

Introduction

Hall County is projected to experience continued growth and investment over the next 20 years. In an effort to meet the community's future needs, the County coordinated the efforts of its citizens to create a community vision for future development that will be guided by the County's Comprehensive Plan: *Hall County Forward*.

■ Purpose

Hall County Forward represents the growth and development policy for unincorporated Hall County, as expressed by a Future Development Map and supporting goals and implementation strategies. This plan also serves the purpose of meeting the intent and requirements of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' (DCA) "Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning," as established on March 1, 2014. Preparation of a plan in accordance with these standards is an essential requirement in maintaining status as a Qualified Local Government (QLG). QLG status allows communities to be eligible for state assistance programs. This plan allows Hall County to retain its QLG status; each municipality has its own comprehensive plan that it maintains and updates.

■ Scope

This plan addresses economic development, housing, natural and historic resources, land use and development patterns, and community revitalization. These 'planning elements' are organized into three Vision Themes (see Chapter 3) for the purpose of expressing community goals and implementing strategies. They are addressed as individual components in the Community Assessment (see Appendix B), which provides a summary of existing local conditions and trends and was used in the identification of community needs and opportunities.

It is important to note that the topic of transportation is addressed in the *Gainesville-Hall Regional Transportation Plan: 2015 Update* (RTP Update). The Regional Transportation Plan is the Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization's transportation strategy for the region and is incorporated by reference in this plan to satisfy DCA's "Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning" related to transportation.

In addition, this plan includes a Capital Improvements Element (CIE), which is required by the state for local governments that charge impact fees. The purpose of a CIE is to establish where and when certain new capital facilities will be provided within a jurisdiction and how they may be financed through an impact fee program. The CIE was adopted on June 25, 2009 and is provided as an attachment.

■ Why We Plan

Comprehensive planning is an important management tool for promoting a strong, healthy community. A comprehensive plan is a significant policy document that guides the physical development of a community; it can be used to promote orderly and rational development so the county can remain physically attractive and economically viable while preserving important natural and historic resources.

The comprehensive plan allows the community to become more certain about where development will occur, what it will be like, when it will happen, and how the costs of development will be met. It helps the County invest its money wisely in infrastructure such as roads, sewer service, parks and green space, and

other facilities to maintain and improve residents' quality of life as well as economic development projects.

Hall County Forward represents these and additional ideas discussed during the public participation process. It lists county-specific needs and opportunities, supporting goals and strategies, desired development patterns and land uses, and a 5-year prioritized work program to implement the plan.

■ Community Participation and Plan Development

Creating a functional comprehensive plan begins with defining a common vision for the future development of the community. A community vision is the overall image of what the community wants to be and how it wants to look at some point in the future. It is the starting point for creating a plan and actions to implement the plan. A successful visioning process requires meaningful participation from a wide range of community stakeholders.

Visioning Process

The Visioning Process, or citizen participation process, for *Hall County Forward* included multiple layers of participation from residents and stakeholders. Several public workshops, stakeholder interviews, and an online survey provided opportunities for input, as described in this section.

Kickoff Meeting

The countywide Kick-Off Meeting took place on May 10, 2016 at the Hall County Government Center. The planning process, schedule, and future public involvement opportunities were presented to the public, who were invited to provide comment and also share their contact information for inclusion on a project e-mail list that was used throughout the development of the plan to distribute meeting and plan status information.

Visioning Workshop

Participants provided their input on the future of Hall County during a countywide workshop held on June 21, 2016 at the Hall County Government Center. Public input was received via prioritization exercises, facilitated discussion and one-on-one conversations with the planning team. Visioning Workshop participants prioritized and contributed to a list of community Assets, Issues and Dreams that were compiled from responses to a community survey. Participants also provided input during a mapping exercise intended to generate discussion on desired community character (e.g. appropriate land uses, amount of open space, etc.), including which areas of the county are likely to support change or should remain relatively unchanged.



Neighborhood Visioning Meeting

A neighborhood-level workshop was held at the Bethel Church of the Nazarene on September 13, 2016 to gather ideas, comments, and concerns for the future of the Morningside Heights, Gaines Mill Road, and Black and Cooley Drive areas. Residents of the area, which abuts I-985 east of Downtown Gainesville, participated in small group exercises and filled out comments forms to share their thoughts about local housing, development, connectivity, pedestrian safety, parks and open space, and public infrastructure. Input was used to develop land use policy and issue-specific strategies for the community, which are presented in Chapter 5 Implementation.

