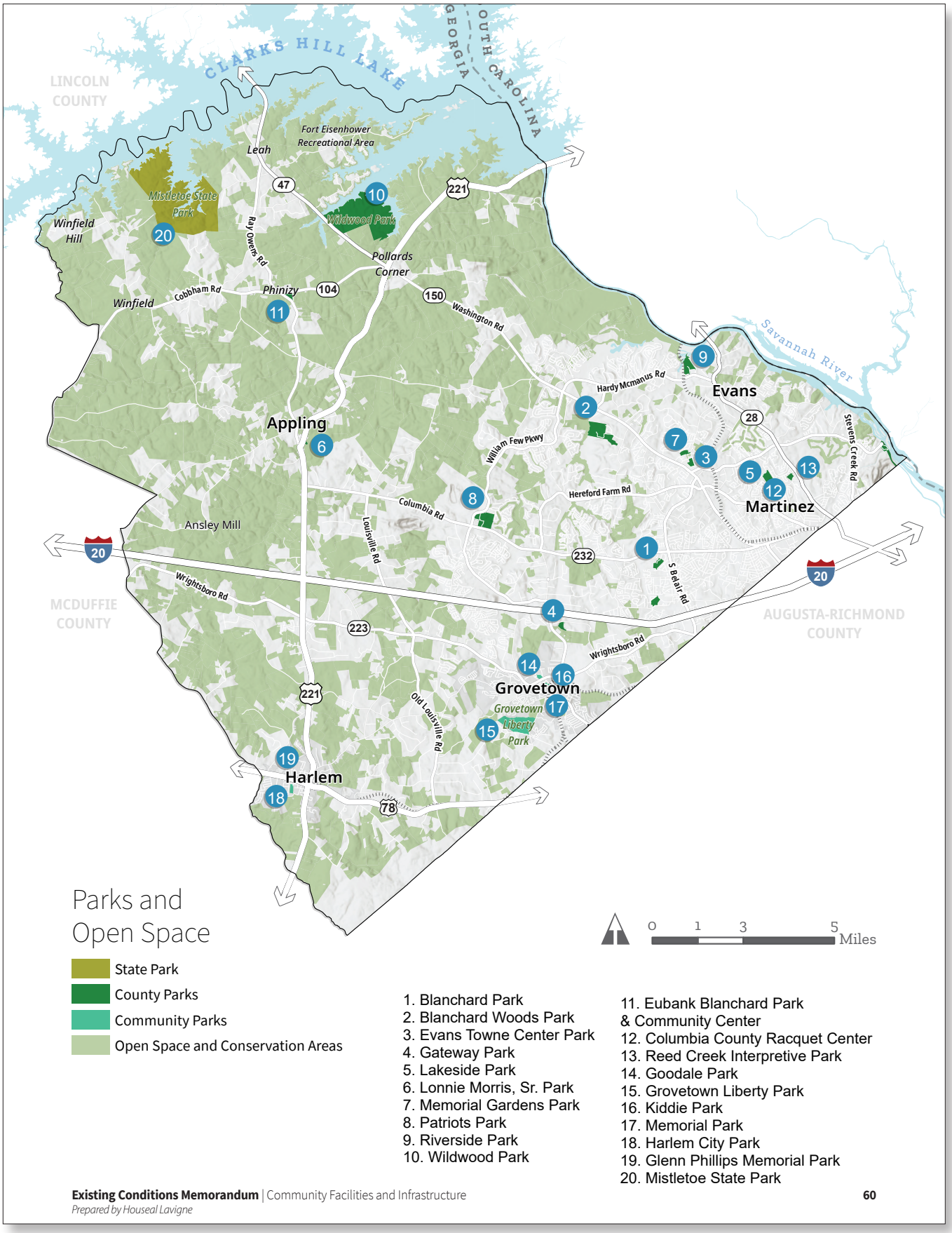
Park /Facility	Area in Acres	Facilities
Blanchard Park	26 Acres	Baseball, football, lacrosse, playground, restrooms, walking/jogging trail.
Blanchard Woods Park	170.6	Biking (BMX), Picnic Pavilion, Restrooms, Skatepark, Soccer, Walking / Jogging Trail
Evans Towne Center Park	16.8 Acres	Playground, dog park, gazebo, picnic pavilions, and lawn area for concerts
Gateway Park	19 Acres	Picnic pavilion rentals, picnic tables, pavilion playground, restrooms, splash pad, walking/jogging trail
Lakeside Park	34 Acres	Multipurpose courts, tennis courts, walking track
Lonnie Morris, Sr. Park	6.5 Acres	Baseball-softball, tennis court-basketball court, batting cage, playground with picnic area and restroom facility
Memorial Gardens Park	2.4 Acres	Picnic tables/pavilion, playground, rentable/reservable venues, restrooms, stage, walking / jogging trail
Patriots Park	102.8 Acres	Baseball / softball, disc golf, gymnasium, picnic pavilion rentals, playground, rentable / reservable venues, restrooms, soccer, tennis, walking / jogging trail
Riverside Park	57.3 Acres	Recreation complex includes- tennis courts and a beach volleyball court, baseball/softball fields, playground
Wildwood Park	974.4 Acres	Fishing, boating, beach, picnic area, and campsites on Clarks Hill Lake
Eubank Blanchard Park & Community Center	26.6 Acres	Playground, rentable/reservable venues, walking/jogging trail
Columbia County Racquet Center		Tennis courts and multipurpose courts
Reed Creek Interpretive Park	12.7 Acres	Boardwalk, trail, and Interpretive center

Community Parks

Columbia County's small community parks offer accessible, neighborhood-friendly spaces where residents can relax, play, and connect. These community parks provide open green spaces, scenic walking paths, sports courts, community areas, a playground, and multi-purpose courts. Families with younger children can enjoy Kiddie Park's safe play structures and picnic spots, and Memorial Gardens Park in Evans offers a peaceful setting with a pond, landscaped gardens, and walking trails perfect for leisurely strolls. In Harlem, Harlem City Park is a bustling hub with multiple athletic fields, a playground, a pavilion, and social gatherings. Nearby Glenn Phillips Memorial Park provides a quiet, reflective space with a gazebo and benches for relaxation.

Maintained by respective municipalities to ensure cleanliness and safety, these parks are integrated into residential areas, making it easy for all residents to enjoy fresh air, exercise, or a moment of tranquility close to home. By blending play, nature, and social spaces, these small but impactful parks strengthen community bonds and enhance the County's quality of life.

Parks	Area in Acres	Facilities
Grovetown Goodale Park	12 Acres	Basketball court, dog park, a multipurpose field, parking, playground, a shelter with picnic tables, restrooms, tennis courts, and walking track
Grovetown Liberty Park	210 Acres	4 ball fields, 2 multi-purpose fields, concession stand, restrooms, and community center with meeting rooms
Kiddie Park	3.5 Acres	Picnic tables, playground, restrooms
Memorial Park	0.5 Acres	
Harlem City Park	7.8 Acres	T-ball field, baseball field, tennis court playgrounds with picnic areas, basketball court, restrooms
Glenn Phillips Memorial Park	0.6 Acres	Gazebo, benches, parking


CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Fort Eisenhower Recreational Area
Leah
Mistletoe State Park
Winfield Hill
Wildwood Park
Ray Owens Rd
Pollards Corner
Winfield
Cobbham Rd
Phinizy
Washington Rd
Savannah River
Hardy Mcmanus Rd
Evans
Appling
William Few Pkwy
Stevens Creek Rd
Hereford Farm Rd
Columbia Rd
Martinez
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
S Belair Rd
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
Grovetown
Grovetown Liberty Park
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
47
221
104
150
28
20
232
223
78
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
Parks and Open Space
State Park
County Parks
Community Parks
Open Space and Conservation Areas
0 1 3 5 Miles
1. Blanchard Park
2. Blanchard Woods Park
3. Evans Towne Center Park
4. Gateway Park
5. Lakeside Park
6. Lonnie Morris, Sr. Park
7. Memorial Gardens Park
8. Patriots Park
9. Riverside Park
10. Wildwood Park
11. Eubank Blanchard Park & Community Center
12. Columbia County Racquet Center
13. Reed Creek Interpretive Park
14. Goodale Park
15. Grovetown Liberty Park
16. Kiddie Park
17. Memorial Park
18. Harlem City Park
19. Glenn Phillips Memorial Park
20. Mistletoe State Park

Recreational Facilities

Recreational facilities of the County cater to diverse interests and age groups, enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. These facilities not only provide opportunities for physical activity and recreation but also serve as hubs for community engagement and cultural events. Below is a list highlighting some of the key recreational facilities in the County:

Bobby Waters Gymnasium at Patriots Park

The gymnasium hosts various sports leagues, tournaments, and community events, promoting physical fitness and providing a space for social interaction. The indoor facility spans 29,000 square feet and includes a 15,000 square-foot area for basketball and volleyball, four racquetball courts, an exercise room, a game room, a concession stand, and a 1,400 square-foot activity/meeting room.

Columbia County Amphitheater (C.C.A.)

The amphitheater hosts concerts, festivals, and community events throughout the year, providing a venue for local artists and performers. This outdoor performance stage is centrally located, overlooking a small pond. It has a 1/3-mile walking trail and is surrounded by natural scenery.

Columbia County Exhibition Center (CCEC)

The Exhibition Center boasts state-of-the-art infrastructure, including modern audiovisual systems, high-speed internet connectivity, and advanced lighting capabilities. The Center offers 15,400 square feet of trade show space, 3,000 square feet of pre-function space, and 2,175 square ft of breakout/meeting space, accommodating up to 850 people for banquet events and 1,450 people for a seated presentation.

Eubank Blanchard Park and Community Center

Built in 1995, the Eubank Blanchard Park and Community Center is a community hub offering a blend of indoor and outdoor amenities. The Center features a 75-seat indoor space with a commercial kitchen, a covered pavilion, and picnic tables. Outdoor facilities include a playground, a 1/4-mile walking track, a volleyball court, and a softball field.

Reed Creek Nature Park and Interpretive Center

The park and interpretive center provide educational opportunities for visitors of all ages, promoting environmental awareness and conservation. The 13-acre nature park offers a peaceful retreat for nature lovers, with picnic areas, scenic views, and a 0.4-mile wooden boardwalk through the wetlands, allowing visitors to encounter wildlife and unique wetland plants up close. The Interpretive Center has animals on exhibit and a floral garden.

Savannah Rapids Pavillion and Park (Historical Canal Headgates)

This 38-acre park is set along the Augusta Canal and Reed Creek waterfall. It offers a range of activities, including running or biking the Augusta Canal Trail, floating down the canal to Lake Olmstead, and exploring the historical canal headgates buildings. The Savannah Rapids Pavilion is a multi-purpose venue with over 25,000 square feet of space, featuring a natural and elegant wood-beamed, vaulted ceiling. Although currently closed due to storm-related damage, the Pavilion will resume its full range of activities and services once repairs are completed.

Trails

The County has a trail network that caters to hikers, cyclists, nature enthusiasts, and families. Most of these trails wind through scenic landscapes, including forests, wetlands, riverbanks, and the historic Augusta Canal, offering opportunities for recreation in the region's natural beauty. The County oversees most of its trails except those in state-managed areas like Mistletoe State Park.

- **Paved Greenways:** These are multi-use, ADA-accessible paths like the Euchee Creek Greenway (3.5 miles) and segments of the Columbia County Greenway System, ideal for walking, bicycling, and strollers.
- **Natural Surface Trails:** These are unpaved trails in parks such as Blanchard Woods Park (disc golf course trails) and Big Hart Nature Trail, offering hiking and wildlife observation in wooded or lakeside settings.
- **Multi-Use Recreational Trails:** These trails are shared-use paths like the Augusta Canal Towpath Trail (7.5 miles in the County), managed in partnership with the Augusta Canal Authority.
- **Park-Specific Loops:** These are short, family-friendly loops such as the Baker Place Park Trail (0.5 miles) and trails at Patriots Park, blending playground access with casual walking routes.
- **Educational/Interpretive Trails:** These are boardwalk-heavy routes like those at Reed Creek Nature Park, featuring wetland exploration and environmental education.

Notable Trails and Activities

The County actively engages residents and visitors by promoting a diverse array of recreational activities and events through platforms like the Visit Columbia County Georgia website. The County offers extensive outdoor recreation programs, including boating and fishing at Clarks Hill Lake, camping at Wildwood Park, and hiking on an extensive trail system. Additionally, the County provides various sports facilities, such as courts for racquet sports and fields for soccer and baseball, to cater to a wide range of interests.

Bombasin Trails

The Bombasin Trails are a collection of trails on the Savannah River's sub-basins. These trails provide opportunities for biking, hiking, and exploring the area's natural beauty. Many of the trails have camp sites and access to water and restrooms.

- **Bartram Trail System:** This one-way trail extends approximately 27 miles from the West Dam Recreation Area to the Keg Creek area.
- **Lake Springs Loop:** This is a 2.5-mile paved beginner trail located within the Lake Springs Recreation Area.
- **Rock Dam Trail:** A 6.25-mile advanced loop located within Mistletoe State Park, offering a challenging route for seasoned mountain bikers.
- **Keg Creek Loop:** This is a 9-mile advanced loop near Wildwood Park, designed for experienced hikers and mountain bikers, and features creek crossings.
- **Evans to Locks Trail:** This is a 6-mile fully paved, wheelchair-accessible trail suitable for all users, ending at the Columbia County Visitors Center and Savannah Rapids Park.
- **Rock Dam Trail:** This is a 6.25-mile advanced loop located within Mistletoe State Park, offering a challenging route for seasoned mountain bikers.
- **Augusta Canal Tow Path Trail:** This trail spans approximately 7.9 miles, following the historic canal's tow path. The trail offers a broad, level surface suitable for mountain biking, walking, and offers scenic views of the canal and the Savannah River.
- **Euchee Creek Greenway:** This is a 6.7-mile trail featuring asphalt and boardwalk surfaces. It runs between Patriot Park and Harlem Grovetown Road, offering a family-friendly environment for biking, walking, and inline skating.
- **Blanchard Woods Cross Country Course:** This is a cross-country course that offers multiple loops ranging from 3K to 10K. Located in Blanchard Woods Park, this trail passes through wooded areas, meadows, and over hills, serving as the home track for Augusta University's cross-country team.

Serene18 Paddle Trail

The Serene18 Paddle Trail is a network of five paddle routes spanning 18 square miles. It is designed to promote paddling along local waterways. The trail highlights the County's natural resources and offers scenic tours for kayakers and outdoor enthusiasts. Kayak rentals are available, and participants can obtain a passport stamped at various locations along the trails.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure Key Takeaways

Increasing Access to Healthcare: Columbia County is currently served by one hospital and one EMS ambulance service. As the population grows, additional facilities such as hospitals, urgent care centers, and telemedicine services will be essential to meet increasing medical demands. The Comprehensive Plan can assess current service areas to identify gaps and explore future locations for healthcare facilities.

Enhance Waste and Recycling Services: Waste and recycling services vary across jurisdictions within the County. The Comprehensive Plan can outline recommendations to expand access to recycling programs and explore waste reduction initiatives, which are intended to help create a more consistent and sustainable approach to waste management.

Supporting the School District: The County is recognized for its high-quality school district, which attracts families specifically for educational opportunities. This demand has also intensified local housing pressures, with many families buying or renting homes to gain district access. The Comprehensive Plan can outline balanced infrastructure upgrades to the school district to accommodate anticipated future growth.

Extending and Improving Infrastructure: Most of the Northwestern parts of the County currently lack sewer infrastructure due to concerns about potential development spurts following infrastructure expansion. While previous attempts to update and expand these services have met with opposition, the County needs to support anticipated growth through infrastructure enhancements. The Comprehensive Plan has an opportunity to assess the current infrastructure to identify areas that require careful maintenance and targeted extension of services.

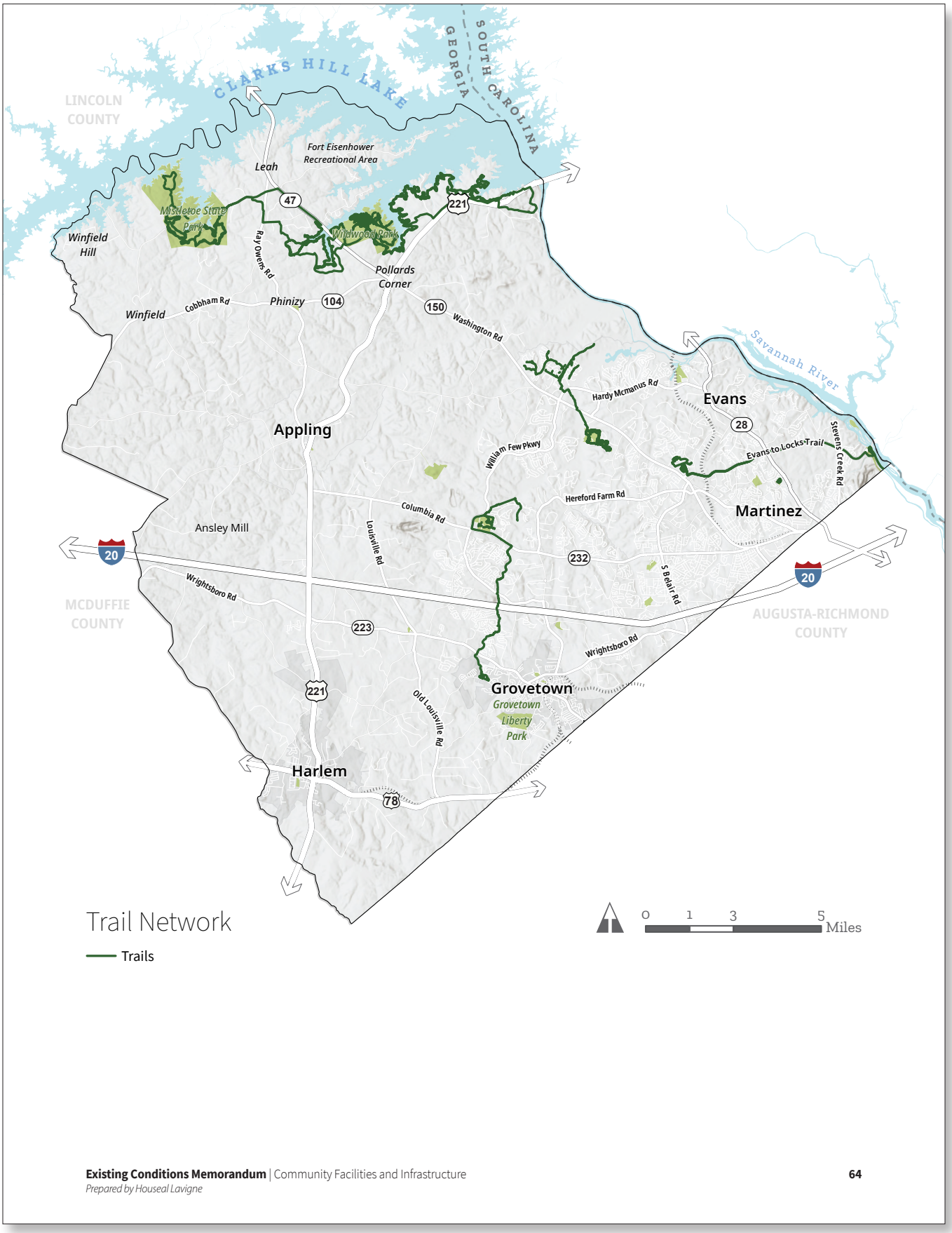
Military Presence: Previously listed on the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) list, the base has since seen renewed investment and expanded its use, with a growing number of employees now stationed there. This shift has contributed to noticeable residential growth in nearby communities, such as Grovetown, and has led to increased traffic volumes along major corridors like U.S. Route 78, highlighting the need for coordinated infrastructure and land use planning in response to the base's evolving role.

Parks and Recreation Spaces Key Takeaways

Preserving Greenspace in the County: According to the Columbia County Greenspace Program, the goal is to preserve 20% of the geographic area of the County as greenspace through fee-simple land acquisition (buying or acquiring a piece of land with complete and total ownership rights), donations, conservation easements or permanent restrictive covenants, ensuring long-term environmental and recreational benefits. The Comprehensive Plan will identify priority areas for preservation and guide land use policies that align with long-term conservation objectives.

Enhancing Park Access: Accessible parks are essential for community well-being, physical activity, and social equity. While campgrounds near Clarks Hill Lake are always in demand year-round, the western portion of the County remains largely wooded with limited connections between sidewalks, long-distance trails, recreational amenities, and parks. The Comprehensive Plan provides an opportunity to assess park accessibility and explore strategies to expand and improve access across underserved areas

Tourism through Natural Assets: The County boasts an extensive natural landscape, recreational facilities, and amenities that can be leveraged to further expand Eco-tourism opportunities. Marketing these areas, events, and amenities can help attract future residents and visitors and generate revenue for maintenance and future enhancements. To capitalize on the County's natural assets, the Comprehensive Plan can integrate tourism development with long-term conservation strategies, ensuring growth is both economically beneficial and environmentally sustainable.


CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Fort Eisenhower Recreational Area
Leah
Mistletoe State Park
Winfield Hill
Ray Owens Rd
Wildwood Park
Pollards Corner
Winfield
Cobbham Rd
Phinizy
Washington Rd
Savannah River
Hardy Mcmanus Rd
Evans
Appling
William Few Pkwy
Evans to Locks Trail
Stevens Creek Rd
Hereford Farm Rd
Martinez
Columbia Rd
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
S Belair Rd
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
Grovetown
Grovetown
Liberty Park
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
47
221
104
150
28
232
223
78
20
Trail Network
Trails
0 1 3 5 Miles

SECTION 8

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Natural Environment section will inform future environmental planning efforts and maintain and enhance the County's natural character and ecological health. This section examines the current state of Columbia County's natural resources, including water bodies, forests, wildlife habitats, and open spaces.

Columbia County is known for its vast natural landscape that offers residents and visitors access to natural forested and open areas. The County spans over 308 square miles and is adjacent to the Savannah River.

The County's Environmental Management Division is responsible for enforcing permitting processes and implementing programs for floodplain, stormwater systems, and land protection, ensuring balanced development while conserving natural resources. Additionally, the Columbia County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a local agency that works with farmers, landowners, and other partners to promote sustainable land practices, control erosion, and protect water quality throughout the County.

Water Features

The County has notable water features that shape its landscape and enrich the local environment. Defined by the Clarks Hill Lake and the Savannah River on two sides, it has an extensive network of streams and creeks. These water features play an important role in the County's ecological health and serve as natural drainage systems, reducing flood risks by absorbing and channeling stormwater runoff.

Savannah River

The Savannah River defines the County's eastern boundary and is an important natural resource for the area. It serves as the state line between Georgia and South Carolina, supports a variety of recreational activities, conserves numerous ecological habitats, and provides drinking water to the County.

Clarks Hill Lake

Clarks Hill Lake, also known as Lake Strom Thurmond or the J. Strom Thurmond Reservoir, is a major reservoir located along the northwestern border of Columbia County. Spanning approximately 71,000 acres with 1,200 miles of shoreline, the lake is known for national events, recreational activities, and its natural habitat for wildlife. Managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the lake serves multiple purposes, including flood control, hydroelectric power generation, water supply, and recreation.

Streams

According to Columbia County Green Guide, the County is home to a 791-mile stream network that supports life, economy, and recreational activities in the community. Major streams in the County include Jones Creek and Reed Creek, which run through populated areas like Martinez, while Kiokee Creek serves parts of Evans. The Little River and Uchee Creek also flow near Evans, Greenbrier Creek runs through Appling, and Euchee Creek winds through Grovetown.

Riparian Areas

Riparian areas are the zones of land that border water bodies such as rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands. These areas act as transitional zones between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and are characterized by unique vegetation and soil conditions. Riparian areas are vital in maintaining ecological balance and providing numerous environmental benefits like preserving water quality, controlling erosion, providing wildlife habitat, and mitigating flood risks. These areas filter pollutants from surface runoff, stabilize stream banks to prevent erosion, and help reduce flood risks by absorbing and slowing stormwater.

Reed Creek

Located in the eastern portion of the County, Reed Creek's riparian zones are essential for managing stormwater runoff and preventing localized flooding. The Reed Creek Nature Park and Interpretive Center offers educational opportunities about the importance of wetlands and riparian buffers. The area supports a diverse range of wetland plants and wildlife, sustaining the ecological balance.

Savannah River

Located in the eastern portion of the County, the Savannah River's riparian zones are vital for water quality and biodiversity. Efforts by organizations like the Central Savannah River Land Trust have helped preserve stretches of this riverbank, maintaining its natural state and ecological functions draining runoff into the Atlantic Ocean and providing habitats to many species of fish, birds, and mammals.

Betty's Branch and Jones Creek

These tributaries of the Savannah River have riparian areas that help manage stormwater runoff, mitigate localized flooding, and support aquatic habitats. Preserving these areas is essential for maintaining water quality and sustaining the county's ecological health and resilience.

