

Community Vision

Hall County is a growing community with unique needs and opportunities related to its development patterns and projected future growth. The Community Vision chapter uses a series of Vision Themes to describe a shared ‘community vision’ – what the community envisions for its future – in terms of identified needs and opportunities that are addressed by recommended goals and strategies.

■ Vision Themes

The Vision Themes organize primary needs/opportunities identified during the planning process as needing to be addressed, followed by goals and strategies that in turn address these needs and opportunities. Vision Themes represent the ideas and concerns of participants in the planning process and narrow the big picture vision to specific strategies that aim to make the Community Vision a reality. Recommended strategies are presented in the Implementation Program chapter as specific action items to be undertaken by the County.

The themes presented are:

- Social and Economic Development
- Development Patterns
- Resource Conservation

These themes generally address the planning topics of land use and housing (Development Patterns), natural and historic resources (Resource Conservation), and economic development and community revitalization (Social and Economic Development).

Social and Economic Development (SED)

Primary Needs and Opportunities

Promote opportunities for clean industry, higher-paying jobs, and small businesses – During the Visioning Process, many economic development issues or ideas touched on these themes. The Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce is the economic development ‘agency’ for all of the county and has numerous programs, initiatives and committees that routinely address ways to recruit and retain businesses and train the local workforce to compete for desired new employers. The county and municipalities support the Chamber’s efforts, which includes provision of public infrastructure such as sewer. Further coordination among the Chamber and local governments in Hall County could result in a countywide Economic Development Plan that would address specific topics of concern or interest to each jurisdiction.

Revitalize existing commercial/industrial areas – Revitalization of existing areas and buildings, in addition to focused expansion of new industrial uses, was identified during the Visioning Process as a need. Areas include those that were identified in the 2012 Gainesville-Hall County Urban Redevelopment Plan; they include the Chicopee Mill area on Atlanta Highway and Athens Highway, both of which are currently not within the boundaries of approved Opportunity Zones or Less Developed Census Tracts. Such a designation could provide tax incentives for businesses to locate or expand by creating a minimum number of jobs.

Facilitate neighborhood revitalization efforts – During the development of *Hall County Forward*, a neighborhood level study of the Morningside Heights area was undertaken to identify residents’ concerns

and goals for the traditionally underserved community east of downtown Gainesville. Recommendations for the area are intended to be implemented as a coordinated effort between Hall County and the Concerned Citizens of Gainesville/Hall County civic organization, a group of neighborhood residents that represent the study area of Morningside Heights, Black and Cooley Drive, and Gaines Mill Road.

Goals and Strategies

SED Goal 1: Support existing businesses and focus recruitment efforts on technology business and industry

SED Strategy 1.1: Continue to work with the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce in support of their economic development activities, including workforce development initiatives with local education partners and the Existing Industry Program, which includes the Small Business Council

SED Strategy 1.2: Evaluate development review and permitting processes to assess the ease of “doing business” in Hall County

SED Strategy 1.3: Extend sewer to targeted business/industrial development locations, consistent with the Future Development Map and the county’s sewer system master plans

SED Strategy 1.4: Utilize the Comprehensive Plan in the process to update the South Hall County Sewer System Master Plan and the North Hall County Sewer System Master Plan

SED Goal 1.5: Partner with the Chamber of Commerce and the Hall County Joint Municipal Association to prepare a county-wide Economic Development Plan

SED Goal 1.6: Coordinate with the Lake Lanier Convention and Visitors Bureau to promote agritourism in the county

SED Goal 2: Stimulate revitalization activities and redevelopment of aging properties

SED Strategy 2.1: Coordinate with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to apply the Less Developed Census Tract designation in the Chicopee Mill area, which would allow businesses that create five or more jobs to participate in the Georgia Job Tax Credit Program

SED Strategy 2.2: Submit a new application to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for Opportunity Zone designation for the Candler Road area, which includes the Athens Highway corridor in the Morningside community; such a designation allows new or existing businesses to benefit from tax credits upon creating a minimum number of jobs

SED Strategy 2.3: Partner with the Concerned Citizens of Gainesville and Hall County to facilitate neighborhood and quality of life improvements in the Morningside Heights, Black and Cooley Drive, and Gaines Mill Road communities

SED Strategy 2.3a: Consistently enforce county codes pertaining to outdoor storage and junk items, inoperable vehicles, and litter

SED Strategy 2.3b: Increase Sheriff’s patrols to address the high frequency of cars running all-way stops and to prevent criminal activity

SED Strategy 2.3c: Assess the ability to form a local Neighborhood Watch, with the assistance of the Sheriff's Office Public Information and Community Services Unit