Future Development Workshop

The countywide Future Development Workshop was held October 25, 2016 at the Hall County Government Center. Attendees participated in small group map exercises and conversed with the planning team to develop scenarios for preferred land use types and intensities across the county. The maps depicted six areas of the county to allow more fine-grain review and detail: Chestnut Mountain/Candler, East Hall, Gainesville, Murrayville/Sardis, North Hall and South Hall. The planning team also conducted stakeholder interviews with county department heads to inform the planning process.

Open House

The public was invited to comment on draft recommendations of the plan at an Open House held on May 20, 2017 at the Hall County Government Center. Specifically, goals, strategies and the Future Development Map were displayed for review and comment. The format allowed participants to drop in at their convenience and stay as little or as long as they desired. Participants spoke individually with planning team members and filled out comment forms to present questions or concerns.

Stakeholder Meetings / Interviews

The planning team met with the following groups and individuals to better understand local issues and identify needs and opportunities:

- Issues Committee, Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce
- Greenspace Committee, Vision 2030
- Hall County Green Alliance
- Concerned Citizens of Gainesville and Hall County
- President and CEO, Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce
- Vice President of Economic Development, Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce
- President, Leadership Hall, Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce
- Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity of Hall County
- Director of Development, Habitat for Humanity of Hall County
- Executive Director, Lake Lanier Association, Inc.
- Operations Project Manager for Lake Lanier, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- County Extension Coordinator, UGA Extension – Hall County
- Owner, Truelove Dairy

- President, Reynolds Architects
- Hispanic Community Representative
- Lanier Village Estates HOA Board

Community Survey

A 15-question online community survey in English and Spanish was developed and promoted throughout the community as another forum for providing public input. It was open from May to October 2016, and hard copies were made available. The surveys were distributed at the public meetings held during the Visioning Process. Over 700 responses were received.

Flyers, E-Mail Blasts and Project Webpage

Throughout the planning process, flyers were distributed to announce and promote public meetings. An email distribution list was continually updated and was used to publicize the community survey and public meetings. Meeting announcements and presentations, as well as draft plan materials, were posted on a dedicated project webpage hosted by the Hall County Government website.

■ Chapter Summaries

The sequence of chapters in this plan is structured to follow the planning process, which can be thought of as answering the questions “Where do we want to be in 20 years?” followed by “How do we get there?” The plan is organized into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Executive Summary
- Chapter 2: Introduction
- Chapter 3: Community Vision
- Chapter 4: Future Development Guide
- Chapter 5: Implementation Program
- Appendix A: Report of Accomplishments
- Appendix B: Public Participation Documentation
- Appendix C: Community Assessment

The chapters that follow this introductory chapter are summarized below:

Chapter 3: Community Vision

The Community Vision reflects the community’s vision for growth and development for the next 20 years. This vision, which was developed with an extensive public visioning process, is defined by Vision Themes. The Vision Themes organize primary needs and opportunities and corresponding goals and strategies under the following headings: Development Patterns, Resource Conservation, and Social and Economic Development. These themes address the planning topics of land use and housing (Development Patterns), natural and historic resources (Resource Conservation), and economic development and neighborhood revitalization. The listed strategies are used to create the Implementation Program chapter.

Chapter 4: Future Development Guide

The Future Development Guide defines the community's desired development patterns and guides future decision-making related to the physical development of the community. It is comprised of a Future Development Map and supporting Character Area Policy.

The Future Development Map section presents the recommended character areas for the entire county.

The Character Area Policy section describes the intent, general characteristics, application, primary land uses, and design principles for each Character Area, which are areas with unique quality worth preserving or areas that have been identified with the potential to develop into something new or different.

Chapter 5: Implementation Program

The Implementation Program identifies specific actions necessary to achieve the community's vision. This chapter incorporates the strategies presented within the Community Vision and Future Development Guide chapters into a plan of action. The Implementation Program includes ordinances, programs, community improvements or investments, additional plans or studies, administrative systems and financing arrangements or other initiatives to be put in place to implement the Comprehensive Plan. The Community Work Program prioritizes strategies to be implemented over the next five years and assigns responsible parties, identifies potential funding sources, and provides a timeline for completion of each. Chapter 5 also details the specifics of maintaining the Comprehensive Plan in accordance with state requirements.

Appendices

The appendices supplement the information presented in Chapters 1-5 of the Comprehensive Plan as described below:

- Appendix A – Report of Accomplishments (2016-2021 Short Term Work Program)
- Appendix B – Public Participation Documentation
- Appendix C – Community Assessment