Existing Flood Hazard Areas

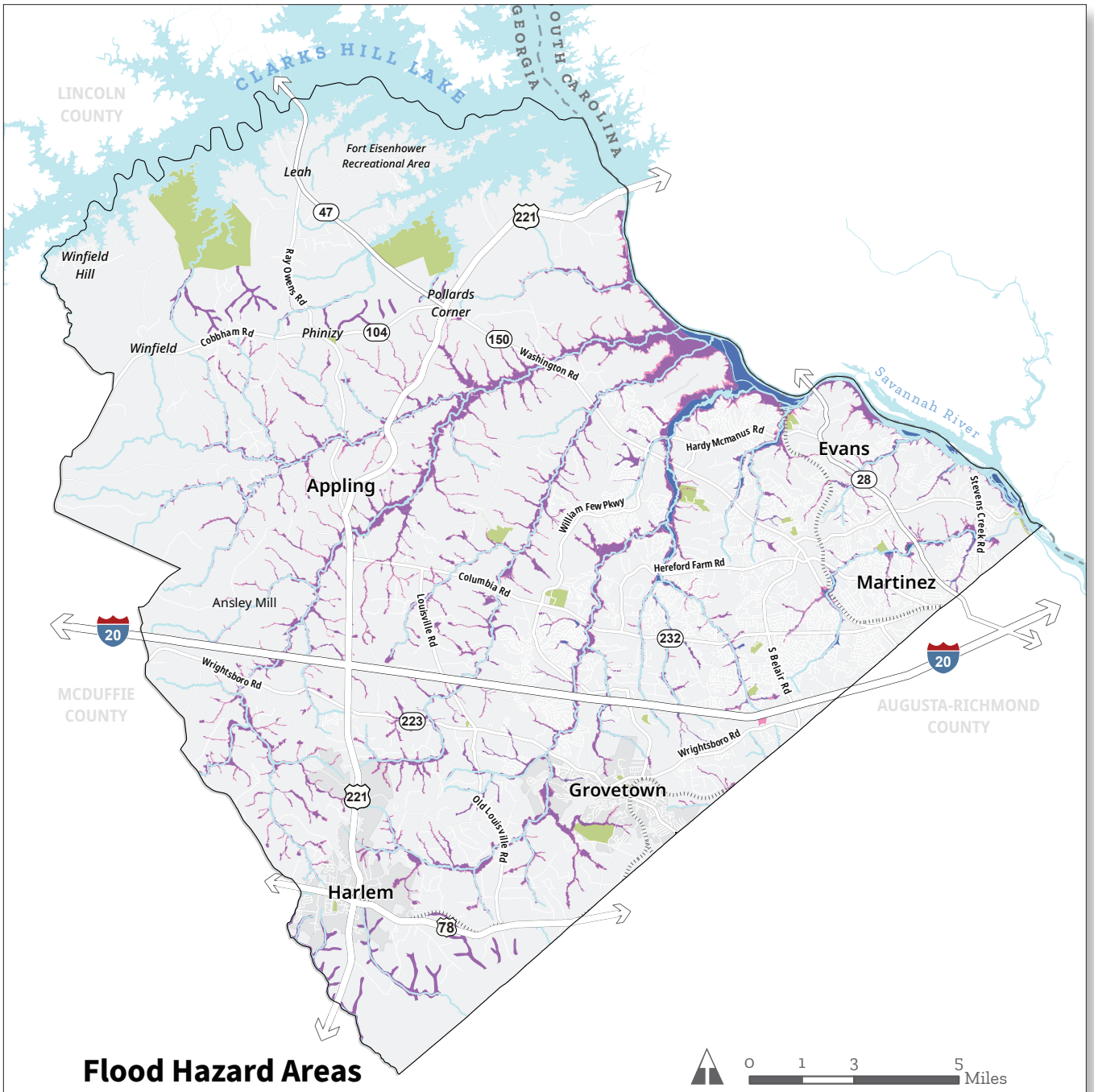
Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) or floodplains are areas defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) "that will be inundated by the flood event having a 1-percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year." The major flood hazard areas in the County are primarily concentrated along significant water bodies. These include areas adjacent to the Savannah River and Clarks Hill Lake, where flood risks are generally higher due to the large volumes of water and potential overflow. Additionally, the County's most densely populated regions, including areas around Reed Creek, Betty's Branch, and Jones Creek, are particularly vulnerable to flooding. Localized flooding may occur around these creeks after heavy rainfall.

- **Regulatory Floodway:** Areas or portions of a river or another watercourse and the immediate adjacent land areas that must channel the majority of water during a flood event. Floodways must be able to discharge flood water without causing a significant increase in the water surface elevation more than a designated height.
- **Floodplains:** The 100-year floodplain refers to areas with a one percent chance of flooding in any given year. The 500-year floodplain has a 0.2 percent chance of flooding annually.

Wetlands

Wetlands are areas where water saturates the soil either permanently or seasonally, creating unique ecosystems that support diverse plant and animal life. These environments play a crucial role in improving water quality, controlling floods, and providing habitats for wildlife. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

In Columbia County, areas adjacent to Reed Creek Nature Park, Uchee Creek, Betty's Branch, and Jones Creek contain wetlands. The Reed Creek Nature Park & Interpretive Center, for instance, features a 0.4-mile boardwalk through wetland areas, offering educational experiences and opportunities to observe native flora and fauna.


CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Fort Eisenhower Recreational Area
Leah
47
221
Winfield Hill
Ray Owens Rd
Pollards Corner
Winfield
Cobbham Rd
Phinizy
104
150
Washington Rd
Savannah River
Hardy Mcmanus Rd
Evans
28
Appling
William Few Pkwy
Stevens Creek Rd
Hereford Farm Rd
Columbia Rd
Martinez
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
232
20
S Belair Rd
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
223
Wrightsboro Rd
Grovetown
221
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
78
Flood Hazard Areas
0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
Regulatory Floodway
0 1 3 5 Miles

Farmland

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines farmland as any location that produces and sells, or typically would produce and sell, at least $1,000 worth of agricultural products within a given year. Agriculture and farmland represent a considerable portion of the local economy and landscape of the County. According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture by the USDA, the County had 227 farms covering 25,036 acres, a notable 24% increase in number of farms from 2017. Total farmland also saw a significant rise, growing by 10 percent to 25,036 acres, though the average farm size decreased by 12% to 110 acres. Economic indicators show growth in the market value of agricultural products sold; the County sold approximately $6 million worth of products in 2022. Crops like grains, oilseeds, and dry beans dominated the agricultural output, making up 86 percent of sales, while livestock, poultry, and related products contributed 14%.

The land in the County is diverse, including cropland, pastureland, and woodland, which is often utilized for agricultural purposes. The County's farmland primarily consisted of woodland (15,779 acres), followed by pastureland (3,832 acres) and cropland (3,730 acres), with smaller areas dedicated to other uses.

Wooded Areas

The County encompasses expansive forests, which cover 76% of the region and include diverse ecosystems like mixed hardwood-pine forests and protected areas such as Heggie's Rock Preserve and Mistletoe State Park. The County offers incentives for timberland properties as they qualify for tax incentives under Georgia's Conservation Use Assessment (CUVA), which reduces property taxes by assessing land at 40% of its current use value (e.g., timber production) instead of market value.

Note: *"Timberland Property" refers to land primarily used for the bona fide production of trees for commercial uses.*

Valuable Habitat and Cultural Resources

Valuable habitats and cultural resources – like forests, parks, wetlands, and nature preserves – serve as natural homes for plants and animals. These areas shelter countless species and provide recreational spaces, help clean air and water, and keep the environment healthy by preventing floods and supporting biodiversity. Preserving these habitats is important to ensure ecological stability and safeguard natural resources vital for life.

Mistletoe State Park

Mistletoe State Park is a 1,972-acre Georgia state park located in the northwest region of the County on the southern shore of Clarks Hill Lake (Lake Strom Thurmond). Established in 1970, the park is named after the abundance of mistletoe plants found in the surrounding forests. The area features diverse Piedmont habitats, including mature mixed pine and hardwood forests, riparian areas along creeks, and regenerated woodlands. The park also provides camping facilities, including 92 RV-friendly sites, 10 cottages, and a four-bed tent cabin.

Heggie's Rock Preserve

Heggie's Rock Preserve is a distinctive natural landmark, covering about 101 acres in the County. The granite outcrop rises approximately 70 feet above the surrounding terrain. This area provides a vital habitat for local flora and fauna within its forests of oak, pine, and hickory. Managed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Heggie's Rock was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1980, recognizing its ecological importance. Access to Heggie's Rock Preserve is restricted and is generally not open to the public to protect its delicate ecological balance.

Stallings Island Preserve

Stallings Island Preserve is a national historic landmark in Columbia County. The preserve is a 16-acre archaeological site in the Savannah River renowned for its association with the Stallings Culture, which thrived during the Late Archaic period (4,500–3,500 years ago). The Stalling Culture represents an early Native American civilization known for the oldest documented pottery in North America, the first local shell fishing, and the region's first settled communities. Today, the island is monitored via surveillance and signage to protect its artifacts and wildlife, and can only be accessed by kayak and remains off-limits to the public.

Wildwood Park

Wildwood Park is a County park located spread across 867 acres. The park offers access to Clarks Hill Lake and is known for its tranquil setting. Though many of the forests in this section of the County are planted and grown for timber, those within the park are able to stand untouched, resulting in a greater diversity of flora and, through unmanaged succession, a healthier ecosystem. Many animal species, such as deer, make use of the park's habitats. The Park is surrounded by open water, forested, residential, commercial, agricultural, and public/open space. The park is known for hosting fishing tournaments like ESPN Bassmasters and American Bass Anglers, and is home to the International Disc Golf Center.

Augusta Canal

The Augusta Canal is a National Heritage Area and a cultural resource providing locals and visitors with recreational spaces for over 150 years. Built in 1847, it is the only intact industrial canal in the American South still operational today. It originally fueled hydropower, provided drinking water, and enabled transportation. Today, the canal offers a variety of recreational activities, including kayaking, boating, bird watching, and a well-utilized trail system. Visitors can also explore historic sites along the canal's banks.

Savannah Rapids Park

Located along the Augusta Canal and Reed Creek waterfall, the park encompasses 33 acres of preserved natural landscapes, including riparian zones along the Savannah River and Reed Creek. The park's conservation efforts focus on maintaining ecological functions such as filtering stormwater and reducing erosion, ensuring the protection of water quality and biodiversity. Additionally, the park offers educational opportunities through interpretive signage and programs highlighting the importance of habitat preservation.

Natural Environment Key Takeaways

Flood Risks and Development Pressure: As Columbia County continues to grow, managing development in and around floodplains and wetlands will be a challenge. These natural areas are responsible for absorbing stormwater and reducing flooding. While the County has existing regulations to protect these sensitive zones, densely developed areas near Reed Creek, Betty's Branch, and Jones Creek remain vulnerable to flash flooding due to frequent heavy rainfall. The Comprehensive Plan can integrate and support wetlands and floodplains preservation efforts to ensure communities and ecosystems are protected.

Park and Natural Resource Management: Several parks and natural areas in Columbia County fall under the jurisdiction of multiple entities, including the County, State, and Federal agencies, as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Comprehensive Plan can help continue the collaboration efforts between the County and all involved entities to ensure that future development aligns with their respective regulations and management goals.

Taking Advantage of the County's Assets: Clarks Hill Lake and surrounding recreational areas offer significant opportunities for enhancing community well-being and attracting visitors. While these assets remain underutilized, they continue to draw residents and tourists alike. As the County considers future investments, the Comprehensive Plan has the opportunity to explore how improved access, maintenance, and promotion of these areas could support quality of life, local engagement, and tourism-related economic benefits.

Improve Storm-Impacted Recreational Areas: Hurricane Helene caused notable damage to key recreational areas such as Savannah Rapids Pavilion, Petersburg Campground, and Wildwood Park. While portions of these sites remain in use, their full restoration is essential to ensure long-term functionality, safety, and continued community enjoyment. The Comprehensive plan can identify and incorporate strategies to improve affected areas.

Preserving Rural Character: The County's northwest area is predominantly rural and the residents are keen on maintaining its character to large homestead-style properties scattered across expansive lots. The Comprehensive Plan can guide balanced growth with conservation to maintain the character of this area.

Appendix C:
Community Visioning

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Community Visioning Workshop

May 22, 2025

FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

Agenda

- Comprehensive Plan: About the Planning Process
- Community Visioning Workshop
- Outreach Opportunities
- Next Steps

ABOUT THE PLANNING PROCESS

About the Comprehensive Plan

- A "Roadmap" or "Blueprint" for the next two decades
- The Comprehensive Plan...
  - Engages the community
  - Identifies community desires, needs, and aspirations
  - Assesses the County's existing issues and strengths
  - Guides a broad range of topics (policy)
  - Is a dynamic document – can be updated and maintained to reflect trends and events

Why is a Comprehensive Plan Important?

- Tell Columbia County's story and share the community's vision
- Evaluate and inform development proposals
- Foundation for the regulatory framework
- Coordinate local and regional initiatives
- Support capital improvements planning and budgeting
- Identify future studies and funding opportunities
- Inform and educate the community

Planning Process

5 steps over 14 months

- **Step 1: Project Initiation and Management**
- **Step 2: Community Engagement and Existing Conditions Analysis**
- **Step 3: Plan Visioning & Key Recommendations**
- **Step 4: Draft Comprehensive Plan Elements – Future Development Guide**
- **Step 5: Draft and Final Comprehensive Plan**



Scope of Work

- Step 1: Project Initiation and Management
- Step 2: Community Engagement and Existing Conditions Analysis
- **Step 3: Plan Visioning & Key Recommendations**
- Step 4: Draft Comprehensive Plan Elements – Future Development Guide
- Step 5: Draft and Final Comprehensive Plan




VISIONING WORKSHOP

Example Map

Visioning Workshop

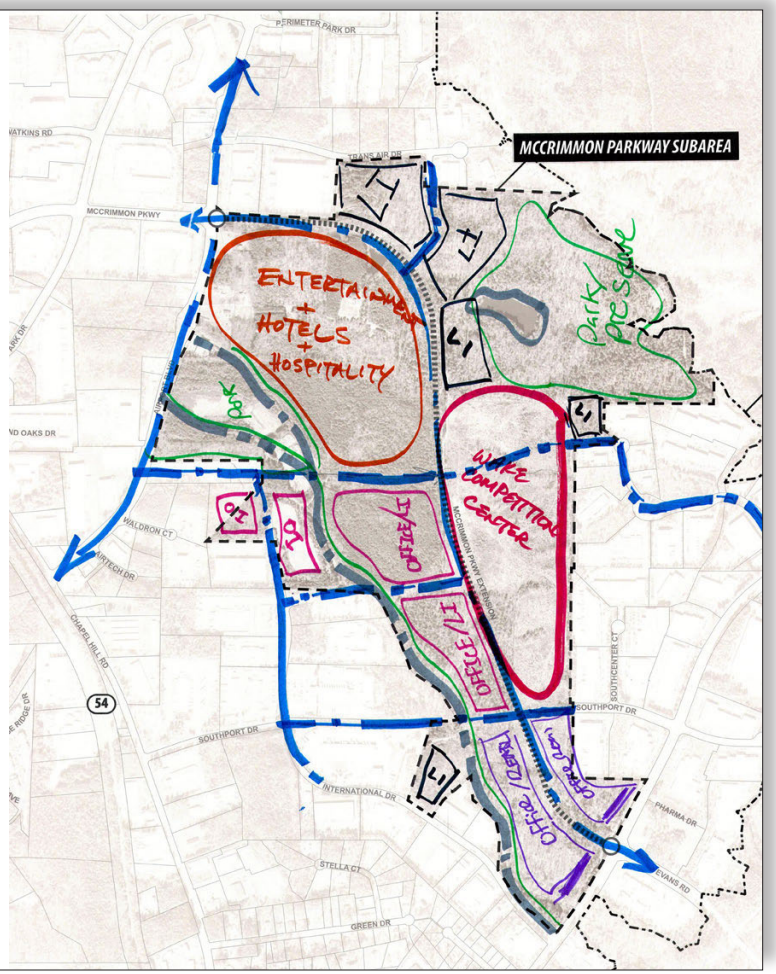
Morrisville Land Use Plan

Group # 3

Land Use

- STREAM
- ENTERTAIN + HOSPITALITY
- INDUSTRIAL DEVELOP
- PARK + TRAILS
- COMPETITION CTR
- OFFICE RETAIL
- OFFICE + LIGHT INDUSTRIAL
- _____

- Transportation & Access
- Parks, Facilities & Amenities
- Urban Design
- Priority Development Site(s)
- Other



Workshop Instructions

1. Introduce yourselves (name and where you live and/or work)
2. Designate someone to take detailed notes in your packets
3. Designate your spokesperson to present your ideas
4. Confirm your Group # on the map and on the packet
5. Work on the mapping exercise with your group
6. Small groups present each map to the room
7. Have FUN!

Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

Types and location of new housing, property maintenance, housing renovation, code enforcement, neighborhood improvements, affordable housing, senior housing, etc.



Commercial Areas

Types of commercial development, desired aesthetic, key redevelopment opportunity sites, examples of quality development, desired areas for commercial uses (e.g., office and retail spaces), desired areas for industrial uses (e.g., manufacturing, warehousing, and logistics), impacts on surrounding uses, access, and infrastructure, etc.



Transportation

New streets and extensions, roadway improvements, intersection improvements, traffic signals, transit service, parking, new pedestrian connections, bike lanes or routes, sidewalks, crosswalks, multimodal trails, etc.



Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Desired locations for improved or expanded County services, areas in need of improved infrastructure, new community branches for facilities and services, public gathering spaces, etc.



Natural Resources and Environment

Locations for future parks or park expansions, open space preservation targets, sensitive environmental areas, trails, greenways, etc.



Other

Include any suggestions that do not fit under one of the other categories.



Visionary "Big Idea"

What is your big idea or vision for the County?

"Columbia County will be..."

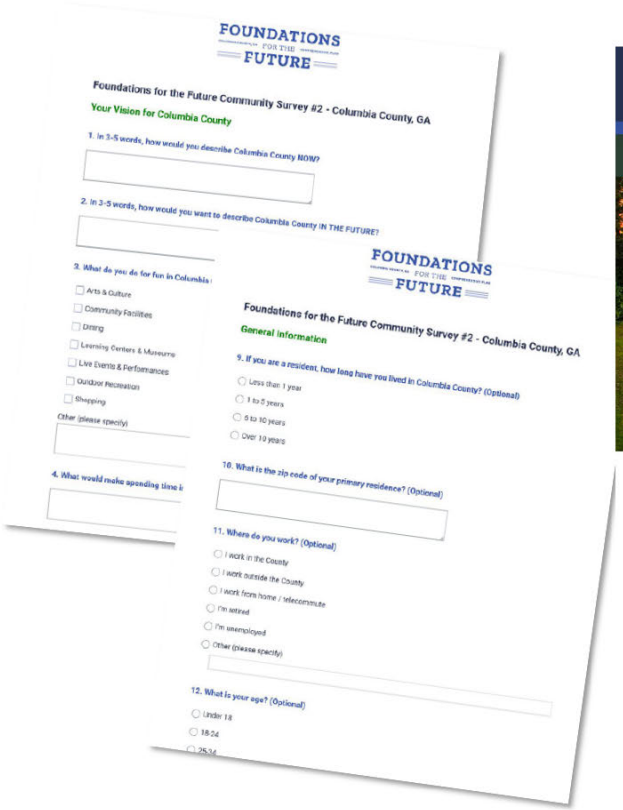
FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

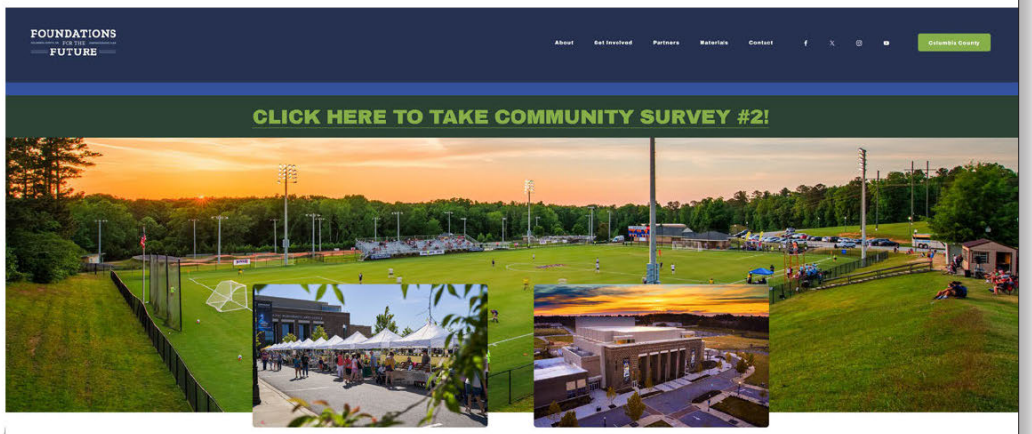



ONLINE
PARTICIPATION


FOUNDATIONS
FOR THE
FUTURE
About
Get Involved
Partners
Materials
Contact
Columbia County
CLICK HERE TO TAKE COMMUNITY SURVEY #2!
LET'S GET TO WORK,
COLUMBIA COUNTY!
Project Website – www.futurecolumbiacounty.com

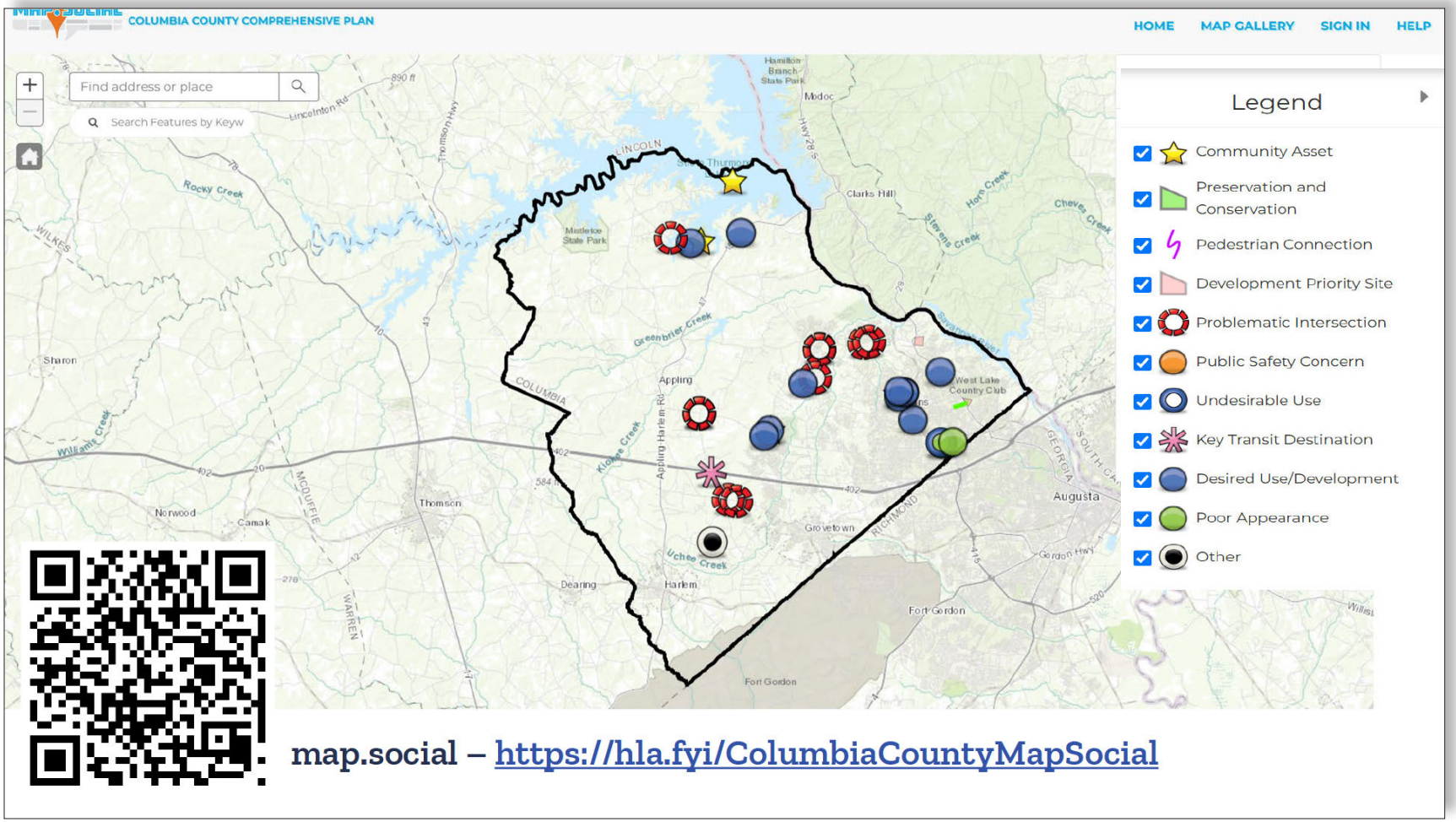
Community Survey #2





LET'S GET TO WORK,
COLUMBIA COUNTY!

www.surveymonkey.com/r/ColumbiaCoSurvey2


COLUMBIA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
HOME
MAP GALLERY
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HELP
Find address or place
Search Features by Keyw
Legend
Community Asset
Preservation and Conservation
Pedestrian Connection
Development Priority Site
Problematic Intersection
Public Safety Concern
Undesirable Use
Key Transit Destination
Desired Use/Development
Poor Appearance
Other
Augusta
Thomson
Norwood
Camak
Sharon
Appling
Harlem
Dearing
Grovetown
Fort Gordon
Clarks Hill
Modoc
West Lake Country Club
map.social – https://hla.fyi/ColumbiaCountyMapSocial

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

- **Outreach**
  - Online outreach available now

- **Project Deliverables**
  - Outreach Summaries (available now on project website)
  - Existing Conditions Memo (available soon)
  - Vision, Goals, and Key Recommendations



THANK YOU!
HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan Visioning Workshop

Sign-in Sheet

Name	Connection to the County (Resident, Business Owner, etc.)	Email Address
Keith Lawrence	[illegible] CSRA Development	[redacted]
Bryce Melear	Resident	
Russell Wilder	Business Owner	
Carroll Pusek	Business Owner	
Tiffany Heitzman	Home Builders Associati	
Jonathan Crawford	Southeastern Development	
Jim Cox	Development Authority	

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan Visioning Workshop

Sign-in Sheet

Name	Connection to the County (Resident, Business Owner, etc.)	Email Address
RUSSELL LAHODNY	CHAMBER OF COMMERCE	[redacted]
CHRIS HERRMANN	RESIDENT / DIST 4	

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan

FOUNDATIONS

COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FUTURE

Community Visioning Workshops

Foundations for the Future - Columbia County Comprehensive Plan
Thursday, May 22, 2025
1:30 PM -3:00 PM and 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM
Columbia County Exhibition Center
212 Partnership Drive Grovetown, GA 30813

The **Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan** will guide Columbia County for the next 20 years, helping County leaders make thoughtful decisions for the community.