SED Strategy 2.3d: Evaluate the best long-term measures for addressing speeding on local streets based on input from the Hall County Traffic Engineering Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program and the Sheriff's Office

SED Strategy 2.3e: Prioritize sidewalk and street lighting needs based on frequency of use and access to local transit stops

SED Strategy 2.3f: Continue to identify properties suitable for federal Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) and Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) grants to assist with home repairs/rehabilitation and to provide affordable housing opportunities

SED Strategy 2.3g: Evaluate options for providing clean-up opportunities in addition to annual Keep Hall Beautiful neighborhood clean-up, such as temporary placement of containers in accessible areas for disposal of bulky or hazardous items (tires, white goods)

SED Strategy 2.3h: Identify homes suitable for Homes for Heroes and/or the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) Officer Next Door programs to reduce the costs of purchasing a home and encourage law enforcement officers to live in the community

SED Strategy 2.3i: Identify potential "pocket parks" and trail connections during the update to the county's Parks and Recreation Plan

SED Strategy 2.3j: Coordinate with the Hall County Master Gardeners to establish planted gateways and community gardens, either as permanent or temporary uses of properties

SED Strategy 2.3k: Research methods for recruiting a small-scale grocery store to the area; one example is a Dollar General Market, which offers a wider variety of produce and dry groceries

SED Strategy 2.3l: Submit a new application to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for Opportunity Zone designation that would include the Athens Highway corridor; such a designation allows new or existing businesses to benefit from tax credits upon creating a minimum number of jobs

SED Strategy 2.3m: Evaluate opportunities for using County-owned property in the area for a neighborhood park

SED Strategy 2.3n: Improve coordination with the City of Gainesville on zoning, development, and code enforcement issues that relate to properties inside the city limits but are adjacent to the Morningside area

SED Strategy 2.3o: Research the potential for establishing a non-profit Community Development Corporation, which could allow interested residents to undertake economic development and residential development activities

SED Strategy 2.3p: Conduct quarterly meetings with Concerned Citizens of Gainesville and Hall County board members and County leadership/staff

SED Strategy 2.3q: Discuss and coordinate housing-related needs and initiatives with the City of Gainesville, Habitat for Humanity, and other public or private stakeholders to maximize the use of financial and staff resources

SED Strategy 2.3r: Evaluate the justification for a traffic signal warrant study at the Gaines Mill Road/Athens Highway intersection with the Georgia Department of Transportation

Development Patterns (DP)

Primary Needs and Opportunities

Balanced future development that preserves rural areas and greenspace – Protection of North and East Hall’s rural character, including farms and greenspace, was cited as an issue during the Visioning Process. As Hall County grows, there will be pressures on these rural areas to transition to neighborhood development at suburban densities, especially due to current zoning that sets a minimum lot size of 1.5 acres in most agriculture and residential zoning districts. Given the uncertainty of amending the zoning ordinance to significantly increase minimum lot size requirements, focus can be paid to land use policy (as illustrated by the Future Development Map and the Future Development Guide), regulations (open space requirements and design; tree protection), sewer infrastructure planning, and research of greenspace preservation measures to preserve rural areas.

Protect existing neighborhoods while supporting future home options – Encroachment of commercial uses on neighborhoods and loss of open space and tree cover are viewed by the community as having the potential to impair the local quality of life. During the Visioning Process, many residents also indicated a desire to promote larger lot sizes and single-family homes, while many others identified a real need for housing options. Local regulations can address these issues to an extent; however, coordination with other groups and local governments to pool resources and ideas related to countywide housing issues and needs may be beneficial.

Promote quality corridor development – Concerns along major road corridors include encroachment of commercial or industrial uses into residential areas, as well as aesthetic concerns due to predominant outdoor-oriented uses (outdoor displays, storage, sales) along several commercial corridors in the county. In addition, future corridors that may be needed to reduce traffic congestion should be designed to consider the context of existing land uses, environmental features, and the built environment (i.e. “context-sensitive design”). One example is a potential east-west connector to serve as an expansion to the planned Sardis Connector from SR 60/Thompson Bridge Road to SR 365.