It is important that Columbia County residents, businesses, and other stakeholders are involved in the development of the Comprehensive Plan to create a community-based vision for the County.

Mapping Exercise Agenda

- **Introduce yourselves** (name and where you live or work)
- Designate **someone to take detailed notes** in your packets
- Designate your **spokesperson to present** your ideas
- Confirm your **Group #** on the map and on the packet
- Work on the **mapping exercise** with your group
- Small groups present each map to the room
- Have **FUN**!

Group # 2

Visioning Topics

Identify areas of strength, assets, issues, and concerns on your map for each of the following Visioning Topics. **Be sure to keep notes of the areas you are identifying and explain why in the space allowed.**

Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

Examples: Types and location of new housing, property maintenance, housing renovation, code enforcement, neighborhood improvements, affordable housing, senior housing, etc.

Commercial Areas

Examples: Types of commercial development, desired aesthetic, key redevelopment opportunity sites, examples of quality development, desired areas for commercial uses (e.g., office and retail spaces), desired areas for industrial uses (e.g., manufacturing, warehousing, and logistics), impacts on surrounding uses, access, and infrastructure, etc.

Group # 2

Transportation

Examples: New streets and extensions, roadway improvements, intersection improvements, traffic signals, transit service, parking, new pedestrian connections, bike lanes or routes, sidewalks, crosswalks, multimodal trails, etc.

2. Connectivity by sidewalks to schools - shoulders (Harle greenpath
3. Widen road and add shoulders
4. Street Widening
5. Overwalk Bridge in front of high School (Graniteu
6. sidewalk in front of Evans High School

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Examples: Desired locations for improved or expanded County services, areas in need of improved infrastructure, new community branches for facilities and services, public gathering spaces, etc.

1. Require developers to Regularly Spaced 35 mph access roads through subdivisions
Modular connections through subdivisions

2. Commercial Infrastructure along the Savannah River - Rest, Coffee Shops, Small Businesses

Group # 2

Natural Resources and Environment

Examples: Locations for future parks or park expansions, open space preservation targets, sensitive environmental areas, trails, greenways, etc.

Other

Examples: Include any suggestions that do not fit under one of the other categories.

1 Multizoned Community Center near Kelaire with walking access from Kelaire
2. Adjust billboards to only be a certain height and restrict tall billboards to I20
3.

Group #

2

Group Vision Statement

What is your group's big idea? Based on discussion throughout the workshop, write 2-3 sentences about your group's vision for the future of Columbia County

Columbia County will be...

5/22

FOUNDATIONS

COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FUTURE

Community Visioning Workshops

Foundations for the Future - Columbia County Comprehensive Plan
Thursday, May 22, 2025
1:30 PM -3:00 PM and 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM
Columbia County Exhibition Center
212 Partnership Drive Grovetown, GA 30813

The **Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan** will guide Columbia County for the next 20 years, helping County leaders make thoughtful decisions for the community.

It is important that Columbia County residents, businesses, and other stakeholders are involved in the development of the Comprehensive Plan to create a community-based vision for the County.

Mapping Exercise Agenda

- **Introduce yourselves** (name and where you live or work)
- Designate **someone to take detailed notes** in your packets
- Designate your **spokesperson to present** your ideas
- Confirm your **Group #** on the map and on the packet
- Work on the **mapping exercise** with your group
- Small groups present each map to the room
- Have **FUN**!

Group #

pM

Visioning Topics

Identify areas of strength, assets, issues, and concerns on your map for each of the following Visioning Topics. **Be sure to keep notes of the areas you are identifying and explain why in the space allowed.**

Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

Examples: Types and location of new housing, property maintenance, housing renovation, code enforcement, neighborhood improvements, affordable housing, senior housing, etc.

Should have transitional residential developments
Need more high-density housing or housing in general near Ft. Eisenhower
Larger, rural res (2.5ac) lots in N
Senior living near hospital, fire stations - townhomes, condos, assisted living (mix)

Commercial Areas

Examples: Types of commercial development, desired aesthetic, key redevelopment opportunity sites, examples of quality development, desired areas for commercial uses (e.g., office and retail spaces), desired areas for industrial uses (e.g., manufacturing, warehousing, and logistics), impacts on surrounding uses, access, and infrastructure, etc.

Rest., Shopping along Interstate 20 @ 221; less industrial (wetlands, riparian areas, etc. to preserve in area)
Near Pollard's Corner - rest., small boutiques, small biz
Riverwatch Pkwy - [redacted] commercial

Group #

PM

Transportation

Examples: New streets and extensions, roadway improvements, intersection improvements, traffic signals, transit service, parking, new pedestrian connections, bike lanes or routes, sidewalks, crosswalks, multimodal trails, etc.

River Watch Pkwy - access mgmt needed in corridor
traffic is a problem
Park & Ride ?
Bike path along Wm Few / Henry McManus
High speed limit on Dozier Rd. (too high)
Cross road somewhere on Columbia Rd.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Examples: Desired locations for improved or expanded County services, areas in need of improved infrastructure, new community branches for facilities and services, public gathering spaces, etc.

Need comm facil for voting as res develops
More emergency facilities & EMTs
Want clean energy (no diesel turbines, generators)
Infrastructure extension - Wrightsboro Rd. - I-20
School needed between Phinizy & Pollards Corner

Group #

PM

Natural Resources and Environment

Examples: Locations for future parks or park expansions, open space preservation targets, sensitive environmental areas, trails, greenways, etc.

Protect wetlands, creeks

Parks & rec areas in North

Access & rec on river

Other

Examples: Include any suggestions that do not fit under one of the other categories.

Historic Site - United Methodist White Oak Campground
Wm Few house
Woodville

Group #

PM

Group Vision Statement

What is your group's big idea? Based on discussion throughout the workshop, write 2-3 sentences about your group's vision for the future of Columbia County

Columbia County will be...

Smart, sustainable development embraced
Protect open, green, and natural areas
Work w/ ACoE to make a small, recreation area
Wildwood - kayak launch, kids areas, campsites, cabins, small stoves
Maintaining natural, rural areas (build what fits w/i county)
Protect areas in north, develop more high-density in southern portion
More neighborhood-friendly developments w/ bike paths

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COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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- Have **FUN**!

STEERING COMMITTEE - 17 PEOPLE
5 COMMISSIONERS
10 - APPOINTED BY COMMISSIONERS

Group # 1

Visioning Topics

Identify areas of strength, assets, issues, and concerns on your map for each of the following Visioning Topics. **Be sure to keep notes of the areas you are identifying and explain why in the space allowed.**

Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

Examples: Types and location of new housing, property maintenance, housing renovation, code enforcement, neighborhood improvements, affordable housing, senior housing, etc.

BAKER PLACE DEVELOPMENTS ARE OVER EXCEEDING ROAD CAPACITY. THIS ISSUE TOOK 10 YEARS TO BE RESOLVED ON CHAMBLIN ROAD WITH TWO ADDED TRAFFIC LIGHTS. AND IS STILL IN ADAQUATE.

Commercial Areas

Examples: Types of commercial development, desired aesthetic, key redevelopment opportunity sites, examples of quality development, desired areas for commercial uses (e.g., office and retail spaces), desired areas for industrial uses (e.g., manufacturing, warehousing, and logistics), impacts on surrounding uses, access, and infrastructure, etc.

THE DEVELOPMENT ON THIS SIDE OF THE INTERSTATE IS OVERCROWDING AND OVERLOADING ROADS. LEWISTON ROAD ON OPPOSITE SIDE SHOULD BE USED TO EXPAND COMMERCIALLY.

Group # 1

Natural Resources and Environment

Examples: Locations for future parks or park expansions, open space preservation targets, sensitive environmental areas, trails, greenways, etc.

Other

Examples: Include any suggestions that do not fit under one of the other categories.

Group # 1

Transportation

Examples: New streets and extensions, roadway improvements, intersection improvements, traffic signals, transit service, parking, new pedestrian connections, bike lanes or routes, sidewalks, crosswalks, multimodal trails, etc.

BAILOR PLACE
CHAMBLIN
WILLIAM FOW — ALL INADEQUATE TO SUPPORT CURRENT AND FUTURE TRAFFIC LOADS

MORE INTERSTATE ON/OFF RAMPS IN COLUMBIA COUNTY TO EASE TRAFFIC AT GROVETOWN EXIT

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Examples: Desired locations for improved or expanded County services, areas in need of improved infrastructure, new community branches for facilities and services, public gathering spaces, etc.

(NATURAL) TRAIL SYSTEM IS A HUGE PLUS, HOWEVER NO ACCESS FROM ADJOINING NEIGHBORHOODS CREATES ISSUES

Group #

1

Group Vision Statement

What is your group's big idea? Based on discussion throughout the workshop, write 2-3 sentences about your group's vision for the future of Columbia County

Columbia County will be...

MORE TRAFFIC ENGINEERING NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED AND IN PLACE BEFORE EXPANSIONS ARE APPROVED.

IN THE FUTURE COMMISSIONERS SHOULD NOT APPOINT ANYONE TO THE STEERING COMMITEE. THIS CREATES BIAS ON THE COMMITEE WITH IN DIRECT INFLUENCE.

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COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FUTURE

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Group #

3

Visioning Topics

Identify areas of strength, assets, issues, and concerns on your map for each of the following Visioning Topics. **Be sure to keep notes of the areas you are identifying and explain why in the space allowed.**

Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

Examples: Types and location of new housing, property maintenance, housing renovation, code enforcement, neighborhood improvements, affordable housing, senior housing, etc.

Commercial Areas

Examples: Types of commercial development, desired aesthetic, key redevelopment opportunity sites, examples of quality development, desired areas for commercial uses (e.g., office and retail spaces), desired areas for industrial uses (e.g., manufacturing, warehousing, and logistics), impacts on surrounding uses, access, and infrastructure, etc.

Group # 3

Transportation

Examples: New streets and extensions, roadway improvements, intersection improvements, traffic signals, transit service, parking, new pedestrian connections, bike lanes or routes, sidewalks, crosswalks, multimodal trails, etc.

"Green Corridors Under Power Lines" sent 22 May '2
by Danielle Calasanzio for multimodal trails to
connect residential, shopping and public areas.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Examples: Desired locations for improved or expanded County services, areas in need of improved infrastructure, new community branches for facilities and services, public gathering spaces, etc.

Community Centers are needed to provide public gathering
paces for education, games. Perhaps a senior center
roximate to a planned community.

Full hospital ✓

Community garden sponsored by the County with
how-to classes and education

Group # 3

Natural Resources and Environment

Examples: Locations for future parks or park expansions, open space preservation targets, sensitive environmental areas, trails, greenways, etc.

Preserve green buffers surrounding the White Oak Business Park and create trails connecting the business park to planned residential areas. ~~Create Trail to CONNECT SUBSTATION~~

Preserve the natural springs where people collect water.

Other

Examples: Include any suggestions that do not fit under one of the other categories.

Enhance the County recycling center in Ghoretown off William Few; it can't handle the volume.

Conserve agricultural areas to enable people to grow food.

REDUCE THE POPULATION GROWTH FORECAST (HOW)?

Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan Page 4 of 5

Group #

Group Vision Statement

What is your group's big idea? Based on discussion throughout the workshop, write 2-3 sentences about your group's vision for the future of Columbia County

Columbia County will be...

Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan

Page **5** of **5**

Community
Visioning #2
6:30

parks
· mix of green space, recreation, large lots, no apartments near lake

· Rural agricultural near Mistletoe Park

in areas south of lake want 2.5 acre lots "transitional" area

· appreciate housing w/ amenities - parks, streams etc.

need to consider wetlands when talking about housing

"indp"
· senior living near hospitals, access to fire stations between interstate and Grovetown - senior living

Type? = townhomes, but fire assistance living apts

ppl have trouble finding housing options for aging parents

Brandon wilde good example bc its a mix but very costly

ex: Dell well?

need to put more emergency services in proximity to senior

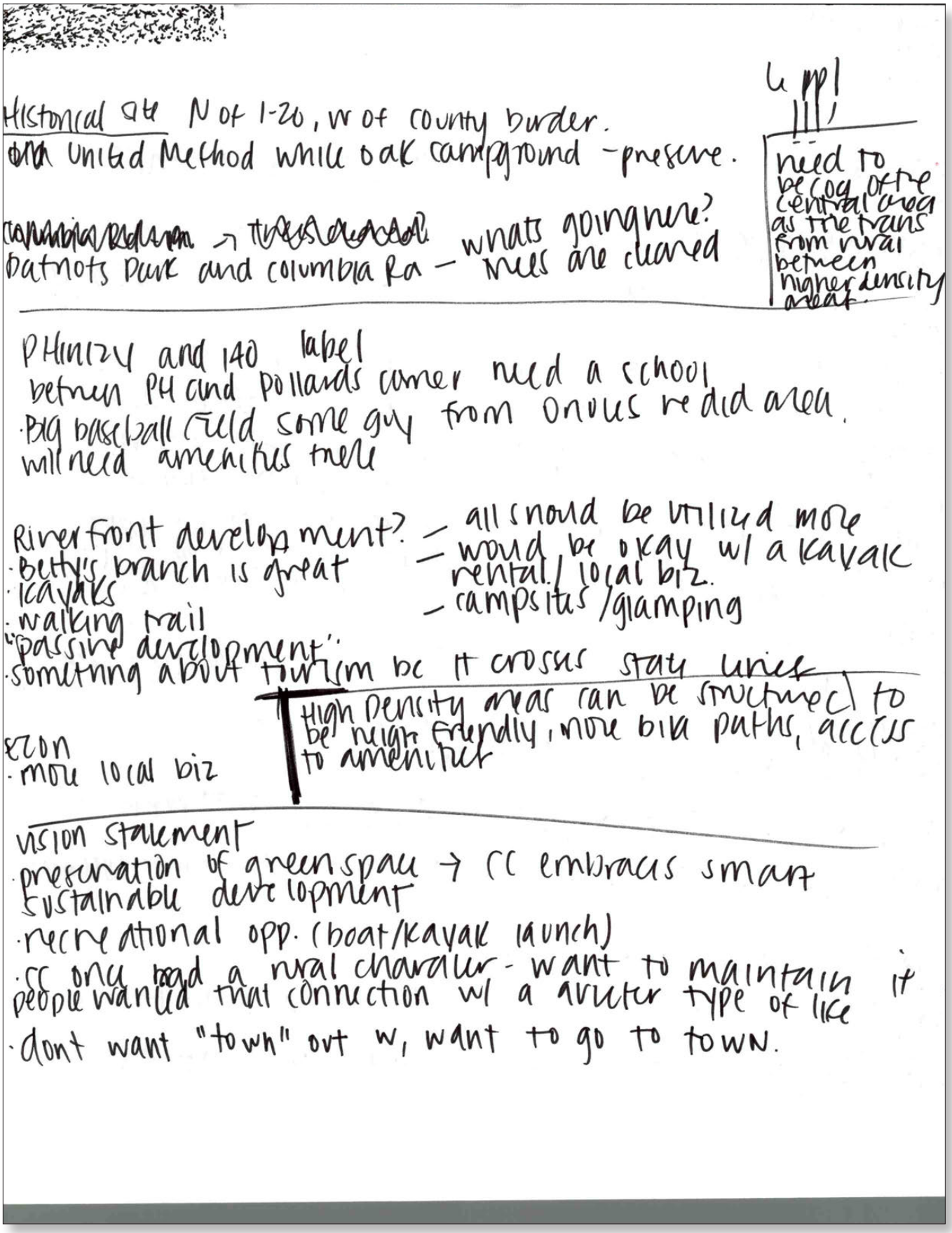
Natural Res./Com Fac.
worried about Savannah River and data centers
worried about effect on well water

Q: Areas on edge of density and areas we want to preserve?
How do we protect certain pockets of neigh. that
ex: William Few struggling. People went out there for large lots and now its changing

traffic - willam Few to Lewiston

have they considered a park n ride as a public transit option

· traffic engineering to reconsider speeds on Countyrd


Historical dist N of I-20, W of county border.
United Method while oak campground - preserve.
Patriots Park and Columbia Rd - whats going here? trees are cleared
need to be cog of the central area as the trans from rural between higher density areas
PH in 24 and 140 label
betwen PH and Pollards corner need a school
·Big baseball field some guy from Orioles re did area. will need amenities there
Riverfront development?
·Betty's branch is great
·Icaviks
·walking trail
"passive development"
·something about tourism be it crosses state lines
– all should be utilized more
– would be okay w/ a kayak rental / local biz.
– campsites / glamping
High density areas can be structured to be neighborhood friendly, more bike paths, access to amenities
·more local biz
vision statement
·preservation of green space → CC embraces smart sustainable development
·recreational opp. (boat/kayak launch)
·CC once had a rural character - want to maintain it people wanted that connection w/ a quieter type of life
·dont want "town" out w, want to go to town.

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COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

Community Visioning Workshops Summary

Columbia County Comprehensive Plan | May 22, 2025

Columbia County hosted two Community Visioning Workshops on May 22, 2025, at Columbia County Exhibition Center. The workshop allowed residents, business owners and operators, and other stakeholders to discuss the community and provide visioning input for Columbia County. The feedback received will help guide the planning process and help County leaders make thoughtful decisions for the community. The Community Visioning Workshops were designed to allow participants to voice their thoughts on the County before Plan recommendations are crafted.

Total participants engaged: 18 attendees

Workshop Format

The workshops included a brief presentation introducing the Comprehensive Plan purpose and planning process, and a group mapping exercise. Participants worked together in breakout groups at tables. Each group was provided with a packet that included guidelines for discussion along with a large map of the County. Groups worked as teams to prepare their visions for the community including mapping desired improvements and development. The exercise allowed community members to identify where they believe future uses should be developed within the County, as well as opportunity sites and other improvements. Each group was then tasked with translating their maps into a written vision statement or set of big ideas that explained their envisioned future for Columbia. At the end of each workshop, groups presented their maps and summaries of their big ideas and vision statements.

Note on Summary Context

The items identified in this summary are not recommendations or observations of the consultant. They represent feedback and comments received from those who participated in the workshop exercises.

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COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

Summarized Results

A summary of community input received from the maps, activity packets, and the ensuing discussion is provided by topic area on the following pages.

Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

- **Need for More Housing.** Multiple groups expressed a desire for additional housing to accommodate the County's growth, ranging from high density housing to large single-family detached housing. Groups stated that more housing options should be located near Fort Eisenhower with transitional housing between low density and higher density housing.
- **Rural Residential.** Large 2.5-acre lot rural residential developments should be considered in the northern section of the County, north of Highway 221 near Mistletoe State Park, Wildwood Park, and in areas where similar rural residential development already exists. Participants also noted that this type of development would be appropriate on the western edge of the County, near Wrightsboro Road and Clary Curt Road. Larger lot homes, outside of the rural and agricultural category, should provide a transition between rural residential homes and the more urbanized portions of the County. One group suggested that large lots estates should be accommodated between William Few Parkway and Highway 221, and between Columbia Road and Washington Road. Additionally, one group also identified that more neighborhood-friendly developments with bike paths should be planned.
- **Senior Housing.** Groups emphasized difficulty finding housing for aging parents. Senior housing like townhomes, condominiums, or assisted living near the hospital and other community facilities like fire stations and medical services are desirable.
- **Sustainable Development.** One group emphasized the importance of smart and sustainable development across the County to prevent overdevelopment, infrastructure strain, and preserve the area's rural character.
- **Overdeveloped.** Participants indicated that the area surrounding Baker Place Road and Columbia Road is overdeveloped, resulting in traffic congestion and road operating beyond their intended capacity.

Commercial Areas

- **Retail and Business Environment.** One group mentioned that shopping would be desirable along Interstate 20 at Highway 221 with less industrial uses along the corridor to preserve natural features. Participants expressed a desire to see small businesses and boutiques located near Pollard's Corner. One group indicated that Riverwatch Parkway would be appropriate for additional commercial uses.
- **Overcrowding.** One group stated that the development on the south side of the I-20 and Chamblin Road is overcrowding and overloading roads in the area. However, this group suggested that commercial expansion should happen along Lewiston Road between I-20 and Columbia Road to balance development across the area and improve traffic distribution.
- **Specific Development/Redevelopment Opportunities.** Several specific areas were identified for development and improvement. Participants expressed that the area surrounding the intersection of Interstate 20 and Highway 221 could accommodate mixed-use developments. One group identified that commercial uses, such as kayak

and fishing rentals, small stores, and campgrounds, should be located along the Savannah River to support and enhance recreational uses.

Transportation

- **Traffic Control and Management.** Participants consistently emphasized traffic as being a major concern. Several roads were identified as being unable to support the existing road volumes including Baker Place Road, Chamblin Road, Lewiston Road, and William Few Parkway. Baker Place Road and William Few Parkway were identified by participants to be dangerous and have the greatest traffic concerns. One group indicated that more interstate on/off ramps in Columbia County would help ease congestion at the Grovetown exit, while another group stated that traffic engineering needs to be considered and in place before new development and expansions are approved.
- **Sidewalk and Pedestrian Safety.** Participants stated that road improvements near schools should be prioritized, with a strong emphasis on sidewalk connectivity. Suggestions included widening existing sidewalks and adding new ones to improve access between neighborhoods and schools. Specific locations noted were a new sidewalk in front of Evans High School on Cox Road and an overpass bridge in front of Grovetown High School to enhance pedestrian safety. One group supported sidewalk improvements as part of a larger greenpath system to connect schools and residential areas.
- **Bike and Roadway Improvements.** Bicycle lanes, paths, and paved shoulders were mentioned as desirable options. Participants conveyed the need for sidewalk widenings and bike paths. One group specifically identified the stretch of William Few Parkway/Hardy McManus Road between Columbia Road and Furys Ferry Road as an ideal location for a bike path. Participants also mentioned the need for general road widenings and paved shoulders, particularly in areas like Harlem, to improve overall connectivity and safety for cyclists and pedestrians.
- **Public Transportation.** Participants suggested evaluating opportunities for Park & Ride facilities to make public transportation more feasible, particularly at the Pollards Corner intersection.
- **Speed Limits.** Participants noted that speed limits are too fast, particularly along Dozier Road and County Road.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

- **Community Facilities.** Groups highlighted the need for maintaining and improving County streets, trails, and services near residential neighborhoods. Participants also expressed the need for additional community facilities for voting, public gathering, education, and recreation as the nearby residential areas develop. A community garden sponsored by the County with gardening education classes was also suggested. One group identified the need for a new multi-zoned community center within walking distance of the Kelarie housing development (near Baker Place Road and William Few Parkway).
- **Educational Facilities.** One group suggested that an additional school should be located between Phinizy and Pollards Corner.
- **Infrastructure.** Groups suggested infrastructure should be extended along Wrightsboro Road/I-20 and along the Savannah River to support new rural agricultural residential development on the south side of Wrightsboro Road

and Clary Curt Road and mixed development at the intersection of I-20 and Highway 221. The County recycling facility in Grovetown off William Few Parkway was highlighted by one group as exceeding its capacity.

- **Trails.** Participants praised the County for the trail system; however, limited access to and from adjacent neighborhoods creates issues. One group suggested the addition of a new trail that connects the White Oak Business Park to the planned adjacent residential areas.
- **Fire and EMS Stations.** Some group members expressed a need for more fire and emergency substations to support the growing community, particularly near existing or new senior living facilities.

Natural Resources and Environment

- **Preservation.** Groups stated that wetlands and creeks should be preserved, especially preserving a green buffer surrounding the White Oak Business Park and providing a new trail connection to the future residential area nearby. One group mentioned the preservation of the natural springs where residents collect fresh water. Additionally, participants expressed a desire for more restaurants and shopping along I-20 and generally preferred less industrial development. However, they also emphasized the importance of preserving wetlands and riparian areas, particularly along I-20 and near its intersection with Highway 221.
- **Parks and Trails.** Participants indicated that new parks in the north of the County and on either side of Louisville Road between Tubman Road and Columbia Road are desired. Participants also highlighted trails like Euchee Creek Trail should be connected to the adjacent neighborhoods and existing parks such as Patriots Park.
- **Savannah River.** Groups expressed the need for additional parks and recreational opportunities along the Savannah River. Suggested ideas included County-owned park space, kayak rentals, pavilions, fishing areas, and other small-scale commercial uses. Participants specifically identified the stretch between Furys Ferry Road/Highway 28 South and Clarks Hill Road/Highway 221 as a location for these amenities.

Other

- One group indicated that the height and size of billboards should be restricted in certain areas and only permit tall billboards along I-20.
- One group stated that historic sites to be preserved like United Methodist White Oak Campground, the William Few home, and Woodville.
- One group suggested conserving agricultural areas in rural residential zones to allow residents to operate small-scale farms and grow food on their own properties.

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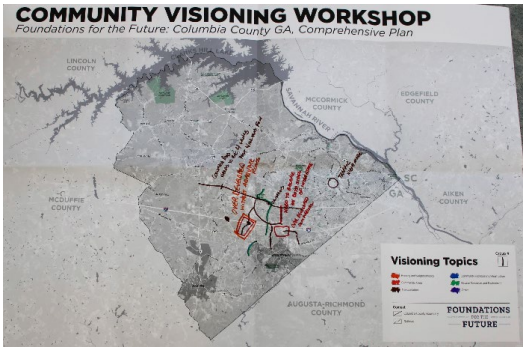
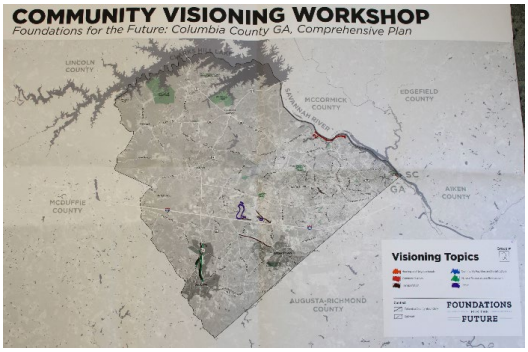
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

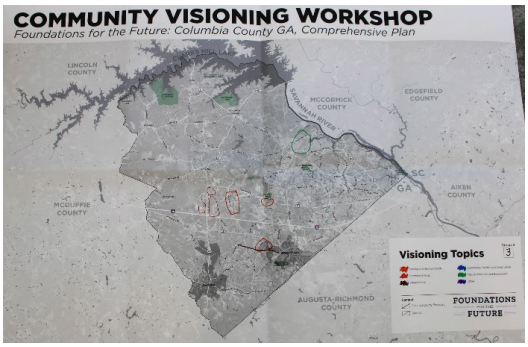
FUTURE

Visioning Maps

Images of each map are included on the following pages and high-resolution images are available to view and download by clicking HERE.





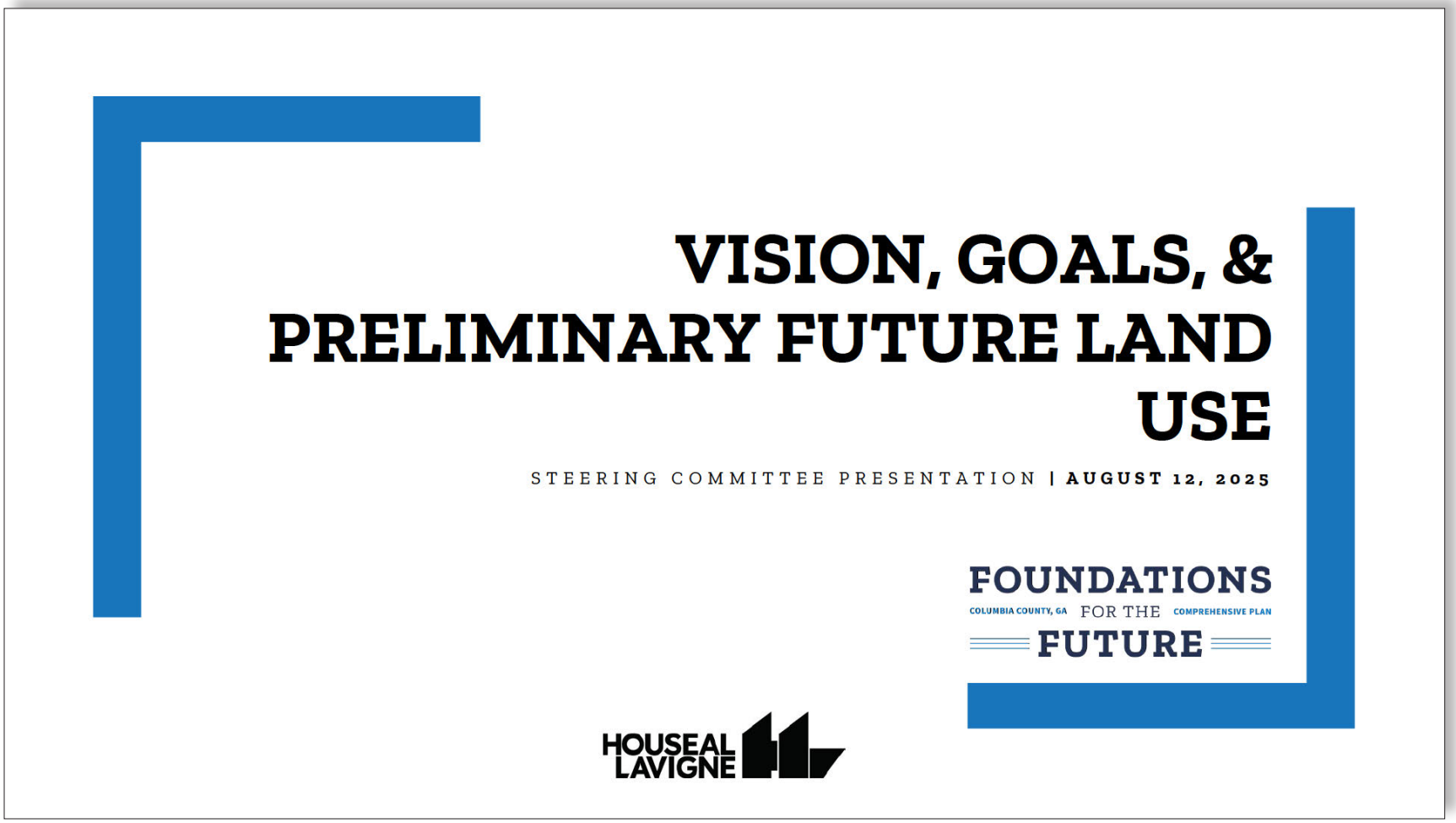




Group Vision Statements – *What are your group's "big ideas?"*

Each group was tasked with translating their maps into a written vision statement or set of big ideas that explained their envisioned future for Columbia County. Vision or "Big Idea" statements are presented here largely "as written," with minor edits for spelling, grammar, and clarity, as needed.

- Smart, sustainable development should be embraced.
- Protect open, green, and natural areas.
- Work with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) to make a small recreation area.
- Wildwood – kayak launch, kids' area, campsites, cabins, small stores.
- Maintaining natural rural areas (build what fits within County).
- Protect areas in the north; develop more high density in the southern portion of the County.
- More neighborhood-friendly developments with bike paths.
- More traffic engineering needs to be considered and in place before expansions are approved.


VISION, GOALS, & PRELIMINARY FUTURE LAND USE
STEERING COMMITTEE PRESENTATION | AUGUST 12, 2025
FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE
HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

Agenda

- Planning Process Update
- Review Vision Statement
- Review Goals and Key Recommendations
- Review Land Use Framework and Plan
- Next Steps

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FUTURE

PLANNING PROCESS

Scope of Work

Approximately 18-month process to:

- Establish where we are today
- Define where we want to go
- Establish the roadmap to get there



Step 3: Plan Visioning and Recommendations

3a. Community Visioning Workshops (Two Events)

3b. Vision Statement and Goals

3c. Key Recommendations Memo

3d. County Staff Review

3e. Advisory Committee Working Session



VISION STATEMENT

What is a Vision Statement?

- Aspirational narrative
- Depicts the community's collective desires
- Serves as the foundation for the Plan's goals, recommendations, and actions
- Long range – looks ahead 15-20 years
- Based on community feedback!

Columbia County Vision Statement (pt 1)

Columbia County will continue to be a welcoming community known for its unique character, impressive natural areas, and distinctive neighborhoods. With a shared identity that connects urbanized centers like Evans and Martinez to rural areas like Appling, the County will thoughtfully balance its rural heritage with strategic growth and development.

With a growing and diverse population, Columbia County's neighborhoods will offer housing for households of all types and sizes. New neighborhoods will be designed around parks, greenways, and natural landscapes, creating attractive, connected communities. Reinvestment in established residential areas will enhance their vitality, while careful planning will ensure the County's rural charm continues to define the community.

Columbia County Vision Statement (pt 2)

Columbia County will evolve from being one of Georgia's most desirable bedroom communities into a strong and self-sustaining economic hub. Given Fort Gordon's role as a major economic and population driver, the County will become a key player in the regional economy, attracting innovation, diverse industries, and a skilled workforce, while fostering a robust job market. New neighborhood-scale commercial nodes will bring shopping, dining, and daily conveniences closer to residents across the County. Evans Towne Center will continue to grow as the civic and cultural heart of the County, offering a mix of local restaurants, retail, and year-round events.

Columbia County Vision Statement (pt 3)

Roads and highways will be efficient and safe, promoting smooth traffic flow and travel for all users. An expanded network of sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails will create connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial areas. This comprehensive network will support healthy, active lifestyles and provide options for walking and biking across the County.

Essential infrastructure and services in the County will continue to support growth and maintain a high quality of life for current and future residents. Guided by community values, the County will work to preserve land and water resources, protecting them for future generations.

Columbia County Vision Statement (pt 4)

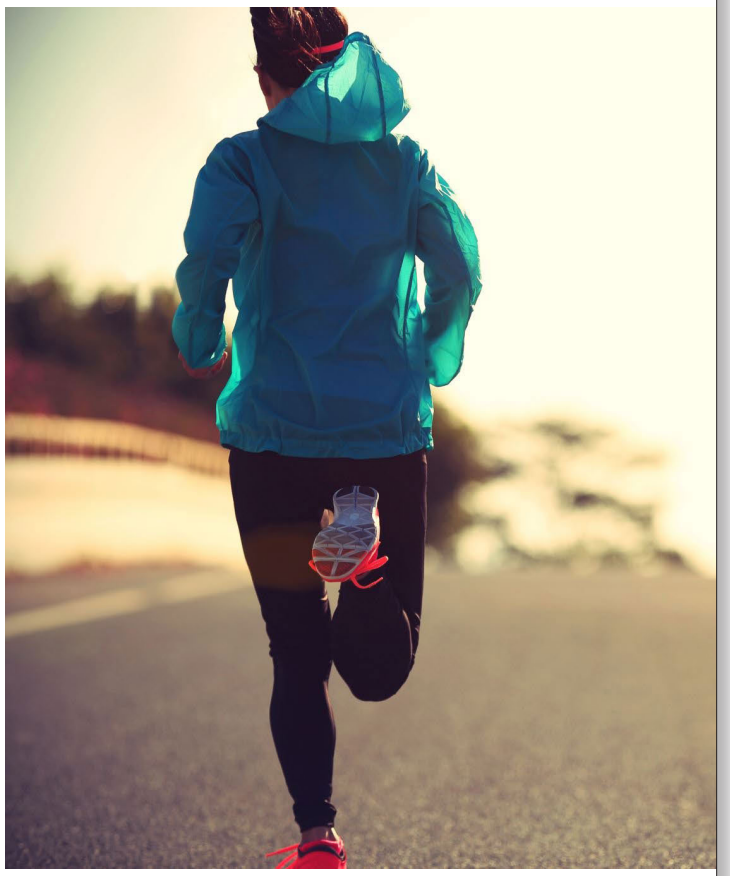
The scenic shoreline of Clarks Hill Lake and the forested trails of Mistletoe State Park are defining features of the community and will continue to be celebrated for their beauty and accessibility. Parks, greenways, and conservation areas will connect residents and visitors to the outdoors, while destinations like Wildwood Park and the Savannah Rapids Pavilion will continue to attract millions of visitors each year, reinforcing the County's reputation as a destination for recreation, events, and natural beauty.

As Columbia County grows thoughtfully, it will build its reputation as one of the best places to live, work, and recreate in Georgia. Residents will benefit from access to high quality jobs, a nationally recognized school system, a variety of housing options, and exceptional natural areas, all while the County continues to prioritize safety and an outstanding quality of life.

GOALS

What is a Goal?

Goals are **broad** and **long-range** desired outcomes of what the County aims to achieve in the future. They are ambitious and will require the **culmination of many incremental actions** to be fully realized.



Land Use and Development Patterns

Goal 1: Ensure that future development in the County follows a balanced approach to preservation and expansion by directing growth to areas served by infrastructure and utilities to limit patterns of sprawl.

Goal 2: Development in the County should include a range of complete neighborhoods, commercial districts, employment areas, with an emphasis on protecting its rural character and natural environment.



Housing and Neighborhoods

Goal 1: Expand the County's housing options by providing well-connected neighborhoods that offer diverse types of housing at varying price points, ensuring accessibility for existing and future residents.

Goal 2: Ensure that new housing and neighborhoods blend the County's rural character with future development.



Commercial and Industrial Areas

Goal: Establish commercial and industrial areas that promote employment growth, enhance the tax base, and contribute to a resilient local economy with access to goods, services, entertainment, and recreation.



Transportation

Goal: Establish a comprehensive multi-modal transportation system that efficiently and safely connects residents and visitors to all areas of the County.



Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Goal 1: Ensure sufficient infrastructure, utilities, and public safety services are available throughout the County, including established areas and in potential growth areas, to support current and future development.

Goal 2: Strengthen community identity by investing in cultural facilities, recreational amenities, and public gathering spaces that reflect Columbia County's character and support connections among residents.



Natural Resources and Environment

Goal: Maintain and enhance park areas to serve residents' evolving needs while protecting the County's natural areas and resources.

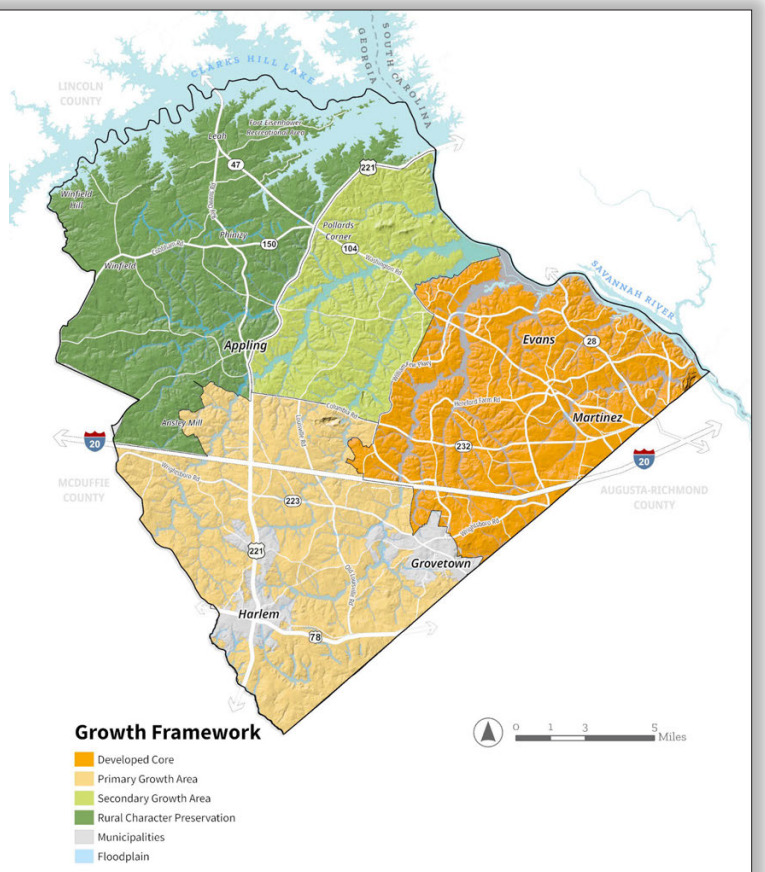



GROWTH FRAMEWORK

DRAFT Growth Framework

What is it?

- Defines where growth should occur
- Identifies areas best suited for development
- Context-sensitive guide to sustainable land use decisions
- Foundation for future land use policies



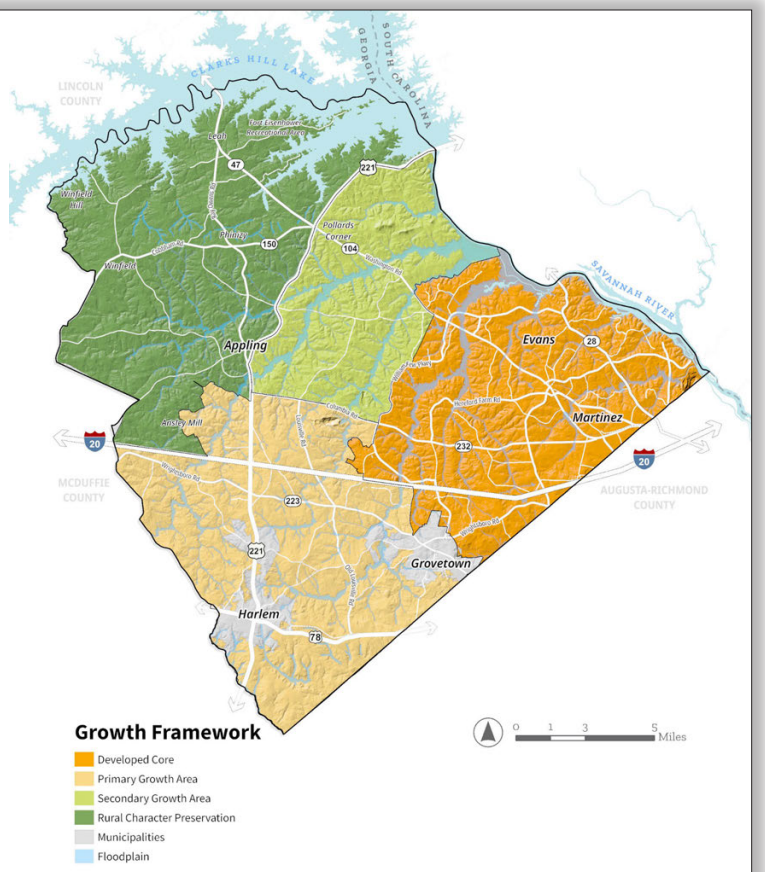
Future Growth Framework

Developed Core: Characterized by established infrastructure, services, and access to commercial and employment centers; targeted future infill and new mixed-use community nodes.

Primary Growth Area: Priority for future growth due to proximity to existing population centers, utilities (existing and planned), and major roads.

Secondary Growth Area: Environmental and infrastructure constraints; phased development focused along the edge of the developed area and around rural nodes, scaled to serve nearby residents and enhance rural character.

Rural Character Preservation: Maintain agricultural lands, conservation areas, and rural landscape; limited low-density development near existing infrastructure and nodes.



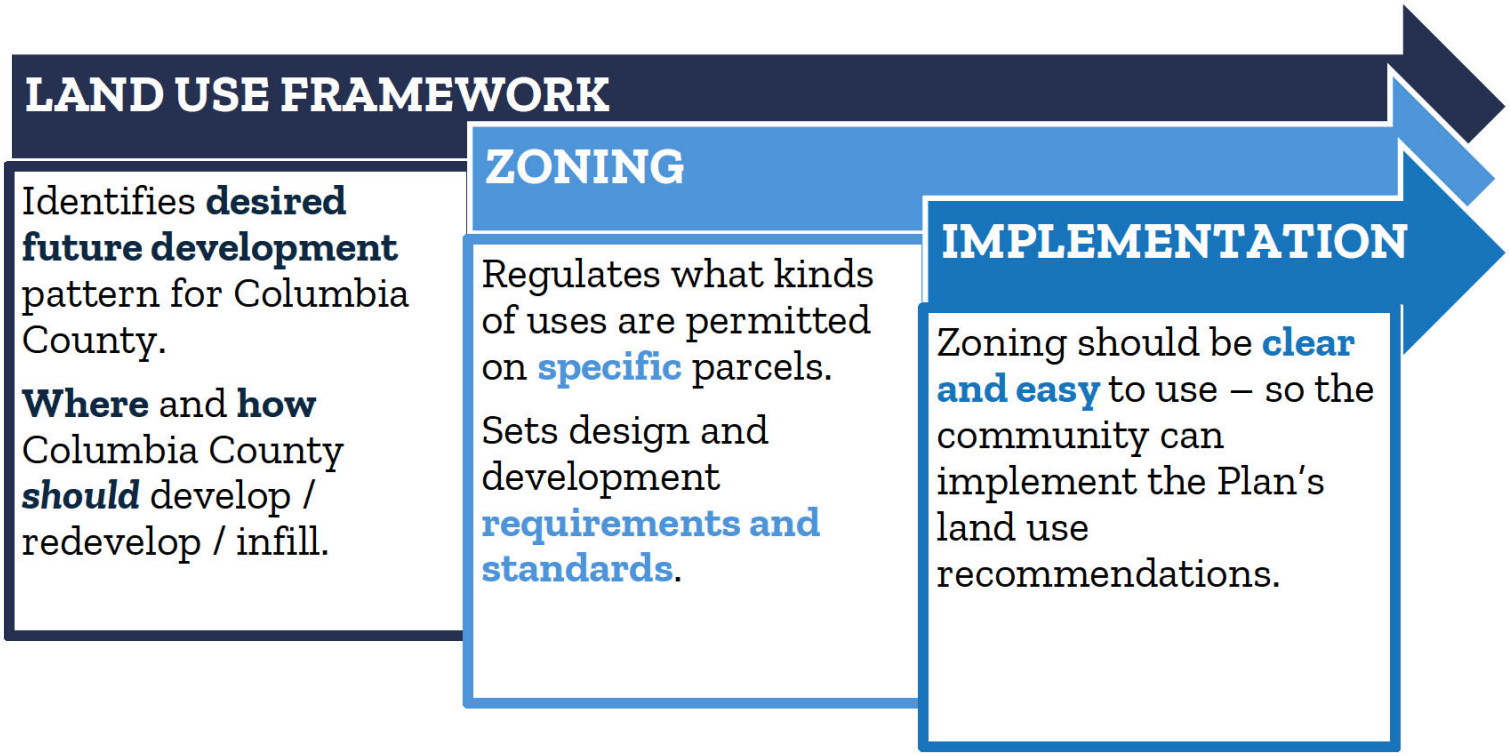
FUTURE LAND USE

Future Land Use

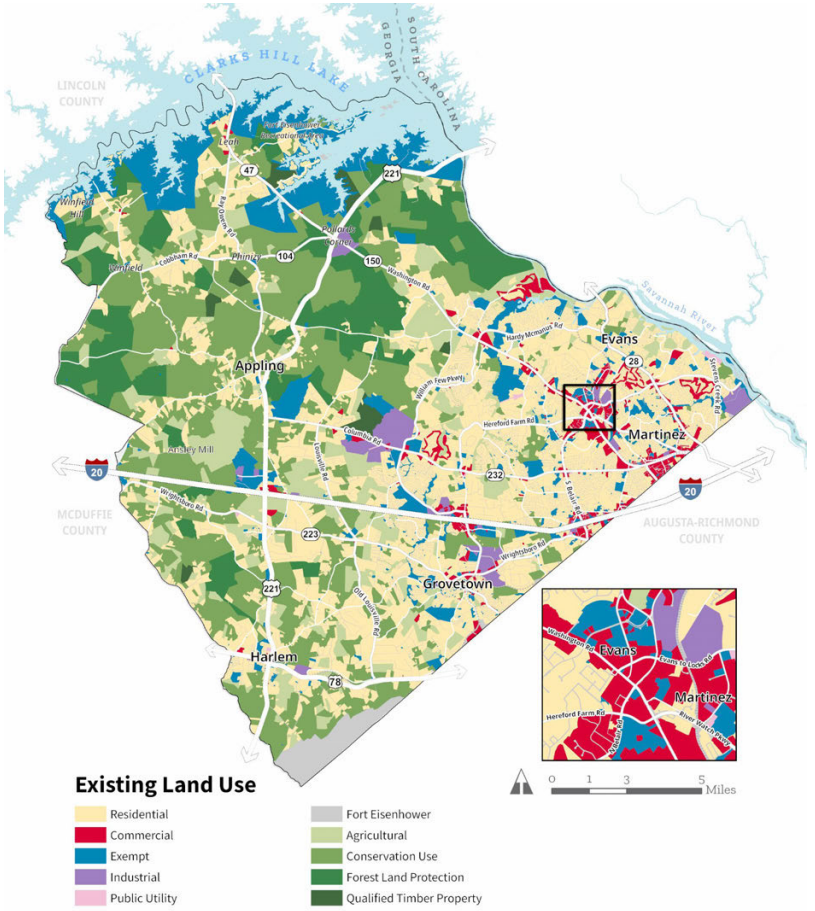
What is it?