Goals and Strategies

DP Goal 1: Preserve rural character and development patterns in North and East Hall areas

DP Strategy 1.1: Use the Future Development Map to guide planning for sewer infrastructure projects, limiting future service to targeted development locations and avoiding areas intended to support agricultural and low-density residential uses as well as Conservation-designated areas

DP Strategy 1.2: Evaluate and promote options for the permanent conservation of land during the development of the Parks and Greenspace Master Plan (an update of the 2008 Parks and Recreation Master Plan)

DP Strategy 1.3: Require an “Agricultural Use Notice” statement on final plats to inform the owner, occupants and uses of a property adjacent to an agricultural use or zoning classification that there may be potential impacts from lawful agricultural operations; consider similar language for zoning proposals and building permits

DP Goal 2: Maintain green space in new developments

DP Strategy 2.1: Evaluate the effectiveness of the County’s tree protection standards and Conservation Subdivision Design Option and identify potential amendments, as needed

DP Strategy 2.2: Incorporate minimum open space requirements into the Planned Development zoning classifications (residential, commercial, office and industrial)

DP Goal 3: Protect and enhance established neighborhoods

DP Strategy 3.1: Evaluate minimum buffer standards in the Zoning Ordinance to ensure they are sufficient where commercial or industrial uses abut residential properties

DP Strategy 3.2: Maintain residential use (or agricultural) as the primary land use along roadways that do not have a Corridor designation on the Future Development Map

DP Goal 4: Create quality new development

DP Strategy 4.1: Amend regulations to incorporate common conditions of zoning (conditions that are routinely approved as part of a rezoning and are not currently found in the Zoning Ordinance) that are used to ensure a high quality of development and the provision of adequate infrastructure by an applicant

DP Strategy 4.2: Evaluate use and outdoor storage and display standards of the Gateway Corridor Overlay District to ensure uses requiring outdoor storage/display are appropriately located and screened

DP Strategy 4.3: Where roadways cross both county and city lines, evaluate corridor-specific standards and design guidelines applied by the municipalities to identify any requirements that could enhance the County’s requirements

DP Strategy 4.4: Present standards for development in a Unified Development Code, which consolidates all land use, design, and environmental regulations into a single document for ease of use

DP Goal 5: Accommodate housing options

DP Strategy 5.1: Review existing regulations for impediments to special housing needs and opportunities such as senior housing, accessory dwelling units, and affordable housing

DP Strategy 5.2: Discuss and coordinate housing-related needs and initiatives with the City of Gainesville, Habitat for Humanity, and other public or private stakeholders to maximize the use of financial and staff resources

DP Goal 6: Coordinate transportation and land use planning

DP Strategy 6.1: Prepare an East-West Corridor Study to determine the viability of a new connection for relieving congestion on Dawsonville Highway and also establish next steps in project development

DP Strategy 6.2: Use the 2014 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to identify and prioritize projects that can connect neighborhoods with parks, schools, or other activity centers

Resource Conservation (RC)*Primary Needs and Opportunities*

Protection of water resources – Given the significance of Lake Lanier, protecting its water quality is a primary concern of many property owners, residents, business owners, and users of the lake. The County has local development standards in place for protecting water quality and it complies with the Regional Water Plan (Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District). However, additional coordinated efforts can help to prevent pollutants from entering the lake and its tributaries, especially as the county continues to grow. These efforts include partnerships with local organizations on environmental initiatives and studies.

Protection of greenspace – During the Visioning Process, many citizens expressed an interest in permanently protecting some areas of the county from development, resulting in property remaining in its natural state or being utilized for trails or other passive recreation. An expanded update to the county's 2008 Park and Recreation Master Plan can provide a mechanism for addressing greenspace needs, tools, and funding sources. The plan can also provide an opportunity to integrate ideas and ongoing efforts of the Chamber of Commerce's Greenspace Committee with county level planning for parks and recreation.

Potential for heritage tourism – The Healan's - Heads' Mill restoration project and Cherokee Bluffs Park promote awareness of the county's history and have the potential to be a regional draw. Development of a Historic Preservation Plan, which would utilize a 2012 Historic Resources Survey among other resources, can identify additional ways of protecting and promoting the county's history in order to contribute to residents' quality of life and to the local economy.

RC Goal 1: Protect water resources and improve water quality

RC Strategy 1.1: Implement the recurring County-specific action items in the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's (MNGWPD) Water Resources Management Plan (the 2009 *Watershed Management Plan, Water Supply and Water Conservation Management Plan, and Wastewater Management Plan* elements are currently in effect; a 2017 update is in final draft form)

RC Strategy 1.2: Evaluate the steps needed to return highly treated wastewater to Lake Lanier to support long-term sustainable water use, as recommended in the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's (MNGWPD) Water Resources Management Plan (April 2017 draft)

RC Strategy 1.3: Participate in the update to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Master Plan for Lake Lanier; the plan is intended to provide guidance for the management, protection, and preservation of the lake's environment while allowing a balanced use of the shoreline