- Describes the character of land use and future development
- Based on existing land use patterns and context
- Foundation for future decision making
- **Plan content** - the Land Use and Development Chapter

Land Use, Zoning, & Implementation



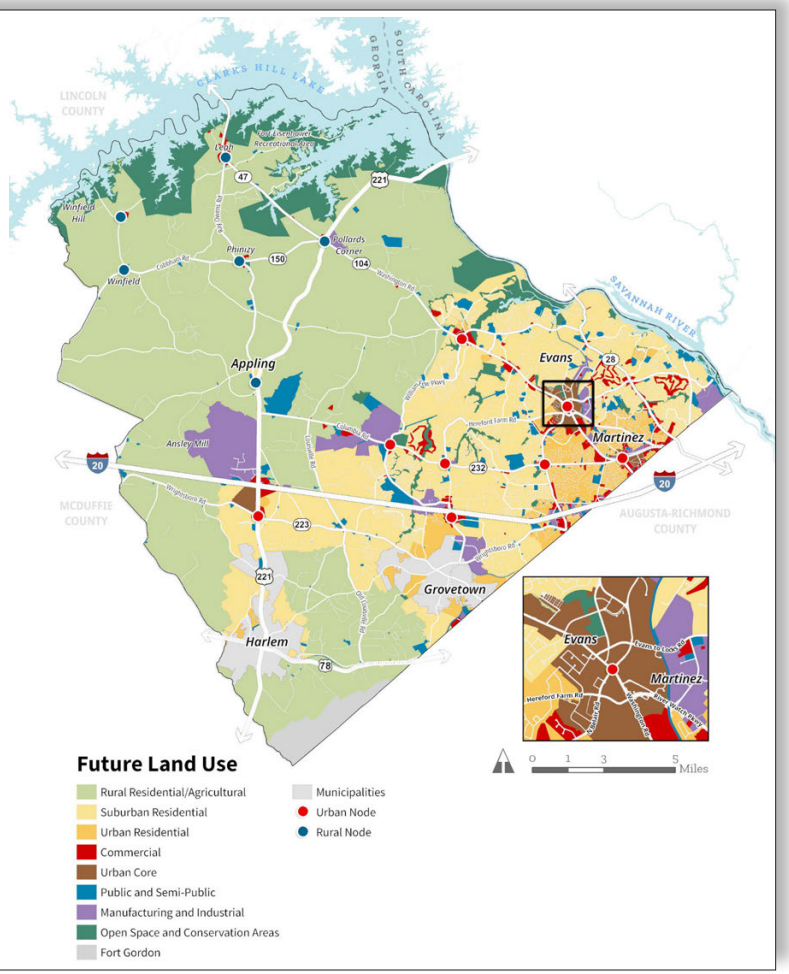
Existing Land Use



DRAFT Future Land Use

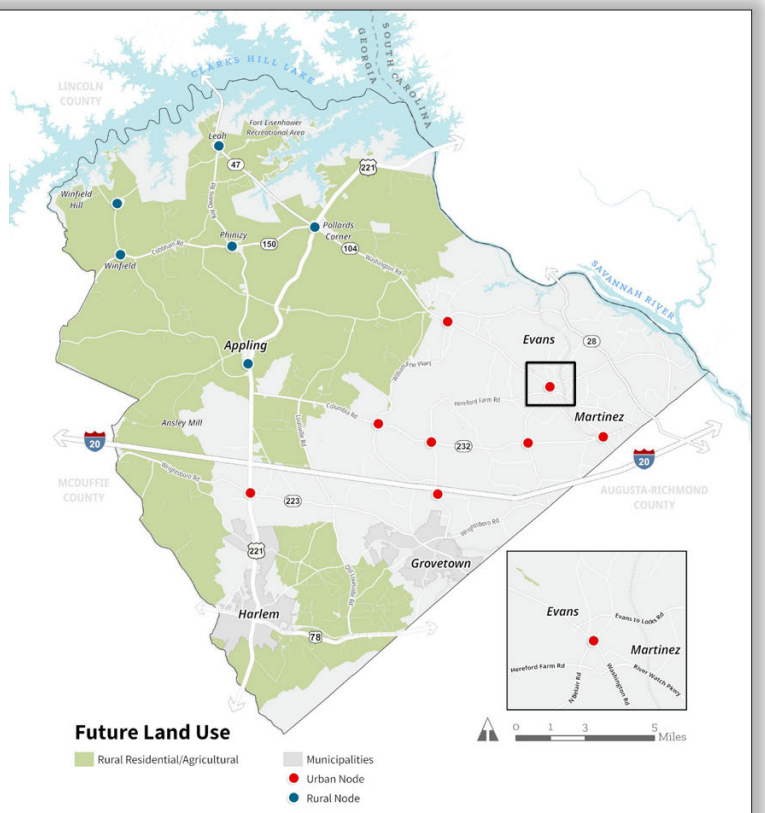
Each Future Land Use category is defined

- What is it?
- Example where it currently exists
- How it should apply going forward



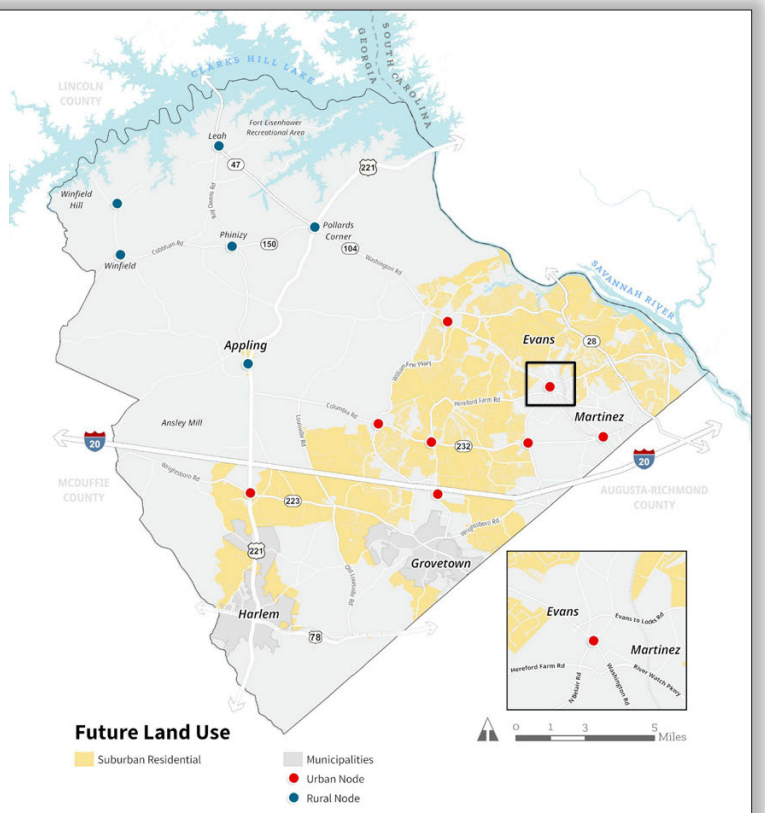
Rural Residential / Agriculture

- Rural residential/agricultural areas are primarily made up of large-lot single-family homes, often combined with agricultural uses.
- This is the most common land use in the County and is designed to reinforce its rural identity and character.
- Development should maintain wide setbacks and be interspersed with natural features, supporting small-scale agriculture, forestry, and agritourism.
- Future growth should match the scale and character of existing neighborhoods to preserve the area's rural and agricultural fabric.



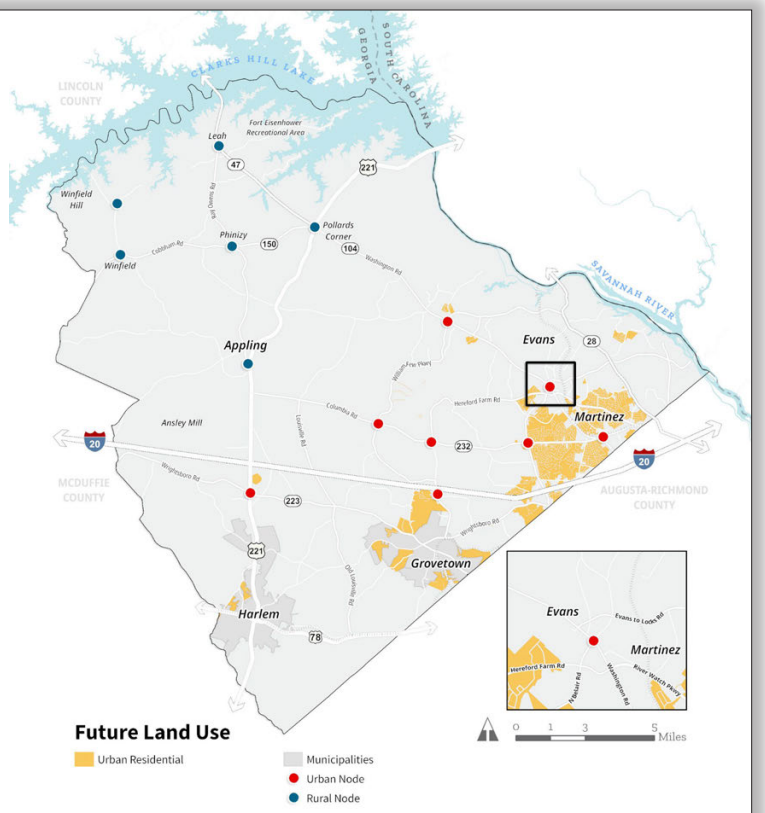
Suburban Residential

- Suburban residential areas are mainly composed of single-family detached homes, with some two-family homes, supporting the County's single-family character.
- These areas are concentrated in the south and east, particularly around Grovetown, Evans, and along US 221 and State Route 223.
- They serve as a transition between low-density rural areas and higher-density urban neighborhoods.
- Parks and open spaces in these areas should offer recreational amenities to support residential quality of life.



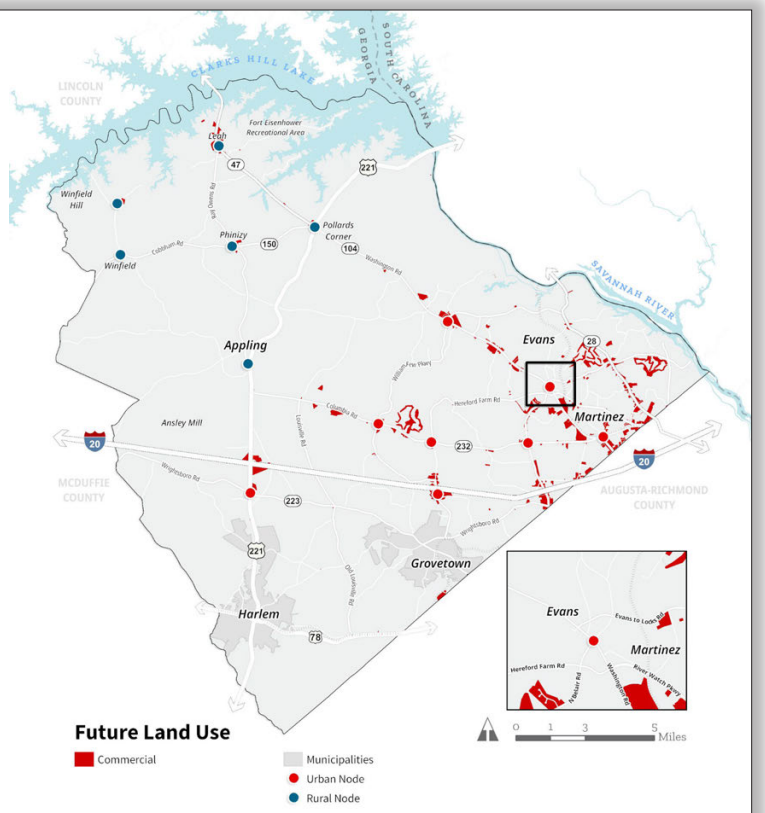
Urban Residential

- Urban residential areas support a mix of housing types, including single-family attached units, townhomes, multi-family buildings, and small-scale commercial uses.
- They serve as a transitional zone between urban centers and surrounding suburban neighborhoods.
- This land use encourages greater housing diversity and flexibility in higher-density residential development.
- These areas are intended to surround the cores of Evans, Martinez, Harlem, and Grovetown.



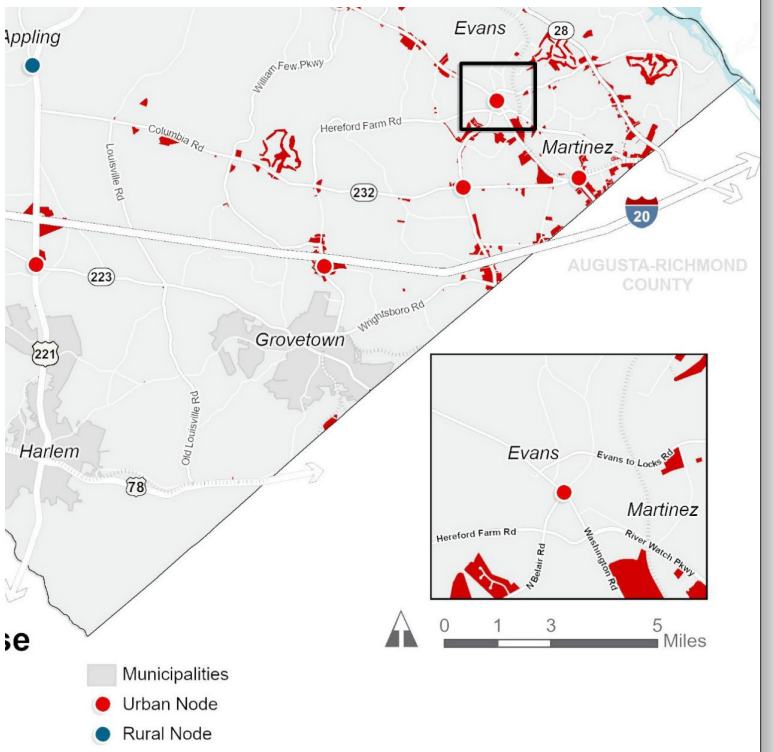
Commercial

- Commercial land uses include compact, small-scale retail, service businesses, and offices located at neighborhood intersections.
- Larger commercial developments are concentrated along major transportation corridors like State Route 104, 28, 232, and near I-20 ramps.
- These major corridors should host shopping centers, grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, hotels, and large office buildings.
- Smaller commercial clusters are recommended at rural intersections such as Leah, Pollard's Corner, and north of Winfield.



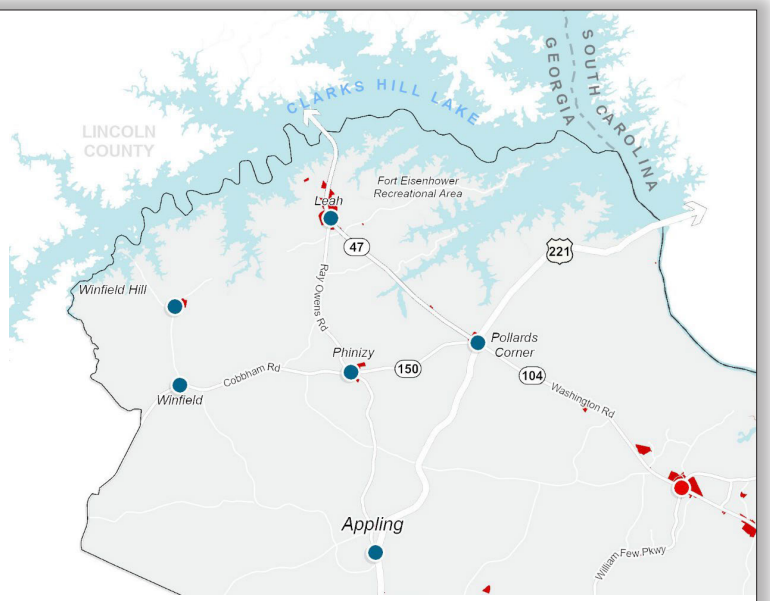
Urban Node

- Urban nodes benefit from existing infrastructure, public services, and access to major transportation routes.
- These nodes are intended to concentrate commercial development at major intersections in the central and southern parts of the County.
- Mixed-use developments are prioritized to support complete neighborhoods with pedestrian-friendly features like sidewalks, crossings, street trees, and streetscaping.
- Commercial uses at intersections are encouraged to drive economic vitality, support diverse retail options, and create job opportunities.



Rural Node

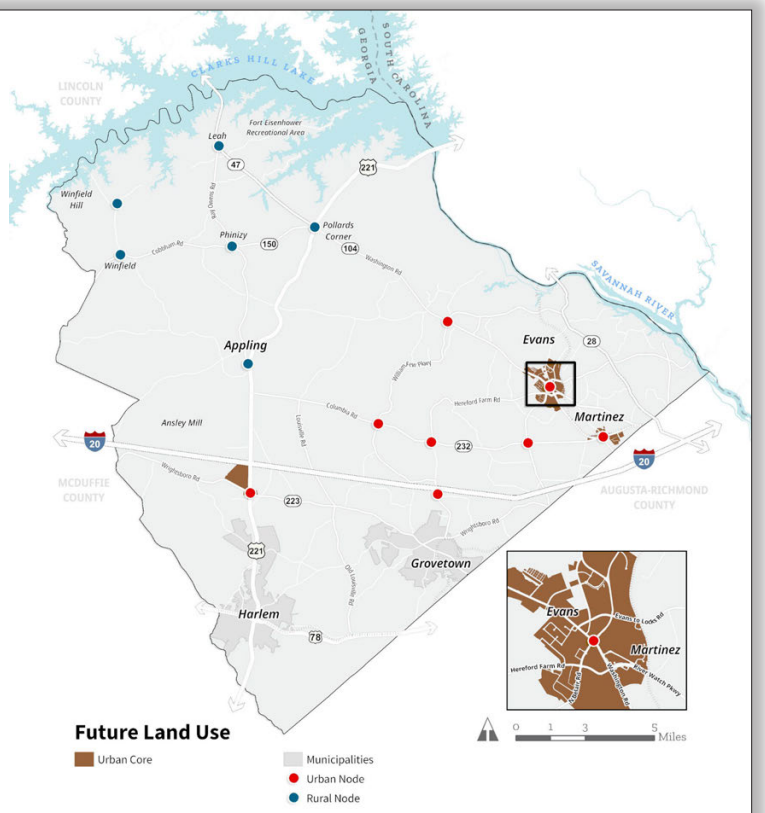
- Rural nodes are low-intensity, smaller-scale versions of urban nodes, located near major intersections in Secondary Growth and Rural Character Preservation Areas.
- These nodes feature clusters of commercial development but offer more limited services compared to urban nodes.
- Rural nodes are intended to function as local community centers, giving nearby residents access to essential services and retail goods.
- New development should be compact, context-sensitive, and focused on support services such as gas stations, healthcare clinics, and grocery or convenience stores.





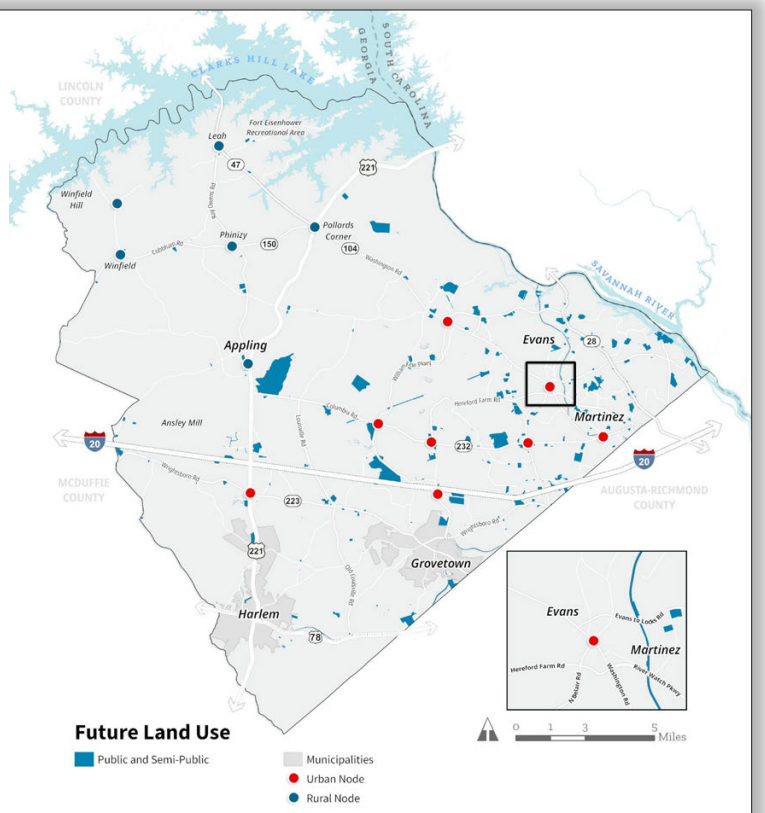
Urban Core

- Urban core areas function as the County's primary hubs for commercial activity, mixed-use development, and civic engagement.
- These areas support a diverse mix of land uses, including retail, restaurants, offices, hotels, and civic institutions.
- Residential options like condominiums, townhomes, and mixed-use housing are also encouraged in urban cores.
- Urban core areas should be located in central parts of Evans, Martinez, Harlem, Grovetown, and at the I-20 and US 221 intersection.



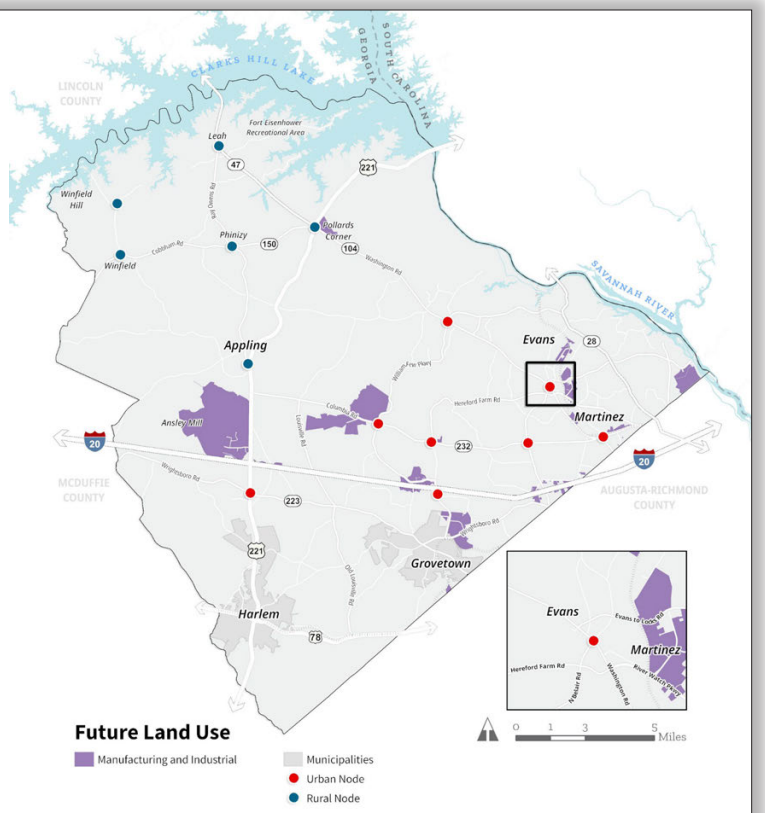
Public and Semi-Public

- Public and semi-public uses include government facilities, schools, community services, places of worship, and assembly spaces.
- They also encompass infrastructure such as utility easements, substations, water and wastewater facilities, telecommunications, and railroads.
- These uses provide essential services and are distributed throughout the County.
- Future public and semi-public facilities can be located anywhere based on need and should be integrated with new development to ensure equitable access to services.



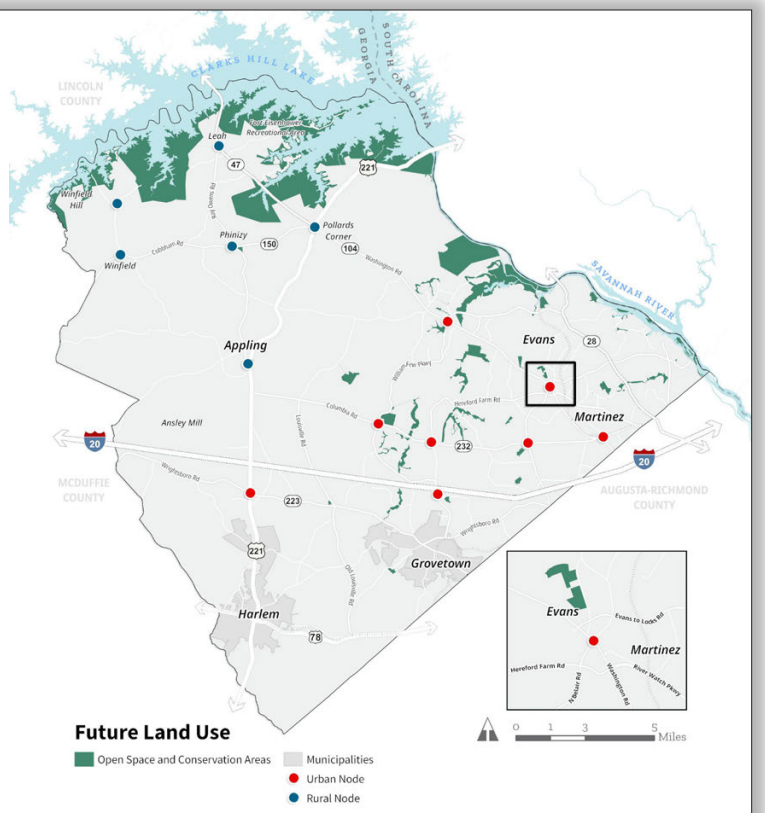
Manufacturing and Industrial

- Manufacturing and industrial uses include facilities for production, processing, storage, distribution, research, tech industries, and flexible industrial spaces, including heavier uses like quarries and lumber operations.
- Existing infrastructure, supported by facilities like the John Deere and Club Car factories, makes the County well-positioned for additional industrial development.
- Future industrial growth should occur in Primary Growth Areas with existing utilities and road access, featuring large-scale, low-profile buildings within landscaped campuses to buffer nearby residential uses.
- These land uses aim to diversify the County's tax base and expand employment opportunities.



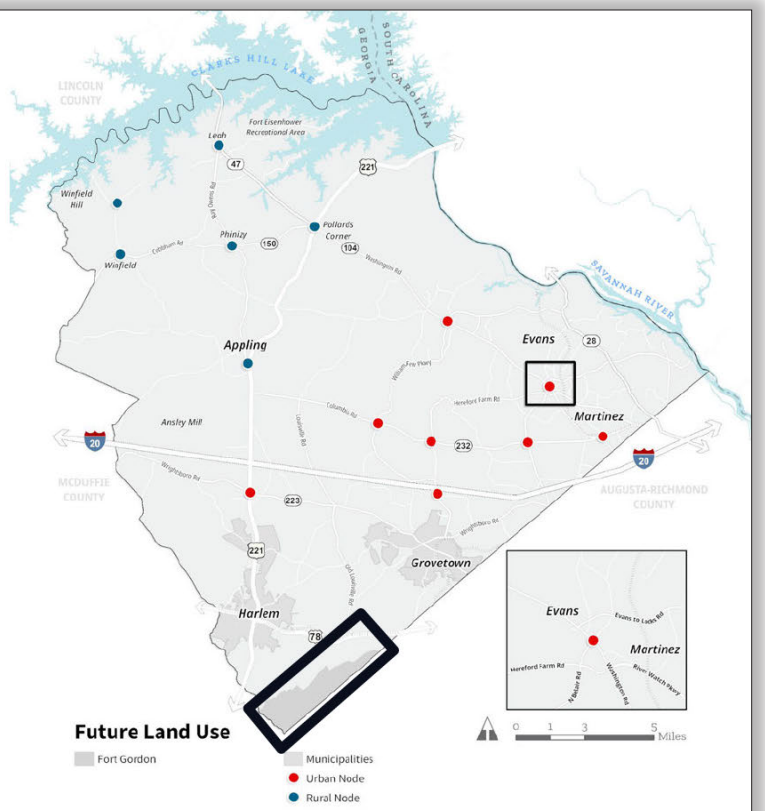
Open Space and Conservation Areas

- Open space and conservation areas include public parks, natural environments, recreational facilities, and lands managed for conservation.
- These areas range from developed parks to large natural spaces overseen by Federal, State, and County agencies.
- They encompass important environmental features like floodplains, County Greenspace properties, privately owned conservation lands, and major assets such as Mistletoe State Park, Clarks Hill Lake, and Wildwood Park.
- Sensitive areas will be preserved in their natural state, while recreation-based amenities like trails, shelters, and canoe launches may be added in suitable locations to enhance access without impacting ecological integrity.

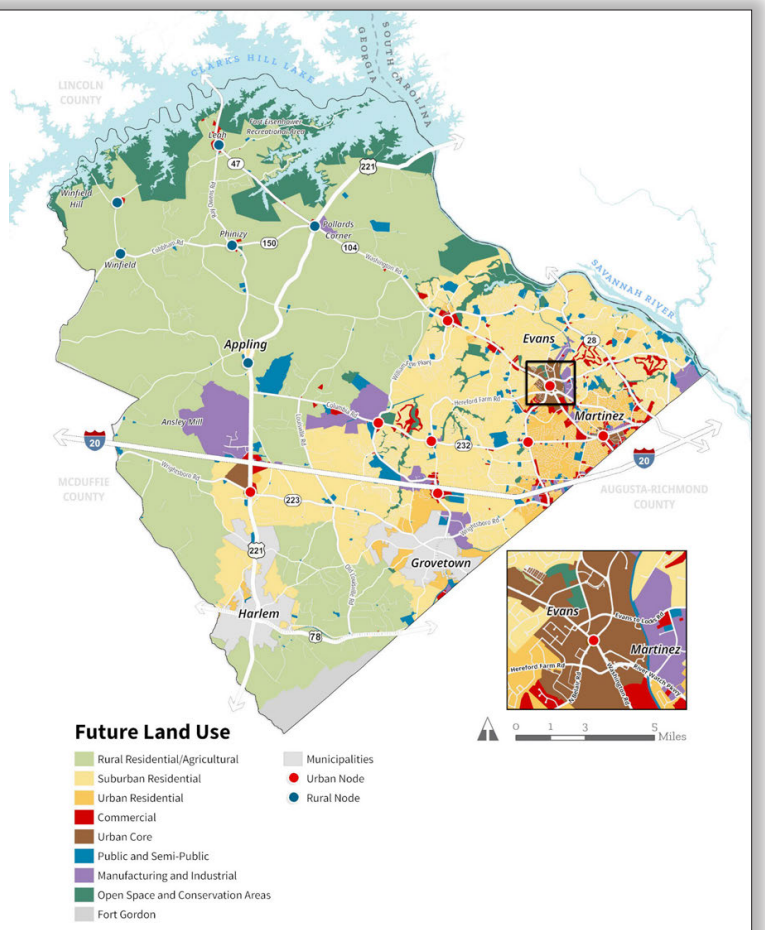


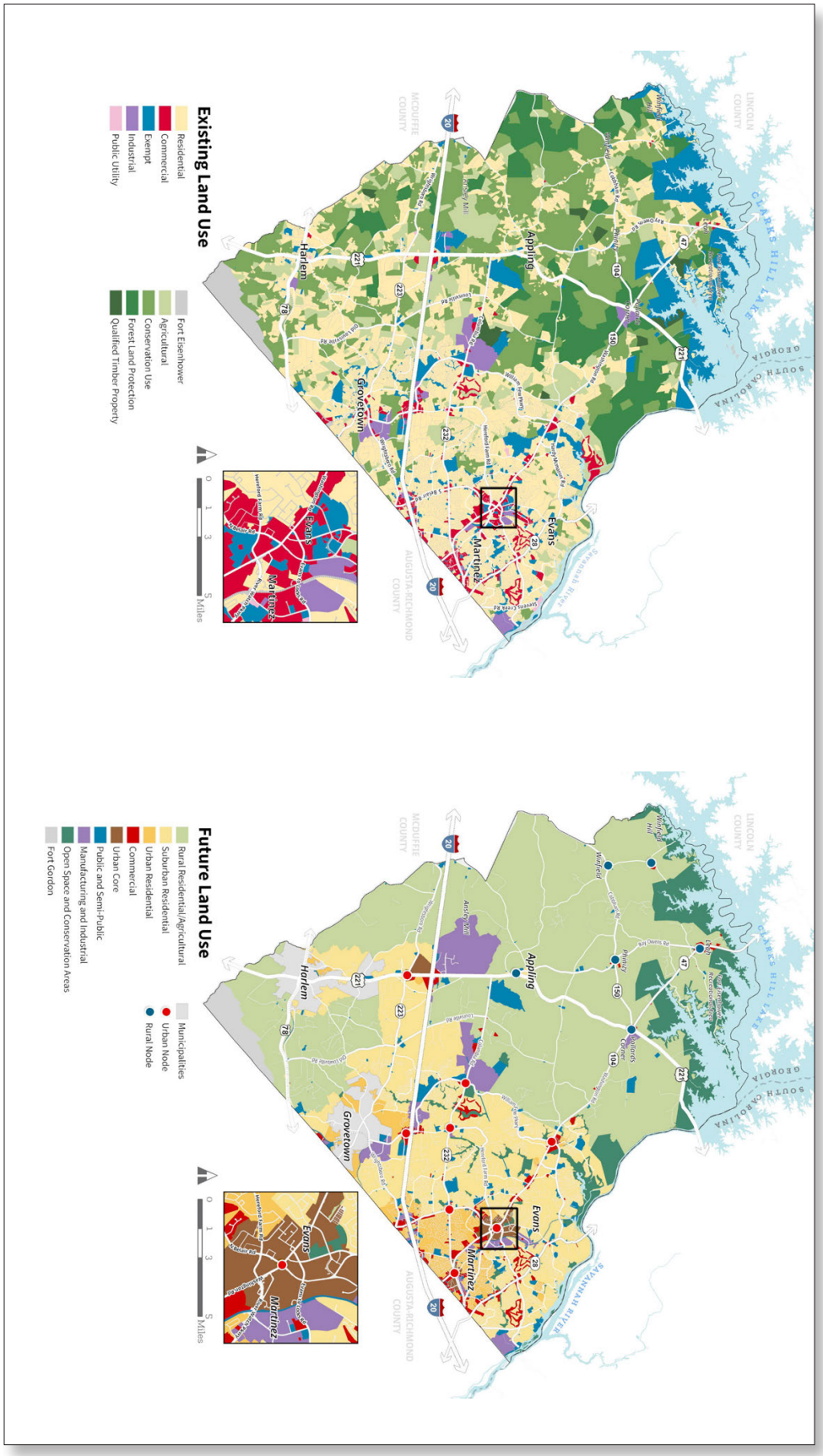
Fort Gordon

- The southwest corner of the map shows the military base Fort Gordon and its associated training grounds. These are separated from civilian development yet influence the adjacent land-use intensity and road access.



DRAFT Future Land Use




Existing Land Use
Residential
Commercial
Exempt
Industrial
Public Utility
Fort Eisenhower
Agricultural
Conservation Use
Forest Land Protection
Qualified Timber Property
Future Land Use
Rural Residential/Agricultural
Suburban Residential
Urban Residential
Commercial
Urban Core
Public and Semi-Public
Manufacturing and Industrial
Open Space and Conservation Areas
Fort Gordon
Municipalities
Urban Node
Rural Node
Harlem
Appling
Grovetown
Evans
Martinez
Columbia County
McDuffie County
Lincoln County
Augusta-Richmond County
Clarks Hill Lake
Georgia
South Carolina
Savannah River
0 1 3 5 Miles

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

- Step 1: Kick-off and Existing Conditions
- Step 2: Public Engagement
- Step 3: Plan Visioning and Key Recommendations
- Step 4: Draft Comprehensive Plan Elements
- Step 5: Draft and Final Comprehensive Plan



FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

THANK YOU!

HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

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FOUNDATIONS
COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FUTURE

HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

MEMORANDUM

CHICAGO
188 W Randolph St Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60601
312-372-1008

LOS ANGELES
360 E 2nd St Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213-259-1008

HELENA
317 Cruse Ave Suite 202
Helena, MT 59601
406-944-1008

SEATTLE
999 3rd Ave Suite 700
Seattle, WA 98104
206-828-1008

MILWAUKEE
313 North Plankinton Ave Suite 207
Milwaukee, WI 53203
414-392-1008

To: Columbia County
Scott Sterling, AICP, Division Director - Planning Services Division

From: Houseal Lavigne Associates
Kari Papelbon, AICP, CFM, Senior Planner
Josh Koonce, AICP, Practice Lead

Date: August 11, 2025

Re: Foundations for the Future - Columbia County, GA Comprehensive Plan
Vision, Goals, Key Recommendations, and Preliminary Future Land Use Plan

This memorandum includes the Vision Statement, Goals, and Key Recommendations paired with a Preliminary Land Use Plan for *Foundations for the Future: Columbia County, GA Comprehensive Plan*. The memorandum has been developed based on input received through outreach efforts conducted so far. These components of the Plan are intended to provide Columbia County with a sense of direction and priorities to be addressed in the Plan, before detailed core elements, policies, and actions are drafted in the coming months. This is an interim deliverable for discussion with staff and the Steering Committee and will serve as the foundation for subsequent Plan deliverables. The following sections are organized under topical headings that reflect the chapter structure currently being considered for the Plan.

The **Vision Statement** is an aspirational description of what Columbia County would like to accomplish in the long term. The statement is meant to serve as a foundation upon which to base the County's future decision making. It introduces the content of the chapters that will eventually be discussed in the Plan.

Goals support the vision and further define what the County is aiming to achieve in the future. They represent broad categories that will help the County realize its vision.

The **Key Recommendations** support the goals and provide an indication of policy direction to be included in the forthcoming Comprehensive Plan. The Project Team will use these key recommendations to build out more detailed outlines for each of the subsequent core elements of the Plan.

The **Growth Framework** identifies where future development should be prioritized, outlining how the County should guide growth while preserving its rural areas consistent with the desired character and visions of the community.

The **Preliminary Land Use Plan** section of this memo identifies high-level policies to guide the type and location of land uses and long-range investment. The Preliminary Land Use Plan builds upon existing uses and patterns of development within the community to establish an economically sustainable, compatible, and desirable mix of uses to meet the needs of current and future stakeholders.

Note: *Each of the following sections in this memorandum is in draft form. As the planning process continues in the coming months, these will be adjusted and refined for incorporation into the draft Plan document*.

Vision Statement

Columbia County will continue to be a welcoming community known for its unique character, impressive natural areas, and distinctive neighborhoods. With a shared identity that connects urbanized centers like Evans and Martinez to rural areas like Appling, the County will thoughtfully balance its rural heritage with strategic growth and development.

With a growing and diverse population, Columbia County's neighborhoods will offer housing for households of all types and sizes. New neighborhoods will be designed around parks, greenways, and natural landscapes, creating attractive, connected communities. Reinvestment in established residential areas will enhance their vitality, while careful planning will ensure the County's rural charm continues to define the community.

Columbia County will evolve from being one of Georgia's most desirable bedroom communities into a strong and self-sustaining economic hub. Given Fort Gordon's role as a major economic and population driver, the County will become a key player in the regional economy, attracting innovation, diverse industries, and a skilled workforce, while fostering a robust job market. New neighborhood-scale commercial nodes will bring shopping, dining, and daily conveniences closer to residents across the County. Evans Towne Center will continue to grow as the civic and cultural heart of the County, offering a mix of local restaurants, retail, and year-round events.

Roads and highways will be efficient and safe, promoting smooth traffic flow and travel for all users. An expanded network of sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails will create connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial areas. This comprehensive network will support healthy, active lifestyles and provide options for walking and biking across the County.

Essential infrastructure and services in the County will continue to support growth and maintain a high quality of life for current and future residents. Guided by community values, the County will work to preserve land and water resources, protecting them for future generations.

The scenic shoreline of Clarks Hill Lake and the forested trails of Mistletoe State Park are defining features of the community and will continue to be celebrated for their beauty and accessibility. Parks, greenways, and conservation areas will connect residents and visitors to the outdoors, while destinations like Wildwood Park and the Savannah Rapids Pavilion will continue to attract millions of visitors each year, reinforcing the County's reputation as a destination for recreation, events, and natural beauty.

As Columbia County grows thoughtfully, it will build its reputation as one of the best places to live, work, and recreate in Georgia. Residents will benefit from access to high quality jobs, a nationally recognized school system, diverse housing, and exceptional natural areas, all while the County continues to prioritize safety and an outstanding quality of life.

Goals and Key Recommendations

Goals are broad and long-range desired outcomes. They are ambitious and will require the culmination of incremental actions to be fully achieved. The County's planning efforts should work to support these goals. Key recommendations identify a preliminary set of initiatives needed to support the Vision Statement, these start to form the outline for each element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Land Use and Development Patterns

Goal 1: Ensure that future development in the County follows a balanced approach to preservation and expansion by directing growth to areas served by infrastructure and utilities to limit patterns of sprawl.

Goal 2: Development in the County should include a range of complete neighborhoods, commercial districts, employment areas, with an emphasis on protecting its rural character and natural environment.

Key Recommendations:

- Review and align the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance with the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map to ensure successful implementation.
- Encourage smart and sustainable development practices to preserve rural areas across the County.
- Support a balanced mix of uses that create attractive residential areas, well-paying employment opportunities, lively commercial districts, high-quality open spaces, and recreation opportunities.
- Prioritize shared access, pedestrian improvements, landscaping, and signage upgrades along key commercial corridors.
- Coordinate with Harlem and Grovetown to align land use decisions, support shared goals, and promote thoughtful growth across community boundaries.
- Support land use transitions in development intensity to ensure new growth complements the character of existing areas.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Goal 1: Expand the County's housing options by providing well-connected neighborhoods that offer diverse types of housing at varying price points, ensuring accessibility for existing and future residents.

Goal 2: Ensure that new housing and neighborhoods blend the County's rural character with future development.

Key Recommendations:

- Encourage development of senior housing, aging-in-place, and aging-in community housing options to meet residents' needs through all stages of life.
- Promote context-sensitive subdivision design by incorporating connectivity, sidewalks, and open space requirements, while allowing for flexibility and modified standards in rural or agricultural areas to preserve their character.
- Encourage non-monotonous design in new residential areas through various architectural styles, a mix of façade styles, and incorporating open space elements into subdivisions.
- Encourage renovating and preserving existing housing stock to maintain neighborhood character through regular code enforcement and preventive maintenance programs to strengthen existing neighborhoods.
- Consider offering incentives, such as reduced development fees, to encourage the preservation of natural landscape features in new residential development.

- Promote the development of a diverse housing stock to meet the needs of residents across all household sizes and income levels, with a focus on expanding homeownership opportunities through accessible and appropriately sized housing options.
- Identify areas in developed parts of the County that can support infill housing.

Commercial and Industrial Areas

Goal: Establish commercial and industrial areas that promote employment growth, enhance the tax base, and contribute to a resilient local economy with access to goods, services, entertainment, and recreation.

Key Recommendations:

- Balance regional economic growth strategies that benefit the entire community with targeted programs to support and expand locally owned businesses.
- Improve gateways and wayfinding in the County through new signage, landscaping, and beautification initiatives.
- Enhance access management in commercial areas by promoting shared access points and reducing curb cuts to improve traffic flow.
- Explore funding tools like the Tax Allocation Districts (TADs) and Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) to support aesthetic improvements along commercial corridors, including enhancing landscaping, façade upgrades, reduced curb cuts, and the removal of billboard signs.
- Partner with the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce to recruit new businesses and expand business diversity to create local employment opportunities.
- Establish partnerships with local schools, vocational training programs, and the business community to develop industry specific workforce training programs that align with employer needs.
- Partner with the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County to support and enhance their business attraction, retention, and expansion programs.
- Encourage the development of context-sensitive commercial nodes, both rural and urban, at designated major intersections throughout the County, that offer convenient access to daily goods and services.
- Encourage the use of landscaping and buffering techniques to reduce the visual impact of industrial and commercial development, including truck traffic, and to provide a transition between industrial, commercial, and residential areas.
- Continue to develop Evans Towne Center, further establishing it as a pedestrian-friendly center of activity where residents and visitors gather to dine, shop, and enjoy public events and spaces.
- Following guidance from *Vision 2035*, complete a Martinez Redevelopment Plan.
- Collaborate with the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County to identify incentives and local funding options to support businesses development.

Transportation

Goal: Establish a comprehensive multi-modal transportation system that efficiently and safely connects residents and visitors to all areas of the County.

Key Recommendations:

- Continue to identify and implement active transportation that can connect neighborhoods with parks, schools, and other essential services and amenities.
- Implement projects that improve the existing street network connectivity to provide alternative routes and system redundancy.
- Conduct access management studies along major corridors to improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, and enhance safety for all users.
- Evaluate Columbia County Public Transit's "Curb to Curb" service to identify opportunities for increasing ridership.
- Explore the feasibility of introducing fixed-route services, in addition to the "Curb to Curb" program, to improve efficiency and address mobility needs of residents county-wide.
- Continue collaboration with the ARTS Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to identify, design, and fund projects that improve county-wide connectivity.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Goal 1: Ensure sufficient infrastructure, utilities, and public safety services are available throughout the County, including established areas and in potential growth areas, to support current and future development.

Goal 2: Strengthen community identity by investing in cultural facilities, recreational amenities, and public gathering spaces that reflect Columbia County's character and support connections among residents.

Key Recommendations:

- Build and maintain strong working relationships with Fort Eisenhower to support coordinated planning efforts and shared goals.
- Align the Community Work Program with the Comprehensive Plan to meet the infrastructure needs and priorities of the community.
- Continue coordinating with the Columbia County School Board to monitor population growth and development trends to help assess future school facility needs and support the Board's ability to meet current and future demand.
- Increase investment in arts, music, sports, and festivals to strengthen Columbia County's cultural scene and attract both residents and visitors.
- Explore the feasibility of creating a sports complex to attract state, regional, and national-level sporting events and tournaments.
- Identify and pursue opportunities to provide cultural and recreation activities, programming, and facilities that appeal to children, young adults, and seniors.
- Collaborate with Fort Gordon and regional partners to implement recommendations from the *Compatible Use Study* (CUS).

Natural Resources and Environment

Goal: Maintain and enhance park areas to serve residents' evolving needs while protecting the County's natural areas and resources.

Key Recommendations:

- Update the Economic Development Authority of Columbia County's Economic Development Strategic Plan to include eco-tourism.
- Expand and enhance existing trails and greenways, like the Euchee Creek Greenway, to connect neighborhoods and recreation areas across the County.
- Coordinate with the U.S. Army of Corps of Engineers (USACE) to ensure any future development proposals align with the *J. Storm Thurmond Project Shoreline Management Plan*.
- Explore opportunities to increase public access to the Savannah River.
- Promote Clarks Hill Lake as a destination for recreation and tourism.
- Enhance recreational access to natural areas, especially Clarks Hill Lake, by increasing trail connectivity along the lakefront.
- Enhance collaboration between Columbia County, state and federal agencies, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to align future development with shared regulations and park management goals.

Growth Framework

The Growth Framework map divides and outlines which areas of the County should be prioritized for new development and which areas should accommodate mindful conservation-focused, low-intensity growth to maintain the County's rural and natural character. Development around the County's two cities and its most populated census-designated places may be more compact and denser, with a focus on infill development, while areas in rural settings should incorporate conservation-focused designs to preserve the natural landscape and maintain the area's rural character.

The framework was developed considering existing conditions and various constraints such as steep slopes, flood zones, and access to services and infrastructure present or planned in those specific areas of the County. The framework lays the foundation for land use recommendations, guiding appropriate development within each growth area. It encourages connectivity and higher density in established and built-out areas of the County, supports future development and expansion in primary and secondary growth areas, and protects the County's rural character in preservation areas.

Developed Core

The Developed Core area includes Evans, Martinez, and surrounding residential and commercial areas. This area is located in the southeastern part of the County. It is defined by the Savannah River on the east side and by Augusta-Richmond County on the south side. This area has existing infrastructure and utility services, access to commercial and employment centers and is expected to experience minimal change over the life of the Plan. Although designated as primarily developed, this area still has opportunities for targeted infill development and growth. Both Evans and Martinez should develop their central areas into new mixed-use nodes to provide well defined and accessible community centers. As development progresses, it is essential that the quality of services and infrastructure is able to meet the demand of new residents and businesses.