RC Strategy 1.4: Evaluate opportunities to place additional litter traps in waterways (similar to the Flat Creek Bandalong Litter Trap installed by Hall County/City of Gainesville in 2016) to curb the amount of pollutants entering Lake Lanier

RC Strategy 1.5: Review the zoning and subdivision regulations for any impediments to low impact development (LID) or 'green infrastructure' approaches to stormwater management, which can lower the amount of untreated stormwater discharging to surface waters; assess findings to identify potential regulatory modifications

RC Strategy 1.6: Update local wastewater master plans to address both sewer and septic systems in accordance with the requirements of the regional Water Resources Management Plan

RC Strategy 1.7: Coordinate with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GAEPD) on the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plan for Lake Lanier; the GAEPD plan is intended to outline stakeholder actions that can address existing water quality impairments

RC Strategy 1.8: Research the requirements needed to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) Program to potentially reduce flood insurance rates for property owners

RC Strategy 1.9: Establish buffer requirements for the portion of the Chattahoochee River not under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, consistent with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' rules for river corridor protection

RC Goal 2: Support and partner with local organizations to protect the environment

RC Strategy 2.1: Maintain partnerships with organizations that monitor water quality of Lake Lanier and its tributaries, including Chattahoochee Riverkeepers and the University of North Georgia

RC Strategy 2.2: Promote public awareness of annual events such as Lake Lanier Association's Shore Sweep and Keep Hall Beautiful's Team UP 2 Clean UP Event

RC Strategy 2.3: Leverage SPLOST funds to address shoreline erosion and abandoned vessel removal on Lake Lanier, working in conjunction with Lake Lanier Association, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and private donors

RC Strategy 2.4: Partner with and promote Hall County Schools' recycling events as well as Keep Hall Beautiful's recycling initiatives

RC Strategy 2.5: Partner with the City of Gainesville on pollution prevention activities, including public outreach through TV 18 and online media, and identifying additional opportunities for litter traps in waterways that have public access

RC Strategy 2.6: Continue to support and promote Green Hall Alliance and its efforts to enhance public awareness and support of environmental stewardship and sustainability practices in the community

RC Strategy 2.7: Coordinate with the local office of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Resources Conservation Office to identify eligible projects for federal Section 319(h) Nonpoint Source Implementation Grants; grant awards can fund projects that will reduce pollutants and improve water quality in impaired waters

RC Strategy 2.8: Maintain high standards in countywide recycling efforts and protecting the environment by utilizing innovative ideas to operate and maintain the county landfill

RC Goal 3: Develop and implement a coordinated plan for a linked system of protected greenspace and trails

RC Strategy 3.1: Prepare a Parks and Greenspace Master Plan (a comprehensive update to the county's 2008 Parks and Recreation Plan), resulting in recommendations that will address parks, recreation, trails and greenspace

RC Strategy 3.2: Create a process that identifies land for permanent protection based upon a standard set of criteria, such as the recreational, ecological, environmental, aesthetic, cultural, historic or agricultural value; this process will be developed and described in the Parks and Greenspace Master Plan

RC Strategy 3.3: Identify additional segments during the development of the Parks and Greenspace Master Plan to expand the Highlands to Islands Trail System

RC Strategy 3.4: Identify mechanisms and funding sources – including consideration of future Special Purpose Lost Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) revenue and impact fees – for the permanent protection of land and land acquisition/construction costs for the Highlands to Islands Trail

RC Strategy 3.5: Designate an existing county government position to promote and implement Parks and Greenspace Master Plan recommendations pertaining to greenspace protection and extension of the Highlands to Islands Trail, and to coordinate with the Hall County Chamber of Commerce Vision 2030 Greenspace Committee

RC Goal 4: Promote and protect the county's history

RC Strategy 4.1: Prepare a Historic Preservation Plan to promote general awareness of historic resources throughout unincorporated Hall County, prioritize protection for different resources, and encourage heritage tourism as an economic development tool

RC Strategy 4.2: Adopt a Historic Preservation Ordinance to meet the eligibility requirements of the National Park Service's Certified Local Government (CLG) Program, which provides financial and technical assistance for historic preservation activities, including a Historic Preservation Plan

RC Strategy 4.3: Pursue Certified Local Government (CLG) status to become eligible for federal historic preservation funds (requires adoption of a Historic Preservation Ordinance)

RC Strategy 4.4: Identify funding to complete the Healan’s-Head’s Mill Historic Preservation Project, including the addition of land acreage for trails and a Visitor’s and Heritage Center building

RC Strategy 4.5: Coordinate with the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce to promote the Healan’s-Head’s Mill Visitor’s and Heritage Center upon its completion.