Primary Growth Area

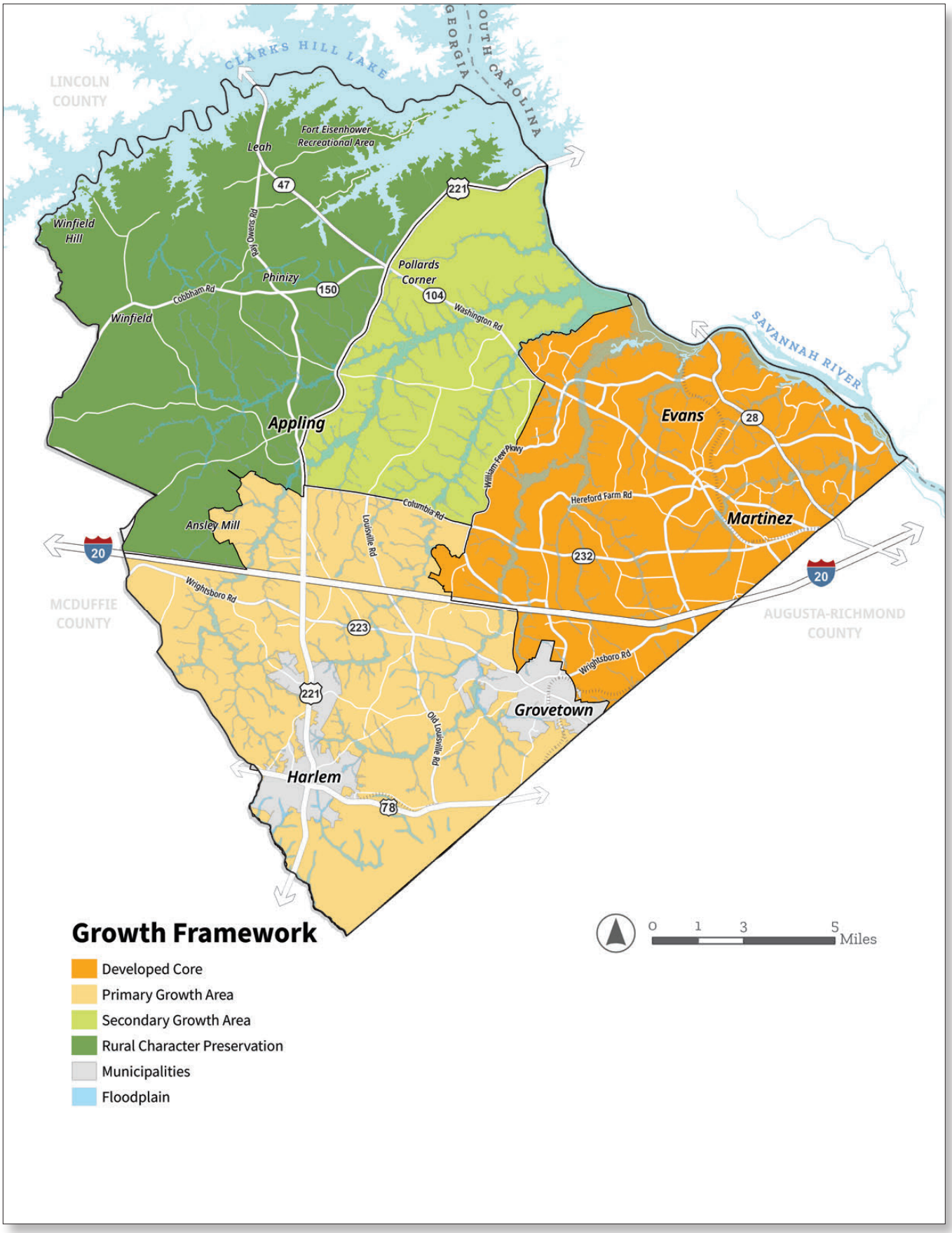
This area is located west of the Developed Core and south of Appling. The Primary Growth Area encompasses areas along U.S. Highway 221 (U.S. 221) and areas south of Interstate 20 (I-20). It currently features low-density residential parcels, as well as undeveloped agricultural and woodland parcels on predominantly flat terrain, with only a few parcels located in flood-prone zones. The area is well connected by a network of local and arterial roads, and utilities are concentrated in Harlem and Grovetown. Water lines extend along most roads in between U.S. 221, U.S. Highway 78, and State Route 223 (SR 223), whereas sewer lines are primarily limited to the two cities and immediately adjacent residential subdivisions. New development will most likely require extensions to the sewer network. Though some infrastructure improvements will be needed, this areas proximity to existing population centers, utilities, and major roads make it a suitable target for prioritizing future growth.

Secondary Growth Area

This area extends north from I-20 and Appling through Pollards Corner toward the Clarks Hill Lake shoreline. The area is bordered by U.S. 221 on the north side and Columbia Road on the south side. This area features rolling terrain and floodplains, which restrict the available land for development. There is no existing utility infrastructure network in this area. Future development should be modest and phased, focusing development along the edge of the developed area. Thereafter, development may occur around the rural nodes in Appling and Pollards Corner, at a scale that primarily services nearby residents and enhances this area's rural character.

Rural Character Preservation

The rural character preservation area occupies the northern part of the County, defined by Clarks Hill Lake to the north, US 221 to the east, and I-20 to the south. This area contains natural features such as wooded areas, natural protected areas, and some agricultural parcels. The area has flood-prone parcels, limited access to water utilities, and no sewer utilities, which can make development challenging. This area is primarily rural in character, hosting agricultural, conservation, woodlands, and forest lands. This area should continue to preserve farming and conservation lands while accommodating low-density residential development. Other uses should be avoided unless they are located near existing infrastructure and transportation nodes where they can provide effective service to the rural community.


CLARKS HILL LAKE
GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
LINCOLN COUNTY
Fort Eisenhower Recreational Area
Leah
47
221
Winfield Hill
Rd Owens Rd
Phinizy
150
Cobbham Rd
Winfield
Pollards Corner
104
Washington Rd
SAVANNAH RIVER
Appling
Evans
28
William Few Pkwy
Hereford Farm Rd
Columbia Rd
Martinez
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
232
20
20
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
Wrightsboro Rd
223
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
Wrightsboro Rd
221
Grovetown
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
78
Growth Framework
Developed Core
Primary Growth Area
Secondary Growth Area
Rural Character Preservation
Municipalities
Floodplain
0 1 3 5 Miles

Preliminary Future Land Use Plan

The Future Land Use Plan guides the future growth and development of Columbia County by assigning each parcel one of nine land use designations that reflect the County's full range of land use types. These designations should serve as the foundation for development review, zoning decisions, and any future zoning amendments needed to implement the Plan's recommendations.

Rural Residential/Agricultural

Rural residential/agricultural areas consist of large-lot single-family detached homes and homes with agricultural activities and land uses. It is the most common land use and is intended to emphasize the County's rural identity and character. This land use will host detached single-family homes on lots with large setbacks that ensure development is interspersed by natural features. Small-scale agricultural, silvicultural, forestry, and agritourism uses would be supported in this land use category. This land use is intended to preserve the existing rural character, agricultural uses, and natural features. Future development and investment in these areas should align with the scale and character of existing neighborhoods to maintain a cohesive rural residential fabric.

Suburban Residential

Suburban residential areas primarily consist of single-family detached homes, with some two-family residential homes also present. This use is intended to provide and retain the County's single-family residential character. These areas are primarily located in the south and east regions of the County. In the south, these areas stretch from the edges of Grovetown and are located along US 221 and State Route 223. In the more developed parts of the County in the east, suburban residential is the predominant land use, covering most of the areas surrounding Evans and Grovetown. These areas should aim to bridge the gap between low-density rural residential and higher-density urban residential land uses. Parks and open spaces within suburban residential areas should provide recreational amenities.

Urban Residential

Urban residential areas encourage a mix of single-family attached units, townhomes, and multi-family buildings, and neighborhood-scale commercial. This land use acts as a transition between the urban core and suburban residential areas. Urban Residential land use will continue to encourage a greater variety in Columbia County's housing stock, allowing for more flexibility in development of dense residential buildings in developed areas of communities. These areas should surround the cores of Evans, Martinez, Harlem, and Grovetown.

Commercial

Commercial land uses include both compact, small-scale retail, service businesses, and offices, at neighborhood intersections, as well as larger commercial developments along major transportation corridors. These corridors, such as State Route 104, State Route 28, State Route 232, and commercial nodes around ramps off of I-20, should host shopping centers, grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, hotels, and large office buildings. Smaller clusters of commercial activity areas should be located at rural intersections, such as Leah, Pollard's Corner, and north of Winfield.

Urban Node

Urban nodes are well-served by existing infrastructure and public services, including utilities readily available to meet the community's development needs, and access to major transportation routes. Urban nodes are intended to host a cluster of commercial land uses at major intersections in the central and southern areas of the County. Developments with a mix of uses should be prioritized within urban nodes to create complete neighborhoods by providing safe sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, street trees, and other landscaping and streetscaping features. Commercial uses along the intersections are encouraged to promote economic vitality, diverse retail activities, and employment opportunities.

Rural Node

Rural nodes are smaller, low-intensity counterparts to urban nodes. They also sit at or are near major intersections in the Secondary Growth Area and the Rural Character Preservation Area. Rural nodes are categorized by clusters of commercial development around the intersection of major roads. In these nodes, access to services is limited and less extensive than in urban nodes. Rural nodes will serve as community centers, providing local residents with access to essential services and retail goods. New development at rural nodes should be context-sensitive, compact, and prioritize uses that provide support services like gas stations, healthcare clinics, grocery and convenience stores to adjoining residential areas.

Urban Core

Urban core areas serve as the County hubs for commercial activities, mixed-use development, and foster civic engagement through parks and central gathering spaces. This use is intended to encourage a diverse range of land uses including retail, restaurants, office spaces, hotels, and civic institutions. The urban core area will also promote residential options, such as condominiums, townhomes, and mixed-use developments. These areas should be located in the center of Evans, Martinez, Harlem, Grovetown, and the intersection of I-20 and US 221.

Public and Semi-Public

Public and semi-public uses include local government uses, municipal facilities, community service providers, schools, and places of worship and assembly. These uses also include public utilities such as easements, substations, water supply and treatment facilities, wastewater, telecommunication infrastructure, and railroad rights-of-way. These uses are intended to provide essential facilities and services within the County and are scattered throughout the County. Because of the functions they provide, future public and semi-public uses can be located anywhere in the County, depending on local need, and should be constructed alongside new developments to ensure an even spread of services and amenities.

Manufacturing and Industrial

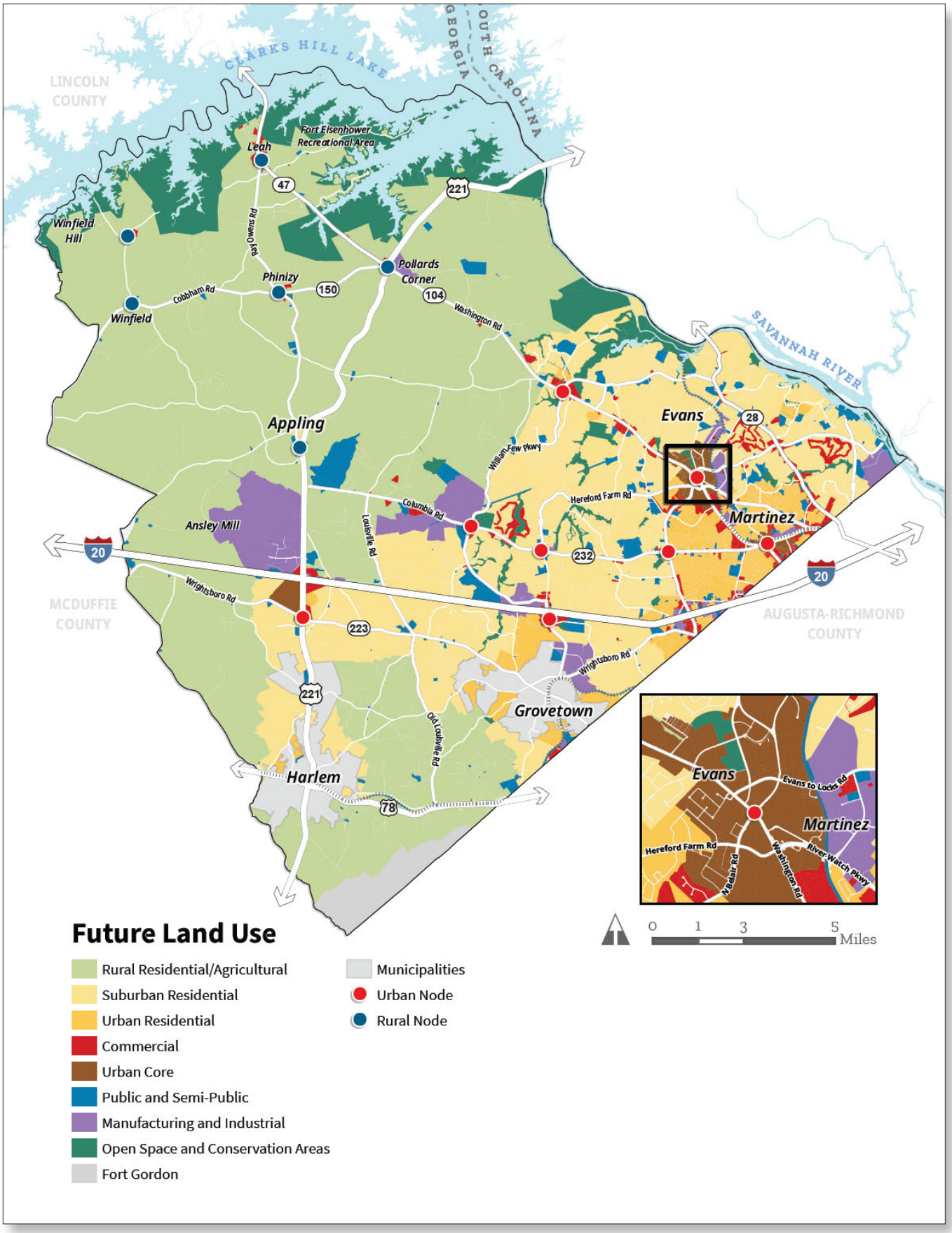
Manufacturing and industrial land uses include facilities involved in manufacturing, processing, storage, and distribution of goods and materials, as well as research centers, tech industries, and flex spaces. Heavier industrial uses, such as quarries, milling, and lumber operations, are also included. Infrastructure that allows for new industrial uses is already in place due to the presence of existing industrial uses, such as the John Deere factory outside of Grovetown or the Club Car factory in the west part of the County. This land use should feature large-scale, typically single-story buildings that produce minimal outdoor nuisances. Future Manufacturing and Industrial growth should be located within Primary Growth Areas where utilities and road infrastructure access already exist. Structures should be located within a larger landscaped campus to ensure industrial uses are properly buffered from residential and lower intensity uses. These land uses should help diversify the County's tax base and provide employment opportunities.

Open Space and Conservation Areas

Open space and conservation areas encompass designated public park spaces, open areas, natural environments, recreational facilities, and conservation areas. These areas include both developed parks of various sizes and functions, and large natural open spaces managed by the Federal, State, and County agencies. These uses will also include key environmental features like floodplains, County Greenspace properties, privately owned conservation lands, and notable assets like Mistletoe State Park, Clarks Hill Lake, and Wildwood Park. Sensitive areas will remain in their natural state to protect habitats and support passive recreation, while appropriate locations should have recreation-based development outside of protected areas, such as trails, shelters, or canoe launches, and infrastructure upgrades that enhance public access without harming ecological functions.

Fort Gordon

The southwest corner of the map shows the military base Fort Eisenhower and its associated training grounds. These are separated from civilian development yet influence the adjacent land-use intensity and road access.


CLARKS HILL LAKE
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104
Cobbham Rd
Winfield
Washington Rd
SAVANNAH RIVER
Evans
28
Appling
William Few Pkwy
Hereford Farm Rd
Columbia Rd
Martinez
Ansley Mill
Louisville Rd
20
232
20
Wrightsboro Rd
MCDUFFIE COUNTY
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY
223
Wrightsboro Rd
221
Grovetown
Old Louisville Rd
Harlem
78
Evans
Evans to Locks Rd
Martinez
Hereford Farm Rd
N Belair Rd
Washington Rd
River Watch Pkwy
0 1 3 5 Miles
Future Land Use
Rural Residential/Agricultural
Suburban Residential
Urban Residential
Commercial
Urban Core
Public and Semi-Public
Manufacturing and Industrial
Open Space and Conservation Areas
Fort Gordon
Municipalities
Urban Node
Rural Node

Appendix D:
Comprehensive Plan Open House

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FOUNDATIONS

COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FUTURE

Planning Commission Public Hearing | November 20, 2025

HOUSEAL LAVIGNE

All Together.

Agenda

- Overview of the Planning Process
- Orientation, Review, and Discussion of the Draft

  Foundations for the Future: Columbia County, GA Comprehensive Plan

- Next Steps

PLANNING PROCESS

What is Comprehensive Plan?

- A "Roadmap" or "Blueprint" for the next two decades
- The Comprehensive Plan...
  - Engages the community
  - Identifies community desires, needs, and aspirations
  - Assesses the County's existing issues and strengths
  - Guides a broad range of topics (policy)
  - Is a dynamic document – can be updated and maintained to reflect trends and events

Why is a Comprehensive Plan Important?

- Tell Columbia County's story and share the community's vision
- Evaluate and inform development proposals
- Foundation for the regulatory framework
- Coordinate local and regional initiatives
- Support capital improvements planning and budgeting
- Identify future studies and funding opportunities
- Inform and educate the community

Georgia Comprehensive Planning Act

- The Georgia Planning Act (O.C.G.A. § 50-8-1, et seq.) establishes the framework for comprehensive planning at all local governments.
- Minimum requirements
  - Plan Elements
  - Community involvement
  - Consideration of other Regional Water Plans and Environmental Planning Criteria
  - Review by Regional Commission and DCA
  - Public Hearings
  - Adoption

Georgia Comprehensive Planning Act

Plan Element	Required	Recommended	Included in Foundations?
Community Goals	All local governments		✓
Needs and Opportunities	All local governments		✓
Community Work Program	All local governments		✓
Broadband Services	All local governments		✓
Capital Improvements	Governments w/impact fees	Certain communities	✓
Economic Development	GA Job Tax Credit Tier 1 Communities	Certain communities	✓ ✓
Land Use	Communities w/Zoning	Certain communities	✓ ✓
Transportation	Communities in MPOs	Certain communities	
Housing	Entitlement	Certain	

Planning Process

Approximately 12-month process to:

- Establish where we are today
- Define where we want to go
- Create the roadmap to get there



Planning Process

Approximately 12-month process to:

- Establish where we are today
- Define where we want to go
- Create the roadmap to get there




A Foundation for
Decision Making

ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan* employed a comprehensive community engagement framework designed to solicit input from residents, business owners, community partners, and stakeholders across the County. Through a strategic combination of in-person forums and digital platforms, the planning process facilitates broad public participation to inform the development of a long-term vision for Columbia County's growth and development over the next 20 years.

This section presents an overview of key themes identified through community feedback. For detailed analysis and comprehensive insights, please refer to the Engagement Summary Appendix.

Key Themes

The following high-level priorities emerged from in-person and digital community engagement conducted between February and September 2025.

Everyday Infrastructure Investments

- Need for road, utility, and drainage improvements in older neighborhoods
- Traffic and congestion challenges
- Interest in more ways to get around

Managing Growth Thoughtfully

- Desire for slower, more balanced growth
- Housing opportunities and attainability
- Protecting natural resources, green space, and community character

Enhancing Community Life and Places

- Enhanced parks and trail systems
- Expanded cultural, youth, and senior opportunities
- More family-friendly activities and events

Public Communication and Accessibility

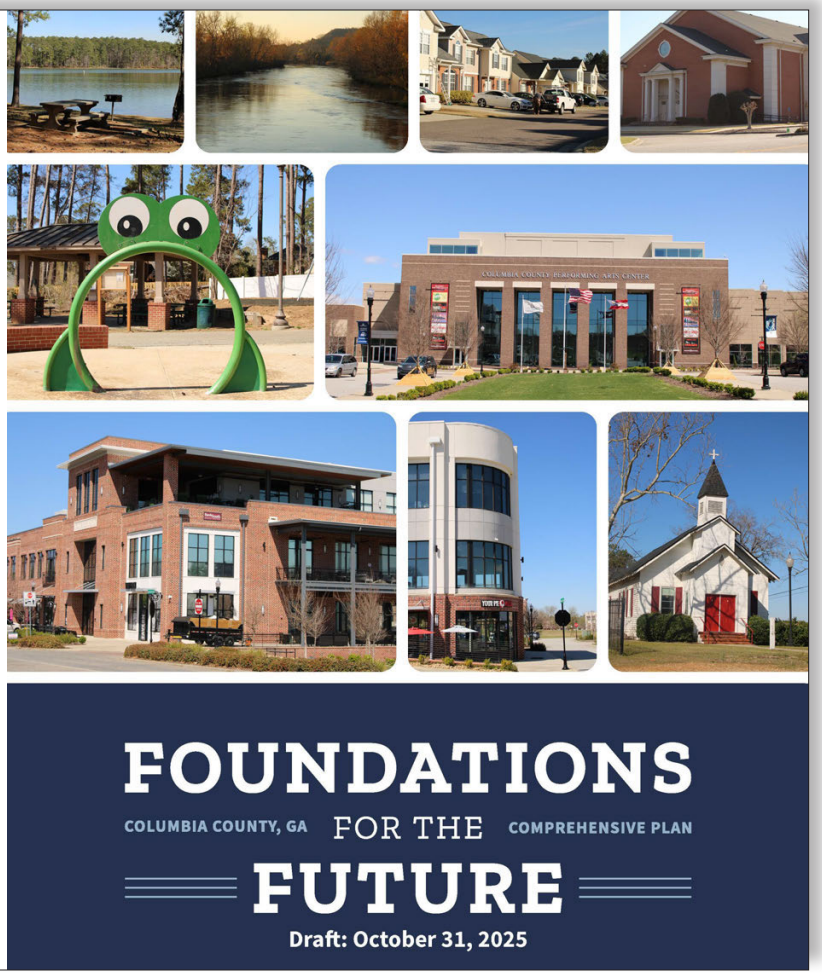
- Improved communication and feedback opportunities
- Balanced County services
- Strengthening Voices



DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ELEMENTS

Plan Outline

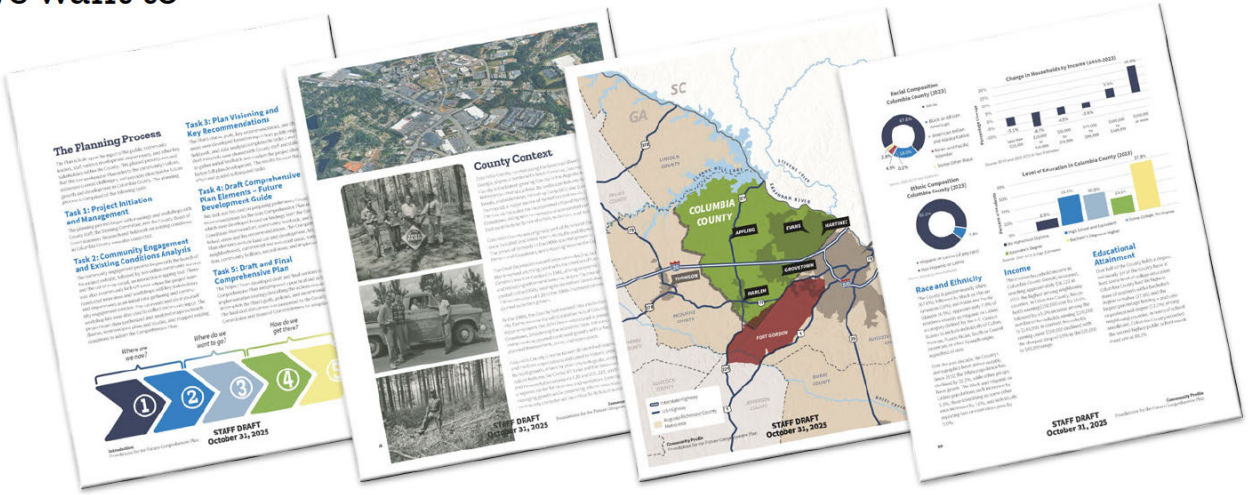
- 01: Introduction
- 02: Community Profile
- 03: Vision Statement and Goals
- 04: Land Use and Development
- 05: Housing and Neighborhoods
- 06: Commercial and Industrial Areas
- 07: Transportation
- 08: Community Facilities
- 09: Natural Environment
- 10: Implementation



Introductory Chapters

- Sets the stage for the Plan
- Where do we want to go?





Vision Statement and Goals



03

Vision Statement and Goals

The vision statement captures how Columbia County envisions its future after bringing the goals of the *Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan* to life. Rooted in community and stakeholder input, it reflects the collective aspirations that will guide the County's growth and development. The accompanying goals outline broad, long-range outcomes the County aims to accomplish, forming a clear framework that guides planning efforts and ensures that all future initiatives align with the community's vision. These goals are ambitious and will require the culmination of incremental actions to be fully achieved.

Vision Statement and Goals
Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan

STAFF DRAFT
October 31, 2025

25

Vision

Columbia County will continue to be a community known for its unique character, impressive natural areas, and distinctive neighborhoods. With a shared identity that connects urbanized centers like Evans and Martinez to rural areas like Appling, the County will thoughtfully balance its heritage with strategic growth and development.

With a growing population, Columbia County's neighborhoods will continue to offer housing for households of all types and sizes. New neighborhoods will be designed around parks, greenways, and natural landscapes, creating attractive, connected communities. Reinvestment in established residential areas will enhance their vitality, while careful planning will ensure the County's rural charm continues to define that portion of the community.

Columbia County will evolve from being one of Georgia's most desirable bedroom communities into a strong and self-sustaining economic hub. Given Fort Gordon's role as a major economic and population driver, the County will continue to be a key player in the regional economy, attracting innovation, various industries, and a skilled workforce, while fostering a robust job market. New neighborhood-scale commercial nodes will bring shopping, dining, and daily conveniences closer to residents across the County. Evans Towne Center will continue to grow as the civic and cultural heart of the County, offering a mix of local restaurants, retail, and year-round events.

Roads and highways will be efficient and safe, promoting smooth traffic flow and travel for all users. An expanded network of sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails will create connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial areas. This comprehensive network will support healthy, active lifestyles and provide options for walking and biking across the County.

Essential infrastructure and services in the County will continue to support growth and maintain a high quality of life for current and future residents. Guided by community values, the County will work to preserve land and water resources, protecting them for future generations.

Parks, greenways, and conservation areas will connect residents and visitors to the outdoors, while key destinations such as Wildwood Park and the Savannah Rapids Pavilion will remain major draws for visitors, reinforcing the County's reputation for recreation, events, and natural beauty.

As Columbia County grows thoughtfully, it will build upon its reputation as one of the best places to live, work, and recreate in Georgia. Residents will benefit from access to high quality jobs, a nationally recognized school system, a variety of housing options, and exceptional natural areas, all while the County continues to prioritize safety and an outstanding quality of life.

26

STAFF DRAFT
October 31, 2025

Vision Statement and Goals
Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan

Goals

Goals are broad and long-range desired outcomes of what the County aims to achieve in the future. They are ambitious and will require the culmination of incremental actions to be fully achieved. The County's planning efforts should work to support these goals. Key recommendations identify a preliminary set of initiatives needed to support the Vision Statement; these start to form the outline for each element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Land Use and Development

Goal: Guide future development in the County toward a balanced approach to preservation and expansion by directing growth to areas served by infrastructure and utilities to limit patterns of sprawl.

Goal: Future development in the County should include a mix of complete neighborhoods, commercial and industrial districts, and employment areas, with a continued focus on protecting its rural character and natural environment.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Goal: Expand the County's housing options by providing well-connected neighborhoods that offer housing options, ensuring accessibility for existing and future residents.

Goal: Promote new housing and neighborhoods that blend the County's rural character with future development.

Commercial and Industrial Areas

Goal: Establish commercial and industrial areas that promote employment growth, enhance the tax base, and contribute to a resilient local economy with access to goods, services, entertainment, and recreation.

Transportation

Goal: Establish a comprehensive multi-modal transportation system that efficiently and safely connects residents and visitors to all areas of the County.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Goal: Plan for sufficient infrastructure, utilities, and public safety services are available throughout the County, including established areas and potential growth areas, to support current and future development.

Goal: Strengthen community identity by investing in cultural facilities, recreational amenities, and public gathering spaces that reflect Columbia County's character and support connections among residents.

Natural Resources and Environment

Goal: Maintain and enhance park areas to serve residents' evolving needs while protecting the County's natural areas and resources.

Vision Statement and Goals
Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan

STAFF DRAFT
October 31, 2025

27

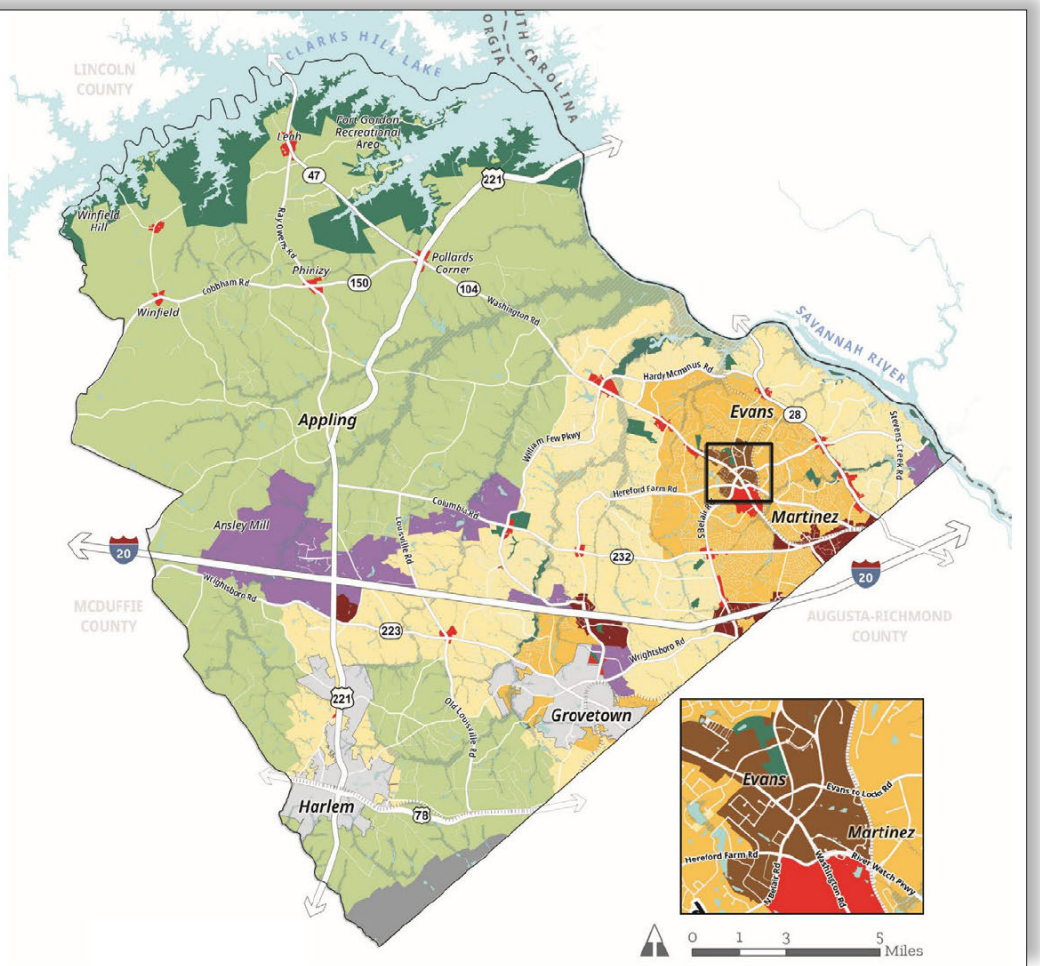
Land Use and Development

- Existing Land Use
- Constraints and Influences
- Character Areas



Character Areas

- Rural Residential/Agricultural
- Medium-Density Residential
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Town Center
- Community Commercial
- Regional Commercial
- Technology and Industrial
- Open Space and Conservation Areas
- Fort Gordon
- Floodplains



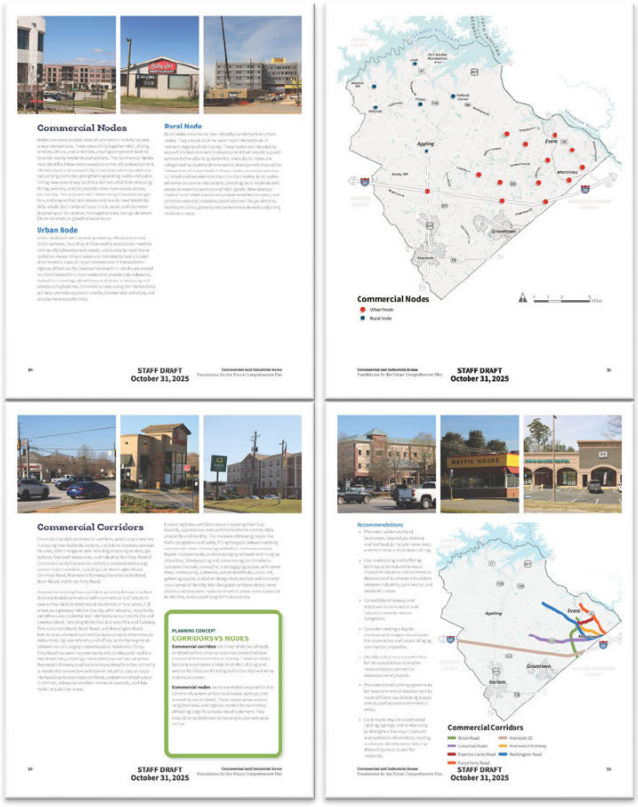
Housing and Neighborhoods

- Neighborhood Character
  - Mix of housing styles and amenities
  - Connections
- Planning for New Growth
  - Context-Sensitive Development
  - Infill
- Housing Mismatch
  - Attainability
  - Variety
- Quality and Maintenance



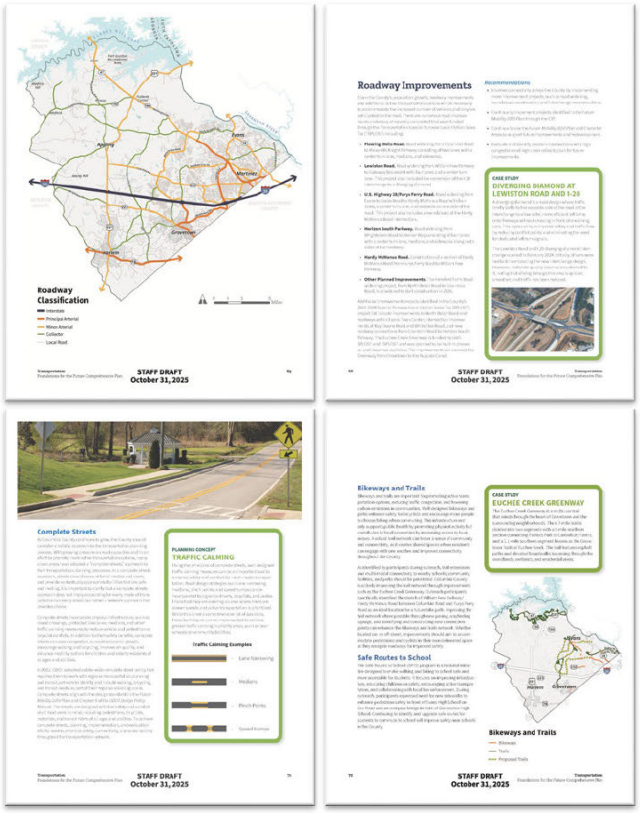
Commercial and Industrial Areas

- Commercial Nodes and Corridors
- Proximity-Based Development
- Reinvestment
- Urban Design and Placemaking
- Workforce Development
- Quarries and Mining
- Tourism and Events
- Business Development and Attraction



Transportation

- Roadway Network and Capacity
- Roadway Improvements
- Active Transportation
- Alternative Transportation
- Freight Rail



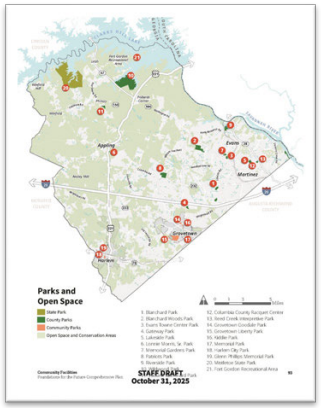
Community Facilities

- Community Services
- Update Utilities and Infrastructure
- Telecommunication and Broadband
- Historical and Cultural Resources
- Parks and Open Space
- Tourism





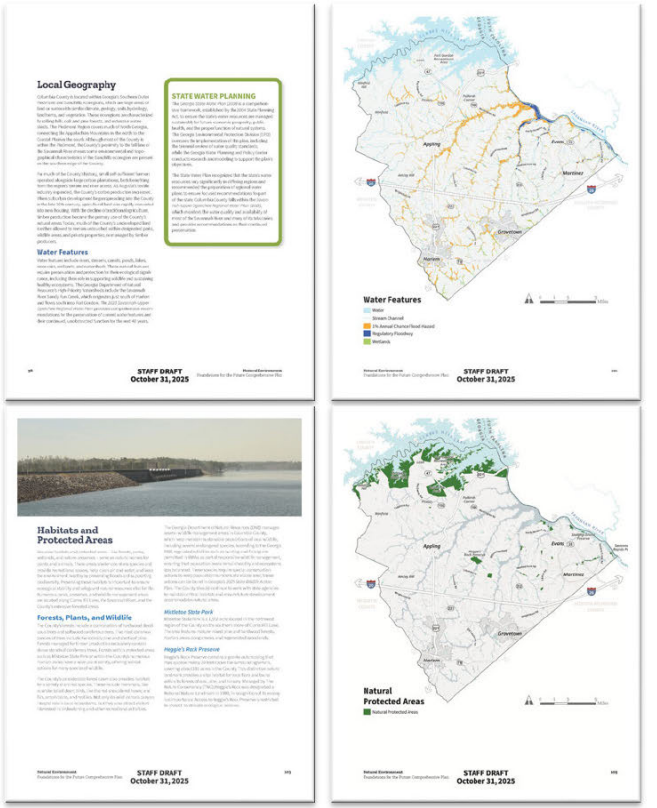






Natural Environment

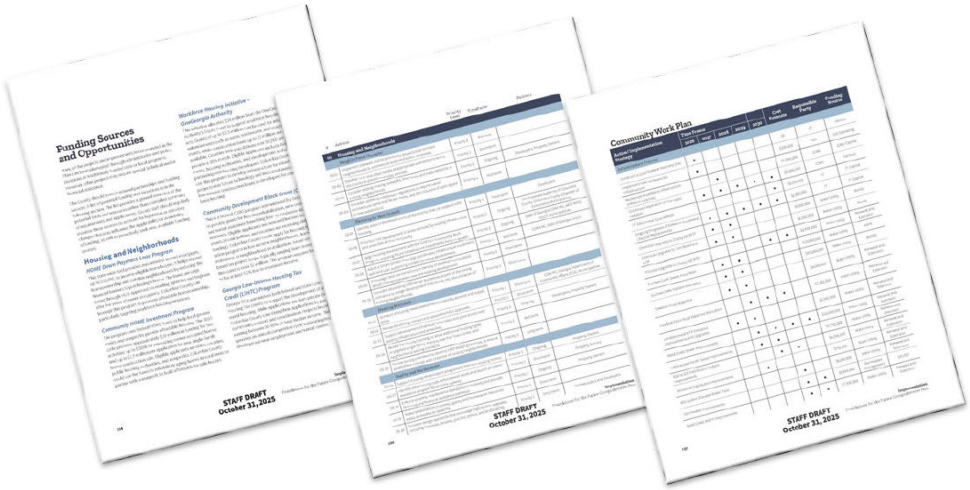
- Local Geography
- Habitat and Protected Areas
- Existing Hazards
- Disaster Response and Recovery



Implementation

- Funding Sources and Opportunities
- Action Matrix
- Community Work Plan





NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

- **Review**
  - Georgia Department of Community Affairs Review
- **Adoption**
  - Board of Commissioners




THANK YOU!
HOUSEAL LAVIGNE
All Together.

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Foundations for the Future Comprehensive Plan Open House

Sign-in Sheet

Name	Connection to the County (Resident, Business Owner, etc.)	Email Address
Paul & Sidney Clark	Residents	[redacted]
Terry Brown	Resident	
Susan Warren	Resident	
Jessica Anderson	Redident	
Vin Mueller	Resident	
Joshua Heinrich	Resident	
YeSun Wiltse	Resident	
Matt Schlachter	Col. Co	
Skyler Dunn	The Augusta Press (Media)	

Appendix E:
Report of Accomplishments

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Report of Accomplishments

The following list of items are from the Vision 2035 Community Work Program. With Foundations for the Future, we have elected to include a traditional Community Work Plan with a five-year timeline, but also an Action Matrix with near-term, mid-term, and long-term action time frame which enables County staff to approve specific, actionable items each year and to evaluate progress based on completed actions.

- **Completed:** The project has concluded.
- **Ongoing:** The project is ongoing or could be ongoing perpetually as now a function of our government.
- **Postponed:** Project has been postponed or priorities have changed.
- **Not Accomplished:** Project has not been completed and/or priorities have changed.

Regulations

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Update Sewer Use Ordinance.	•				Industrial pretreatment has been addressed.
Update Water Utility Engineering Standards and Specifications.	•				Draft complete.
Develop design standards for both commercial and residential development.	•				Expanded in proposed Action Matrix as a priority 1 timeframe.
Develop standards for Columbia Activity Center.	•				Revised into separate parts and expanded into other areas as a priority 1 timeframe in proposed Action Matrix.
Develop standards to protect rural corridors.				•	Rural Corridors removed from Future Development map.
Amend regulations to incorporate common conditions of zoning that can ensure a high quality of residential development.	•				Expanded in proposed Action Matrix.
Adopt additional standards to protect water resources based on the state model ordinance for groundwater recharge, water supply watersheds, and wetland protection.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix as a priority 3 timeframe.
Review codes and remove obstacles to attract businesses that may be desired within mixed use developments.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix and expanded.
Amend regulations to incorporate standards for meaningful open space in all new residential and mixed use development.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix with a priority 1 timeframe.

Functional Plans

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Complete and adopt the Parks, Recreation, and Events Master Plan.	•				Completed in 2023.
Update Information Security Plan.	•				Completed in 2023.
Complete Business Continuity Plans for County Departments.	•				Completed in 2024. Updates proposed in Community Work Plan for 2029. Anticipated to have a 5-year continuous update process.
Complete Disaster Recovery Plans for Technology-Driven Departments.		•			These plans are being reenvisioned due to the new County backup data center site and is included in Community Work Plan with a 2026 completion.
Complete County-wide Continuity of Operations Plan.	•				Complete with updates proposed in 2027 in Community Work Plan.
Develop formal IT Infrastructure Management (ITIM) Plan.	•				Draft complete. Adoption in 2026.
Expand the Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) Regional Transportation Plan to include the updated urbanized area of Columbia County after the 2020 Census results are final.	•				Draft complete.
Work with the Columbia County Development Authority to implement their economic development plan "Harnessing Opportunities and Talent: An Economic Development Strategy."	•				Included in the Action Matrix as separate points with multiple priorities.
Update the Development Authority of Columbia County (DACC) Economic Development Strategic Plan to include eco-tourism, including the support and development of the Clarks Hill Lake recreation economy.	•				Expanded to include Visit Columbia County in proposed Action Matrix.
Implement recommendation of the Regional Workforce Study and OEA Fort Gordon Study Grant.	•				Broadly included in the Action Matrix under Workforce Development.
Prepare a countywide Solid Waste Management Plan.				•	No current funding source, but may be taken up again.

Small Area Master Plans

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Complete and adopt the Martinez Redevelopment Plan.				•	No longer being pursued, but elements are included in the proposed Action Matrix.
Prepare sub area plans for Community Crossroads and define the limits of nonresidential development and acceptable uses.				•	No longer being pursued, but elements are included in the proposed Action Matrix.
Prepare a development and transportation strategy for the Gateway Activity Center.				•	No longer being pursued, but elements are included in the proposed Action Matrix.
Plan and begin implementation for the White Oak Business Park Phase II and remainder of Appling Harlem Employment Center.	•				Phase II was constructed and is under contract.

Process/Progam

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Improve Community Rating System Score.	•				Improved from a 7 to a 6.
For the development community, increase knowledge on, and use of, green infrastructure and low impact development practices to reduce runoff throughout the County.	•				Green Guide is in use and expansion of education on that Guide are included in the Action Matrix as a priority 2 timeframe and is ongoing.
Maintain compliance with the NPDES MS4 Phase II Stormwater Permit.	•				Required to maintain permit, so will perpetually be ongoing, but is a policy function.
Obtain Fire Services Accreditation from Center for Public Safety Excellence.				•	Under evaluation.
Install the Gateways and Wayfinding signage.	•				Substantially complete and working with GDOT and others to complete remainder.
Implement the Martinez Redevelopment Plan				•	Plan not completed or adopted, but elements of that plan are included in the proposed Action Matrix.
Increase mobility of web sites and applications.	•				Many sites have been moved to the cloud, and others are in progress.
Increase availability of free, public Wi-Fi.	•				Free Wi-Fi is available at county buildings and parks. Wi-Fi pavilions included in new Work Plan.
Develop Internet of Things (IoT) Strategy.	•				There is not a formal document for this topic, but IoT is a part of other plans and processes

Process/Progam

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Implement Business Intelligence (BI) Software.				•	This project has shifted to a more software solution-specific model, since most vendors are now incorporating extensive dashboards into their solutions, reducing our need for separate BI tools. This need still exists, but our need to develop a custom solution has been reduced.
Streamline online business processes for Customers.	•				This project will never really end, but new software has been put in place to cause significant changes in workflows.
Form Sustainability Team to work on County-wide initiatives.	•				This is part of the Green Guide now.
Facilitate a Greenspace Group and guide preservation of greenspace in Columbia County.				•	The County is assessing how best to approach greenspace in Columbia County at this time.
Expand the public education program to address water conservation, stormwater pollution prevention, septic system best practices and flood risk reduction.	•				Public education program was expanded and continues to work on other education initiatives as well.
Coordinate with the USACE to identify opportunities to support eco-tourism on Clarks Hill Lake.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix with a priority 2 timeframe.
Evaluate the potential for corridor-based Community Improvement Districts (CIDs).				•	While not being specifically proposed, elements of a CID (Community Improvement District) are included in the Proposed Action Matrix.
Coordinate with the Columbia County School Board to plan for appropriate development with respect to school siting decisions.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix as two separate parts with priority 1 and 2 timeframes.
Coordinate with USACE to educate the public about allowable shoreline development activity.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix as a priority 2 timeframe.

Inventory/Assessment

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Expand the stream gage project to more basins.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix with a priority 1 timeframe.
Evaluate all major culvert crossings for maintenance plan.	•				Project will be ongoing for foreseeable future as policy.
Conduct stream monitoring for Watershed Protection Plan (Functional Plan).	•				Functionally complete, but is part of policy.
Identify opportunities to preserve greenspace near Clarks Hill Lake and within floodplains.	•				Included in proposed Action Matrix to align development with the *J. Strom Thurmond Project Shoreline Management Plan.*
Identify opportunities to create destinations by identifying historic sites that are close to parks or trails.				•	Evaluating, but no funding source.
Update the list of buildings and sites that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.	•				Continued in proposed Action Matrix as a priority 3 timeframe. This is functionally a policy at this point and should be in the Action Matrix.
Identify locations where soils are not appropriate for a common septic system and where Advanced Treatment Units must be used.				•	Working on coordination between Health Department and Columbia County. No anticipated timeline.

Infrastructure Projects

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Increase stormwater storage capacity in the Reed Creek basin.	•				Project complete, but is policy along with increasing storage capacity in other basins.
Conduct a stream bank restoration project listed in the County's current Hazard Mitigation Plan.	•				Singular project was completed but is now part of policy.
Design and complete Miramar Drive drainage ditch improvements.	•				Completed in 2024.
Complete development of Martinez Park (Trails, dog park, pavilions, play equipment, ties into Blanchard Park).	•				Completed in 2023.
Complete development of Riverwood Park (Passive park in the Riverwood neighborhood area).	•				Project is underway.
Complete development of Gateway Youth Sports Tournament Complex (Venue to attract state, regional, and national level baseball, softball, soccer, etc. tournaments).		•			Renamed the Columbia County Sports Complex and projected to be in design in Spring 2026. Continued in Community Work Plan.
Complete development of Blanchard Park Renovation (New multipurpose rectangular fields, storage building, fencing).				•	Lack of funding source for this project.
Complete Blanchard Woods Park Expansion (Complete master plan to include 6-8 soccer fields).		•			Carried over to new Community Work Program with an anticipated 2028 timeframe.
Complete Evans Towne Center Park expansion.	•				Project complete.
Addition of a Class A Burn Building, a classroom, and technical rescue complex at the training center.		•			Moved to new Community Work Plan with a projected 2027-2028 timeline.
Purchase of an Aerial Truck to meet the expanding demand in West Columbia County.		•			Ongoing and in new Work Program as New Aerial Fire Truck with an anticipated 2027 completion.
Additional fire station in the Washington Road & Rosemont Drive area.	•				Land has been acquired and is broadly included in Community Work Plan as New Fire Stations.
Additional fire station in the Highway 150 & Smith Crawford Road area.	•				Land was acquired and is broadly included in Community Work Plan as New Fire Stations.
Work with the ARTS Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to identify, design, and fund projects that improve countywide connectivity north and south of I-20 and from I-20 to Fort Gordon.	•				This will be an ongoing project since it is a function of government but is functionally complete.

Infrastructure Projects

Project	Completed	Ongoing	Postponed	Not Accomplished	Comments
Construct a Local Disaster Recovery Site	•				The site itself is constructed but the process of installing equipment and setting up the failover from the primary site is in progress. Carried over to Community Work Plan with a 2026 total completion.
Implement new hardware GIS Infrastructure.	•				This project is substantially complete. GIS infrastructure will be moved to the cloud by June 2026 and carried over to Community Work Plan as noted.
Modernize broadband infrastructure and achieve Broadband Ready Designation.	•				Broadband Ready was achieved, and new switches were implemented in 2021-2022.
Support expansion of fiber-optic network.	•				This is on ongoing project which will never be finished, but for purposes of this plan it can be considered complete because we're continually expanding the network and adding customers. Included in Community Work Plan as an ongoing project.
Expand the Euchee Creek Greenway.	•				Currently underway and in design phase.
Identify 'quality of life' CIP projects needed to expand cultural and civic facilities/services.	•				This is ongoing and will be for the foreseeable future. Since this is a function of County government, it is not noted explicitly in the proposed Action Matrix or Work Program.
Furys Ferry Rd. (2 to 4 lanes, Evans to Locks to Hardy McManus).	•				Anticipated 2026 completion.
Flowing Wells Rd. (2 to 3 lanes, Wheeler Rd. to Washington Rd.).	•				Completed.
Hereford Farm Rd. (Belair Rd. to Gibbs Rd.)	•				Project underway. Anticipated to be let for construction in 2026.
I-20/Lewiston Rd. (Columbia Rd. to Grovetown).	•				Completed.
Horizon South Parkway: I-20 to Grovetown.	•				Project underway.